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Sexual-Spousal Love in the Theological Anthropology of V. S. Soloviev:
Systematic Analysis and Recent Roman Catholic Interpretation

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Sexual-Spousal Love in the Theological Anthropology of V. S. Soloviev:
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This dissertation analyzes V. S. Soloviev's theological anthropology of sexual-spousal love and assesses its value as a resource for Roman Catholic theology as illustrated in the work of Angelo Cardinal Scola and Hans Urs von Balthasar.

It includes the following elements. First, it presents a biography of Soloviev and an overview of the development of his theory of sexual-spousal love in all relevant texts. Second, it analyzes his methodology of "free theosophy." Third, it examines the theoretical foundations of his theory, including his Trinitarian metaphysics of "all-unity," his theology of Christ's divine-humanity, and his aesthetics of "free theurgy." Fourth, it provides an analysis of his theory of human love in general and sexual-spousal love in particular. Fifth, it assesses how Soloviev is used as a resource for contemporary Roman Catholic theological anthropology in Scola's work, *The Nuptial Mystery*, and von Balthasar's essay, "Soloviev" in *The Glory of the Lord*, identifying key positive and negative elements.

Soloviev argues that the meaning of sexual-spousal love is the realization of the *imago Dei* or authentic personhood as revealed in "true marriage" and participates in the "great mystery" of Christ's union with the Church (Ephesians 5:32). This love is unique in its power to overcome egoism and is fulfilled in spousal union. It is the "type and ideal" of all human love. The gradual historical realization of this union in "true marriage" is a free, creative, divine-human process dependent on grace, faith, ecclesial communion, and the

spiritual and moral “feat” (*podvig*) of the Christian life. This union will only be perfected in the fullness of the kingdom of God, the wedding of the Bride and the Lamb.

Soloviev’s ideas anticipate recent dogmatic and theological developments concerning spousal love and union with their emphasis on personhood, love, freedom, and communion, as well as a new focus on theological aesthetics, the former exemplified in Scola’s work and the latter in von Balthasar’s. Engaging Soloviev could promote progress in a Catholic understanding of sexual-spousal love and union that could help overcome tendencies to moralism, dogmatism, and the abandonment of *eros* to the secular culture.

This dissertation by John Romanowsky fulfills the dissertation requirement for the doctoral degree in Historical Theology approved by Peter Casarella, Ph.D., as Director, and by Rev. Brian V. Johnstone, C.S.S.R., S.T.D. and Msgr. Paul McPartlan, S.T.L., D.Phil. as Readers.

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Table of Contents

PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

Chapter I. On Overview of Soloviev's Life, Work, and Theory of Sexual-Spousal Love	1
1. An Introduction to the Subject	1
2. The Formation of a Christian Philosopher	5
2.1 <i>Laying the Foundations</i>	5
2.2 <i>Intellectual Formation</i>	11
2.3 <i>Three Encounters with "Divine Sophia"</i>	16
2.4 <i>Soloviev's Three Creative Phases</i>	20
2.4.1 <i>"Free Theosophy" (1873-1883)</i>	22
2.4.2 <i>"Free Theocracy" (1883-1890)</i>	26
2.4.3 <i>"Free Theurgy" (1890-1898)</i>	30
2.5 <i>Apocalypse (1898-1900)</i>	34
3. A Chronological Synopsis of Soloviev's Writings on Sexual-Spousal Love	35
3.1 <i>"Primordial Chaos": La Sophie (1876) and The White Lily (1880)</i>	36
3.2 <i>1880s: Sexual-Spousal Love and le Vrai Mariage (1883-89)</i>	38
3.3 <i>1890s: Sexual-Spousal Love, Divine-Humanity, and Free Theurgy</i>	41
3.3.1 <i>The Meaning of Love (1892-94)</i>	42
3.3.2 <i>The Justification of the Good (1894-97)</i>	59
3.3.3 <i>The Life Drama of Plato (1898)</i>	62
3.3.4 <i>Brockhaus Encyclopedia article on "Love"</i>	67
4. An Overview of the Dissertation	69
4.1 <i>Soloviev's Methodological Application of "Free Theosophy"</i>	70
4.2 <i>Soloviev's Trinitarian Metaphysics of Love</i>	71
4.3 <i>Divine-Humanity and the Sacramentum Magnum</i>	72
4.4 <i>Soloviev's Theological Aesthetics of Free Theurgy</i>	73
4.5 <i>The General Meaning of Human Love</i>	74
4.6 <i>The Meaning of Sexual-Spousal Love</i>	74
4.7 <i>Soloviev as a Resource for Catholic Theology: An Analysis of the Treatment of Soloviev in Scola's The Nuptial Mystery and von Balthasar's The Glory of the Lord</i>	76
Chapter II. Soloviev's Methodological Application of "Free Theosophy"	79
1. Free Theosophy as Christian Mission	82
2. Slavophilism and Integral Knowledge	85

3. Free Theosophy	88
3.1 <i>Confronting the Crisis of Western Philosophy</i>	89
3.2 <i>Mysticism and the Possibility of Knowledge</i>	91
3.3 <i>The Critique of Abstract Principles</i>	94
4. Methodological Application	98

PART TWO: THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Chapter III. Soloviev's Trinitarian Metaphysics of Love	103
Trinitarian Metaphysics of All-Unity	105
1 <i>The Absolute as Hen kai Pan</i>	106
2 <i>Concrete Idealism and Love</i>	108
3 <i>The Formal Truth of the Trinity</i>	110
4 <i>The Divine Monarchia and the Personalist Metaphysics of Ecclesial Being</i>	113
5 <i>The Divine Essence as Absolute Love</i>	117
Chapter IV. Divine-Humanity and the <i>Sacramentum Magnum</i>	121
1. <i>The Principles of Divine-Humanity</i>	123
1.1 <i>The Chalcedonian Foundation of Divine-Humanity</i>	127
1.2 <i>Christ as Incarnate Logos and Second Adam</i>	128
1.3 <i>The Drama of Divine-Humanity and the Kenotic Podvig of Christ</i>	129
1.3.1 <i>The "Podvig of the Spirit" and the Three Temptations of Christ</i>	131
1.3.2 <i>The "Podvig of the Flesh" and the Paschal Mystery</i>	133
2. <i>The Realization of Divine-Humanity</i>	135
2.1 <i>Divine-Humanity as Divine Sophia Incarnate</i>	137
2.1.1 <i>Imago Trinitatis</i>	142
2.1.2 <i>Man-Woman-Society and the Marriage of Heaven and Earth</i>	145
2.2 <i>The Incarnate Sophia as the Universal Church</i>	148
Chapter V. Soloviev's Theological Aesthetics of Free Theurgy	156
1. <i>The Place of Aesthetics in Soloviev's Synthesis</i>	158
2. <i>Beauty in Nature</i>	163
3. <i>The Meaning of Art</i>	170
3.1 <i>The Subjective Principle of Art</i>	173
3.2 <i>Art as Redemptive Task</i>	176
3.3 <i>"Perfect Art" and the Universal Church</i>	178

PART THREE: THE MEANING OF SEXUAL-SPOUSAL LOVE

Chapter VI. The General Meaning of Human Love	182
1. <i>The Challenge and Significance of Terminology</i>	183
2. <i>Soloviev's Personalist Paradigm Shift</i>	190
3. <i>Human Personhood</i>	197
4. <i>The Problem of Egoism</i>	201
5. <i>The General Meaning of Human Love</i>	204
6. <i>"The Love, from which Every Love is Named"</i>	209
6.1 <i>Bodiliness</i>	212
6.2 <i>Inclusivity</i>	215
6.3 <i>True Individuality and "One Flesh Union"</i>	217
Chapter VII. The Meaning of Sexual-Spousal Love	220
1. <i>"Ars est Artium Ars Amoris"</i>	221
1.1 <i>"It is only with the heart that one can see rightly"</i>	222
1.2 <i>Theosis and the "Poetic Fire" of Erotic Pathos</i>	231
2. <i>The Futility and False Norms of Sexual-Spousal Love</i>	236
2.1 <i>Proximate Reasons for Love's Futility</i>	238
2.2 <i>Remote Reasons for Love's Futility</i>	242
3. <i>"True Marriage" as Theurgic Task</i>	244
3.1 <i>The "Great Mystery" of Ephesians 5 and "True Marriage"</i>	247
3.2 <i>The Divine Principle in "True Marriage"</i>	256
3.3 <i>The Human Principle in "True Marriage"</i>	261
3.4 <i>"True individuality," "Perfect Marriage," and the "True Androgyne"</i>	267
4. <i>Sexual-Spousal Love and Syzygy</i>	272

PART FOUR: SOLOVIEV AS A RESOURCE FOR CATHOLIC THEOLOGY

Chapter VIII. Soloviev as a Resource for Catholic Theology: An Analysis of Soloviev in Scola's <i>The Nuptial Mystery</i> and von Balthasar's <i>Glory of the Lord</i>	275
1. <i>The Nuptial Mystery, Cardinal Angelo Scola</i>	276
1.1 <i>The Meaning of Love as Scola's Preferred Path to the Nuptial Mystery</i>	280
1.2 <i>Scola's Selective Integration of Soloviev's Ideas Concerning Sexual-Spousal Love</i>	281
1.2.1 <i>Spousal Love and Sexual Difference</i>	283
1.2.2 <i>The Essential Unity of Love, Sexuality, and Procreation</i>	291

2. The Glory of the Lord: Lay Theological Styles, <i>Hans Urs von Balthasar</i>	298
2.1 <i>Soloviev as Roman Catholic Thinker</i>	304
2.2 <i>Von Balthasar's Interpretation of Soloviev's Theory of Sexual-Spousal Love</i>	306
2.2.1 <i>Soloviev's "Catholic" Methodology and the Integration of Eros</i>	307
2.2.2 <i>Soloviev's Sophiology and the Meaning of Eros</i>	309
2.2.3 <i>Eros as "Theurgic Art" in The Meaning of Love</i>	313
3. <i>Conclusion</i>	316
Selected Bibliography	320

PART ONE

CHAPTER I

On Overview of Soloviev's Life, Formation, and Theory of Sexual-Spousal Love

This thesis will attempt to analyze and assess Vladimir Soloviev's theological anthropology of sexual-spousal love and union. The following introduction offers a brief exposition of the subject itself, its main themes, and its chronological development in Soloviev's writings. Next, it gives a biographical sketch of Soloviev, focusing on the elements of his life, intellectual and spiritual formation, and scholarship that shape him as a Christian thinker. Finally, it presents a synopsis of the seven chapters that follow, in which the methodology, theoretical foundations, and content of the subject will be investigated. This investigation will include an examination and assessment of the treatment of Soloviev's theological anthropology in Angelo Cardinal Scola and Hans Urs von Balthasar's works respectively.

1. AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SUBJECT

According to Russian philosopher, Nikolai Berdyaev, Vladimir Soloviev's theory of sexual-spousal love (*polovaia-supruzheskaia liubov*) is the only original word written on *eros* since Plato's *The Symposium*. Soloviev's theory was the fruit of a life-long commitment, fueled by the self-confident ambition of a nineteenth-century thinker, to fashion a universal Christian synthesis flowing from the all-inclusive, living truth of Christ's "divine-humanity" (*Bogochelovechestvo*). He coined this term because the individual union

of God and man in Jesus Christ the “God-man” must still be realized in humanity as a whole, historically and eschatologically, in the free and perfect union of the divine, human, and material principles of existence. Articulated most fully in *The Meaning of Love* (1892-94) and *The Life Drama of Plato* (1898), Soloviev’s theory of sexual-spousal love constitutes an integral and crucial element of this universal synthesis.

The originality of his theory is evident from the beginning when he locates the meaning of sexual-spousal love in personal or individual life and not in procreation. He argues that we can only achieve authentic personhood or “true individuality” (*istinnaia individualnost*) by overcoming the law of egoism that condemns us to “empty individuality.” While only one among the many forms of human love, sexual-spousal love is unique in its ability to undermine egoism at its deepest root because it empowers us to transfer the center of our entire personal existence to the other. Sexual-spousal love’s unique power follows from its true meaning as revealed in the perfect union of man and woman, which is *par excellence* the created condition of being *imago Dei* (Genesis 1:27). The paradoxical prerequisites for such a union of persons are fully present only in sexual-spousal love: full equality and reciprocity of persons together with irreducible difference. Soloviev builds his argument on the analogy between Christ’s union with the Universal Church or divine *Sophia*, and sacramental spousal union (Ephesians 5:32). As Christ’s Body and Bride, he describes the Universal Church as the realization of divine Wisdom or *Sophia* in the material and human spheres of existence. He aims to show how the ultimate meaning of sexual-spousal love is revealed only in the eschatological mystery of the marriage of the Bride and the Lamb, and that this eschatological mystery can be realized historically as the fruit of a

free and creative divine-human effort that engages all aspects of human existence, from mystical and moral to sexual and social.

From an historical perspective, this human potential to incarnate and participate in the love and union of the Bride and the Lamb, while dependent on individual effort, is still evolving and is analogous to the gradual realization of the human capacity for language. Such an historical process is necessarily “divine-human” or “theurgic” insofar as it is a free, conscious, creative, and all-encompassing activity of God and man dependent on divine initiative and grace and conditioned by creaturely freedom. In what he terms “true marriage,” the husband and wife participate in this process to the extent that they achieve true union through the daily and life-long “feat” (*podvig*) of sacrificial love that encompasses and presumes an ecclesial existence empowered by the grace of the sacraments, informed by the practice of asceticism and ethics, and grounded in faith and prayer. Since this love assumes the eternal and absolute¹ significance of the mortal other, its possibility, foundation, and justification can be found only through the divine gift of faith in the resurrected Christ, who reveals humanity in its ideal reality, i.e., in God. The immediate “task” of love is the sanctification of the beloved, insofar as by sanctification is meant the realization or incarnation of the beloved’s unique *imago* in the fullness of his or her humanity. Analogous to artistic creativity, this process begins when the ideal essence of the beloved is glimpsed through and inspired by the pathos of sexual love or *eros*, an experience that calls forth human creativity, constant labor, and “perseverance to the end.” Of course,

¹ The adjective “absolute” (*absolutny*), which Soloviev employs frequently, is synonymous for “ideal” (*idealny*) insofar as it refers to that which finds its exemplar in the “absolute” or “ideal” being of the Absolute or God.

this individual dimension is inseparable from the present human condition, which outside divine grace remains futile.

Since the human person, as a physical and fallen creature, remains subject to the law of sin, corruption, and death, the full restoration of the *imago Dei* in spousal union requires and assumes the transformation of the entire cosmos: the universal realization of what he calls in philosophical terms “all-unity” (*vseedinstvo*) and in theological terms the “kingdom of God.” Just as the Church, the Bride of Christ, is both individual and universal, so too, Soloviev argues, the power and form of sexual-spousal love and union must be extended analogously to every relation between the individual and the communal or universal spheres of human existence. This relation must not be one of submission or dominion, but rather one of “loving interaction” in which the individual and the communal or universal perfect one another in a conscious, free, and active unity without confusion or separation.

While Soloviev’s theory has elicited much academic interest in various fields, including ecumenical theology, eschatology, and modern Russian religious philosophy in general, the present analysis and exploration will focus on his theology of sexual-spousal love as a resource for contemporary Catholic theological anthropology. Accordingly, once the necessary foundations for understanding this theology have been laid and its content has been analyzed, Angelo Cardinal Scola’s *The Nuptial Mystery* and Hans Urs von Balthasar’s essay on Soloviev in *The Glory of the Lord (Herrlichkeit)* will be examined insofar as they have drawn on Soloviev’s thought to support, develop, and illustrate their own theological anthropologies. This examination will endeavor to show how the confluence of the personalist and aesthetic dimensions of his theory anticipate and shed light on recent

promising directions of development in theological anthropology. At the same time, it will offer a critique of his theory in light of recent magisterial teaching on the essentially and intrinsically fruitful aspect of sexual-spousal love and union as *imago Trinitatis*. Although Soloviev's theory is rooted in Trinitarian metaphysics and theology, he nevertheless rejects any intrinsic or meaningful relationship between the meaning of sexual-spousal love and fruitfulness, procreation, or family. For him, procreation is nothing more than an exigency of the divine-human economy that makes it possible for future generations to realize the meaning of "true marriage."

2. THE FORMATION OF A CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHER

2.1 *Laying the Foundations*

Vladimir Sergeevich Soloviev was born in Moscow on January 16, 1853 into a well-known family of Russian Orthodox *intelligentsia*. His father, Sergei Mikhailovich Soloviev (1820-1879), the son of an Orthodox priest, was the preeminent historian of his generation. An assiduous scholar and author of the 29-volume *The History of Russia*, Sergei Mikhailovich maintained a strict, almost ascetical religious regime in the family home. He spent most days in his study, having little to do with day-to-day family affairs.² Vladimir, the fourth of eight children, with his passionate temperament, sharp wit, and penchant for literature and poetry seemed to have almost nothing in common with the pragmatic, iron-

² The emotional distance from his father is clearly shown in Soloviev's letters, which do not contain the slightest hint of warmth or closeness. See K. Mochul'skii, *Vladimir Solov'ev: Zhizn' i Uchenie [Vladimir Soloviev: Life and Teaching]*, 2 ed. (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1951), 12.

willed, traditional Christian family man that was his father.³ But later in life his father's influence proved to be decisive, and there was significant continuity between the two in several respects.

Vladimir's father instilled in his son scholarly discipline, intellectual integrity, and an unshakeable confidence in the power of reason to discover universal truths. He inherited his father's enormous capacity for work, his rigorous approach to research, and a well-developed historical consciousness.⁴ Father and son also shared a love and respect for the scientific method, and for the natural sciences in particular, which amounted to a sort of awe before the "scientific." Even when expressing his most paradoxical and poetic ideas later in life, Soloviev's language sometimes seemed better suited to the dry, impersonal style of scientific inquiry. Nevertheless, he was renowned for his immense literary gifts and wrote with "astonishing clarity, precision and vividness."⁵

In addition to his scholarly gifts, the entire trajectory of Soloviev's life had also much to do with his father's influence, sensibilities, and intellectual evolution. They both began their intellectual lives among the Slavophiles but later rejected the increasingly narrow and nationalistic historical, philosophical, and theological exclusivism that they encountered there. Both father and son came to believe such exclusivism inherently incompatible with universal Christian ideals, and eventually migrated to intellectual circles associated with the Westernizing journal, *The European Messenger* [*Vestnik Evropy*]. As an

³ Paul Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology: Bukharev, Soloviev, Bulgakov: Orthodox Theology in a New Key* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 110.

⁴ Ibid., 110. His interest in the historical development of humanity can be attributed to his father's influence. He read his father's entire 29-volume history of Russia while still a teenager. Mochul'skii, 11.

⁵ V. V. Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, trans., George L. Kline, 2 vols., vol. 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1953), 479.

historian, Sergei Mikhailovich criticized the Slavophile theory of history, while his son would later take issue with their philosophical and theological ideas.⁶ In their shared critique of Slavophile exclusivism, father and son both exemplify what the Russian Orthodox theologian Vladimir Lossky calls a characteristic feature of modern Russian thought, namely, “the search for an exhaustive knowledge of reality *as a whole*.”⁷

But Soloviev’s philosophical endeavors did not simply complement his father’s accomplishments in history; he was also realizing his father’s youthful ambition to become a religious philosopher. In his autobiographical *Notes to My Children*, Sergei Mikhailovich wrote that he wanted to become the “founder of a philosophical system that, having shown clearly the divinity of Christianity, would put an end to disbelief.”⁸ It is to this optimistic and idealistic end that his son, Vladimir would eventually devote most of his life’s labor.

Not long before Soloviev died, he described a significant formative experience with his father. As a youth, Vladimir discovered modern German philosophy, lost his faith, and ceased accompanying the rest of his family to the Sunday Liturgy; but his otherwise strict father did not directly oppose this immature apostasy. Later in life Soloviev recalled this as wise pedagogy. “My father let me experience religion as a moral power, and this, of course, was much more effective than any accusation or demand.”⁹ A profound awareness and appreciation for the indispensable role of freedom in religious belief and in every sphere of thought and life never left him.

⁶ Dmitri Stremoukhoff, *Vladimir Soloviev and His Messianic Work*, trans., Elizabeth Meyendorff (Belmont, MA: Nordland Publishing Company, Inc., 1980), 25.

⁷ N. O. Lossky, *History of Russian Philosophy* (New York: International Universities Press, Inc., 1951), 95 (emphasis added).

⁸ Mochul'skii, 11-12.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

Soloviev's mother, Poliksena Vladimirovna, was a quiet, faithful, and intelligent woman dedicated to her husband and children. On her father's side she came from the noble Romanov family in the Ekaterinoslav region and counted as a great-uncle the famous wandering philosopher-poet Skovoroda, whom, it was said, the perpetually homeless Soloviev resembled in both appearance and life-style.¹⁰ On her mother's side she descended from the Brzheski family, whose roots were Byelorussian, not Polish (and Roman Catholic), as some biographers have speculated.¹¹ Soloviev received his mystical disposition, ardent temperament, pensiveness, and poetical intuition from his mother. He recalls that she taught him to read and write, recited to him the poetry of Vasily Zhukovsky, Alexander Pushkin, and Mikhail Lermontov, and taught him sacred history.¹² He also took after her physically with his somewhat swarthy complexion, blue-grey eyes, and black wavy hair.¹³

One of Soloviev's most insightful biographers, Konstantin Mochulsky, notes that Soloviev's grandfather, Father Mikhail Vasileevich also left a lasting mark on the future philosopher's personality. Although he was only eight years old when his grandfather died, Soloviev remembered him fondly as a role model and dedicated to him his *magnum opus* on ethics, *The Justification of the Good*. His older brother, Vsevolod describes their grandfather as kind, childlike, humble, and joyful, traits for which Soloviev himself would eventually

¹⁰ Soloviev attested to this himself, as is recounted in the biography written by his nephew, Sergei Mikhailovich Solov'ev. See Sergei M. Solov'ev, *Vladimir Solovyov: His Life and Creative Evolution*, trans., Aleksey Gibson (Brussels: Izdatel'stvo Zhizn' s Bogom, 1977), 9. Hryhori Skovoroda (1722-1794) was a highly gifted and famous intellect, poet, and composer who spent the final quarter of his life writing books on philosophy, composing poetry, and staying with friends as he wandered incessantly from place to place, much like his descendant Vladimir would do a century later. The affinity between Skovoroda and Soloviev is explored in V. Ern, *Grigorii Savich Skovorda, Zhizn' I Uchenie* (Moscow: 1912).

¹¹ Some biographers erroneously believed that Soloviev's mother had Polish roots and that this fact explained his sympathies towards Poland and the Catholic Church. For a summary of his mother's family background see Stremoukhoff, 25.

¹² Sergei M. Solov'ev, 14.

¹³ Mochul'skii, 13.

become well-known. He and his brother were sure their grandfather “conversed with God, and that God himself spoke to him” and that such communication was quite commonplace.¹⁴

Years later, Soloviev confided to a close friend what was for him a significant event from childhood: when he was eight years old his grandfather took him up to the church altar and solemnly consecrated him to the service of the Lord and his Church.¹⁵ “No matter what form Soloviev’s outward activity took,” observes Mochulsky, “within his heart he was always performing a priestly rite.”¹⁶ This inner sense of a “priestly” or mediating mission from within the Church between God and the world was always part of Soloviev’s inner compass, despite his not formally embracing a priestly or religious vocation.

His childhood was happy, healthy, peaceful, and for the most part unremarkable. He possessed an unusually precocious piety, not surprising considering his strong personality and the religious atmosphere of the Soloviev household. For example, at his father’s bidding he began reading the lives of the saints when he was seven years old. This inspired him to various ascetical “feats” (*podvigi*). One cold winter’s night his mother found him lying in bed shivering without blankets in a heroic attempt to conquer “his sinful flesh.”¹⁷ He also displayed a rare sensitivity to the world around him and had the odd but insightful habit of choosing names for his favorite possessions, like his satchel, “Grisha” and his pencil, “Andryushka.”¹⁸

¹⁴ Ibid., 10.

¹⁵ Ibid., 4.

¹⁶ Mochul'skii, 10.

¹⁷ Sergei Lukianov, *O Vl. Solovyove V Ego Moldye Gody: Materialy K Biografii [on Vl. Solovyov in His Young Years: Materials for a Biography]*, 3 vols. (Petrograd: 1916-21; reprint, Moscow: Kniga, 1990), cited in Lossky, 81.

¹⁸ Sergei M. Solov'ev, 31-32.

As befitted a boy of his social class, his education began in the early 1860s at the *Gymnasium* in Moscow. Ivan Turgenev illustrated the intellectual climate of this time in his 1862 novel, *Fathers and Sons*, in which the hero, Bazarov represents the younger generation of materialists and nihilists at odds with the previous generation's Christian faith and idealism. The young literary critic, Dimitri Pisarev (1840-1868) emerged as the leader of the nihilist movement of this time, which was based on natural science and found its bible in Ludwig Büchner's *Kraft und Stoff*. From an early age Soloviev displayed prodigious intellectual gifts, but his immature Christian faith was no match for this powerful *zeitgeist*. Having read Büchner when he was thirteen, he left behind his family's traditional Russian Orthodox Christianity and became an ardent atheist, materialist, and nihilist. He later remembered this period of his development, roughly from 1865 to 1869, as following a clear-cut dialectic.

The progression of my thoughts in this direction was perfectly logical and in four years I experienced one after the other all the phases of the negative development of European thought over the past four centuries. Passing from iconoclasm and doubt about the necessity of external religious practice, I advanced toward rationalism and disbelief in miracles and the divinity of Christ. I became a deist, then a pantheist, then an atheist and a materialist.¹⁹

His close friend Lev Lopatin said of him at the time, "I never met later such a passionately convinced materialist. He was a typical nihilist of the '60s."²⁰ At each point of his development, Soloviev not only held his intellectual convictions with zeal, but he committed himself to realizing them in everyday life. During his period of atheistic nihilism, this commitment often resulted in behavior that shocked his friends, such as when he

¹⁹ Ibid., 41.

²⁰ Ibid., 44.

destroyed icons or trampled on crosses in the cemetery. ““I am ashamed even to recall the stupid blasphemies, which I then spoke and committed,’ he wrote some years later.”²¹

Soloviev’s nihilistic phase came to an end with the discovery of what his friend Lopatin called “his first philosophic love,” the Dutch philosopher Spinoza (1632-77), whose influence proved profound and lasting. Spinoza’s sense of God as *causa sui* and *causa omnium*, the “experience of the spiritual total unity of the world,” and the epistemological trichotomy of empirical, rational, and mystical cognition, which Soloviev would later develop in his own thought, resonated deeply with the restless young atheist.²² This marks the beginning of his journey back to a conscious, free, and intellectually mature Christian faith as a member of the Russian Orthodox Church. In addition to mastering the usual course of studies at the *Gymnasium*, which included Greek, Latin, French, German, and English, his discovery of Spinoza marked the beginning of a period of prodigious spiritual and intellectual education and development.

2.2 *Intellectual Formation*

As the 1860s drew to a close, Büchner’s materialism was giving way to Auguste Comte’s positivism in Russian intellectual circles. Soloviev caught up with this trend in his late teenage years, embarking on a systematic study of modern Western philosophy, including Comte, Feuerbach, Mill, and Hegel, leading—by way of Kant—to Schopenhauer, von Hartmann, Fichte, and Schelling. Leo Mikhailovich Lopatin, a biographer of Soloviev, notes that it was at this time that Schopenhauer, with his “limitless pessimism and misty

²¹ Zenkovsky, 473.

²² Mochul'skii, 27. See also Stremoukhoff, 29.

hopes for redemption,” captivated Soloviev “as no other philosopher ever had or would.”²³

Since Schopenhauer had led him to an “absolute internal void” and demonstrated to him the “futility of science and philosophy,” he served as Soloviev’s final stepping stone back to Christian faith. “All that abstract reason can provide has already been experienced and has been found to be invalid, and reason itself has proven its insufficiency,” he wrote. “But this decline is the beginning of light, for when man is forced to say ‘I am nothing,’ at the same time he is saying ‘God is everything’.”²⁴

In 1872 at the age of nineteen, he sent two letters to his cousin, Katia Romanova, whom at one point he had seriously considered marrying, in which he articulated his newfound faith in Christ and his sense of personal vocation. He declared his belief in Christian revelation as the “unconditional Truth” and declared that it was his primary aspiration to articulate evangelical faith within the paradigm of modern philosophy in order to lead others to this same conviction.²⁵ He also had an early intuition that he would follow the seemingly paradoxical (and prophetic) path of “worldly monasticism.”²⁶ As he wrote to Katia a year later: “They imagine that I am capable of becoming a monk... but you can see that this would not suit my goals in the least. At one time monasticism served its lofty

²³ Cited in Sergei M. Solov'ev, 61.

²⁴ As quoted in Stremoukhoff, 30.

²⁵ Vladimir Solov'ev, *Pis'ma Vladimira Sergeevicha Solov'eva*, 4 vols., vol. 3 (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia t-va 'Obshchestvennaia Pol'za', 1908-11), 75.

²⁶ Paul Evdokimov articulated the Eastern Orthodox notion of a sort of lay form of monasticism that developed in the twentieth century and was put into practice by such well-known figures as Catherine Doherty, Lev Gillet, Mother Maria Skobtsova, and others. See “Interiorized Monasticism” in Paul Evdokimov, *Ages of the Spiritual Life*, trans., Michael Plekon and Alexis Vinogradov (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998), 135-56. See also Michael Plekon, *Living Icons* (South Bend, IN: Notre Dame Press, 2004).

purpose, but now the time has come to go out into the world in order to transform it, not to run away from it.”²⁷

When he first enrolled at Moscow State University, he joined the Faculty of History and Philology, most likely under his father’s influence. However, he soon followed his own inclinations and transferred to the Faculty of Natural Science. Science in general had a particularly strong influence on him and he placed great significance on the discoveries of Darwin, defending him from all detractors. Nevertheless, although he had a deep appreciation for the study of science *per se*, he eventually became disillusioned with its isolated and exclusive pursuit. He decided not to complete his degree, having discovered a deeper attraction to the philosophy of science and theoretical philosophy in general. He expressed his dissatisfaction with purely scientific pursuits in one of his letters to Katia. “By itself this knowledge [of natural science] is perfectly empty and illusory,” he wrote. “Only human nature and life are worthy of study in themselves, and one can get to know them best of all in works of true poetry; therefore I advise you to read the great poets as much as possible.”²⁸ In time he transferred back to the Faculty of History and Philology.

During these years he occupied himself constantly with the study of philosophy and theology. In addition to immersing himself in modern Western thought, especially German idealism, he read the works of early Slavophile thinkers such as Ivan Kireevsky (1806-56) and Alexei Khomiakov (1804-60). He studied both Greek and Latin patristic theology, as well as Sacred Scripture, to acquire a first-hand, thorough understanding of Christianity.²⁹ Two of his professors at this time, Pamfil D. Yurkevich and Alexei Ivantsov-Platonov

²⁷ Vladimir Solov'ev, *Pis'ma Vladimira Sergeevicha Solov'eva*, 89.

²⁸ Cited in Sergei M. Solov'ev, *Vladimir Solovyov: His Life and Creative Evolution*, 58.

²⁹ Stremoukhoff, 39.

contributed much to his intellectual and spiritual formation. The philosophy of Yurkevich synthesized Platonism and biblical truths in the context of traditional Orthodox theology, while Ivantsov-Platonov, a Christian humanist and Church historian, combined “the strength of a scholarly mind with the warmth of an evangelical faith.”³⁰

During his fourth year he prepared for and passed the state exam as an independent student and spent the following academic year at the Moscow Theological Academy in Sergeev Posad near Moscow. At the age of twenty he published his candidate’s essay, *The Mythological Process in Ancient Paganism*, which was imbued mainly with the ideas of Khomiakov and Schelling, in the theological journal, *The Orthodox Review* [*Pravoslavnoe Obozrenie*]. By the end of the following year he had finished translating Kant’s *Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik*³¹ and published his Master’s thesis, *The Crisis of Western Philosophy: Against the Positivists*. In the latter, he proposed the thesis that “philosophy, in the sense of an abstract, *exclusively* theoretical knowledge, has come to the end of its development and has passed irrevocably into the world of the past.”³² In this

³⁰ Soloviev eventually had a falling out with Ivantsov-Platonov when his former teacher attacked him in 1883 in response to his publication of *The Great Controversy and Christian Politics*, in which he argued for Roman primacy in the Church. See Sergei M. Solov'ev, *Vladimir Solovyov: His Life and Creative Evolution*, 61-63.

³¹ Lukianov, Soloviev’s biographer, believed that he balanced his strong personal inclination toward mysticism with an equally strong capacity for critical philosophical reflection based on his thorough knowledge of Kant. Lukianov, I: 358-60 as cited in Michael Meerson, “The Love Paradigm and the Retrieval of Western Medieval Love Mysticism in Modern Russian Trinitarian Thought (from Solov'ev to Bulgakov)” (doctoral dissertation, Fordham University, 1996), 51.

³² Vladimir Solov'ev, *Sobranie Sochinenii* [*Collected Works*], ed. S. M. Solov'ev and E. L. Radlov, 12 vols. (St. Petersburg: 1901-03; reprint, Bruxelles: Foyer Oriental Chrétien, 1966), *Krizis Zapadnoi Filsofii*, SS I: 27 (emphasis in original). Hereafter Vladimir Soloviev’s *Collected Works* [*Sobranie Sochinenie*] will be cited as SS. All quotations from the works of Soloviev are original translations from the Russian as found in the *Collected Works* with two exceptions. First, since he wrote *La Sophie* and *La Russie Et L'Église Universelle* in French and published the latter in France, quotations from these works are taken from the original French text, not the Russian translations in his *Collected Works*. The quotations of these works in the present study are original translations from the French as published in *La Sophia Et Les Autres Écrits Français*. Lausanne: La Cite - L'Age d'Homme, 1978. Second, while Soloviev’s prose in Russian is clear and concise, his poetry, like all poetry, presents challenges to the translator to find a balance between literal meaning and form. Therefore, the excellent translations of Soloviev’s poetry by Boris Jakim and Laury Magnus will be used and cited as

work, the philosophical paradigm of his Christian synthesis was already beginning to emerge. He sought to move beyond rationalism (idealism) and empiricism (positivism) and to establish a new philosophical point of departure that would eschew all forms of rationalist exclusivism that lead inevitably to absurdity and self-contradiction, and that would integrate theology and natural science into a greater synthesis.³³ As a display of his encyclopedic knowledge, mature understanding, and creative approach to perennial philosophical problems, the public defense of his thesis brought the young scholar instant fame. The eminent historian Konstantin Bestuzhev-Riumen, who was present at the defense, declared that “Russia can be congratulated on a man of genius.”³⁴ The following year he accepted a teaching position at Moscow State University.

It was also around this time, during the summer of 1874 at his father’s dacha in *Neskushny Sad* that he began writing poetry for the first time. Through his own lyrical poetry, as well as his literary criticism of other poets such as Alexander Pushkin, Mikhail Lermontov, Fyodor Tiutchev, Count Alexei Tolstoy, and others, he would go on to become what Judith Kornblatt called “arguably the most influential figure in the development of modern Russian poetry.”³⁵ Years later his poetry would inspire an entirely new movement in Russian literature called Symbolism, a movement that flourished in Russia’s “Silver Age” of cultural renaissance in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Its principal

such. See Vladimir Solovyov, *The Religious Poetry of Vladimir Solovyov*, trans., Boris Jakim and Laury Magnus (San Rafael, CA: Semantron Press, 2008).

³³ Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Soloviev," in *Volume III: Studies in Theological Style: Lay Styles, The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, trans., Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 297.

³⁴ Marina Kostalevsky, *Dostoevsky and Soloviev: The Art of Integral Vision* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 57.

³⁵ Judith Deutsch Kornblatt, "The Transfiguration of Plato in the Erotic Philosophy of Vladimir Solovyev," in *Transformations of Eros: An Odyssey: From Platonic to Christian Eros* (St. Paul, MN: Grailstone Press, 1992), 81.

representatives, the poets Alexander Blok, Andrei Bely, and Vyacheslav Ivanov, openly acknowledged Soloviev as their principal literary mentor.

Like many educated young people in Russia at the time, Soloviev was fascinated by non-traditional belief systems, such as Kabala and Gnosticism. In the summer of 1875, he requested and received a commission to do scholarly research in London where he primarily pursued research into the Kabala. He also later admitted to taking part in some spiritualist séances, but had immediately become disillusioned by the “charlatans” and “blind believers” he encountered there. He enjoyed exercising his sharp wit by ridiculing their outlandish antics in letters to his family.³⁶ In his Kabala research, however, he did discover what were for him compelling ideas. The ideas which resonated with him most corresponded to certain aspects of his own nascent Christian philosophy. These ideas included the essential unity between ideal and phenomenal reality; the belief that ideal being can become incarnate in matter; and that the human form of being in itself is absolute and universal.³⁷ It was while studying the Kabala in the British Museum that he experienced his second mystical encounter with what he would eventually describe as the “divine *Sophia*.”³⁸

2.3 *Three Encounters with “Divine Sophia”*

Most biographical treatments of Soloviev, even the most summary, mention three “mystical encounters” he had in his childhood and youth with the “Eternal Feminine” or

³⁶ Sergei M. Solov'ev, *Vladimir Solovyov: His Life and Creative Evolution*, 129.

³⁷ Stremoukhoff, 50.

³⁸ Father Pavel Florensky wrote to Soloviev's biographer, Sergei M. Lukyanov: “It seems to me that Soloviev entered the Theological Academy simply to study theology and Church history, but then, coming upon the idea of Sophia, which was pre-established in his soul, he left the Academy and occupied himself specifically with Sophia.” The intellectual historian Zenkovsky agrees with this assumption. See Zenkovsky, 480.

“divine *Sophia*.” This interest is understandable, given the sophiological dimension of his theology, which is certainly its most ambiguous, controversial, and problematic aspect, as well as the personal manner in which he seemed to relate to *Sophia*, who often appeared as a *dramatis personae* in his philosophy, theology, and poetry. But it would be misleading to read too much into the impact these experiences alone had on his thought.

Soloviev himself rarely if ever spoke or wrote about these mysterious encounters in his childhood and youth. The only concrete evidence for their having occurred at all consists of one humorous poem called “The Three Meetings,” which he wrote in 1898 shortly before his death and 36 years after the actual events. The tongue-in-cheek tone of these verses, which he admits in the preface do in fact recount a profound experience, is telling and characteristic. He possessed a self-deprecating and notoriously sharp sense of humor and parody that he often used to veil the more personal areas of his life, especially in spiritual matters.³⁹ He understood the dangers and limitations involved in both discerning the truth of, as well as trying to express, mystical and deeply subjective experience. Although he would become an authority on mysticism in general, and Christian mystical theology in particular, he never claimed to be a mystic himself. In fact, in his encyclopedia article on mysticism he insists on strict criteria for interpreting the truth of mystical experience and only identifies as “truly orthodox” the mystical theology of the Victorines, Bonaventure, and Teresa of

³⁹ Nikolai Berdyaev calls him “one of the most enigmatic figures in Russian literature of the nineteenth century” along with Nikolai Gogol (1809-52). Nikolai Berdyaev, *The Russian Idea* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1948), 167. Zenkovsky also commented on Soloviev’s tendency to veil personal matters with humor. “Solovyov’s literary talent was also marked by a strong penchant for irony and mockery. He like to introduce jokes into the accounts of even his most intimate experiences (for example in the poem ‘Three Encounters’, which relates the visions of Sophia)—and sometimes rather coarse ones. Solovyov had a keen taste for parody; and parody was necessary for him to soften the inner passion which he modestly concealed behind mocking language.” Zenkovsky, 486.

Avila.⁴⁰ The criteria he cites for a fully orthodox understanding of mystical experience include ecclesial, sacramental, and moral principles, and he affirms that any authentic mysticism follows the “triple way” of the *via purgativa, illuminativa, and unitiva*.⁴¹ Given the exceptional and ambiguous nature of his own experiences, he wisely heeded the advice he describes receiving in the above-mentioned poem:

And therefore, if it would offend you
If anyone considered you demented
Or merely a fool, then make no further mention
Of this inglorious adventure to anyone.⁴²

Nevertheless, given that sophiological ideas do play a key role in his thought in general, and in his theory of sexual-spousal love in particular, it is important to understand the actual nature and context of his personal encounter with the one whom he later identified as the divine *Sophia*.

His first encounter occurred when he was nine years old and in the throes of a childish “love crisis.” The immediate object of his affection was the lovely Yulinka Sveshnikova, and the source of his anguish was her preference for his rival, with whom the smitten Soloviev came to blows. This crisis had only just come to a head when he had his first vision. It took place at the high point of the Eucharistic liturgy in the Moscow University Church of Saint Tatiana on the Feast of the Ascension. When the choir began to sing the Cherubic Hymn, the azure light of the sky suddenly filled the church, encompassing

⁴⁰ Solov'ev, *Mistika*, SS X: 245. Meerson points out that Soloviev had high esteem for others in the Christian mystical tradition, both East and West, but was conscious of the heterodox elements in their teaching. For example, as Meerson notes, “Solov’ev held in high esteem Erigena who transported speculative theology to the West and, under the influence of Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus the Confessor, produced his own, highly original theosophic system. Solov’ev, however, pointed out Erigena’s heterodox pantheism, and contrasts it with the orthodox mystical theology of the Victorines, Bonaventure, and Theresa of Avila.” Meerson, 49.

⁴¹ Solov'ev, “Mistika,” SS X: 336.

⁴² Vladimir Solovyov, *The Religious Poetry of Vladimir Solovyov*, trans., Boris Jakim and Laury Magnus (San Rafael, CA: Semantron Press, 2008), 106.

him inside and out, and in its midst there appeared to him a beautiful woman holding in her hand a blossom “from other worlds.” She nodded towards him, smiled, and vanished. He describes his emotional reaction to this event in superlative terms and reports that his infatuation for Yulinka evaporated instantly.⁴³ (It is worth noting that this initial experience did not prevent his whole-hearted embrace of atheistic materialism four years later.)

As noted above, the second encounter took place when he was twenty one years old at the British Museum in London. According to the poem, one autumn afternoon he unexpectedly saw the face of the mysterious woman who had appeared to him in childhood. He asked her to reveal herself to him fully and heard an “inner voice” directing him to Egypt. Under the pretext that his studies required it, he decided to go immediately. “Feeling did not have to fight with reason,” he wrote in his poem, “reason remained quite silent—like an idiot.”⁴⁴

After he arrived in Cairo, he eventually ventured out into the desert of the Thebaid. Some Bedouins mistook him in his black coat and top hat for a demon, tied him up, and left him to die. “The incident with the Arabs amused me more than it frightened me,” he wrote to his mother.⁴⁵ When he woke up, the night sky was filled with stars and the air with the scent of roses.

And in the purple of the heavenly glow
 You gazed with eyes full of azure fire.
 And your gaze was like the first shining
 Of universal and creative day.

⁴³ Sergei M. Solov'ev, *Vladimir Solovyov: His Life and Creative Evolution*, 36.

⁴⁴ Vladimir Solovyov, *The Religious Poetry of Vladimir Solovyov*, 102.

⁴⁵ Vladimir Solov'ev, *Pis'ma Vladimira Sergeevicha Solov'eva*, 4 vols., vol. 2 (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia t-va 'Obshchestvennaia Pol'za', 1908-11), 21.

What is, what was, and what will be were here
Embraced within that one fixed gaze... The seas
And rivers all turned blue beneath me, as did
The distant forest and the snow-capped mountain heights.

I saw it all, and all of it was one,
One image there of beauty feminine...
The immeasurable was confined within that image.
Before me, in me, you alone were there.⁴⁶

In the immediate aftermath of this experience, he remained in Egypt and began to articulate his initial intuitions and ideas in a treatise entitled *La Sophie*, a sort of Platonic dialogue between the divine *Sophia* and “the Philosopher,” presumably himself. Soloviev’s nephew and biographer, Sergei M. Soloviev rightly characterized and dismissed this work as nothing but the “primordial chaos out of which will subsequently appear [his] strict and polished schemes.”⁴⁷ Soloviev was well aware of its shortcomings and wisely decided not to try to have it published. By the summer of 1876 he was back in Russia and after a brief stint of teaching in Moscow moved to St. Petersburg and took up an administrative position in the Ministry of National Education. It was then that his serious intellectual and scholarly work began.

2.4 SOLOVIEV’S THREE CREATIVE PHASES

Scholars commonly distinguish three creative phases in Soloviev’s life,⁴⁸ which correspond roughly to the tripartite structure of the Slavophile notion of “integral life” that

⁴⁶ Vladimir Solovyov, *The Religious Poetry of Vladimir Solovyov*, 105.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 149.

⁴⁸ Zenkovsky gives a concise summary of the different ways in which scholars have organized these creative phases, arguing that Trubetskoi’s approach, whose divisions he adopts himself, is the most common and accurate. “It would be better to adopt Trubetskoi’s scheme, which, although it fails to exhibit the inner unity of Solovyov’s creative development, at least does not distort anything.” Zenkovsky, 480. Stremoukhoff’s scheme, which will be adopted for this thesis, follows the same reasoning, with the exception of adding an

he would subsequently develop.⁴⁹ “Integral life” comprises an organic synthesis of all aspects of human knowledge, activity, and creativity, corresponding to human knowing, willing, and feeling. Each of these modes, according to Soloviev, who was partial to tripartite schemes, enjoys three levels of realization: true knowledge is gained through “free theosophy,” the synthesis of theology, philosophy, and natural science; human activity, both individual and social, is fulfilled in “free theocracy,” the synthesis of ecclesial, political, and economic life; and creativity is expressed fully in “free theurgy,” the synthesis of the incarnation of mystical realities, the fine arts, and technical craftsmanship or technology.⁵⁰

The three main phases in his life-long project to build this synthesis, which included not only theoretical development, but social, political, and ecclesial activism, as well as his own poetic creativity and literary criticism, can be described respectively as his theosophic, theocratic, and theurgic phases. In addition to a description of each of these phases, an addendum will be included, following his biographer, Dmitri Stremoukhoff’s scheme, that includes the brief but distinctive period immediately preceding his death, his so-called “apocalyptic phase,” the heart of which is expressed in his well-known work, *Three Conversations and a Short Tale of the Antichrist*.

Each of these phases, which taken together constitute the proper context of each of his scholarly works, will be considered briefly, including his many forays into ecclesial, political, and social activism, journalism, and public polemics. These phases also reveal a

addendum, the so-called final and “apocalyptic phase,” which is a unique and crucial aspect of Soloviev’s development.

⁴⁹ See Slesinski’s excellent article, Robert F. Slesinski, “Russian Philosophical Thought as a Search for Integral Knowledge,” in *Essays in Diakonia: Eastern Catholic Theological Reflections* (New York: P. Lang, 1998), 128-41.

⁵⁰ Solov'ev, *Filosofskie Nachala Tsel'nogo Znaniia*, SS I: 264-66.

remarkable degree of unity between the various elements of his synthesis, despite the passage of years. “The continuity of Soloviev’s spiritual development and the *singleness of theme* of his philosophy is astonishing,” Mochulsky rightly concludes.⁵¹ Recognizing the essential elements of this inner unity of “integral life” is crucial for a proper understanding of Soloviev’s individual works.

2.4.1 “*Free Theosophy*” (1873-1883)

As soon as he returned from his adventures in Egypt and Europe, he began researching and writing *The Principles of Integral Knowledge*, which unfortunately remained unfinished, and *The Critique of Abstract Principles*, which eventually evolved into his doctoral dissertation. In *Philosophical Principles*, he argues that philosophy should have three parts: the logical, which takes the Absolute as its primary object; the metaphysical, which deals with the Absolute’s relationship with creation; and the ethical, which concerns the mutual integration of the Absolute and creation. The latter element he worked out in greater detail in *The Critique of Abstract Principles*, where a substantial ethic of value and being that includes striking parallels to Max Scheler’s thought is found.⁵² Soloviev places human self-realization in the context of the total self-realization of God in the cosmos, establishing an intimate relationship between ethics and aesthetics. Most importantly, in both works he introduces and formulates his concept of “all-unity” [*vseedinstvo*] which, as

⁵¹ Mochul'skii, 107 (emphasis in original).

⁵² Von Balthasar, 298.

Vladimir V. Zenkovsky observes, “gradually became the central idea and guiding principle of his philosophy.”⁵³

At the same time, having most likely first encountered the notion of the divine *Sophia* at the Moscow Theological Academy,⁵⁴ he continued researching the subject, although he was disappointed by what he found.⁵⁵ Besides the works of Paracelsus, Jacob Boehme, and Emanuel Swedenborg, who only cast minimal light on the subject, he could find nothing that satisfied the rigors of theological, philosophical, and scientific analysis. Undeterred, he confided to a friend that “the field remains wide open to me.”⁵⁶

After a brief attempt to be a war correspondent in the Balkans, inspired by his then still considerable Slavophile sympathies, he returned to St. Petersburg to work on a series of lectures entitled *Lectures on Divine-Humanity*. These twelve lectures, delivered over the course of four years (1877-81), mark his first attempt to formulate a religious metaphysics and to reflect on “the transcendence of God to the world, as well as his immanence in the world that draws man to his own transcendent destiny of union with God.”⁵⁷ He also introduced the notion of “divine-humanity” (*Bogochelovechestvo*), which would become

⁵³ Zenkovsky, 482.

⁵⁴ Although there is no direct proof, Sergei Solov'ev offers circumstantial evidence that Soloviev first encountered the idea of the divine *Sophia* at the Moscow Theological Academy. In addition to Sergei's own belief that he had discovered the handwritten marginal comments of Soloviev in a work of Jacob Boehme in the library of the Academy, he quotes a letter in his biography from Father Pavel Florensky to Sergei Lukianov about Soloviev's discovery of *Sophia*: “Vladimir Solovyov was close to Dimitry Golubinsky, the son of the famous archpriest and philosopher Fyodor Golubinsky [1797-1854], who, as it turns out, profoundly cherished the idea of *Sophia*, which he passed on to [Alexander] Bukharev [1824-71]. Dimitry Golubinsky, who revered the memory and intellectual legacy of his father, probably communicated it to Solovyov as well. Apparently, Solovyov took this idea directly with him from the academy, as afterwards he devoted himself especially to searching for literature on that subject (i.e., his trips abroad).” Quoted in Sergei M. Solov'ev, *Vladimir Solovyov: His Life and Creative Evolution*, 87.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 186.

⁵⁶ Vladimir Solov'ev, *Pis'ma Vladimira Sergeevicha Solov'eva*, 200.

⁵⁷ Robert Slesinski, “V. S. Solovyov: The Centenary of a Death,” *Communio* 26 (1999), 781.

one of the primary characteristic themes of modern Russian religious thought.⁵⁸ He coined the term *Bogochelovechestvo* to describe the positive truth contained in Chalcedonian Christology, namely, a vision of the free, interior, and perfect union of the material universe and of humanity with the Trinity through the mediation of Jesus Christ the Godman [*Bogochelovek*] in which God becomes “all in all.” This vision, as Zenkovsky points out, “is not only the nucleus around which [Soloviev’s] thoughts crystallized, the nodal point of their intersection and combination, but a vital and creative pathway—one might say, a heuristic principle.”⁵⁹

In the spring of 1880, the now famous young scholar successfully defended his doctoral dissertation. He also began lecturing as a docent at the University in St. Petersburg in the Women’s Courses, but this proved short-lived. After the assassination of Emperor Alexander II on March 1, 1881, he gave a public lecture criticizing the Enlightenment in which he condemned all revolutionary activities. To the horror of his audience, he concluded his talk with an appeal to the new emperor, Alexander III, to forgive and pardon his father’s assassin and witness to the world what Christian kingship ought to be. This appeal reached the ear of the new emperor, who was not amused. Soloviev was forced into early retirement

⁵⁸ Soloviev’s neologism, *Bogochelovechestvo* [Богочеловечество] has been variously translated into English as “Godmanhood,” “humanity of God,” or “God-humanity.” In the present study it will be translated it with the English term “divine-humanity” because it best preserves in contemporary English the meaning and integrity of the original Russian. The only weakness of “divine-humanity” is that “divine” does not correspond literally with the prefix of the Russian term, i.e., *Bog*, which means “God,” not “divine,” and the English term risks coming across as abstract or impersonal, unlike the Russian. Nevertheless, given the alternatives, “divine-humanity” is the most practicable because it retains the unity of the Russian term, the essential priority of the divine in relation to the human, and an accurate and happier translation of *chelovechestvo*, which means “humanity” as a whole, not “manhood” with its limited connotations. Also, unlike the other English translations, the term “divine-humanity” can be easily modified in English to translate the Russian adjectival form. Thus, for example, *Bogochelovecheskii organizm* can be translated “divine-human organism.” When it is found in the singular, it refers specifically to Jesus Christ, and therefore it will be translated as “Godman,” as opposed to the literal and overly abstract “God-person.”

⁵⁹ Zenkovsky, 483.

and warned about making any further public statements.⁶⁰ From this point on he devoted himself exclusively to scholarship and supported himself as a free-lance journalist, writing mainly for prominent academic journals. His life-long career as a journalist and free-lance writer is worth noting since it grounded him deeply in the day-to-day social, political, and cultural life of Russia and Europe and allowed him to take an active part in various public debates. This should qualify the common characterization of him as a philosopher of religion, a mystic, and a poet, which, while true, implies a certain otherworldliness and detachment from mundane existence. “This material circumstance should not be forgotten in an evaluation of his spiritual work,” writes Peter Ulf Moller. “Even with his eyes fixed on the eternal, he was also obliged to take note of what was going on around him.”⁶¹ As will be seen, the necessity to publish many of his ideas in a journalistic context would also affect his style, method, and terminology.

With the publication of *The Principles of Integral Knowledge*, *The Critique of Abstract Principles*, and *Lectures on Divine-Humanity*, Soloviev succeeded in articulating the theoretical elements of his Christian synthesis of “free theosophy” and developing his fundamental insights of “all-unity” (*vseedinstvo*) and “Divine-humanity” (*Bogochelovechestvo*).

⁶⁰ His last public speech was in 1891 in Moscow, *On the Decline of the Medieval Worldview*, but after this he was forbidden to speak in public. See Sergei M. Solov'ev, *Vladimir Solovyov: His Life and Creative Evolution*, 228.

⁶¹ Peter Ulf Moller, *Postlude to the Kreutzer Sonata: Tolstoy and the Debate on Sexual Morality in Russian Literature in the 1890s* (Leiden and New York: E. J. Brill, 1988), 281.

2.4.2 “Free Theocracy” (1883-1890)

Creatively speaking, the years 1880 to 1883 were unremarkable. He wrote a series of articles published in *Rus*, a journal edited by the Slavophile, Ivan Aksakov, and later compiled in *The Great Dispute and Christian Politics* (1883). In these he emphasized the role Russia should play in the reunion of the Eastern Orthodox and Catholic Churches, but this was also the point at which he began to criticize the exclusiveness and nationalism of the Russian Orthodox Church and fell out of favor with his fellow Slavophiles. As a result, he began publishing in *The European Messenger*, a Westernizing and liberal periodical. In a series of articles later published in book form as *The National Problem in Russia* (1891), he argued that Russia’s vocation was to rise above nationalism and serve the cause of humanity’s spiritual unification.⁶² At this time he also wrote three articles in commemoration of his close friend Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-81), in which he portrayed the novelist as a prophet and champion of universal Christianity.⁶³

This same period coincided with the development of his relationship with the woman who was to be his only true and lasting love, Sophia Petrovna Khitrovo (née Bakhmeteva), the niece of his friend, the poet Count Alexei Tolstoy. Soloviev met her in 1877 on the latter’s estate of Pustynka, where he spent many happy and productive summers. At that

⁶² Frederick Charles Copleston, *Philosophy in Russia: From Herzen to Lenin and Berdyaev* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), 208-09.

⁶³ Soloviev and Dostoevsky met in 1874 and enjoyed a close and fruitful friendship dating from 1877. They went on pilgrimage together to the monastery of *Optina Pustyn* and collaborated creatively. Most biographers agree that either Alyosha or Ivan or both in *The Brothers Karamazov* were based on Soloviev. See Frederick Charles Copleston, *Philosophy in Russia: From Herzen to Lenin and Berdyaev*, 208 and Sergei M. Solov'ev, *Vladimir Solovyov: His Life and Creative Evolution*, 235-36. For a in-depth treatment of the friendship of Soloviev and Dostoevsky, see Kostalevsky, 49-80.

point she was already married to the diplomat and poet, Mikhail Khitrovo.⁶⁴ Soloviev's love for Sophia grew in stages, but when it had matured, it would last, at least in the form of friendship, for the rest of his life. She inspired his best poems, both during and after the romantic phase of their relationship, and provided him with his most profound experience of romantic love. Many of his poems describe seeing a reflection of the beauty of divine *Sophia* in the face of Sophia Petrovna. He spoke to her about the possibility of her divorcing her husband so they could be free to marry, which the Russian Orthodox Church would have allowed. But the first priority for them both was the welfare of Sophia's children, so they eventually decided to part ways. Putting this relationship behind him was certainly one of most difficult ordeals in his personal life. When asked in confidence: "Have you been in love, and how many times?" Soloviev answered: "Seriously—once; otherwise—twenty seven times."⁶⁵ It would be characteristic of him to veil an intimate personal truth behind a flippant answer, and there is little doubt that this one serious love referred to Sophia Khitrovo. Despite the intensity of this romantic relationship, it did not, at that time in his life, inspire any serious creative work beyond several excellent poems.⁶⁶ He maintained an intense schedule that took its toll on his already fragile health. He was almost always penniless due to a lack of steady income and his habit of giving what he had to anyone who

⁶⁴ Sophia and Mikhail Khitrovo's marriage was a purely practical arrangement for them both. Mikhail spent the majority of their married life stationed abroad.

⁶⁵ As quoted in Lossky, 89.

⁶⁶ There is no doubt that, generally speaking, his personal experience of love inspired, motivated, and informed his reflections on the subject. But there is no direct correlation between his falling in love with Sophia Khitrovo in 1877 and his decision to engage the subject of *eros* and marriage in the 1890s.

asked. Trubetskoi once found him suffering from Moscow's frigid winter temperatures, having given his only overcoat away to a beggar.⁶⁷

The year 1883 marked the beginning of a period of social and ecclesial activism. His studies had led him to the conviction that only Rome and the Catholic Church preserved the universal form necessary to incarnate the one true Body and Bride of Christ. He immersed himself more deeply in Church history and began to work actively towards reconciliation between the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches. He first spoke publicly on this topic in his third speech on Dostoevsky in February, 1883. His efforts at reconciliation won him few friends on either side as he engaged in fierce public polemics, which the government constantly censored. At the same time, he wrote a brilliant and clear summary of Christianity, *The Spiritual Foundations of Life* (1882-84) that reflected his new Catholic Christian theological vision, as well as *The History and Future of Theocracy* (1884), and *The Great Schism and Christian Politics* (1885). He also began to travel once more to the West, including Croatia, where he established a collaborative friendship with the famous Roman Catholic Bishop Josip Juraj Strossmayer (1815-1903) of Djakovo. By this time, he had left his youthful meanderings in non-Christian religions far behind and had become a committed man of the Church, professing his belief in and ecclesial obedience to the authority and infallibility of the Bishop of Rome, and even subscribing publicly to the formal definition of the Virgin Mary's Immaculate Conception.⁶⁸

He shifted the focus of his studies to include Polish, Italian, and Hebrew, an in-depth study of Dante, and a more systematic study of Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox

⁶⁷ Prince Eugene Trubetskoi, *Mirosozertsaniye Vl. Solovyova [Vl. Solovyov's World-View]*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Moscow: Izdanie avtora, 1913), 12.

⁶⁸ Sergei M. Solov'ev, *Vladimir Solovyov: His Life and Creative Evolution*, 285.

politics, history, and theology. His career as an ecclesial activist culminated in Paris where in 1887 he gave a lecture on the Russian Orthodox Church. It only appeared in print in France and was entitled *L'Idée russe*. In 1889 he wrote a more substantial work called *La Russie et L'Église Universelle*, in which he made a detailed historical and theological case for the reunification of the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches, prefaced on Eastern Orthodoxy's acceptance of Roman primacy and infallibility.⁶⁹ The threat of Russian censorship forced him to publish this work in France. Despite his brilliant *apologia* for the Roman papacy, which he distinguished from "Roman papism," Soloviev was never tempted to convert overtly to Roman Catholicism. To pose such a question of "conversion" is to misunderstand his ecclesiology.⁷⁰ In his own heart and mind he belonged to the universal or "catholic" Church, living and incarnate in both Eastern Orthodoxy, as well as the Roman Catholic Church. As he wrote in a letter to Vasily V. Rozanov, "I am just as far from Latin narrowness as from Byzantine narrowness. ... The religion of the Holy Spirit which I confess is broader and at the same time richer in content than any particular religion."⁷¹ In other words, his understanding of the Church included all that was truly universal and therefore Christian in both the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches, which for him included the primacy and infallibility of Peter living in the bishop of Rome.⁷²

⁶⁹ Bishop Strossmayer sent a manuscript of this work to Pope Leo XIII, who read it and replied, "*Bella idea, ma fuor d'un miracolo e cosa impossibile*." See Vladimir Solov'ev, *Pis'ma Vladimira Sergeevicha Sol'oveva*, 4 vols., vol. 4 (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia t-va 'Obshchestvennaia Pol'za', 1908-11), 118-19.

⁷⁰ Given the historical conditions of Soloviev's time, and the common presuppositions among Roman Catholics that Eastern Orthodox Christians were not members of the true Church, he did not characterize his own belief as a conversion to "Roman Catholicism" from "Eastern Orthodoxy." Those categories, as they were understood at the time, were too narrow and exclusive for his universal ecclesial vision.

⁷¹ Vladimir Solov'ev, *Pis'ma Vladimira Sergeevicha Solov'eva*, 43.

⁷² At the end of his introduction to *La Russie et L'Église Universelle*, Soloviev makes a statement of faith in the infallibility of the Bishop of Rome in terms of the Apostle Peter living on his successors: "As a member of the true and venerable eastern orthodox or Greco-Russian Church, who speaks neither through an anti-

By 1891 he had become exhausted from years of trying and failing to realize his vision of “free theocracy,” the harmonious cooperation of the social, political, and ecclesial orders, including the reunion of the Eastern Orthodox and Catholic Churches. He had gradually become disillusioned by the strong opposition and intransigence of the Russian autocracy and Russian Orthodox clergy, the oppressive government censorship, and the lack of sympathy and understanding from his Roman Catholic colleagues, especially the Jesuits he met in France. Eventually, he realized that reunion between the Churches would not come in his own lifetime. This period ended not only with a severe illness, but with his alienation of many trusted friends because of his uncompromising polemics.

2.4.3 “*Free Theurgy*” (1890-1898)

When he regained his health, he turned once again to theoretical philosophy, and in particular, to aesthetics. “The task of humanization now emerges as the solution to an aesthetic question, a solution for which the Beautiful in Nature prepares the way and which art continues,” writes Stremoukhoff. “Aesthetics thus becomes the science of the progressive embodiment of the idea... The new position of the philosopher is that he now treats the world process from the aesthetic viewpoint, instead of confining himself to the theocratic dimension.”⁷³ In Soloviev’s words, he was developing his vision of the universal

canonical synod nor through the employees of the secular power, but through the voice of her great Fathers and Doctors, I recognize as supreme judge in matters of religion him who has been recognized as such by Saint Irenaeus, St. Dionysius the Great, St. Athanasius the Great, St. John Chrysostom, St. Cyril, St. Flavian, the Blessed Theodoret, St. Maximus the Confessor, St. Theodore of the Studium, St. Ignatius, etc., etc.—namely, the Apostle Peter, who lives in his successors and who has not heard in vain the words of the Lord: ‘You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church’; ‘Strengthen your brothers’; ‘Feed my sheep, feed my lambs’.” Soloviev, *La Russie*, lxvi.

⁷³ Cited in von Balthasar, 299-300.

human vocation of cooperating with God to realize “Goodness through Truth in Beauty,”⁷⁴ a vision he had introduced in *Lectures on Divine-Humanity*. During this period he wrote and published *Beauty in Nature* (1889), *The General Meaning of Art* (1890), and several articles on prominent poets. In 1892-94, he also published a series of articles on sexual-spousal love in the journal *Problems of Philosophy and Psychology* [*Problemy Filosofii i Psikhologii*] which was later published in one volume under the title, *The Meaning of Love*. Unfortunately, his premature death would prevent him from finishing his major systematic work on aesthetics, which he originally intended to be the third part of his *Critique of Abstract Principles*.⁷⁵

There is no record of Soloviev ever having explained what inspired him to write and publish the articles on sexual-spousal love at this time. This has left room for speculation by some scholars, such as Konstantin Mochulsky and Soloviev’s personal friend, Count Sergei Trubetskoi. They place considerable emphasis on the role played by Soloviev’s personal mystical and romantic experiences. Other scholars, such as Edith Klum in her religious-philosophical study *Natur, Kunst und Liebe in der Philosophie Vladimir Solov’ëvs*, tend to dismiss the biographical context as largely irrelevant. She argues that the ideas in *The Meaning of Love* are the fruit of a consistent application and development of his previously articulated cosmology, anthropology, and aesthetics of “free theurgy,” the area of his thought on which he was focusing at the time.⁷⁶ Klum’s argument rests on theoretical

⁷⁴ A. F. Losev, "Tvorcheskii Put' Vladimira Solov'eva [the Creative Path of Vladimir Soloviev]," in *Vladimir Sergeevich Solov'ev, Sochineniia V Dvukh Tomakh*, ed. A. F. Losev and A. V. Gulyga (Moscow, Akademiia nauk SSSR, Institut filosofii: Izdatel'stvo 'Mysl', 1988), 111.

⁷⁵ See Robert Slesinski’s summary of the theurgic aspect of Soloviev’s activity in Robert Slesinski, "V. S. Solovyov's Unfinished Project of Free Theurgy," *Diakonia* 29, no. 2 (1996), 138-41.

⁷⁶ Edith Klum, *Natur, Kunst Und Liebe in Der Philosophie Vladimir Solov'ëvs, Eine Religionsphilosophische Untersuchung* (Munich: Slavistische Beiträge 14, 1965), 161-216. See also Losev, 560-63.

evidence as well as the demonstrable consistency of the essential aspects of Soloviev's ideas on sexual-spousal love. The rudiments of these ideas are already in evidence in his early works, such as *The Principles of Integral Knowledge* (1877), which predates the publication of his articles on sexual-spousal love by several years. Later, in his most mature works, such as *The Justification of the Good* (1894-97) and *The Life Drama of Plato* (1898), he develops these rudiments without any substantial changes.

Moller agrees with Klum in terms of the relative unimportance of Soloviev's personal life experiences, but argues that what caused him to fully articulate and publish his theory on sexual-spousal love was the publication in 1889 of Leo Tolstoy's controversial novella, *The Kreutzer Sonata*, which had sparked intense public debate in Russian society concerning the nature and meaning of sexuality, love, and marriage.⁷⁷ "It is clear," concludes Moller, "that by virtue of its publication date (1892-94), its medium (a journal) and, of course, its subject (sexual love in a Christian perspective), [*The Meaning of Love*] forms part of the debate on sexual morality initiated by *The Kreutzer Sonata*."⁷⁸ This argument is supported, as he points out, by Soloviev's persistent polemic against what he believed was Tolstoy's abstract, moralistic, and disembodied notion of Christianity. As Mochulsky demonstrates, the desire to give a comprehensive and public response to Tolstoy had also influenced the publication of two other major works of Soloviev, *The Justification of the Good* and *Three Conversations*.⁷⁹ Finally, within the text of *The Meaning of Love* itself, Moller points out, Soloviev targets *The Kreutzer Sonata* by name, and clearly structured his initial arguments to refute the reasoning of Tolstoy's cynical protagonist,

⁷⁷ Moller, 284-85.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 284.

⁷⁹ Mochul'skii, 248-50.

Pozdnyshov.⁸⁰ Regardless of what occasioned its publication, and it would seem reasonable that all of the above factors played some role,⁸¹ most scholars concur with Mochulsky that *The Meaning of Love* “belongs to the greatest creations of all Russian philosophical thought.”⁸²

In addition to aesthetics, he also turned to ethics around this time, publishing *The Justification of the Good* (1894-97). In the course of this exhaustive study, Soloviev formulates his understanding of the ethical meaning of *eros*, sexuality, spousal love, procreation, and sacramental marriage. This text is crucial for a proper understanding of his theory of sexual-spousal love in *The Meaning of Love*, especially with regard to its sacramental dimension. In the 1890s, he was also writing articles for the *Brockhaus and Ephron* encyclopedia as its editor of philosophy. A renewed focus on theoretical philosophy led him once again to study Plato and he published in 1898 a remarkable essay, *The Life Drama of Plato*.⁸³ There, he sums up Plato’s life and thought in three stages: the false renunciatory idealism of his youth, his unsuccessful attempt to overcome dualism through *eros*, and his complete failure to do so represented by *The Republic* and the *Laws*.⁸⁴ In the section on *eros*, Soloviev restates several of his key ideas about sexual-spousal love from his earlier work, *The Meaning of Love*.

⁸⁰ Solov'ev, *Smysl Liubvi*, SS VII: 31.

⁸¹ Moller, 284.

⁸² Mochul'skii, 201.

⁸³ Judith Kornblatt notes in her essay on *The Life Drama of Plato* that Mochulsky believed that work to be Soloviev’s “personal confession,” and Prince Trubetskoi noted the intentional “harmony” between the life dramas of Plato and Soloviev. See Kornblatt, 81.

⁸⁴ Sergei M. Solov'ev, *Vladimir Solovyov: His Life and Creative Evolution*, 477.

2.5 “APOCALYPSE” (1898-1900)

By the late 1890s his life seemed to have come full circle. Once again he spent time at Count Alexei Tolstoy’s estate of Pustynka and visited Europe and Egypt. When he returned in September, 1898, he composed the poem, *The Three Meetings*. The dense forest and early dusk of Pustynka inspired him, as he recalled, “to reproduce in light verse the most significant events that had happened to me in my life.”⁸⁵ Although his trip to Egypt and time at Pustynka gave him a renewed nostalgia for his encounter with the divine *Sophia*, he no longer saw her in the face of any earthly beloved; as a mature and accomplished poet, he only saw her reflected in nature, and in particular in the beauty of Lake Saima near Finland, on whose shores he wrote the fifth and final article of *The Meaning of Love*.⁸⁶

His last major work, *Three Conversations, Including a Short Story of the Anti-Christ*, dealt primarily with the problem of evil in the world. Having first planned to include a chapter on evil in *Theoretical Philosophy*, he felt it was important to make his ideas accessible to the general public.⁸⁷ It is not surprising, given his renewed interest in Plato, that he chose the format of a dialogue. Since many of Soloviev’s earlier ideas about free theocracy are put into the mouth of the Anti-Christ, and the reunification of the Churches and the realization of the kingdom of God only comes about at the end of history, the extent to which Soloviev renounces his own ideas in this work has long been a topic of debate.

His health took a drastic turn for the worse in the summer of 1900. His last days were spent on the estate of his friend, Prince Sergei Trubetskoi. Soloviev’s intensive work schedule, nomadic and, in later years, ascetical way of life left him utterly exhausted at the

⁸⁵ Ibid., 466.

⁸⁶ Solov'ev, *Stikhotvorenie I Shutochnye Pesi [Poems and Humorous Plays]*, SS XII: 11.

⁸⁷ Sergei M. Solov'ev, *Vladimir Solovyov: His Life and Creative Evolution*, 496.

age of forty seven. On the evening of July 31, having spent many hours in prayer—including reciting the psalms in Hebrew for the Jewish people—and having received the sacraments from a Russian Orthodox priest, he died. His last words were: “Difficult is the work of the Lord.”⁸⁸ His funeral was held on August 4 in Moscow at the Church of St. Tatiana, where the divine *Sophia* had first offered him a blossom from “unearthly lands” during the Hymn of the Cherubim so many years before.⁸⁹

3. A CHRONOLOGICAL SYNOPSIS OF SOLOVIEV’S WRITINGS ON SEXUAL-SPOUSAL LOVE

This section will consider the chronological development of Soloviev’s writings on sexual-spousal love. Although his ideas on this subject developed over time, they remained remarkably consistent throughout the three major creative phases of his life. From his most immature works, such as the unpublished essay *La Sophie* (1876) and his comedic play, *The White Lily* (1878-80) through *Spiritual Foundations* (1883) and *La Russie et L’Église Universelle* (1889) to his most mature and comprehensive treatments of the subject in *The Meaning of Love* (1892-94), *The Justification of the Good* (1894-97), and *The Life Drama of Plato* (1898), it is clear that he conceived the essence of his theory early on and developed it through the 1880s and 90s as an integral element of his Christian synthesis.

The earlier works offer a glimpse into how his theory began to take shape under the overarching notions of Trinitarian all-unity (*vseedinstvo*) and divine-humanity (*Bogochelovechestvo*). In his later works, which flesh out and develop the early rudiments of his thought, there are no substantial variations as such, but there is a notable variation in

⁸⁸ Mochul'skii, 264.

⁸⁹ Sergei M. Solov'ev, *Vladimir Solovyov: His Life and Creative Evolution*, 36.

emphasis, terminology, and scope according to the immediate purpose and context of each work. For example, in his writings that deal strictly with theology, ecclesiology, and ethics, namely, *Spiritual Foundations*, *La Russie et L'Église Universelle*, and *The Justification of the Good*, he emphasizes the sacramental, ecclesial, and moral aspects of sexual-spousal love and union. In contrast, *The Life Drama of Plato* focuses solely on the ultimate philosophical meaning of Plato's *eros* as a universal human phenomenon and its theurgic meaning in which he mentions the theological dimension only in passing and by way of conclusion.

Finally, *The Meaning of Love*, though conditioned by its polemical and apologetic purpose, contains the most inclusive articulation of his theory in the context of his aesthetics of free theurgy and divine-humanity. Thus, in order to obtain a full understanding of his argument as a whole, which includes an accurate interpretation of the theological meaning of its "free theosophical" terms and concepts, all of his writings on the subject, insofar as they complete and clarify the formal statement of his theory in *The Meaning of Love*, need to be taken into account.

3.1 "Primordial Chaos": *La Sophie and The White Lily*

Soloviev first articulates his reflections on sexual-spousal love at the age of twenty one in *La Sophie*, written in the form of a platonic dialogue between "*La Sophie*" and "*le philosophe*" during his first visit to Egypt. This work was heavily influenced by his recent studies of Kabala in London, as well as his fascination with Gnosticism and early studies in German idealism. His attempt to integrate these elements into a Christian synthesis was

superficial and unsuccessful. Nevertheless, there are in *La Sophie* rudimentary ideas, which would reappear purified, fully formed, and successfully integrated into an orthodox, universal Christian synthesis in later works. For example, in *La Sophie* he affirms the essential oneness and inseparability of *amor ascendens* and *amor descendens*, and identifies love, and in particular sexual-spousal love as symbolized in the *Song of Songs* and *Revelation*, as a transformative force and the foundational principle of unity not only between man and woman but between the individual and social spheres of humanity, whose ultimate form is ecclesial and universal divine-humanity.⁹⁰

Not long after he penned *La Sophie*, he composed *The White Lily: A Dream on the Night of Pokrov* (1878-80), a rather bizarre three-act comedy in which coarse and cynical jokes intermingle with sophiological imagery. Despite its comedic intention and poetic form, this play gives us valuable insight into the initial dilemma Soloviev encountered when attempting to make theological sense of the phenomenon of *eros*, a dilemma he sought to resolve in his future Christian synthesis of “integral life.” Verses from his early poem, *The Song of the Ophites*, written in France,⁹¹ appear in *The White Lily* and express the heart of this dilemma and to the hoped for resolution: “We will marry the white lily with the rose, / With the scarlet rose.” The symbol of the “white lily” would appear often throughout his poetry, and is not only a metaphor for the divine *Sophia*, but more generally for that divine and wholly pure *eros* proclaimed by the Old Testament prophets, symbolized in the *Song of Songs*, revealed to the Apostle John, and experienced by the mystics. The “red rose” represents both any concrete earthly beloved as well as the phenomenon of *eros* in its

⁹⁰ See A. P. Kozyrev, "Smysl' Liubvi v Filosofii Vladimira Solov'eva i Gnosticheskie Paralleli," *Voprosi filosofii* 7, no. (1995), 59-78.

⁹¹ See Sergei M. Solov'ev, *Vladimir Solovyov: His Life and Creative Evolution*, 163, 205-06.

present, fallen human form, “full of the heat of passion.” As his nephew Sergei Solov’ev points out, even at this early stage, Soloviev “recognized that he could not and must not become disembodied and pass into the fourth dimension,” so to speak, nor could he “unite with a heavenly being in the full heat of passion with a complete spiritual and physical love,” since that would mean “taking a demonic path.”⁹² Rather, he understood that he would have to seek a third way, i.e., that of the transformation of the tainted “red rose” of human *eros* through its marriage with the pure “white lily” of divine love.

3.2 1880s: Sexual-Spousal Love and “le Vrai Mariage”

In his more mature period of the 1880s, Soloviev had left behind his infatuation with Kabbalistic and Gnostic ideas and immersed himself in Eastern Orthodox and Catholic Church history and theology, with a special focus on patristics. His ideas on love are now articulated in an explicitly ecclesial and sacramental context, beginning with *Spiritual Foundations*, in which he gives a brief explanation of marriage as sacrament, and culminating in *La Russie et L’Église Universelle*, in which he devotes the final chapter to “les quatre sacrements des ‘devoirs’ de l’homme, of which the sacrament of marriage is one. In these works, he argues that the sacrament of marriage “makes true sexual love the first positive basis of divine-human integration.”⁹³ In *Spiritual Foundations*, he distills the “universal and divine” meaning of each of the seven sacraments in order to demonstrate why

⁹² Ibid., 207.

⁹³ Vladimir Soloviev, “*La Russie et L’Église Universelle*,” in *La Sophia Et Les Autres Écrits Français* (Lausanne: La Cite - L’Age d’Homme, 1978), 296.

they are essential elements of the Catholic Church (*kafolicheskaia tserkov*)⁹⁴ as the way, the truth, and the life.⁹⁵ The role sacramental marriage in particular plays is to sanctify the “fullness of physical life” through the “fullness of spiritual fellowship,” in which the spouses participate in the “mystical wedding” of Christ and the Church. In so doing, individual human beings regain their wholeness, and become “a full and complete link in the chain of universal life.”⁹⁶ In *La Russie et L’Église Universelle*, he develops and broadens this brief definition, filling out its context and justification.

While most of *La Russie et L’Église Universelle* is devoted to an historical and theological apologetic for the Roman Papacy⁹⁷ and an argument for reconciliation between the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches, the third and final section delves into the Trinitarian, Christological, and eschatological dimensions of the Catholic Church. In the seventh chapter of this section, entitled “*Triple incarnation de la Sagesse divine*,” he argues that the “contrast and union of the divine Word and earthly nature is reproduced for man himself in the distinction and union between the sexes.”⁹⁸ But while the essence of human nature is fully represented by individual man and woman, the *imago Dei* in humanity includes relationality and can only be realized through communal or social life. He describes the *theosis* of humanity, one in essence but separate in existence as Man, Woman, and Society, as a “triple incarnation” of divine Wisdom: Christ, the Blessed Virgin, and the

⁹⁴ Soloviev uses the Russian word “catholic” (*kafolicheskaia*) when speaking of the Universal Church or her “universal” or “catholic” attributes. He takes this term directly from the Nicene Creed and clearly wants to express the ecclesial notion of “universal”. Translators have rendered this term in English as “universal,” not “catholic,” most likely to avoid any confusion.

⁹⁵ Solov'ev, *Dukhovnie Osnovi Zhizni*, SS III: 398.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 399.

⁹⁷ The contemporary value and relevance of Soloviev’s apologetic for the papacy was marked by the recent publication of this section as a separate publication by Catholic Answers in 2002. See Vladimir Soloviev, *The Russian Church and the Papacy* (San Diego: Catholic Answers, 2001).

⁹⁸ Soloviev, *La Russie*, 264.

Church.⁹⁹ In the final two chapters of the book, chapters eleven and twelve, he seeks to explain how the seven sacraments progressively realize the incarnation of divine Wisdom in the Universal Church.

In chapter eleven, Soloviev summarizes the meaning of Baptism, Confirmation, and Communion through an analogy with the “rights of man,” whereby these sacraments bestow in principle the grace of being children of God, brother and sister of one another, free and equal in Christ. But this grace, while reflecting a God-given right, and while true in principle, remains to be fully realized in actual human existence, both individual and communal. In chapter twelve, the four sacraments of *les devoirs de l’homme*—Reconciliation, Matrimony, Holy Orders, and Extreme Unction—address this aspect of realization in sacramental life. In these sacraments God gives man the “privilege of making himself in reality what ideally he is already, and of realizing the principle of his being by his own activity.”¹⁰⁰ In this context, Soloviev lays out the essence of his theory of sexual-spousal love in the context of sacramental marriage, what he also terms *le vrai mariage*.

His argument begins with a statement of the fundamental problem of egoism as “the root of all human evil” that pervades and undermines every aspect of individual and social existence. He then declares that the solution to this problem can only be love, which is, like the sacraments, at once a power in itself (*la force*), as well as a task (*l’oeuvre*). Since love as a power enables human individuals to “inwardly surpass the confines of our given existence” and “unite us to the Whole,” love’s ultimate task is the “integration of humanity,” and through humanity, of all created existence. The foundation of this process is the

⁹⁹ Ibid., 264-66.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 295.

reintegration of human individuality through the “true and eternal union” of man and woman in sacramental marriage, which “makes true sexual love the first positive basis of the divine-human integration.”¹⁰¹ When Soloviev uses the term “true love” between spouses, he explains that it is this love, and not man’s desire to possess woman “externally in the name of a blind and irrational passion,” that has been ordained and blessed by God and perpetuated by the Church in the sacrament of marriage.¹⁰² True sexual-spousal love is uniquely suited to overcome egoism because it is love “at its most concentrated and most concrete,” which shatters our “brutal egoism” by “an intense emotion impelling it to identification with another being.”¹⁰³ Since love is a form of truth, it restores the proper order of being as well, and thus physical union becomes “an ultimate consequence and external realization of this mystical and moral relationship.”¹⁰⁴ Thus, the meaning of true, sacramental marriage, what he terms *le vrai mariage*, is the restoration of the *imago Dei* in the “one flesh” union of husband and wife through “sanctified love.” This divine-human process of restoration progressively realizes the “true individual elements” of the incarnate *Sophia*, the eschatological fullness of the Catholic Church.

3.3 1890s: Sexual-Spousal Love, Divine-Humanity, and Free Theurgy

Soloviev’s writings on sexual-spousal love in the 1890s cannot be grouped under any one genre, despite all having been written during the “theurgic” phase of his life. *The*

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 296.

¹⁰² It is worth noting that Soloviev here gives new richness to the meaning of the Russian word for chastity, *tselomudrie*, which is derived from the word “whole,” *tselý*, and wisdom, *mudrost’*. According to Soloviev’s ideas of sexual-spousal love and union, chastity for him is the reintegration of human wholeness according to divine wisdom.

¹⁰³ Soloviev, *La Russie*, 296.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 296.

Meaning of Love, in which his theory is formulated in full for the first time, was published as a series of articles in the Russian liberal academic journal, *The Problems of Philosophy and Psychology* over a span of roughly two years, from the fall of 1892 until the summer of 1894. It falls under the genre of polemical journalism and sought to win over a skeptical, educated readership influenced by various modern trends of thought, including scientific Positivism, Tolstoyan Christianity, psychology, and Nietzschean philosophy. In contrast, his exhaustive opus on moral philosophy, *The Justification of the Good* (1894-97), was published as a separate tome and focuses on the moral dimension of existence, in the context of which he touches on the moral dimension of sexual-spousal love, sacramental marriage, procreation, and family; while *The Life Drama of Plato* (1898) reiterates elements of *The Meaning of Love* within the context of an analysis of Plato's life and thought and in order to correct and complete the Greek philosopher's ingenious but insufficient insights into the true meaning of *eros*. Finally, Soloviev's pithy article in the *Brockhaus and Ephron* encyclopedia on love, published in the late 1890s, further confirms the consistency and coherence of his ideas on sexual-spousal love and shows the remarkable breadth and depth of his own multidisciplinary knowledge of the subject in general.

3.3.1 *The Meaning of Love* (1892-94)

The five chapter divisions in *The Meaning of Love* correspond to the original five articles published separately over a period of two years in the journal, *Problems of Philosophy and Psychology*, which perhaps explains the uncharacteristically untidy structure of its argument. In chapter one Soloviev criticizes the theories of sexual-spousal love

prevalent in modern Russian society, most of which were in some way inspired by Charles Darwin, Arthur Schopenhauer, or Leo Tolstoy. He argues that these theories cannot and in fact do not bestow any intrinsic meaning on the existential phenomenon of sexual-spousal love or *eros* itself. To obtain an accurate picture of this phenomenon he relies on empirical evidence, biblical revelation, and human experience, whose ideal truth, he asserts, is distilled and expressed faithfully in true literature and especially the best lyrical poetry. In chapter two, he introduces his own theory by arguing that the meaning of human love, and sexual-spousal love in particular, can only be found in individual existence, or more precisely, in “the justification and salvation of individuality through the sacrifice of egoism.”¹⁰⁵ In chapter three he develops this idea further by focusing on sexual-spousal love as an aesthetic or theurgic task, because the meaning of love is first given only in feeling; it remains to be realized and justified in concrete human existence through the creative dynamism of human freedom cooperating with divine grace, what he calls a “divine-human” process. In chapter four, he considers the proximate goal of this task, namely, the restored integrity of the human being as *imago Dei* through spousal love and union, which is analogous to the union between God and creation, and Christ and the Church. He argues that such integration through divine-human union is the “absolute norm” for a human being (as opposed to the reductive, partial, or perverted norms promulgated by modern psychology). In chapter five, he presents the ultimate goal of sexual-spousal love’s task, which is the extension of the power and form of sexual-spousal love to the relations of the true individual to all communal and universal spheres of human and natural existence, i.e., the realization of all-unity

¹⁰⁵ Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 16.

(*vseedinstvo*), which in theological terms he identifies as divine-humanity or the kingdom of God.

Chapter 1

At the outset of his argument, Soloviev attacks two commonly assumed but untenable theories: first, that sexual love, both animal and human, exists strictly as a means for the procreation of the species; and second, that the individual, subjective aspect of human sexual love exists to further perfect humanity as a whole. He argues that empirical science proves the first false: sexual procreation as such is simply not necessary for the procreation of living organisms (e.g. plants). Furthermore, at the lowest levels of organic life a maximum multiplication of the species and minimal (or no) individual attachment is observed; while at the highest levels there is minimal (or no) multiplication of the species and maximum individual attachment that culminates with human sexual-spousal love, in which individuals become ends in themselves. If anything, based on the facts of natural science, one should deduce an inverse ratio between the significance and meaning of individual sexual-spousal love and attachment and the exigencies of natural reproduction for the good of the species.

Schopenhauer attempts to explain the individual character of sexual love with his universal *Wille*, which seeks to perfect the human race by using sexual love to attract the best possible mates to one another. But as Soloviev points out, the necessary causal relation between the quality and intensity of sexual love and the quality of person born of its consummation simply does not exist, except by way of rare exception. On the contrary—if

one consults biblical history, which “embodies the ideal meaning of the facts in their empirical details,” and literature, which expresses “whole types” and not “isolated phenomena”¹⁰⁶—sexual love is rarely mutual, and if mutual, is rarely fruitful, and if fruitful, produces ordinary offspring. Further, the true universal *Wille*, Divine Providence, does in fact guide human history and ordain the birth of individuals, such as the Messiah himself; but according to the biblical evidence, Providence does not employ sexual love as a means to do so. Any theory that locates the meaning of sexual love in the quantity or quality of human procreation thereby renders itself meaningless and fails to account for sexual love as a uniquely human phenomenon that is determined primarily by the subjective feeling of absolute, concrete, and individual significance. Soloviev concludes that our subjective experience of sexual-spousal love’s absolute value for human individuality is in fact supported by objective historical and scientific evidence, and that consequently its positive meaning must “have its roots in individual life.”¹⁰⁷

Chapter 2

Having established that sexual-spousal love, as the “supreme blossom” of human individuality, cannot be “merely an instrument of the purposes of an historical process external to it,” he argues that the “authentic aim of the historical process,” properly understood, does confirm the absolute significance of human individuality (*individualnost*, personhood) as an end in itself.¹⁰⁸ This aim is revealed in the uniquely human form or *imago* of rational consciousness that is at once individual and personal as well as universal and

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 10, 7.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 11.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 12.

absolute. Human rational consciousness has access to ideal norms of universal truth, goodness, and beauty—what Soloviev calls the norms of “all-unity” (*vseedinstvo*)—and is able to compare them with existential human conditions, actions, and all facts and phenomena in general. With such an awareness and understanding, the human individual has the capacity to “infinitely perfect his life and nature *without leaving the boundaries of the human form*.”¹⁰⁹ Therefore, with the advent of humanity, the cosmogonic process, through which ever more complex forms of organic life had evolved, reaches its conclusion, and the historical process, strictly speaking, begins.

In humanity, universal consciousness is manifested in heightened individual consciousness. As a consequence, this consciousness is not merely an organ for individual life, but is also revealed (in religion, science, morality, and art) as the “center of a universal consciousness of nature, as the soul of the world, as the realized potential of absolute all-unity (*vseedinstvo*).” There can be no “higher form of life,” since above the human individual there can only be the Absolute in its “perfected act or eternal existence, i.e., God.”¹¹⁰

Every human being as *imago Dei* is capable of knowing and realizing universal truth or “all-unity” (*vseedinstvo*) and becoming “a living reflection of the absolute whole” and “a conscious and independent organ of universal life.”¹¹¹ But mere consciousness of truth is not sufficient to realize this potentiality. Human individuality is fully justified only if it actually *exists* in “all-unity,” which it does not. Actual human existence is governed by the law of *egoism*, which is diametrically opposed to the universal truth of “all-unity.” Egoism

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. (emphasis in original).

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 14.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

exclusively affirms and desires its own isolated, fragmentary existence to be the whole in and for itself, and thus remains existentially outside all-unity. More than a law, egoism is an existential “living force” or “power” (*zhivaia sila*) that permeates and conditions every aspect of human existence. In relation to such a living force, *consciousness* of all-unity is powerless and appears as a “superficial illumination” or the “flash of an alien light”¹¹² that merely unmasks the futility of an ego-centered existence. Here Soloviev introduces his preliminary thesis concerning the general meaning of human love: “Truth, as a living force that takes possession of the inner essence of man and in actuality leads him out of false self-affirmation is called love.”¹¹³ Assuming the role played by rational consciousness, which allows the individual to distinguish between “false egoism” and “true individuality,” Soloviev concludes that, generally speaking, “the meaning of human love is the *justification and redemption of individuality through the sacrifice of egoism*.”¹¹⁴

Before turning to his primary thesis on sexual-spousal love, Soloviev returns once more to the nature of egoism. The egoistic individual is right to place absolute significance and infinite value on his own self; the error—perpetuated in “living consciousness,” “intrinsic feeling,” and “actual practice” as opposed to “abstract theoretical consciousness”—lies in the denial of that same significance and value to others. Since the truth of being itself is “all-unity,” the ego’s claim to be “all” in isolation from others leads to existential emptiness and futility. Although the metaphysical, physical, historical, and social conditions of human existence preordained by Providence modify and mitigate the effects of egoism, only love is able to eradicate it at its root by compelling us effectively to

¹¹² Ibid., 15.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 16 (emphasis in original).

“acknowledge in the *other*, with all our being, the unconditional, central significance that, on the strength of egoism, we sense only in ourselves.”¹¹⁵ More than a feeling, this acknowledgement involves the “transfer of our entire vital interest from self to other” and the “transposition of the very center of our personal life.”¹¹⁶ After making it clear that every form of human love manifests this capacity and fulfills this meaning, Soloviev introduces his thesis as to why sexual-spousal love in particular manifests and fulfills it in the highest degree.

Sexual-spousal love differs from all other forms of love by a “greater intensity, a more captivating character, and the possibility of a more full and all-around mutuality; only this love can lead to the actual and indissoluble union of two lives into one, only of this love does the Word of God say: ‘The two will become one flesh,’ i.e., will become one actual being.”¹¹⁷ The principles he discerns here, which make this possible, are sexual-spousal love’s intensity, concreteness, all-embracing character, and the homogeneity of nature but all-round difference in form between man and woman. Other forms of love, he argues, do not possess these principles to the same degree. Mystical love, as per the *Upanishads* and *Vedas*, lacks concreteness and homogeneity and only abolishes egoism by dissolving individuality along with it. Parental love, and maternal in particular, comes closest to sexual-spousal love in intensity and concreteness, but does not possess the same degree of equality, given the nature of the relationship, nor difference, since it is conditional on “an external physiological bond.”¹¹⁸ Friendship lacks the all-round formal distinction; and patriotism or

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 21 (emphasis in original).

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 22.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 21.

“love of humanity” lacks the necessary concreteness and homogeneity of natures. Thus, citing the *Song of Songs* and *Revelation*, Soloviev declares that sexual-spousal love is the “type” and “ideal” of every other love because through it the meaning of human love in general can be realized most completely in physical-spiritual spousal union.¹¹⁹

Chapter 3

At the outset of the third chapter, Soloviev gives a blunt and realistic analysis of the actual human phenomenon of sexual-spousal love, concluding that all empirical evidence points to its being, individually speaking, nothing but a “deception,” “amorous reverie,” and “illusion.” Nevertheless, although love’s ideal meaning has not yet been realized, it does not follow that it is *intrinsically* unrealizable, as long as it does not contradict the general meaning of cosmic and historical development. He compares it to other human potentialities, unfeasible for millennia, but ultimately realized in history, such as language, science, art, civil society, and control over the forces of nature. He suggests that love is for humanity what reason once was for animals, existing in “beginnings or rudiments, but not yet in actual practice.”¹²⁰ Unlike the cosmogonic process, however, human historical development is a conscious and free process that takes place not only in humanity, but through it, and in cooperation with God in, through, and with the divine *Logos*, incarnate in Christ. The proper task of sexual-spousal love is to realize its meaning, at first given only in feeling, through the creation of a “true human being as a free unity of the male and female

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 16.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 23.

principles, preserving their formal solitariness, but having overcome their essential discord and disintegration.”¹²¹

Having shifted his focus to sexual-spousal love as a creative, aesthetic, or “theurgic” *task*, he now considers the principal obstacles to its fulfillment. First, sexual-spousal love has not been recognized as a task at all, but only as a given fact, a natural, transient state imposing no special obligation. Comparing it to humanity’s progressive realization of the capacity for speech, he maintains that our capacity for sexual-spousal love cannot even begin to grow beyond “vague fits of passion and involuntary attractions” unless we move beyond passive enjoyment and consciously and freely strive to incarnate its ideal truth in reality. Second, what ought to be the culmination and consummation of sexual-spousal love, namely, sexual union, is instead isolated as an immediate end in itself, which subverts and ultimately eradicates true love. There is no positive or intrinsic relation between sexual union *in itself* and love, since it occurs without love and love occurs without it; its significance is only revealed in relation to the true meaning of sexual-spousal love as the divine-human realization of true human individuality or personhood.¹²² Third, the reality of sin and death would seem to confirm the opinion of those who consider the subjective feeling of the absolute significance of love to be an illusion and therefore inherently unrealizable. Mortality is irreconcilable with the unconditional significance of human individuality revealed through sexual-spousal love because the object of this love is the “whole human being,” this particular, concrete “embodied living spirit in a corporeal

¹²¹ Ibid., 24.

¹²² Ibid., 29-30.

organism,”¹²³ whom death will destroy. But if immortality is revealed as a necessary condition for the full realization of true love’s meaning, this condition is in turn irreconcilable with the immorality and futility of human existence in its present state. Thus, the full realization of the meaning of sexual-spousal love necessarily presumes the redemption of our mortal, sinful existence and the incarnation of the “absolute content” of “eternal life” or the “kingdom of God,” a life *worthy* of the eternal.¹²⁴

This process of realization or incarnation has as its end a theurgic or divine-human work of “art,” so to speak, and thus, as with any such work, must begin with inspiration. When speaking of sexual-spousal love, inspiration occurs when the lover perceives the beloved in an ideal light. This idealization of the beloved, Soloviev insists, is not an illusion, nor merely a moral and intellectual evaluation; the lover actually perceives sensuously, concretely, and vividly the *imago Dei* or ideal essence of the beloved. Soloviev dismisses the notion as groundless that the transience of this vision proves it to be illusory. Love’s power to enlighten, transform, and inspire external phenomena reveals its objective potency; but it remains the lover’s task to restore the *imago* in the beloved through the power of an active and true faith as moral exploit (*podvig*) and labor, of real imagination, and real creativity.”¹²⁵

Chapter 4

In the fourth chapter, Soloviev addresses the proximate end of sexual-spousal love by interpreting the Genesis text on man and woman as created in the *imago Dei* and the

¹²³ Ibid., 30.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 32.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 27.

divine-human “great mystery” of Ephesians 5, in which the “true union of the sexes” consists. He prefaces this by pointing out that the tyranny of the species over the individual, in which life, procreation, and death are inextricably intertwined, is a law that nature herself has been gradually striving to overcome. He argues that with the advent of the human person there exists an individual being who possesses “an absolutely supreme organic form” capable of embodying an individual self-consciousness. This universal form of self-consciousness liberates man, in principle, from the tyranny of nature (the species) over the individual, and enables him to relate to nature as to an object. In this way, he is able, in principle, to transcend the impersonal cycle of life, procreation, and death, which consumes all other individual beings. But human beings, existing separately as man and woman and thus in a “state of disintegration and the beginning of death,” reproduce and die just like other animals.¹²⁶ This state of isolation, division, and disintegration cannot be overcome through a physiological, transient union of the sexes, nor through simply refraining from such a union; it can only be overcome through a third way, a “true union of the sexes.”¹²⁷ In what does “true union” consist for individuals made in the divine *imago* of the Trinity?

Citing mid-nineteenth-century German and French psychiatric literature, he argues that what is taken as the norm for sexual relations in society is in principle as abnormal as any clinically diagnosable fetishism. Fetishisms are abnormal because they focus on the part in isolation from the whole; likewise, what is commonly considered normal sexual relations are equally abnormal because they separate the physical body from the whole of the human being’s essence, which includes three spheres: the animal, the socio-moral, and the spiritual,

¹²⁶ Ibid., 32-34.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 34.

mystical, or divine. Each sphere respectively corresponds to a mode of union: physical, legal, and union in God. The latter, when it comes first, is completely “natural” for the human being in its entirety, “as a creature participating in the supreme, divine principle and interceding between it and the world,” because this mode of union regenerates the mortal life of nature and society “by the eternal and non-decaying power of grace.”¹²⁸ He argues that the two lower elements of animal nature and the social law (which correspond to sexual union and the social institution of marriage respectively), while good and natural in themselves and in their place, become “unnatural” vis-à-vis human nature when separated from the higher sphere and substituted for it. Likewise, a purely and exclusively spiritual love is “devoid of any real objective and vital aim” and is as unnatural as an exclusively physical love or an exclusively social and legal union. He concludes that “the absolute norm is the restoration of the wholeness of the human essence” brought about by a “true spiritual love” that transforms the mortal into the immortal. “True spirituality,” he insists, “is not a “rejection of the flesh” but “its regeneration, redemption, and resurrection.”¹²⁹

Soloviev then turns to two inseparable truths that constitute the Scriptural foundation of his theory: the notion of *imago Dei* as referring to the original union of man and woman in Genesis, and the Pauline “great mystery” in Ephesians 5. The restoration of the *imago Dei* in human individuals presumes the integration of the whole human essence, and this integration takes the form of spousal union, which represents an “essential analogy,” though not an identity, between God’s relation to creation, Christ’s relation to the Church, and a husband’s relation to his wife. But while God and Christ relate to creation and the Church

¹²⁸ Ibid., 38.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 40.

respectively as “everything to nothing” and “actual perfection to potential perfection,” the “relation of husband and wife is the relation of two distinctly acting but identically imperfect potentials, achieving perfection only by a process of cooperation.” Furthermore, husband and wife do not have the power *in themselves* to “mutually fulfill one another” in a “real” or even an “ideal” sense. They “must receive it from God” because they only “possess it by grace and adoption,” having in themselves “only the possibility (potential) for its conception.”¹³⁰

The foundation and first step of the active role played by the spouses in the process of realizing the “great mystery” in spousal union, the “matter of true love,” is *faith*. The apparent contradiction between the unconditional, absolute significance of the other revealed by love, and the empirically objective reality of the limited, sinful, transient beloved individual, means that affirming the former of the latter could only be a case of blasphemy or insanity. The only way to affirm the infinite, absolute significance of the other without falling into idolatry or delusion is to have faith in and affirm their ideal existence *in God*. For the lover, this faith in the beloved in turn rests on faith in God, as well as in himself as an individual with the center and root of his own existence in God. When this triune faith is put into action in space and time, it is properly called “prayer” and is the first, small step toward true spousal union.

In active faith as prayer we love one and the same person in two distinct but inseparable spheres of existence: the ideal (not in the abstract sense, but in the sense of belonging to a higher sphere of objective reality that is perceived concretely through the pathos of love) and the real. By virtue of “real, believing, seeing love,” we know that this

¹³⁰ Ibid., 41-42.

ideal essence “is not our arbitrary contrivance, but that it expresses *the truth* of the object, only not yet realized in the sphere of external, real phenomena.”¹³¹ True love is thus indivisibly both ascending and descending, *amor ascendens* and *amor descendens*, striving to realize the ideal essence, the divine *imago*, in and through the transformation and regeneration of the natural human essence. Although it becomes in some way visible to the lover in rare and fleeting moments of loving pathos, this ideal image of the beloved endures beyond these moments only as an object of our memory and imagination. Nevertheless, he argues, since our minds are not wholly alien to the transcendent sphere of existence, the image we form in our imagination may be said to be “inspired” or informed by the ideal essence of the beloved. In the transcendent sphere, “reality belongs to unity—or, more precisely, all-unity (*vseedinstvo*) and distinction and isolation exist only potentially and subjectively.” Consequently, the objective reality *of this* person in the transcendent sphere is not “individual” in the sense of local, actual existence. Rather, an individual person is ideally or in truth “an individualization of all-unity, which is indivisibly present in each of these its individualizations.”¹³²

Soloviev ends this chapter by giving a short summary of this one reality of all-unity (*vseedinstvo*) of which human beings are individualizations. In addition, he introduces the notion of creation as the “eternal feminine,” the “eternal object of divine love” considered as a living whole. Divine creation *ex nihilo* of “all that is not God,” on which God bestows his own perfect image of all-unity, precedes human sexual-spousal love as a living ideal. The truth of loving pathos lies in participating in this divine-creaturely drama, in which “the

¹³¹ Ibid., 44 (emphasis in original).

¹³² Ibid., 44-45.

idealization of the lower essence is at the same time the incipient realization of the higher.”¹³³ Although for God his other, i.e., creation as a whole, has always had the form of perfected femininity, he desires “not only that this form be for him, but that it also be realized and incarnated for each individual essence capable of uniting with it.” Thus, in “truly understood and truly realized sexual love, this divine substance receives a means for its definitive, utmost incarnation in the individual life of a human person and a way to the most profound and, at the same time, most real and tangible union with it.”¹³⁴

Chapter 5

He begins the fifth and final chapter with a brief recapitulation of the proximate cause of sexual love’s transitory character and apparent futility, namely, the “perversion of the loving attitude itself” that replaces the highest end of love with a lower, and that leads merely to an “*egotism à deux*.” The experience and inner activity of conscious, religious faith, the practice of asceticism, and the moral “feat” (*podvig*) of “patience to the end” and “taking up the cross” are the only defenses against the existential dominion of “senseless chance” and animal and human passions. But even if spouses strive to realize love’s true meaning faithfully to the end, they remain as before, restricted beings dependent on the material world and subject to the “ruthless law of organic life and death.”¹³⁵ Ultimately, the human individual can be redeemed, reborn, and immortalize his individual life in true love, only together with all. “If the moral meaning of love demands the unification of that which has been unjustly separated, demands the identity of self and other, then to isolate the task of

¹³³ Ibid., 45.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 46.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 50.

our individual perfection from the process of universal unification would be against this very same moral meaning of love.”¹³⁶ Every attempt to isolate the individual process of regeneration in true love is met with a three-fold insuperable barrier: the life of isolated lovers turns out to be physically unsound, powerless against time and death; intellectually empty and without content; and morally unworthy. Thus, “a true life of individuality, in its full and unconditional significance, is realized and immortalized only in the corresponding development of universal life,” in which one can and must “take more conscious and active participation as much as possible ... for ourselves and for all others *indivisibly*.”¹³⁷

According to Soloviev, empirical science proves that the life of the universe consists in the all-one Idea (*vseedinaia Ideia*) gradually being realized by progressively overcoming the impenetrability and fragmentation of time and space. This process does not consist of the “all” absorbing the parts into a simple unity. On the contrary, “perfect all-unity, according to its own conception, requires full equilibrium, equality of value, and equality of rights between the one and the all, between the whole and the parts, between the common and the individual. The fullness of the idea requires that the greatest unity of the whole be realized in the greatest independence and freedom of the parts and individual elements—in themselves, through them, and for them.”¹³⁸ It is with the appearance of humanity, both as individuals and as a social organism, that this Idea finds an adequate form in which to be realized, since the human individual and society mutually penetrate one another, existing in, through, and for one another. Although sexual-spousal love is the “basis and type” of true life, i.e., of “living in another as in oneself” and thus of “finding in another a positive and unconditional

¹³⁶ Ibid., 50-51.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 53 (emphasis in original).

¹³⁸ Ibid., 55.

fulfillment of one's essence," this integration of individual life necessarily demands the very same integration in the spheres of social and universal life.

Soloviev's argument culminates in his associating the meaning of individual sexual-spousal love with the meaning of universal life, what he calls the "idea of universal *syzygy*." Using this idea of *syzygy*, he extends the meaning and form of the sexual-spousal relationship by analogy to the relations of individual to society, the part to the whole, the member to the Body. Just as spouses are irreducibly distinct but equal in rights and worth and thereby complement and fulfill each other, so too must the individual be in relation to all spheres of social life, the family, nation, Church, and humanity as a whole. The proper relation of the true individual to all social organisms is neither one of submission nor one of dominion, but rather "to be in a loving interaction with it, to serve for it as an active fertilizing source of advancement, and to find in it a plentitude of vitally important conditions and possibilities."¹³⁹ He argues that the Biblical revelation of cities, nations, Israel, and the Universal Church as images of feminine individualities is not merely a matter of metaphor. These biblical images reveal that we are able to enter into loving relationships with these social bodies as with any actual living being in the "closest and fullest mutuality."¹⁴⁰ To these social and ecclesial spheres he adds the sphere of nature as a whole, arguing that the individual must relate to it also as to a living being with equal rights. As with the individual and social *syzygy* relations of love, this relationship with nature is not passive but requires humanity to enter into nature from within in order to vivify it and

¹³⁹ Ibid., 58.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

immortalize its beauty.¹⁴¹ But while the exact nature of these collective and natural supra-personalities remains beyond us, the task to incarnate the all-one Idea requires that we extend the same form of loving, *syzygy* relation to the social and universal milieu, relating to it “as to a real living being with which we, while never merging to indistinction, find ourselves in the most proximate and fullest interaction.” This sort of relation “perfects individuality itself, communicating to it the unity and fullness of living content, and at the same time, elevates and immortalizes the fundamental, individual form of love.”¹⁴² Thus it is through the transformation or “interior conversion” of sexual-spousal love as a creative power, both individually and socially-universally, that true individuals cooperate with divine grace to inspire and incarnate the all-one Idea in material reality and human existence. With this, Soloviev believes he has fulfilled his task to define the meaning of love, “since by the meaning of any subject is understood precisely its inner connection with universal truth.”¹⁴³

3.3.2 *The Justification of the Good*

In *The Justification of the Good*, Soloviev addresses the subject of sexual-spousal love in two distinct ways. First, he introduces an elaborate argument to prove that sexual love, and in particular sexual shame, is the “natural root of human morality.”¹⁴⁴ He establishes the basis of this argument in part two, “The Good is from God,” in the first chapter, “The Unity of Moral Principles.” There he argues that the existential phenomenon of sexual shame demonstrates that the human person is not merely a natural event or

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 59.

¹⁴² Ibid., 58.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 60.

¹⁴⁴ Soloviev, *Opravdanie Dobra*, SS VIII: 119-20.

phenomenon but is a free and rational creature aware of his own absolute significance as an individual. In the experience of sexual shame, the individual experiences the irreconcilable contradiction between the ideal human norm of what *ought* to be and the existential experience of what *is*. This ideal human norm demands the inviolability, preservation, and realization of the *wholeness*, significance, and dignity of the *individual* human person as an end in himself, possessing freedom, immortality, and sovereignty over his own bodily existence. Fallen, mortal human existence undermines this ideal norm in various ways. (For example, death is shameful because it undermines the ideal of individual immortality, and the individual's lack of control over bodily functions is shameful because it undermines the ideal of sovereignty.) But he argues that the subordination of the individual to the life of the species in procreation and the resulting succession of generations undermines the ideal norm at the deepest level because it treats the individual person as merely a means to an end. The external conditions of fallen human existence constitute "the very essence of animal life, or of the fundamental and highest expression of natural being."¹⁴⁵ Thus, in the experience of shame, the human person becomes aware of himself as a "supra-animal and supra-natural being" and through this experience "becomes human in the full sense."¹⁴⁶

The second way he addresses the subject of sexual-spousal love is in the third section of *The Justification of the Good*, "The Good through Human History." There, he formulates his ideas of sexual-spousal love and union in relation to the moral dimension of marriage and family in the chapter, "The Moral Organization of Humanity as a Whole." He structures this chapter according to the three essential manifestations of "collective man": family,

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 166.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

nation, and universal humanity or the universal Church. “Family” includes three natural bonds, namely, family religion (devotion to our ancestors), marriage, and the education of children. In the universal Church, these natural bonds are sanctified and “spiritualized” in the communion of saints, praying for the salvation of our ancestors, sacramental marriage, and the spiritual formation of children.¹⁴⁷ In the section on sacramental marriage, he reiterates the same ideas found in *The Meaning of Love*, but here the primary subject is the meaning of “true marriage,” which is brought about by divine grace as the “realization of the absolute moral norm in the vital center of human existence.”¹⁴⁸

The “highest morality,” which comes from and is determined by the “absolute principle” of grace, does not abolish but perfects the natural elements of marriage, namely, the *material* or physical attraction; the *ideal* or feeling of “being in love”; and the *purpose* of natural sexual relations or reproduction. In the process of the “transubstantiation” of the “natural bond” in “true marriage,” he argues, the primary significance is accorded to the experience of “being in love,” as opposed to physical attraction or procreation. The ideal meaning of “being in love,” insofar as it marks the beginning of true sexual-spousal love, is realized through a divine-human or theurgic task. In summarizing this task here, he stresses that while marriage remains the satisfaction of natural sexual desire and the natural means for the reproduction of the species, the purpose of sexual love and union in “true marriage” is no longer limited to the natural sphere, but becomes a means for the divinization of the spouses in their spiritual and bodily union.¹⁴⁹ Soloviev does not explain in detail how spouses can overcome the existential problems and obstacles to passing from the natural to

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 453.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 455.

the divine-human sphere in “true marriage.” Nevertheless, he makes it clear that this process includes the entire life of grace, sacraments, faith, prayer, and asceticism in the Church, and is achieved “through constant renunciation,” in which the soul passes through “martyrdom.”¹⁵⁰

In addition to focusing explicitly on the theological meaning of sexual-spousal love in the context of “true marriage,” he also considers the “relative good” of human procreation, upon which he only touched briefly elsewhere. Natural human procreation is not necessary for “perfect marriage” when “the inner completeness of the human being is finally attained through perfect union with the spiritualized material essence” because the supreme purpose of marriage will have been achieved. “True marriage” is only the *means* for achieving this perfect “moral union of man and woman,” not its original condition. Indeed, “true marriage” is only “true” insofar as its goal is the free, theurgic realization of the “complete human being” in “perfect marriage.”¹⁵¹ As long as there is a gap between the ideal of “perfect marriage” and the reality of “true marriage,” natural procreation will remain the “necessary means for its future attainment.”¹⁵² In other words, by virtue of the divine economy, only procreation and the succession of generations make it possible for future generations to achieve what past generations could not.

3.3.3 *The Life Drama of Plato* (1898)

In *The Life Drama of Plato*, published two years before his death, Soloviev briefly reiterates the ideas he presented in *The Meaning of Love*, emphasizing creativity, bodiliness,

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 456.

¹⁵² Ibid., 456-57.

and immortality. Presuming his own original thesis concerning the chronology and content of Plato's dialogues, Soloviev presents Plato's life drama as a manifestation of the most fundamental human tragedy, in which the evil of "what is" triumphs over the good of "what ought to be." The unjust execution of Socrates, who embodied righteousness and the search for and realization of the True and the Good in this world, set this tragedy in motion. Unlike Hamlet, Plato's "to be or not to be" referred not to himself but to Truth and the possibility of its realization in this world.¹⁵³

According to Soloviev, Plato's dismissal of this world as "non-existent" and comprised of illusory, meaningless phenomena stems from his unsuccessful attempt to solve the existential and ethical dilemma posed by Socrates' death.¹⁵⁴ At a certain point of Plato's life, however, the inadequacy of his pessimistic philosophy was exposed by what Soloviev speculates, based on the *Phaedrus* and the *The Symposium*, was for Plato a life-changing experience of *eros*: not one of the many then socially accepted forms of carnal *eros*, *Aphrodite Pandemos*, but of the "heavenly *eros*," *Aphrodite Urania*. Soloviev believes the experience that inspired these two dialogues to have been the "central crisis" of Plato's life. *Eros* revealed itself to Plato as a real force, a bridge-builder and mediator, independent of reason, between this mortal, passing world and the world of ideas. As an infinitely creative power, it opened up the possibility of "spiritually regenerating" *what is* and creating from it *what ought to be*, the True and the Good in the form of Beauty. But Plato was not able to follow his own rudimentary insights to their logical conclusion, nor to embrace the meaning of *eros* as a practical task. Although *eros* had turned Plato's attention once more to the

¹⁵³ Soloviev, *Zhiznennaia Drama Platona*, SS IX: 198-99.

¹⁵⁴ The works Soloviev cites to support his argument include *Gorgias*, *Meno*, *Phaedo*, *Cratylus*, *Theaetetus*, *The Sophist*, and *Parmenides*.

temporal world, over time it seems he became disillusioned and his subsequent attempts at reform (*The Republic*) were ultimately compromised by his appeal to despotic power (the same sort of power that executed Socrates) to enact them by force (*The Laws*). Soloviev concludes that the importance of the “divine” Plato’s life-drama, i.e., of his impotence and ultimate failure to realize the truth of *eros*, reveals the impossibility of man fulfilling his own destiny through the power of intellect, genius, and moral will alone, thus demonstrating the necessity of grace and “the actual existence of the Godman.”¹⁵⁵

He presents his own theory of *eros* as the full truth of what Plato only partially glimpsed in the *Phaedrus* and *The Symposium*. He affirms that *eros* is in fact a creative power, a “bridge-builder” or “*pontifex*” that mediates between the ideal and the real by transfiguring and transforming the latter.¹⁵⁶ But in order for this transformation to be achieved, the higher soul must struggle with and master the sensual soul, which would drag *eros* down to the level of lust and limit its purpose solely to the “evil infinity” of natural procreation. Since *eros* is not a contemplative power (Apollo, Hermes), its realm is the “border where two worlds meet,” what is called “Beauty.”¹⁵⁷ According to Plato, the true work of *eros* is indeed to “generate in Beauty.”¹⁵⁸ But what did Plato mean by this? Soloviev discounts artistic creativity, strictly speaking, since Plato was largely indifferent to the plastic arts in general. The only hint of the true meaning of Plato’s intuition is voiced by Diotima in *The Symposium*, namely, that the work of *eros* “is a substantial task, just as real

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 241.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 226-27.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 228.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

as generation in animals, but immeasurably higher in its significance, in correspondence with the true dignity of man as an intelligent, wise, and upright being.”¹⁵⁹

Picking up where Diotima left off, Soloviev argues that if *eros* is the substantial bond between the divine and the mortal, its creative task must be to transform the mortal into the immortal. In other words, the “real task of love is actually to immortalize the object loved, to save it from death and decay, and to give it a new birth in beauty.”¹⁶⁰ For this reason he sees Plato’s choice of the term *eros*, as opposed to *philia*, *storge*, or *agape*, as possessing such profound significance: *eros* is the most physical and sensual form of love. As the son of *Poros* and *Penia* (divine abundance and material poverty), *eros* is capable of bestowing its plenitude of life and beauty on the actual, physical being of the beloved. But this is true only in principle. Soloviev lists five ways in which the power of *eros* can be channeled, of which the first two are unworthy of man, the second two are “blessed,” and only the fifth and final is the ideal, affirming and integrating all that is true and good in the first four. First, there is the demonic, about which he says nothing. Second, there is the animal, which is sexual union for its own sake, justified by instinct and desire. Third, there is the “really human way” of natural and civil marriage, which limits and orders the animal dimension, and is necessary for the preservation and progress of humanity. Fourth, there is celibacy, most highly developed in Christian monasticism, which seeks to transcend *eros* and thus protect and purify it. Finally, there is the highest way that “truly regenerates and deifies.”¹⁶¹

He concludes his argument by pointing out the “basic conditions which determine the fundamental principle and aim of this higher way.” The first condition is the creation of

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 228.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 231.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 233.

the man-woman pair as *imago Dei*, which he refers to here as the “true androgyne” or “ur-couple.” In keeping with the principle of all-unity, the true union of man and woman is “without external fusion of forms, which would be a monstrosity, and without any inner separation of personality and life, which would be an imperfection and a principle of death.”¹⁶² The second condition is the perfect union of spirit and body, whose opposition in the individual is another principle of death. According to its ideal meaning, *eros* is the “spiritually-corporeal” (*dukhovno-telesnoe*) restorative principle of this unity because its proper object is the whole person, body and soul. Both conditions, however, cannot be realized by human power alone. A human person can only be regenerated or “deified” through the actually existing power of an eternally existing Divinity. The way of higher love, which perfectly unites the male with the female, and the spiritual with the physical, presumes from the very beginning the “union or interaction of the divine with the human” in what is essentially a *divine-human* process.¹⁶³ What characterizes this process as not only divine but authentically human is the necessity of *free* human cooperation, and corporality or bodiliness (*telesnost*). Corporality that is worthy of love, beautiful and immortal, “does not grow up of itself from the earth, nor does it fall ready-made from heaven, but is acquired through a spiritually-physical (*dukhovno-telesnoe*) and divine-human feat (*podvig*).”¹⁶⁴ And such divine-human cooperation, he concludes, is impossible without the “actual existence of the Godman.”¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² Ibid., 234.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 234.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 241.

3.3.4 Brockhaus and Ephron *Encyclopedia Article on "Love"* (c. 1891-98)

Soloviev's brief article on love in the *Brockhaus and Ephron* encyclopedia reveals his general approach to the subject as well as his extensive knowledge of love as a subject of natural science, anthropology, history, literature, philosophy, and theology. The influence of his own theory on his approach in the article can be discerned in his initial definition of love as the "attraction of a living being towards another to unite with it for mutual enhancement of life."¹⁶⁶ He then goes on to emphasize the essential unity but three-fold manifestation of love, which is rooted in the mutuality of human relationships—*amor descendens* (love that gives more than it receives or parental love), *amor ascendens* (love that receives more than it gives, or love of children for parents), and *amor aequalis* (love in which both are equal or sexual-spousal love). He also points out that since sexual-spousal love is the "strongest expression of personal self-affirmation and self-renunciation," Christian Tradition, and in particular Sacred Scripture, affirms it as the "highest symbol of the ideal relationship between the personal principle and the social whole."¹⁶⁷ Therefore, Soloviev concludes, the "ideal principle of social relationships, according to Christianity, is not power, but love." It is significant that a few sentences later, when summarizing the understanding of love in the history of philosophy and religion, he identifies "Christian *agape*," and not sexual-spousal love, as historically the "ideal principle of spiritual and social union."¹⁶⁸ This apparent contradiction points to both his understanding of the essential oneness of love, whether in the form of *agape* or *eros*, as well as his conviction that his own theory of love constitutes an unprecedented development of the Christian understanding of *eros* itself.

¹⁶⁶ Soloviev, "Mirovaia Dusha," *SS X*: 236.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 237.

Soloviev's overview of love in the history of religion and philosophy, with which he ends his article, is not so much a comprehensive historical summary, as it is his own judgment of the most significant elements and stages of this history. First, in religion, he maintains that love had primary significance in only two traditions: as a wild elemental force of sexual attraction in pagan phallism, and as *agape* in Christianity. In ancient philosophy, he singles out Empedocles' *philia* and Plato's *eros*, pointing out that the latter did not receive any attention in patristic or scholastic philosophy. Turning to the Middle Ages, he draws attention to the confluence of Christian and Platonic ideas found in Dante, and in general to love as a subject of religious mysticism. In particular, he cites the Victorines, Bernard of Clairvaux, and especially Bonaventure and his works, *Stimulus amoris*, *Incendium amoris*, *Amatorium*. He also mentions courtly love's cult of the woman and idealized sexual love that was spread through the poetry of the troubadours of southern France. He singles out the unique understanding of love presented by Spinoza (1632-1677), who identifies it with absolute knowledge (*amor Dei intellectualis*), and who believes that to philosophize is nothing other than to love God. In modern thought, he identifies Schopenhauer's essay *Metaphysik der Liebe*¹⁶⁹ as a "witty though unfounded" theory and says that "truer and profounder indications and hints" can be found in Franz Baader's *Erotische Philosophie*.

All of the above writings contribute to the systematic analysis offered in this study. The following chapters, however, will endeavor to distill Soloviev's theology of sexual-

¹⁶⁹ Schopenhauer's *Metaphysik der Liebe* ["The Metaphysics of Love"] is published in his work, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* [The World as Will and Idea]. See Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*, trans., Jill Berman (London: Everyman, 1995), 263-67.

spousal love relying first and foremost on *The Meaning of Love*, secondarily on *The Life Drama of Plato*, and to greater and lesser degrees on all of the writings summarized above.

4. AN OVERVIEW OF THE DISSERTATION

With the above synopsis of the chronological development of Soloviev's idea of sexual-spousal love in mind, it is now possible to turn to the argument of this thesis. The dissertation is divided into four parts and eight chapters. This overview will present the reasons for this structure and will explain the steps that will be followed to demonstrate the value of Soloviev's theory of sexual-spousal love as a resource for contemporary Catholic theology.

Chapter 2 in this introductory Part One will analyze his methodology of "free theosophy" or integral knowledge, which accounts in large part for the originality of his theological anthropology of love. Part Two will examine in greater depth the theoretical foundations and principles underlying and informing his ideas about sexual-spousal love. There are three chapters in Part Two that examine these foundations and principles in the context of three areas of his thought. Chapter 3 will examine his Trinitarian and personalist metaphysics of "all-unity" (*vseedinstvo*); Chapter 4 will examine his theology of Christ's divine-humanity (*Bogochelovechestvo*), his ecclesiology, and his notion of the divine *Sophia*; and Chapter 5 will examine his incarnational aesthetics of "free theurgy." Part Three includes two chapters that will offer an in-depth analysis of his notion of love. Chapter 6 will analyze his notion of human love in general. Chapter 7 will analyze his theory of sexual-spousal love and union in particular and will attempt to discern its personalist,

scriptural, spousal, sacramental, and ecclesial elements. Finally, in Part Four, Chapter 8 will offer an assessment of how Soloviev has been used as a resource for contemporary Catholic theological anthropology in Scola's work, *The Nuptial Mystery*, and von Balthasar's essay, "Soloviev" in *The Glory of the Lord*, looking at both positive and negative dimensions of these assessments.

4.1 *Soloviev's Methodological Application of "Free Theosophy"*

In order to discern and assess accurately Soloviev's theology of sexual-spousal love, one must consider his methodology and the epistemology on which it is based, as will be done in Chapter 2. The reasons for this are several. Since the Russian thinker formulated his ideas on love as a component of "free theosophy" (*svobodnaia teosofia*), his synthesis of theology, philosophy, and natural science (a synthesis that formalized his epistemology of "integral knowledge"), correctly interpreting the theological component of this synthesis, and how it relates to the other elements, depends on having a clear grasp of his methodological principles. Such an interpretation is complicated further by his use of abstract philosophical terms, including several neologisms, to express theological notions. Finally, in addition to its epistemological justifications, his methodology is also conditioned to a large extent by the purpose and context of his writings on the subject in general, namely, his life-long mission to vindicate Christianity by "raising it to a new level of rational consciousness; to show how this ancient faith, freed from the fetters of local isolation, coincides with eternal and universal truth (*vselenskaia istina*)."¹⁷⁰ More often than not, the

¹⁷⁰ Solov'ev, *Pervy Shag K Polozhitelnoi Estetike*, SS IV: 214. The Russian word *vselenskaia*, which I translate here as "universal," can also be translated "ecumenical" or "catholic" in an ecclesial context.

venue for this mission was the academic journals in which his ideas were often woven into polemical public debates with such influential thinkers as Leo Tolstoy or Friedrich Nietzsche. A consideration of the historical development of his methodology of free theosophy, especially its explicitly Slavophile and Russian Orthodox roots, and an analysis of its epistemological foundations, will enable a subsequent interpretation of his theology of sexual-spousal love, and an evaluation of how its synthesis with philosophy and natural science both enhanced this theology and is partly responsible for its timely and prophetic insights.

4.2 *Soloviev's Trinitarian Metaphysics of Love*

Part Two treats the theological foundations of Soloviev's theory. These foundations, and the principles that he derives from them, permeate every aspect of his theory and reveal it as an integral and inseparable element of his universal Christian synthesis. Part Two will consider all-unity (Chapter 3), divine-humanity (Chapter 4), and free theurgy (Chapter 5), respectively.

Chapter 3 will deal with the Trinitarian foundation, form, and substance of his metaphysics of all-unity (*vseedinstvo*), and focuses on those aspects that directly influence his understanding of human love. It will become clear that the role played by the notion of all-unity in his theory of human love does not merely identify love and unity with ideal being but anticipates recent developments in Catholic theology concerning human persons in communion as *imago Trinitatis*. More concretely, Chapter 3 will focus on the essentially personal and communal form of ideal being and its source in the mystery and freedom of the

monarchia of the Father and the *communio personarum* of the Trinity, as well as on Soloviev's notion of the divine essence as all-unity, or divine Love, containing in perfect all-unity the distinct but inseparable mysteries of divine Goodness, Truth, and Beauty.

4.3 *Divine-Humanity and the Sacramentum Magnum*

Chapter 4 will consider Soloviev's primary paradigm for the Christian totality, namely, Christ's "divine-humanity" (*Bogochelovechestvo, theandria*), which for him has the form of the "great mystery" of Ephesians 5, the mystical, spousal union between Christ the Bridegroom and his Body and Bride, the Universal Church or the divine *Sophia*, who encompasses all of humanity and creation. Divine-humanity alone preserves Soloviev's Trinitarian metaphysics of all-unity from abstraction, since only in, through, and with the incarnate and risen *Logos*, Jesus Christ, is it possible for humanity and creation to be transformed by and freely participate in Trinitarian all-unity or divine Love. His theory of sexual-spousal love not only constitutes a vital element of this integral vision, but develops and enriches its content, focusing on the immanent and eschatological realization of divine-human union, the kingdom of God, in and through true sexual-spousal love and union or "true marriage."

An overall understanding of what is implied in the Solovievian terms "divine-humanity" and "divine-human," is necessary in order fully to appreciate and interpret the theological meaning of sexual-spousal love in its proper context, and to understand its theological implications. Therefore, Chapter 4 will focus first on the fundamental principles of divine-humanity revealed in the person, nature, and paschal mystery of Christ, the same

principles enshrined at Chalcedon on which, like Maximus the Confessor, Soloviev would base his entire Christian vision of natural and supernatural reality. Chapter 4 will then summarize the cosmogonic and historical roots and development of divine-humanity, including the appearance of humanity, the advent of Christ, and the founding of the Church, a development that continues and culminates in the historical and eschatological realization of the kingdom of God. This summary will focus on the essence and conjugal form of Soloviev's vision of Christian reality, a vision whose free theurgic incarnation is the main subject of his theory of sexual-spousal love.

4.4 *Soloviev's Theological Aesthetics of Free Theurgy*

Chapter 5, the final chapter dealing with theological foundations, will consider Soloviev's aesthetics of "free theurgy" (*svobodnaia teurgia*). As he makes clear in *The Life Drama of Plato*, Christian *eros* does not belong primarily to the realm of knowledge (truth) or ethics (goodness), but is an existential, living force or power (*sila*) that transforms, restores, and redeems sinful, fragmented, mortal being, mediating between the divine and created orders, creatively incarnating the ideal in the real, the divine in the human, in the form of the beautiful. Sexual-spousal love in its Christian meaning can thus be said in general terms to be a subject of what he calls "free theurgy": the realization of goodness through truth in beauty. Having been introduced to Soloviev's aesthetics of free theurgy, it will then be possible to understand why he formulates his theological anthropology in the context of aesthetics, and more concretely how he understands sexual-spousal love as inspiring the "perfect art," the work of free theurgy *par excellence*, the fulfillment of that

divine-human creative activity of which nature and art are precursory, partial, and prophetic manifestations.

4.5 *The General Meaning of Human Love*

Part Three will be comprised of two chapters dealing first with Soloviev's theory of human love in general and then his theory of sexual-spousal love in particular. Chapter 6 will analyze his terminology in depth and then follow his argument, which is in large part a response to Schopenhauer's *Wille zum Leben*, up to the point of his primary thesis on the general meaning of human love as "the *justification* and *redemption* of individuality (*individualnost*, personhood) through the sacrifice of egoism."¹⁷¹ This treatment will include an explanation of his personalist paradigm and of the theological anthropology on which it is based; his notion of human personhood and the problem of egoism; and the general meaning of human love. This will provide the necessary basis for turning to the substance of his theory, since he argues that sexual-spousal love is the "type and ideal" of all forms of love,¹⁷² encompassing and integrating all the essential elements of all forms of human love in the highest degree, and that it therefore is uniquely capable of realizing love's divine-human finality of justifying and redeeming "true individuality."¹⁷³

4.6 *The Meaning of Sexual-Spousal Love*

Chapter 7 will deal with Soloviev's theory of sexual-spousal love in particular, relying primarily on his series of articles published in *The Meaning of Love*, secondarily on

¹⁷¹ Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 16 (emphasis in original).

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 18-19.

his essay, *The Life Drama of Plato*, and thirdly on other primary sources insofar as they uncover and clarify the full theological meaning of each element of his theory. Chapter 7 will consider first his argument for why sexual-spousal love is the “type and ideal” of every human love,¹⁷⁴ and then will consider its meaning in light of its two-fold finality: first, the restoration and realization of the *imago Dei* or “true individuality” in “one flesh” spousal union or “true marriage,”¹⁷⁵ and second, the imparting of an analogous form, by extension, to all human relations between the individual and the social spheres of life, including the familial, national, ecclesial, natural, and universal. He chooses to describe the latter process by retrieving and re-defining the ancient Greek term *syzygy*.¹⁷⁶

The analysis of his theory in light of “true marriage” will begin with his assessment of the apparently illusory and futile character of sexual-spousal love’s subjective significance. It will then analyze the divine-human principles, conditions, and context for the realization of sexual-spousal love’s meaning in “true marriage” as a “free theurgic” task. Finally, it will examine his understanding of spousal union as a participation in, and realization of the “great mystery” of Ephesians 5. Having established Soloviev’s understanding of sexual-spousal love’s meaning, Chapter 7 will conclude by considering his argument for the inseparability of the individual and social dimensions of its finality. Just as the full realization of love’s meaning is impossible without the transformation of the entire external environment, so too “an extension of the *syzygy* relation to the spheres of communal and universal existence perfects individuality itself, communicating to it the unity and

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 16.

¹⁷⁵ Soloviev, *La Russie*, 296.

¹⁷⁶ Since the term *syzygia*, which stems from the ancient Greek *syzygos* meaning “yoked together,” *syn* + *zygon* “yoke,” perhaps Soloviev had in mind a biblical metaphor for union with Christ. Cf. Matthew 11:29.

fullness of living content, and by the same token elevates and immortalizes the fundamental individual form of love.”¹⁷⁷

4.7 *Soloviev as a Resource for Catholic Theology: An Analysis of the Treatment of Soloviev in Scola's The Nuptial Mystery and von Balthasar's The Glory of the Lord*

Chapter 8 will look at how Soloviev's theory is incorporated into the recent work of two Catholic theologians, Angelo Cardinal Scola and Hans Urs von Balthasar. It will examine the accuracy of their interpretation of his thought, as well as consider why each thinker affirms, adopts, or critiques certain elements and aspects in relation to his own theological program. In this context, Chapter 8 will assess the value of Soloviev's theory as a resource for contemporary Catholic theology in general and suggest how Catholic magisterial teaching can serve as a complement and corrective to it. Basing himself in large part on Pope John Paul II's magisterium concerning the analogous relationship between the dual unity of man and woman and the relations of the three persons in God, as well as the theological anthropology of von Balthasar,¹⁷⁸ Scola affirms in *The Nuptial Mystery* several of Soloviev's theological insights about the meaning of human love in general and “nuptial love” in particular. As will be seen, while his affirmation is largely implicit, Scola directly credits Soloviev with identifying and justifying spousal or nuptial love as the *analogatum princeps* of all forms of love, and explicitly adopts this insight as the best path to approaching the subject of human love. At the same time, Scola's work as a whole represents an implicit Catholic critique of Soloviev's theory, insofar as Soloviev rejects a

¹⁷⁷ Soloviev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 58.

¹⁷⁸ Angelo Cardinal Scola, *The Nuptial Mystery*, trans., Michelle K. Borrás (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 5.

central element of Scola's thesis, namely, that fruitfulness (sexual procreation) is an essential dimension of spousal love rooted in the *imago Trinitatis*.

Von Balthasar's essay, "Soloviev," in *The Glory of the Lord III: Studies in Theological Style: Lay Styles* presents Soloviev's Christian synthesis as an exemplary modern illustration of the richness of an aesthetic theological reading of divine revelation in Christian Tradition. Von Balthasar chooses twelve theologians as exemplary stars to make up a "theological constellation" of the second and third volumes of *The Glory of the Lord*.¹⁷⁹ As with his choice of each of them, von Balthasar's choice of Soloviev is based on his estimation of both the intrinsic excellence of Soloviev's theological aesthetic and the depth and significance of the latter's historical impact. As such, his depiction of Soloviev's thought is of a system that "aims at bringing a whole ethical and theoretical scheme to perfection in a universal theological aesthetic—a vision of God's coming to be in the world."¹⁸⁰ While this summation is accurate in itself, the essay as a whole tends to gloss over problematic aspects of Soloviev's thought and in places lapses into "speculative reconstruction" that renders the Russian thinker more palatable and credible to a Catholic audience.

Nevertheless, Soloviev's inclusion among the luminaries of *The Glory of the Lord* highlights the importance of his theological aesthetic of sexual-spousal love for contemporary Catholic theological anthropology. At a time when the dogmatic and moral truths of Christian anthropology have largely lost their power to convince, attract, and resist

¹⁷⁹ Von Balthasar gives a detailed explanation for his choice of these twelve theologians in von Balthasar, *Volume III: Studies in Theological Style: Clerical Styles*, trans., Andrew Louth, Francis McDonagh, and Brian McNeil, C.R.V. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1984), 11-22.

¹⁸⁰ Von Balthasar, "Soloviev," in *Volume III: Studies in Theological Style: Lay Styles, The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, 281.

the forces of an increasingly secular, technologically sophisticated, and self-sufficient culture, Soloviev's recasting of the Catholic meaning of sexual-spousal love in terms of the free theurgic "art" (*isskustvo*) of "true marriage" surely indicates a fruitful avenue for theological reflection.

CHAPTER II

Soloviev's Methodological Application of "Free Theosophy"

Soloviev's goal in *The Meaning of Love* is to define the meaning of sexual-spousal love by elucidating its inner connection to "universal truth."¹⁸¹ To this end, he adopts a methodological approach in *The Meaning of Love* that incorporates a wide range of sources and modes of knowledge. He moves seamlessly between the revealed truths of Scripture and Tradition, poetic knowledge of ideal being, mystical theology, rational analysis, empirical biology, and modern psychology. This approach at times leads to overly speculative ideas that ignore essential aspects of Christian Tradition, most notably the theological significance of the intrinsic link between the unitive and procreative aspects of spousal union. Nevertheless, his methodology represents an uncompromising and creative effort to discover the meaning of sexual-spousal love that takes into account the unconditional truth of Christian revelation, the entire phenomenological range of human experience (the ideal truth of which he argues is expressed in true literature and poetry), the findings of empirical science, and the exigencies of discursive reason. This methodology needs to be explained in its historical context and its underlying epistemological principles if the theological foundations, meanings, and nuances in his theory of sexual-spousal love, which are often veiled by the unfamiliar language and conceptual apparatus of free theosophy, are to be understood.

Soloviev's methodology stems in large part from the nineteenth-century Slavophile notion of "integral knowledge" (*tselnoe znanie*). According to this notion, knowledge of the

¹⁸¹ Solov'ev, *Smysl Liubvi*, SS VII: 60.

Ding an Sich (thing in itself) is possible only through an ordered integration of all modes of human cognition. They argued on the basis of this epistemology that there ought to be a formal methodological synthesis of theology, philosophy, and natural science.¹⁸² Soloviev refines and develops this approach, which among Slavophile thinkers had remained rudimentary, in his epistemology of “free theosophy” (*svobodnaia teosofia*).¹⁸³ Some scholars maintain that such a synthetic approach is overly-ambitious and rationalistic, forcing ineffable theological mysteries into abstract conceptual boxes and thus inevitably misrepresenting or deviating from orthodox Christian dogma.¹⁸⁴ Others recognize it as an ingenious and fully orthodox synthesis of faith and reason reminiscent of Maximus the Confessor or Thomas Aquinas.¹⁸⁵ But all recognize the intention of Soloviev’s “free

¹⁸² Soloviev, *Filosofskie Nachala Tsel'nogo Znaniia*, SS I: 290.

¹⁸³ Although Soloviev adopted the term “integral knowledge,” he also chose to coin his own neologism, “free theosophy.” This is explained in part, as Losev notes, by his desire to differentiate it from the traditional theology of the time, which he considered “too rationalistic, too dead, too unfree.” But his main objective was to express both the theocentric as well as universal character of his synthesis, as well as the freedom and relative independence of each element. See Losev, I:9. The word “theosophy” itself, from the Greek *theosophia*, “God-wisdom”, has Neoplatonic roots and was used by such Renaissance thinkers as Cornelius Agrippa, Paracelsus, and Jacob Boehme. In Soloviev’s own time, it was commonly associated with Madame Blavatsky’s modern theosophist movement of the 1870s. However, as Valliere notes, any similarities between this and Soloviev’s own thought are negligible. For a brief analysis of Soloviev’s use of this term see Valliere, 140. Losev confirms this conclusion, arguing that Soloviev’s free theosophy had nothing in common with the theosophical teachings of the nineteenth century. See Losev, I:9. For more on the subject of theosophy in Soloviev’s work, see Judith Deutsch Kornblatt, “Soloviev’s Androgynous Sophia and the Jewish Kabbalah,” *Slavic Review* 50 (1991), 487-96, and Maria Carlson, “Gnostic Elements in the Cosmogony of Vladimir Soloviev,” in *Russian Religious Thought*, ed. Judith Deutsch Kornblatt and Richard F. Gustafson (Madison and London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1996).

¹⁸⁴ Zenkovsky praises Soloviev’s effort at synthesis but agrees with Trubetskoi that ultimately his thought is compromised by rationalistic and pantheistic elements and as such is Christian in name only. Zenkovsky believes Soloviev’s methodology is inconsistent, dualistic, and overly abstract, and concludes that in the end he “introduces Christian ideas into philosophy in order to enrich and fructify philosophic thought,” and not vice versa, and that he “did not succeed in creating an *organic* synthesis of the principles which he was trying to harmonize.” Zenkovsky, 529-30. Other scholars such as Copleston seem to accept the substance of this critique. Citing Zenkovsky, Copleston acknowledges that “we cannot simply dismiss the claim made by some writers that, in spite of Soloviev’s criticism of rationalism and of ‘abstract’ philosophy, he himself proceeded along this path.” Copleston, 218.

¹⁸⁵ See Robert Slesinski’s tribute to Soloviev in Robert Slesinski, “V. S. Solovyov: The Centenary of a Death,” *Communio* 26 (1999), 778-90. Von Balthasar compares Soloviev to Maximus the Confessor and Thomas Aquinas in his essay, “Soloviev.” See von Balthasar, “Soloviev,” 284, 287-88. Pope John Paul II included

theosophy” to provide “a single, indivisible integration point for all of human knowledge and experience.”¹⁸⁶

In free theosophy, this integration point is in fact not a philosophical concept, nor even revealed dogma; it is a person: Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, who embodies “the underlying principles of reconciliation of all individual differences and oppositions, and the redemption of reality in its entirety.”¹⁸⁷ Soloviev well understood the impossibility of encompassing this reality within any philosophical or rational system (as demonstrated by his frequent criticism of Hegel and abstract philosophy in general); free theosophy for him was a life-long project that was necessarily open-ended and merely one dimension of the whole. While its *form* is universal, it only finds its true significance in the ever greater Christian totality of “integral life,” an actual evolving synthesis of all human thought, activity, and creativity, lived both individually and socially, and which as a living and concrete whole was ultimately the “supra-personal” (*sverkhlichnoe*) subject of *theosis*, the Universal Church.¹⁸⁸ For Soloviev, while the freedom and truth of free theosophy was certainly an essential part of *theosis*, only an all-encompassing integral *life* could realize a “vital and genuine communion with the Absolute.”¹⁸⁹

Soloviev among the “great Christian theologians” of history, including Augustine and Aquinas, who have exemplified in their thought the harmony between faith and reason. See John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, Encyclical letter on faith and reason, September 15, 1998, 74.

¹⁸⁶ See Wozniuk’s introduction in V. S. Soloviev, *The Heart of Reality: Essays on Beauty, Love and Ethics* by V. S. Soloviev, trans., Vladimir Wozniuk (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003).

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, xi.

¹⁸⁸ Solov’ev, *Dukhovnie Osnovi Zhizni*, SS III: 402.

¹⁸⁹ Zenkovsky, 488.

1. FREE THEOSOPHY AS CHRISTIAN MISSION

Soloviev's rediscovery of Christianity by way of modern philosophy, his theological studies and strong sense of mission, and his well-developed historical consciousness all convinced him of the need for a new Christian synthesis. He began to articulate its foundational principles while still at university. In a letter to his cousin Katia Romanova (1872), he writes that the "conscious Christian" finds in faith "a wealth and depth of thought before which all of his human inventions are pitiful; it is obvious to him that it is not he himself who reads such profound meaning into Christianity, because he clearly recognizes the absolute nothingness and impotence of his own intellect, of his own thought before the grandeur and power of divine thought."¹⁹⁰ Therefore, Soloviev continues,

humanity should become conscious of Christian truth in all its fullness and purity. And to this end ... the historical discord between faith and reason, religion and science, must be brought to an end. In order to preach Christian truth one must be fully armed with contemporary knowledge and world culture, for only in [Christian truth] do philosophy and life find their meaning and justification.¹⁹¹

Soloviev's newfound consciousness of Christian truth in its "fullness and purity" was a recognition and affirmation of its universal and absolute character.¹⁹² As such, "philosophy and life" must necessarily find their meaning and justification in light of this truth. From the beginning, he "systematically makes the Chalcedonian dogma ... the foundation upon which the entire structure of natural and supernatural reality in the world is erected."¹⁹³ For him, reality, unveiled in the light of faith, is the result of the free and sovereign acts of God revealed in and through the historical event of the Word becoming flesh. This divine act is

¹⁹⁰ Mochul'skii, 37.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 37.

¹⁹² Soloviev expands on his understanding of Christian truth as "universal" and "unconditional" in other letters to Katia from this period. Cf. Vladimir Solov'ev, *Pis'ma Vladimira Sergeevicha Solov'eva*, 75.

¹⁹³ Von Balthasar, 287.

the highest form of rationality in and through which universal truth may be discerned. *Fides quaerens intellectum* is the only possible path to true knowledge. In other words, the “conscious Christian,” with full awareness, interiorizes the truth that “only in your light do we see light.”¹⁹⁴

At the same time, Soloviev agreed with the Slavophile thinkers who believed that the universality of Christian truth could only find adequate expression in the form of an all-encompassing organic synthesis, the integration of faith and reason, religion and science. To exclude one of these elements, to isolate them from one another, or to limit their relations to the purely accidental or external, is to be less than fully conscious of who Christ is as the incarnate *Logos* and therefore to be less conscious of the universal meaning and catholicity of Christianity. This lack of awareness was what confronted him in the growing secularization of late nineteenth-century European society. Instead of connecting humanity and the world with the absolute principle of all that exists, which necessarily ought to be “all in all,” determining what we know, do, and create, modern Christianity, he observed, was “hidden in a very small and remote corner of our inner world. It is just one of a multitude of different interests that divide our attention.”¹⁹⁵ Since humanity, having rejected the religious principle as “subjective and impotent,” abhors this vacuum, it seeks to find an objective, unifying, and organizing principle outside the religious sphere “to establish itself and make itself comfortable in the realm of temporal, finite interests.”¹⁹⁶

Faced with this state of affairs, Soloviev committed himself to vindicating Christianity by “raising it to a new level of rational consciousness; to show how this ancient

¹⁹⁴ Psalm 36:10

¹⁹⁵ Solov'ev, *Chtenia O Bogochelovechestve*, SS III: 3.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

faith, freed from the fetters of local isolation, coincides with eternal and universal truth (*vselenskaia istina*).¹⁹⁷ Since the practical fulfillment of Christianity in life is still far off, he wrote, “we must still work at the theoretical aspect, at *theological* teaching. This is my true mission.”¹⁹⁸ His chosen method for this mission was “to bring religious truth into the form of freely-rational thought,”¹⁹⁹ but he never intended his efforts to in any way compromise the integrity nor the mystery of revealed religious truth by subjugating it, as it were, to reason. He did not in fact seek, as some scholars have suggested,²⁰⁰ to “vindicate” revealed religious truth in the court of reason.²⁰¹ Rather, he believed that Christian truth would vindicate itself if it was only freed from narrow or “abstract” dogmatism and unveiled in its “fullness and purity,” which necessarily includes preserving its own autonomy as well as its “inner connection with philosophy and natural science”²⁰² and indeed with “integral life” in general. For him, it is not a matter of demonstration but of disclosure through a new and more adequate paradigm, since the ultimate truths of faith and reason are ultimately one and cannot contradict one another. In this way his efforts to restore harmony between philosophy and religion were more akin, though certainly not identical, to the late Schelling’s theory of “positive philosophy” than to Christian apologetics of the eighteenth century, which sought external, rational buttresses for religious belief.²⁰³

Soloviev knew from personal experience the “grandeur and power of divine thought” and that “truth cannot impose itself except by virtue of its own truth, as it makes its entrance

¹⁹⁷ Solov'ev, *Pervy Shag*, SS IV: 214.

¹⁹⁸ Cited in Lossky, 94 (emphasis in original).

¹⁹⁹ Solov'ev, *Kritika Ot vlechenykh Nachal*, SS II: 350.

²⁰⁰ Zenkovsky, 490.

²⁰¹ One need only read his explicitly theological works to appreciate his clarity on this matter. In particular, see his short treatise on the Christian faith, *The Spiritual Foundations of Life*.

²⁰² Solov'ev, *Kritika*, SS II: 350.

²⁰³ Copleston, 217.

into the mind at once quietly and with power.”²⁰⁴ Thus his methodology was born from his desire to lead others to the same conscious awareness and vision of Christ as the living, absolute, and universal Truth by presenting the Christian vision of reality in a new and universal paradigm.²⁰⁵

2. SLAVOPHILISM AND INTEGRAL KNOWLEDGE

In his desire and efforts to heal the rift between faith and reason, Soloviev stands firmly within the Russian Slavophile tradition, in which the theory of “integral knowledge” was formulated as a Christian solution to the ever-increasing spiritual and intellectual fragmentation that prevailed in modern European thought and society.²⁰⁶ This Christian epistemological theory is attributed primarily to Ivan Kireevsky and Alexei Khomiakov, both deeply influenced by both post-Kantian German idealism and Greek patristics.²⁰⁷ Integral knowledge, also called at the time “believing thought” (*veruiushoe myshlenie*), sought “to elevate reason itself above its usual level, thus striving to raise the very source of reason, the very manner of thinking, to the level of sympathetic agreement with faith.”²⁰⁸

²⁰⁴ Second Vatican Council, Decree on Religious Liberty, *Dignitatis Humanae*, 1.

²⁰⁵ See Copleston’s excellent summary of Soloviev’s understanding of philosophy of religion and his own mission vis-à-vis theology and philosophy. Copleston, 217.

²⁰⁶ Slesinski, “Russian Philosophical Thought as a Search for Integral Knowledge,” 135.

²⁰⁷ Some scholars have overemphasized the continuity between Soloviev’s epistemology and Slavophilism. See E. L. Radlov’s “Biographical Excerpt” in Solov’ev, *SS X*: xi. Prince Eugene Trubetskoi, *Mirosozertsaniye VI. Solovyova [VI. Solovyov's World-View]*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Moscow: Izdanie avtora, 1913), 85; and Zenkovsky, 488. Other scholars more accurately note elements of continuity with Slavophile thought as well as originality in Soloviev’s own thought. Slesinski in particular has demonstrated how Soloviev “develops an original schematics in articulating his own understanding of integral knowledge, especially in its moment as ‘believing thought’.” Robert F. Slesinski, “Believing Thought as a Category in Russian Religious Philosophy,” *Communio* 26, no. (1999), 579. See also Slesinski, “Russian Philosophical Thought as a Search for Integral Knowledge,” 134.

²⁰⁸ Ivan Kireevsky, *O Neobkhodimosti I Vozmozhnosti Novykh Nachal Dlia Filosofii [of the Necessity and Possibility of New Principles for Philosophy]* (Moscow: 1861), 2: 309 as quoted in Slesinski, “Believing Thought as a Category in Russian Religious Philosophy,” 575.

2.1 Ivan Kireevsky

Ivan Kireevsky, who actually coined the term “integral knowledge” (*tselnoe znanie*), describes this process of elevating reason in his seminal work on the subject, *Of the Necessity and Possibility of New Principles for Philosophy (O neobkhodimosti i vozmozhnosti novykh nachal dlia filosofii*, 1856), as “a striving to collect all the separate parts of the soul into one power, to find that inner center of being where mind and will, and feeling, and conscience, and the beautiful, the true and the wonderful, and the hoped for, are focused into one living unity, thereby restoring the essential personality of man to its primeval indivisibility.”²⁰⁹ This notion of interior integration as a necessary precondition for knowledge of reality is what Kireevsky calls *sushchestvennost*, “essentiality.”²¹⁰ Accordingly, “only essentiality (*sushchestvennost*) can touch the essential (*sushchestvennoe*).”²¹¹ This idea is termed *believing* thought because, he argued, it is only achieved through faith, understood as that all-encompassing “existential attitude that says ‘yes’ to being,” whether supernatural or natural, an affirmation that requires and demands the integrated response of the whole person.²¹² For Kireevsky, faith is synonymous with integral knowledge. It alone spans the abyss between the knowing subject and the *Ding an Sich* insofar as it affirms, heals, and restores communion between them. Ultimately, Kireevsky leaves many ideas and questions undeveloped and unanswered, including his

²⁰⁹ Ivan Kireevsky, “*O neobkhodimosti i vozmozhnosti novykh nachal dlia filosofii*,” *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow, 1861), 2: 283-325.

²¹⁰ The term *sushchestvennost* means literally “essentiality”, but Slesinski gives a more literary and accurate translation of the term as “the essential” or “reality itself,” which captures the correct intention of the term and implies “a lived contact” and “existential understanding” of reality. Slesinski, “Russian Philosophical Thought as a Search for Integral Knowledge,” 131.

²¹¹ Kireevsky, 2: 335 as quoted in Slesinski, “Believing Thought as a Category in Russian Religious Philosophy,” 576.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 576.

rather vague notion of faith, which he seemed to confuse with intellectual intuition. It was his contemporary, Alexei Khomiakov, who managed to clarify the separate cognitive elements of integral knowledge.

2.2 Alexei Khomiakov

Alexei Khomiakov sees faith as only one of three components at work in the act of knowing, albeit the primary one. For him, *vera* (faith), *volia* (will), and *razum* (reason) are interdependent and constitutive of any cognitive act. We must first have initial, direct contact with, and knowledge of the real, whether it be of a sensual, intellectual or mystical object. This is the role of what he calls “faith” or the “vision of the mind” (*zriachest’ razuma*). (By the term “faith,” Khomiakov would seem to have in mind a form of intellectual intuition.) The will then must actively render judgment as to what has objective substantiality and what is purely an imaginary representation, what is *ya, no ne ot menia* (“the I, but not from me”) and *ya i ot menia* (“the I and from me”). Reason, which by itself does not have direct contact with the real, discerns the purely formal dimension of the known object and how it relates to other concepts.²¹³ Only when these three cognitive powers are integrated does religious belief, as a recognition and knowledge of spiritual reality, consciously emerge.²¹⁴ In Khomiakov’s epistemology, “faith gives the living content

²¹³ Slesinski, “Russian Philosophical Thought as a Search for Integral Knowledge,” 133-34.

²¹⁴ See Frederick Charles Copleston, “Ivan Kireevsky and Integral Knowledge,” in *Philosophy in Russia: From Herzen to Lenin and Berdyaev* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), 69-70. For an excellent succinct summary, see Robert F. Slesinski, *Pavel Florensky: A Metaphysics of Love* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984), 57-58.

to the mind, the will divides the domain of fantastic representation from the domain of the objective world, while reason finds abstract law in the content of knowledge.”²¹⁵

3. FREE THEOSOPHY

Soloviev develops the notion of “integral knowledge” in his theory of free theosophy, and transforms it into the “very cornerstone of his subsequent speculative system.”²¹⁶ His epistemological ideas are found in three early works. *The Crisis of Western Philosophy: Against the Positivists* (*Krizis zapadnoi filosofii: protiv pozitivistov*, 1874), which includes a brilliant, comprehensive critique of modern European philosophy as a whole, concludes with a delineation of the “positive results” of its historical development. Here he argues that Western thought, understood as “abstract, *exclusively* theoretical knowledge,” ought to be relegated, in both its *isolated* rational and empirical manifestations, to the irretrievable past.²¹⁷ His monograph on *The Principles of Integral Knowledge* (*Filosofskie nachala tsel'nogo znaniia*, 1877) remained unfinished and was followed by *The Critique of Abstract Principles* (*Kritika otvlechennykh nachal*, 1877-80).²¹⁸ In both of these works, he endeavors to salvage the partial truths of Western philosophy by integrating them into his own “true philosophy” of “free theosophy.”²¹⁹

²¹⁵ E. L. Radlov, "Teoriia Znaniia Slavianofilov [the Theory of Knowledge of the Slavophiles]," *Zhurnal Ministerstva Narodnogo Prosveshcheniia* [The Journal of the Ministry of Public Education] 2 (1916), 156, as cited in Slesinski, *Pavel Florensky: A Metaphysics of Love*, 58.

²¹⁶ Slesinski, *Pavel Florensky: A Metaphysics of Love*, 59.

²¹⁷ Solov'ev, *Krizis Zapadnoi Filosofii*, SS I: 27 (emphasis in original).

²¹⁸ For these works, see Solov'ev, *Filosofskie Nachala*, SS I: 250-406 and Solov'ev, *Kritika Otvlechennykh Nachal*, SS II: 1-398.

²¹⁹ See Solov'ev, *Filosofskie Nachala*, SS I: 250-68 and *Kritika*, SS II: 342-53.

3.1 *Confronting the Crisis of Western Philosophy*

The subject of Soloviev's critique in *The Crisis of Western Philosophy* is not theoretical philosophy *per se*, but rather an isolated, *exclusively* theoretical philosophy. Since for him "truth is the whole," the *exclusive self-assertion* of any partial truth is the underlying source of all error and ultimately leads to abstraction, absurdity, and self-contradiction. The relegation of philosophy, religion, and empirical science to isolated, separate spheres necessarily cuts humanity off from "that which truly is."²²⁰ As part of his effort to bridge this abyss, Soloviev seeks in his thesis to demonstrate *from within* the consequences of modern spiritual and intellectual fragmentation. He analyzes the two distinct and fundamental trajectories of modern Western thought, rationalism and empiricism, and renders his conclusions in the form of the following syllogisms.

According to rationalism, that which truly is, is known in *a priori* knowledge (Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Wolff). But only the forms of our thought are actually known (Kant). Therefore, the forms of our thought are that which truly is (Hegel). According to empiricism, that which truly is, is known in our actual experience (Bacon). But in our real experience only different empirical states of consciousness are known (Locke). Thus, the different empirical states of consciousness are that which truly is (Mill).²²¹ Such a reduction of knowledge to abstract forms of thought and empirical states of consciousness, what he labeled "abstract formalism," denies and empties of meaning the concrete, living reality and substantiality of the knowing subject, as well as the substantiality of the phenomenal and ideal object of experience and thought. Soloviev identified Western philosophy's

²²⁰ Solov'ev, *Kritika*, SS II: 296.

²²¹ Solov'ev, *Krizis Zapadnoi Filosofii*, SS I: 134-35.

fundamental failing as the all-pervasive and underlying tendency to logical abstraction, i.e., *to hypostasizing predicates without any real justification*, such as the Hegelian *Sein* or Schopenhauerian *Wille*.²²²

His solution to this impasse, the beginnings of which he discerns in von Hartmann's "philosophy of the superconscious,"²²³ is to purify the relative truths of rationalism and empiricism of their respective claims to exclusive self-assertion and pretension to absolutism, and to integrate them into a "true philosophy."²²⁴ The key to "true philosophy" must be a constant striving for organic synthesis, since apart from it "science, philosophy, and theology are only isolated parts or aspects, fragmented organs of knowledge, and as such not in any way adequate to integral truth itself."²²⁵ The realization of this synthesis, he argues, must be the "supreme goal and ultimate result of intellectual development," and its attainment will mean "the restoration of the complete inner unity of the intellectual world."²²⁶ In this way, as Robert Slesinski notes, Soloviev hopes "to restore primacy to the immediately given in knowledge, and precisely as a manifestation of the divine absolute that undergirds the whole of reality itself."²²⁷

²²² On this particular point he follows the Schellingian critique of Hegel almost to the letter. See Stremoukhoff, 76. For Soloviev's argument against what he called Hegel's "dialectical deception," see Solov'ev, *Filosofskie Nachala*, SS I: 347.

²²³ Solov'ev, *Krizis Zapadnoi Filosofii*, SS I: 150.

²²⁴ Ibid., 151. "Free theosophy is an organic synthesis of theology, philosophy and natural science, and only such a synthesis can contain in itself the entire truth of knowledge: outside of it science, philosophy, and theology are but separated parts or sides, isolated organs of knowledge and as such cannot to any extent be adequate to the whole truth itself." V. V. Bychkov, "Estetika Vladimira Solov'eva Kak Aktualnaia Paradigma [the Aesthetics of Vladimir Soloviev as an Actual Paradigm]," *Istoriia filosofii* 4, no. (1999), 290.

²²⁵ Solov'ev, *Filosofskie Nachala*, SS I: 290.

²²⁶ Solov'ev, *Krizis Zapadnoi Filosofii*, SS I: 151.

²²⁷ Slesinski, "Believing Thought as a Category in Russian Religious Philosophy," 579.

3.2 *Mysticism and the Possibility of Knowledge*

In *The Principles of Integral Knowledge*, Soloviev argues that absolute knowledge, in addition to formal and material knowledge, is the *sine qua non* of true knowledge of reality because “an object of experience or thought does not become true simply because I experience or conceive it.”²²⁸ Therefore, the only way to account for the possibility of knowledge of the real is to recognize that we enjoy a “direct perception of absolute reality” that transcends the limitations of human subjectivity and “unites us inwardly with the object of knowledge and penetrates it.”²²⁹ Such direct perception is only possible if we admit a third and distinct mode of cognition, a mode he terms “mysticism” (*mistika*) or “mystical knowledge” (*misticheskoe znanie*).²³⁰ “Mystical knowledge,” he writes, “is necessary for philosophy since apart from it philosophy comes to absurdity, both in consistent empiricism and consistent rationalism.”²³¹

As Helmut Dahm shows in his comparative analysis of Soloviev and Max Scheler, Soloviev employs the term “mysticism” merely to indicate a theory of cognition in philosophy that presumes a common metaphysical ground between the knower and the known.²³² Just as the common meaning of the term “mystical” refers to the “direct and immediate relation of our spirit to the transcendent world,”²³³ so cognitive “mysticism” is the “reflection of our intellect on this relation, constituting a particular direction in

²²⁸ Solov'ev, *Kritika*, SS II: 287.

²²⁹ Ibid., 326.

²³⁰ Solov'ev, *Filosofskie Nachala*, SS I: 303.

²³¹ Ibid., 305.

²³² Helmut Dahm, *Vladimir Solovyev and Max Scheler: Attempt at a Comparative Interpretation*, ed. Dr. J. M. Bochenski, *Sovietica* (Dordrecht-Holland/Boston-U.S.A.: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1975), 26.

²³³ Solov'ev, *Filosofskie Nachala*, SS I: 263.

philosophy.”²³⁴ *A priori* mystical knowledge is that which enables the knower to discern and affirm the objective reality of the known object.²³⁵

Soloviev identifies the proper object of knowledge as the “truly-existent” [*istinno-sushchee*] (*toontos on, das wahrhaft Seiende*) in its objective expression or idea.²³⁶ As such, it cannot be merely an object of thought or experience, nor even be properly described as “being” (*bytie*), which is an abstraction. At the same time, one cannot conclude that the “existent” (*sushchii*) is “non-being” (*nebytie*) or the absence of being, since the actuality of being (*bytie*) presupposes an “absolute primordial principle” (*absolutnoe pervonachalo*). The “truly-existent” is the principle and foundation of all and every being (*bytie*). Since being (*bytie*) can only be a *predicate* of the existent (*sushchii*), the object of true philosophy can be described as the truly-existent (*istinno-sushchee*) in its predicates.²³⁷ We know this truly-existent of all being in everything we know, and without it we are unable to know anything at all. The truly-existent unites all in itself as absolute unity, including us ourselves, and this bond constitutes the “mystical” foundation of knowledge.²³⁸ At the same time, in order to be actual, mystical knowledge requires positive content and universal form.

The positive content of knowledge comes through the totality of human experience (*opyt*). He identifies three levels of experience, structured hierarchically according to their

²³⁴ Ibid., 263. Mystical philosophy only corresponds to theology by way of *analogy*, insofar as it deals with the Absolute.

²³⁵ Slesinski believes that Soloviev shares Kireevsky and Khomiakov’s “fundamental weakness” of an imprecise use of terms that seemed to confuse mysticism or faith with intellectual intuition. “It must be asked whether it is really mysticism (or “theology”) that is at question or the immediacy of intuition.” See Slesinski, “Russian Philosophical Thought as a Search for Integral Knowledge,” 136. Dahm’s rigorous analysis shows that Soloviev’s use of these terms is purely philosophical although they correspond by analogy to their religious meaning. See Dahm, 26.

²³⁶ Solov’ev, *Filosofskie Nachala*, SS I: 309.

²³⁷ Solov’ev, *Kritika*, SS II: 304-05.

²³⁸ Zenkovsky affirms that Soloviev took the characteristically Russian approach of ontologism, beginning with a basic intuition into existence and a vital relationship with it, as opposed to epistemology, and therefore that his epistemology conformed to his metaphysics, not vice versa. See Zenkovsky, 518.

respective spheres: the mystical,²³⁹ psychological, and physical or material. The latter two are necessary for the “fullness of absolute being” because the physical sphere deals with the “external peripheral unity” of the truly-existent (*istinno-sushchii*), its furthestmost realization, while the psychological sphere serves as the “interior mediator” between the mystical center and the physical periphery.²⁴⁰ This affirmation of the *totality* of human experience as providing the content of truth is what gives Soloviev’s methodology its phenomenological character.²⁴¹

At this point he introduces the Schellingian notion of *intellektuelle Anschauung*,²⁴² which he terms “intellectual intuition” (*umstvennoe sozertsanie*) or simply “intuition” (*intuitiia*).²⁴³ As the “true primary form of integral knowledge,” intellectual intuition is necessary in order to give the “form of integral truth” to the raw and fragmented material provided by the various sorts of human experience, to focus the partial beams of sensible perception and experiential knowledge into universal ideas.²⁴⁴ Soloviev believes the existence of this faculty is proven by the “universal human fact” of artistic creativity. The

²³⁹ His use of the term “mystical” experience here refers to the direct and conscience experience of that same transcendent reality, which lies beyond thought and sensory perception, of which mystical knowledge had direct *a priori* knowledge.

²⁴⁰ Solov'ev, *Filosofskie Nachala*, SS I: 316.

²⁴¹ Dahm’s study, cited above, demonstrates the commonalities between Soloviev and Max Scheler’s phenomenological methodologies.

²⁴² Zenkovsky criticizes Soloviev’s epistemological inconsistency since he later failed to consider the problem and/or develop the notion of the intellectual intuition of ideas in the *Critique*, given the fact that he introduced it in *Principles*, and then seemed to revert to it again in *Lectures*. He notes that other scholars who have studied Soloviev’s epistemology in depth, namely, Trubetskoi, Vvedenskii, and Ern have not shed light on this particular question. Zenkovsky thus concludes that “we fail to find unity in Soloviev’s most fundamental epistemological theories.” But it seems Zenkovsky was reading too much into Soloviev’s terminological ambiguity, since in the *Critique* Soloviev does not attribute intellectual intuition or contemplation (*umstvennoe sozertsanie*) to the imagination (*voobrazhenie*), but rather seeks to develop the latter term so as to include the notion of intellectual intuition. There is accordingly more epistemological unity to his ideas than his imprecise terminology might lead us to conclude. Zenkovsky, 522. See Solov'ev, *Kritika*, SS II: 341.

²⁴³ Most scholars translate *umstvennoe sozertsanie* as “intellectual intuition,” although strictly speaking *sozertsanie* means “contemplation” and other scholars have used this term instead. See Sergei M. Solov'ev, *Vladimir Solovyov: His Life and Creative Evolution*, 224.

²⁴⁴ Solov'ev, *Filosofskie Nachala*, SS I: 316.

artist is able to intuit existent ideas because these same ideal essences reveal themselves and *act upon us* and *elicit* cognition and creativity from us. He argues that the artist actually “sees” them in their “inner wholeness,” as Goethe and Hoffmann testify from their own experience.²⁴⁵ Generally speaking, we call the effect of these “ideal images” or existent ideas on us “inspiration” (*vdokhnovlenie*). In the same way, we can say that intuition is the active (*deistvuiushchee*) principle of true philosophical cognition.²⁴⁶ These ideas are further refined in his doctoral thesis, *The Critique of Abstract Principles*.

3.3 *The Critique of Abstract Principles*

In the preface to *The Critique of Abstract Principles*, Soloviev develops his epistemology by describing the object of true philosophy as the “all-one existent” (*vseedinoe sushchii*).²⁴⁷ We are able to obtain knowledge of it through sensible experience and rational thought because of a “triple act of faith (*vera*), imagination (*voobrazhenie*), and creativity (*tvorchestvo*).”²⁴⁸ At the *basis* of this triple act, as was seen above, lies “mystical perception” (*mysticheskoe vospriiatie*) of the all-one existent. From this direct perception our logical thinking receives its “unconditional rationality,” and our experience receives the

²⁴⁵ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) and E. T. A. Hoffmann (1776-1822). Solov'ev, *Chtenie*, SS III: 67. Soloviev remarks in a footnote that the scholastic controversy between the nominalists, who asserted *universalia post res*, and the realists, who insisted on *universalia ante res*, was based on an insufficient understanding of the difference between concepts and ideas, i.e., the two possible meanings of the term *universalia*. Given the proper understanding of this distinction, he concludes that both sides were essentially correct.

²⁴⁶ Solov'ev, *Filosofskie Nachala*, SS I: 318-19.

²⁴⁷ The Russian term *vseedinstvo*, or its adjectival form, *vseedinoe*, is derived from the words *vse*, “all” or “total” and *edinstvo*, “unity”. Various translations are possible, such as “total-unity”, “all-oneness” or “all-unity”. I have chosen the latter since it corresponds most literally to his intended meaning.

²⁴⁸ Solov'ev, *Kritika*, SS II: x.

“significance of unconditional reality.”²⁴⁹ As the direct object of mystical knowledge, truth can therefore become an object of natural knowledge (*estestvennoe znanie*), i.e., it can be consciously comprehended by human reason and grasped in sensible experience. In this way truth is introduced into the *forms* of logical thought and is communicated in the concrete data of sensible experience.²⁵⁰

Since the truth of knowledge is determined by the truth of the object, the three phases of the cognitive act correspond to the three determinations of the existence of the object: 1) as an “unconditioned existent” (*sushchii, ens, to ontos on*); 2) as an idea or “essence” (*sushchnost, essentia, ousia*); and 3) as a “being” (*esse, bytie*), which as a phenomenon (*iavlenie, actus, phainomenon*) is in a certain sense necessary and actual. The full truth of an object must be sought therefore in the total actuality of the object, and only secondarily in its universality. Based on this ontology, true cognition must affirm *that* the object exists, *what* it is, and finally *how* it appears.²⁵¹

First, faith (*vera*) gives us “immediate certainty” *that* there is present an independent object beyond the subjective states of our consciousness. Since this interior certainty corresponds to the object’s most profound determination as an existent (*sushchii*), it transcends sensation and thought. It is accessible to the subject only in its inner unity with the object. The unconditioned “being-in-itself” (*bytie v sebe*) of the knower corresponds to the unconditioned “being-in-itself” of the object. On this basis, we can say that the knowing

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Ibid. This new formulation demonstrates Soloviev’s increasingly independent intellectual development, distancing him further from the obvious influences of Plato, Schopenhauer, and Hegel in *Principles*, and approaching more closely the ideas of the later Schelling and Goethe. Sergei M. Solov'ev, *Vladimir Solovyov: His Life and Creative Evolution*, 225.

²⁵¹ Solov'ev, *Kritika*, SS II: 339-42.

subject is truly *in* the object of thought and the object is *in* the knowing subject. Although this metaphysical bond is deeper than our natural consciousness, it is expressed and manifested in our consciousness in the immediate certainty of faith, which is prior to each sensible perception and each abstract reflection.²⁵² This certainty is not determined by our sensations or understanding of the object. Rather, the *objective meaning* of our sensations and understanding themselves are directly determined by this certainty in the independent existence of the object.²⁵³ Soloviev argues that faith, as a free act of cognition, testifies to “our freedom from all things and, along with this, is an expression of our interior bond with all things.”²⁵⁴ This insight is decisive for Soloviev’s thought.²⁵⁵ Understood properly in the context of this epistemological realism, faith is the “basis for our freedom from subjectivity and, thus, for our freedom from absolute skepticism.”²⁵⁶

Second, what he terms “intellectual intuition” (*umstvennoe sozertsanie*) or “imagination” (*voobrazhenie*) expresses *what* the object is, its immutable essence or idea. In equating these two terms, it is clear that he seeks to expand the meaning of the latter, and Dahm comes closer to Soloviev’s meaning than Zenkovsky when he translates the term *voobrazhenie* as “ideation” or “representation.”²⁵⁷ The essence or idea of an object is clearly not accessible to the knowing subject in external empirical knowledge. Therefore, “the essential representation (*sushchestvennoe voobrazhenie*) of the object in and for the knowing subject rests on an interaction (*vzaimodeistvie*) between the essence of the object and the

²⁵² Ibid., 340.

²⁵³ Ibid., 325.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 330.

²⁵⁵ Although Soloviev’s notion of the epistemological role of “faith” echoes Khomiakov’s, Slesinski argues that Soloviev’s insight into the consequences of this truth mark a significant advance over the Slavophile thinker. See Slesinski, “Russian Philosophical Thought as a Search for Integral Knowledge,” 136-37.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ See Dahm, 79-81 and Zenkovsky, 521-22.

knowing subject. Through this interaction the essence of the object is expressed in the “imagination” through an image (*obraz*) that is distinct from sensible impressions.²⁵⁸

At the same time, this image only becomes actual knowledge when it is evoked (“caused to manifest or appear,” *vyzivauiut k proiavleniiu*) by sensible perceptions in our natural consciousness. In this way, Soloviev wants to integrate the relative truths of empirical and rational knowledge, namely, that, properly understood, “*nihil est in intellectu quod non fuerit prius in sensu*” and at the same time, “*nihil est in sensu quod non fuerit prius in intellectu*.”²⁵⁹ At this level, Soloviev calls the intuition of the object’s idea “metaphysical imagination” (*mysticheskoe voobrazhenie*). Whereas, insofar as it appears in our natural consciousness, he calls it “psychological imagination” (*psikhologicheskoe voobrazhenie*) or “fantasy” (*fantaziia*).²⁶⁰ By subsuming the notion of intellectual intuition under the term metaphysical and psychological “imagination” (*voobrazhenie*), whose root is “image” (*obraz*), Soloviev is alluding to his conviction that every act of cognition, while grounded in mystical knowledge and determined by the objective essence of the object, is inseparable from and conditioned by empirical perception and physical sensations. In other words, the truth *incarnate* communicates itself to the knowing subject through the image (*obraz*).²⁶¹

Third, the act of “psychological creativity” (*psikhologicheskoe tvorchestvo*) corresponds to *how* the object is, i.e., its phenomenal appearance (*iavlenie*) as a being (*bytie*). We actualize or, more literally, “incarnate” (*voploshchaem*) the idea or essence of an

²⁵⁸ Solov'ev, *Kritika*, SS II: 340.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 340.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 340-41.

²⁶¹ Ibid., 341.

object in the data of our experience, our sensations, and the relative qualities that derive from these sensations. Through our own creative act, we confer phenomenal being (*bytie*) on the object. The full actuality of the object is only present through this incarnation in the sensations of the subject, without which it would possess no objective significance or meaning and properly speaking would not be an object at all. This interaction or reciprocity (*vzaimodeistvie*) with the other is essential for the object's external natural actuality, which is manifested in the multiplicity of external impressions and sensations. But the content of actuality is not thereby determined by the subject. Sensations can only represent the actuality of the object because they are determined by its idea.²⁶² Sensible experience as knowledge of immediate actuality is therefore essential for true cognition. It cannot be separated from faith in the unconditioned existence of the object insofar as faith is nothing less than an experience of a reality that corresponds to an organic cognitive function.²⁶³

4. METHODOLOGICAL APPLICATION

The inner unity of the cognitive process through which we attain true knowledge of that which is, when formalized, constitutes free theosophy's synthesis of theology (corresponding to "faith" as "mystical perception" of the existent), philosophy (corresponding to the process of active cognition), and natural science (corresponding to sensory perception and experience). Only such a synthesis, Soloviev argues, "can contain in itself the whole truth of knowledge."²⁶⁴ For Soloviev, it is the unconditional truth of

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ See Ibid., 196-206. See also Dahm, 34. Soloviev's notion of psychological creativity should not be mistaken for Kant's theory of apriority, against which he argues at length in *The Crisis of Western Philosophy*.

²⁶⁴ Soloviev, *Filosofskie Nachala*, SS I: 290.

theology that prevents this synthesis from degenerating into abstract syncretism. Theology is not a merely human endeavor and cannot be reduced to an individualistic or academic discipline; on the contrary, it presumes a living communion with the divine in and through Jesus Christ and his Church. In *The Spiritual Foundations of Life*, he asserts unequivocally that the individual human person must “conform his ideas and opinions to the dogma of the Church who herself bears the mind of Christ ... for in its origins and in our acceptance of it is fulfilled the necessary moral condition of true knowledge: abnegating (*samootrechenie*) our isolated, carnal mind and uniting it with the mind of Christ, that is, with absolute truth.”²⁶⁵ The Church’s consciousness of herself as possessing Christ, who is Truth, is fully justified, Soloviev insists, “as not only the truth of Christian faith but also the truth of Christian reason.”²⁶⁶

Presuming the essentially ecclesial context of *fides quaerens intellectum*, and the unconditional and preeminent truth of Revelation, Soloviev insists that a universal synthesis can only be achieved when the disciplines of theology, philosophy, and natural science each freely affirms the universality of “integral truth” by renouncing its own exclusivity (*iskliuchitelnost*). This dialectic formally resembles Hegel’s “sublation” (*Aufhebung*), but while the Hegelian dialectic transcends all things in its relentless path to absolute Spirit, Soloviev’s method integrates all partial and relative truths and forms of actualization in such a way that they are not only preserved, but actualized, purified, and perfected. This is based explicitly on his conviction that the formal principle of any synthesis must be found in Chalcedonian Christology, in which one and the same person of Christ is acknowledged “in

²⁶⁵ Solov'ev, *Dukhovnie Osnovi Zhizni*, SS III: 383.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 397.

two natures without confusion, change, division, or separation. The distinction between natures was never abolished by their union, but rather the character proper to each of the two natures was preserved as they came together in one person.”²⁶⁷ In like manner, the respective truths of theology, philosophy, and natural science ultimately find their justification when they renounce their own exclusivity and become inwardly united not only with one another but with the truth of the whole, all-unity (*vseedinstvo*).

The Meaning of Love provides an exceptionally clear and fruitful example of the methodology of free theosophy. As was seen above, the terminology, mode of argument, and conceptual apparatus Soloviev employs here, as elsewhere, are consistent with his mission to “bring religious truth into the form of freely-rational thought,”²⁶⁸ and thus they are primarily determined by the mode of philosophical discourse. Despite the explicit inclusion in his argument of terms and concepts from various discourses, including theological and biblical, he primarily crafts his argument by using rational discourse and disguising theological terms with their philosophical equivalents, such as the obvious “Godman” for Jesus Christ, or the more obscure “absolute content” (*bezuslovnoe soderzhanie*) for the “kingdom of God or “grace,” depending on the context. He also inserts his own neologisms, which are difficult to translate into English directly, for his most foundational, pivotal ideas, such as the above mentioned “all-unity” (*vseedinstvo*) and divine-humanity (*Bogochelovechestvo*). Finally, he redefines terms to suit his purposes, such as his epistemological use of “mystical,” or more to the point, his use of the Greek term *syzygy* in *The Meaning of Love*. In addition to the use of such terminology, he crafts his

²⁶⁷ J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1978), 339-40.

²⁶⁸ Soloviev, *Kritika*, SS II: 350.

argument as a deliberate appeal to reason, exposing and attacking the inconsistency, errors, and limitations of competing theories. He appeals to the truth and authority of Christian Revelation only when necessary. In other words, here the apologetic purpose of his methodology of free theosophy can be clearly seen.

Soloviev's notion of "true philosophy" is the synthesis of free theosophy.²⁶⁹ First, he weaves into his argument both the metaphorical discourse of poetry and the factual discourse of empirical science, including Darwinian evolutionary biology and modern psychology. But his affirmation and incorporation of the partial truths found in poetic and scientific discourse are complemented by a critique of their radical insufficiency. His criticism also acknowledges the failure of these discourses to give an account of universal truth, or indeed of the full meaning of any given phenomenon, including human love. Second, his philosophical reasoning is inseparable from the absolute and authoritative source of truth in whose light he seeks to devise the synthetic and inclusive discourse of free theosophy, namely, the dogmatic truths of Sacred Scripture and Christian Tradition revealed in and through the Church. Indeed, his insistence on the absolute authority of divine revelation is a stumbling block to some scholars who otherwise sympathize with his all-inclusive and synthetic methodology.²⁷⁰ In actual fact, the tension between Soloviev's faith in the absolute authority of divine Revelation and his commitment to crafting a universal synthesis adequate to the full truth of human reality is what prevents his thought from

²⁶⁹ See Wozniuk's introduction in Soloviev, *The Heart of Reality*, ix-xviii.

²⁷⁰ For example, Edith Clowes complains about the "anomalous" and "uncritical" way in which Soloviev treats biblical discourse in comparison to how he treats "secular discourses," concluding with disapproval that "the *polemical* citation of scientific and poetic sources used frequently elsewhere in the essay now gives way to what can be called *authoritative* citation of New Testament sources" (emphasis added). Edith W. Clowes, "The Limits of Discourse: Solov'ev's Language of Syzygy and the Project of Thinking Total-Unity," *Slavic Review* 55, no. 3 (1996), 561.

becoming abstract and fruitless syncretism. The skill with which he employs his own methodology is in large part what makes his theory of sexual-spousal love far from merely a subject of purely historical, literary, or academic interest and explains its lasting relevance for Christian thought in general and theological anthropology in particular. The methodology of free theosophy flows directly from Soloviev's Trinitarian metaphysics of all-unity (*vseedinstvo*), which the following chapter will consider.²⁷¹

²⁷¹ Zenkovsky, 518.

PART TWO

CHAPTER III

Soloviev's Trinitarian Metaphysics of Love

“All-unity” (*vseedinstvo*) is not for Soloviev merely a theoretical postulate—although as an idea it lies at the heart of his logic²⁷²—nor is it simply his “primary intuition,” as Berdyaev maintained;²⁷³ rather, it is a living, concrete, and all-encompassing reality, revealed in Christ as Love, as that which ought to be realized in every aspect of material creation and human life, individually and socially.²⁷⁴ In his *Brockhaus* encyclopedia article, Soloviev defines “all-unity” as “the relation of the all-embracing spiritual-organic whole to the living members and elements which are found in it.”²⁷⁵ For Soloviev, to say that “God is Love,” is simply another way of saying that God is a triune *communio personarum*, whose origin and principle of unity is the person of the Father (the divine

²⁷² Russian Orthodox theologian, Father Sergius Bulgakov saw “positive all-unity” as the central idea in Soloviev’s system, and Zenkovsky, while arguing for a diversity of points of departure in Soloviev’s thought, nevertheless concludes that “The idea of ‘total-unity’ gradually became the central idea and guiding principle of his philosophy.” Zenkovsky, 479, 482. Copleston agrees, writing “The central idea of Soloviev’s metaphysics is the concept of total-unity, of reality as one. In religious language it is the idea of God in all and all in God.” Copleston, *Philosophy in Russia: From Herzen to Lenin and Berdyaev*, 222. Valliere sees “the whole of things” as informing all aspects of Soloviev’s teaching, which he argued was an ongoing project, not a system, and has concrete content, despite the fact that nowhere does Soloviev lay out a complete theory of this “whole of things.” Valliere, 121-27.

²⁷³ Berdyaev, 168.

²⁷⁴ This is why his metaphysics also informs his epistemology, as Zenkovsky points out. “Metaphysics, rather than epistemology, is the creative center of his thought. ... This is evident, among other things, from the fact that definite metaphysical ideas underlie Solovyov’s epistemological theories; and it is in the light of these that his epistemological views first become wholly clear.” Zenkovsky, 493.

²⁷⁵ Soloviev’s entire definition reads as follows: “All-unity (*vseedinstvo*), that is, the unity of all, can be understood in two primary senses: the negative or abstract and the positive or concrete. In the first sense, the unity of all is understood as what is *common* to all that exists, while according to the diversity of philosophical points of view, *what is common* appears diverse: thus, for materialism it is matter, for logical idealism—the self-disclosing logical idea, and so on. In the second, positive sense, it is the relation of a unified principle to all, understood as the relation of the all-embracing spiritual-organic whole to the living members and elements, which are found in it. This sense also allows for certain modifications in different metaphysical systems.” Soloviev, *Stati Iz Entsiklopedicheskovo Slovaria*, SS X: 231.

monarchia), and whose essence is the infinite fullness of Being and the reconciliation of all *coincidentia oppositorum*. The divine Trinity, whose all-one (*vse-edinoe*) essence is revealed as infinite, absolute Love, is the free personal principle, source, and exemplar of creation. Soloviev retrieves Christian Neoplatonic exemplarism through the personalist prism of medieval love mysticism, emphasizing the *analogia entis* between humanity and the Trinity. Humanity, and in and through it all of creation, finds its ultimate meaning in Christ. Soloviev never envisions Christ as an isolated individual apart from the Trinity or his Body and Bride the Church, which encompasses all of humanity and creation. For him, the Trinity is the exemplar for humanity, which has been divinized in principle in Christ's divine-humanity, in its essentially relational, interpersonal, and communal existence.²⁷⁶

Soloviev formulates his metaphysics of all-unity (*vseedinstvo*) in *The Principles of Integral Knowledge*, *Lectures on Divine-Humanity*, *The Critique of Abstract Principles*, and *La Russie et l'Église Universelle*. In this chapter the Trinitarian roots and essential principles of all-unity found in these works will be examined and evaluated, with a primary focus on the latter work,²⁷⁷ since it represents his most mature thought on the subject and most closely preceded and informed his ideas in *The Meaning of Love*. Grasping the Trinitarian foundation and form of his metaphysics of all-unity is crucial when discerning and assessing his theory of sexual-spousal love.

²⁷⁶ See Meerson, 45.

²⁷⁷ His purpose for laying out his metaphysical ideas in *La Russie* complements the present one: to present Christian metaphysical principles insofar as they provide a foundation for theological anthropology, Christology, and ecclesiology.

1. TRINITARIAN METAPHYSICS OF ALL-UNITY

Soloviev weaves his metaphysical synthesis primarily from Christian Neoplatonism, medieval speculative mysticism, and post-Kantian German idealism. He retrieves the Neoplatonic exemplarist vision of reality using the thought of the Victorines, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Bonaventure as a sort of corrective lens.²⁷⁸ The theological and speculative syntheses of medieval thought provided him with a deeply Christian affirmation of material creation, as well as a basis for naming the living God as not only absolute Goodness, but absolute Love.²⁷⁹ His Trinitarian theology is also firmly rooted in the patristic traditions of both East and West, including Dionysius the Areopagite, the Cappadocians, Augustine, and Maximus the Confessor, who, like Soloviev, based his Christian philosophy on Chalcedonian Christology. As with his project of free theosophy, Soloviev turns to post-Kantian German idealism, especially to the late Schelling, to craft the formal and conceptual framework of his metaphysics.²⁸⁰ He adopts Hegel's dialectic, but only in its strictly logical and formal aspects. By substituting the notion of a real existent (*istinno sushchee*) for Hegelian "being" (*Sein, bytie*), he transforms the dialectic from within and successfully incorporates the Christian distinction between person (*hypostasis*) and nature (*ousia*) as a

²⁷⁸ Meerson demonstrates Soloviev's indebtedness to Western medieval love mysticism, which remained largely implicit in his works. See Meerson, 48-50.

²⁷⁹ Meerson cites two concrete examples. Hugh of St. Victor stressed the "value of matter as being the indispensable receptacle of the divine glory," while Bernard of Clairvaux's theology of ontological love complemented the Neoplatonic notion of God as the absolute Good. Ibid., 48.

²⁸⁰ Indeed, some scholars, such as Zenkovsky and Trubetskoi, have dismissed his metaphysics as simply a restatement of Spinoza's pantheism and the thought of the late Schelling. While it is true that Soloviev's synthesis suffers from the intrinsic philosophical weaknesses of German idealism vis-à-vis Christian theology, Zenkovsky ignores Soloviev's subsequent corrections, which are duly noted by von Balthasar. See Zenkovsky, 530, and von Balthasar, "Soloviev," 306-07.

foundational metaphysical principle.²⁸¹ Soloviev's approach to metaphysics is an attempt to synthesize "the descent of speculative contemplation with the ascent of rational reasoning."²⁸² In this, he believes, he is participating in the ongoing development of the Church's understanding of the full meaning of her dogmatic definitions.²⁸³

1.1 *The Absolute as Hen kai Pan*

Soloviev begins to formulate his metaphysics by reflecting on what it means "to be." When we say "I am" or "this is," we beg the question, *who* am I and *what* is this. The verb "to be" only links the subject and predicate grammatically; the objective truth of the statement depends upon the existence of the subject and the nature of its relationship to its predicate. "Being" (*Sein, bytie*), and all possible predicates thereof, cannot and do not subsist *in themselves*, but only insofar as they are possessed, posited, and manifested by "that which is," a real existent (*istinno sushchee*). Unless metaphysics includes and affirms this fundamental distinction as a criterion of real being, the concept of "being" itself dissolves into an empty abstraction devoid of actuality and positive content. Therefore, Soloviev concludes that "being (*bytie*) can be conceived only as the *relation* of an existent

²⁸¹ Meerson argues that Soloviev initiated the personalist trend in modern Russian religious philosophy and theology and that he anticipated what Meerson calls "the anthropocentric paradigm shift of twentieth-century theology." See his chapter "The Personalist Shift in Solov'ev's Trinitarian Synthesis" in Meerson, "The Love Paradigm and the Retrieval of Western Medieval Love Mysticism in Modern Russian Trinitarian Thought (from Solov'ev to Bulgakov)," 44-92.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 50.

²⁸³ Speaking to how the Church did not preclude the free activity of theology and philosophy to develop the positive meaning of defined Trinitarian dogma, Soloviev writes that "the determinations of the purely logical thought developed with such perfection in the newest German philosophy, which has for us in its formal aspect the same meaning the Academy and the Lyceum had for the ancient theologians, can serve as a priceless means for the full logical elucidation of this fundamental dogma; and those who now oppose the introduction of this philosophical element into the religious sphere should first reject the entire past history of Christian theology, which, one can say, was nourished by Plato and Aristotle." Solov'ev, *Chtenia O Bogochelovechestve*, SS III: 82.

(*sushchee*) to its objective essence (*sushchnost*) or content, a relation in which it affirms, posits, manifests its content, its essence (*sushchnost*) in one way or another.”²⁸⁴

It follows, therefore, that if we say “God exists,” we are affirming his existence first and foremost as “that which is,” as the existent or subsisting subject (*sushchee*) of absolute Being. God is totally transcendent and free in himself from every kind of being and therefore every kind of definition. The divine Absolute is therefore “nothing”, i.e., no particular thing or combination thereof, since this would imply a limitation or lack, which is precluded by the very notion of the Absolute. Soloviev incorporates the Kabbalistic idea of *Ein-Sof*, the “infinite” or “endless,” to describe the ineffable, subsisting divine subject as a “positive nothing” or the “positive power of being.”²⁸⁵ At the same time, the *Ein-Sof* must contain in itself *all* possible being; he cannot be limited by what he is not.²⁸⁶ “If [the Absolute] is nothing, then being (*bytie*) is its other, but since the Absolute is the principle of being (as possessing the positive power of being), it is the principle of its other. If the Absolute remained only itself and excluded its other, this other would be its negation, and consequently, the Absolute would not be the Absolute.”²⁸⁷

God as *Ein-Sof* is therefore nothing (*neshto*) and at the same time the perfect fullness of absolute Being, the “All” (*vse*). To capture this paradox, Soloviev combines the Schellingian notion of the Absolute as the “super-subsistent” with the medieval notion of

²⁸⁴ Solov'ev, *Chtenie*, SS III: 83-84.

²⁸⁵ He notes that this notion of the *Ein-Sof* is the “direct opposite” of Hegel’s “negative nothing” that equals pure being and at which we arrive through pure abstraction or through the elimination of all positive attributes. Soloviev does not give an explanation for his choice of this term, although it seems clear that he wanted to express, without resorting to theological terminology at this point, the paradox of the existence of an absolute principle that transcends all being and yet is the source of all being. See Solov'ev, *Filosofskie Nachala Tsel'nogo Znaniia*, SS I: 348-49.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 348.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 349.

God as a *coincidentia oppositorum*.²⁸⁸ He insists that if God's revealed existence is to be intelligible for us at all, then it must possess to an absolute degree the universal form of all true being. Integrating and purifying Spinoza's concept of the Absolute of its pantheistic implications, Soloviev insists that God, totally free and transcendent in himself, but also as the source of all Being, must exist, so to speak, not only as *hen* ("one") or *pan* ("all"), but as *hen kai pan* ("one and all").²⁸⁹

1.2 Concrete Idealism and Love

All-unity [*vseedinstvo*], in which the infinite diversity of the "many" is reduced to the perfect, inner unity of the "one," pervades each aspect of Soloviev's metaphysics as the essential *form* of being itself. But how are we to describe the diverse totality of that which is united in this perfect unity? If the Absolute exists as the perfect unity of all "ideal substances,"²⁹⁰ what makes this unity perfect? Any truly existing ideal substance, what Soloviev calls an "entity" (*suchchestvo*), possesses and manifests its own essence or determinate *idea*. Since the ideal *form* of being itself is "all-one," some degree of inner unity in diversity necessarily characterizes any real being, as well as their relations with one another. Subsisting finite entities, insofar as they possess their own unique ideal essences or ideas, are able to find meaningful, *inner* unity in relation to other entities. The ideal dimension of being is the necessary foundation for meaningful, interior, and free relations

²⁸⁸ As Meerson has shown, Soloviev was well versed in medieval thought. His concept of the Absolute as a *coincidentia oppositorum* in particular is reminiscent of the theology of Hugh of St. Victor, Bonaventure, and Nicolas of Cusa. Like these medieval thinkers, Soloviev's belief that everything mutually opposed and contradictory in the creature is reconciled and complementary in God does not mean that he held to some sort of pantheism. His understanding of the divine essence as positive all-unity precludes any such reduction. See Meerson, 59.

²⁸⁹ Solov'ev, *Filosofskie Nachala*, 349. See Zenkovsky, 501.

²⁹⁰ Solov'ev, *Chtenie*, SS III: 49.

and unity, in which each entity has its own unique place in an ordered cosmos, the organic whole; otherwise, any unity between entities would remain purely external, accidental, coerced, and therefore meaningless.

For Soloviev these ideas do not exist merely in the rational realm of abstract thought. Unlike concepts, whose scope is inversely proportional to their actual existential content, the ideas of real entities correspond directly to their actual existence.²⁹¹ This sort of “concrete idealism,” the understanding of ideas as actual metaphysical entities subsisting in God, recalls and in all likelihood is influenced by Bonaventure’s *rationes aeternae*.²⁹² The inner relations between ideal entities in the divine substance are perfectly integrated, harmonious, and infinitely complex manifestations of all-unity (*vseedinstvo*), or what Soloviev calls an infinitely complex “organism of ideas” (*organizm idei*). Within this organism there is a sort of organic hierarchical structure in which simpler organisms are fully realized in ever more complex, inclusive, and richer organisms, each finding its unique and proper place in the absolute, “all-embracing spiritual-organic whole.” When we describe the divine essence as eternally including, affirming, integrating, perfecting, and uniting inwardly each entity and each organism of ideas into one infinite, harmonious whole, Soloviev writes, “we are only repeating in a more abstract form the words of the great apostle: God is Love.”²⁹³ The mystery of absolute Love is thus not simply one divine attribute among others. It is itself the very essence of God. It is “precisely that ideal all, that all-unity that constitutes the proper

²⁹¹ Ibid., 63.

²⁹² See Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey into God, the Tree of Life, the Life of St. Francis*, ed. Richard J. Payne, trans., Ewert Cousins, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York, Ramsey, Toronto: Paulist Press, 1978), 25-26. Meerson also draws attention to the parallels between Bonaventure’s *rationes aeternae* and Soloviev’s “concrete idealism.” See Meerson, 59. See also “Part Three” in John Quinn, *The Historical Constitution of St. Bonaventure's Philosophy* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1973), 443-523.

²⁹³ Soloviev, *Filosofskie Nachala*, SS I: 349.

content of the divine principle. For the fullness of ideas cannot be conceived as their mechanical aggregate; it is their inner unity, which is love.”²⁹⁴

Following the logic of his metaphysical distinction between the existent (*sushchee*) and being (*bytie*), Soloviev arrives at a distinctly personalistic metaphysics. Every entity that participates in ideal being, which is determined by the Absolute’s mode of existence, must not only possess a unique objective idea, it must also be unique as a subject, it must possess its own essence in its own determinate way. In order to subsist as a unique subject, therefore, it must exist in and for itself, which means that it must have self-consciousness or *personhood* (*lichnost*). “The bearer of an idea, or an idea as subject, is a person (*litso*),” he asserts. Ideal being is thus found only in the synthesis of a personal subject and its concrete idea. The former reveals itself in the latter, while remaining free and transcendent in itself. “These two terms, person and idea, are correlative as subject and object and necessarily require each other for the fullness of their activity.”²⁹⁵ For Soloviev, ideal being as such is necessarily a personal mode of existence insofar as it includes and transcends the subject-object distinction. This in turn rests on the above mentioned metaphysical criteria of the Trinity as *hen kai pan* or all-unity. The explicitly Trinitarian principles of this metaphysics are found primarily in *La Russie et L’Église Universelle*.

1.3 *The Formal Truth of the Trinity*

Although Soloviev’s exposition of the Trinity is an excellent example of how his apologetic intention to “demonstrate” the universal truth of Christian dogma conditions his

²⁹⁴ Solov'ev, *Chtenie*, SS III: 57-58.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 70.

writing, his attempt to “deduce” its formal truth is questionable.²⁹⁶ He takes as his point of departure that the Absolute can only be a personal, conscious, living being. By this, three interdependent modes of being—unity, duality, and trinity—are simultaneously implied. The Absolute possesses unity as one, existent subject, and it has duality insofar as it manifests itself in its objective essence or idea, as a *something*, as was seen above. Its Trinitarian mode appears in that it relates to its own essence in three distinct ways. First, it possesses its essence as its own actuality. Second, the Absolute possesses its essence in the activity in and through which it manifests its essence. Third, the Absolute possesses its essence “in the awareness or enjoyment of its own being and activity, in that return upon itself which proceeds from existence manifested in activity.”²⁹⁷

Without all three elements, the Absolute would be an inert, passive thing, inferior to man himself, who, while possessing these modes of being as a personal, living being, is limited and contingent insofar as he is a created being dependent for his existence on his divine Creator. Only in God do we find these modes of personal, living being in their absolute and perfect form. God possesses perfect unity as the transcendent “super-subsistent” subject. He possesses perfect duality in that his divine substance is a manifestation of his infinite being from all eternity as pure actuality, admitting no lack or division. God’s triune possession of his own absolute being appears “in himself” as act (absolute fact), “for himself” as manifesting and producing it (absolute action), and “with

²⁹⁶ Slesinski believes that “Solovyov’s logic may well be faulted in his attempted ‘deduction’ of the Holy Trinity, but his elaboration of the Godhead as given in Christian revelation is certainly intelligible from a philosophical point of view.” Robert Slesinski, “Toward an Understanding of V. S. Solovyov’s ‘Gnosticism,’” *Diakonia* 31, no. 2 (1998), 84.

²⁹⁷ Soloviev, *La Russie*, 241.

himself” as the perfect unity of his existence and manifestation (absolute enjoyment).^{112 298} This triune mode of being is rooted in and dependent upon the mystery of the Father as the transcendent, absolute first principle since “he cannot enjoy it without having manifested it, and He cannot manifest it without having it in Himself.”²⁹⁹

Having argued that God necessarily relates to his own substance in three distinct ways, Soloviev goes on to deduce that each of these relations must necessarily be a subsisting hypostasis. First, he maintains that one divine hypostasis could not both be, manifest, and enjoy its own being without either falling into self-contradiction or admitting temporal and spatial elements into the Godhead. In order for God to be eternally in, for, and with himself, each mode of existence, each relation to the divine substance, must be a subsisting hypostasis. While this resolves the purely logical contradiction and preserves the idea of God as necessarily existing outside the limitations of time and space by transforming the contradiction into a supra-logical paradox, Soloviev’s positing of three divine hypostases does not in fact follow by *logical* necessity. The problem of conceiving of the ineffable, transcendent, triune Godhead without inadvertently smuggling in the notions of time and space points to the deeper limitations of cataphatic theology as a whole, which cannot be “resolved” but merely conditioned and complemented by the apophatic approach of *docta ignorantia*. In this sense, the notions “generation” and “procession” are as limited as “manifestation” and “enjoyment.”

Second, he argues that “God as reproduced and manifested” and “God as enjoying his manifestation,” insofar as they are absolute modes of existing, must each be fully God

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 243.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

and therefore must subsist as hypostases. While this is a legitimate elaboration of a proper understanding of the distinctions between divine hypostases in terms of subsisting relations, its logical necessity also does not follow, since it relies on Soloviev's having suddenly introduced into his argument, with no *logical* justification, the notion of generation, from which the rest of his argument follows.³⁰⁰ Thus, he does not adequately justify his conclusion that he has "logically deduced [the Trinity]."³⁰¹ However, notwithstanding the limitations of his method, he has nevertheless succeeded in presenting a helpful philosophical elaboration of the Trinity that does not contradict "the infallible doctrine of the Church."³⁰²

1.4 *The Divine Monarchia and the Personalist Metaphysics of Ecclesial Being*

In the second part of *La Russie et L'Église Universelle*, Soloviev develops his ecclesiology by reflecting on "the trinitarian principle and its social application."³⁰³ But he seems to presume what he sets out to argue, since, in keeping with the patristic tradition of pastoral theologians such as St. Ignatius of Antioch, St. Irenaeus, and St. Athanasius, he approaches the truth of Trinitarian being through knowledge and experience of *ecclesial being*.³⁰⁴ Since ecclesial being manifests itself as a living unity, the proper term for ideal being, or the "most general and comprehensive name for the plentitude of reality everywhere and in everything," is *life*. Soloviev suggests that the *analogia entis* ought to be

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 244.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Ibid., 240.

³⁰⁴ See John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), 16.

formulated in these terms: “We speak with equal right of divine life, of human life, and of the life of nature.”³⁰⁵ Thus his point of departure in formulating the Trinitarian foundation of his metaphysics fully concurs with John Zizioulas’s summation of the patristic conviction that “being means life, and life means communion.”³⁰⁶

In contrast to a negative, solitary, barren “bad infinity” (*die schlechte Unendlichkeit*) that opposes and obliterates all plurality, Soloviev argues, the positive, living, and fruitful unity of the Church alone is analogous to divine unity because it possesses the universal form of “all-unity” (*vseedinstvo*). “This unity,” he argues, “while always remaining itself above all limited and manifold reality, includes, determines, and reveals the living powers, the uniform reasons, and the varied qualities of all that exists.”³⁰⁷ Divine all-unity, and anything that exists according to its universal form, such as the Church (or human reason), must be both completely *exclusive*, insofar as by definition there cannot be two identical universal forms of being, and at the same time and by virtue of this same fact, *all-inclusive*, insofar as the content of the universal *qua* universal must embrace and account for the all in its diverse and concrete particularity. What makes this all-one form of ideal being or life possible is its personal mode of being. The productive and all-embracing principle of divine all-unity, from which all other manifestations of all-unity derive their form, he argues, “is precisely what is confessed in the Creed: *credo in unum Deum Patrem omnipotentem (pantokratora)*.” Following Greek patristic thought, especially that of the Cappadocians and

³⁰⁵ Solov'ev, *Na Puti k Istinnoi Filosofii*, SS III: 290. See Copleston, *Philosophy in Russia: From Herzen to Lenin and Berdyaev*, 222.

³⁰⁶ Zizioulas, 16.

³⁰⁷ Soloviev, *La Russie*, 240.

Maximus the Confessor, Soloviev affirms and emphasizes the Father as the personal principle and source of the divine nature, and thus of divine all-unity (*vseedinstvo*).³⁰⁸

He further elucidates the personal and thus hierarchical existence of the Trinity by reflecting on the fittingness of the revealed proper names of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Since any complete, living being manifests itself in generation, which is “causality *par excellence*,”³⁰⁹ he argues, the names Father and Son, which correspond to the relational notions of paternity and filiation, capture the idea of “an absolutely intimate relationship between two hypostases of one and the same nature, which are essentially equal to one another, but of which the former gives, without receiving, existence, while the latter receives, without giving, it.”³¹⁰ Since the Father is transcendent in himself as subject, this gift of being is an act of personal *freedom*. Also, while there is an absolute distinction between Father and Son in this *act* of existence, there is an absolute unity in substance. Thus they enter into a reciprocal *relationship* that emerges from and overcomes their distinction in substantial unity. As the substantial fruit of both Father and Son, this unity subsists as a third hypostasis. The proper name of this hypostasis, Holy Spirit, expresses the idea of God manifesting, possessing, and enjoying in unity his own divine Being “in the plenitude of his consciousness.” This is precisely the analogous role of spirit, metaphysically and

³⁰⁸ This principle is consistently reflected in all aspects of his thought, most notably in his ecclesiology and theosophical anthropology. Cf. Zizioulas’s summary of the Greek Fathers’ notion of the *hypostasis* as the principle of being. “No substance or nature exists without person or *hypostasis* or mode of existence. No person exists without substance or nature, *but* the ontological ‘principle’ or ‘cause’ of being—i.e., that which makes a thing to exist—is not the substance or nature but the person or *hypostasis*. Therefore being is traced back not to substance but to person.” Zizioulas, 41-42.

³⁰⁹ The personalist shift in Soloviev is again evident in his approach here. He begins from below by drawing an *analogia entis* between a living human being, knowledge of which he gains from external and interior experience, and having discerned the idea which is present, despite its imperfect character, then elevates it to the level of absolute being, purifying it of any imperfection, and shows how this not only corresponds to divine revelation, but also is actually the true principle and exemplar of human existence. Soloviev, *La Russie*, 245-47.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 245-46.

psychologically speaking, in the human being, as opposed to the soul or intellect. Also, it is in the Spirit, as perfect self-possession, that God is free to act outside of himself, which corresponds to the notion of spirit (*pneuma, spiritus*) as perfect liberty of external action or motion.³¹¹

The divine names therefore are revelatory of the essentially personal mode and the determinate hierarchy of divine triune Being. Having affirmed the Father's *monarchia*, Soloviev emphasizes that it is this very same paternal principle which produces, and in turn only exists, in the perfect and all-inclusive substantial unity of all three hypostases. The Father is only Father insofar as he generates the Son, and so on. "This effectual unity of the three hypostases," he concludes, "derives from the unity of their principle. There is in the Trinity only one first cause, the Father, and thence arises a determinate order which makes the Son dependent upon the Father, and the Holy Spirit upon the Father and the Son."³¹² Each of the three hypostases possesses the fullness of the divine substance equally, but they do so only in unity. This aspect of the divine *coincidentia oppositorum*, the paradox of absolute hierarchy and perfect unity, plays a significant role in Soloviev's entire synthesis, as will be seen presently. He would fully agree with Zizioulas's thesis of being as communion: the Father's *monarchia* means that "not only communion but also *freedom*, the free person, constitutes true being. True being comes only from the free person, from the person who loves freely—that is, who freely affirms his being, his identity, by means of an event of communion with other persons."³¹³ Only when Soloviev has established the priority

³¹¹ Ibid., 246.

³¹² Ibid., 248.

³¹³ Zizioulas, 18 (emphasis in original). Zizioulas identifies two patristic theses of the theology of the person: "a) There is no true being without communion. Nothing exists as an 'individual', conceivable in itself.

of free and transcendent divine personhood as the principle of the divine essence and the paradox of hierarchy and all-unity in the Trinity does he then go on to consider the divine essence.

1.5 *The Divine Essence as Absolute Love*

Soloviev reasons that since each of the three divine hypostases, which he describes in Schellingian terms as “being-in-itself” (*v-sebe-bytie*), “being-for-itself” (*dlia-sebia-bytie*), and “being-at-home-with-itself” (*u-sebia-bytie*), has a determinate relation to the one divine essence, and since being itself is nothing other than the relation of the subject to its essence, the divine essence must reflect this triune principle. To express this truth, as Fr. Michael Meerson notes, Soloviev retrieves and develops the Augustinian psychological analogy of the distinctions present in the human spirit’s modes of existence, *esse*, *scire*, and *velle*, by reworking Schopenhauer’s distinction between will (*Wille*) and representation (*Vorstellung*).³¹⁴ The first mode of the Absolute’s subsistence is revealed to us as “the principle of its own other,” i.e., as will (*volia*). But this implies the second mode of subsistence distinct from the first and from its will, namely, that it subsists as other, as an *object* of the will, or representation (*predstavlenie*). These two modes of subsistence enter into a reciprocal relationship in which they become manifest to each other. Through this prism of psychological analogy, we can say that the Absolute wills, represents, and feels its

Communion is an ontological category. b) Communion which does not come from a ‘hypostasis’, that is, a concrete and free person, and which does not lead to ‘hypostases’, that is concrete and free persons, is not an ‘image’ of the being of God. The person cannot exist without communion; but every form of communion which denies or suppresses the person, is inadmissible.”

³¹⁴ Meerson, 67. Cf. Arthur Schopenhauer, *Die Welt Als Wille Und Vorstellung* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1996).

own essence in three subsisting modes of existence. When viewed from the perspective of the divine essence, we can say that “in the first relationship (as the content of the will of the existent or as the object of its desire), the idea is called goodness (*blago*); in the second (as the content of its representation), it is called truth (*istina*); in the third (as the content of its feeling), it is called beauty (*krasota*).”³¹⁵

Having drawn this analogy, he then brings it fully into the Trinitarian paradigm. This means that the act of willing goodness, representing truth, and feeling beauty belongs equally to the Father, Son, and Spirit, but only in their unity, insofar as each fully possesses the one divine essence. Since they are determined only by their relations, or modes of being, the *way* in which each of them wills, represents, and feels the divine essence is distinct, though not separate, from the others. For example, the Father represents and feels insofar as he wills.

As was seen above, the content of the divine essence, that which is willed, represented, and felt, is the “All” (*vse*) in the form of all-unity (*vseedinstvo*). This “All” represents the fullness of divine Being expressed in the transcendental categories of absolute Unity, Goodness, Truth, and Beauty, whose distinctions are only formal, not material. Goodness, Truth, and Beauty are different aspects of how the one God—the Father, through, with, and in the Son and Spirit—reduces the All (*vse*) to perfect oneness or unity (*edinstvo*), while preserving, affirming, and perfecting in freedom the infinitely diverse elements of its content, hence the notion of “all-unity” (*vseedinstvo*). Just as the Father, Son, and Spirit are united according to hierarchy, so too the divine essence is inwardly united according to a

³¹⁵ Solov'ev, *Chtenie*, SS III: 107.

corresponding hierarchical principle. Thus, the primordial source of the divine essence is the will to goodness, which corresponds to the *monarchia* of the Father.

Goodness is the unity of the all or of all individuals; it is love as what is *desired*, i.e., what is beloved. Consequently, here we have love in a special and preeminent sense as the idea of ideas: this is *essential* unity. Truth is also love; that is, it is the unity of the all, but as objectively represented; this is *ideal* unity. Finally, beauty is also that same love (that is, the unity of all individuals). But it is love as manifested or tangible; this is *real* unity.³¹⁶

“Any *inner* unity, any unification of the many coming *from within*, is love,” Soloviev concludes; therefore, Goodness, Truth, and Beauty are only different dimensions of Love,” which, as a divine reality, is synonymous with all-unity, the fullness of divine Being.³¹⁷ The divine essence, the absolute fullness of being as essential-ideal-real all-unity, or absolute Love, depends entirely on the free, personal, and loving act of the Father, the “will to goodness,” and is the manifestation of the resulting divine, triune *communio personarum*. In other words, Trinitarian life, or absolute Love, is essentially dynamic, an eternally free and personal *act*. For Soloviev, “God is love” is another way of saying that the Father, Son, and Spirit eternally actualize their all-one essence as absolute Goodness though absolute Truth in absolute Beauty.

As will be seen below, what has been called here Soloviev’s Trinitarian metaphysics permeates and informs every aspect of his Christian synthesis, including his ideas in *The Meaning of Love*. However, since the *way* in which human existence manifests and realizes divine all-unity is only revealed and made possible in, through, and with the Godman, Jesus

³¹⁶ Ibid., 110 (emphasis in original).

³¹⁷ Ibid. (emphasis in original). Meerson argues that Soloviev’s interpretation of 1 John 4:16, “God is love,” in an ontological sense stems from his retrieval of medieval love mysticism, most notably that of St. Bernard of Clairvaux. See Meerson, 65.

Christ, it is necessary for the present inquiry to turn to Soloviev's theory of divine-humanity (*Bogochelovechestvo*).

CHAPTER IV

Divine-Humanity and the *Sacramentum Magnum*

Soloviev's Trinitarian metaphysics of all-unity (*vseedinstvo*) remains foundational to his theory of sexual-spousal love because for him love, freedom, and unity are not mere accidents but rather constitutive principles of ideal being. The movement from empty egoism to the union of "true marriage" is a process of becoming, the progressive realization or incarnation of divine all-unity in human existence. Likewise, Christ's divine-humanity (*Bogochelovechestvo*, *theandria*) constitutes the explicitly theological context out of which Soloviev articulates his theory.³¹⁸ As will be explained presently, for Soloviev divine-humanity reveals the full significance of sexual-spousal love and union as the unity of man and woman, the male and female principles, insofar as their love and union participates in and manifests the love and unity between the Trinity and humanity, the divine-human life of Christ in communion with His Body and Bride.

Divine-humanity is the "vital and creative pathway for his thought,"³¹⁹ the key to Soloviev's vision of cosmology, anthropology, Christology, ecclesiology, and eschatology. His theory of love represents an essential element of his vision of divine-humanity and is located in the third part of his universal synthesis of "integral life" that deals with free theurgy (*svobodnaia teurgia*), the free and creative realization or incarnation of the divine in

³¹⁸ The Russian term *Bogochelovechestvo*, a neologism combining the words *Bog* (God) and *chelovechestvo* (humanity), has been variously translated into English as "Godmanhood" (the traditional translation), "the humanity of God", and "Divine-humanity." I have chosen the latter since while "divine" is not a literal translation of *Bog*, it preserves the intended meaning while incorporating the more accessible "humanity" in place of "manhood." It also accommodates the Russian adjectival form of the term, *Bogochelovecheskii*, "Divine-human." In the case of the singular *Bogochelovek*, there is no reason to deviate from the traditional translation of "Godman."

³¹⁹ Zenkovsky, 483.

all that is human.³²⁰ It is also in his theory of love that he expresses the notion of divine-humanity explicitly in the Bride-Bridegroom paradigm. Only partially articulated in his earlier works, this paradigm appears clearly for the first time in *La Russie et L'Église Universelle*, in which he argues that the meaning of natural humanity as mediator between God and the world is reflected in its essential form as Man, Woman, and Society, a meaning fully revealed in Jesus Christ, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the Universal Church, which contains in itself the entire cosmos. This same “great mystery,” in its concrete actuality as a divine-human unity of male, female, and social principles, reveals the significance of spousal union as the fullness of the *imago* in humanity. It also reveals the mediating role of Christ’s divine-humanity between the Trinity and creation. Thus, for Soloviev, the truth that Christ “fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear,”³²¹ would have to include in some way the theological significance of humanity’s male, female, and social principles.

A comprehensive treatment of divine-humanity, which would include an examination of the entirety of Soloviev’s synthesis, is beyond the scope of the present study. For that reason, this chapter will limit itself to a consideration of its originating and constitutive principles in the person, nature, and paschal mystery of Christ. It will then trace its cosmogonic and historical roots in the evolution of nature and humanity and its eschatological realization as divine *Sophia* incarnate in creation, the Body and Bride of

³²⁰ See below p. 154.

³²¹ *Gaudium et Spes*, 22. All Second Vatican Council documents are cited from the online Vatican Resource Library at <http://www.vatican.va/archive/index.htm>. See also Soloviev, *La Russie*, 264-66.

Christ, the Universal Church.³²² The aim here is to elucidate the concepts, formulated to further Soloviev's project of free theosophy, which he here introduces, and to bring into focus the essence of his vision of Christian reality, a divine-human reality manifested in the individual realization of sexual-spousal love in "true marriage."

1. THE PRINCIPLES OF DIVINE-HUMANITY

In *Lectures on Divine-Humanity* Soloviev argues that "in Christianity *as such* we find Christ *and only Christ*,"³²³ whose incarnation is first and foremost an *event* and a *fact*. Since Christ is the divine *Logos*, incarnate as man (*anthropos*) and flesh (*sarx*), the universal Way, Truth, and Life,³²⁴ the question for Soloviev then becomes: "how are we to conceive or represent to our reason Christ as the Life and the Truth?"³²⁵ The notion of divine-humanity is an attempt to address this problem by elucidating the universal meaning of the Incarnation, the principles of which he finds expressed in Chalcedonian Christology, in a modern philosophical paradigm. In doing so, he endeavors to encompass in one vision the consequences of Christian faith in God, humanity, and the world when it is taken to its ultimate end. As he declares in *Lectures on Divine-Humanity*: "The old traditional form of religion comes from faith in God, but does not follow this faith to the end. Contemporary extrareligious civilization stems from faith in man, but it also remains inconsistent and

³²² Soloviev developed a rich and profound ecclesiology in the 1880s in his efforts to promote reconciliation between the Eastern Orthodox and Catholic Churches. He drew heavily on the Greek patristic tradition and integrated many non-Christian elements, such as Kabalistic and Gnostic elements, even as he included a powerful *apologia* for the infallibility and universal authority of the Roman papacy. This *apologia* is found in the first section of *La Russie et L'Église Universelle*. The present study will limit its focus to what is essential in his understanding of the Church as what he terms a "universal divine-human organism," the incarnate *Sophia*.

³²³ Solov'ev, *Chtenie*, SS III: 112 (emphasis added).

³²⁴ John 14:5

³²⁵ Solov'ev, *Chtenie*, SS III: 113.

doesn't follow its faith to the end. But when these two faiths, faith in God and faith in man, are followed consistently to the end and fully realized, they come together in the one, complete, universal truth of divine-humanity.”³²⁶

Soloviev's notion of Christ's divine-humanity has been portrayed as a rational abstraction having little in common with the Jesus of Nazareth of Sacred Scripture and apostolic Tradition. Zenkovsky expressed this view in the conclusion of his study on Soloviev's life and thought. “He took the concept of divine-humanity from Christianity, but he transformed it from a concept bound up with the theme of man and history, of sin and salvation, into a general metaphysical concept, thus emptying it almost completely of its Christian content.”³²⁷ Vladimir Lossky offers a similar Eastern Orthodox critique of Soloviev's theology in his work, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*.³²⁸ Frederick Copleston defends Soloviev's thought as having a fundamental “Christian inspiration,” but he acknowledges that “we may sometimes be left wondering whether he is talking about the Biblical God or about the Absolute of German idealism,” an ambiguity that was “largely the result of the effort to raise religious truth to a new level of consciousness with the aid of western metaphysics.”³²⁹ Stremoukhoff defends Soloviev's Christological orthodoxy, contrasting his Christian notion of divine-humanity with Schelling's abstract metaphysics.³³⁰ One need only consult Soloviev's *Spiritual Foundations of Life*, or *La Russie et L'Église Universelle* to see that the center of thought was indeed, as Gallaher has shown, “Jesus

³²⁶ Ibid., 26.

³²⁷ Zenkovsky, 530.

³²⁸ Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1991), 112.

³²⁹ Copleston, *Philosophy in Russia: From Herzen to Lenin and Berdyaev*, 222.

³³⁰ See Stremoukhoff, 67.

Christ, the Godman, crucified and risen according to the Scriptures.”³³¹ In *Spiritual Foundations* Soloviev writes that “Jesus Christ is shown to us as a living reality, independent of our limited personality, by the Church. Those who think they can dispense with any intermediary and obtain personally a full and definite revelation of Christ are certainly not yet ready for that revelation; what they take to be Christ are the fantasies of their own imagination. We have to look for the fullness of Christ, not within our own personal sphere, but in his own universal sphere, the Church.”³³²

In theological terms, Soloviev equates divine-humanity with the biblical metaphor of the “kingdom of God” (*tsarstvie Bozhie*), since it captures the fullness of Christian truth’s essence as the universal meaning of the Incarnation.³³³ The Church reveals this meaning as at once “the full realization of the divine in the natural-human through the Godman, Christ” and “the fullness of natural-human life united through Christ with the fullness of Divinity.”³³⁴ This realization of divine-humanity is synonymous with Soloviev’s notion of salvation³³⁵ as a restoration through, with, and in Christ of all-unity (*vseedinstvo*) in creation, “the perfect unity of those principles whose separation is evil, suffering, and death.”³³⁶ Incorporating the Greek patristic notion of *theosis* (*obozhenie*), especially as found in the thought of Maximus the Confessor, and Christ as the cosmic *Logos*, into a

³³¹ Brandon Gallaher, “Into the Stream of Phenomena: Christology and Sophiology in Vladimir Solov’ev’s Lectures on Godmanhood.” (unpublished), 1.

³³² Solov’ev, *Dukhovnie Osnovi Zhizni*, SS III: 303.

³³³ Soloviev presents this argument in a famous polemical article, “On Counterfeits” in which he takes issue with late nineteenth-century Russia’s prevailing moralistic and passive “pseudo-Christianities.”

³³⁴ Solov’ev, *O Poddelkakh*, SS VI: 331.

³³⁵ For an excellent summary of Soloviev’s understanding of salvation, see Richard F. Gustafson, “Soloviev’s Doctrine of Salvation,” in *Russian Religious Thought*, ed. Judith Deutsch Kornblatt and Richard F. Gustafson (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1996).

³³⁶ Solov’ev, *Tri Rechi V Pamiat’ Dostoevskovo*, SS III: 214.

modern scientific and German idealist framework,³³⁷ he envisions salvation history as including within itself the evolutionary or progressive unification of the “World Soul” (*Mirovaia Dusha*) with the divine *Logos*. This evolutionary process is conditioned by divine and creaturely freedom; nevertheless, it can be observed in hindsight as a discernible tendency in which “all nature strove and gravitated toward humanity, while the whole history of humanity was moving toward divine-humanity.”³³⁸ The fruit of this process is the personal incarnation of the divine *Logos* in Jesus Christ. With the advent of Christ the mustard seed of the “kingdom of God” begins to take root and grow in humanity, and it acts as leaven and salt, gradually deifying all that is natural and human. To describe this divine-human historical and eschatological process of God becoming “all in all,” Soloviev employs the notion of divine *Sophia*,³³⁹ “the divine Wisdom as residing in the non-divine.”³⁴⁰ A rich and often ambiguous notion that will be more fully examined below, the incarnation of divine *Sophia* in creation, according to Soloviev’s vision of divine-humanity, is destined for eschatological fulfillment in the universal resurrection from the dead and the “one flesh” mystical union of the Bride and the Lamb in the Heavenly Jerusalem.

³³⁷ Gustafson, 34; cf. Jaroslav Pelikan, *Jesus through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 65-66.

³³⁸ Solov'ev, *Chtenie*, SS III: 165.

³³⁹ The personification of divine Wisdom or *Sophia* appears in late Judaism and Philo and was used by Saint Paul and the early Church Fathers in reference to Christ and/or the Holy Spirit. See Judith Kornblatt’s chronological overview of the notion of *Sophia* in Vladimir Solovyov, *Divine Sophia: The Wisdom Writings of Vladimir Solovyov*, trans., Judith Kornblatt Boris Jakim, Laury Magnus (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2009), 34-81.

³⁴⁰ See David Hart’s excellent introduction in Vladimir Solovyov, *The Justification of the Good: An Essay on Moral Philosophy*, trans., Nathalie A. Duddington (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), xl.

1.1 *Chalcedonian Foundation of Divine-Humanity*

Chalcedonian Christology is Soloviev's stated point of departure for developing his vision of divine-humanity.³⁴¹ By opposing the Nestorian, Monophysite, and Monothelite heresies, the Church, he believes, was affirming the three "essential logical conditions of the true idea of Christ," namely, "a single divine-human person uniting two natures and possessing two wills."³⁴² Soloviev drew extensively on the thought of Maximus the Confessor, whom he called the "strongest philosophical mind of the Christian East after Origen."³⁴³ Soloviev adopts these dogmas as universal first principles and then transposes them into the evolutionary and historical paradigm of German idealism.³⁴⁴ These principles affirm that the *Logos* was incarnate as the Son of Man (*anthropos*), but also as flesh (*sarx*), and thus not only reveal humanity's meaning and destiny in terms of *theosis*, but also reveal the full significance of the material universe that "waits with eager expectation" to be "set free from slavery to corruption and share the glorious freedom of the children of God."³⁴⁵ As Richard F. Gustafson has shown, Soloviev's doctrine of *theosis* integrates both the "realistic" tradition of Irenaeus, Athanasius, and Cyril of Alexandria, which emphasized the deified flesh of Christ, and the "mystical" tradition of Origen, the Cappadocians, Pseudo-Dionysius, and Maximus the Confessor, which emphasized the intellectual, moral, and

³⁴¹ He draws mainly on the Council of Chalcedon (451) and the Third Council of Constantinople (681) at which the two natures in the one person of Christ, and the two wills and two operations in Christ respectively were affirmed and authoritatively proclaimed.

³⁴² Solov'ev, *Chtenie*, SS III: 167.

³⁴³ Solov'ev, SS XII: 598. Maximus is the first Christian writer to use the term "theandric" or "divine-human" frequently and freely. Thunberg notes that "the theandric dimension is thus for Maximus an affirmation of the duality of [divine and human] natures in reciprocal communion, and of their communion in preserved duality. This means exactly that this dimension is the divine-human dimension as such, seen in a cosmic, universal, and soteriological perspective." Lars Thunberg, *Man and the Cosmos: The Vision of St. Maximus the Confessor* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), 72.

³⁴⁴ Von Balthasar, 287-88.

³⁴⁵ Romans 8:21.

mystical union with the divine.³⁴⁶ *Theosis* for Soloviev is both a mystical and actual triumph over division and death, a transubstantiation (*presushchestvlenie*) of his human existence, of “the life of the flesh into spiritual life—the materialization of spirit and spiritualization of matter—a new union of those two elements whose division is the basis for the life of the flesh.”³⁴⁷

1.2 *Christ as Incarnate Logos and the Second Adam*

Retrieving Greek patristic *Logos*-incarnation theology, Soloviev reformulates in Christian terms Schelling’s theory of cosmic salvation as a restoration of unity through the light of reason.³⁴⁸ The key to the restoration of unity between God and man, and with creation itself, is found in the *personal* incarnation of the *Logos*, “through whom all things were created.”³⁴⁹ Before his appearance in the fullness of time, the *Logos* was active from the beginning and at every stage of cosmic and human history, an active force of unity appearing as a tendency towards the realization of unity, order, and harmony (*cosmos*). Soloviev sees these successive and partial realizations as real theophanies, albeit incomplete, figurative, preparatory.³⁵⁰ The ultimate realization of true inner unity between the divine and the human-natural orders could only be achieved by the person (*litso*) of the *Logos* becoming incarnate of the Blessed Virgin Mary, since only love can achieve true and actual unity and therefore requires a person.

³⁴⁶ Gustafson, 38-39.

³⁴⁷ Solov'ev, *Dukhovnie Osnovi Zhizni*, SS III: 379.

³⁴⁸ Gustafson, 34.

³⁴⁹ John 1:3

³⁵⁰ Solov'ev, *Chtenie*, SS III: 165.

He argues this point in *Spiritual Foundations*: “In order for the accord between the divine and natural principles to become a reality in man himself, it *must* be realized in one *person*, otherwise there would only be a real or ideal reciprocal action between God and natural man, but there would not be a new spiritual man.”³⁵¹ Moreover, if this is to be a real unity of two principles, then both principles must be fully present, and this one person must be at once truly God and truly natural man. Finally, if this unity of the divine-human person is to be actual, i.e., to conform to and participate in the all-one Trinitarian unity as a “free spiritual action” and not an “external fact,” a human will that freely obeys the divine will and puts human nature in a state of complete and intimate harmony with the Godhead. The role played by the divine and human wills in Christ thus leads Soloviev to reflect on the *mode* of real unity between God and humanity, and in and through humanity, all of creation.

1.3 *The Drama of Divine-Humanity and the Kenotic Podvig of Christ*

According to Soloviev, Christ’s human soul is ready for total self-renunciation out of love. In Christ, God is the “spirit of love and mercy” that communicates to this soul the fullness of divine life, not suppressing it by force, nor merely enlightening its reason, but “quickenning it in goodness” (*v blagosti zhivotvoriashchei*).³⁵² The divine-human “double spiritual feat” (*podvig*)³⁵³ accomplished freely by Christ in his divine and human wills is an

³⁵¹ Solov'ev, *Dukhovnie Osnovi Zhizni*, SS III: 369 (emphasis in original).

³⁵² Solov'ev, *Chtenie*, SS III: 167.

³⁵³ The Russian term *podvig*, like other Russian theological terms, cannot be adequately translated into English, since in addition to its more prosaic meaning of “feat,” “exploit,” or “heroic deed,” such as *boevoi podvig*, “feat of arms,” it carries a profound Christian meaning with certain cultural and spiritual nuances. It was used in Russian Orthodox monastic parlance to describe any sort of ascetical or moral act, interior or exterior, that required intense struggle, suffering, and self-renunciation. A monk who practiced the life of asceticism to an exemplary degree was called a *podvizhnik* and the life itself *podvizhnichestvo*. But the *podvig* was merely a means to an end, and whether one carried out *podvigi* for their own sake, or for the sake of Christ, made all the

essentially *kenotic* and loving act.³⁵⁴ As God, Christ renounces his divine glory, empties himself, taking the form of a servant, so that as man, he would receive the possibility of *attaining* and sharing in that same glory through a free human *podvig* of total, loving self-surrender.³⁵⁵ By renouncing his own will as man freely in favor of the divine will, not as an external force but as an interior good, Christ is able to achieve and possess that same good in reality as man. The fruit of this free double *podvig* of kenotic love is the most intimate and interior of unions, a *communicatio idiomatum*, the divinization of man and the humanization of God.³⁵⁶ Thus, although the unity of God and man is given in the incarnation itself insofar as Christ is true God and true man, “real unity,” which by definition is intrinsically *personal*, can only be achieved in and through the *free*, reciprocal and kenotic love of God and man.

The unity in Christ between the Creator and creation, the infinite and the finite, the eternal and the temporal, is the *coincidentia oppositorum* par excellence; and it presumes and is brought about through a restoration of the original hierarchy between God, humanity, and the material universe, which had been inverted through original sin. The disruption of this prelapsarian hierarchy resulted in fragmentation and division between the consequently dominant material element, the enslaved human principle, and the purely external divine principle. The interdependence of hierarchy and unity is rooted in the perfect unity and

difference. The term also implies an act that exposes the person to personal risk and danger and requires exceptional courage, as with military heroism, so with the spiritual connotation as well. In theological discourse it is often translated into English as “spiritual feat,” but I will retain the Russian term here in order to preserve its nuanced meaning.

³⁵⁴ The centrality and significance of *kenosis* in Maximus the Confessor’s theological argument against the proponents of Monothelitism became a central principle in Soloviev’s divine-humanity, one which he emphasizes in his own polemic against modern “counterfeit” forms of Christianity, especially those that denied the all-encompassing, free participation of the human element in the economy of salvation. See his essay, “On Counterfeits,” in Solov’ev, *O Poddelkakh*, SS VI: 327-39.

³⁵⁵ Cf. Philippians 2: 6-8 and Hebrews 5:8-9.

³⁵⁶ For a summary of Origen’s teaching on *communicatio idiomatum* in his *De principiis*, see: Johannes Quasten, *Patrology*, 4 vols., vol. 2 (Allen, TX: Christian Classics, 1995), 80-81.

equality of the Trinity and the *monarchia* of the Father, and it also plays a central role in Christ's divine-humanity.

Soloviev enters more deeply into "his original reading of Christ's saving work as a 'double feat' (*podvig*) of salvation" by establishing the basic principles for the personal mode of Christ's divine-humanity, a point underscored by Gustafson.³⁵⁷ This double *podvig* includes the "*podvig* of the spirit" (*dukhovny podvig*) and the "*podvig* of the flesh" (*podvig ploti*). The former signifies the deification of his distinctly human element, his self-conscious "rational will" (*ratio, razumnaia volia*). As such, he accomplishes this aspect of his double *podvig* through a free and perfect act of kenotic love. The latter refers to the deification of the flesh, the purely external, material element of his human nature (*sarx*).³⁵⁸ The divinization of his human will and his human body are distinct but inseparable. This saving work begins with and presumes the original kenotic act of incarnation, but its full realization encompasses the entire paschal mystery, the divine-human drama of Christ's life, death, and resurrection.

1.3.1 *The "Podvig of the Spirit" and the Three Temptations of Christ*

In his interpretation of Christ's divine-humanity, Soloviev integrates the Antiochian *Logos-anthropos* and the Alexandrian *Logos-sarx* Christological traditions insofar as the "*podvig* of the spirit" corresponds to the former and the "*podvig* of the flesh" to the latter.³⁵⁹ He singles out the three temptations of Christ in the desert, which his close friend Dostoevsky would rework into his poem of the Grand Inquisitor in *The Brothers Karamazov*

³⁵⁷ Gustafson, 37.

³⁵⁸ Solov'ev, *Chtenie*, SS III: 170-71.

³⁵⁹ Gustafson, 37.

several years later, as representing the actual inner “*podvig* of the spirit.”³⁶⁰ Satan’s triple temptation of Christ in the desert corresponds to humanity’s triple enslavement. Jesus, fully aware of the limitations of his natural being as man, namely, the inherent limitations of human flesh, intellect, and spirit, was subject to the evil temptation of using his divine power as a means for attaining the ends that flow from these limitations.

The first temptation targets the desire to overcome the enslavement to the flesh (*plot*) by making material welfare the end, and divine power the means of attaining it. Rejecting the temptation, Christ asserts that the Word of God is the source of true, spiritual life, not an instrument for material life. By overcoming this temptation, the Son of Man is freed from the domination of the flesh. Now that he is free from fleshly motives, the second temptation he experiences is directed to his human personality, the sin of self-assertion of pride of the mind. Having rejected this temptation by subordinating his intellect to God, he receives power over minds. The third and most powerful and subtle temptation takes place on the highest moral level, since Christ’s human will finds itself free from the enslavement of the flesh and the pride of the mind. This temptation of the spirit consists in using divine power to coerce the world to submit to the purposes of good for its own perfection. But, Soloviev reasons, this is tantamount to admitting that in itself good is impotent and evil is stronger than good, which would mean choosing to worship the “principle of evil” that openly reigns in the world. Having overcome the attractive “lust for power” (*vlastoliubie*), Christ’s human will freely subordinates itself to the true good and thus receives supreme power in the realm

³⁶⁰ Dostoevsky’s friendship with Soloviev is well documented, and there is little doubt that the characters of Ivan, Alyosha, and the Elder Zossima were all in part modeled on Soloviev. See Kostalevsky, 66-67.

of the spirit.³⁶¹ Through this threefold kenotic and loving act, Christ freely chooses the divine will as the plenitude of his human good, despite his creaturely limitations, and thus deifies his humanity, completing the humanization of his divinity when he was conceived in the womb of the Blessed Virgin.³⁶² But he was not only incarnated as man (*vochelovechilsya*), he was also made flesh (*voplotilsya, sarx egeneto*).³⁶³

1.3.2 *The “Podvig of the Flesh” and the Paschal Mystery*

The *podvig* of the spirit is inseparable from the *podvig* of the flesh, because although Christ had freed his humanity from the influence of the evil one, his sensuous, material nature was still subject to the evil “futility” of suffering, death, and decay. In this sense, Christ’s Passion is not primarily the redemptive suffering and death of what Soloviev takes to be the typically Western *theologia crucis*, but rather a struggle for spiritual power over the flesh, despite its weakness. This spiritual victory could only be achieved through a similar act of self-abnegation in which Christ submitted his physical nature out of love and obedience, in spite of its weakness, to the divine will even unto suffering and death. In the Resurrection, Christ receives victory over the natural element. In his person, the “reconciliation of matter and spirit,” whereby matter becomes the direct expression and instrument of the Spirit, takes place once and for all. The divinization of matter, for Soloviev as well as for Eastern Orthodox theology in general, is an essential truth of authentic Christianity. Unless the divinization of the flesh (*sarx*) is acknowledged as an essential

³⁶¹ Solov'ev, *Chtenie*, SS III: 169-70.

³⁶² Ibid., 163.

³⁶³ Solov'ev, *Dukhovnie Osnovi Zhizni*, SS III: 373.

Christian principle, Soloviev insists, Christian faith devolves into either moralistic or dogmatic abstraction.³⁶⁴

Thus the original hierarchical order between God, humanity, and nature, overturned by the first Adam, is restored by the second Adam. This hierarchy is essential for unity because “unification presupposes subordination” between the principle of unification and that which is united. In this way, real unification is restored without outright domination.³⁶⁵ In Christ’s life, death, and resurrection, God shows that he cannot only unmask and defeat evil, but that He can redeem and liberate fallen humanity and nature, bringing truth out of falsehood and goodness out of evil in a divine act of triumphant love.³⁶⁶ An important aspect of redemption as *theosis* for Soloviev was the affirmation of the relative autonomy, integrity, and goodness of creation and humanity in themselves. The Incarnation and Resurrection of Jesus Christ is thus a threefold triumph, made possible by His divine *kenosis*, in which all three principles of being—divine, human, and material—participate. It is in the bodily Resurrection of Christ that the unconditional and universal meaning of the human and material principles are revealed in the divine-human form of all-unity (*vseedinstvo*). “The condition of resurrection is the *podvig*,” writes Soloviev in summary,

that act of the divine-human person by which Christ rejected the law of sin and submitted himself to the absolute will of God, having made his human principle the instrument of divine action upon material nature. When the root of the world’s evil had thus been severed, so also its fruit, death, was overcome by the Resurrection, which is the victory of God, but also, through the divine act of *kenosis*, the victory of the material principle and of the free human principle fully present and realized in Christ.³⁶⁷

³⁶⁴ Ibid., 376.

³⁶⁵ Ibid., 404.

³⁶⁶ Ibid., 374.

³⁶⁷ Ibid., 376.

2. THE REALIZATION OF DIVINE-HUMANITY

Jesus Christ, the incarnate *Logos*, freely realized and revealed his divine-humanity through the paschal mystery in the “fullness of time” and thereby, according to Soloviev, fulfilled in his individual person, the entire *raison d’être* of cosmogonic and human history. In his conclusion to *Lectures on Divine-Humanity*, Soloviev explains how Christ is not only the fulfillment of the meaning of the old creation but the divine-human foundation of the new, the “first born among many brothers.”³⁶⁸ Prior to Christianity, the natural principle in humanity, the “old Adam” was the given fact, the fixed foundation of life, while divinity was the ideal that was sought, the principle of change, movement, and progress that acted externally and ideally on humanity, evidenced by its complex but progressive religious development. In Christ, this relationship has now been reversed: that which was sought is given, the divine principle has become human and material, the ideal has become fact, event, encounter. Christ is the fixed foundation of life. Divine-humanity signifies deified humanity realized individually in Christ and includes in principle not only all that is human, but the entire material cosmos. It is the universal realization of this divine-human fullness that has now become that which is sought, the ideal. Thus, he concludes, “as that which is sought, this ideal humanity is the active principle of history, the principle of movement, of progress.”³⁶⁹ The unity of the divine and human natures in the individual Godman, Jesus of Nazareth, is therefore the “*originating principle*, the necessary foundation and center point, while the *end and completion* is divine-humanity.”³⁷⁰ Soloviev considered the danger of Pelagianism a non-issue, since his affirmation of humanity’s free and active role in its own

³⁶⁸ Romans 8:29.

³⁶⁹ Solov'ev, *Chtenie*, SS III: 181.

³⁷⁰ Solov'ev, *Evreistvo i Khristianskii Vorpros*, SS IV: 158 (emphasis added).

deification is entirely dependent on and participates in Christ's divine-humanity, which is a free gift of God's kenotic love.

While this can be read as simply an elaboration on Athanasius's much-quoted dictum on *theosis*, "God became man so that man could become God,"³⁷¹ it is important to appreciate how Soloviev himself interpreted "man" as the subject of *theosis*.³⁷² Just as the first Adam was a separate person among others and at the same time the "all-one" (*vseediny*) person synthesizing all of natural humanity, so too Christ as the second Adam is not only *this* individual being, but also a universal being embracing *in principle* the whole of regenerated humanity and the entire material universe.³⁷³ While natural, fallen humanity, lacking a center and a transcendent personal principle of unity, cannot realize itself as a universal organism, regenerated humanity is born and grows into Christ's one Body and Bride, the Universal Church.³⁷⁴ "As God incarnate saves humanity, so too humanity united with God ought to save all of nature; for as humanity in the form of the Church is the living Body of Christ, so all of the natural world ought to become the living body of regenerated humanity."³⁷⁵ Thus for Soloviev, the *apokatastasis ton panton* is not only an eschatological reality, but also a divine-human *task*, the *podvig* of the Universal Church.³⁷⁶ In light of the principles of Christ's individual and archetypal divine-humanity, the nature and historical development of Christ's divine-humanity as a transformation of natural humanity into a "universal theandric organism" or the Universal Church, will now be considered. Soloviev

³⁷¹ Athanasius, *In Ioh.* I, 9 (PG 73, 157) as cited in J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 352.

³⁷² Soloviev, *Tri Rechi*, SS III: 222.

³⁷³ Soloviev, *Chtenie*, SS III: 163.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 164.

³⁷⁵ Soloviev, *Dukhovnie Osnovi Zhizni*, SS III: 345-46.

³⁷⁶ Soloviev qualifies his use of the term *apokatastasis ton panton* as including the totality of redeemed humanity and the material universe, and not the eventual and inevitable redemption of all. See Soloviev, *La Russie*, 259.

refers to the totality of this divine-human reality as the divine *Sophia* incarnate, insofar as, being the Body and Bride of Christ, its finality includes deified humanity in each and every sphere of its individual and social life, activity, and culture.³⁷⁷

2.1 *Divine-Humanity as Divine Sophia Incarnate*

As Valliere observes in *Modern Russian Theology: Bukharev, Soloviev, Bulgakov: Orthodox Theology in a New Key*, Soloviev's sophiology serves an eminently practical purpose, a purpose that unites the various diverse trends in modern Russian religious thought, namely, to support "the project of Orthodox engagement with modern civilization."³⁷⁸ Sophiology is an attempt to develop the traditional Orthodox understanding of *theosis*, which was rooted in monastic asceticism and tended, according to Soloviev, to a sort of "abstract theosis," the "deification of the ontological shell or template of the human being." As Valliere points out, for Soloviev, "human beings are divinizable not just as primordial image but as creative agents engaged in the pursuits that fulfill humanity in the flesh, such as politics, science, education, the arts, technology and so on."³⁷⁹ Since Christ, as the humanity of God, has the power to divinize human "wisdom," or culture, the fruit of this process of deification is not merely redeemed human individuals, let alone saved souls, but is the deified totality of all that is human and is thus called *Sophia*.³⁸⁰

³⁷⁷ Solov'ev, *Dukhovnie Osnovi Zhizni*, SS III: 380.

³⁷⁸ Valliere, 161.

³⁷⁹ Ibid., 161.

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

In *La Russie et L'Église Universelle*, after which his sophiology did not change significantly,³⁸¹ Soloviev identifies the uncreated, divine *Sophia* as the totality of the absolute, divine essence (*ousia*), antecedent and superior to any particular aspect or element, the eternally actualized “all-unity” (*vseedinstvo*) of God. Divine *Sophia* is therefore synonymous with the *ousia* of the Trinity as Love, the infinite and eternal realization of divine Goodness in Truth as Beauty. Commenting on Sacred Scripture’s witness to Wisdom’s role in creation, Soloviev argues that since the triune God created the world and humanity “in his essential Wisdom,” *Sophia* is therefore understood as the “true *raison d’être* and end of creation.”³⁸² This truth is confirmed in the revelation of God’s humanity in Christ, the incarnation of divine Wisdom as man (*anthropos*) and flesh (*sarx*). As David Hart succinctly observes, Soloviev’s *Sophia* is “the divine Wisdom as residing in the non-divine; she is the mirror of the *Logos* and of the light of the Spirit, reflecting in the created order the rational coherence and transcendent beauty in which all things live, move, and have their being.”³⁸³ In this way, Soloviev hoped to conceptually span the abyss between the divine and phenomenal worlds and reveal the full meaning of Christ’s divine-humanity in a new, all-inclusive paradigm.³⁸⁴

Soloviev does not identify humanity per se with divine *Sophia* incarnate. In order to establish a foundation for his sophiology, he finds in Neoplatonism and German idealism the notion of the “World Soul” (*psyche ton kosmos*, *anima mundi*, *Weltseele*),³⁸⁵ who in

³⁸¹ Zenkovsky, 507.

³⁸² Soloviev, *La Russie*, 257.

³⁸³ See Hart’s introduction in Solovyov, *The Justification of the Good*, xl.

³⁸⁴ Brandon Gallaher, “Graced Creatureliness: Ontological Tension in the Uncreated/Created Distinction in the Sophiologies of Solov’ev, Bulgakov and Millbank,” *Logos* 47, no. 1-2 (2006), 6-7.

³⁸⁵ The concept of the “world soul” appeared first in Plato’s *Timaeus* (34a-b) and was adopted by Neoplatonism, Plotinus, and Gnosticism. It can be found in early Christian Neoplatonists such as Origen, and

humanity has “for the first time become inwardly united in consciousness with the divine *Logos* as a pure form of all-unity (*vseedinstvo*).”³⁸⁶ It is with the advent of humanity that “nature outgrows itself and passes (in consciousness) into the domain of absolute being.”³⁸⁷ He understood creation not as a direct act of unmediated divine creation, which he believed would render the concrete particularities of cosmogonic and human history meaningless, but as a dynamic, evolutionary process conditioned by divine and creaturely freedom. He argued that Sacred Scripture, philosophical truth, and empirical science all confirmed this truth.³⁸⁸ Considered in itself, the “World Soul” is the “indeterminate subject of Creation,” equally accessible to the evil or chaotic principle and to the divine, creative *Logos*.³⁸⁹ The free interaction of the World Soul and the *Logos* is complex. It involves both a turbulent affair of “love and marriage” between earth and heaven, as well as a “mortal struggle” for possession of the World Soul between the *Logos* and the “lower principle” of chaos. These interactions determine the entire nature of creation as a seemingly haphazard, messy, laborious, and gradual evolution from chaos to cosmos.³⁹⁰ Whenever it responds in receptive humility to the initiative of the *Logos*, the World Soul receives from Him the all-one form of true being

certain Platonist thinkers in the Renaissance. Soloviev cites its modern appearance in the poetry of Goethe and the philosophy of Schelling. Soloviev most likely adopted his own notion of the world-soul partly from Jacob Boehme and Gnostic sources, but primarily from the late Schelling. See Friedrich Schelling, *Von Der Weltseele*, ed. K. F. A. Schelling, *Sämmtliche Werke*, vol. 2 (Stuttgart and Augsburg: 1856-8), 347-490. For a comparison between Soloviev’s concept of world-soul and that of Gnosticism, Boehme, and Schelling, see Stremoukhoff, 65-69. See also Soloviev’s own encyclopedia article on the subject in Solov’ev, “Mirovaia Dusha,” *SS* X: 246.

³⁸⁶ Solov’ev, *Chtenie*, *SS* III: 149.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 150.

³⁸⁸ Soloviev, *La Russie*, 261.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 257.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 261.

or divine love, and thus further realizes its own true being. The fruit of this interaction is the progressive incarnation of divine *Sophia* in creation.³⁹¹

Before continuing, it is worth noting how Soloviev understood the “evil principle” in creation as that which is diametrically opposed to the action of the *Logos* and must be overcome from within to ultimately realize divine-humanity. The foundation and cause of all evil, both natural and moral, he contends, is *egoism*, analogously speaking. Egoism is a universal *fact* of existence and life, and as such a universal *law*, which becomes in human life the law of *sin*.³⁹² Egoism is an individual being’s *exclusive* affirmation of its own existence over against others and against the whole. In nature, he describes it in terms of a Darwinian struggle for existence. “Every creature in our world from the smallest grain of dust to man in his entire natural life says the same thing: I alone exist and all else exists for my sake; if I collide with another, I say to him, ‘Since I exist, you cannot; there’s no space for both of us’.”³⁹³ He insists that the individual’s affirmation of his own absolute value and significance is not what renders egoism evil; rather the evil lies in the *exclusivity* of this self-affirmation, its particularism that denies the same absolute value and significance to other beings, and in union with them, to the whole. The result of this conflict between fundamentally egoistic beings is disharmony, chaos, absurdity, and suffering, which in turn give rise to death and decay. Soloviev describes evil as one in essence and triune in

³⁹¹ In differentiating the created “world soul” from the divine Sophia, Soloviev describes *Sophia* as the “substance of the Holy Spirit” and uses the maternal image of “the guardian angel of the world, overshadowing all creatures with its wings as a bird her little ones, in order to raise them gradually to true being.” Ibid., 257.

³⁹² Soloviev speculated at length, and like so many others, unsuccessfully, on the ultimate explanation for natural and moral evil in the world. These speculations do not directly affect how his understanding of evil conditions divine-humanity. As he himself explains in *Spiritual Foundations*, “We will not speak here about *how* evil appeared in the world and sin became the law of worldly life; for us the corruption of nature is above all a fact, and Christianity as a religion of salvation presupposes this fact.” Solov'ev, *Dukhovnie Osnovi Zhizni*, SS III: 352.

³⁹³ Ibid., 352.

manifestation, the one tree of fallen nature whose root is sin, whose trunk is suffering, and whose fruit is death. But fallen nature, despite its enslavement to the evil of sin, suffering, and death, is nevertheless discernible as a *cosmos* that manifests a tendency towards harmony, light, order, purpose, and all-one unity. In this sense, as Hart writes, “Soloviev’s *Sophia* stands in the interval between God and world, as an emblem of the nuptial mystery of Christ’s love for creation and creation’s longing for the *Logos*.”³⁹⁴

Modeling his cosmogonic history on the philosophies of nature of Schelling and Hegel,³⁹⁵ Soloviev gives an exhaustive account of the successive stages of the victory of the *Logos* over the principle of chaos or “egoism” as it attracts and informs the World Soul with the all-one idea of divine love. This gradual victory is evidenced from the beginning in gravity and chemical composition. The victory advances through progressively complex organic forms of life, and the organic in turn is further penetrated by the *Logos* until, after a long series of formations, it generates the perfect physical organism of the human being.³⁹⁶ “Although in reality only one of the many entities in nature,” Soloviev argues, “the human being, having in consciousness the faculty of comprehending the reason, or the inner connection and meaning (*logos*), of all that exists, appears, in idea, as the *all*.”³⁹⁷ The human capacity for reason (*ratio*, *razum*), the universal form of rational consciousness, is what

³⁹⁴ See Hart’s introduction in Solovyov, *The Justification of the Good*, xl.

³⁹⁵ See Frederick Charles Copleston, *Modern Philosophy: From the Post-Kantian Idealist to Marx, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche*, 9 vols., A History of Philosophy, vol. 7 (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 195-202, 109-114.

³⁹⁶ Solov'ev, *Chtenie*, SS III: 149. In O'Donovan's excellent article, “Evolution Under the Sign of the Cross,” he compares the respective Christian interpretations of evolution in von Balthasar, Teilhard de Chardin, and Soloviev. He agrees that “since the world soul only comes to itself in man, it should in fact be identified with him, and this identification is central to Soloviev’s conviction that only freedom can be a sufficient reason for the strain and effort involved in the course of the universe’s history.” Leo O'Donovan, “Evolution under the Sign of the Cross,” *Theological Studies* 32, no. 1 (1971), 606.

³⁹⁷ Solov'ev, *Chtenie*, SS III: 149-50 (emphasis in original).

characterizes humanity as *imago Dei*. Through it, the *raison d'être* of the world becomes the meaning of man's entire existence, which he is able consciously and freely to comprehend and realize. Soloviev summarizes this idea in *Spiritual Foundations*.

Man himself has meaning insofar as he understands the "all" in unity, i.e., he understands the meaning of the "all," and in this human comprehension of universal meaning he receives the *possibility* of his own full realization, because each person through his own personal awareness can *conform* himself to universal meaning, and consequently can be united with it *of himself* (voluntarily); such an interior and free unification of each with the all is also the true realization of universal meaning.³⁹⁸

What he deliberately implies here is that humanity is created for a supernatural end, one that is realized individually by the Godman, the second Adam, and then collectively by divine-humanity, the Universal Church. As with his reinterpretation of *theosis*, Soloviev understands man as *capax Dei* not only in terms of his individual rational nature, but in the inseparable spheres of his individual and social existence. This is why, according to his interpretation, divine Wisdom "found delight in the sons of men."³⁹⁹

2.1.1 Imago Trinitatis

Since Soloviev discerns the *imago Dei* in humanity both individually and socially, he expresses this by saying that humanity's true exemplar is divine *Sophia*, the absolute unity of Trinitarian being as *hen kai pan*.⁴⁰⁰ As individual persons, each human being possesses reason, a universal form of rational consciousness capable of grasping ideal, universal, and absolute content. At the same time, individual persons are unique, unconditional,

³⁹⁸ Solov'ev, *Dukhovnie Osnovi Zhizni*, SS III: 358 (emphasis in original).

³⁹⁹ Cf. Proverbs 8:22-31. See Soloviev, *La Russie*, 263.

⁴⁰⁰ Soloviev was well aware of the conditions of exemplarity and the radical limitations of drawing analogies between divine and created realities, acknowledging the always greater "essential difference" between the two. Soloviev, *La Russie*, 269-70.

unchanging, concrete *ideas*. This particular and concrete “idealization” of individual personhood grants to the personality (*lichnost*) of each person an absolute character and significance. This idea determines each person’s own unique way of being human, of possessing human nature, and thus of having his or her role and place in the universal drama of divine-humanity.⁴⁰¹ This personal uniqueness is rooted in the uniqueness of divine personhood as subsisting relation in which each, while equally possessing the same essence, possesses it in his own unique way. In addition, Soloviev discerns the form of triune being in the individual human person through two “real analogies” articulated by Leibniz and St. Augustine respectively. The first looks at reason turned upon itself in self-consciousness. The subject, object, and the conscious reason that unites them are all distinct and yet indivisibly one and the same. According to Soloviev, St. Augustine’s analogy from the *The Confessions* focuses on the unity-in-difference of the human spirit’s acts of being (*esse*), knowing (*scire*), and willing (*velle*). They are inwardly united not only in content, but in that each one necessarily contains the other two. Thus, *sum sciens et volens*, *scio me esse et velle*, and *volo me esse et scire*, all describe one indivisible act of personal existence.⁴⁰²

In terms of the collective *imago Dei* in humanity, Soloviev’s understanding of humanity as a meta-empirical or metaphysical unity rooted in Trinitarian all-unity (*vseedinstvo*) developed over the course of his life and, as Zenkovsky notes, was “one of the most persistent of his views.”⁴⁰³ It forms the anthropological foundation of his emphasis on Christianity as a social-ecclesial reality, one of the central themes of the Russian religious

⁴⁰¹ Soloviev, *Chtenie*, SS III: 56.

⁴⁰² Ibid., 101-02. See Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans., Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 279-80.

⁴⁰³ Zenkovsky, 513.

renaissance.⁴⁰⁴ He first began to formulate this theme in *Principles of Integral Knowledge* and *Lectures on Divine-Humanity*⁴⁰⁵ and presented his most mature and lucid account of it in his essay, *The Idea of Humanity in Auguste Comte*.⁴⁰⁶ The key aspect of Comte's teaching for Christianity, he argued, was its assertion that humanity is *le Grand Être*, one organic entity, which is "completely real" despite its external appearance as isolated individuals. While it is not *fully* personal in the sense of the empirical human individual, this does not make it in any way *impersonal*. Humanity as a whole, he concludes, is a "*supra-personal entity*," the World Soul, informed by and united inwardly with the *Logos*, and as such the creaturely incarnation of divine *Sophia*.⁴⁰⁷ In other words, the multiplicity of individual human persons, which appears in empirical and phenomenal reality, is not in actual fact a meaningless and impersonal collective. Recalling his Trinitarian metaphysics, the form of true being, humanity's exemplar, is all-unity (*vseedinstvo*), the reconciliation of the one (*hen*) and the all (*pan*) in a supra-personal whole.

⁴⁰⁴ See Konstantin Mochul'skii, "Ideia Obshchestvennovo Khristianstva V Russkoi Filosofii (the Idea of Social Christianity in Russian Philosophy)," *Pravoslavnoe Delo* 1, no. (1939), 45-61. See also Jonathan Sutton, "Vladimir Solovyov and the Russian Ideal of the 'Whole Man'," *Religious Traditions* 3, no. (1980), 29-38.

⁴⁰⁵ In *Lectures on Divine-Humanity*, Soloviev, following Origen, argues that ideal humanity enjoyed actual existence in God from all eternity in order to try to reconcile the cosmic fall of creation and original sin. He later rejects this idea in *La Russie et L'Église Universelle*. See Soloviev, *La Russie*, 259.

⁴⁰⁶ "The subject of historical development is humanity as a real, though collective, organism." Solov'ev, *Filosofskie Nachala*, SS I: 255. For his ideas on humanity as an eternal ideal organism, see "Lecture Eight" in Solov'ev, *Chtenie*, SS III: 112-20. Copleston remarks on Soloviev's surprising affirmation of Comte's ideas, since as the "high priest of classical positivism," Comte was one of Soloviev's principal philosophical adversaries. He did in fact reject Comte's positivist philosophy as a whole but credited him with genuine insight, albeit "half conscious," into the truth of humanity as *la Grand Être*. Copleston, *Philosophy in Russia: From Herzen to Lenin and Berdyaev*, 227-28. See Solov'ev, *Ideia Chelovechestva U Avgusta Konta*, SS IX: 172-93.

⁴⁰⁷ Solov'ev, *Ideia Chelovechestva*, SS IX: 186.

2.1.2 *Man-Woman-Society and the Marriage of Heaven and Earth*

Since man is able to conceive in his conscious reason “all that exists in an ideal unity” and is also inseparably united with the natural world by his factual origin and existence, he is the natural mediator between God and material existence both individually and collectively.⁴⁰⁸ Thanks to this twofold nature, man is *capax Dei* and created for perfect—that is, *free* and *reciprocal*—union with God in a way inaccessible to angelic or animal being: he alone can preserve his freedom while achieving an ever completer union with God by “a continuous series of conscious efforts and deliberate actions.”⁴⁰⁹ Since natural man is in a fallen state, mediation is given to him in principle, and offered to his freedom as a universal vocation. “If through [man], through his reason, earth is raised to heaven, through him also, through his activity, the heavens must descend and fill the earth; through him all the world outside the Godhead must become a single living body, the complete incarnation of the divine Wisdom.”⁴¹⁰

While Soloviev clearly articulates the dimension of humanity that can be called *imago Trinitatis*, he seeks the full meaning of humanity in the mediating and thus priestly nature and vocation of Christ in his divine-humanity. Following Maximus the Confessor, he argues that the supernatural meaning and vocation of humanity as mediator, realized and revealed in Christ’s divine-humanity, belongs to its very essence. But whereas Maximus sees humanity as mediating the five-fold distinction between the created and uncreated, the intelligible and sensible, heaven and earth, paradise and the kingdom of men, and finally

⁴⁰⁸ Solov'ev, *Chtenie*, SS III: 150.

⁴⁰⁹ Soloviev, *La Russie*, 263-64.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 264.

man and woman as masculine and feminine,⁴¹¹ Soloviev sees all aspects of humanity's mediation as objectively manifested and expressed in humanity's actual, historical existence as a triunity of Man, Woman, and Society.

Recalling Soloviev's argument that the human realities of personhood, love, and all-unity find their ultimate meaning and exemplar in the divine life of Trinitarian all-unity, it is now possible to turn to how he understands the significance of nuptiality vis-à-vis the essentially triune structure of humanity.⁴¹² This structure will serve as a backdrop in the analysis of his theory of love below.

Humanity as Man and Woman, Soloviev argues, manifests the "masculine" divine act and initiative of the *Logos*, and the "feminine" earthly potentiality and receptivity of the World Soul. The human individual, both man and woman as human persons, in him or herself, *subjectively* possesses human nature in its entirety. But man (Adam), can only come to *know* himself as a knowing or active subject (masculine, man) through union with his other as known object (feminine, woman).⁴¹³ Just as the Father knows Himself perfectly through union with his Word, so by analogy true human self-knowledge is impossible except by a real union, since perfect knowledge must be realised and real union must be conceived in idea to be perfect.⁴¹⁴ Thus, Soloviev concludes, "the contrast and union of the divine Word and earthly nature is reproduced for man himself in the distinction and union between the sexes."⁴¹⁵

⁴¹¹ Thunberg, 80.

⁴¹² See above pp. 112-18.

⁴¹³ Soloviev, *La Russie*, 264.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 262-63.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 264.

In order, however, for individual man (Adam) to realize in actuality his whole essence, which he possesses only *in potentia*, he must not only “reduplicate himself” or render his material side objective in the personality of woman, so to speak, but he must also multiply himself or render the universality of his rational being objective in a plurality of individual existences, organically bound together and forming a corporate whole—human Society. Therefore, for Soloviev, “man” as the subject of *theosis* in divine-humanity is an indivisible triune reality of Man, Woman, and Society, each of which is different in their *mode of existence*, but one in their shared human *essence*. Only through this triune existence can man fulfill his final end, namely, “the universal integration of all existence outside the Godhead.”⁴¹⁶ But natural humanity in its fallen condition contains only the unnamed desire, potential, and *possibility* for fulfilling its true end. Its triune existence is merely a preordained condition and foreshadowing of the indivisible unity of God and man in the Incarnation. Jesus Christ (Man), the Blessed Virgin (Woman), and the Church (Society) fulfil, perfect, and transform the natural form of Man, Woman, and Society. In the incarnate *Logos*, Jesus Christ, God is perfectly united with humanity, threefold in its distinct modes of existence, but one in its essence (*ousia*). Deified humanity, the individual humanity of Christ, the humanity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the collective humanity of the Church, constitute one divine-human organism, what Soloviev calls the incarnate *Sophia*.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁶ Ibid.

⁴¹⁷ Vladimir Solovyev, *Russia and the Universal Church*, trans., Herbert Rees (London: Geoffrey Bles-The Centenary Press, 1948), 177.

The key distinction for Soloviev is between the divine person of Christ and what he is trying to express with the term *Sophia*.⁴¹⁸ In *La Russie et L'Église Universelle* he offers the following explanation of the distinction:

There can be no doubt as to the close connection and complete analogy between the individual humanity of Christ and his social humanity, between his natural Body and his mystical Body. In the sacrament of Communion the personal Body of the Lord becomes in a mystical but real way that unifying principle of his collective Body, the community of believers. Therefore the Church, human society made divine, possesses fundamentally the same substance as the incarnate Person of Christ or his individual humanity; and since this latter has no other origin or substance than the human nature of the Blessed Virgin, the Mother of God, it follows that the organism of the divine-human incarnation, *having in Jesus Christ a single active and personal centre*, possesses also in its threefold manifestation one single substantial foundation, namely, the bodily nature of the divine Wisdom, as both latent and revealed in the lower world. It is the World Soul completely converted, purified, and identified with Wisdom itself, as matter identifies itself with form in a single concrete and living being. And the perfect realization of this divine-material substance, this *semen mulieris*, is glorified and resurrected Humanity, the Temple, Body, and Bride of God.⁴¹⁹

2.2 *The Incarnate Sophia as the Universal Church*

Taken as a whole, the incarnation of *Sophia* in creation as Christ-Mary-Church is what Soloviev calls the *Universal Church* (*Vselenskaia Tserkov*). Since this is how he formulates the “great mystery” of Christ and the Church in *The Meaning of Love*, his understanding of the Church in her ideal being through the lens of divine-humanity must now be examined. Soloviev’s ecclesiology in *La Russie et L'Église Universelle* includes an account of the extraordinarily complex process of sophiological *theosis* that encompasses

⁴¹⁸ Kornblatt argues that Soloviev’s loose definition of the term *Sophia* stems not from changes in his own understanding of that which he was trying to express, but from the lack of adequate terms of expression in the various traditions with which he was familiar, from the Old Testament to Plato, from Philo and the Neoplatonists to Kabala and Jacob Boehme. See her introductory chapter in Vladimir Solovyov, *Divine Sophia: The Wisdom Writings of Vladimir Solovyov*, 48.

⁴¹⁹ Soloviev, *La Russie*, 265-66 (emphasis added).

“all spheres and activities” of humanity.⁴²⁰ This examination will be limited to a distillation of the divine-human principles, analogous to Christ’s own *podvig* of *theosis*, by which the human and natural element is conformed to the Church’s divine principle, namely, Christ’s presence in her as way, truth, and life.

Soloviev insists on the unique and essential role of the *person* of Christ, the divine *Logos*, as the “central and completely *personal* manifestation of *Sophia*.”⁴²¹ Indeed, as he says in *Lectures*, strictly speaking, Christ alone, understood in the sense of the *totus Christus*, can be said to be *Sophia*.⁴²² Just as the *hypostasis* of the Father in his *monarchia* is the source of the essence and essential unity of the Trinity, so too the *hypostasis* of the *Logos* is the one proper personal subject and principle of the being and unity of *Sophia* incarnate in creation, and therefore of the Church. This is what he means when he says that there “is only one divine-human being, the incarnate *Sophia*.”⁴²³ But just as the divine *ousia* is possessed by each divine Person in actuality only *together with* the others in the all-unity of Love, so too Christ possesses his divine-humanity, the incarnate *Sophia*, *together with* the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Universal Church, his Body and Bride. Only in this way can we say that Mary “is” *Sophia* and the Church “is” *Sophia*. They are such by grace and the Holy Spirit, in through, and together with Christ, participating in his divine-humanity. It is

⁴²⁰ Solov'ev, *Dukhovnie Osnovi Zhizni*, SS III: 380.

⁴²¹ Soloviev, *La Russie*, 265 (emphasis in original).

⁴²² Solov'ev, *Chtenie*, SS III: 115. Soloviev’s sophiology was a conscious development of the Greek patristic theological tradition that identified Christ with the feminine divine *Sophia*. The personification “divine *Sophia*” was eventually adopted by the Cappadocians as a standard title for Christ alongside the Pauline “power of God,” and the Johannine “light,” “life,” and “*Logos* of God” in response to its misinterpretation and misuse in the Arian controversies. It was analogous to the title *Logos* in that it had both epistemological and cosmological connotations and referred to the “very being” of the cosmic Christ. See Jaroslav Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture: The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 218-19.

⁴²³ Soloviev, *La Russie*, 265.

only by virtue of the *personal* mediation of the *Logos* that divine-humanity, the one living reality of Christ-Mary-Church, constitutes a real participation in Trinitarian all-unity (*vseedinstvo*) and manifests itself as the universal mediator between God and the world.⁴²⁴

Christ's union with Mary and the Church is analogous to the union in his person between the divine and human principles. He freely takes the initiative to empty himself through a *podvig* of kenotic love—the paschal mystery—in order to communicate his essence, *Sophia*, to Mary and the Church, according to their respective modes of existence. Mary (perfectly)⁴²⁵ and the Church (progressively), receives this gift through their own free *podvig* of humble obedience and kenotic love. This unity in freedom and love makes

⁴²⁴ Soloviev's sophiology is not free from notable ambiguities, which stem primarily from his attempts to express his understanding of *Sophia*. In the images of various traditions he found partial elements of what he wanted to express, but no one tradition provided an image that encompassed all of the richness and nuances of his own vision. Kornblatt gives a concise summary of his sophiological ambiguities: "We can recognize Plato when Solovyov focuses on *Eros*, we see Philo in his connection between *Logos* and *Sophia*, and we see the Neoplatonists in his attempt to place her as World Soul ... We have already seen her as the *Hokhmah* of Hebrew scriptures ... as Kabbalah's *Shekhinah*, and, closer to Solovyov's own home, as the Divine Wisdom of Russian iconography." Vladimir Solovyov, *Divine Sophia: The Wisdom Writings of Vladimir Solovyov*, 48. Nevertheless, Soloviev's sophiology encompasses the images of the Church as both Christ's Body and Bride and affirms the role of Mary as the personification of creation and the Church. It also presents Christ as always in relation to his beloved "other," first in the form of the "world soul," then in humanity, and ultimately in the Church. His sophiological vision of Christ is never as an isolated individual, but always as existing in relationship with his Body and Bride, from the first moment of her creation to her eschatological fulfillment at the Parousia. In this way, his sophiology may offer insights into a middle road between the theology of Zizioulas, who argues that Christ is the sole *hypostasis* of the Church as a "corporate personality" and that therefore Christ and the Church constitute one another, and von Balthasar, who envisions Mary as the personification of the Church and as such the "Bride of Christ," who is created from the side of the crucified Christ. See Paul McPartlan's analysis of Zizioulas's theology in relation to von Balthasar in Paul McPartlan, "Who Is the Church? Zizioulas and Von Balthasar on the Church's Identity," *Ecclesiology* 4, no. (2008), 271-88.

⁴²⁵ Hart is skeptical about Soloviev's identification of Mary as an individual incarnation of *Sophia* but summarizes the way in which one might justifiably interpret Soloviev's meaning. "The ultimate purpose for which humanity was fashioned is to be joined to the *Logos* in the incarnation. It is only in this sense that one *might* say that the Mother of God somehow embodies *Sophia*: in Mary the human openness to the advent of God reaches its purest and most selfless expression; she perfectly embodies the consent of humanity—and of all creation—to the power of God's Spirit, and so is the full flowering of nature's longing to become fruitful with the *Logos*—to become the temple of divine glory. It is the Mother of God's "sophianic" transparency before divine love that makes of her the highest exemplar of humanity waiting upon (but not of itself accomplishing) the arrival of "divine-humanity." See Hart's introduction in Solovyov, *The Justification of the Good*, xli.

possible in reality the most intimate unity, an analogous *communicatio idiomatum* admitting of no confusion, change, division, or separation.⁴²⁶ This unity is thus the basis for the reciprocity and complementarity between Christ, Mary, and the Church.⁴²⁷ Such complementarity, revealed in Christ, Mary, and the Church, is necessary in order to realize the meaning of humanity—Man-Woman-Society—as mediator. The incarnation of *Sophia* in the masculine personality of Christ, the “second Adam,” is complemented by her incarnation in the feminine personality of Mary, the “new Eve,” in that they manifest the divine, and the human and natural principles respectively.⁴²⁸ But only divine *Sophia*’s incarnation in the Universal Church constitutes the real, objective, visible, and universal *actualization* in creation of the meaning of divine-humanity as fully revealed in Christ and Mary, namely, the perfect unity of divinity, humanity, and all of creation in the kingdom of God: the mystical “one flesh” union of the Bride and the Lamb.⁴²⁹

Soloviev cites several sources for this “religious truth” that Christ, Mary, and the Church, while distinct according to existence, share one indivisible essence of divine *Sophia*. He argues that the Church, both Latin and Greek, has identified at times both Christ

⁴²⁶ See the Chalcedonian settlement in Kelly, 339.

⁴²⁷ Soloviev’s extension of *theosis* as a *perichoresis*, a double penetration of the divine and the human in Christ to the relationship between God, humanity, and nature, builds directly on this same notion in Maximus the Confessor. “The *perichoresis* of God and the believer, which has its prototype in the *perichoresis* of the hypostatic union in the person of the *Logos*, can be seen, in Maximus, as an organic relation of human freedom and divine grace, as fulfilled in divinizing union.” See Elena Vishnevskaya, “Divinization as Perichoretic Embrace in Maximus the Confessor,” in *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions*, ed. Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 132-34.

⁴²⁸ Soloviev’s identification of *Sophia* with Mary was a later development appearing not only in *La Russie et L’Église Universelle*, but also in his poetry, most notably “The Sign” (*Znamenie*). See Solov’ev, *Stikhotvoreniia i Shutochnye Pesy*, SS XII: 69-70, and his last and well-known work, *Three Conversations and a Short Story of the Antichrist* in Solov’ev, *Tri Razgovora i Kratkaia Povest’ ob Antikhriste*, SS X: 81-221. See David Matual, “Mary in the Eschatology of Vladimir Solovyov,” *Diakonia* 29, no. 3 (1996), 175-88.

⁴²⁹ Soloviev, *La Russie*, 265. Cf. Revelation 19:7.

and Mary with the divine Wisdom of Scripture.⁴³⁰ He also appeals to Pope Pius IX's Apostolic Constitution on the definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, *Ineffabilis Deus*, that speaks of both Mary and Christ as having their origin in the Eternal Wisdom, which he sees as a confirmation of this ancient ecclesial insight.⁴³¹ But what in his view reveals the undivided essence of all three beyond any doubt, he insists, is the Eucharist.

In the sacrament of Communion the personal Body of the Lord becomes in a mystical but real manner the unifying principle of His collective Body, the community of the faithful. Thus the Church, human Society made divine, possesses fundamentally the same substance as the incarnate Person of Christ or His individual Humanity; and since this latter has no other origin or substance than the human nature of the Blessed Virgin, the Mother of God, it follows that the organism of the divine-human incarnation, having in Jesus Christ a single active and personal center, possesses also in its threefold manifestation one single substantial basis ... the divine Wisdom.⁴³²

Unlike Christ, in whom the “fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily,”⁴³³ and the Blessed Virgin, who is the Immaculate Conception, the Church in her historical, earthly form is in a state of becoming and her purely human and natural elements, in their sinful and fallen condition, must be conformed to her divine principle. What is divine in her is already a given divine-human reality that comes directly from Christ, her Head, through the mediation of Mary, her Heart, and depends entirely on this “inexhaustible fountain of grace” and the “unceasing action of the Holy Spirit.”⁴³⁴ According to Soloviev, there are three essential “links” that, in their indissoluble unity, hold the earthly Church fast to her divine

⁴³⁰ Although he neglects to mention the patristic tradition of divine Wisdom being identified with the Holy Spirit. Kelly, 106.

⁴³¹ “And hence the very words with which the Sacred Scriptures speak of Uncreated Wisdom and set forth his eternal origin, the Church, both in its ecclesiastical offices and in its liturgy, has been wont to apply likewise to the origin of the Blessed Virgin, inasmuch as God, by one and the same decree, had established the origin of Mary and the Incarnation of Divine Wisdom.” Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus*, Apostolic Constitution on the Immaculate Conception (December 8, 1854), 5.

⁴³² Soloviev, *La Russie*, 266.

⁴³³ Colossians 2:9.

⁴³⁴ Soloviev, *Dukhovnie Osnovi Zhizni*, SS III: 386.

foundation, namely, the presence of Christ as way, truth, and life, respectively. In order for the individual members of the earthly Church freely and consciously to follow Christ's way, know his truth, and live his life, they must be able to recognize the divine principle in its ecclesial forms; to discern the purely human element and where it is not in harmony with the divine; and to strive continually to remove this disharmony in themselves and in others.⁴³⁵ Since he equates the divine principle with all-unity or Love, removing disharmony is synonymous to overcoming the principle of *egoism* in all its forms. "Everything that is divine in the Church has a universal or 'catholic' character that admits of no *self-love* or *particularism*, whether personal, national, local, or any other sort."⁴³⁶ Thus humanity can only fulfill its vocation to realize all-unity and incarnate divine *Sophia* by individually and collectively conforming itself to Christ as the universal way, truth, and life.

The "way" of Christ refers to the hierarchical structure that externally unifies the earthly Church. The exemplar of ecclesial hierarchy as an active principle of unity is the Trinity itself, as Soloviev argues in *La Russie*.⁴³⁷ It is "catholic" and divine because its origin, form, and meaning come from the "one source of all grace" Jesus Christ.⁴³⁸ This unbroken chain of grace is not flawed by any human self-affirmation, since from its visible head down to the humblest parish priest, every member receives grace and truth as a free gift from Christ. The objective form of divine and ecclesial authority is thus essentially kenotic and other-centered. To conform oneself to this hierarchical structure means that one must first acknowledge that God alone is the one source of all goodness, truth, and life, and then

⁴³⁵ Ibid., 387.

⁴³⁶ Ibid., 395 (emphasis in original).

⁴³⁷ See his chapter, "The Absolute Sovereignty of Christ. The Social Trinity. Priesthood and Fatherhood" in Soloviev, *La Russie*, 280-88.

⁴³⁸ Soloviev, *Dukhovnie Osnovi Zhizni*, SS III: 395

strive to banish any self-love and egoism that would assert one's individual authority and significance over against God's authority in his Church.

The "truth" of Christ refers to the dogmatic teaching of the Church, which is "catholic" and divine in its content, source, and object. The defined dogmatic teachings of the Church contain the essential elements of the vision of the whole and thus *implicitly* the whole of universal truth. The source of dogmatic truth is Christ himself and is manifested when the representatives of the Church "are concerned solely to ascertain the truth of Christ which is *entrusted* to the Church by the grace of the Holy Spirit" and proclaim it in the name of the Church.⁴³⁹ And its object is both the whole individual person and the whole of humanity; it encompasses every aspect of personal and social existence, both theoretical and practical. To assert any particular or isolated truth apart from dogmatic teaching taken as a whole is by definition not to be conformed to divine truth.

The "life" of Christ refers to the sacraments, which according to Soloviev are "catholic" because their purpose is to free the human person from his false individuality and unite him effectively with others, physically and spiritually, in order to "restore the *integrality* (*vsetselost*) of true life in God."⁴⁴⁰ The restoration of humanity's physical life includes the whole of the material universe, which is manifested and foreshadowed in the sacraments, and most clearly in the Eucharist. The entire ecclesial form of Christian life as way, truth, and life precludes any self-affirmation, willfulness, exclusivism, particularism, or

⁴³⁹ Ibid., 397 (emphasis in original).

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid., 398 (emphasis in original).

separation and gives humanity, individually and collectively, a “universal form that is by this very fact divine and of the eternal substance of the Church.”⁴⁴¹

The common thread running through Soloviev’s notion of divine-humanity, from the dual *podvig* of Christ that divinizes his humanity and his flesh, to Christ’s presence in the Church as the way, truth, and life that divinizes humanity and material nature, is the principle of incarnation (*voploshchenie*). He insists that it is not enough to know Christ as truth, nor to follow him as goodness; rather, the essence of Christianity is only found in integral *life*. Human beings must live the life of Christ in their own life, both individually and socially, by *making real*, or by incarnating divine goodness in truth in the form of beauty in every sphere of human existence. In this sense, the incarnation of divine *Sophia*, or the all-encompassing realization of Christ’s divine-humanity in the Universal Church, is a free *theurgic* process, a universal “work of art.”⁴⁴²

⁴⁴¹ Ibid., 401.

⁴⁴² Solov'ev, *Kritika*, SS II: 354-5.

CHAPTER V

Soloviev's Theological Aesthetics of Free Theurgy

Soloviev's emphasis on the necessity of "realization" (*osushchestvlenie*) or "incarnation" (*voploshchenie*) as a criterion of authentic Christianity leads him to specify that divine-humanity's primary vocation is the highest form of creativity, what he called "free theurgy" (*svobodnaia teurgia*). "Free theurgy" is the divine-human task of divinizing not only human nature and material creation, but also human life and culture or "wisdom." The divine exemplar of all created being is the supra-personal, free, and thus, in a sense, infinitely creative realization of all-unity (*vseedinstvo*) or divine Love in the Trinity, the eternal realization of Goodness (essential unity) through Truth (ideal unity) in Beauty (real unity). This divine act of realization is at work analogously in the divine-human activity of the Church. While Soloviev strongly emphasizes the active historical realization of the goodness, truth, and beauty of the kingdom of God, he acknowledges that the kingdom of God is ultimately destined for eschatological fulfillment in the mystery of the wedding feast of the Bridegroom and his Church, "prepared as a bride for her husband" (Rev. 21:2). But as a task, this process of building the kingdom is not merely a theoretical one whose object is truth (free theosophy), nor an ethical one whose object is goodness (free theocracy), but a creative or *aesthetic* one whose purpose is the free and tangible incarnation (*voploshchenie*) of goodness and truth in beauty (free theurgy).

The Meaning of Love belongs to the third aspect of Soloviev's synthesis of integral life because it deals not so much with the theoretical truth or with the moral dimension of sexual-spousal love, but with the role the latter plays in the individual realization of, and

participation in, what is given in principle in the incarnate mystery of divine-humanity, namely, the mystical, union of Christ-Mary-Church.⁴⁴³ While some scholars have overlooked or ignored the essential relationship between Soloviev's aesthetics of free theurgy and his theory of sexual-spousal love,⁴⁴⁴ those most familiar with his thought are unanimous in their judgment that the latter is an integral and indeed the most significant element of the former.⁴⁴⁵ Indeed, as will be argued here, Soloviev understands human love as what he calls the "perfect art," free theurgy *par excellence*, the fulfillment of that divine-human creative activity of which the beauties of nature and art are partial, prophetic, and preliminary manifestations.

⁴⁴³ Stremoukhoff points out that in his aesthetic works Soloviev did not actually use the term "theurgy" in relation to aesthetic activity, but that he does refer the reader to his *The Principles of Integral Knowledge*, where he does use the term freely in the context of aesthetics. See Stremoukhoff, 298.

⁴⁴⁴ For example, in her critique of *The Meaning of Love*, Olga Matich does not take into account its aesthetic context. See Olga Matich, *Erotic Utopia: The Decadent Imagination in Russia's Fin De Siècle* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005). Marina Kostalevsky, in her study on Soloviev and Dostoevsky, gives an otherwise complete summary of Soloviev's aesthetics without reference to his theory of love. See Kostalevsky, 45-48.

⁴⁴⁵ See Bychkov, 3-43; E. L. Radlov, "Estetika Vl. Solov'eva [The Aesthetics of Vl. Soloviev]," *Vestnik Evropy* [*The European Messenger*] 1, no. (1907), 84-118; and Klum. In Michelina Tenace's concise but uncritical treatment, she concludes that for Soloviev "beauty in nature leads us to beauty in art, and then from art we pass into history; the force that moves history towards its aesthetic realization is love." See Michelina Tenace, *La Beauté Unité Spirituelle Dans Les Écrits Esthétiques De Vladimir Soloviev* (Troyes, France: Editions Fates, 1993), 151. Comparable studies of Soloviev's aesthetics have yet to be published in English. However, an English translation of Stremoukhoff's French work, *Vladimir Soloviev et Son Oeuvre Messianique* includes a helpful, succinct, and insightful synopsis that affirms an organic connection between Soloviev's aesthetics and his theory of love. See Stremoukhoff, 297-313. In addition, Wozniuk has translated and published in one volume Soloviev's works on aesthetics, literary criticism, and sexual-spousal love (although he leaves out *The Life Drama of Plato*, an unfortunate omission) for the sole purpose of putting *The Meaning of Love* into the proper context of Soloviev's aesthetics for an English reading audience. See V. S. Soloviev, *The Heart of Reality: Essays on Beauty, Love and Ethics by V. S. Soloviev*, trans., Vladimir Wozniuk (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), xiii. Alexander Schmemmann also published a short compilation of Soloviev's essays on aesthetics and love as one chapter of his anthology *Ultimate Questions*. See V. S. Soloviev, "Beauty, Sexuality, and Love," in *Ultimate Questions: An Anthology of Modern Russian Religious Thought*, ed. Alexander Schmemmann (New York, Chicago, San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), 73-134.

1. THE PLACE OF AESTHETICS IN SOLOVIEV'S SYNTHESIS

As a philosopher, poet, and mystic, Soloviev can be included among the post-Kantian thinkers naturally oriented toward aesthetics and can be understood as making a unique contribution within that history.⁴⁴⁶ He characteristically rejected the polarization typical of the polemics from the end of the nineteenth century between the aesthetic separatism of Nietzschean “art for art’s sake” and the utilitarian argument of “art for life’s sake.” Soloviev proposed his own theory as a third way, one that integrated the partial truths of both perspectives, arguing that art’s ultimate purpose can only be found in the realization of divine-humanity. Already in his *The Principles of Integral Knowledge* (1877), he began to outline this third way of “free theurgy,” which finds its subjective principle in “feeling” (*chuvstvo*), its objective principle in beauty (*krasota*), and its three-fold expression, in ascending order, in the technical arts, the fine arts, and “mysticism.”⁴⁴⁷ In the conclusion to his *Critique of Abstract Principles* (1880), he gives a succinct summary of the place of free theurgy in his synthesis.

If in the moral sphere (concerning the will) all-unity (*vseedinstvo*) is absolute Goodness, and if in the cognitive sphere (concerning the mind), it is absolute Truth, then the realization of all-unity (*vseedinstvo*) in external reality, its realization or incarnation (*voploshchenie*) in the sphere of sensible material being, is absolute Beauty. Since this realization of all-unity (*vseedinstvo*) is not yet given in our reality in the human and natural world, but is only being accomplished here by us ourselves, then it is a task for humanity, and its fulfillment is art (*isskustvo*).⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁶ “Only since the time of Kant has philosophy realized that without aesthetics it is impossible to create a comprehensive picture of the universal, and every major philosopher had (although far from all were capable) in some way or another to complete his system with aesthetics, a subject that lends itself least of all to verbalization. Soloviev was one of the few for whom aesthetics was not problematic since in the sphere of undefined spiritual experience – both mystical and artistic – he was his own man.” Bychkov, 1.

⁴⁴⁷ Solov'ev, *Filosofskie Nachala*, SS I: 257-66.

⁴⁴⁸ Solov'ev, *Kritika*, SS II: 354-5.

His intention was to devote the third and final part of the *Critique of Abstract Principles* to an aesthetics that defines the essence of art as an all-encompassing, creative human activity whose purpose is to transform “all that exists into the form of beauty.”⁴⁴⁹ However, as Mochulsky notes, Soloviev’s focus at this time became fixed solely on his theoretical and ecumenical project of free theosophy and free theocracy respectively so that he only returned to the subject of free theurgy ten years later in what was to be the last decade of his life. His premature death at the age of forty seven deprived him of the opportunity to compose and publish what would have been the sequel to his *Justification of the Good*, namely, a comprehensive and systematic *Justification of Beauty*.⁴⁵⁰

While his aesthetic ideas, as will be seen, are inseparable from his own sophiological vision of divine-humanity, they are also influenced directly by Plato, Christian Neoplatonism, and in particular the works of Pseudo-Dionysius and John Damascene.⁴⁵¹ They incorporate the participationist metaphysics of medieval speculative mysticism, in particular that of Bonaventure and the Victorines,⁴⁵² and make explicit reference to the aesthetic ideas of thinkers such as Aristotle, Aquinas, Schelling, Nicolai Hartmann, Darwin, Nikolai Chernyshevsky, and Fyodor Dostoevsky. His efforts to develop the positive meaning of Chalcedonian Christology with his teaching on divine-humanity and sophiology

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid., 355.

⁴⁵⁰ The year before he died, Soloviev wrote an open letter to the journal *Novoe Vremia*, in which he explains why, due to an illness, he will have to refuse all nonessential requests in order to focus on his “principal and immediate obligations.” Included in the list of the obligations were: “The translation of Plato with studies about him. 2) *Theoretical Philosophy*. 3) Aesthetics. 4) An aesthetic critique of Pushkin. 5) Biblical philosophy with a translation and interpretation of the Bible.” His premature death prevented the completion of these intended works. Sergei M. Solov'ev, *Vladimir Solovyov: His Life and Creative Evolution*, 501.

⁴⁵¹ Soloviev emphasizes the full Christian significance of matter as found, for example, in Saint John Damascene’s *On the Divine Images*: “I do not venerate matter, I venerate the fashioner of matter, who became matter for my salvation and accepted to dwell in matter and through matter worked my salvation, and I will not cease from reverencing matter, through which my salvation was worked.” Quoted in Andrew Louth, “‘Beauty Will Save the World’ the Formation of Byzantine Spirituality,” *Theology Today* 61, no. (2004), 75.

⁴⁵² See Meerson, 70.

is comparable to his efforts with free theurgy to elucidate in a modern philosophical paradigm the positive and full significance of the conclusions of the Seventh Ecumenical Council of Nicaea II (787), at which the Church affirmed the possibility of the incarnation of the divine in the material and rejected the heresy of iconoclasm.⁴⁵³ This effort, as Wozniuk rightly notes, is not merely derivative of Neoplatonism and German Idealism, as some would argue, but constitutes an original Christian synthesis of ancient, patristic, medieval, and modern aesthetics.⁴⁵⁴

In addition to the early programmatic outlines of free theurgy found in *The Principles of Integral Knowledge* and *The Critique of Abstract Principles*, he did succeed in writing and publishing several essays and articles on aesthetics and literary criticism. These include *Three Speeches in Memory of Dostoevsky* (1881-83), *Beauty in Nature* (1889), *The General Meaning of Art* (1890), and *A First Step Towards a Positive Aesthetic* (1894). In addition, between the years 1894-99 he wrote numerous critical articles on renowned Russian poets, most notably for the present thesis, those dedicated to Count Aleksei Tolstoy, Fyodor Tiutchev, Alexander Pushkin, and Mikhail Lermontov, the latter published

⁴⁵³ Slesinski summarizes the Eastern accent on beauty, which Soloviev inherited from the Orthodox Tradition. “Dogmatic development in the East clearly shows that the form of beauty is indispensable for the understanding of truth, a point often underappreciated in the West. The classical interpretation of beauty as the *synthesis* of the transcendental properties of being (unity, truth, goodness) naturally finds the expression of truth in beauty. In particular, the Seventh Ecumenical Council, Nicaea II, struggled to express the necessary link that obtains between truth and beauty. ... The most fundamental issue before the Council was a dogmatic concern. Behind the immediate issue of the veneration of icons lay the whole question of the Christian understanding of the economy itself of salvation. Could the divine and the human truly meet in this world? Is communion between them in this world, in other words, ontologically possible? ... The legacy of the Seventh Ecumenical Council is the alliance of theology and art.” Robert Slesinski, “Postmodernity and the Resources of the Christian East,” in *Essays in Diakonia: Eastern Catholic Theological Reflections* (New York: P. Lang, 1998), 48-9.

⁴⁵⁴ Wozniuk acknowledges that Soloviev’s work has been seen as “rather unoriginal, as primarily derivative from Platonic and German idealism, and somewhat obscurantist in its religious mysticism.” However, he continues, “while Soloviev was indeed broadly influenced both by Plato and the German idealists, the essays in this volume [on the subject of aesthetics] also appear to be more directly informed by the work of Aristotle, Aquinas, and Dostoevsky.” See Wozniuk’s introduction in Soloviev, *The Heart of Reality*, xi.

posthumously in 1901.⁴⁵⁵ It is justifiable to take all of these works, which span almost the entire period of his creative activity, as an undivided and consistent whole, since, as Eugene Trubetskoi, Stremoukhoff, Zenkovsky, and Bychkov all concur, Soloviev's fundamental aesthetic principles did not undergo any significant changes.⁴⁵⁶ Also, as Mochulsky records, in 1895 Soloviev informed his friend, Fyodor Gets in a letter, that he was preparing to publish three "mature and detailed" works, one of which was "almost ready for publication" and was entitled simply, "*Aesthetics*." Since this work has never appeared, Mochulsky speculates that Soloviev was simply planning on reworking his previously published essays and articles on aesthetics into one systematic whole.⁴⁵⁷ This thesis is further supported by Trubetskoi's first-hand testimony of Soloviev's life-long refusal to publish his ideas on any given subject until he had thoroughly worked them out beforehand to his own satisfaction, which apparently he must have done with the subject of aesthetics.⁴⁵⁸

What emerges in his extant and partial writings is a vision of the divine-human drama, the dynamic and free ongoing realization of all-unity (*vseedinstvo*) in its aesthetic, incarnational, material aspect or what has been called his "religious materialism."⁴⁵⁹ In *Principles* he argues that if the ultimate purpose of this process was only choosing Goodness and knowing Truth, as the moralist or dogmatist contends, then the abiding incarnation of

⁴⁵⁵ His works dealing with sexual-spousal love, *The Meaning of Love* (1892-94) and *The Life Drama of Plato* (1899) should also be included in this list of aesthetic works, but they will be considered in detail only in the next section.

⁴⁵⁶ Trubetskoi speculates that one reason for this consistency is the absence of the discouragement that Soloviev had experienced with his theocratic ideas. See Prince Eugene Trubetskoi, *Mirosozertsaniye VI. Solovyova [VI. Solovyov's World-View]*, 2 vols., vol. 2 (Moscow: Izdanie avtora, 1913), 329. Stremoukhoff, 297. Zenkovsky speculates that the life-long consistency in Soloviev's aesthetics stems precisely from the fact that he did not have the opportunity to systematize his ideas, as he had with his theories of knowledge and ethics. See Zenkovsky, 527, and Bychkov, 5.

⁴⁵⁷ Mochul'skii, *Solov'ev*, 234.

⁴⁵⁸ Trubetskoi, *Mirosozertsaniye*, 331.

⁴⁵⁹ See Meerson, 71.

the *Logos* as *anthropos* and *sarx* simply would not have been necessary. On the contrary, he insists, Christ's divine-humanity is ultimately the solution to an aesthetic problem in that it is the perfect incarnation (*voploshchenie*) of Goodness and Truth in the created, material universe. Nature, the material, "chaotic" principle is necessary for Goodness and Truth not only as a means and medium of their realization, but for the manifestation of their *fullness* (*polnota*) in Beauty as the living and actual all-one unity of Love. Indeed, as he declares in his second speech on Dostoevsky, Goodness, Truth, and Beauty "live only in their unity. Goodness, separated from Truth and Beauty is only an undefined feeling, an impotent impulse, abstract Truth is an empty word, and Beauty without Goodness and Truth is an idol."⁴⁶⁰ Material existence must be spiritualized, i.e., introduced into the ethical, ideal order if Love is not to be defeated by the material forces of fallen nature. In other words, the very existence and ultimate triumph of Goodness and Truth in the world is synonymous with their free incarnation in Beauty. The triumph of Goodness and Truth is thus only complete in the bodily Resurrection of Christ and its eschatological fulfillment in the Heavenly Jerusalem. This, generally speaking, is the rationale behind Soloviev's choice of "Beauty saves the world," paraphrasing Dostoevsky, for the epigraph of his essay, *Beauty in Nature*.⁴⁶¹

⁴⁶⁰ Solov'ev, *Tri Rechi*, SS III: 203.

⁴⁶¹ This famous phrase from Dostoevsky's novel, *The Idiot*, is actually only attributed to the protagonist, Prince Myshkin by other characters in the novel. The prince never actually utters the phrase himself. It is noteworthy that the usual form of the phrase reads: "Beauty *will* save the world," while Soloviev's epitaph is clearly in the present, active tense, "Beauty *saves* the world." See Solov'ev, *Krasota v Prirode*, SS VI: 33.

2. BEAUTY IN NATURE⁴⁶²

Soloviev's stated purpose in his essay, *Beauty in Nature*, is to discover the necessary foundations for a philosophy of art.⁴⁶³ To this end, he seeks first to define what he calls the objective, all-one (*vseedinoe*) essence of beauty, that which causes us to recognize and value it as a *sui generis* and absolute value in itself. He rejects the contention of classical idealism that beauty can be reduced to temporal, transitory appearance and argues that an affirmation of its purely formal dimension reveals nothing of its objective content and positive significance.⁴⁶⁴ Well aware of the skepticism of his audience, he argues for the objectivity of beauty in part by drawing attention to Darwin's discoveries of the role of beauty in natural evolution, insisting that the great English scientist had shown "the independence of aesthetic motives from utilitarian goals even in the animal kingdom, and with this provided for the first time a positive foundation for an authentically ideal aesthetic."⁴⁶⁵ Since beauty in nature is an objective and distinct reality, "it has to have also a certain general ontological basis, it has to be—at various stages and in diverse appearances—the perceptible incarnation (*voploshchenie*) of one absolutely objective idea of all-unity (*vseedinstvo*)."⁴⁶⁶

Soloviev adopts a distinctly phenomenological and inductive approach to his subject and turns to an instance of actual beauty in nature, in this case a diamond, to illustrate his preliminary definition of beauty as "the transfiguration (*preobrazhenie*) of matter through

⁴⁶² Soloviev's article, *Beauty in Nature*, was first published in 1889 in the Russian academic journal, *Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii* [Questions of philosophy and psychology].

⁴⁶³ Solov'ev, *Krasota*, SS VI: 35.

⁴⁶⁴ Soloviev attributes this purely abstract and negative definition of beauty (*kalos*) as a useless object of contemplation possessing absolute value in itself to Plato, and more recently to Schopenhauer. Ibid., 38.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., 68.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid., 73.

the incarnation (*voploshchenie*) in it of another, supra-material principle.”⁴⁶⁷ He observes that the beauty of a diamond is not found in the substance of either petrified coal or light in themselves, but in a reciprocal and transformative interaction that achieves an “ideal balance” or unity between them. The principles of this unity are analogous to those found in Chalcedonian Christological dogma, and Soloviev’s choice of terminology in particular indicates that this parallel is intentional and significant.⁴⁶⁸ For example, the Russian terms he employs in his definition, and throughout his aesthetics in general, namely, *preobrazhenie* and *voploshchenie*, while often translated as “transformation” and “embodiment” respectively,⁴⁶⁹ are clearly chosen for the Christological connotations of their literal and theological meaning, i.e., “transfiguration” and “incarnation” respectively. The latter translation better preserves Soloviev’s stated intention to develop his aesthetics as an integral aspect of his overall Christian synthesis of divine-humanity.⁴⁷⁰

In *Beauty in Nature*, he writes that the first principle of beauty is present in the all-one form of unity at work in the beauty of a diamond: while preserving their own individual natures, petrified coal and light come together in an interior “unity without confusion or separation” (*v nesliiannom i nerazdelnim soedinenii*) that we are able to recognize as

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid., 41.

⁴⁶⁸ Nicholas of Cusa makes the same argument, albeit without explicit reference to Chalcedon, when he reflects on the beauty of a ruby in *On the Not-Other*. See chapters 11-14 in Jasper Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa on God as Not-Other: A Translation and an Appraisal of De Li Non Aliud* (Minneapolis: The Arthur J. Banning Press, 1987), 1128-42.

⁴⁶⁹ Wozniuk translates this same sentence in the following way: “the transformation of matter through the embodiment in it of another, supra-material principle.” Soloviev, *The Heart of Reality*, 36.

⁴⁷⁰ Kornblatt affirms the significance of the same theological terminology here, but chooses to identify it as “Trinitarian” instead of Christological, referring to the undivided but unconfused union of the Persons of the Trinity. But these terms themselves that she uses are lifted directly from the Chalcedonian Christological formulation. See Kornblatt, “The Transfiguration of Plato in the Erotic Philosophy of Vladimir Solovyev,” 84.

beautiful.⁴⁷¹ This unity not only gives birth to a new, undivided phenomenal reality, but also transfigures the constitutive elements themselves, since the lucidity of the densest carbon crystal, and the full spectrum of color latent in light is only revealed when they penetrate one another in this dynamic unity. Petrified coal has the capacity for lucidity but cannot manifest this capacity in isolation. Light has the capacity to be refracted in color but also cannot do so in isolation. In other words, there is a sort of *communicatio idiomatum* between the two substances so that an illumined diamond, he concludes, can accurately be described as “light-bearing matter and incarnate light” or more poetically, “lucid coal and petrified rainbow.”⁴⁷² He insists that this unity and its consequent beauty is neither accidental nor without objective significance. On the contrary, only in their all-one unity in beauty do coal and light achieve *together* a “new plenitude of phenomenal being,” and at the same time only in their all-one unity are the hidden but ideal essences of their *individual* natures fully realized and revealed.⁴⁷³

Another foundational Solovievian principle of aesthetics revealed in the beauty of the diamond is the “contested” character of the reciprocal relation between coal and light. The diamond, as crystallized carbon, does not merely absorb or deflect light, nor does it allow it to penetrate and pass through its substance unhindered. Light only penetrates and passes through the diamond “fretfully and indirectly.”⁴⁷⁴ It is precisely the extremely dense, unyielding materiality of the body of the diamond—the purely material principle of

⁴⁷¹ Solov'ev, *Krasota*, SS VI: 40.

⁴⁷² Ibid., 40.

⁴⁷³ Ibid., 39 (emphasis in original).

⁴⁷⁴ Caryl Emerson, “Solov'ev, the Late Tolstoi, and the Earl Bakhtin on the Problem of Shame and Love,” *Slavic Review* 50, no. 3 (1991), 666. Emerson points out the importance of this principle in Soloviev's aesthetics as a whole, arguing that *The Meaning of Love* is the best example of this principle in his thought.

“chaos”—that makes it capable of incarnating light in this particular, concrete, and refracted way, introducing into it the form of beauty. Light passing through transparent glass has negligible aesthetic value: the entirely uncontested relationship between them leaves light’s aesthetic potential intact but disincarnate and thus hidden. As Caryl Emerson correctly observes, for Soloviev “beauty is not a static quality but the result of dynamic interaction under pressure.”⁴⁷⁵ “For beauty,” Soloviev writes in his essay on the poet, Fyodor Tiutchev, “it is not necessary at all that the power of darkness [the material, chaotic principle] be destroyed in the triumph of earthly harmony: it is enough that the luminous [ideal] principle seize it, make it its own, and become incarnate in it ... limiting but not controlling its freedom and resistance.”⁴⁷⁶ Thus, an important aesthetic criterion can be found in the degree to which the material and ideal elements are unlike, are a *coincidentia oppositorum*. The relative capacity of the material principle to resist the supra-material or ideal principle, and the latter’s relative capacity to “seize” and “make its own” the former, results in a more or less intense, dynamic, and reciprocal “contested relationship.” According to this principle, we will find the highest forms of beauty precisely in those instances where the most “material” and resistant substance is penetrated and transfigured by the highest ideal principle.⁴⁷⁷ He thus concludes his reflection on the diamond with the preliminary definition

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid., 670.

⁴⁷⁶ Solov'ev, *Poeziia F. I. Tiutcheva*, SS VII: 127.

⁴⁷⁷ This principle is applied analogously in other areas of Soloviev’s thought. For example, in *The Spiritual Foundations of Life*, its application is found in the spiritual and moral sphere: “in a holy person actual goodness suggests potential evil: he is great in holiness precisely because he is able to be just as great in evil; he has fought the power of evil and subjected it to the higher principle, so that this power has become the basis and bearer of goodness.” Solov'ev, *Dukhovnie Osnovi Zhizni*, SS III: 364.

of beauty in nature already seen above as the “transfiguration (*preobrazhenie*) of matter through the incarnation (*voploshchenie*) in it of another, supra-material principle.”⁴⁷⁸

Soloviev goes on to fill out this definition by analyzing the various forms of beauty in nature in the implicit light of his Trinitarian metaphysics of all-unity (*vseedinstvo*) and the sophiological cosmogony of divine-humanity.⁴⁷⁹ He observes that not every embodied essence has aesthetic value but only those which incarnate “ideal content,” such as light.⁴⁸⁰ This leads him to further refine his definition of beauty in nature as a manifestation and revelation of the “Idea,”⁴⁸¹ which not only possesses objective and independent existence, but is that which *ought* to exist in the sense that it is being (*bytie*) that is in itself “worthy of existence” (*dostoino byt*). Beauty, he writes, is nothing other than the “incarnate idea” (*voploshchennaia ideia*).⁴⁸² Since only the Absolute—the divine Trinity—is, properly speaking, “worthy of existence,” individual, created beings are only worthy insofar as they participate in the all-one form of Trinitarian existence, i.e., insofar as they enter into the universal process of the incarnation of the divine Idea in creation.

⁴⁷⁸ Solov'ev, *Krasota*, SS VI: 41. See above p. 162.

⁴⁷⁹ In his detailed and ingenious analysis of the various forms of beauty in nature, from the simplest to the most complex, Soloviev incorporates the Hegelian dialectic of the progressive embodiment of the Ideal in the real, but rejects Hegel's argument that beauty is only a transitory, sensuous appearance of the Ideal in the real, which is in turn subsumed in the dialectic of religious and then philosophical development. See Copleston, *Modern Philosophy: From the Post-Kantian Idealist to Marx, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche*, 230-34.

⁴⁸⁰ Commenting on Soloviev's use of light in his aesthetics of natural beauty, Bychkov writes that Soloviev “in fact turns to the metaphysics and aesthetics of light, long forgotten in the new European culture, that constituted an important part of medieval Christian (especially Byzantine and ancient Russian) aesthetics. However, in contrast to his medieval ancestors, the philosopher of the age of positivism lowers the aesthetics of light down from the mystical heights of absolute spiritual (or even divine – held by the Byzantine Church Fathers and Christian mystics) being to the ground of the natural scientific and philosophical achievements of his own time.” Bychkov, 7. Bychkov's observation about Neoplatonism in the west does not take into account Nicholas of Cusa's contribution in *God as Not-Other*. See Note 477.

⁴⁸¹ With this definition, he rejects two popular late nineteenth-century notions of beauty, namely, that beauty is the external expression of any internal content, or that beauty is a purely subjective experience of the temporary appearance (*Schein*) of the Idea (Hegel, von Hartmann).

⁴⁸² “Beauty or the incarnate idea is the better half of our real world, namely, the half that not only exists, but is worthy of existence.” Solov'ev, *Krasota*, SS VI: 44.

Soloviev identifies three criteria to judge the worthiness of the form of being:

1. The individual elements of a being do not exclude one another but are interiorly united in mutual solidarity;
2. individual elements do not exclude the whole but maintain their individual existence on a single, universal foundation;
3. and the all-one principle, which is the basis of the unity of the individual elements, does not repress or absorb them, but in revealing itself to them gives them the freedom to realize the fullness of their own being.⁴⁸³

The content of the Idea, ideally speaking, is all-unity (*vseedinstvo*), which is desired as Good, known as Truth, and realized, and thus manifested, as Beauty. In nature, the progressive incarnation of Beauty in various forms must therefore involve ever richer and more perfect embodiments of this all-unity, “the absolute freedom of constitutive parts in the perfected unity of the whole.”⁴⁸⁴

Two fundamental aesthetic aspects follow from this notion of beauty as a manifestation of the progressive incarnation of the Idea: first, the “general ideal essence” or “ideality” of an object or phenomenon that corresponds to its worthiness from the point of view of existence, and second, the “specific aesthetic form” that corresponds to the purely *formal* worthiness of a being. *What* is incarnate cannot be separated from *how*, from its concrete form. The first aspect, ideality, incorporates the Schellingian notion of beauty as

⁴⁸³ Solov'ev, *Obshchi Smysl' Iskusstva*, SS VI: 79-80.

⁴⁸⁴ Solov'ev, *Krasota*, SS VI: 44.

the infinite idea entering into finite, concrete being,⁴⁸⁵ while the latter, the purely aesthetic aspect, recalls the Thomistic and medieval Christian aesthetic of proportionality and form.⁴⁸⁶ To illustrate the dynamic relationship between these aspects, Soloviev contrasts an intestinal worm with the diamond: the worm is superior and objectively worthier of existence in its ideality because its ideal content is life with its diversity and complexity of parts reduced to inner unity, but it is inferior in its particular aesthetic form. The diamond, on the other hand, is superior in its aesthetic form, but inferior in its ideality, insofar as its ideal content is light.

Countless phenomena produced by the complex dynamic of cosmogonic evolution manifest these aspects in their respective distinctiveness. Citing numerous examples, Soloviev observes that the natural capacity for beauty in any given species of being is directly proportional to its capacity for ugliness. In contrast to inorganic matter, “we know that ugliness only begins where life begins.”⁴⁸⁷ Since it is precisely the evolving complexity of the material or “chaotic” principle that constitutes natural being’s capacity for beauty, it becomes increasingly difficult for the Idea, the supramaterial principle, to overcome the resistance of the principle of chaos *from within* to achieve higher and more lasting forms of beauty. The *Logos*, the “eternal Artist,” thus “narrows the field more and more to achieve lasting victories” of cosmos over chaos; but “each new victory reveals the possibility of a

⁴⁸⁵ In *Bruno* (1802), Schelling writes that “beauty exists where the particular (the real) is so in accord with its idea that this idea itself, as infinite, enters into the finite and is intuited *in concreto*.” As quoted in Copleston, *Modern Philosophy: From the Post-Kantian Idealist to Marx, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche*, 121.

⁴⁸⁶ On the centrality of proportionality to Thomistic and medieval Christian aesthetics, see Umberto Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, trans., Hugh Bredin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 56-57, 97-100, 141-152.

⁴⁸⁷ Solov'ev, *Krasota*, SS VI: 61.

new defeat: with every higher degree of organization and beauty achieved, more powerful deviations, more profound instances of ugliness, also appear.”⁴⁸⁸

Using these criteria, he goes on to describe the cosmogonic process as a whole from an aesthetic viewpoint,⁴⁸⁹ which has two goals, general and specific. The general goal is “the incarnation of the Idea, for example, *light* and *life*, in various forms of natural beauty.”⁴⁹⁰ The specific goal is the creation of man as “that form, which, taken together with the greatest physical beauty, represents as well the highest intrinsic conversion of light and life that we call self-consciousness.” With the advent of self-consciousness comes the possibility of participation in the creative activity of the divine *Logos* himself, for “man not only already participates in the activity of cosmic principles, but is capable of *knowing the purpose* of this activity and, consequently laboring over its achievement intelligently and freely.”⁴⁹¹

3. THE MEANING OF ART

In the outset of *The General Meaning of Art*, Soloviev clarifies why art is not a mere prolongation or extension of the incarnation of the Idea in nature. He maintains that man is the final end of nature in two ways: as the highest form of natural beauty in terms of both “ideality” and (potentially) “specific aesthetic form,” as well as the free and creative *agent* of the same universal process. Since he possesses a reasoning consciousness and free will,

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid., 62.

⁴⁸⁹ It is worth noting that his account is a synthetic interpretation of the creation account in Genesis, the findings of Darwin regarding the objective existence of beauty as a value in itself in nature, namely, the animal kingdom, and the poetry of Tiutchev, which for Soloviev captures the different forms of natural beauty. See Ibid., 46-73.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid., 73 (emphasis in original).

⁴⁹¹ Ibid., 73-4 (emphasis in original).

man can grasp the universal meaning of this process and is thus able to “more perfectly correspond” to its ideal purpose, namely, the “full mutual permeation and free solidarity of the spiritual and material, the ideal and the real, the subjective and objective factors and elements of the universe.”⁴⁹² While Martin Heidegger believed that one’s understanding of art was determined by one’s understanding of being, Soloviev argues that, on the contrary, the meaning and essence of art, properly understood, allows us to discover the meaning of being itself, since beauty is the manifestation and revelation of its true and ideal essence.⁴⁹³ This is why his Trinitarian metaphysics of all-unity (*vseedinstvo*) and theory of divine-humanity (*Bogochelovechestvo*) come together and are inseparable from his aesthetics. What Soloviev seeks to develop is a positive aesthetic that affirms the meaning of art as nothing other than the one vital, universal goal of humanity, what he elsewhere identifies as the Universal Church or the kingdom of God, where “God is all in all things” (*Bog vse vo vsekh*).⁴⁹⁴ Acknowledging the partial truths of the Nietzschean and utilitarian positions respectively, he agrees that the purpose and value of art is indeed found in itself, insofar as it embodies and offers its own unique element of beauty. Art thus participates in the universal process “*in its own way and by its own means*.”⁴⁹⁵ But this is only true, he argues, insofar as art does not become self-sufficient, isolating itself from all other vital human activities, but has a vital, intrinsic, and reciprocal relationship with them.

While the present study does not require a consideration of the aesthetic criteria of individual forms of art, all of which Soloviev analyzes according to their own specificities,

⁴⁹² Solov'ev, *Obshchi Smysl' Iskusstva*, SS VI: 76.

⁴⁹³ Tenace, 88.

⁴⁹⁴ Solov'ev, *Obshchi Smysl' Iskusstva*, SS VI: 81.

⁴⁹⁵ Solov'ev, *Pervy Shag k Polozhitelnoi Estetike*, SS VII: 74 (emphasis in original).

the criteria he deems constitutive of “true art” should be considered. Knowledge of the universal meaning of art sheds light not only on its various particular forms, he insists, but also indicates the “breadth of its future horizons.” While acknowledging that the modern proponents of “pure art” are correct to reject present forms of artistic beauty because of their impotence before the ugliness of reality, he argues that the limitations of artistic creativity—the illusoriness of ideal beauty—is simply the “expression of an imperfect stage in the development of human art, and in no way flows from its very essence.”⁴⁹⁶ The essence of art, as with any given essence, is greater and more profound than any given phenomena, since as their source it is also the potential source of new phenomena which will “gradually express or realize it more and more,” a process that only ends with its perfect, definitive, and universal realization. Thus, for Soloviev, the meaning of art, belonging as it does to historical, phenomenal existence, can only be found in the sphere of eschatology.

The highest task of art is the perfect incarnation of spiritual fullness in our reality, the realization in it of absolute beauty, or the creation of a universal spiritual organism. Clearly, the fulfillment of this task should coincide with the end of the entire world process. While history is still in process, we can only have partial and fragmentary *foreshadowings* (anticipations) of perfect beauty; the arts of today, by capturing flashes of eternal beauty in our present reality and extending them further, forewarn and give us presentiments of the supernatural reality in store for us, and serve in this way as the transition or connecting link between the beauty of nature and the beauty of the future life.⁴⁹⁷

Therefore, as he concludes in *The General Meaning of Art*: “every tangible representation of any object or phenomenon whatsoever from the viewpoint of its final state, or in light of the world to come, is a work of art.”⁴⁹⁸

⁴⁹⁶ Solov'ev, *Krasota*, SS VI: 35.

⁴⁹⁷ Solov'ev, *Obshchi Smysl' Iskusstva*, SS VI: 84 (emphasis in original).

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 85.

3.1 *The Subjective Principle of Art*

The first criterion of authentic art to be considered involves its subjective principle. Insofar as art is a tangible, “fully perceptible” incarnation of the Idea, it does not constitute the proper object of the reason or will, but corresponds to what he calls “feeling” (*chuvstvo*). Only through, with, and in “feeling” does it indirectly engage the reason and will, which can judge its moral and rational content, as per the epistemological principles of integral knowledge. He defines his choice of the term “feeling” as a way of indicating the subjective “principle of creativity” (*nachalo tvorchestva*), regardless of its form or the level at which it occurs. For example, he posits “feeling” as the subjective principle of both the technical arts, fine arts, and the “mystical,” the latter referring to “the creative relationship of human feeling to the transcendent world.”⁴⁹⁹ Soloviev chooses the term “feeling” to emphasize the incarnational and tangible character of beauty, and our perception and experience of it, and to distinguish it from our intellect and will, whose proper objects are truth and goodness. Nevertheless, his choice of the term “feeling” is ambiguous and inadequate for conveying the full range and depth of what he is trying to express. As Slesinski points out, while it is true that beauty arouses feeling, it seems that Soloviev inadvertently reduces the affective recognition and reception of the beautiful to “mere sensation,” the material level of being. Given that beauty, like goodness and truth, is a revelation of ideal being, should he not, as Slesinski suggests, “posit a third distinct *spiritual* dimension to man beyond knowing and

⁴⁹⁹ Solov'ev, *Filosofskie Nachala*, SS I: 263.

willing, namely, an affective activity that truly represents a mark of human transcendence before the beautiful?”⁵⁰⁰

Soloviev himself had argued along these lines when, having attributed the will to the spirit, and representation to the mind, he attributed “feeling” to the soul (*dusha*).⁵⁰¹ He argued that artistic creativity integrated but was distinct from external observation and abstract reflection and offered this argument as proof for the existence of intellectual intuition. “Anyone more or less acquainted with the process of artistic creativity,” he writes, “knows well that artistic ideas and images are not merely the complex products of observation and reflection, but are revealed to the mind’s gaze all at once in their inner totality, and the work of the artist comes down to their development and incarnation in material details.”⁵⁰² It is the action of an ideal essence on the artist, calling forth his creativity, that Soloviev calls inspiration (*vdokhnovenie*). While inspiration certainly causes and is usually accompanied by feeling, it is misleading to assume they are synonymous. This terminological weakness need not be resolved here. What needs to be kept in mind is what the term “feeling” is supposed to signify in Soloviev’s aesthetics, namely, the entire subjective and sensible dimension of beauty in human experience, and the subjective aspect of artistic inspiration and creativity, which is inseparable from—but only indirectly engages—the reason and will.⁵⁰³

⁵⁰⁰ On this point Slesinski acknowledges that he is following the argumentation of von Hildebrand as found in Dietrich von Hildebrand, *The Art of Living* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1965), 107-19. See Slesinski, “Free Theurgy,” 137-38.

⁵⁰¹ Solov'ev, *Filosofskie Nachala*, SS I: 373.

⁵⁰² Ibid., 318.

⁵⁰³ Slesinski points out another weakness of Soloviev’s tripartite scheme of reason, will, and feeling, namely, that there is an intrinsic creative aspect to all spheres of human activity, including the cognitive. Slesinski, “Free Theurgy,” 138. In Soloviev’s defense, the ultimate purpose of his tripartite schemes is to illustrate

The use of the term “feeling” does serve another important purpose, however, since it connotes the passive and receptive dimension of human creativity and its divine-human or theurgic character. Although, as he admits, “creative feeling” (*tvorcheskoe chuvstvo*) might seem like a contradiction, “the point is that man, as a finite creature, cannot be an absolute creator, i.e., [he] cannot create from himself alone, and consequently his creativity necessarily presupposes the reception of higher creative powers in feeling.”⁵⁰⁴ But since human creativity is a free and conscious activity, it is not enough to receive “higher creative powers”; the artist must have immediate knowledge of the aesthetic ideal, what he had earlier attributed to artistic inspiration. Before one is able to “create in beauty” or “convert a non-ideal reality into an ideal one,” it is necessary to know the difference between them—to know not in abstract reflection, but “in the spontaneous (*neposredstvenni*, direct, immediate) feeling inherent to the artist.”⁵⁰⁵ As Soloviev argues in his essay on Tiutchev, this is a form of knowledge no less objective, and richer in content, than scientific knowledge and represents the epistemological reconciliation of thought and feeling. “The most perfect content of being, which philosophy attains as the truth of thought, and which reveals itself in ethical activity as the unconditional demand of conscience and duty, is revealed directly to artistic feeling in the form of tangible beauty.”⁵⁰⁶ This recognition, attraction, and reception of artistic inspiration as the intuitive knowledge of ideal beauty and creative power take on a form analogous to that of *eros*: it is a form of *ekstasis*, “leading us out of our habitual natural

distinction in unity, not separation. He emphasizes that, in reality, reason, will, and feeling always and only operate as a living unity, distinct but inseparable.

⁵⁰⁴ Solov'ev, *Filosofskie Nachala*, SS I: 262.

⁵⁰⁵ Here Soloviev clearly uses “feeling” as a synonym for “inspiration.” Solov'ev, *Obshchi Smysl' Iskusstva*, SS VI: 79.

⁵⁰⁶ Solov'ev, *Tiutchev*, SS VII: 364.

center and elevating us to a higher sphere.”⁵⁰⁷ But this, as well as the given talent of the artist, only makes authentic artistic creativity possible. True art is first and foremost a task or mission entrusted to human freedom and all the contingencies and limitations of human existence.

3.2 *Art as Redemptive Task*

Soloviev agrees with what he calls the accidental and partial insight of the “realists and utilitarians” of his time, namely, that “the aesthetically sublime should lead to *a real improvement of reality*.”⁵⁰⁸ Ideal content (goodness and truth) insofar as it only exists as the intrinsic property of the spirit, its will and intellect, lacks beauty. And, as Soloviev never tires of emphasizing, “the absence of beauty is the impotence of the idea.”⁵⁰⁹ If it is to “improve” reality, artistic creativity must not be separated from the sphere of faith and morals, which alone provide the universal criteria for truth and goodness. And since our present “reality” itself is in a state of becoming, we can only discern its degrees of “improvement” against the eschatological horizon of the kingdom of God, the perfect incarnation of divine Love or all-unity (*vseedinstvo*). As such, he interprets “improving reality” as a free and *theurgic* task, and interprets the fallen world’s desire for redemption as primarily an aesthetic problem.

⁵⁰⁷ Solov'ev, *Filosofskie Nachala*, SS I: 319.

⁵⁰⁸ Solov'ev, *Krasota*, SS VI: 33 (emphasis in original).

⁵⁰⁹ Solov'ev, *Obshchi Smysl' Iskusstva*, SS VI: 81.

The task of art, in principle, is to liberate natural creation to “share in the glorious freedom of the children of God,”⁵¹⁰ to transform physical life into spiritual life, to animate and perpetuate natural beauty in its individual phenomena, and to incarnate the most profound aspects of the Idea that lie beyond the capacity of material nature. This can only be done, he argues, if two aesthetic criteria are met: namely, if the materialization of a spiritual essence, and the spiritualization of a material phenomenon, are perfect and complete, “without confusion or separation,” resulting in the spiritual or ideal essence becoming the inseparable form of the material phenomenon. The redemptive necessity of this incarnation is found in a third criterion that flows from these first two: “a material phenomenon, having really become beautiful, i.e., having really incarnated in itself the idea, ought to become as enduring and immortal as the idea itself.”⁵¹¹ In other words, contrary to Hegelian aesthetics, Soloviev believes that beautiful phenomena are not transitory appearances of Spirit, destined to be absorbed in an absolute spiritual subject, but are rather “flashes” of the universal Resurrection, the kingdom of God, in which natural and created beauties are not absorbed and superseded but preserved and perfected. As von Balthasar rightly observes, for Soloviev aesthetics and eschatology necessarily coincide in practical terms because “if God has become man in Christ, the kingdom of God does not break in ‘unilaterally’ from above and from outside; it must necessarily grow to maturity just as much from within.”⁵¹²

⁵¹⁰ “For creation awaits with eager expectation the revelation of the children of God; for creation was made subject to futility, not of its own accord but because of the one who subjected it, in hope that creation itself would be set free from slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God.” Romans 8:23

⁵¹¹ Solov'ev, *Obshchi Smysl' Iskusstva*, SS VI: 82.

⁵¹² Von Balthasar, 284.

The “highest task of art” is not limited to individual phenomena but aims at the perfected incarnation of the “spiritual fullness of our reality,” which includes all things in all-one unity. But, he concludes, since it is clear that “the fulfillment of this task must coincide with the conclusion of the entire world process,”⁵¹³ and the perfect incarnation of the Idea as absolute beauty in “a new heaven and a new earth” is inseparable from the descent of the new Jerusalem “prepared as a bride adorned for her husband,”⁵¹⁴ artistic creativity is limited to historical existence.⁵¹⁵ Even if there appeared a poet greater than Goethe or Shakespeare, who expressed with poetic perfection the absolute ideal, Soloviev declares, this miracle of poetry would remain, in the midst of actual reality, only a “magnificent mirage in a waterless desert” and could not slake our spiritual thirst.⁵¹⁶ Since the ultimate task of “perfect art” ought to be “the incarnation of the absolute ideal, not only in imagination, but in actual fact, to spiritualize and transubstantiate our actual life,”⁵¹⁷ art as we know it must be understood as “an inspired *prophecy*.”⁵¹⁸

3.3 “Perfect Art” and the Universal Church

Expressing his opinion that the known forms of art had already been perfected, Soloviev concludes that if art has a future it can only be “in an entirely new sphere of

⁵¹³ Solov'ev, *Obshchi Smysl' Iskusstva*, SS VI: 84.

⁵¹⁴ “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The former heaven and the former earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. I also saw the holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.” Revelation 21:1-3

⁵¹⁵ Solov'ev, *Obshchi Smysl' Iskusstva*, SS VI: 84-85.

⁵¹⁶ This is the central theme of his essay on Russia's greatest poet, Alexander Pushkin. Despite his poetic genius, Pushkin could not overcome the contradiction between the poetic ideal and everyday reality, and “either did not know how or did not want to become a practical, ideal, and active servant of good and a reformer of reality.” See Solov'ev, *Sud'ba Pushkina*, SS IX: 33-61. Pushkin's fate will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

⁵¹⁷ Solov'ev, *Obshchi Smysl' Iskusstva*, SS VI: 90.

⁵¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 84 (emphasis in original).

activity.”⁵¹⁹ What does he mean by this?⁵²⁰ In *The Critique of Abstract Principles*, he defines “free theurgy” as the integral unity of human creativity on the material level (technical arts), formal level (fine arts), and the absolute level, “the mystical” (*mistika*).⁵²¹ All three share the subjective principle of “feeling” and not “cognition” or the “active will.” All three have as their means “imagination” (*voobrazhenie*, representation), and not “thought” or “external activity.” All three presuppose “ecstatic inspiration” (*ekstatischeskoe vdokhnovlenie*). Finally, all three participate in their own distinct ways in the same universal task: the aesthetic realization of the absolute Idea in empirical, natural, and human reality.⁵²² Since the unconditionally ideal fullness of beauty exists in the “ideal world,” transcending the natural and the human spheres, Soloviev calls any creative relationship of human “feeling” to this transcendent world “*mystical*.”⁵²³ Thus, it is clear in context that what he is referring to as the “new sphere of activity” of art is what he elsewhere calls “perfect art,” “religious art,” or according to his tripartite scheme, to that form of “art,” which corresponds to “the mystical” (*mistika*).

For Soloviev, “the mystic is always considered to be at the summit of human creativity,”⁵²⁴ insofar as the experience of “the mystical” designates “intercourse

⁵¹⁹ He goes on to say that “the future development of aesthetic creativity depends on the general course of history since art in general is the sphere of the incarnation of ideas and not their original generation and growth.” *Ibid.*, 90.

⁵²⁰ While he may have had in mind as yet undiscovered forms of fine art, it is more likely in context that he was referring to a sphere other than the entire formal level of fine art in general. Needless to say, he did not foresee the advent of various forms of art made possible by new technologies, such as photography and film. Given his aesthetic criteria for beauty in art, it is not improbable that he would have judged the art of film to be the highest form of formal artistic creativity since its content is expressed as an undivided and harmonious whole through a diversity of artistic forms.

⁵²¹ Solov'ev, *Filosofskie Nachala*, SS I: 264.

⁵²² Solov'ev, *Kritika*, SS II: 352-53.

⁵²³ Solov'ev, *Filosofskie Nachala*, SS I: 263.

⁵²⁴ Slesinski, “Free Theurgy,” 141.

(*obshchenie*) with the higher world by way of *interior creative activity*.”⁵²⁵ In his *Brockhaus* encyclopedia article on “the mystical and mysticism,” he writes that “the mystical,” insofar as it is “real” or “experiential,” includes “active mysticism.” He then makes it clear that in order for this to be “entirely orthodox” it must conform to the principles of mystical theology as found in the Victorines, Bonaventure, and Teresa of Avila, and cannot be separated from the “moral conditions” necessary for union with God.⁵²⁶ Thus, it is possible to conclude with Stremoukhoff that according to Soloviev “perfect art” must refer to a kind of “creative mysticism.”⁵²⁷

As was seen above, the absolute level of being coincides with Trinitarian life, all-unity existing as a *communio personarum* of Love.⁵²⁸ Therefore, as the universal task of divine-humanity, creative mysticism’s “work of art,” insofar as its object is the incarnation of the Idea, can only be the Universal Church, and its subjective principle, the “feeling” proper to it, can only be Love. In other words, the sphere of “perfect art” is universal insofar as it is ecclesial and the divine Beauty that it seeks to incarnate is *Sophia*, who reveals herself “as a bride adorned for her husband.”⁵²⁹ However, as Soloviev writes in *The Meaning of Love*, while “for God His *other* ... has always had the image of perfect feminine ... He desires that this image be not only for Him, but that it be realized and incarnated for

⁵²⁵ Solov'ev, *Filosofskie Nachala*, SS I: 263 (emphasis added). Soloviev further clarifies his use of the term “the mystical” (*mistika*) here in a footnote: “We need to make a strict distinction between the mystical and mysticism: the former is the direct, unmediated relationship of our spirit to the transcendent world, the latter is only the reflection of our mind on that relationship, and represents a particular direction in philosophy, about which we will speak later. *The mystical* and *mysticism* are related to each other like, for example, *the empirical* and *empiricism*.”

⁵²⁶ Solov'ev, *Mistika*, SS X: 244-45.

⁵²⁷ Stremoukhoff, 306.

⁵²⁸ See above pp. 104-09.

⁵²⁹ Revelation 21:2.

each individual being capable of uniting with it.”⁵³⁰ Thus the meaning of sexual-spousal love is found in the free and divine-human incarnation of this same “great mystery” in the *individual* life of humanity. As Stremoukhoff concludes, “the task of love has the same definition as the work of art ... and it makes up one of the most important parts of the great and mysterious art ... which aims for the restoration of the image of God, or, as Soloviev will later say, divinization [*theosis*],” the process of “free theurgy.”⁵³¹

⁵³⁰ Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 46 (emphasis in original).

⁵³¹ Stremoukhoff, 310.

PART THREE

CHAPTER VI

The General Meaning of Human Love

Emil Brunner's assertion that the doctrine of *imago Dei* "decides the destiny of all theology"⁵³² certainly seems warranted when considering Soloviev's theological anthropology and free theurgy vis-à-vis human love. In late nineteenth-century Russia's public debate about love and sexuality (much like today), what was at stake was not only the very nature of human personhood, but what constituted authentic Christianity. The two major authorities on the subject—Schopenhauer, with his impersonal *Wille zum Leben*, and Leo Tolstoy, with his disembodied and moralistic Christian philosophy—provoked Soloviev to defend an authentic Christian anthropology by attempting to define the meaning of sexual-spousal love in the context of a complete Christian understanding of man and woman as *imago Dei*.⁵³³ As Meerson has shown, this comprehensive theory is in large part the fruit of Soloviev's retrieval of Christian Neoplatonic exemplarism through the prism of medieval love mysticism. This retrieval of the past allowed Soloviev to emphasize both the subjective and material aspects of human personhood that were presupposed both in the doctrine of incarnation (*voploshchenie*) and in his theory of *theosis* (*obozhenie*).

⁵³² Quoted in Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory, Vol. II: Dramatis Personae: Man in God* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 264. The truth of Brunner's assertion is affirmed by both von Balthasar and Barth, who decried the absence of the *imago Dei* in modern works of dogmatic theology. See von Balthasar, *Man in God*, 317 and Marc Cardinal Ouellet, *Divine Likeness: Toward a Trinitarian Anthropology of the Family* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 26.

⁵³³ For a summary of Schopenhauer's influence on Soloviev, see G. A. Time, "The Metaphysics of Sexual Love as Metalove: From A. Schopenhauer to V. Solov'ev," *Studies in Philosophy* 46, no. 1 (2007), 64-75. For comprehensive and insightful summaries of Soloviev's polemics with Tolstoy and how they influenced *The Meaning of Love* see Emerson, 663-71 and Moller.

In order to understand the general meaning of love, basic terms will need to be examined carefully, the meaning of key concepts will need to be explored, and the relationship between each of the distinct terms and concepts will need to be laid out. After this clarification of Soloviev's terminology, his critique of Schopenhauer and how it leads to his personalist understanding of the meaning of human love will be analyzed. His general definition of the meaning of love as "the *justification* and *redemption* of individuality (personhood, *individualnost*) through the sacrifice of egoism,"⁵³⁴ will be investigated in this analysis. Finally, his justification for designating sexual-spousal love as its unique "ideal and type" will also be considered.

1. THE CHALLENGE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF TERMINOLOGY

The few modern Christian philosophers and theologians who have risked reflecting seriously on the meaning of love have all consciously endeavored, with varying degrees of success, to adopt a terminology that captures its ideal essence without excluding any of its phenomenological complexity.⁵³⁵ Soloviev is no exception in this regard. He understood

⁵³⁴ Soloviev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 16.

⁵³⁵ The ambiguities and difficulties associated with the conceptual language of love have always plagued modern philosophy and theology. See the introduction to C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1971), 1-9 and Pieper's linguistic survey of the terms in various languages (Greek, Latin, German, French, and English) used to describe the phenomenon of love in Josef Pieper, *Faith, Hope, Love*, trans., Richard and Clara Winston (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997), 145-62. The terminological difficulties encountered by Lewis and Pieper have only become more acute today. In his recent study, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, Jean-Luc Marion observes that philosophers have "forsaken love, dismissed it without a concept and finally thrown it to the dark and worried margins of their sufficient reasons—along with the repressed, the unsaid, and the unmentionable." Theology, on the contrary, "knows what love is all about; but it knows it too well ever to avoid imposing upon me an interpretation that comes so directly through the Passion that it annuls my passions—without taking the time to render justice to their phenomenality, or to give a meaning to their immanence." As a result, "not only do we no longer have a concept of love, but we do not even have a word to say it. 'Love'? It resonates as the most prostituted word there is..." Jean-Luc Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, trans., Stephen E. Lewis (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 1-3. In his 2005 Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict XVI agrees that if the subject of love is

love itself to be one in essence and therefore an analogous term; but he chooses to approach the meaning of human love in general through what he argues is its paradigmatic type, ideal, or form, which he terms “sexual-spousal love” (*polovaia-supruzheskaia liubov*).⁵³⁶ This approach has led some to conclude that Soloviev had left behind his Russian Orthodox faith and was attempting to craft some sort of heterodox philosophy of *eros*. Scholars such as Eugene Trubetskoi and Matich represent the most reductive and critical interpretation of Soloviev’s theory of love, dismissing it as in essence nothing more than his own fantastical “erotic utopia.”⁵³⁷ Stremoukhoff, in contrast, gives an accurate, albeit extremely abridged, summary of how Soloviev’s theory encompasses the meaning of “sexual love” (*polovaia liubov*) within the Christian meaning of “spousal love” (*supruzheskaia liubov*) and “true marriage” (*istinny brak*). The same affirmation of Soloviev’s Christian orthodoxy vis-à-vis sexual-spousal love or is found in recent Catholic interpretation, as will be seen below in the works of Scola and von Balthasar. In order to discern which of these interpretations most accurately reflects the substance of Soloviev’s theory of love, it is necessary first to arrive at a definition of his terms, including their context, intended meaning, and inherent limitations.

A careful and comprehensive analysis of his terminology, not only in *The Meaning of Love* and *The Life Drama of Plato* but in all relevant texts (*The Justification of the Good*,

broached “we immediately find ourselves hampered by a problem of language” because today “the term ‘love’ has become one of the most frequently used and misused of words, a word to which we attach quite different meanings.” Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, Encyclical Letter on God is love (December 25, 2005), 2.

⁵³⁶ Soloviev’s conviction that human love is essentially one in essence is grounded in patristic and medieval Tradition and has been confirmed by recent Catholic scholarship, which is in part a response to Nygren’s influential critique of the Augustinian-Thomistic “caritas synthesis.” Cf. Pieper, 157-63 and Scola, *The Nuptial Mystery*, 55-59.

⁵³⁷ Matich’s study is the best example of this, since she incorporates aspects of Trubetskoi’s critique and borrows his phrase “erotic utopia.” Trubetskoi’s early twentieth-century critique stems from a theological vision heavily influenced by the Reform tradition, the same tradition that later informed Nygren’s critique of *eros*. Matich, writing in the late 1970s, does not take Christian orthodoxy as a criterion of judgment, but analyzes Soloviev’s ideas from a psychological and sociological point of view. See Matich, “The Meaning of *The Meaning of Love*,” 57-88. See also Stremoukhoff, 306-13.

La Russie et L'Église Universelle, and his *Brockhaus* encyclopedia article on love), reveals that for him the most adequate term to describe the essential and ideal meaning of love between man and woman is “spousal love” (*supruzheskaia liubov*). For him, this term presumes the divine-human reality of sacramental marriage and affirms and encompasses the natural, human, and divine aspects of love between man and woman. The purely natural and human phenomenon of “sexual love” (*polovaia liubov*) or *eros* is fully revealed and realized in true “spousal love.” Nevertheless, in order to be faithful to his methodology in each particular work, the following analysis will retain the three different terms he uses to refer to different aspects of love between man and woman, namely, sexual love (*polovaia liubov*), *eros*, and spousal love (*supruzheskaia liubov*).

The terminology Soloviev employs in *The Meaning of Love* reflects the venue and purpose of its publication. He chose to publish his ideas in an academic journal devoted to questions in philosophy and psychology in order to respond publicly to Leo Tolstoy’s argument in *The Kreutzer Sonata* that “being in love” (*vliublionost*) is an “unhealthy delusion” and a “valueless, egoistic feeling that led one away from Christian love of one’s neighbor.”⁵³⁸ Within this context of polemical journalism, Soloviev’s dilemma is to find a term that captures the human phenomenon in question, while avoiding reductive or misleading connotations. For example, the Russian term for “being in love,” *vliublionost*, which can also mean mere “infatuation,” is too weak to bear the full weight of what he wants to express, although he does use this expression on occasion with certain

⁵³⁸ Moller argues that “Solov’ev brought the tradition into the current debate on sexual morality in an original attempt at explaining the Christian meaning of the sexual love that Tolstoj had repudiated.” See Moller, 285.

qualifications.⁵³⁹ He also avoids the terms “romantic love,” “erotic love,” and even *eros* itself, most likely because their already well-known literary and philosophical connotations leave little room for his own original definition of love between man and woman,⁵⁴⁰ which seeks to give theological significance to its concrete phenomenality, and implicitly integrates traditional notions of *eros* (*amor ascendens*), as well as *agape* (*amor descendens*).⁵⁴¹ In the end, he himself admits that he is simply not able to find a satisfactory term for what he intends to convey, explaining in a footnote that he chose “sexual love” (*polovaia liubov*) to articulate his ideas in *The Meaning of Love* “for want of a better term.”⁵⁴²

His lack of enthusiasm for this term is not without good reason. In Russian, the root of *polovaia* is *pol*, meaning “sex” as in “gender,” and thus can also refer to such things as “sexual attraction” (*polovoe vlechenie*) or “sexual intercourse” (*polovaia sviaz*), which in Soloviev’s case presume the male-female relation. “The point,” Russian philosopher Aleksei Losev points out, “is that in Russian, ‘sexual’ (*polovaia*) sounds too naturalistic and prosaic. This term is more biological, physiological, and not even sufficiently psychological, but rather every-day and narrow-minded.”⁵⁴³ Despite these unavoidable limitations, of which he

⁵³⁹ Russian also has more general terms for “sex” (*seks*) and “sexual” (*seksualny*), which contain the same nuances commonly found in English and which Soloviev avoids for obvious reasons.

⁵⁴⁰ Soloviev states explicitly in *The Meaning of Love* that he is the first to propose a solution to the “problem of love,” i.e., to the discrepancy between the subjective and objective significance of the phenomenon of sexual love. “The problem of love has never been consciously presented and, therefore, has never been solved as it ought to have been.” Solov’ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 24-25.

⁵⁴¹ See *Ibid.*, 46.

⁵⁴² *Ibid.*, 22.

⁵⁴³ A. F. Losev, *Vladimir Solov’ev I Ego Vremia [Vladimir Solovyev and His Time]* (Moscow: Molodaia Gvardiia, 2000), 561. Losev himself suggests the term “sophianic love” (*sofinaia liubov*) because Soloviev “tolerated neither abstract idealism nor naked materialism, and in place of all of this created the theory of Sophia, in which wisdom and the transfiguration of matter merged into one undivided, spiritualized-personal, and definitely spiritualized-social whole.” Losev, *Vladimir Solov’ev I Ego Vremia [Vladimir Solovyev and His*

certainly was aware, Soloviev attempts to define the term so as better to serve his own purposes, treating it as a neutral, objective term that has yet to receive definitive content. Thus, at the outset of his argument, he defines the term “sexual love” as “the exclusive attachment (both mutual as well as one-sided) between persons of a different sex (*pol*), which makes possible between them the relation of husband and wife.”⁵⁴⁴ His emphasis on “persons of a different sex,” “exclusive attachment,” and the “relation of husband and wife,” as opposed to a more abstract, non-exclusive erotic attachment between a man and woman, alludes to the more adequate and inclusive term he employs elsewhere: “spousal love” (*supruzheskaia liubov*).

While it is true that the term “spousal love” appears only once in *The Meaning of Love*,⁵⁴⁵ Soloviev almost always qualifies and clarifies “sexual love” in other contexts by juxtaposing it with the term “spousal love” (*supruzheskaia liubov*). For example, in his encyclopedia article on love he consistently refers to the meaning of love between man and woman as “sexual or spousal love” (*polovaia ili supruzheskaia liubov*), associating its ideal essence with the “spousal union” (*supruzheskaia sviaz*) between God and the Chosen People in the Old Testament, and with the “marriage (*brak*) of the ‘Lamb’ to His bride—the illuminated and triumphant Church, the ‘New Jerusalem’ in the New Testament.”⁵⁴⁶ The notion of the inseparability of the meaning of “sexual love” and the love proper to sacramental marriage, what he often calls simply “true marriage” (*istinny brak*), is also

Time], 561. It will be argued here that such an esoteric term is not necessary once Soloviev’s notion of true conjugal love (*supruzheskaia liubov*) is understood.

⁵⁴⁴ Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 22.

⁵⁴⁵ Towards the end of *The Meaning of Love*, he writes that “the foundation and type of this true life remains and always will remain sexual or conjugal love” (emphasis added). Ibid., 57.

⁵⁴⁶ Solov'ev, “Mirovaia Dusha,” SS X: 236-37.

explicitly articulated in *The Spiritual Foundations of Life, La Russie et L'Église Universelle*, and most extensively in *The Justification of the Good*.⁵⁴⁷ In the latter, he makes it clear that the true meaning of “sexual love” is fully revealed and realized only when, in cooperation with human freedom, it is “transubstantiated” (*presushchestvlaietsia*) through grace in the sacrament of marriage.⁵⁴⁸ Moreover, in the same work he refers the reader directly to both *The Meaning of Love* and *The Life Drama of Plato* for his teaching—not on “sexual love” (*polovaia liubov*) *per se*—but rather on *marriage* (*brak*) “in its highest spiritual sense,” the “great mystery,” which he cites from Ephesians 5:32, and what he calls “the mystical meaning of matrimony” (*supruzhestvo*), perfecting and transforming all that is indicated by the term “sexual love.”⁵⁴⁹ Based on this alone, the relative infrequency of the term “spousal love” (*supruzheskaia liubov*) belies its significance, which will only be fully demonstrated by delving more deeply into the theory itself. “Spousal love” (*supruzheskaia liubov*) is therefore the most inclusive term he employs in connection with the true meaning of love between man and woman.

His use of the term *eros* to articulate his theory of love in *The Life Drama of Plato* is of only secondary terminological importance. Soloviev’s intention in this work is not to make the term his own—this is the only instance where he employs *eros* in the context of his theory—but rather to reflect on Plato’s life and philosophy in Platonic terms. Plato uses the term *eros*, as opposed to *philia*, *agape*, and *storge*, in the *Phaedrus* and *The Symposium* to

⁵⁴⁷ For a brief summary of the “catholic and divine sacrament of marriage,” see Solov'ev, *Dukhovnie Osnovi Zhizni*, SS III: 399. For a more detailed account of the “sacrament of marriage” or “true marriage” see Soloviev, *La Russie*, 295-97; and for the most comprehensive treatment, in the context of his ethics, see Solov'ev, *Opravdanie*, SS VIII: 353-57.

⁵⁴⁸ Solov'ev, *Opravdanie*, SS VIII: 353-57.

⁵⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 80.

describe what Soloviev speculates was a life-changing experience of love.⁵⁵⁰ In the context of Soloviev's own theory, *eros* may be interpreted simply as a synonym for "sexual love" (*polovaia liubov*), since in both cases the underlying human reality being signified is the same. Regarding the strictly Platonic notion of *eros*, Soloviev argues that without the active power of the divine principle (grace), its promise and exalted task to unify heaven and earth, the ideal and the real, can only lead to frustration and disillusionment. The revelation of *eros* remained for Plato merely an unrealizable "mental image."⁵⁵¹ "The way of higher love, which perfectly unites male and female, the spiritual with the physical," Soloviev concludes (thereby "baptizing" Plato's insight into the meaning of *eros*) "is necessarily by its very principle the unification or interaction of the divine and the human, or a *divine-human* (*bogochelovechesky*) process."⁵⁵²

For the purposes of the present study, Soloviev's terminology will be adhered to according to its immediate context and in light of his theory as a whole. Before proceeding, it is worth reiterating the English connotations of the translations employed in this dissertation that might muddy Soloviev's intended meaning. "Sexual love" (*polovaia liubov*) refers only to what is "sexual" broadly speaking, referring exclusively to that which concerns relations between a man and woman in their totality.⁵⁵³ Contemporary English's more common and abstract meaning of "sexual," which would be the equivalent of the Russian *seksualnaia*, would be a misleading reduction. The term *eros* will be used as a

⁵⁵⁰ See Solov'ev, *Zhiznennaia Drama Platona*, SS IX: 229-30.

⁵⁵¹ Ibid., 231.

⁵⁵² Ibid., 234. For Soloviev, the "divine-human process" is inseparable from its essential Christological and ecclesiological dimensions.

⁵⁵³ Scola identifies the problematic nature of contemporary terminology, which becomes evident when translating Soloviev's term *polovaia liubov* when he writes that the terms "male/female," "sexual difference," or "gender" are "not altogether synonymous" and that a "difference in expression can be a way of insinuating an ideological reduction of the reality of things." Scola, *The Nuptial Mystery*, 89.

transliteration from the Greek to signify, as this term does for Soloviev, “sexual love.” Since the ideal meaning of “sexual love” is contained in the term “spousal love” (*supruzheskaia liubov*), it should be kept in mind that the elements of “sexual love” and “natural marriage” are for him that which must be transformed through a free, divine-human process of purification, “spiritualization” (*odukhotvorenie*), and *theosis* (*obozhenie*).⁵⁵⁴

2. SOLOVIEV’S PERSONALIST PARADIGM SHIFT

The unprecedented personalist shift in *The Meaning of Love* begins at the outset, in Soloviev’s critique of what he calls Schopenhauer’s “witty though unfounded theory of sexual love” formulated in the latter’s *Metaphysik der Liebe*.⁵⁵⁵ According to Meerson, the entire relational understanding of personhood is first introduced into Russian thought here, through Soloviev’s polemic against Schopenhauer’s philosophy and the absolute role it assigns to an impersonal *Wille zum Leben* vis-à-vis human love.⁵⁵⁶ At the outset of Soloviev’s argument, he temporarily brackets “ideal considerations,” employing instead poetic, scientific, and biblical discourse to present his argument. He reasons that the commonly accepted causal connection between sexual love and procreation, even when it is filtered through Schopenhauer’s notion of individualization, cannot be confirmed through empirical observation because such a connection does not exist. By pointing out the false

⁵⁵⁴ See Solov'ev, *Opravdanie*, SS VIII: 454.

⁵⁵⁵ Solov'ev, "Mirovaia Dusha," SS X: 237-38.

⁵⁵⁶ Meerson, who analyzed the roots of Soloviev’s personalism in detail, writes that his “discussion of Schopenhauer introduces the relational understanding of personality into Russian thought. Contemporary Russian scholars view Solov’ev’s treatment of the I-Thou relationship (or rather Solov’ev’s criticism of Schopenhauer’s treatment at this point) as an anticipation of the subsequent Russian development of the “I-Thou” relational philosophy of personhood in Florensky, Bulgakov, and especially Bakhtin, a Russian literary critic.” Meerson, 87.

presumptions underlying Schopenhauer's theory, he arrives at a *reductio ad absurdum* that he believes only a personalist alternative can resolve.⁵⁵⁷

Soloviev submits two “facts of natural history” to illustrate why believing the meaning of sexual love, in its strict sense, to be nothing more than the “increase of the race, for which it serves as a means”⁵⁵⁸ is objectively unfounded.⁵⁵⁹ First, since procreation exists in nature apart from sexual difference—parthenogenesis, for example—the significance of sexual difference, let alone sexual love, cannot be explained away solely by procreation as an exigency of organic life. Since only among “higher organisms” is sexual difference linked to reproduction, its meaning ought to be sought if anywhere in the distinctive idea of the latter. Second, as we ascend in the hierarchy of organisms we find a steadily increasing inverse ratio between the multiplication of the species (fish) to the constancy of sexual relations (birds) or intensity of passion (mammals). Therefore, he concludes, since we find sexual reproduction without any individual sexual love or attachment on the lowest level of animal life, and individual sexual love or attachment without any reproduction on the highest level (humanity), “then it is perfectly clear that these two phenomena cannot be ordered in indissoluble connection with each other—it is clear that each of them has its own

⁵⁵⁷ It is important to recall that for Soloviev sexual reproduction (*polovoe ramnozhenie*) as such belongs to the natural, animal part of postlapsarian human nature. In this state, humanity is only preserved through the sacrifice of the individual for the sake of the species in an futile cycle of life and death. See Solov'ev, *Dukhovnie Osnovi Zhizni*, SS III: 306-10. For a summary of the Greek patristic view of original sin, see Kelly, 348-52.

⁵⁵⁸ Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 3.

⁵⁵⁹ Soloviev incorporated nineteenth-century Darwinism into his vision of divine-humanity and that in place of a blind evolutionary tendency he sees the free activity of the *Logos* progressively transforming chaos to cosmos from within.

independent meaning, and that the meaning of one cannot consist in its being the means of the other.”⁵⁶⁰

Schopenhauer and Soloviev both agree that only in the human being is sexual love fully individualized, where “*just this* person of the opposite sex has for the one who loves an unconditional meaning as unique and irreplaceable, as an end in herself.”⁵⁶¹ What Soloviev rejects is the notion that “a power unknown”—“Nature” or “the will of the universe” or the Schopenhauerian *Wille zum Leben*—manufactures and manipulates what amounts to the *delusion* of individualized sexual love, solely as a means to forward its own absolute and universal “avowed aims, which are foreign to us personally.”⁵⁶² These aims remain foreign and external to us despite their not being limited to the multiplication of the species, but to the procreation of “the most perfect specimens of the race,”⁵⁶³ which is what necessitates the illusory significance of individuality.⁵⁶⁴

Turning to the exclusively human phenomena of procreation and sexual love and their ostensible intrinsic relationship, Soloviev chooses to illustrate his argument with examples from the “great works of poetry” since he reasons that, unlike isolated, individual manifestations of sexual love in actual life, true poetry is capable of expressing pure, “whole types” (*tselye tipy*).⁵⁶⁵ For Soloviev the indisputable fact of artistic inspiration

⁵⁶⁰ Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 7.

⁵⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 5 (emphasis in original).

⁵⁶² *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵⁶³ Solov'ev, “Mirovaia Dusha,” SS X: 238.

⁵⁶⁴ “But whenever two people fall in love, however objective and touched even by the sublime their admiration may seem, nature’s sole intention is the procreation of an individual of specific qualities.” Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*, trans., Jill Berman (London: Everyman, 1995), 265.

⁵⁶⁵ Soloviev’s conviction about the truth of poetic types raises complex questions about the nature and verity of poetic discourse itself, which are beyond the scope of the present study to address. It is certainly worth noting that Denis de Rougemont concludes the exact opposite in his extensive study on the origins of the notion of romantic love in the West. Beginning with the myth of *The Romance of Tristan and Iseult*, he argues that this

(*vdokhnovlenie*) proves that we can acquire immediate knowledge of “integral ideas”

(*tselnaia ideia*) through intellectual intuition. He argues that the “ideal images” manifested or incarnated (*vplashchaiutsia*) by artists in their work cannot be mere reproductions of observed phenomena in their particular actuality, nor intelligible abstractions from this same actuality; otherwise anyone who observes and contemplates, every scholar and thinker, would be a true artist, which is not the case. “Everyone who is somewhat acquainted with the process of creative work knows well,” he insists, “that artistic ideas and images ... are revealed to the mind’s eye all at once in their interior totality,” and, therefore, that “the work of the artist is reduced solely to their development and incarnation (*voploshchenie*) in material details.”⁵⁶⁶ He continues:

Therefore, it follows that:

a genuine artistic image or type undeniably requires the interior union of perfect individuality with perfect generality or universality, and that such a union even constitutes the essential sign or attribute of a genuine, mentally contemplated idea, as distinct from an abstract concept, to which belongs only generality, and from a particular phenomenon, to which belongs only individuality. Thus, if the subject of art cannot be either a particular phenomenon, accessible to external observation, or a general concept produced by reflection, then this subject can only be an integral idea (*tselnaia ideia*) that is revealed to intellectual contemplation or intuition.⁵⁶⁷

Just as each cognitive faculty in Soloviev’s epistemology of integral knowledge is inherently limited to its own sphere, so artistic or poetic intuition of concrete or “integral ideas” of phenomena only pertains to the “ideal periphery” of reality. In this sphere, “integral ideas” are accessible only insofar as they reveal themselves to the artist or poet in

notion was inspired by a heretical “Eros-inspired” theology that was *fabricated* and popularized by the troubadours and poets of medieval Provence so as to become the dominant myth in western culture. See Denis de Rougemont, *Love in the Western World*, trans., Montgomery Belgion (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983).

⁵⁶⁶ Solov'ev, *Filosofskie Nachala*, SS I: 318.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid., 318-19.

immediate, concrete, sensory phenomena, and thus artistic and poetic images and types are only able to express “this or that idea considered separately, and independently of its relationship to everything else.”⁵⁶⁸ Jean-Luc Marion, describing this same limitation, writes that “poetry can tell me about the experience I have not known how to articulate, and thus liberate me from my erotic aphasia—but it will never make me understand love conceptually.”⁵⁶⁹ Thus, by citing the poetic types of sexual love found in Goethe’s *Werther*, Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, or Nikolai Gogol’s *Athanasia Ivanovitch and Pulcheria Ivanovna*, Soloviev’s intention is to integrate a discourse that, while inherently limited, is capable of bringing to bear on his argument the full weight of the universal-concrete phenomenality of sexual love.⁵⁷⁰

If Schopenhauer’s theory is correct, then the rare manifestations of the most intense sort of sexual love, represented by pure poetic types such as those of Goethe and Shakespeare, ought to result in the most superior of human offspring; but this is far from the case. “In real experience,” Soloviev writes, “not even the smallest hints of this view can be found.”⁵⁷¹ On the contrary, the *Wille zum Leben*, ostensibly responsible for inspiring and

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid., 319.

⁵⁶⁹ Marion, 1.

⁵⁷⁰ On the limitations of poetry in relation to the understanding of sexual love, see Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 65. See also his essay on the Polish poet, Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855) in Solov'ev, *Mitskevich*, SS IX: 258. Nevertheless, Soloviev would surely agree with Pieper, who, having cited examples from Goethe and Dante description of sexual love’s transformative power, responds to a likely objection about this image of sexual love: “I would not be disconcerted if someone were to say at this point: All very well, those are the statements of poets and mean nothing in regard to ‘concrete reality’ (nor are they even meant to). The authentic poet, of course, is not one who naively or intentionally—like the sophist—embodies any wishful thinking that comes his way. The poet, to be sure, does not simply describe everyman’s empirical reality; but he brings to consciousness something that this everyman in his better moments can recognize as what he had all along dimly sensed, what at bottom he has long known and can corroborate. With the aid of the poet’s imagination we suddenly ‘know’: Ah, yes, things could happen this way in the world of men if—of course not ‘if men were all angels’, but if by a happy dispensation we were enabled to act out our true humanity, as happens in the case of love.” Pieper, 201.

⁵⁷¹ Solov'ev, “Mirovaia Dusha,” SS X: 238.

manipulating sexual love, actually seems intent on frustrating the very possibility of true lovers producing any posterity whatsoever. As a poet himself, Soloviev was well acquainted with love's so-called "delusion" of individualization and its "fatal misapprehension" that more often than not, he writes, drives lovers to suicidal despair, into monasteries, or to some other sort of unhappy and fruitless end.⁵⁷² In reality, strong sexual love is usually unrequited; when it is mutual, it often ends tragically without having produced offspring. When it is happy, mutual, and intense, it often still does not produce offspring. Finally, in those rare cases where it does produce offspring, they are entirely ordinary. He points out that persons who have had an exceptional impact on human history, such as Christopher Columbus, are usually born of average marital unions.⁵⁷³ Thus, he concludes, for the *Wille zum Leben*, as a substance that functions teleologically, "love's labor lost is an absolute absurdity."⁵⁷⁴

Soloviev does admit that there exists an omniscient and omnipotent power that directs the life of humanity and arranges for the procreation of offspring according to its own aims. This power, he says, is not a blind, impersonal, absolute *Wille*, but the free and personal mystery of Divine Providence. The way in which Providence achieves its aims through procreation could not be more clearly revealed than in the detailed accounts of Christ's ancestry, since in the Bible's authoritative account of sacred history we find a "true and profound realism." This, he argues, "does not exclude, but incarnates the ideal meaning

⁵⁷² Marion's justification of his own phenomenological approach demonstrates that personal experience of sexual love does not undermine one's objectivity but given the nature of love itself is a necessary prerequisite for being able to know or express anything at all about it. Considering philosophy's mistreatment and betrayal of love, he speculates that perhaps philosophers have never experienced it themselves. See Marion, 1, 9-10.

⁵⁷³ Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 8-9.

⁵⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

of facts in their empirical details.”⁵⁷⁵ Sketching the genealogy of Christ in broad strokes, he concludes that while we find manifestations of “exceptional, individualized, elevated sexual attraction” among the ancestors of the Messiah, this phenomenon has no direct bearing on the genealogy itself. For example, while Jesus descends from Jacob’s son, Judah, the latter is not the offspring of the beloved wife, Rachel, but the unloved wife, Leah. He cites several other examples among Christ’s ancestors as evidence that Divine Providence never “infringes on the freedom of ardent feeling” between lovers and uses “means of another sort altogether” to achieve his historical aims, from the arranged marriage of Isaac and Rebecca to the spontaneous and adulterous circumstances of King Solomon’s conception.

Therefore, “when subjective feeling tells us that love is an independent good, that it has its own unconditional value for our personal life, this feeling corresponds to the fact that in objective reality *strong individual love never occurs as an instrument of service for the aims of the race, which are achieved without it.*”⁵⁷⁶ This conclusion points to the heart of Soloviev’s objection to Schopenhauer, namely, that human persons, and that which is “thematic” of the person, can never be reduced to the “passive or transient means” to an impersonal or extrinsic end.⁵⁷⁷ Since sexual love, strictly speaking, “does not play any role in, nor have any effect on, the historical process, its meaning must be rooted in individual existence.”⁵⁷⁸ But if Soloviev believes that isolated individuality is a mere abstraction and that in actuality humanity is a supra-personal living whole whose *form* of existence is both

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid., 10.

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid., 11 (emphasis added).

⁵⁷⁷ See Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Man, Woman, and the Meaning of Love* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 2002), 12.

⁵⁷⁸ Soloviev, *Smysl*, 11-12. Soloviev’s personalist notion that the meaning of human sexuality was not primarily associated with procreation was adopted by subsequent Russian religious philosophers Nicholas Berdyaev (1874-1948), Dmitry Merezhkovsky (1865-1941) and his wife, the poet, Zinaida Gippius (1869-1945).

divine-human and all-one or Trinitarian,⁵⁷⁹ how does he understand “individual existence” vis-à-vis the positive meaning of sexual love?

2. HUMAN PERSONHOOD

When Soloviev rejects Schopenhauer’s impersonal *Wille zum Leben*, asserting that “the true purpose of the historical process is *not of such a nature* that human personality could serve merely as its passive and transient instrument,”⁵⁸⁰ he presupposes that this “historical process” is determined by Christ’s divine-humanity as its *causa finalis*. The personal incarnation of the divine *Logos* in Jesus Christ definitively reveals that human individuality or personhood (*individualnost*),⁵⁸¹ of which sexual-spousal love is the “highest flowering” and “most powerful expression,” possesses in itself “absolute worth” and “independent significance.”⁵⁸² He insists that the realization of perfect (free, conscious, interior) unity between the divine and the natural-human “without confusion, change, division, or separation” is such that it can only be accomplished in and by a *person (litso)*. The world’s *raison d’être* is revealed in divine love, which appears as a “living *personal* force” in Christ.⁵⁸³ For Soloviev, the individual human potentiality for *theosis*, actualized in the risen Christ, proves that “each human subject, as an independent center of living forces, as the potential (possibility) of eternal perfection, as a being who is able in consciousness

⁵⁷⁹ Soloviev describes the form of human existence as “messianic” and “trinitarian” in his chapter on “Messianic Man, Human Chaos, and the Primitive Elements of Trinitarian Society.” See Soloviev, *La Russie*, 268-69.

⁵⁸⁰ Soloviev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 17 (emphasis added).

⁵⁸¹ The Russian term, *individualnost* is usually translated “individuality,” which is certainly accurate. However, it can also be translated as “personhood,” which clarifies more effectively the contrast he draws between the “false individuality,” i.e., egoism, and “true individuality,” i.e., true personhood.

⁵⁸² Cf. “Man is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself.” *Gaudium et Spes*, 24.

⁵⁸³ Soloviev, *Dukhovnie Osnovi Zhizni*, SS III: 365 (emphasis in original).

and in his own life of containing absolute truth ... possesses unconditional meaning and worth.”⁵⁸⁴ Thus, the individuality of “Adam,” endowed as it is with the universal form of rational consciousness and freedom,⁵⁸⁵ cannot be the means to an impersonal, universal end because it is by definition that which realizes this universal end—divine-humanity—in and through *itself*: *persona est affirmanda per seipsam*. Soloviev illustrates this principle by developing certain elements of the biblical and patristic *imago Dei* and incorporating them into his own theological aesthetic of divine-humanity.

In *The Justification of the Good*, he maintains that the most fundamental distinction God inscribes in creation is between impersonal and personal being, which is analogous to the distinction between person (*hypostasis*) and nature (*ousia*) in the Trinitarian Godhead. While all that exists only does so by virtue of divine affirmation, in the first chapter of Genesis there are two distinct types of divine affirmation. All that God creates in the first five days he declares to be “good” (*tôv, kala*); but when he creates “Adam” according to his image, he declares him alone to be “very good” (*tôv mě’od, kala lian*).⁵⁸⁶ Soloviev interprets the distinction between “good” and “very good” as signifying the distinction between the value of impersonal being and personal being. Impersonal being is “good” in itself, but as comprising the world as a “system of conditions,” it exists to serve the full realization of those who possess personal being, who are willed by God as his “direct purpose” or “immediate end” and who as such belong to the “kingdom of ends” (*tsartsvo tselei*). Each human being is created to become a citizen “possessed of the full rights in the kingdom of

⁵⁸⁴ Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS III: 17.

⁵⁸⁵ “In order for an accord between the divine and natural principles to become an actuality in man himself, it is necessary that it be realized in one person.” Solov'ev, *Dukhovnie Osnovi Zhizni*, SS III: 369.

⁵⁸⁶ Cf. Genesis 1: 1-31.

ends,” because each individual possesses the capacity for *theosis*, a “full, conscious, and free union with the Godhead.”⁵⁸⁷ For Soloviev, this also explains why the “Wisdom of God looks after all of creation, but only finds her joy in the sons of man.”⁵⁸⁸

In *The Meaning of Love* he takes up this notion and argues that the unconditional value, dignity, and significance of human individuality is not based on self-conceit or empirical fact. Rather, it is revealed in the human person’s “absolute form (image, *obraz*) of *rational* consciousness.”⁵⁸⁹ Following Maximus the Confessor, he moves beyond the Christian Platonism of the Cappadocians, who identify human reason vis-à-vis *imago Dei* as primarily a capacity for *gnosis*. He argues that man, as a rational being, is able to not only recognize and grasp absolute Truth with its universal truths and norms, but to actualize and incarnate it in sensible human forms (as microcosm) and relate it to God (as mediator). Rational consciousness reveals man to be created in the *imago Dei* primarily because it reveals man’s capacity to realize the theandric dimension of the universe.⁵⁹⁰

According to his Trinitarian metaphysics, Soloviev understands absolute Truth to be a supra-personal divine reality distinct but inseparable from absolute Goodness and Beauty, all of which possess actuality only in their unity as divine Love or all-unity (*vseedinstvo*). Faithful to this vision, he describes the human capacity to know and realize universal truth not only in theoretical but also in moral and aesthetic terms as “setting a value on his condition and activity” in relation to “universal norms” (ethics), as well as incarnating all-

⁵⁸⁷ Solov'ev, *Opravdanie*, SS VIII: 201-02.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid., 201. Cf. Proverbs 8.

⁵⁸⁹ Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 12.

⁵⁹⁰ For the Cappadocian notion of *imago dei* vis-à-vis human reason, see Pelikan, *Christianity*, 120-35. Thunberg summarizes Maximus the Confessor’s vision of man’s vocation to realize the “five mediations,” already accomplished in and by Christ, in the following way: to overcome the divisions between the created and uncreated, the intelligible and the sensible, heaven and earth, paradise and the human world, and finally, the masculine and the feminine. See Thunberg, 80-91.

unity “in sensible forms” (creativity). Although man in his given actuality is only part of nature, he is continually and consistently infringing on these limits through his “spiritual offspring” of “religion and science, morality and art.” These reveal humanity as the “center of the universal consciousness of Nature, as the soul of the world, as realizing the potential of absolute all-unity (*vseedinstvo*).”⁵⁹¹ Anticipating twentieth-century Russian philosopher and literary critic, Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of “unfinalizability” as the distinctive characteristic of the unconditionality (*bezuslovnost*) of human personhood,⁵⁹² Soloviev insists that the human person may “infinitely improve his life and nature, *without departing from the boundaries of the human form*.”⁵⁹³ Once this is grasped, he concludes, the appearance of another universal form of existence would be nothing more than meaningless redundancy, which explains its absence.

Since the human capacity to know and realize truth is not only innate but *individual*, each human person “may become a living reflection of the absolute whole, a conscious and independent organ of universal life.”⁵⁹⁴ But this assertion is limited to the sphere of *potentiality*,⁵⁹⁵ in which the *imago Dei* is but the empty *form* that has yet to receive “absolute content”—his “free theosophical” term for divine life or grace (*blagodat*)—and be realized in actuality as *imago Dei*. As he argues in *Lectures on Divine-Humanity*, “the

⁵⁹¹ Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 14.

⁵⁹² The notion of “unfinalizability” is developed in the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans., Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). The correspondences between Soloviev and Bakhtin’s personalist anthropology, explained in part by the influence of the former on the latter, are discussed in Alan Jacobs, “Bakhtin and the Hermeneutics of Love,” in *Bakhtin and Religion: A Feeling for Faith*, ed. Susan M. Felch and Paul J. Contino (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2001).

⁵⁹³ Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 12 (emphasis in original).

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹⁵ Solov'ev, *Opravdanie*, SS VIII: 198.

human 'I' is absolute *in possibility*, and nothing *in actuality*.”⁵⁹⁶ This contradiction is the source of all human evil and suffering, and the reason for the “inner slavery” of the human person. He identifies “the truth that will set you free”⁵⁹⁷ as the truth of “absolute content” or “fullness of being,” i.e., divine life, which is attested to “by the infinite striving of the human ‘I’.”⁵⁹⁸ Thus, while the *ideal* or *formal* correspondence between rational human consciousness and the absolute perfection of all-unity (*vseedinstvo*) attests to the *imago Dei* as the informing principle (*eidos, causa formalis*) of human existence, the end and purpose of human existence, that towards which man aspires by nature (*hou heneka, causa finalis*), is the realization or incarnation of this absolute, ideal perfection in material, concrete, human forms.⁵⁹⁹ The “image and likeness of God ... is the indispensable possession of each person, in which his proper absolute significance, dignity, and worth consist.”⁶⁰⁰ While it takes a multitude of forms, the fundamental obstacle to the realization of human individuality as *imago et similitudo dei* is that which determines the corrupt and mortal phenomenal existence of our “bad reality,” namely, *egoism*.

3. THE PROBLEM OF EGOISM

“Egoism” or “exclusive self-assertion” permeates each aspect of Soloviev’s thought as the formal antithesis to Trinitarian all-unity (*vseedinstvo*), or “absolute Love,” in which Goodness, Truth, and Beauty are distinct but inseparable as a living whole.⁶⁰¹ Egoism is

⁵⁹⁶ Solov'ev, *Chtenie*, SS III: 25-26 (emphasis in original).

⁵⁹⁷ John 8:32.

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁹ Solov'ev, *Opravdanie*, SS VIII: 195.

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid., 231.

⁶⁰¹ See Lectures Four and Seven in Solov'ev, *Chtenie*, SS III: 48-58, 103-19.

both the source of natural evil, characterizing Nature's fragmented, transitory, chaotic existence, as well as the root of all moral evil, suffering, and death in the human sphere, what Soloviev calls in *Spiritual Foundations* the all-encompassing "law of sin."⁶⁰² In *The Meaning of Love*, he focuses on egoism as an *existential* fact that taints and undermines every aspect of human existence. Christ liberates human individuality from its slavery to egoism not only because human individuality (*logos anthropos*) is divinized through his moral "feat" (*podvig*) of kenotic love, but because this love is also expressed through his material, temporal, and corruptible flesh (*logos sarx*), which is also divinized through the paschal mystery. As Soloviev often argued from within the narrative of religious development, the problem of ego-centric human existence can only be overcome from within by the "absolute event" (*absoliutnoe sobytie*) of the bodily Resurrection of Christ, the revelation of "perfect personhood."⁶⁰³ Thus, the problem of egoism ultimately demands the transformation (*theosis*) of human individuality in its entirety—spirit, soul, and body.

The falsity and evil of egoism does not lie in the original and immediate individual subject's self-affirmation as having "absolute significance" and "infinite value." After all, Soloviev recalls, "what can man give in exchange for his soul?"⁶⁰⁴ The falsity of egoism lies rather in the individual's denial of this same absolute significance and infinite value to

⁶⁰² "The life of nature, insofar as it is based on egoism, is an *evil* life, and its law is the law of *sin*." Solov'ev, *Dukhovnie Osnovi Zhizni*, SS III: 351-53.

⁶⁰³ For Soloviev, the resurrected Christ enjoys "perfect personhood" because in him the contradiction between the "absolute" form of human personhood and the "nothingness" of his empirical, phenomenal existence is overcome. "[Christianity] gives a living image of a personhood possessing not merely the negative perfection of indifference or the merely ideal perfection of intellectual contemplation, but perfection that is absolute, total, and fully realized, and therefore victorious over death. Christianity reveals to humanity the absolutely perfect and therefore bodily resurrected personhood." Solov'ev, *Opravdanie*, SS VIII: 276-77.

⁶⁰⁴ See Matthew 16:26 and Mark 8:37.

others, affording them nothing more than an “external and relative value” to himself.⁶⁰⁵

Remaining in empirical reality merely an “individualized, infinitesimal part of the universal whole,” the individual nevertheless presumes and desires to be “all” in separation and isolation both from the absolute “All,” as well as from other individuals. While every sane person acknowledges in “abstract, theoretical consciousness” that others possess the same rights as himself, in his “living consciousness, in his own inner feeling, and in reality” he asserts himself as “everything” and the others as “nothing.” While the complex scheme of various metaphysical, physical, historical, and social hindrances and correctives preordained by Divine Providence mitigate the evil of egoism and curb its outward manifestation, the foundation of egoism remains untouched. Egoism is an actual, existential, and fundamental *force (sila)*, rooted in the depths of our being, that “permeates and embraces the whole of our activity” and that functions “uninterruptedly in all the particulars and details of our existence,” peeking out from under the cover of personal and public morality.⁶⁰⁶ Since the “untruth” of egoism is manifested in a disordered personal living *will*, it cannot be opposed and overcome by truth alone, so long as this truth remains an abstract idea and is not incarnated in an actual and existential “living personal force.”⁶⁰⁷

Since for Soloviev true or ideal being by definition participates in the Trinitarian form of all-unity (*vseedinstvo*), the consequences of egoistic existence become self-evident. Existing in his egoistic subjectivity *outside* this truth, the human individual deprives himself of the “true content” of existence, “reduces his individuality to an empty form” and is thus

⁶⁰⁵ Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS III: 16-17.

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid., 14-17.

⁶⁰⁷ Solov'ev, *Dukhovnie Osnovi Zhizni*, SS III: 362.

doomed (subjectively) to destruction.⁶⁰⁸ In other words, Jesus' assertion that "whoever seeks to save his life (*psyché*, soul, self) will lose it,"⁶⁰⁹ expresses a profound existential paradox of fallen human existence: the *exclusive* assertion of one's own absolute and eternal significance is precisely that which precludes its realization *in actuality*. In order to move from the "empty form" and "lie" of false individuality to the Trinitarian form of all-unity (*vseedinstvo*) in which "true individuality" or "personhood" is realized, the isolation and exclusivity of egoism, at its root and on all levels, must be abolished.

A human being (in general and each human being in particular), being in actuality only this *one* and not *another*, can *become* all, only by abolishing in his consciousness and in life that inner boundary that separates him from the other. "This" can be "all" only *together with others*; only together with others can realize his own absolute significance and become an inseparable and irreplaceable part of the universal whole, an independent, living and unique organ of absolute life. True individuality is a particular determinate image of all-unity (*vseedinstvo*), a certain determinate mode of apprehending and adopting all that is other.⁶¹⁰

But the truth of all-one being is not merely theoretical. "Truth," Soloviev declares, "as a living force that takes possession of the inner essence of man and effectively leads him out of false self-affirmation is called love."⁶¹¹

4. THE GENERAL MEANING OF HUMAN LOVE

Human love reveals itself as truth precisely because it alone is able to "seize the inner being of man" and liberate him in actual fact from the false self-affirmation of egoism. As a feeling, love's meaning and value consists in the fact that "it actually compels us to recognize *in the other* that absolute, central significance, which by virtue of our egoism, we

⁶⁰⁸ Cf. 1 Corinthians 15:56: "The sting of death of sin." See Lecture Nine in Solov'ev, *Chtenie*, SS III: 129-42.

⁶⁰⁹ Cf. Luke 17:33.

⁶¹⁰ Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 17 (emphasis in original).

⁶¹¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

only feel in us ourselves.”⁶¹² But in order to function as an inner, free, and redemptive force, the superior power of love still requires the purely cognitive capacity of rational consciousness (“consciousness of the truth”) to distinguish between egoism, which must be sacrificed, and “true individuality,” which must be affirmed and redeemed. In the theoretical and moral sphere, reason is capable of discerning why an egoistic disposition towards others is “unfounded and unjust,” but only love abolishes this disposition in actual fact, i.e., in “inner feeling” and with a “living will” (*zhiznennaia volia*). By actually “surrendering himself to love” and “sacrificing his egoism,” the individual finds in it not only a “living,” but a “life giving” force that does not obliterate his individual essence, but actualizes and “immortalizes” it.⁶¹³ In this way, ideally speaking, the “inner boundary” of separation from others is abolished and the individual acquires “true personhood,” becoming in actuality “an inseparable and irreplaceable part of the universal whole, a living and unique organ of absolute life,” and “a particular determinate image of all-unity (*vseedinstvo*).”

This capacity to cross the boundaries of our “actual, phenomenal being” and to “live not only in ourselves, but in another” through a sort of *perichoresis*, is precisely what justifies the absolute significance, worth, and dignity of human individuality or personhood.⁶¹⁴ Here Soloviev arrives at his preliminary definition of human love as the essential and constitutive relational aspect of human personhood, one that will serve as a

⁶¹² Ibid., 21 (emphasis in original).

⁶¹³ Ibid., 15-16.

⁶¹⁴ According to Meerson, “Contemporary Russian scholars view Solov’ev’s treatment of the I-Thou relationship ... as an anticipation of the subsequent Russian development of the ‘I-Thou’ relational philosophy of personhood in Florensky, Bulgakov, and especially Bakhtin ... K. I. Isupov, for example, traces this train of thought from Solov’ev’s view on altruism as an assertion of another self to Florensky’s theory of love as *kenosis* of the self vis-à-vis the Other in the I-Thou relationship, to Bulgakov’s idea of the sacrifice of one’s selfishness in the opening of oneself to the Other, and lastly, to Bakhtin’s philosophy of personality: being the unfinalizable and free subject, the person opens him/herself to the Other in order to actualize his/her nature.” Meerson, 87.

“general foundation” for his eventual definition of sexual-spousal love: the meaning of human love in general is “the *justification* and *redemption* (*spasenie*) of individuality (personhood, *individualnost*) through the sacrifice of egoism.”⁶¹⁵ The “justification” of individuality refers to the fulfillment of the promise revealed in the *imago Dei*. The “redemption” of individuality refers to its actual realization, and the “sacrifice of egoism” denotes the kenotic character of *theosis* as a participation in the divine-human feat (*podvig*) of sacrificial love manifested in the Paschal Mystery.⁶¹⁶

Most scholars overlook the significance of Soloviev’s analogical use of the term “human love” in this preliminary definition, which, though general and foundational, expresses the crux of his personalist paradigm shift.⁶¹⁷ His methodology of integral knowledge, grounded in his Trinitarian metaphysics of all-unity (*vseedinstvo*), explains why he always seeks first “to unify in order to distinguish.”⁶¹⁸ When speaking about the relationship of sexual-spousal love to human love in general, he uses the characteristically Solovievian and inclusive notion of “type and ideal” as opposed to what for him would be an inherently false assertion of “exclusivity.” His theory is therefore rightly entitled, “The Meaning of *Love*,” as opposed to “The Meaning of *Sexual Love*,” precisely because his purpose is to identify the essential meaning of human love in its paradigmatic form of

⁶¹⁵ Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 16 (emphasis in original).

⁶¹⁶ Soloviev anticipates de Lubac’s retrieval of the uniquely Catholic Christian understanding of true personhood as essentially communal. See “The Revelation of Man” in Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, trans., Lancelot C. Sheppard and Sr. Elizabeth Englund. OCD (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 337-43.

⁶¹⁷ Critics and supporters alike assume that this initial definition of human love applies solely to sexual love or *eros*, which leads some, such as Trubetskoi and scholars such as Matich who rely on his commentary, to characterize his theory as an exclusively “erotic utopia,” while others such as Berdyaev herald the originality of his personalist shift exclusively in relation to sexual love. See Trubetskoi, *Mirosozertsaniye*, 613-14; Matich, 4-5; Berdyaev, *Slavery and Freedom*, trans., R. M. French (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944).

⁶¹⁸ This phrase, taken from Henri de Lubac’s seminal work, *Catholicism*, is one of many similarities between the two thinkers related to their respective understandings of “catholic” and “all-unity.” See de Lubac, 329-31.

sexual-spousal love. Placing himself firmly in the Greek patristic and Augustinian-Thomistic tradition and anticipating contemporary Catholic thought and magisterial teaching, Soloviev states clearly that human love is one in essence but diverse in form, thus implicitly justifying his analogical use of the term.⁶¹⁹ Immediately following his brief explanation of how love alone redeems human individuality, he makes a point of asserting more than once that “every love is a manifestation of this capacity” and that he fully recognizes the “great importance and lofty merit of other types of love.”⁶²⁰ Further, although he is well-versed in the philosophical, theological, and literary history of love, in the course of which at different times one form was often exalted over others,⁶²¹ the distinctions he

⁶¹⁹ Pieper interprets the widespread analogical use of the term “love” in various languages through the lens of Augustinian-Thomistic thought and concludes that the existence of “one single word” to encompass the diverse forms of love cannot be “without some foundation in reality.” See Pieper, 163. More recently, Jean-Luc Marion makes a compelling phenomenological case for the *analogia entis* of divine and human love and thus human love’s analogical character in the conclusion to his reflections on the “erotic phenomenon.” See Marion, 217-22. Regarding Magisterial teaching, several scholars have noted the significance of Pope Benedict XVI’s 2005 Encyclical Letter, *Deus Caritas Est* in this regard. According to David Schindler, “As the pope states forcefully at the outset of the encyclical, there is ultimately just one love, with a variety of dimensions that are all necessary in order to sustain the full meaning of love ... the critique of the ‘Nygrenian’ antithesis of *eros* and *agape* in this encyclical ... makes the insistence on the unity of love part of the official magisterial teaching of the Church.” David C. Schindler, “The Redemption of *Eros*: Philosophical Reflections on Benedict XVI’s First Encyclical,” *Communio* 33, no. 4 (2006), 378, 390. In Pope Benedict’s words, “Fundamentally, ‘love’ is a single reality, but with different dimensions; at different times, one or other dimension may emerge more clearly. Yet when the two dimensions [*eros* and *agape*] are totally cut off from one another, the result is a caricature or at least an impoverished form of love.” *Deus Caritas Est*, 8.

⁶²⁰ Soloviev, *Smysl*, SS III: 18-19, 21 (emphasis in original). He repeats here this same assertion, saying that love’s importance “as the transfer of our entire vital interest from ourselves to the other” is “characteristic of every love.”

⁶²¹ “In the history of religion love twice received primary significance: as a wild elemental force of sexual attraction in pagan phallism (still preserved in places in the guise of organized religious communities, such as for example Indian Shaktites with their priestly-pornographic writings, the Tantras), and then opposite this, as the ideal principle of spiritual and social union in Christian *agape*. In the history of philosophy an understanding of love naturally occupied a visible place in various systems. For Empedocles love (*philia*) was one of the universe’s two principles, namely, the principle of universal unification and wholeness (integration), and the principle of the metaphysical law of attraction and centripetal motion. Plato’s love is the demonic (connecting the earthly world with the divine) striving of a finite being towards perfect fullness of being and, flowing from this, ‘creation in beauty’. This aesthetic meaning of love did not receive attention in patristic and scholastic philosophy. We find a unique confluence of Christian and Platonic ideas about this subject in Dante. Generally, in the Middle Ages love was a subject of religious mysticism. On the one hand, the Victorines, Bernard of Clairvaux, and especially Bonaventure, in his works *Stimulus amoris*, *Incendium amoris*, *Amatorium*, and on the other hand, a special sort of poetry. This poetry, spreading throughout Europe from

himself draws between love's various forms do not divide the unity of its essence. They concern rather its formal and relational particularities.

His most distilled and succinct definition of human love is found in his *Brockhaus* encyclopedia article. There he writes that love subsists within the "mutuality of relationships" from which can be deduced its fundamental "threefold aspect." There exists the type of love that "gives more than it receives," or descending love (*amor descendens*), the type that "receives more than it gives," or ascending love (*amor ascendens*), and the type in which both are equal (*amor aequalis*).⁶²² Both the manifested, relational diversity, and the essential oneness of love's threefold-aspect are rooted in what he identifies elsewhere as the *ratio Trinitatis* that determines the relational (both hierarchical as well as communal) form of all natural and human existence.⁶²³ For Soloviev, human love is of one, undivided essence and meaning, whose distinctions in its phenomenal manifestations are determined by the human person's role as microcosm and mediator, and by the diversity and concrete character of human relationships. In other words, it possesses the "catholic" character of all-unity

southern France, was devoted to the cult of the woman and idealized sexual love, in the sense of the harmonious unification of all three of its elements: piety, pity, and shame. In the Renaissance era (ending with Giordano Bruno) love again becomes the subject of philosophic thought in the spirit of Platonism. In this new philosophy a unique understanding of love was presented by Spinoza, who identifies it with absolute knowledge (*amor Dei intellectualis*), and who affirms that to philosophize is nothing other than to love God. In the newest philosophy we should note the witty though unfounded theory of sexual love of Schopenhauer (*Metaphysik der Liebe* in *Parerga u. Parl.*). Schopenhauer explains the individualization of this passion in man by the fact that here the will to life (*Wille zum Leben*) strives not only to perpetuate the race (as with animals), but also to produce the most perfect specimens of the race as possible; thus, if this man passionately loves precisely this woman (and vice versa), this means that it is precisely with her that he can, given the circumstances, produce the best offspring. In real experience not even the smallest confirmation of this view can be found. We can find truer and profounder indications and hints (lacking a clear and consistent system) in Franz Baader (*Erotische Philosophie* and others)." Soloviev, "Liubov," *SS X*: 237-38.

⁶²² The term and notion of *amor aequalis* seems original to Soloviev. Oliver Smith speculates that it may have early Gnostic roots, based on Gnostic Christian writings of Clement of Alexandria, but no definitive precedent has been found. See Oliver Smith, "Vladimir Soloviev and the Spiritualization of Matter" (Ph.D. thesis, University College London, 2008), 238.

⁶²³ Soloviev alludes to the *analogia entis* between the Trinity and natural and human existence in the context of his ecclesiology. See Soloviev, *La Russie*, 269-70.

(*vseedinstvo*) or absolute truth, in which the perfection of each of the parts in themselves is inseparable from the perfection of the whole, and in which each part plays an essential and unique role and in so doing perfects its own unique form. Moreover, as actual human phenomena, these aspects of love are never found as pure, isolated types: to varying degrees, every human love both gives and receives. When he describes what is distinctive about sexual-spousal love *per se*, his language reflects a difference in *degree*, not essence, based on what characterizes the relationship in which it is manifested. Thus, he writes that “not every love realizes [the capacity to live not only in ourselves but in another] *to the same degree*,” and that sexual love “is distinguished from other types of love by a *greater* intensity, a *more* captivating character, and the possibility of a *more* full and all-encompassing mutuality.”⁶²⁴

As will be seen below, Soloviev argues that sexual-spousal love is the “type and ideal” of all forms of love because it encompasses and integrates all of the essential elements of human love in all its forms and to the highest degree, and therefore is uniquely capable of realizing love’s divine-human purpose of justifying and redeeming “true individuality” in “one flesh” spousal union.

5. “THE LOVE, FROM WHICH EVERY LOVE IS NAMED”⁶²⁵

“It is not by chance,” writes Soloviev in *The Justification of the Good*, that the “apparently simple relationship of marriage” (*brak*) is called a “great mystery” (Ephesians 5:32) and that it is the “abiding image (*obraz*), sanctified by the Word of God, signifying the

⁶²⁴ Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 22 (emphasis added).

⁶²⁵ “*O amor, a quo omnis amor cognominatur etiam carnalis ac degener!*” William of Saint-Thierry, *Expositio Super Cantica*. Preface, 26.

union of the Lord of Israel with His people, of the crucified Christ with the earthly Church, and of Christ the King of Glory with the New Jerusalem.”⁶²⁶ For Soloviev, the reasons why sexual-spousal love is the “type and ideal” of all forms of human love, revealing the universal form of divine-human love and union, are to be found in creation itself. Natural and human existence as a whole is the fruit of a free and reciprocal striving on the part of the divine *Logos* and the “World Soul” to realize and incarnate the kingdom of God, a process that is guided by Divine Providence, conditioned by creaturely freedom, and through which humanity becomes more and more fully itself as divine-humanity. “The highest morality,” he writes in reference to sacramental marriage, “which comes from and is determined by the absolute principle (that which in theology is called grace [*blagodat*]), does not annihilate nature, but imparts true perfection to it.”⁶²⁷ As he writes in *La Russie et L’Église Universelle*, the historical and eschatological fulfillment of the meaning of “true sexual love” (*l’amour sexuel véritable*) is inseparable from its unique and concrete material and formal particularities. As a natural human phenomenon, “true sexual love” emerges “independently of us” from the complex and hidden intricacies of material, organic, embodied existence, as well as from the ideal and spiritual dimension of human personhood as *imago Dei*.⁶²⁸ It is these particularities, taken together, which constitute sexual-spousal love’s material and natural capacity and potentiality to achieve “true individuality” in “perfect marriage” through the free, creative, divine-human process of “true marriage (*le vrai mariage*).” For him, “perfect marriage” is nothing less than a tangible, living,

⁶²⁶ Solov'ev, *Opravdanie*, SS VIII: 453.

⁶²⁷ Ibid., 454.

⁶²⁸ Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 25.

individual manifestation of the *sacramentum magnum*, the mystical union of Christ and the divine *Sophia* incarnate.

Soloviev presents three aspects of sexual-spousal love in order to justify its designation as the paradigmatic form of human love. First, as he emphasizes in *The Life Drama of Plato*, of all human loves it is love at its most “physical” or “bodily” and therefore “sensual” or “tangible” (*telesno*). Second, it is the most all-encompassing and inclusive form of love, “rooted in the deepest center of our existence” and one that “permeates and embraces all of our reality ... continuously acting in all the particulars and details of our being.” Third, only “through this, so to speak, chemical union of two beings, which are homogenous and of equal significance, but in every respect different with regard to form (in both the natural and spiritual order),” i.e., through the spousal union of man and woman is “the authentic realization of true human individuality” possible.⁶²⁹ By examining each of these aspects in turn, it will be possible to understand better why Soloviev believes that sexual-spousal love and union is nothing less than “the first positive basis of divine-human integration.”⁶³⁰ In other words, he believes that true, sacramental love and marriage is the most basic foundation for the realization of divinized humanity, the Universal Church. As he asserts by way of conclusion in *The Meaning of Love*, sexual-spousal love is paradigmatic because of all human loves, it is the only form that God ordained and blessed as a sacrament.⁶³¹

⁶²⁹ Ibid., 19.

⁶³⁰ Soloviev, *La Russie*, 296.

⁶³¹ Ibid., 296.

5.1 *Bodiliness*

The first criterion of sexual-spousal love's paradigmatic character is "bodiliness." Soloviev insists that in order to undermine egoism at its root love must be, among other things, just as "real and concrete" as egoism itself.⁶³² While this criterion refers primarily to the unique inclusivity of the sexual-spousal relationship for individuality, in which "every manifestation of our essence" and our "every living act" meets a "corresponding, but not identical manifestation" in the other, it also points to the embodied nature of human existence. The immediate "erotic pathos" of sexual-spousal love is analogous to, and has developed on the basis of, animal sexual attraction. In *The Life Drama of Plato* he writes that unlike any other form of love, including love for God, properly speaking sexual love is "love for bodiliness (*liubov k telesnosti*)." Or, as he says more forcefully elsewhere, "love, in the sense of an erotic pathos, always has as its proper object *bodiliness (telesnost)*."⁶³³ In other words, unlike other forms of love, it is inseparable from (while not limited to) the concrete particularities of the bodily existence of the beloved in and through which his or her unique essence is manifested and revealed. He speculates that by choosing the term *eros* to express "the highest expression of human life," and not other possible Greek terms for love such as *filia*, *agape*, or *storge*, Plato intuited the potential and power of *eros* to unite the heavenly and the earthly insofar as it was not only the son of *Poros* ("divine abundance"), but of *Penia* ("material poverty").⁶³⁴ He suggests that Plato's intuition was not born of deduction or argument, but was the fruit of personal experience, since *eros* itself does not belong to the ideal realm of reason. *Eros* is a mediating force between the ideal and

⁶³² Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 18.

⁶³³ Solov'ev, *Drama*, SS IX: 234 (emphasis in original).

⁶³⁴ *Ibid.*, 226-30.

universal, the material and the concrete. Although Plato makes a distinction between the purely carnal, vulgar, and base form of *eros*, *Aphrodite Pandemos* (*pandemos*, literally “common”) in her notorious “many-hued” ancient Greek manifestations, and the true or heavenly *eros*, *Aphrodite Ourania* (*ouranios*, “heavenly”), he affirms that for the earthly man both forms necessarily have but “one root” and “grow up in the same material soil.”⁶³⁵ Soloviev embraces this “law of the soil” as an apt metaphor to illustrate the significance of sexual-spousal love’s earthly, carnal roots for his own theory.

From the perspective of divine-humanity, the Pauline affirmation that “the spiritual was not first; rather the natural and then the spiritual,”⁶³⁶ does not imply that the spiritual and ideal in any way transcend or replace the natural and material, as it would in what Soloviev calls Plato’s “aloof idealism.” On the contrary, the “spiritual,” by definition, is the “regeneration, salvation, and resurrection” of natural, material, and human existence.⁶³⁷ The mysterious distinction between Christ’s individual body pre-Resurrection (“natural”) and post-Resurrection (“spiritual”) exemplifies this relationship. Characteristically, he elucidates the element of carnality in Plato’s theory while giving it his own interpretation. He inserts an excerpt from one of his own poems into his argument to make the point:

*Light out of darkness.
The visages of your roses
Could not have risen above
The black depths
If their dark roots
Had not sunk down*

⁶³⁵ Ibid., 224. This metaphor applies to *Aphrodite Pandemos* and *Aphrodite Ourania* in their more mature stages. In reality, there is no radical separation between them for Plato. Rather, *Aphrodite Ourania* is the initial, immature stage of the initiation into the mysteries of love that is characterized by its devotion to “the beauties of the body.” This initiation ends when the lover has left all bodily beauty behind and contemplates “heavenly beauty face to face.” See Plato, *Symposium*, 210a-211e.

⁶³⁶ 1 Corinthians 15:46.

⁶³⁷ Soloviev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 40.

*Into the dusky womb.*⁶³⁸

“We know,” he goes on to explain, “that the most beautiful flowers and the best tasting fruit grow from earth, and moreover from the most impure earth, from dung. This does not spoil their taste or aroma, but also does not transmit their fragrance to the dung, which does not become noble from the noble growths which it serves.”⁶³⁹ Nevertheless, “the visages of your roses could not have risen above the black of earth” had not, thanks to “their dark roots,” that same black earth not been taken up and transformed from within into the beautiful actuality of the roses. The tension inherent in this process of transformation recalls the aesthetic principle he illustrated above with the beauty of the diamond.⁶⁴⁰ The indispensable condition of the diamond’s beauty is the extremely dense, unyielding materiality of its body, which resists and contests the higher, transformative principle of light. Analogously, while the material, bodily, and sensual “dark roots” and “dusky womb” in which sexual-spousal love is born and grows render it more resistant to the divine-human process of purification, sanctification, and transfiguration (*theosis*) than any other form of human love, this very resistance is not without its own significance. The inherent resistance of sexual-spousal love to grace points to its unique potentiality to become the most beautiful living image of the “great mystery” of Ephesians 5:32, “a particular determinate image of all-unity (*vseedinstvo*).”⁶⁴¹

⁶³⁸ Vladimir Solovyov, *The Religious Poetry of Vladimir Solovyov*, 49. The Russian text reads: *Svet iz t'my. Nad chernoi gluboi; Voznestisia ne mogli by; Liki roz tvoikh, Esli b v sumrachnoe lono; Ne vpivalsia pogruzhenny; Temny koren ikh.* Solov'ev, *Stikhotvoreniia I Shutochnye Pesy V. S. Solov'eva*, SS XII: 18-19.

⁶³⁹ Solov'ev, *Drama*, SS IX: 224.

⁶⁴⁰ See above p. 163.

⁶⁴¹ Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 17.

5.2 *Inclusivity*

In addition to its intrinsic relation to bodiliness (*telestnost*), the second element that distinguishes sexual-spousal love as human love's paradigmatic form is its capacity to permeate "all the particularities and details of our being."⁶⁴² In other words, it permeates every element of humanity that is seeking reintegration, the material and spiritual, and the male and female. The process of reintegrating these elements is dependent upon and inseparable from a "union or interaction of the divine with the human," i.e., it is essentially "a *divine-human* process."⁶⁴³ All forms of human love to greater and lesser degrees enable us to transfer the center of our personal existence and our vital interests beyond our empirical self in practice, thus undermining egoism and realizing our own individual truth as the capacity to live not only in ourselves but in the other as well. But due to its "greater intensity," "more captivating character," and the "possibility of a fuller and all-round mutuality," Soloviev argues, sexual-spousal love is uniquely suited to accomplish this to the highest degree. "Only this love," he emphasizes, "can lead to an actual and indissoluble union of two lives into one, and only about [this love] is it said in the word of God: the two shall become one flesh, i.e., will become one real being."⁶⁴⁴

In *La Russie et L'Église Universelle*, Soloviev writes that this love (*l'amour*) "is the most concentrated and the most concrete, and therefore the most profound and the most intense—it is the basis and general type of all other love and all other union."⁶⁴⁵ Its concentrated, concrete, and intense character is fueled by, but exceeds, the carnal dimension

⁶⁴² Solov'ev, *Drama*, SS IX: 234.

⁶⁴³ Ibid., 234 (emphasis in original).

⁶⁴⁴ Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 22.

⁶⁴⁵ Soloviev, *La Russie*, 296.

of erotic pathos. As an actual phenomenon, true sexual-spousal love involves both this physical or “material” aspect of “physical attraction based on the nature of the organism,” as well as a spiritual or an “ideal” facets that involves the person and all aspects of his or her unique personality that is the focus of the “exaltation of sincere feeling that is called ‘being in love’ (*vliublennost*).”⁶⁴⁶ But, he argues, its unique power lies in neither the one nor the other in isolation, but specifically in their inseparable unity. More than any other kind of human love, true sexual-spousal love embraces and engages the entire being of persons, penetrating to their ideal essence as *imago Dei* and embracing all the spiritual, intellectual, and physical particularities of their actual, bodily existence. For the lover, all those aspects of “the intellectual and physical existence of the beloved are equally of interest, remarkable, and dear, and he is attached to them with an identical intensity of feeling, though in a different way.”⁶⁴⁷ The principle of unity here is the person (*litso*) or true personal essence (*istinnaia sushchnost*) of the beloved, as he expresses in another poem:

Is it because
In you, in you alone,
My heart, my life, and mind
Have drowned irretrievably?⁶⁴⁸

⁶⁴⁶ Solov'ev, *Opravdanie*, SS VIII: 454.

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid., 171. C. S. Lewis makes the same point in his reflection on *eros*. “A man in this state really hasn’t leisure to think of sex. He is too busy thinking of a person. The fact that she is a woman is far less important than the fact that she is herself. He is full of desire, but the desire may not be sexually toned. . . . And when at a later stage the explicitly sexual element awakes, he will not feel (unless scientific theories are influencing him) that this had all along been the root of the whole matter. He is more likely to feel that the incoming tide of Eros, having demolished many sandcastles and made islands of many rocks, has now at last with a triumphant seventh wave flooded this part of his nature also—the little pool of ordinary sexuality which was there on this beach before the tide came in. Eros enters him like an invader, taking over and reorganizing, one by one, the institutions of a conquered country. It may have taken over many others before it reaches the sex in him; and it will reorganize that too.” Lewis, 93-94.

⁶⁴⁸ Vladimir Solovyov, *The Religious Poetry of Vladimir Solovyov*, 46. The Russian text reads: *Ottogo li, potomu li,—; No v tebe, v tebe odnoi; Bezvozzratno potonuli; Serdtse, zhizn i razum moi*. Solov'ev, *Stikhotvoreniia I Shutochnye Pesy V. S. Solov'eva*, SS XII: 94.

As he argues in *The Justification of the Good*, the inclusive wholeness (*tselost*) and tendency to integration inherent in sexual-spousal love, with regard to its embrace of the entire being of both the lover and the beloved, is the positive aspect of the fundamental moral feeling of shame, and sexual shame in particular. Shame is an existential reaction against the loss of the “essential vital wholeness (*tselost*)” of the human person in his or her present fallen condition. This loss of wholeness in the individual is manifested primarily in the division between the spiritual and material aspects of human individuality as well as the division between man and woman. Sexual shame is both a witness to this wholeness, as well as a warning against taking any path that would confirm, strengthen, or perpetuate the profound existential divisions in human being and life, such as isolating the carnal dimension of human sexual love. It is not for nothing, Soloviev points out, that the Russian term for chastity, *tselomudrie*, is composed of the word *tselost*, meaning wholeness, and *mudrost*, meaning wisdom, and can thus be literally translated as “the wisdom of wholeness.” Thus, in “true, chaste love (*tselomudrennaia liubov*) for the other sex,” the lover “strives, hopes, and dreams to re-establish this wholeness (*tselost*).”⁶⁴⁹

5.3 *True Individuality and “One Flesh Union”*

Sexual-spousal love is not only the most inclusive form of love with regard to its inseparable spiritual and physical dimensions. It is also the most proximate possibility for the authentic realization of “true human individuality,” i.e., the “one flesh” spousal union of

⁶⁴⁹ Solov'ev, *Opravdanie*, SS VIII: 173. See also translator's note in Solovyov, *The Justification of the Good*, 127.

man and woman as *imago dei*.⁶⁵⁰ The foundation of this possibility, which constitutes sexual-spousal love's paradigmatic character, can be explained as follows. While men and women are absolutely homogeneous and equal according to their human essence, they are at the same time irreducibly and wholly different according to their form. As a result, "every manifestation of our essence, every vital act is met in this other with a corresponding, but not identical, manifestation, so that the relationship of one to the other is a full and continual exchange, a full and continual affirmation of oneself in the other, a perfect cooperation and intercourse (*obshchenie*)."⁶⁵¹ This union, when perfected, embodies the image and likeness (*obraz i podobie*) of God insofar as it is a living and free union of two persons that admits of no "confusion of external forms" (which would be a "monstrosity") and would allow for "no interior division of personality and life"⁶⁵² (which would be "an imperfection and principle of death").⁶⁵³ From this perspective, Soloviev believes that sexual union between husband and wife ought to be the "final consequence" and an "external realization" of an already established spousal love and spiritual unity, what he calls a "mystical and moral relationship."⁶⁵⁴

Having presented the distinguishing characteristics of sexual-spousal love as the necessary criteria for the abolition of egoism at its root and the creation of the "spiritually-bodily" (*dukhovno-telesnoe*) union of man and woman, Soloviev contends (alluding to his polemic against Tolstoyan Christianity) that only a "false spiritualism" and "impotent moralism" would seek a substitute for it with another form of human love, even the most

⁶⁵⁰ Cf. Genesis 1:27

⁶⁵¹ Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 18-19.

⁶⁵² Cf. The Chalcedonian Christological dogma in Kelly, 339.

⁶⁵³ Solov'ev, *Drama*, SS IX: 234.

⁶⁵⁴ Soloviev, *La Russie*, 296.

altruistic Christian *agape*. In every other manifestation of human love, be it mystical love,⁶⁵⁵ parental love, filial love, friendship, patriotism, love for humanity, or even love for science, art, and so on, one or more of these criteria—homogeneity, equality, mutuality, inclusivity, formal difference, otherness, intensity, concreteness, and carnality or bodiliness—is not present to the same degree or lacking in intensity. This makes the actual, tangible, spiritual-bodily realization of “true human individuality” as the living incarnate image of divine-humanity impossible.⁶⁵⁶ Soloviev rejects every form of “false spiritualism” or “impotent moralism” because both ultimately deny even the possibility of *theosis*, the incarnation of the divine in the material and human, and therefore of divine-humanity itself. For Soloviev, to deny the significance and paradigmatic character of the only form of love that is fulfilled in “one-flesh” union (Mark 10:8) is tantamount to a heretical denial of the full significance and implications of the Word becoming flesh (John 1:14). As will be seen in the next chapter, Soloviev believes that when all the evidence is taken into consideration, sexual-spousal love can only find its true meaning as an individual and free realization of and participation in divine-human love and union. The only other possible conclusion, a conclusion that for him is self-evidently false, is that it amounts to no more than an absurd, meaningless, and futile human phenomenon.

⁶⁵⁵ By “mystical” he refers here primarily to the *Upanishads* and *Vedas*. See Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 19.

⁶⁵⁶ It is noteworthy that he singles out maternal love as coming closest to sexual-spousal love insofar as a mother does in fact sacrifice her egoism for the sake of her children. Nevertheless, she is not able to fully affirm her own individuality in them because, on the one hand, the generational difference and unilateral dependence precludes the necessary equality and mutuality, and on the other, they are not sufficiently other: she cannot affirm their “unconditional significance” since she loves them “conditionally” as *her* children; their relationship is premised on the “external physiological connection.” See *Ibid.*, 19-21.

CHAPTER VII

The Meaning of Sexual-Spousal Love

This chapter will analyze Soloviev's theory of sexual-spousal love and union as the task of "free theurgy" par excellence. It will emphasize the sacramental and ecclesial dimension of his theory, which in the past has often been overlooked. While the previous chapter considered his personalist and theological definition of human love in general and on his argument for sexual-spousal love as its paradigm, this chapter will examine the form, content, and ultimate meaning of this concrete paradigm of love itself. Soloviev sees sexual-spousal love as primarily a divine-human or theurgic creative *task*, the "perfect art." The definition of this task is to *justify in practice* the meaning of love that is first revealed only in subjective feeling. As such, the task of love is to create a "true individual," a free union of the male and female principles that preserves their formal distinctness but overcomes their essential isolation, discord, and disintegration.⁶⁵⁷

In keeping with the structure of this—as indeed of any—creative task, this chapter will analyze his theory of sexual-spousal love first in terms of "that which is given in feeling," the sphere of vision, inspiration, and desire, and will consider why it has yet to be realized in actuality. This analysis will then turn to the divine-human task itself, to the conditions and the divine and human means for its "justification in practice." Finally, it will consider the end, the theurgic "work of art," in its immediate, individual aspect, as "true human individuality" or "perfect marriage"; and in what he calls its relation of *syzygy* with the historical and eschatological incarnation of the "all-one Idea" in the *sacramentum*

⁶⁵⁷ Solov'ev, *Smysl Liubvi*, SS VII: 24.

magnum, divine *Sophia*. Once a comprehensive and sufficient understanding of his theory has been established, having become acquainted with its theoretical foundations, it will be possible in the following and final chapter to evaluate Soloviev's theory as a resource for Catholic theology.

1. "ARS EST ARTIUM ARS AMORIS"⁶⁵⁸

When Soloviev argues, much like Erich Fromm half a century later, that "love is an art,"⁶⁵⁹ he uses the term "art" (*isskustvo*) only by way of analogy. As a purely natural and human phenomenon, beauty in nature as well as in the fine arts has the capacity to reveal God's glory, but due to its inherently limited power to spiritualize the material, chaotic principle, it remains anticipatory, prophetic, and transient.⁶⁶⁰ "Similar to the way in which a ray of light plays in a diamond to the pleasure of the observer, but without any change of the material basis of stone," Soloviev observes in reference to Goethe's *Faust*, "so too here the spiritual light of the absolute ideal, refracted by the imagination of the artist, illuminates dark human reality, but does not at all change its essence."⁶⁶¹ In contrast, the mission of what he calls "perfect art" is the "incarnation of the absolute ideal, not only in imagination, but in actual fact," a creative process that ought to "spiritualize and transubstantiate our actual life."⁶⁶² This level of "artistic creativity" corresponds to the third and highest level of

⁶⁵⁸ For Soloviev, Stremoukhoff rightly observes, "as for the commentators on Saint Bernard, though in a slightly different way, '*ars est artium ars amoris*'." Stremoukhoff, 306.

⁶⁵⁹ See Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2006), 1-6.

⁶⁶⁰ "As long as history still continues, we can have only partial and fragmentary *forewarnings* (anticipations) of perfect beauty." Solov'ev, *Obshchi Smysl' Iskusstva*, SS VI: 84.

⁶⁶¹ Ibid., 89-90.

⁶⁶² Ibid., 90.

free theurgy, “the mystical” (*mistika*),⁶⁶³ in which the absolute Idea, divine Love, is incarnated in the concrete, tangible particulars of human and material reality in the form of Beauty.⁶⁶⁴ To say that sexual-spousal love and union is a type of “theurgic art” that belongs to this sphere of “the mystical”⁶⁶⁵ points to its historical, theological, and eschatological horizons and presumes that as a creative task, it is essentially and necessarily *divine-human* or theurgic in character.⁶⁶⁶ Soloviev’s free theurgy of true marriage amounts to a theological affirmation of Kierkegaard’s insight in *Either/Or* that marriage represents the highest aesthetic whose beauty cannot be represented—because, unlike romantic love, it is essentially historical—but only lived.⁶⁶⁷

1.1 “It is only with the heart that one can see rightly.”⁶⁶⁸

“That which is given in feeling” in the sphere of the immediate vision and inspiration of the pathos of love will first be considered. According to Soloviev’s epistemological analysis of artistic creativity and intuition, empirical observation and abstract reflection alone cannot account for the perception and apprehension of “artistic ideas and images,”

⁶⁶³ Solov'ev, *Filosofskie Nachala*, SS I: 264.

⁶⁶⁴ Solov'ev, *Kritika*, SS II: 352-53.

⁶⁶⁵ Soloviev calls any creative relationship of human “feeling” to this transcendent world “*mystical*.” Solov'ev, *Filosofskie Nachala*, SS I: 263.

⁶⁶⁶ Solov'ev, *Drama*, SS IX: 234.

⁶⁶⁷ The 1843 publication of Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous letter, “The Aesthetic Validity of Marriage,” in which he presents marriage as the highest form of art when it integrates the romantic, ethical, and religious spheres, predates the publication of Soloviev’s *The Meaning of Love* (1892-94) by almost half a century. Kierkegaard’s insight into conjugal love and marriage as an aesthetic that can only be lived is remarkably similar to Soloviev’s free theurgy of the “true art” of sexual-spousal love and true marriage. Indeed, Soloviev’s theory may be said to provide significant theological justification for the insights Kierkegaard gained through his existentialist methodology. See Soren Kierkegaard, “The Aesthetic Validity of Marriage,” in *Either/Or* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974), 137-40.

⁶⁶⁸ “It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.” Antoine de Saint Exupery, *The Little Prince*, trans. Katherine Woods (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1971), 87.

which are “revealed to the mind’s gaze all at once in their inner totality.”⁶⁶⁹ He argues that in these ideas and images the artist receives a direct intuition or “vision” of an object’s unique ideal essence or “existent idea” and that such knowledge is possible through the self-revelation and capacity of the object’s ideal essence to *act upon us* and *elicit* cognition and creativity from us. He believes that only such a conclusion can offer a reasonable explanation for the experience of “inspiration” (*vdokhnovenie*). Since the relationship between the knower and the known ideal essence is mediated through the phenomenal, material being of the object and our own physical senses, the unity of knower and known reveals both a creative and an “incarnational” dimension to cognition. The artist actually “perceives” ideal essences in their “inner wholeness”⁶⁷⁰ and is thus able not only to imitate or replicate them but to reveal and manifest their meaning in any number of ways, and to varying degrees, through works of true artistic creativity.

In *The Meaning of Love*, Soloviev argues that this same mode of cognition is active in the “special *idealization*” of the beloved that sometimes occurs during the “exaltation” or “pathos” of sexual love.⁶⁷¹ As such, “idealization” constitutes a crucial aspect of “that which is given in feeling” in sexual-spousal love as a theurgic art. “Everyone knows,” he says, that the lover sees the beloved “in a totally different light” than others, a revelation that includes, but is not limited to, the “moral and intellectual evaluation” of the beloved. When he uses the phrase a “totally different light,” the word “light” is not (only) metaphorical; he argues that this “light” is an actual sensible phenomenon: “the lover actually *sees*, visually

⁶⁶⁹ Solov'ev, *Filosofskie Nachala*, SS I: 318.

⁶⁷⁰ Solov'ev, *Chtenie*, SS III: 67 (emphasis in original).

⁶⁷¹ Solov'ev, *Opravdanie*, SS VIII: 454. As Mochulsky notes, Soloviev’s notion of idealization coincides remarkably with that of von Baader. See Mochul'skii, *Solov'ev*, 204.

perceives, what others do not,” i.e., “that which is usually concealed by material phenomena.”⁶⁷² What is revealed in this light is analogous to the “true essence or idea” of an object of true knowledge or artistic intuition. In the case of true sexual love, the *person* (*litso*) is revealed in his or her ideal essence as *imago Dei* (*obraz Bozhie*) or, in the terminology of his free theosophy, as “a particular form of absolute content.”⁶⁷³

Here Soloviev’s personalist and concrete idealism coincides with his eschatology. For him, the revelation of the beloved’s “true essence” is simply another way of saying the revelation of the beloved “as she was destined to be from the beginning, as God has always seen her, and as she ultimately ought to become.”⁶⁷⁴ This eschatological dimension already appears in his aesthetics where he states that “any tangible representation of any object and phenomenon ... in the light of the world to come, is an artistic work.”⁶⁷⁵ It is precisely in this light that the lover recognizes and affirms in “inner feeling” the beloved’s “unconditional significance” as a “moral person” (*nravstvennoe litso*) who is “an end in herself” (*samotsel*) and thus capable and worthy of spiritualization or *theosis*.⁶⁷⁶ Although this truth may already be apprehended in and through our reason (*razum*) in theoretical and abstract knowledge, in love it is known directly, concretely, and vividly.⁶⁷⁷ It is precisely from this direct “recognition” of the unconditional value of the beloved, which in egoism had been limited to the self, that the “moral duty” emerges (in this instance, from the point

⁶⁷² Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 26-27.

⁶⁷³ Ibid., 27.

⁶⁷⁴ Solov'ev, *Opravdanie*, SS VIII: 454.

⁶⁷⁵ Solov'ev, *Obshchi Smysl' Iskusstva*, SS VI: 85.

⁶⁷⁶ Solov'ev, *Opravdanie*, SS VIII: 454.

⁶⁷⁷ Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 27.

of view of the man) “to act so as to realize in this actual woman and in her life, that which she ought to be.”⁶⁷⁸

Soloviev acknowledges that the infrequent and transitory nature of this phenomenon, in which the “object of love does not preserve in reality that unconditional significance which is given to it by a loving dream (*vliublionnaia mehta*),” leads us to conclude that the vision of love must be “merely a subjective illusion.”⁶⁷⁹ Moreover, to the “outsider’s gaze,” which by definition is devoid of loving pathos, the unconditional significance of the beloved cannot but remain hidden. This hiddenness accounts for the “involuntary tinge of ridicule that unavoidably accompanies an outsider’s relation to lovers.”⁶⁸⁰ The roots of such skepticism, he argues, are not to be found solely in a disinterested objectivity. They reach back into Europe’s past and the cultural history of the idea of romantic love in general. In a

⁶⁷⁸ Soloviev, *Opravdanie*, SS VIII: 454.

⁶⁷⁹ Soloviev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 22. Robert Hazo shows how philosophical and theological differences influence the various interpretations of the phenomenon of love’s idealization. For example, while Marie-Henri Stendhal, who published *L’Amour* in 1822, maintains that “the lover’s idea of the beloved becomes completely illusory through his imputation of many perfections to her,” Scheler and Hartmann (and von Balthasar), argue that “love enhances rather than impairs vision.” Robert G. Hazo, *The Idea of Love* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1967), 67. Karol Wojtyla interprets idealization as a symptom of sentimentality and immaturity in love: “[Idealization] is particularly characteristic of young love. Here, the ideal is more powerful than the real, living human being, and the latter often becomes merely the occasion for an eruption in the subject’s emotional consciousness of the values which he or she longs with all his heart to find in another person. It does not matter whether they are really values possessed by the particular person towards whom the subject feels a sentimental love. Sentimentality is subjective and feeds, sometimes to excess, above all on values which the subject bears within himself or herself, and for which he or she consciously or unconsciously yearns.” Karol Wojtyla, *Love and Responsibility*, trans., H. T. Willetts (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 112-13. In contrast, Scheler argues that “love itself is what brings to the surface in the object ... the ever higher value completely, continually, and in the course of its movement just as if it [the value] radiated ‘by itself’ from the loved object even without each striving activity of the one who loves.” Dahm, 158. Hartmann, whose ideas on love are perhaps closest to Soloviev’s own in general, argues that “it inheres in the essence of personal love to pierce through the empirical person to his ideal value,” and that therefore “a cognitive element is always contained in love.” Hazo, 392-93. Von Balthasar, during the course of his reflection on poetic creativity, also argues that lovers see “their beloved in a wholly different way from others because the beloved’s profound interior self is manifested to them in all its utterances and appears as that which is really precious and worthy of love ... Exterior exchanges are only bridges by which the souls pass over into one another.” Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics: Vol. I: Seeing the Form*, trans., Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), 445.

⁶⁸⁰ Soloviev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 22.

brief argument reminiscent of Denis de Rougemont's analysis of the *Tristan and Iseult* myth and its consequences for modern European notions of love and marriage,⁶⁸¹ Soloviev contends that the ideal of medieval, courtly love was indeed illusory and contradictory (from the Christian point of view) since, given the "strong faith but weak reason (*razum*)" of the knights, it was based on a simplistic "identity of the beloved ideal and the given person (*litso*)."⁶⁸² The logical consequences of such confusion and naïveté between ideal and actual existence were expressed by Cervantes in his portrait of Don Quixote, whose deranged disillusionment "was chivalry's bequest to the new Europe."⁶⁸³ In the modern era, love's idealization subsequently lost all power and credibility to motivate any "exploits" (*podvigi*) whatsoever, inane or otherwise; and the light of love began to be regarded as nothing more than a "fantastic illumination of a short amorous 'prologue to heaven', which then nature very opportunely extinguishes as completely unnecessary for the ensuing earthly performance" (of marriage and procreation), thus rendering it a pleasant but ultimately meaningless and arbitrary human phenomenon.⁶⁸⁴

Soloviev believes this skepticism rests on an inadequate anthropology and an unreasonable and reductive interpretation of the experience of love, which fails to take into account the true distinction between ideal and phenomenal being.⁶⁸⁵ Although he affirms

⁶⁸¹ See de Rougemont, 15-137.

⁶⁸² Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 28.

⁶⁸³ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁶⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸⁵ The actual degree to which the above skepticism prevailed in late nineteenth century Russia and Europe is impossible to determine; but there is no question that Soloviev's argument on this point constitutes an important element in his polemic against Tolstoy and the ideas he had expressed in *The Kreutzer Sonata*. An instructive example of the profound differences in the anthropology (and metaphysics) of the two thinkers is found at the point in the story where Pozdnyshev describes his own experience of the idealization of love. "What a strange illusion it is to suppose that beauty is goodness!" he says. "A beautiful woman utters absurdities; we listen and we hear not the absurdities, but wise thoughts. She speaks, she does odious things,

that the object of love is one and the same person (*litso*), this person exists, so to speak, in “two different forms or in two difference spheres of being—the ideal and the real.”

Although the former is still only an idea, in “authentic, believing, seeing love,” we know that this idea is not an arbitrary invention on our part but manifests the truth of the person, albeit a truth “not yet realized in the sphere of external, real phenomena.”⁶⁸⁶ Moreover, for the materialist and idealist both, objectively speaking, that which seems is not identical with that which is: appearance is nothing more than the “relation or interaction between the seer and the seen” and is “defined by their mutual properties.”⁶⁸⁷ The man and the mole perceive the same world, but no one would dispute that the phenomenal world perceived by the former “corresponds more to that which is closer to the truth” than the latter.⁶⁸⁸ The true essence of a person is not exhausted in his given empirical phenomena: beyond animal and material content, the human person possesses an “ideal nature” as an “image of God.” Thus, despite idealization’s ephemeral and transitory character, it is reasonable to interpret it as a more inclusive experience of the truth of the person, a “revelation (*otkrovenie*) of ideal being.”⁶⁸⁹

Soloviev argues that this idealization of love as a form of true knowledge of the ideal essence of a person is subjectively self-evident because it includes and yet transcends limited empirical knowledge. To seek or demand objective, external proof for the verity of

and yet we are only conscious of something agreeable. If she refrains from absurd or hateful words and acts, and if she is beautiful to boot, we are straightway convinced that she is a paragon of wisdom and morality. As for me, I returned home in ecstasies, deciding that she was the pink of moral perfection and for this reason worthy to be my wife. The next day I proposed to her. What an absurd entanglement of ideas!” Leo Tolstoy, *The Kreutzer Sonata and Other Short Stories* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1993), 78.

⁶⁸⁶ Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 44.

⁶⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁶⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁶⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

knowledge of a personal, as opposed to an objective, essence, amounts to a category mistake. The lover knows insofar as he loves, and the beloved is revealed to the lover insofar as he or she is loved.⁶⁹⁰

The most significant dimension of idealization for Soloviev, however, is not that it demonstrates love's power to penetrate directly to the ideal truth of the beloved, although there is no question that he presumes the extensive patristic and medieval epistemological justification for love's crucial role in cognition, the so-called "*intelligentia amoris*."⁶⁹¹ Rather, it is the mysterious phenomenon of the "light" itself that makes a "special sensual perception" possible and points to love's true meaning.⁶⁹²

If this revelation of an ideal being, which is usually hidden by its material appearance, is not limited in love to inner feeling alone, but becomes at times something tangible even in the sphere of external sensations, then how much more significance should we recognize in love as the principle of the visible restoration of the image of God in the material world, the principle of the incarnation of true ideal humanness (*chelovechnost*). The power of love, turning into light, transfiguring and spiritualizing the form of external appearances, reveals to us its objective power.⁶⁹³

⁶⁹⁰ Jean-Luc Marion's recent phenomenological analysis of erotic love articulates precisely Soloviev's argument for why the "objective" truth of the person revealed in the pathos of love is self-evident to the lover, and hidden from an external, "objective" observer. "It is said that Don Juan and Sganarelle see the same other, but with two different gazes," Marion writes, "the former with the phantasms of desire, the latter with the neutrality of good sense. This is wrong ... The lover alone sees something else, a thing that no one other than he sees—that is, what is precisely no longer a thing, but, for the first time, just such an other, unique, individualized, henceforth torn from economy, detached from objectness, unveiled by the initiative of loving arisen like a phenomenon to that point unseen." Marion concludes that the lover "sees insofar as he loves" and "discovers a phenomenon that is seen insofar as it is loved." Marion, 80-81.

⁶⁹¹ As Meerson has shown, Soloviev did not only encounter the understanding of *amor ipse notitia est* (Gregory the Great) from his exhaustive studies in patristics, but also directly from the western mystical tradition articulated in the works of Bonaventure, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, and the Victorines. His own notion of love as a form of knowing is closer to William of Saint Thierry's dictum that *amor ipse intellectus est*, since the use of *intellectus*, as opposed to *ratio*, indicates that the knowledge of love is distinct from mere conceptual knowing. See Bernard McGinn, "Love, Knowledge, and Mystical Union in Western Christianity: Twelfth to Sixteenth Centuries," *Church History* 56, no. 1 (1987), 9-24.

⁶⁹² Soloviev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 27.

⁶⁹³ *Ibid.*, 27.

The theological justification for this apparently contradictory claim that the “external sensation” of sight can directly and tangibly perceive a spiritual, immaterial essence is well-known in the Eastern Orthodox spiritual tradition.⁶⁹⁴ But while it may safely be assumed that Soloviev was familiar with Origen’s five “spiritual senses” and their medieval formulations in the mystical theologies of Bonaventure and William of Saint Thierry, on the question of spiritual sensibility, as Kornblatt shows,⁶⁹⁵ he is indebted to Eastern Orthodoxy’s emphasis on the anthropological and theological implications of the Transfiguration (*Preobrazhenie*) and its “theology of light” vis-à-vis *theosis*.⁶⁹⁶

In Soloviev’s aesthetics, light and love are both mediating energies, distinct but inseparable, related to one another much like the Transfiguration (*Preobrazhenie*) is related to the divine-humanity of Christ and in, with, and through Him, the all-encompassing process of *theosis* (*obozhenie*): the former is a tangible, concrete manifestation in beauty of the universal reality of the latter. According to Eastern Orthodox theological tradition, the Transfiguration is made possible by the power of divine light, as one of the “divine energies,” to transfigure material phenomena, not only Christ’s body but his clothing as well. The apostles’ capacity to contemplate this revelation, which is humanly speaking

⁶⁹⁴ As von Balthasar shows, the new Christian reality ushered in an awareness of a formerly inconceivable possibility of “spiritual sensibility,” in which the seemingly mutually exclusive extremes of the “hopelessly worldly” tangible experience of the senses and the “hopelessly unworldly” character of mystical experience is overcome. For his theological analysis and historical overview of the “spiritual senses” in Christian Tradition, see von Balthasar, *Seeing the Form*, 365-425.

⁶⁹⁵ “An analysis of Solovyev’s attraction to Plato, concentrating specifically on the image of light in both of their philosophies of love, will reveal Solovyev’s transformation of Eros into Orthodox dogma, for the Russia theologian’s Light, I contend, originates on Mount Tabor, and from there transfigures Plato.” Kornblatt, “The Transfiguration of Plato in the Erotic Philosophy of Vladimir Solovyev,” 81.

⁶⁹⁶ Lossky gives a comprehensive overview of the theology of light in patristic and medieval theology in the Eastern Church. See “The Divine Light” in Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 217-35. For a more in-depth look at the medieval developments, see also “The Theology of Light in the Thought of St. Gregory Palamas” in Vladimir Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2001), 45-69.

imperceptible to their corporeal eyes, points to the mystery of *theosis*. As Lossky explains, “the Transfiguration was not a phenomenon circumscribed in time and space; no change took place in Christ at that moment, even in His human nature, but a change was produced in the consciousness of the apostles, who received for a moment the ability to see their Master as He was, resplendent in the eternal light of His divinity.”⁶⁹⁷ Kornblatt rightly identifies the ambiguity inherent in this theology of the Transfiguration as informing Soloviev’s own understanding of light as a mediating energy: while on the one hand it mediates between two natures, overcoming the abyss between divine and material reality, on the other, it is one of these divine realities itself, i.e., the Spirit, who inspires Saint John to declare that “God is Light.”⁶⁹⁸

The way and the context in which Soloviev uses the verb “to transfigure” (*preobrazhat*) indicates that for him the light that reveals the *imago Dei* of the beloved derives its ultimate significance from the light of Mount Tabor.⁶⁹⁹ If love is the principle of the *visible* restoration of the image of God in the human and material sphere, its power must necessarily be manifested as a light that “transfigures” and “spiritualizes” the *appearance* of external phenomena, revealing and manifesting the ideal essence of the beloved in beauty. But this revelation of love’s objective power is still nothing but “a momentary and mysterious flash of some mystery” that does not yet exist in actual fact. This “flash” brings

⁶⁹⁷ Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God*, 61.

⁶⁹⁸ 1 John 1:5

⁶⁹⁹ “Soloviev’s frequent use of the verb *preobrazhat* has been translated as ‘transform’. The verb has another meaning, however: ‘to transfigure’; and it is this meaning that Soloviev no doubt intended in his discussion of light. ... Although both Eastern and Western Christianity are founded on belief in the Incarnation, it is the Eastern Church that places special emphasis on the belief that God became man so that man might become God, and thus the Orthodox celebrate Transfiguration with added attention. ... Deification is not only possible but necessary; flesh is not evil; and mere redemption is not the highest goal of mankind. All of matter may be, will be, and is continually being transfigured.” Kornblatt, “The Transfiguration of Plato in the Erotic Philosophy of Vladimir Soloviev,” 91.

us to the other aspect of “that which is given in feeling,” namely, the desires that this vision of beauty provokes.

1.2 Theosis and the “Poetic Fire” of Erotic Pathos

Soloviev extends the analogy of artistic inspiration and creativity to the subjective dimension of the desires born of erotic pathos. He affirms Plato’s observation in *The Symposium* that erotic pathos is intrinsically “poetic”⁷⁰⁰ because, unlike Apollo and Hermes, *eros* bestows a power that is neither theoretical nor purely contemplative but rather “infinitely creative.”⁷⁰¹ When *eros* is liberated from the “lower soul,” which limits this creativity exclusively to the physical sphere of procreation, its proper purpose is revealed as what Plato calls “birth in beauty.”⁷⁰² This insight, Soloviev argues, does not refer primarily to artistic activity, which bore no special interest for Plato.⁷⁰³ Soloviev believes that Plato had personally experienced *eros* as a *pontifex* between heaven and earth, as a creative power whose proper sphere of activity is “that border of two worlds, what is called *Beauty*.”⁷⁰⁴ Plato himself never fully defines nor follows through on this notion, and his argument in *The Symposium* ultimately ends in the abandonment of beauty in this world for the direct

⁷⁰⁰ Plato uses the phrase “poetic fire” to refer to the inherently creative character of *Eros*. “*Eros* is himself so divine a poet that he can kindle in the souls of others the poetic fire, for no matter what dull clay we seemed to be before, we are every one of us a poet when we are in love. We need ask no further proof than this that *Eros* is a poet deeply versed in every branch of what I may define succinctly as creative art...” Plato, *The Symposium*, 196e.

⁷⁰¹ Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 22; Solov'ev, *Drama*, SS IX: 227.

⁷⁰² See Plato, *The Symposium*, 206 a-e.

⁷⁰³ “[Plato] could recognize art—but just a certain elementary part of it—as a secondary, preliminary phenomenon of *Eros*, but in no way as its primary and ultimate task. From his ideal city he banishes the most important forms of poetry, as well as all music (as we understand it), with the exception of military songs. Towards the plastic arts he never shows any interest whatsoever. ‘Birth in beauty’ is in any case something much more important than engagement with the arts.” Solov'ev, *Drama*, SS IX: 228.

⁷⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 228 [emphasis in original].

contemplation of the idea of Beauty itself.⁷⁰⁵ Nevertheless, Soloviev discerns an important partial truth in Plato's insight and chooses to interpret "birth in beauty" as a creative activity that seeks the *tangible* realization of the ideal essence of the beloved, which in turn presupposes the *immortalization* of the beloved.⁷⁰⁶ How does he see this creative impulse manifested subjectively?

There are three aspects of the "subjective requirement" of sexual-spousal love in Soloviev's thought: a desire for union, a desire for the good of the other, and a desire for the good of the self. The primary desire elicited by erotic pathos is for "one-flesh union" as an end in itself, a union that is free, actual, indivisible, interior, ultimate, and eternal. This desire presumes both a desire for one's own good, i.e., "to find in the other the positive and unconditional fulfillment of one's own essence," as well as the desire for the other's good, i.e., to transfer "all of one's vital interests to the other" as possessing absolute significance (and thus overcome egoism at its root).⁷⁰⁷ The lover is attracted and drawn out of himself (*ekstasis*) by the beauty of the beloved's ideal essence manifested in and through their phenomenal being when it is revealed in the idealization of erotic pathos; but this ascending love is also descending, in that the lover desires to help the beloved "give birth in beauty" to this ideal essence in him or herself, to realize it in his or her actual, tangible, phenomenal existence, for their own good.⁷⁰⁸

⁷⁰⁵ Plato, *The Symposium*, 211c.

⁷⁰⁶ Soloviev, *Drama*, SS IX: 226, 231.

⁷⁰⁷ Soloviev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 56, 21-22.

⁷⁰⁸ "Love is indeed 'ecstasy', not in the sense of a moment of intoxication, but rather as a journey, an ongoing exodus out of the closed inward-looking self towards its liberation through self-giving, and thus towards authentic self-discovery and indeed the discovery of God: 'Whoever seeks to gain his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will preserve it' (Lk 17:33), as Jesus says throughout the Gospels (cf. Mt 10:39; 16:25; Mk 8:35; Lk 9:24; Jn 12:25)." Livio Melina, "Epiphany of Love: Morality, Cosmology, and Culture," *Communio* 32, no. (Summer 2005), 6.

In actuality, the desires for the good of union, the good of the other, and the good of the self are not mutually exclusive but interdependent, since the desire for the good of the other is necessary for unity, which in turn fulfills the self, marking the transition from isolated individuality to authentic personhood in communion. In this can be discerned the principle of Trinitarian all-unity, since each desire can only be fulfilled to the extent that egoism is overcome, and true personhood or individuality is restored in the other and in the self, which is why this triune structure of desire resists separation into such apparently mutually exclusive categories such as “acquisitive” vs. “benevolent.”⁷⁰⁹ In the abstract terms of *The General Meaning of Art*, Soloviev says this principle is active when “the particular elements find themselves in each other and in the whole ... each experiences in its own particularity the unity of the whole, and in the whole its own particularity.”⁷¹⁰

This triune desire is premised on love’s revelation and affirmation of the absolute significance of the individuality or personhood of the other, and through this affirmation, the absolute significance of the individuality or personhood of the self. Soloviev gives an exhaustive account of the moral implications and consequences of this revelation in *The Justification of the Good* in terms of the moral principles governing human relations.⁷¹¹ In *The Meaning of Love*, however, he emphasizes the theurgic dimension, namely, that the

⁷⁰⁹ Hazo classifies Soloviev’s theory of love, along with the theories of Descartes, Hume, Locke, and Pascal, under the heading, “Love as Wholly or Primarily Judgment,” because of Soloviev’s insistence on the lover’s act of acknowledgement and affirmation of the beloved’s absolute significance. Nevertheless, he does analyze the tendential aspect of love in Soloviev’s theory. His analysis presumes the mutual exclusivity of the acquisitive and benevolent expressions of love and leads him to conclude that Soloviev’s “eros” is transformed over time into “agape,” which is an oversimplification of his theory. “Soloviev’s remarks on the differing desires involved in the love relationship between a man and a woman ... imply that the central desire in love, the desire for the union of complementarity, takes both an acquisitive and a benevolent form. It is, of course, impossible for such a desire to take both an acquisitive and a benevolent expression simultaneously since these tendencies are mutually exclusive. On the other hand, because both are asserted to be part of the tendential aspect of love we must assume that they occur sequentially.” Hazo, 450-52.

⁷¹⁰ Soloviev, *Obshchi Smysl' Iskusstva*, SS VI: 81.

⁷¹¹ See Chapters IV-X in Soloviev, *Opravdanie*, SS VIII: 68-403.

affirmation of absolute significance necessarily includes a desire for it to become actual, for the *immortality* of this particular beloved person, whom he describes in somewhat less than romantic terms as an “incarnate, living spirit in a bodily organism.”⁷¹² As such, this affirmation amounts to a prophetic protest against the inevitability of the death and decay of the beloved.⁷¹³

Ironically, Soloviev’s argument concerning the relation between *eros* and immortality is based on the same belief about what constitutes an authentically Christian notion of immortality as is found in the once highly influential argument made by Anders Nygren, in which he condemns *eros* as irredeemably “unchristian.” In *Agape and Eros*, Nygren draws on ancient and patristic sources to argue that *eros* represents the inherently godless and blasphemous Hellenic doctrine of the “natural immortality of the soul,” a doctrine that presumes the hubris of self-sufficiency and self-deification. Christian *agape*, on the contrary, is the affirmation of what the Apologists called the “Resurrection of the flesh,” which bears witness to God’s sovereign and salvific power. For him, this marks the primary

⁷¹² Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 31.

⁷¹³ On this point, Josef Pieper notes the “astonishing unanimity in basic intent” of such diverse thinkers as Thomas Aquinas, Ortega y Gasset, Blondel, Pfänder, Marcel, as well as Soloviev himself. To varying degrees, they all affirm love’s power to sustain the beloved in existence, and the unanimity of this phenomenological observation, Pieper says, “should cause us to reflect.” Pieper, 167-68. Karol Wojtyla can also be added to this list. He writes in *Love and Responsibility* that “the empirically inescapable connection between love and the affirmation of life compels us to recognize ... that in the perspective of the Creative Love the death of personal existences can only be a transition to a higher form of life. *Morte fortius caritas*.” Wojtyla, 299. Pieper himself accepts what is implied by this common observation only with considerable reservations. He believes that when Marcel says “to love a person means to say: you will not die,” he is merely recognizing that the beloved as a person “cannot simply drop out of reality,” and “will be physically resurrected and live forever, through death and beyond it.” His conclusion that Soloviev crosses the boundary into “madness” with his argument that death and true love are incompatible is not only based on a misunderstanding of Soloviev’s theory (in particular, the distinction between ideal and actual existence, the essential role of grace, and indeed, the entire economy of *theosis*), but reveals where their respective eschatological emphases diverge. For Soloviev, to dismiss the dimension of “realized eschatology” in the historical process of divine-humanity (which, he readily admits, remains in its infancy, historically speaking) and relegate the spiritualization and immortalization of the body exclusively to the eschatological resurrection beyond history is to empty Christianity of its living incarnational essence and condemn it to otherworldly abstraction. Pieper, 169.

difference between Hellenism and the ancient Christian Church.⁷¹⁴ Soloviev fully agrees that belief in the natural immortality of the soul stems from an “abstract faith” that treats human beings as if they were disembodied spirits. But, he argues, it is precisely the light of *eros*, not any sort of spiritual love, that most effectively exposes the insufficiency of this abstract faith. The proper object of *eros* is precisely this particular individual, a “living spirit” embodied in a concrete, material organism.⁷¹⁵

Since the idealization of the beloved reveals love as the principle of “illumination” (*prosvetlenie*) and “spiritualization” (*odukhotvorenie*) of this same concrete individual, the lover desires and “demands” the salvation of the entire being of the beloved, spirit, soul, and body, from death and decay. Soloviev argues this point by interpreting Plato’s notion of *eros*’ task to give birth “in beauty” as that of the “regeneration or resurrection of this life for immortality.”⁷¹⁶ *Eros* thus becomes a sign of the “Resurrection of the flesh” because “that which is illuminated and spiritualized” in its light and (potentially) by its power is precisely “flesh” (*plot*). This relationship between sexual-spousal love and immortality and regeneration or resurrection remains merely an aspect of “that which is given in feeling” and is yet to be justified in actuality. What C. S. Lewis calls the “grim joke” of the combination in *eros* of fickleness and protestations of permanency,⁷¹⁷ remains a riddle of human experience whose solution can only be found, Soloviev believes, in the divine-human

⁷¹⁴ “For Christian faith, salvation from death is a mighty act of God; in the Platonic, Hellenistic view, immortality is a native possession of the human soul. But such a doctrine, from the Christian point of view, is in line with the Fall; it is man’s attempt to make himself like God, to make himself God; it is an assault on God’s divinity.” See Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans., Philip S. Watson (London: S.P.C.K., 1954), 280-86.

⁷¹⁵ Soloviev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 31.

⁷¹⁶ Soloviev does admit that Plato himself never drew this conclusion, and in fact speculates that he forgot his own insight. See Soloviev, *Drama*, SS IX: 230-31.

⁷¹⁷ Lewis, 113-14.

economy of *theosis*. A corporeality that is worthy of love, i.e., that is worthy of the affirmation of absolute significance, does not emerge naturally from the earth or fall readymade from heaven; it is a task to be achieved through an “effort” or “feat” (*podvig*) that is both “spiritual-physical” and “divine-human” in which the beloved’s ideal essence or *imago* becomes fully incarnate, actual, and tangible in the form of beauty. Before turning to the nature of this task, he first deals with the reasons for why it has yet to be accomplished.

2. “THE FUTILITY AND FALSE NORMS OF SEXUAL-SPOUSAL LOVE

Soloviev acknowledges that the realization of sexual-spousal love’s ideal meaning has hitherto never even been posed as a task to be achieved or a problem to be solved because naturally and humanly speaking it is impossible. The experience of erotic pathos and the idealization of the beloved are usually brief, transitory, often one-sided, and therefore appear in hindsight illusory and deceptive. Concupiscence, the as yet largely unrealized human capacity for authentic love, and ultimately sin, decay, and death all seem to condemn the promise and “poetry” of erotic pathos to futility. But Soloviev does not lay the blame solely at the feet of fallen humanity. The very impenetrability of material, temporal existence that characterizes the fallen universe seem to give the last word to the “two facts” of “mortality” and “emptiness.” Since it is both subjectively and objectively impossible to realize *eros*’s promise of the absolute significance of the beloved, which demands not only immortality, but a life worthy of immortality,⁷¹⁸ the phenomenon of *eros* over the course of history has more often than not either devolved into or has been confused

⁷¹⁸ His explanation of this point is clearly part of his rhetorical strategy against Tolstoy and his adherents. By taking an even more deliberately realistic position, he is anticipating the charge of naïve utopianism, while pointing out that even the skeptics do not fully appreciate the nature of the problem.

with various degrees of perversion, reduction, or has at best been replaced by the “prose” of the purely natural and social realities of marriage and family. According to Soloviev, the empirical fact of love’s futility, and thus the absurdity of even posing the problem of its realization, has precluded anyone except the deluded Don Quixotes of the world from making a conscious commitment even to attempt to fulfill love’s promise.

Nevertheless, he argues, the realization of the meaning of sexual-spousal love is no different from any other human capacity that has taken millennia to develop, such as the sciences, arts, civil society, technology, or even the capacity for rational thought itself. As he explains:

Based on the very nature of the human person, who in his rational consciousness, moral freedom, and capacity for self-perfection possesses infinite possibilities, we do not have the right beforehand to consider any task whatsoever unrealizable for him if it does not contain within itself an inherent logical contradiction or inconsistency with the general meaning of the universal and expedient path of cosmic and historical development.⁷¹⁹

His argument does not seek to deny the evidence of actual human experience to which pessimists like Leo Tolstoy appeal; he simply interprets the evidence within the horizons of divine-humanity, claiming the higher ground of a more inclusive and thus more reasonable realism. “For a human person,” he says, “love is for the time being what reason was for the animal world: it exists in beginnings and rudiments, but still not in actual fact.”⁷²⁰

Nevertheless, he exhorts his readers not to make peace with the “unendurable contradiction for the mind” caused by the disappearance of the ideal reality revealed by love. “Why on earth should we make peace with this disappearance? If that which was lost was true, then

⁷¹⁹ Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 23.

⁷²⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

the task of consciousness and will is not in accepting that loss as final, but in understanding and removing its causes.”⁷²¹

As a result of the material impossibility and human incapacity to realize sexual-spousal love’s ideal meaning at this stage of historical development, erotic pathos has been accepted as merely a “given fact” or “state” that can only be passively suffered, carrying with it no higher or lasting significance and no special obligation or task. The tension between its given *subjective* significance for individual life and its *objective* lack of significance for the collective life of humanity results in the general acceptance of *false norms*, such as those formulated in modern psychology, which are, he argues, fragmentary and exclusive (mistaking the part for the whole) and thus merely less extreme abnormalities. The realization of sexual-spousal love’s ideal meaning is indeed *humanly* impossible; but, he argues, it is *divine-humanly* possible. The causes for its failure, which need to be overcome in order to accomplish this divine-human task, are both proximate, concerning individual life, as well as remote, concerning universal existence.

2.1 *Proximate Reasons for Sexual-Spousal Love’s Failure*

The first proximate cause for love’s failure is what he calls the “perversion of the loving relationship itself.” Drawing on the imagery from Hebrews, he says we interpret love’s “good news” of a lost paradise as “an invitation to become naturalized completely in the land of exile,”⁷²² exchanging the better reality and higher principle and law of life

⁷²¹ Ibid., 48.

⁷²² Ibid., 48.

revealed in erotic pathos for a “small part of a field with all its thistles and thorns.”⁷²³ This sinful perversion, in which the “otherworldly” mystical foundation is dismissed and forgotten as a “fleeting exultation” and the physical, exclusively sexual dimension is isolated as an end in itself, is an obstacle to realization because it inverts the “very order of unity,” ensuring the perpetuation of an egoistic, empty, fragmented, and thus mortal existence. Unlike Tolstoy, who interprets this same tendency as inseparable from *eros* itself, and as something inherently unchristian and deserving unconditional rejection,⁷²⁴ Soloviev does not reject sexual union *in itself*: he rejects sexual union *by itself*. When it has been isolated and chosen as the most desired and “essential purpose” of love and as its “primary condition,” it leads ultimately to “love’s grave,” a false and passing unity, what he calls “*egoism à deux*” (*egoizm vdvoem*).⁷²⁵ With the loss of the mystical foundation necessary for true unity, sexual union loses its *human* meaning and is reduced to possessing merely animal significance.

The secondary proximate cause for love’s failure is the universal confusion of what constitutes the norm in sexual love and relations and what amounts to merely “customary deviation,” or the confusion of “that-which-ought-to-be” (ideal being) with “that-which-commonly-occurs.” Soloviev chooses to argue this point with a brief analysis of fetishism.

⁷²³ Cf. “Ground that has absorbed the rain falling upon it repeatedly and brings forth crops useful to those for whom it is cultivated receives a blessing from God. . . . But if it produces thorns and thistles, it is rejected; it will soon be cursed and finally burned. All these died in faith. They did not receive what had been promised but saw it and greeted it from afar and acknowledged themselves to be strangers and aliens on earth, for those who speak thus show that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of the land from which they had come, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better homeland, a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.” Hebrews 6:8, 11:13-16. It is worth noting that Soloviev is not concerned with the moral reasons per se of the perversion of the loving relationship, i.e., sin and concupiscence, which he addresses directly in *Spiritual Foundations*, but is only addressing this tendency to perversion as an obstacle to the realization of sexual-spousal love’s meaning. See his introduction, entitled “Concerning Nature, Death, Sin, Law, and Grace” in Solov’ev, *Dukhovnie Osnovi Zhizni*, SS III: 305-15.

⁷²⁴ See Moller, 285-86.

⁷²⁵ Solov’ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 48.

He cites the work of French psychologist Alfred Binet (1857-1911), “*Le fétichisme en amour*,” and Austro-German sexologist and psychologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing (1840-1902), *Psychopathia Sexualis*, the most influential psychological work on sexuality before the publication of Freud’s ideas. The principle by which the experts condemn fetishism as abnormal and deviant is the fact that the “part is set in place of the whole, a member in place of the essence.”⁷²⁶ But this principle has no objective basis, and is thus purely arbitrary, since these same experts do not even suggest what it means for a human being to be “whole” in the first place. As a consequence, they perpetuate the confusion behind the customary deviation in sexual relationships (*polovoe otnoshenie*), the perversion of love in which the purely animal nature of man is affirmed in isolation, as a “natural” norm.⁷²⁷

Soloviev considers the arbitrariness of psychology’s foundation and its errors inevitable, since its adherents ignore those aspects of human nature without which human wholeness cannot be reasonably proposed, namely, the hierarchical and complex structure of man as a natural, social, and spiritual (“mystical” or “divine”) being. Human wholeness, and thus what is, properly speaking, “natural” for human beings when it comes to sexual relations, is possible to discern correctly only through a free theosophical methodology: it is discerned through an “unsuppressed conscience” (discerning goodness) and an “uncalloused” aesthetic sense (discerning beauty), in full accord with “philosophical understanding” (discerning truth). When these faculties are taken into account, he argues, it becomes evident that any norm of sexuality that separates, isolates, or inverts the three

⁷²⁶ Ibid., 35.

⁷²⁷ Ibid., 35-37.

ordered dimensions of human nature is rightly judged “unnatural,” since what is “natural” to one dimension may be “unnatural” for another, and thus for the human being as a whole.⁷²⁸

Some “unnatural” phenomena are easier to discern than others, such as the exclusive exaltation of the animal dimension over the others. But the tendencies to isolate the other two dimensions are also instances where the ideal norm has been confused with “customary deviation.” When considering the social dimension, in which man’s animal nature is externally curbed and channeled through the socio-moral law, marriage as a social and legal contract has been unjustifiably accepted as the “summit of life.” When the acceptance of this “mediocre middle” becomes a norm, what could have become “free, intelligent expressions of eternal unity in a temporal process” are reduced to an “involuntary conduit of senseless material life.”⁷²⁹ By the same token, when the spiritual dimension is isolated in a purely spiritual love that rejects the lower aspects, the relationship lacks positive content and is reduced to “a dreamy and sterile tenderness devoid of any real objective and vital purpose,”⁷³⁰ which causes sensible people to take such a love for “nothing but poetry.”⁷³¹ The only possible way to preserve and integrate all three dimensions of human nature in one organic whole and thus arrive at a true norm for what is humanly “natural,” is for the spiritual dimension, man as *imago Dei*, to be affirmed as the highest principle. Moreover, the other two dimensions, the animal and social, also need to be affirmed in their proper and relative place, each serving and together realizing the good of the whole, even as each

⁷²⁸ Ibid., 37-38.

⁷²⁹ Ibid., 40.

⁷³⁰ Ibid.

⁷³¹ Ibid. Soloviev makes this point when he writes that “sensible people ‘*glaubt an keine Liebe oder nimmt’s für Poesie*’,” quoting most likely from Schopenhauer or Goethe, both of whom, as Wozniuk points out, he quoted often. See Note 41 in Soloviev, *The Heart of Reality*, 230.

dimension is realized according to its own unique meaning. Soloviev's conclusion about what is "natural" humanly speaking, leads us to what he calls the "remote causes" for love's failure.

2.2 *Remote Reasons for Sexual-Spousal Love's Failure*

To make his argument concerning the remote reasons for love's failure, he reiterates briefly his ideas on the principle of natural and moral evil in creation and humanity. In particular, he summarizes the universal law of the identity of "Dionysius" (generic life) and "Hades" (individual death), which, apart from the grace of divine salvation, condemns the human individual to what is ultimately a mortal, empty, and futile existence. Sexual-spousal love's subjective, personal vision and affirmation of the unconditional significance of the other and the self cannot be reconciled with this fallen human condition. The vision and affirmation of sexual-spousal love encompasses the whole, concrete human individuality and "requires the preservation of it as such," which means that it assumes the immortality of "this particular human being, of this incarnate living spirit in a corporeal organism."⁷³² His remark that this state of affairs apparently "justifies those who consider love as an illusion,"⁷³³ is no doubt directed towards Tolstoy, since he is aiming his most pointed and overt polemic here against what he calls impotent Tolstoyan moralism. Tolstoy, reflecting on the same human condition, concludes in *The Kreutzer Sonata* that sexual-spousal love is nothing more than a passing, sinful, unhealthy delusion brought about by "over-nourishment and provocative dressing," a form of love that is irredeemably and essentially egoistic and

⁷³² Soloviev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 30-31.

⁷³³ *Ibid.*, 30.

therefore an obstacle to true Christian love of neighbor.⁷³⁴ Soloviev does not take issue with Tolstoy's moral judgment in itself, which he calls "obvious." His argument is that a purely moralistic solution is impotent before the realities of sin and death.⁷³⁵

Having argued that the "inevitability of death is incompatible with true love," Soloviev declares that immortality in its turn is incompatible with the fallen human condition, which makes death not only inevitable as the fruit of sin, but "extremely desirable." He agrees with Tolstoy's pessimistic portrayal of this condition, which he believes the great novelist reproduced and condemned magnificently in *Anna Karenina*, *The Death of Ivan Illych*, and, in particular, *The Kreutzer Sonata*. But even an accurate description of an illness has no power to heal. He remarks that while many in Russian society have read and understood *The Kreutzer Sonata* with great delight, hardly one of them would think to turn down an invitation to a ball. Thus, he concludes, it is extremely difficult "to change the practical functioning of the social sphere with ethics alone, even in perfect artistic form."⁷³⁶ In place of Tolstoy's moralistic denial and condemnation of sexual love and the "flesh," which represents a "false spirituality," he proposes his own "true

⁷³⁴ See Moller, 285. See also Pozdnischeff's account of how he fell in love with his wife in Tolstoy, 83-86.

⁷³⁵ Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 31.

⁷³⁶ See footnote in Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 30. Soloviev develops this polemic against Tolstoy in his final work, *War, Progress, and the End of History*. In the "Third Conversation," the "Prince" (representing the views of Tolstoy) and "Mr. Z" (representing Soloviev's own views) are debating the nature of true Christianity. The Prince argues for a moral interpretation of enlightened Christian teaching, and Mr. Z argues that, given the realities of death and evil, the "good must have some power beyond the moral sphere." Mr. Z concludes his argument by declaring, "The real victory over evil is the real resurrection. Only this, I repeat, reveals the real kingdom of God whereas, without it, you have only the kingdom of death and sin and their creator, the devil. The resurrection, not in its metaphorical, but in its literal meaning—this is the testimony of the true God." Vladimir Solov'ev, *Sochineniia V Dvukh Tomakh [Works in Two Volumes]*, 2 ed., 2 vols., *Filosofskoe Nasledie*, vol. 2 (Moscow: Akademiia nauk SSSR. Institut filosofii. Izdatel'stvo 'Mysl', 1990), 733.

spirituality,” which is by definition the divine-human “regeneration, redemption, and resurrection” of the flesh from within.⁷³⁷

3. “TRUE MARRIAGE” AS THEURGIC TASK

Soloviev declares as a matter of fact that the form, conditions, and means for the divine-human or theurgic realization of sexual-spousal love’s ideal meaning, for its “justification in practice,” depend directly on two “well known but little understood” theological truths of Scripture: the fullness of the *imago Dei* as the true unity of man and woman (Genesis 1:27), and the “great mystery” of Christ and the Church as the divine-human exemplar and meaning of this unity in sacramental or “true marriage” (Ephesians 5:32). Consistent with his life-long project to vindicate Christianity by “raising it to a new level of rational consciousness,”⁷³⁸ his explication of the theurgic task of sexual-spousal love elucidates the full meaning of these theological truths.

Each time he addresses the essence of the meaning of sexual-spousal love by way of introduction or summary, from his earlier works to his most mature, he presumes this understanding of the *imago* and presents it in the scriptural and theological context of the Pauline analogy with the “great mystery.” In *The Spiritual Foundations of Life*, he identifies but does not expound on the analogous relationship between the “mystical wedding” between Christ and the Church and the sacrament of marriage.⁷³⁹ In *La Russie et L’Église Universelle*, this understanding of the *imago* and the “great mystery” is expressed more fully in the context of his sophiological Christology and ecclesiology. Christ, Mary, and the

⁷³⁷ Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 40.

⁷³⁸ Solov'ev, "Istoriia i budushchnost' teokratii," SS IV: 214. See above p. 70.

⁷³⁹ Solov'ev, *Dukhovnie Osnovi Zhizni*, SS III: 399.

Church constitute the fullness of the incarnate *Sophia* in her masculine, feminine, and social or universal manifestations. Consequently and by way of analogy, the spousal union of husband and wife, and their particular relationship to the Church, realize this same mystery on an individual level.⁷⁴⁰ In *The Meaning of Love*, he introduces the essence of his theory by quoting Genesis 1:27 and Ephesians 5:32 and then formulates his argument on this foundation.⁷⁴¹ The same assertion of the *imago* and the “great mystery” is found in both *The Justification of the Good* and his *Brockhaus* encyclopedia article on love. “It is not for nothing that such an apparently simple relationship ... is called a “great mystery” and is recognized as the abiding symbol, sanctified by the Word of God, signifying the union of the Lord of Israel with his people, of Christ crucified with the earthly Church, and Christ, the King of Glory with the New Jerusalem.”⁷⁴² Referring to sexual love (*polovaia liubov*), he writes “already in the prophetic books of the Old Testament the relationship between God and the chosen people is analogously portrayed as spousal union (and the falling away of the people from their God as nothing other than fornication). In the New Testament this idea is transferred to Christ and the Church, and the completion of history appears as the wedding of the ‘Lamb’ with His bride, the all-holy and triumphant Church of the New Jerusalem.”⁷⁴³

Contrary to those who interpret his theory as some sort of naturalistic “erotic utopia,” this explication demonstrates that when, in the language of free theosophy, he speaks of the perfect union of man and woman as “true individuality,” he presupposes that such a union is not simply the result of spiritual, moral, and creative human effort but is a truly *theurgic*

⁷⁴⁰ See Soloviev, *La Russie*, 263-66.

⁷⁴¹ See Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 41.

⁷⁴² Solov'ev, *Opravdanie*, SS VIII: 453.

⁷⁴³ Solov'ev, “*Liubov*,” SS X: 236-37.

process of the restoration of the *imago Dei*. In other words, the union itself presupposes the creative power of divine grace (*blagodat*), communicated through the sacraments of the Church, even as it requires the free and full cooperation of the spouses.

The formulation of his argument on this point is not without certain historical limitations vis-à-vis the roles of husband and wife, as well as textual ambiguities concerning the particular form of perfected “true individuality” or “perfect marriage” as the restored *imago Dei* of the man-woman pair. The former limitations have led to accusations of gender bias stemming from the prejudices of his own cultural and social milieu (Tatjana Kochetkova) or from his uncritical and simplistic acceptance of biblical revelation (Edith Clowes).⁷⁴⁴ The latter ambiguities have led some to dismiss his notion of “true individuality” as an unjustified and ultimately heterodox incorporation of androgyny into Christian thought.⁷⁴⁵ While it is true that he found the notion of androgyny (as expressed principally in the works of Plato, Franz von Baader, and the Kabala)⁷⁴⁶ helpful in formulating his Christian anthropology of the divine *imago*, he integrates only those elements that correspond to the principles of Trinitarian all-unity, Chalcedonian divine-humanity, and biblical anthropology.⁷⁴⁷ In so doing he anticipates developments in the

⁷⁴⁴ See “Gender bias in Solov’jov’s theory of love and the question of its relevance” in Tatjana Jurievna Kochetkova, “Vladimir Solov’jov’s Theory of Divine Humanity” (doctoral, Katholieke Universiteit Nijmegen, 2001), 127-29; and Clowes, 561.

⁷⁴⁵ See “The Positive and Negative in the Amorous Romanticism of Soloviev” in Trubetskoi, *Mirosozertsaniye*, 610-31, “Androgynism in Solovyov” in Zenkovsky, 515-18. See also Mochul’skii, “Ideia Obshchestvennovo Khristianstva V Russkoi Filosofii (the Idea of Social Christianity in Russian Philosophy),” 202-03; Philip Sherrard, “The Meaning of Sexual Love in the Works of Three Russian Writers,” *Sobornost’* 6, no. (1972-73), 567-71; Olga Matich, “Androgyny and the Russian Religious Renaissance,” in *Western Philosophical Systems in Russian Literature*, ed. Anthony M. Mlikotin (Los Angeles: University of Southern California Press, 1979), 168, and Matich, *Erotic Utopia*, 57-88.

⁷⁴⁶ For an overview of the Kabalistic notion of androgyny in Soloviev’s thought, see Kornblatt, “Solov’ev’s Androgynous Sophia and the Jewish Kabbalah,” 487-96.

⁷⁴⁷ Although he does not mention the term androgyny or the androgyne in *The Meaning of Love*, he does express in *The Life Drama of Plato* this element of his theory in terms of “true androgyny” because he seeks to

twentieth-century Russian Orthodox and Roman Catholic understanding of the *imago Dei* in humanity.⁷⁴⁸

First, the analogous relationship between Christian marriage and the *sacramentum magnum* will be considered in order to understand the general principles that characterize the theurgic task of sexual-spousal love and “true marriage,” as well as the roles of husband and wife. Next, what characterizes the divine and human aspects of the theurgic task respectively will be addressed. The “divine” includes the primacy of grace (*blagodat*) and the presupposition of “true marriage” as sacrament, while the “human” includes the act and experience of “religious faith,” prayer (what he calls “faith in action”), as well as all that is encompassed in his notion of the spiritual and moral “feat” (*podvig*), “patience to the end,” and “martyrdom.” Finally, his vision of the goal of the theurgic task as “true individuality” or “perfect marriage” will be examined and its characterization by some scholars as a form of androgyny will be assessed.

3.1 The “Great Mystery” of Ephesians 5 and “True Marriage”

Summing up the logic of Ephesians 5:22-30, Soloviev declares that “just as God relates to his creation and Christ relates to His church, so too a husband ought to relate to his wife.”⁷⁴⁹ The foundation for this “ought” is the “great mystery” insofar as it represents what he calls an “essential analogy” (*sushchestvennaia analogiia*), but not an identity, between

show that Plato’s notion of androgyny is an insight into the truth of *eros*, albeit a partial truth that is “indistinctly expressed.” Solov’ev, *Drama*, SS IX: 234.

⁷⁴⁸ For a detailed account of the developments in Russian Orthodox theological anthropology, which Soloviev anticipated, see Meerson. In terms of Catholic development, the most notable early example of a theology of spousal love is the work of Dietrich von Hildebrand. See Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Marriage: The Mystery of Faithful Love* (Manchester, N.H.: Sophia Institute Press, 1991), 3-77.

⁷⁴⁹ Solov’ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 41.

divine and human relations.”⁷⁵⁰ (By “divine relations” he is not referring to intra-Trinitarian relations, but rather to divine relations with creation and the Church respectively, i.e., with the divine *Sophia* incarnate.)⁷⁵¹ In *The Justification of the Good*, he expresses this same truth by stating that “true marriage” is the “permanent symbol of the ‘great mystery’ sanctified by the Word of God.”⁷⁵² Prefaced as it is on the *imago* according to Genesis 1:27, and his vision of the cosmogonic and historical process of the divine *Sophia*’s progressive incarnation as the fruit of the interaction between the *Logos* and the World Soul, he understands this “essential analogy” and “permanent symbol” in exemplarist terms, as an *analogia entis*. As such, “true marriage” is an *individualization* of the incarnation of the divine *Sophia*, the mystical union of Christ and the Church.

His focus in the present context is on the theurgic principles of true marriage implied by this analogy. These principles are determined by the nature of any analogy with regard to sameness and difference. He identifies the elements of sameness in what characterizes the relationality of the *sacramentum magnum*, a complementary relationality symbolized in the masculine-feminine relation that is determined by a free, creative, kenotic love fulfilled in the fullness of all-unity. In terms of difference, these principles are determined by the abyss

⁷⁵⁰ Ibid., 41.

⁷⁵¹ His theological anthropology of marriage is primarily Christological and ecclesiological, which for him is another way of saying “sophiological,” rather than Trinitarian. Meerson emphasizes the Trinitarian aspect of Soloviev’s theological anthropology, which supports his thesis in terms of Soloviev’s contribution to the personalist and Trinitarian shift in theology in modern Russian religious thought. But while there are traces of the *imago Trinitatis* in Soloviev’s theory, mostly in the form of his application of the principles of Trinitarian all-unity, the overwhelmingly dominant paradigm for Soloviev is the *analogia* between spousal love and union and the *sacramentum magnum* of Christ and the Church. See “Human Love Bears the Image of the Trinity” in Meerson, 90-92.

⁷⁵² Solov'ev, *Opravdanie*, SS VIII: 453.

separating divine from created, human being, which is only overcome, he insists, “by grace and adoption.”⁷⁵³

At first glance, the most obvious and essentially analogous theurgic principle proper to the *sacramentum magnum* emphasized by Soloviev is the principle of hierarchy between the divine and the natural-human, the active and passive, and the masculine and feminine. He sees this principle revealed in how God relates to creation as “everything to nothing” or “as absolute fullness of being toward the pure potential of being,” creating and sustaining the universe *ex nihilo*. He sees it also in how Christ relates to the Church as “actual perfection toward the potential of perfection,” bestowing perfection on His Bride by communicating to her “the principle of new spiritual life in a new, higher sphere of unity.” Here he simply expresses in other terms his cosmogonic and historical vision of divine-humanity as the progressive interaction between the divine *Logos* and the World Soul in the incarnation of divine *Sophia*.

Following the logic of Ephesians, a husband ought to relate to his wife in an analogous way, so as “to create and establish his female complement” and “restore” or “incarnate” the divine *imago* “in the living object of his love.”⁷⁵⁴ As an individualization of the World Soul, the individual woman, he writes, “is the concentrated substance of nature as a whole, the final expression of the material world in its *inward* passivity, as ready to pass into a new and higher kingdom and be morally spiritualized ... she is truly recognized as possessed of absolute worth; she is affirmed as an end in herself, an entity capable of

⁷⁵³ Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 42.

⁷⁵⁴ Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 41-42.

spiritualization and ‘deification’.”⁷⁵⁵ Therefore, the man, “as the bearer of the purely human activity, determined by the absolute meaning of life⁷⁵⁶ ... in which woman comes to participate through him,” has the “moral duty to realize in this actual woman and in her life that which she ought to be,” her true essence or idea, the unique divine *imago* “as God saw her from all eternity.”⁷⁵⁷

It is this attribution of the divine, spiritual, creative, active, masculine principle to the role of the husband, and the creaturely, material, receptive, passive, feminine principle to the role of the wife, that provokes accusations of gender bias. There is no question that he presumes and accepts as normative traditional gender roles in marriage as they existed in nineteenth-century Europe. “It is,” he writes, “an elementary thesis that man represents the active and woman the passive principle, that the former must influence the mind and character of the latter in an educational way.”⁷⁵⁸ Scholars such as Kochetkova argue that this “obvious gender bias” is “only accidental” and is “unessential for Soloviev’s theory of love,” and, when ignored, actually “frees the theory from an inconsistency.”⁷⁵⁹

But the principle of hierarchy in his theory cannot be dismissed without misrepresenting it. He himself clarifies this when he speaks of the roles of husband and wife. There he is not referring to the relatively “superficial” roles as found in society, but to the “great mystery” about which Saint Paul writes. In fact, his formulation of the relation of husband and wife, with its emphasis on the active role of the husband, simply transposes the

⁷⁵⁵ Solov'ev, *Opravdanie*, SS VIII: 454 (emphasis in original).

⁷⁵⁶ He defines this “absolute meaning of life” concisely in *The Meaning of Love* as “the realization and individualization of the all-one Idea and the spiritualization of matter.” Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 52.

⁷⁵⁷ Solov'ev, *Opravdanie*, SS VIII: 454.

⁷⁵⁸ Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 41.

⁷⁵⁹ Kochetkova, 128.

analogy Paul describes in Ephesians. Christ is the principal active agent insofar as He is the head of the Church, savior of the Body, loving her, handing himself over for her, sanctifying her, cleansing her, presenting her to himself in splendor, just as the husband is the principal active agent insofar as he is the head of his wife, loving her as his own body and self, and being joined with her so as to become “one flesh.” Thus, Clowes’ critique that Soloviev’s gender bias is a product of his uncritical and “authoritative citation of New Testament sources” has more merit because she rightly acknowledges that the roles he assigns to husband and wife are a matter of Christian dogma and essential to his theory.

Man is increasingly cast in the role of the creator and woman as material to be molded, again following the New Testament model. Just as God (male) created the universe (*vseleennaia*, female) and Christ (male) created the church (*tserkov*, female), so by analogy a man is obliged to create and mold [*tvorit i sozidat*] his female complement. Man is the mediator and conduit of divine force to the female complement, again affirming a hierarchical rather than a mutual, egalitarian structure—or even the triangular structure of ideal androgynous selfhood that Solov’ev earlier saw emerging from man and woman in dialogue with one another. Far from achieving true dialogue and interaction between thinking human beings, the female ‘other’ is metaphorized, reified, and clothed in the male’s ideal image.⁷⁶⁰

Nevertheless, her critique is prefaced on an *a priori* rejection of any sort of hierarchical structure whatsoever in male-female relations, biblically-based or otherwise, and fails to discern the theological meaning of the hierarchical principle in the context of Soloviev’s free theurgy. Soloviev’s hierarchical principle is not a meaningless, temporary social phenomenon that can be superseded by a more enlightened egalitarianism; rather it flows from his Trinitarian metaphysics of all-unity, in which hierarchy (according to form, the relation itself) and unity (according to essence) presuppose and are dependent on one another. The meaning of the hierarchical principle is therefore revealed and fulfilled in the

⁷⁶⁰ Clowes, 562.

perfect unity of the spouses as two individuals who are the same and equal according to essence and thus possess the same absolute significance as ends in themselves.

Soloviev identifies the link in the analogy of the *sacramentum magnum* in his elaboration of how we are to conceive of an individual's ideal being. Human persons in their ideal being, as they exist in God, are not isolated individuals. They constitute one, supra-personal, all-one organism, the incarnation of divine *Sophia*. In *The Meaning of Love*, he recalls this vision insofar as it relates to the theurgic task of realizing "true individuality." The *imago Trinitatis* implied by both Trinitarian all-unity and divine humanity are given concrete expression here. "If in our world," he explains, "distinct and isolated existence is a fact and actuality, and unity is only a concept and idea, then there [in the transcendent sphere], on the contrary, reality belongs to unity—or, more precisely, all-unity—and distinction and isolation exist only potentially and subjectively."⁷⁶¹ Therefore, the objective reality of this unique individual in God, in the transcendent sphere, i.e., in truth, is not "individual" in the sense of local, phenomenal existence. An "ideal person" or "personified idea" is the *individualization* of all-unity, divine *Sophia*, which is *indivisibly present* in *each* of these its individualizations."⁷⁶² Ideal personal existence, "true individuality," can only be realized in all-unity, since according to his Trinitarian metaphysics, "true life is living in another as in oneself."⁷⁶³ Thus, in reality, the process by which "an individual female essence" is transformed into "a beam of eternal divine femininity, indivisible from its radiant source," is inseparable from the process by which the same individual woman is

⁷⁶¹ Ibid., 44-45.

⁷⁶² Ibid., 45 (emphasis added).

⁷⁶³ Ibid., 56.

reunited to God through the restoration of her unique, “living and immortal divine image.”⁷⁶⁴

This description of the woman as possessing, by virtue of the feminine form of her being, the capacity and potential to become an individual incarnation of the divine *Sophia*, reveals the irreducible difference present in the analogy of the *sacramentum magnum*. A correct interpretation of Soloviev’s attribution of the divine, spiritual, creative, active, masculine principle to the role of the man (husband), and the creaturely, material, receptive, passive, feminine principle to the role of the woman (wife), must take into account the fact that it is inseparable from his insistence on the full equality of essence, significance, and value of both man and woman as human persons and ends in themselves, and is therefore an expression of their irreducible difference according to *form*, not essence. This is nothing less than the created condition for the possibility of their unity.

Since he is equal to his wife in every respect, the husband can only fulfill the meaning of the hierarchical principle by way of *mediation*. “Man (the husband),” Soloviev explains, “is the creative principle relative to his female complement *not in himself*, but as the mediator or conveyor of divine power.”⁷⁶⁵ When a wife perceives the man she has chosen as her husband to be her “true savior, destined to reveal to her and to realize for her the meaning of her life,”⁷⁶⁶ she only does so by virtue of his role as a mediator. Far from exerting any sort of personal power or juridical authority over his wife, the husband’s

⁷⁶⁴ Ibid., 46.

⁷⁶⁵ Ibid., 42 (emphasis added). He uses two words here for “creative,” *tvorcheskoe* and *zizhditelnoe*, where the former is the most common term for “creative” and the latter is an obsolete term that also means “creative,” but one with religious connotations, since the noun from which the adjective is derived is *Zizhditel’* or the “Creator” with a capital “C.”

⁷⁶⁶ Soloviev, *Opravdanie*, SS VIII: 454-55.

creative role is determined by the finality of this unity born of full equality of essence and irreducible difference of form:

For his creative activity, man has, in the person of woman, material equal to himself in degree of actualization, before which he can draw upon not actual perfection, but only *the potential advantage of initiative*, only the right and the duty of a first step on the path to perfection.⁷⁶⁷

The husband, as head of his wife, can only lay claim to this “right and duty of a first step,” because the path to perfection is, by definition, one of love, *freedom*, and *mutuality*. These principles are also evident in the interaction between the *Logos* and the World Soul. The *Logos* takes the initiative as the active, creative principle, but only as a movement of creative, kenotic love, preserving and empowering the freedom of the World Soul. The latter, as the divine *Sophia* in the process of becoming, i.e., the universal Church, is “not only a passive form in the divine mind, but a living spiritual essence possessing the entire plenitude of force and action” who also “aspires to the realization and incarnation” of divine-humanity.⁷⁶⁸

Soloviev constantly emphasizes the necessity of freedom, both divine and human, as the foundation of divine-human mutuality. Otherwise, real, interior unity is by definition impossible: the harmony between divine and human principles “depends as much on the active power of the former as the cooperative power of the latter.”⁷⁶⁹ In the case of Christian spouses, the freedom and mutuality that determine their relationship symbolically manifest the interaction between *Logos*-Christ and the World Soul-Church-*Sophia* in the cosmogonic and historical process, but as a direct consequence of their actual and essential *equality* as

⁷⁶⁷ Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 41 (emphasis added).

⁷⁶⁸ Ibid., 46.

⁷⁶⁹ Solov'ev, *Dukhovnie Osnovi Zhizni*, SS III: 401.

human persons. “The relationship between husband and wife is a relationship of two distinctly acting but *identically imperfect potentialities*,” he argues, “achieving perfection only through a process of *mutuality*” and “*cooperation*.”⁷⁷⁰

To illustrate this relationship, he outlines the hierarchy of analogy between divine, divine-human, and human relationships. First, God gives everything and receives nothing from creation. Second, Christ gives everything to the Church and receives nothing from her by way of perfection, although He does receive “an increase in the sense of the completeness of His collective Body.”⁷⁷¹ Third, given their shared human essence and equal value, as well as their shared imperfection as sinful, mortal, and isolated individuals, the husband and wife “mutually fulfill one another not only in a real, but in an ideal sense.”⁷⁷² In other words, when he speaks of woman being “man’s complement” or his “feminine *alter ego*,” he is not referring to the woman as some sort of reified addition or supplement to the man, as Clowes maintains,⁷⁷³ but to this freedom, mutuality, and ideal complementarity of persons whereby they achieve “true individuality” as human persons in unity. Thus, the inseparability of these two distinct aspects of the theurgic task of realizing sexual-spousal love’s meaning, which are characterized respectively by his interpretation of the hierarchical relationship of Ephesians 5 and the principles of freedom, equality, and mutuality, is rooted in Trinitarian all-unity as the eternal *coincidentia oppositorum* and its created manifestation in his sophiological vision of divine-humanity.

⁷⁷⁰ Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 42 (emphasis added).

⁷⁷¹ Ibid., 42.

⁷⁷² Ibid.

⁷⁷³ Clowes, 562.

Ultimately, Soloviev identifies the *raison d'être* of the *sacramentum magnum* in the mystery of *bonum diffusum sui* and divine freedom. “For God, His *other* has always had the perfect feminine image,” he writes, “but He desires that this image be not only for Him, but that it be realized and incarnated for each individual being capable of uniting with it.”⁷⁷⁴ In sexual-spousal love the divine *Sophia* receives the *means* for its “definitive and uttermost incarnation in the individual life of the human person who is capable of the most profound, and at the same time, the most extrinsic, actual, tangible unification with it.”⁷⁷⁵ But *Sophia* can only become incarnate through the creative power of the divine *Logos*, and man cannot restore the divine image in his beloved unless he is able to restore it in actual fact, and for this task he does not have the necessary divine creative power, being in need of the same restoration himself. Therefore, having only the possibility and potential to be a mediator of this power, “he must receive it from God.”⁷⁷⁶

3.2 The Divine Principle in “True Marriage”

The necessity of the divine principle and the role of grace and sacrament in Soloviev’s theory of sexual-spousal love have often been overlooked, leading to misunderstandings and inaccurate critiques.⁷⁷⁷ In every articulation of his theory, he

⁷⁷⁴ Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 46 (emphasis in original).

⁷⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁷⁶ Ibid., 42.

⁷⁷⁷ Trubetskoi's extensive critique focuses on the supposition that Soloviev is attributing redemptive power to sexual-spousal love exclusively and *in itself*, hence the accusation of “erotic utopianism.” Trubetskoi, *Mirosozertsaniye*, 610-31. Mochulsky tends to agree with Trubetskoi's critique, emphasizing the Platonic and German idealist influences on Soloviev's thought and overlooking elements that ground his ideas in the Christian theological tradition of East and West. See Mochul'skii, *Solov'ev*, 203-04. Zenkovsky also overlooks the role of grace in Soloviev's theory, concluding that he attributes a transformative, “magical” power to sexual love itself, reminiscent of Novalis's “magical idealism.” Zenkovsky, 516. More recently, Pieper, mistakenly assuming that Soloviev believed sexual-spousal love *in itself* could immortalize the beloved in this

reiterates the role of grace and makes it clear that for him “true marriage” and “sacramental marriage” are synonymous. When summarizing his theory in the explicit context of “true marriage” vis-à-vis the “great mystery” in *The Justification of the Good*, he emphasizes the theological principle that grace (*blagodat*) “does not annihilate nature but imparts true perfection to it.”⁷⁷⁸ Therefore, the natural bond between the sexes in marriage, *including sexual-spousal love itself*, and every aspect of the purely natural and socio-moral human institution of marriage, must be “transmuted” or “transubstantiated” (*presushchestvlenie*) by grace.⁷⁷⁹ In *The Life Drama of Plato*, he concludes that the Greek philosopher’s failure to realize the meaning of *eros* is due precisely to the absence not only of the divine principle *per se* but also, more concretely, of the divine principle incarnate—and thus accessible—in divine-humanity. Trying to unite the male with the female, or the corporeal with the spiritual, without the active power of an “eternally existing divinity,” he writes, “would be like trying to lift one’s self up by one’s own hair.”⁷⁸⁰ The way of higher love between man and woman is “necessarily” and “by its very principle” an interaction of the *divine* with the human, an irreducibly *divine*-human process.⁷⁸¹ In the theurgic context of *The Meaning of Love*, he states that, unlike Christ, who possesses the creative power of divinity by nature and *actu*, we only possess it “*by grace and adoption (blagodat i usvoenie)*”⁷⁸²

life, concludes, not surprisingly, that Soloviev is “crossing a boundary that might also be called the border with madness.” Pieper, 169. This not only misunderstands Soloviev’s argument that the full realization of love’s meaning coincides with universal redemption and the end of the historical process, but also the necessary role of grace and sacrament as alone possessing redemptive power.

⁷⁷⁸ Solov'ev, *Opravdanie*, SS VIII: 454.

⁷⁷⁹ Ibid., 455.

⁷⁸⁰ Solov'ev, *Drama*, SS IX: 234.

⁷⁸¹ Ibid., 234-35.

⁷⁸² Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 42.

This theurgic principle rests on the foundational relationship between grace and nature. An excellent summary of Soloviev's understanding of this relationship in the context of divine-humanity is found in his essay, "On Counterfeits":

The perfect unity of divinity with humanity ought to be reciprocal (that unity, in which one of the united elements is annihilated is not unity, and that unity, in which its freedom is not preserved is not *perfect* unity). The intrinsic possibility, the basic condition of unity with Divinity is found thus in man himself—the kingdom of God is within you [Luke 17:21]. But this possibility must pass over into reality, man must manifest, disclose the kingdom of God concealed in him, for this he must combine the explicit effort of his free will with the covert action of Divine grace in him—the kingdom of God is taken by force, and applied efforts take possession of it.⁷⁸³

This understanding is also found in his summary of the role of grace "to immortalize the mortal life of nature" in true marriage.

Prior to physiological union in animal nature, which leads to death, and prior to legal union in the socio-moral order, which does not save us from death, there ought to be union in God, which leads to immortality, because it not only puts boundaries to the death-bound life of nature by means of human law, but *regenerates it through the eternal and imperishable power of grace*.⁷⁸⁴

The power of grace, manifested in Christ's divine-humanity, is communicated to humanity through His Body, the Church, and, more concretely, through the sacraments.

Soloviev draws an important distinction between marriage as a legal, socio-moral contract and marriage as a sacrament, what he calls "true marriage." As always, his choice of terminology reflects his evangelical project of free theosophy and leads to certain ambiguities. For example, in *The Life Drama of Plato* he enumerates five possible responses to the experience of *eros*: the demonic path of perversion; the animal path of exclusively physical, sexual desire; the "really human path" of marriage; the ascetical or celibate path, found in its highest form in Christian monasticism; and finally, the divine-human path that

⁷⁸³ Solov'ev, "O podelkakh," *SS* VI: 327-39.

⁷⁸⁴ Solov'ev, *Smysl*, *SS* VII: 38 (emphasis added).

“truly regenerates and deifies.”⁷⁸⁵ What must be understood is that the third path of “marriage” refers only to the human institution, while the fifth path does not refer to some sort of transcendent relationship between man and woman but to “true” or sacramental marriage. Far from rejecting or trying to supersede the valid elements present in the second, third, and fourth paths, the fifth path, as can be seen in both *The Justification of the Good* and *The Meaning of Love*, preserves, purifies, and thus spiritualizes, transfigures, and “deifies” the animal and social elements in the divine-human sacrament of “true marriage.”⁷⁸⁶

In addition to the inseparability of divine-humanity and the sacramental life of the Church, which Soloviev presupposes whenever he speaks of the former, there is no lack of textual evidence in Soloviev’s corpus that the ultimate goal of “true individuality” is synonymous with perfected sacramental union in the Church. In *The Spiritual Foundations of Life*, he affirms that the divine life of Christ abiding in the Church is communicated by the Spirit through the sacraments, and that each of them in their own way truly unites a person, spiritually and physically, with all members of the Church, freeing them from their mortal isolation, and in this unity restoring for them the “integrality (*vsetselost*) of true life in God.”⁷⁸⁷ As one of the sacraments, he writes, marriage (*brak*) also communicates divine life. It sanctifies the “fullness of physical life” and restores the “integrity” (*vsetselost*) of husband and wife as a “whole link” in the “chain of universal life” by conforming them to the “fullness of spiritual fellowship” present in the “mystical wedding” of Christ and the

⁷⁸⁵ Soloviev, *Drama*, SS IX: 231-33.

⁷⁸⁶ Soloviev, *Opravdanie*, SS VIII: 454; Soloviev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 38.

⁷⁸⁷ Soloviev, *Dukhovnie Osnovi Zhizni*, SS III: 398.

Church.⁷⁸⁸ He reiterates this more forcefully in *La Russie et L'Église Universelle* where he writes that it is the sacrament of marriage (*le sacrement du mariage*, which he also calls “true marriage” [*le vrai mariage*]), that “makes true sexual love the first positive basis of divine-human integration” because it “creates true individual elements of the perfect society, the incarnate *Sophia*.”⁷⁸⁹

In *The Justification of the Good* he explicitly states that he is making a clear distinction between natural marriage and sacramental marriage. The latter, he explains, is what he means by “spousal union in its *highest spiritual sense*, which ... is the prototype of the most perfect union between beings: ‘This is a great mystery; but I speak concerning Christ and the Church’ (Eph. 5:32).”⁷⁹⁰ He then goes on to explain that what he means by “true marriage” is by definition the process of realizing the meaning of sexual-spousal love. The “truly human marriage” is sacramental because it not only possesses the divine principle of grace, whereby the “natural bond between the sexes ... is transubstantiated,” but it does so in cooperation with the active human principle, i.e., it “consciously *aims* at the perfect union of man and woman, at the creation of the complete human being,”⁷⁹¹ and therefore is a divine-human or theurgic task. To this final and perfect union of man and woman, the complete human being or “true individuality,” he gives the term “perfect marriage.”⁷⁹² Since he only presents his theory in summary form in *The Justification of the Good*, he refers the reader to *The Meaning of Love* for a full explanation of “the mystical meaning of matrimony

⁷⁸⁸ Ibid., 399.

⁷⁸⁹ Soloviev, *La Russie*, 296.

⁷⁹⁰ Solov'ev, *Opravdanie*, SS VIII: 80 (emphasis added).

⁷⁹¹ Ibid., 255-56 (emphasis in original).

⁷⁹² Ibid., 256.

(*misticheskoe znachenie supruzhestva*),” and notes that by “mystical” he refers specifically to the “great mystery” of Ephesians 5.⁷⁹³

The role of the divine principle, the necessity of grace, and the mediation of Christ, the Church, and the sacrament of marriage, are all confirmed in *The Meaning of Love* and *The Life Drama of Plato*. In the former, there is a consistent affirmation of the necessary role of grace and the presupposition of sacramental marriage based on the biblical principles found in Genesis and Ephesians. In the latter, although he describes the union of man and woman in terms of “true androgyny,” he does so for the same reason he uses the term *eros* instead of sexual or spousal love: his intention in that work is to reveal the partial truth of Plato’s insights into human love, including what Plato, not Soloviev, termed “*eros*” and “androgyny.” Nevertheless, having duly noted the necessity of grace and context of sacramental marriage in both works, he does emphasize the more complex human dimension of realizing the meaning of sexual-spousal love.

3.3 *The Human Principle in “True Marriage”*

In order to cooperate with the divine principle of grace and incarnate the meaning of sexual-spousal love in “true marriage” (which corresponds to the progressive realization of beauty), Christian spouses must freely commit themselves to two fundamental activities: “religious faith” (which corresponds to knowing truth) and the “moral feat (*podvig*)” (which corresponds to willing goodness). By “faith” he means both Christian faith in general, “a gift of God as well as our own free act,”⁷⁹⁴ as he describes it in *The Spiritual Foundations of*

⁷⁹³ Ibid., 80.

⁷⁹⁴ Soloviev, *Dukhovnie Osnovi Zhizni*, SS III: 315.

Life, as well as its concrete manifestation and expression in the context of spousal love and union, as “triune faith” in the ideal truth and absolute value of the beloved and oneself in God. The *act* of faith itself is what he terms “prayer” in a fundamental, not technical sense.⁷⁹⁵ The indivisible union of the self with the other in prayer is merely the first, but necessary step on the path to true union.⁷⁹⁶ Through prayer, consistent, conscious “acts of faith,” we are able to interact truly with the “realm of the truly existing,” including the true being of the other. In this sense, he also speaks of faith as a real experience ” (*opyt*), one that is able to withstand the sensual experience of the phenomenal world that seems to contradict the truth of faith. This contradiction, which is determined by the realities of sin (animal and human passions), suffering, death, and “meaningless chance,” constantly threatens to render this faith impotent. Therefore, its only defense is what he calls the “moral feat” (*podvig*) of “taking up one’s cross” and “patience to the end,” which implies nothing less than a participation in Christ’s own *podvig* of heroic, kenotic love in the paschal mystery. The implications of “religious faith” and the “moral feat (*podvig*)” in Soloviev’s theory will now be considered briefly.

Faith is a necessary condition for even the possibility of a theurgic task, since it alone makes possible knowledge of and interaction with divine, ideal existence. The unconditional significance of the beloved in loving pathos is momentary at best. The “empirically objective reality” of the beloved, which is subject to actual sensual perception, shows that a mortal individual as such cannot possess *any* absolute significance. If the revelation of the divine *imago* in the beloved is to endure so as to inspire and guide the

⁷⁹⁵ See his chapter on prayer. *Ibid.*, 315-35.

⁷⁹⁶ Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 43.

theurgic task, it must be securely and firmly “held and consolidated in the consciousness.”⁷⁹⁷

This is only possible through faith, which he says is “the notice of things hoped for, and the unveiling of things unseen.”⁷⁹⁸ At face value, such an affirmation of absolute significance is absurd, blasphemous, and idolatrous, because the beloved remains *in actuality* only one particular, isolated individual. Logic and “true religion” preclude and forbid an identity of contradictory attributes and idol worship respectively. Therefore, Soloviev believes that the resolution of this contradiction can only be found in religious faith.

To acknowledge the absolute significance of this given person or to believe in him (without which true love is impossible), I can only affirm him *in God*, consequently, by having faith in God himself and in myself, as one having the center and root of my being in God.⁷⁹⁹

This triune faith is an interior act of the will that lays the foundation for the theurgic restoration of the *imago Dei*, what he here calls the “image of the triune God,” an image that can be discerned both in the individual spouses and in their “one flesh” unity.⁸⁰⁰ Since God is Trinity, and his essence is all-unity, eternal and indivisible, to affirm any individual being in God means to affirm him “in everything,” or more accurately “in the unity of everything.”⁸⁰¹ But since this same individual is manifested as a materially isolated being, “true love” must include both the ideal object of “believing love” and the distinct but inseparable empirical object of “instinctive love.”⁸⁰² Faith gives true love its indivisible but two-fold existential structure as ascending love (*amor ascendens*, *Aphrodite Ourania*), whose object is the concrete ideal essence, the living and immortal divine image of the

⁷⁹⁷ Ibid., 43.

⁷⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹⁹ Ibid. (emphasis in original).

⁸⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁸⁰¹ Ibid., 44.

⁸⁰² Ibid.

beloved, and descending love (*amor descendens*, *Aphrodite Pandemos*), whose object is the natural human essence. This structure, of which faith is the foundation, is what makes the theurgic task possible.⁸⁰³

Here is found the most direct application of Soloviev's aesthetics and the realization of sexual-spousal love as "true art." When love is based on and infused by faith—the consistent, conscious, interior acts of faith that constitute prayer—the creative task of this "believing love" comes into focus. Believing love is a creative process by which the "living and immortal divine image" and the "ideal essence" of the beloved is progressively realized or incarnated in the "living, personal material of the natural human essence," and by which this same natural human essence is both spiritualized and idealized through "actual objective regeneration."⁸⁰⁴ As long as the ideal essence remains in the process of actualization, it is only an idea perceived by "the eyes of our soul," and as such, can only exist in the imagination. Although this idea is our own creation, it is not created *ex nihilo*; it is not a matter of mere subjectivity. Both artistic inspiration and the revelation of the pathos of love attest to the fact that "our mind is not completely alien to [another, higher sphere of existence], and we can have a certain speculative comprehension of the laws of its being."⁸⁰⁵ To accept and adhere faithfully to the truth of this vision of the divine *imago* of the beloved is only the first step towards actual union. The problem remains to realize this *imago* in actual fact, and for this reason he insists on the necessity of the "moral feat (*podvig*)."

The brevity with which he describes this element of his theory belies its importance. Believing love and the task of its realization must be actively defended because it is not

⁸⁰³ Ibid., 46.

⁸⁰⁴ Ibid., 44.

⁸⁰⁵ Ibid., 44-45.

possible to preserve true love in the midst of fallen material and human existence. The task of love must be accepted and understood first and foremost as a moral feat (*podvig*).⁸⁰⁶ What is most significant is his characterization of this *podvig* as “patience to the end,” “taking up the cross,” and “martyrdom.” Alluding to the sacramental nature of this process, he writes that “it is not for nothing that the Orthodox Church in its rite of *marriage* commemorates the holy *martyrs* and compares matrimonial crowns to their crowns.”⁸⁰⁷ These images of *kenosis*, sacrifice, and martyrdom flow directly from his teaching on divine-humanity, which involves not merely the imitation of Christ, but a real participation in His redemptive *podvig* of kenotic love, the paschal mystery as a whole. “The new religion,” he writes in *Spiritual Foundations*, “should become *activity with God (teurgia)*, i.e., a combined movement of Divinity and humanity to transform the latter from the physical or natural into the spiritual or divine ... it is the *transformation* or transubstantiation (*presushchestvlenie*) of matter into spirit, and the life of the flesh into divine life.”⁸⁰⁸ In other words, what he implies with the term “moral *podvig*” is nothing less than the entire spiritual and moral Christian life, which he articulates in detail in both the chapters on prayer, fasting, and alms giving in *Spiritual Foundations*, and in *The Justification of the Good*.⁸⁰⁹ In applying this divine-human principle to the realization of sexual-spousal love in true marriage, Soloviev anticipates the later development of what Evdokimov calls *interiorized monasticism*, the adoption by

⁸⁰⁶ Ibid., 49.

⁸⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁸ Solov'ev, *Dukhovnie Osnovi Zhizni*, SS III: 377 (emphasis in original).

⁸⁰⁹ See Ibid., 315-50 and Solov'ev, *Opravdanie*, SS VIII: 3-516.

married lay members of the Church of a spirituality that sought to live out the

“eschatological maximalism of the monastics.”⁸¹⁰

In addition to this general implication of the moral *podvig* in Soloviev’s theory, he also speaks of “martyrdom” in its specific application to married sexuality. Even “true marriage” remains the “satisfaction of the sexual desire,” and the “fullness of life satisfaction, which includes the bodily senses” is still an essential part of it. As he says, the natural elements are not annihilated, but perfected, by grace. Sexuality is now connected not with the “external nature of the animal organism,” but with the “human nature awaiting *theosis*.” The “fullness of life satisfaction” is no longer connected to the “preceding lust,” but to the “subsequent joy of realized perfection.”⁸¹¹ In order to purify and transform natural sexuality into the “final consequence” and “external realization” of sexual-spousal love as a “mystical and moral relationship,”⁸¹² the spouses must pass through the “martyrdom” of “constant renunciation.”⁸¹³ “Constant renunciation” does not imply celibacy or the denial of the goodness of sexuality in itself, something for which he criticizes Tolstoy.⁸¹⁴ In *The Justification of the Good*, he makes a clear distinction between the “flesh” and the “body.” The struggle to transform from within the sinful “flesh,” what he calls an “excited animality” that “cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven,” into the potentiality of the “body,” which is worthy of becoming “spiritual,” “glorified,” “heavenly,” is what determines the

⁸¹⁰ Evdokimov, *Ages of the Spiritual Life*, 233.

⁸¹¹ Solov'ev, *Opravdanie*, SS VIII: 455.

⁸¹² Soloviev, *La Russie*, 296.

⁸¹³ Solov'ev, *Opravdanie*, SS VIII: 455. It is noteworthy that his religious contemporaries misunderstood this ascetical principle, interpreting it as what Mochulsky called his paradoxical combining of “eroticism and asceticism.” See Mochul'skii, *Solov'ev*, 204.

⁸¹⁴ Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 33.

principle of an authentic asceticism.⁸¹⁵ This process has two distinct aspects that in actual life are inseparable: the preservation of the spirit *from* the flesh and the realization of the spirit *in* the flesh. The main point of asceticism lies in achieving *self-control*, the dominion of the spirit over the flesh or chastity (*tselomudrie*).

3.4 “True individuality,” “Perfect Marriage,” and the “True Androgyne”

Soloviev expresses the aim of sexual-spousal love as a theurgic task with three different though synonymous terms: in *The Meaning of Love* as “true individuality” (*istinnaia individualnost*), in *The Justification of the Good* as “perfect marriage” (*sovershenny brak*), and in *The Life Drama of Plato* as “true androgyny” (*istinny androginizm*). In each instance, he makes it clear that he is trying to articulate the ultimate significance of the “one flesh” union of man and woman as *imago Dei* revealed in Genesis 1:27, and of the “great mystery” to which Paul refers in Ephesians 5:32.

His notion of unity is not an abstract concept but flows directly from his Chalcedonian-based understanding of divine-humanity and his Trinitarian metaphysics of all-unity (*vseedinstvo*). Following the principle of true unity found in the former, namely, that the divine and human natures in Christ are united “without mixture or confusion and without separation or division,” he explains that “true androgyny” can only be realized without a “confusion” or “mixture” of external forms and without an interior “separation” or “division”⁸¹⁶ of personality and life.⁸¹⁷ Likewise, “true individuality” is characterized by a “free unity of the masculine and feminine principles that preserves their formal solitude but

⁸¹⁵ See 1 Corinthians 6:19; 15:40; 44, 50.

⁸¹⁶ Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 57.

⁸¹⁷ Solov'ev, *Drama*, SS IX: 234.

overcomes their essential difference and disintegration.”⁸¹⁸ Elsewhere Soloviev underlines this principle again, arguing that “true union presupposes the true separateness of those uniting.” But this “separateness,” he explains, does not “exclude” the other, but “mutually assumes” the other, whereby they find “the fullness of their own life in each other.”⁸¹⁹

According to the principles of all-unity, this *coincidentia oppositorum* of irreducible formal difference and homogeneity of essence is not only for the sake of the resulting unity, but for the sake of the perfection of the individual spouses as well. Since “true individuality” is a concrete, incarnate “individualization” of perfect all-unity, it is determined by the latter’s structure of free and all-one relations.

Perfect all-unity (*vseedinstvo*), according to its very conception, demands the fullness of equality, equality of value, and equality of rights between the one and the all, between the whole and the parts, between the common and the individual. The fullness of the idea demands that the greatest unity of the whole be realized in the greatest independence and freedom of the particular and isolated elements in themselves, through them, and for them.⁸²⁰

This all-one nature of “true individuality,” which produces the indivisible fruits of both perfect spousal union and the individual perfection of the spouses, explains why Soloviev introduces ambiguity by fluctuating between describing the goal of the theurgic task of sexual-spousal love as the husband restoring the divine *imago* in his wife, and in himself; or as the husband and wife restoring the divine *imago* in each other; or as the

⁸¹⁸ Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 24.

⁸¹⁹ Ibid., 56-57. De Lubac articulates the very same principle as deriving directly from both Trinitarian and Chalcedonian Christological dogma. See “Person and Society” in Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, trans., Lancelot C. Sheppard and Sr. Elizabeth Englund. OCD (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 326-43.

⁸²⁰ Solov'ev, *Smysl*, 55. It is important to recall that this principle of all-unity is also the principle of ecclesial existence. “In so far as everything in the Church is catholic (*vselenskaia*, universal), conformable to the absolute whole, all exclusiveness of ethnic and personal characteristics and of social positions disappear in it. All divisions or *separations* disappear, and all the *differences* are left—for piety requires that unity in God should be understood not as empty indifference and bare uniformity, but as the absolute fullness of every life.” Solov'ev, *Opravdanie*, SS VIII: 473 (emphasis in original).

husband and wife restoring the divine *imago* in their shared spousal union. In reality, the “true unification of man and woman” as one “true individuality” is simply another way of expressing the one divine-human process in which the “image of the triune God” in both man and woman individually, and “in them” as a unified whole, is restored. He makes this clear when speaking of “perfect marriage” as, from one perspective, the husband realizing in his wife, and in her life, her “true essence or idea ... as she was from the first destined to be, as God saw her from all eternity, and as she shall be in the end,” which constitutes the “meaning of her life”; and from another, as a shared divine-human task of achieving the “perfect union of man and woman” and the “creation of the complete human being.”⁸²¹

As Meerson has rightly noted, Soloviev’s belief that true individuality or personhood is fully manifested in the communion of spousal love anticipates the personalist paradigm shift that took place in twentieth-century theology in general and in the development of the notion of the *imago Dei* in particular. Without any theological precedent on which to draw, it is not surprising that Soloviev turned to other sources, the Kabala in particular, as he sought an adequate conceptual vocabulary to formulate his understanding of the *imago*. This lack of theological precedent has led several scholars attribute his vision of “true individuality” to the adoption of the problematic idea of “androgyny,” an hypothesis that will now be examined.

It is certainly true that Soloviev was well acquainted with the idea of androgyny. The myth of the androgyne enjoyed a certain resurgence in nineteenth-century European culture and thought, especially in the areas of esoteric religion, Christian mysticism, German

⁸²¹ Solov'ev, *Opravdanie*, SS VIII: 455-56.

romanticism, and certain literary and artistic circles.⁸²² Although it appears under various forms and in diverse contexts, from theoretical philosophy to subcultures based on various sorts of sexual deviancy, the common understanding of the androgyne was that it referred to “a person who unites certain of the essential characteristics of both sexes and who, consequently, may be considered as both a man and a woman or as neither a man nor a woman, as bisexual or asexual.”⁸²³ Soloviev himself would have encountered this general idea in his studies of the Kabala, Plato, Jacob Boehme, Franz von Baader, and Auguste Comte.⁸²⁴ Trubetskoi and Mochulsky both argue that his notion of “true individuality” stems directly from the influence of Plato and especially von Baader, while Zenkovsky disagrees, arguing that Soloviev’s notion of androgyny has almost nothing in common with German romantic thought in general or von Baader in particular.⁸²⁵ Zenkovsky rightly points out that what he calls Soloviev’s own notion of androgyny is characterized not by reference to an historical actuality or a primordial lost unity,⁸²⁶ but by a free, creative, divine-human task

⁸²² The myth of the androgyne appears in diverse forms in nineteenth-century European cultural, literary, philosophical, and religious circles. Its primary religious sources were the Kabala, gnosticism, freemasonry, rosicruciansim, and the teaching of the Protestant mystic, Jacob Boehme. See A. J. L. Busst, “The Image of the Androgyne in the 19th Century,” in *Romantic Mythologies*, ed. Ian Fletcher (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1967), 1-95.

⁸²³ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁸²⁴ Berdyaev, one of the most prominent philosophers of the Russian religious renaissance, as well as other Russian religious thinkers in the twentieth century, considered the ideas of both Boehme and von Baader, including their notions of androgyny, to be of great significance. See Matich, “Androgyny and the Russian Religious Renaissance,” 168, 173.

⁸²⁵ “Solovyov’s androgynism ... can be assimilated to the androgynism of the German romanticists only externally or through a misunderstanding. Even Baader, whose closeness to Solovyov on this point is especially emphasized by Trubetskoi and Mochulsky, has very little in common with him on the problem of androgynism.” Zenkovsky, 515.

⁸²⁶ Plato’s myth about the primordial androgyne is the most influential literary source for the myth as it appears in western culture. Its primary reference is to the original nature of the human being as both male and female, thus rendering man and woman as two halves of a potential whole. Plato describes the myth in the words of Aristophanes: “So you see, gentlemen, how far back we can trace our innate love for one another, and how this love is always trying to reintegrate our former nature, to make two into one, and to bridge the gulf between one human being and another.” Plato, *The Symposium*, 191c-d.

that aims at the future realization of the *imago Dei* in humanity.⁸²⁷ It should also be noted that Soloviev's vision of "true individuality" or the "true androgyne" can in no way be interpreted as a "bisexual" or "asexual" human being, since the formal, i.e., sexual, difference of both man and woman encompasses every aspect of their being as its very *form*. This difference is neither annihilated nor confused in true union but is preserved and perfected.

As Kornblatt has shown, there is ample evidence that Soloviev's vision of "true individuality" or the "true androgyne" has several parallels with the vision of androgyny in the Kabala. But she also argues that this must be understood in light of Soloviev's "tendency to read Kabbalah as confirmation of his own synthetic Trinitarian vision."⁸²⁸ In fact, Kornblatt attributes his affinity with the Kabala to his critical integration of elements of Jewish mysticism through the filters of Eastern Orthodoxy and German idealism.⁸²⁹ Based on the textual evidence, Soloviev's use of the term "true androgyny" and his notion of "true individuality" as the fullness of the divine *imago* are further examples of critical, synthetic integration that remain consonant with his methodology of free theosophy. As he himself points out, "the use of a well-known term by heretics still does not make it heretical."⁸³⁰ In the final analysis, "true individuality" as a "true art" towards which the theurgic task of sexual-spousal love aims is synonymous with the meaning of "perfect marriage" as revealed in Genesis 1:27 and Ephesians 5:32.

⁸²⁷ Zenkovsky, 517-18.

⁸²⁸ Kornblatt, "Solov'ev's Androgynous Sophia and the Jewish Kabbalah," 492.

⁸²⁹ "Despite the Augustinian Christian tradition of western philosophy in which he was trained, Solov'ev turns through Eastern Orthodoxy and German idealism to Jewish theosophy in order to assert that sexuality is not the result of fallen, and therefore evil, matter. Women as well as men are members of a divine-human family, that, understood as a whole, is an erotic, yet androgynous idea. This is perhaps Solov'ev's closest affinity with the Jewish Kabbalah." Ibid., 496.

⁸³⁰ Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 57.

4. SEXUAL-SPOUSAL LOVE AND SYZYGY

Soloviev's definition of the meaning of love is not complete until he establishes its intrinsic connection with universal truth and the "essence of universal life." In order to articulate this connection, he introduces the notion of *syzygy*.⁸³¹ Just as with sexual-spousal love in which the solitary beloved other is at the same time "all" for the lover in the sphere of personal life, so too with the *syzygy* relation, each social sphere as a whole—local, national, universal (ecclesial)—by virtue of the positive solidarity of all its elements or members "must for each of them appear as a real unity, as if it were the other living being that complements it."⁸³² With this notion he seeks to shed light on that aspect of the *sacramentum magnum* that symbolizes and manifests the truth of the relation of the one to the all, the part to the whole, the member to the body.⁸³³ In his encyclopedia article on love, he writes that sexual-spousal love, as the "perfect fullness of living mutuality," becomes the "highest symbol" of the ideal relationship between the personal principle and the social whole. Citing the images of the "great mystery" as they appear in the Old and New Testaments, he concludes that the ideal principle of social relationships is, according to Christianity, "not power but love,"⁸³⁴ and its ideal form is spousal.

The intrinsic connection between individual spousal love and union, and the *syzygy* relation between individual and social whole is revealed in the fact that the individual process of fully realizing "perfect marriage" *in itself* and *in isolation* from the process of

⁸³¹ He explains that he introduces this ancient Greek term for "combination" out of necessity, not having found a better solution. He acknowledges that this term was used by the Gnostics in another sense, but that this fact ought not to discredit his own use of the term according to his own definition. See *Ibid.*, 57.

⁸³² *Ibid.*

⁸³³ Soloviev argues in *The Spiritual Foundations of Life* for the universality of the Church as the fundamental criterion of its divinity, and thus the universal sphere implies the ecclesial as the progressive transformation of humanity and the universe in Christ. See Solov'ev, *Dukhovnie Osnovi Zhizni*, SS III: 394-95.

⁸³⁴ Solov'ev, "Liubov," SS X: 236.

universal life is ultimately impossible, and, if it were possible, would be empty and immoral. First, it is powerless against the laws of material, mortal organic existence and temporal and spatial *impenetrability*, because the solitary human person “can actually be redeemed ... only conjointly, or together with all.” The “inward regeneration” and “reform” of the creative power and relation of sexual-spousal love, and the achievement of an inner, i.e., mystical and moral, union with the other, cannot overcome the “ugly law of physical life” in the external world and in the spouses themselves, or their “mutual separateness and impenetrability,” or their “common dependence on the material world.”⁸³⁵ Analogous to Christ’s dual kenotic *podvig* of love, *theosis* includes not only the inner, spiritual, and moral *podvig*, or the “*podvig* of the spirit,” but also the “*podvig* of the flesh,” the spiritualization or deification of matter realized in Christ’s risen body.⁸³⁶ Second, it is “intellectually empty and without content” and “morally unworthy.” If the very meaning of sexual-spousal love is the unification of that which is unjustly separated and requires the identity of the self with the other, then “to separate the task of our individual perfection from the process of universal unification would be contrary to the moral meaning of love itself, even if such a separation were physically possible.”⁸³⁷

The objective, intrinsic connection between the spousal and *syzygy* relation reveals the meaning of the form of the *sacramentum magnum*. The biblical attribution of the form of feminine individuality to cities, countries, the Israelite nation, and then all of regenerated humanity, “or the universal church,” as he says, “is not a simple metaphor.” Its significance lies in the form of the individual’s relation to the particular social or universal sphere that it

⁸³⁵ Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 49-50.

⁸³⁶ Solov'ev, *Chtenie*, SS III: 170-71.

⁸³⁷ Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 50-51.

implies. While “true marriage” and *syzygy* are distinct as theurgic tasks, they are in reality, by virtue of their intrinsic and formal connection, inseparable and reciprocal. This represents an analogous application of the same relational principles in the individual and social sphere. Thus, while the true life of individuality, in its full and absolute significance, can only be incarnated and immortalized in the corresponding development of universal life, the all-one Idea—another term for universal life or divine *Sophia*—can only be realized or incarnated in the “fullness of perfected individualities.”⁸³⁸ The individual goal of true marriage as theurgic task therefore includes an ever more conscious and active participation in the universal historical process.

Soloviev describes this process elsewhere as the transition from the historical reality of the unity of Christ crucified with the earthly Church to the eschatological reality of the unity of Christ the King of Glory with the New Jerusalem⁸³⁹—“for ourselves, and for all others *indivisibly*.”⁸⁴⁰ The shared goal of this reciprocal activity is “the highest development of each individuality in the fullest unity of all.”⁸⁴¹ As Soloviev notes:

Not to submit to one’s social sphere and not to dominate it, but to be with it in a loving mutuality, to serve it as an active fertilizing principle of progress and to find in it the fullness of vital conditions and possibilities—such is the relationship of true human individuality not only towards its most immediate social sphere and its own nation, but also towards all of humanity.⁸⁴²

⁸³⁸ Ibid., 52.

⁸³⁹ Solov'ev, *Opravdanie*, SS VIII: 453.

⁸⁴⁰ Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 53 (emphasis in original).

⁸⁴¹ Ibid., 52.

⁸⁴² Ibid., 57-58.

PART FOUR

CHAPTER VIII

**SOLOVIEV AS A RESOURCE FOR CATHOLIC THEOLOGY:
AN ANALYSIS OF THE TREATMENT OF SOLOVIEV IN SCOLA'S *THE NUPTIAL MYSTERY* AND
VON BALTHASAR'S *THE GLORY OF THE LORD***

The previous chapters have examined Soloviev's theory of sexual-spousal love and the universal synthesis of philosophical and theological principles upon which it rests. It is now possible to evaluate his theory as a resource for contemporary Catholic theology, taking as a point of departure the works of two theologians whose influence on the development of Catholic theological anthropology has been and continues to be timely and significant:

Cardinal Angelo Scola's *The Nuptial Mystery*⁸⁴³ and Hans Urs von Balthasar's *The Glory of the Lord*.⁸⁴⁴

This chapter will analyze Scola's integration of Soloviev's insights into spousal love vis-à-vis the *imago Dei* into his "nuptial theology" of marriage and family.⁸⁴⁵ This analysis will also consider his critique of elements and identification of lacunae in Soloviev's theory. Scola has with good reason identified Soloviev's theory, with its Christological and Trinitarian personalist and nuptial paradigm, as an anticipation of John Paul II's theology of the body. This claim will be examined and affirmed. Von Balthasar's reading of Soloviev will then be considered. This reading, which endeavors to present the Russian religious

⁸⁴³ Angelo Cardinal Scola, *The Nuptial Mystery*, trans., Michelle K. Borrás (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005). Scola first published this work in Italian in two volumes in 1998 (*Uomo-donna*) and 2000 (*Matrimonio-Famiglia*) under the title, *Il mistero nuziale*. See Angelo Cardinal Scola, *Il Mistero Nuziale*, 2 vols. (Rome: Pul-Mursia, 1998-2000).

⁸⁴⁴ Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Soloviev," in *Volume III: Studies in Theological Style: Lay Styles*, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 279-352.

⁸⁴⁵ In addition to citing Soloviev, Scola's "nuptial theology" relies primarily on the "novel" magisterial teachings of Pope John Paul II, especially as found in *Mulieris Dignitatem*, and on the theological anthropology of St. Thomas Aquinas and Hans Urs von Balthasar.

philosopher as an exemplary Roman Catholic theologian, correctly emphasizes the most fruitful avenue of exploration of Soloviev for Catholic theology, namely, his theological aesthetic. This analysis of how Scola and von Balthasar treat Soloviev as a resource for Catholic theology will allow us to identify those aspects of *The Meaning of Love* in need of correction, clarification, and development, as well as those elements that enrich an understanding of the nuptial dimension of the *imago*, and deserve further exploration and reflection.

1. *THE NUPTIAL MYSTERY*, CARDINAL ANGELO SCOLA

Cardinal Angelo Scola's book, *The Nuptial Mystery*, is a compilation of articles and essays that seeks to give a structured presentation of his nuptial theology as an integrated whole. The ideas he expresses in this work flow directly from his extensive scholarly writings on the theological anthropology of John Paul II and von Balthasar, his two primary sources, and from over twenty years of lecturing as a professor at the John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and the Family in Rome. His stated purpose for publishing the book is an attempt to verify theologically the "fascinating hypothesis" that the most adequate way to describe the phenomenon of love is through the "nuptial mystery" as the "inseparable intertwining of sexual difference, love, and fruitfulness."⁸⁴⁶ In other words, his book is "an inquiry into love, carried out by following the 'guiding thread' of nuptiality."⁸⁴⁷

⁸⁴⁶ Scola, xx.

⁸⁴⁷ Ibid., xxv.

Far from being a limited study of the phenomenon of love, however, Scola's work ultimately seeks to justify "nuptiality" as a universal theological paradigm.⁸⁴⁸ Along with Marc Cardinal Ouellet's more readable work, *Divine Likeness: Toward a Trinitarian Anthropology of the Family*,⁸⁴⁹ Scola's work proposes nuptial mysticism as a response to contemporary society's "disincarnate spiritualism and androgynism" and to the disconnect between sexuality and procreation ushered in by artificial contraception. Scola's treatment of Soloviev is remarkable both for its unconditional affirmation of some and implied criticism of other ideas in the latter's theory of love. He affirms two elements from Soloviev's theory, which are foundational to the central thesis of *The Nuptial Mystery*, namely, the notion of the man-woman pair as the fullness of the divine *imago*, and the idea that spousal love is human love's paradigm. But he strongly rejects any theological argument that would deny the intrinsic connection between love, sexuality, and procreation, a denial clearly found in Soloviev's theory of love.⁸⁵⁰

The following evaluation of Scola's treatment of Soloviev considers three aspects of *The Nuptial Mystery* that can be considered in relation to Soloviev's theory of sexual-spousal love. First, Scola's recognition of the Russian philosopher as having provided contemporary Catholic theology with the best methodological paradigm to investigate the

⁸⁴⁸ "It is precisely by virtue of nuptiality that there shines forth the extraordinary diffusive capacity of being which, in its trinitarian foundation, is pure gift (love). In all of its manifestations, love, when it is really love, does not cease to offer to each human being forms of beauty that propel him or her toward the truth (beauty is always the 'splendor of the truth'!). Why, then, should we not seek, through the nuptial mystery, 'all the truth' (John 16:13) about love? Along the paths of love, the 'whole truth' will make us 'free indeed' (cf. John 8:36)." Ibid., xxvi-vii.

⁸⁴⁹ As he writes in the preface, Cardinal Ouellet's purpose with this theological work is to offer a "modest contribution" that "will help theologians, pastors, and believers to develop fruitfully the legacy of Pope John Paul II and to carry forward the theological and existential quest to bring the Trinity and the family into reciprocal illumination for the good of the contemporary world." Marc Cardinal Ouellet, *Divine Likeness: Toward a Trinitarian Anthropology of the Family* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), x.

⁸⁵⁰ See above p. 62.

notoriously ambiguous phenomenon of human love and its intrinsic relationship to spousal union. Second, his affirmation, which he bases primarily on the magisterium of John Paul II, of the Trinitarian, Christological, and anthropological foundational principles of this theory on which spousal love's designation as the "form" of every love is based.⁸⁵¹ Third, his critique of the rejection of procreation as an intrinsically significant dimension of sexual-spousal love and union.

Scola's acceptance of Soloviev's insight into sexual-spousal love as "the most plausible response"⁸⁵² to the methodological and terminological difficulties and complexities of any study of human love, is notable for three reasons. First, he identifies it as an authoritative and original source for twentieth-century developments in theological anthropology, that identify spousal love as the *analogatum princeps* of love. Second, he affirms the principles behind this insight as "far from arbitrary" and as expressing "the constitutive and nonaccidental character of man's sexual nature," i.e., of the "nuptial character (spousal nature) of the human being."⁸⁵³ Soloviev's application of these principles anticipates recent Catholic magisterial teaching and indicates what Scola believes is an important direction for the ongoing development of our understanding of the *imago*: "the retrieval of Christological and trinitarian reflection as the foundation for anthropology can only help to deepen the notion of person, all too often identified erroneously with that of the 'individual' or of the 'spiritual subject'."⁸⁵⁴ Third, he confirms that since the various forms of love—including divine love—do in fact possess a unifying formal principle in spousal

⁸⁵¹ "It seems to me that the most plausible response is precisely that found in Soloviev's essay: in human experience, the love between man and woman constitutes the 'form' of love." Scola, *The Nuptial Mystery*, 57.

⁸⁵² *Ibid.*

⁸⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

love, it is possible to derive from this an adequate methodological paradigm and thus justify the analogical use of the term “love” itself.

Scola cites Soloviev’s work, *The Meaning of Love*, four times in *The Nuptial Mystery*. The first two citations refer to spousal love as the *analogatum princeps* of love. The third includes him among the authors who have “contributed to the building up of a considerable body of literature on the theme of man and woman.” The fourth is an indirect citation in a quotation from von Balthasar in which the latter criticizes the exclusion of fruitfulness in both Plato and Soloviev’s notion of love between man and woman in its highest form.⁸⁵⁵ These citations represent accurate interpretations in each case, although they are inevitably restricted by his reliance on *The Meaning of Love* as his sole source, depriving him of the benefit of Soloviev’s other relevant works on the subject. For example, having read the text in the English and Italian translations,⁸⁵⁶ and not having access, apparently, to either *La Russie et L’Église Universelle* or *The Justification of the Good*, he assumes that Soloviev’s primary term for love between man and woman is “sexual love,” and not “spousal (conjugal, nuptial) love.” The following analysis will focus primarily on the second and most substantive citation and will consider the fourth only in relation to his critique of the separation of the procreative and unitive dimensions of spousal love and union.

⁸⁵⁵ See Ibid., 9, 56-57, 217, 284. Among those who have contributed to the literature on man and woman, in addition to Soloviev, Scola includes the magisterium of John Paul II, C. S. Lewis, Paul Evdokimov, von Balthasar, Gaston Fessard, and Josef Pieper.

⁸⁵⁶ He cites both V. Soloviev, *The Meaning of Love* (London: Centenary Press, 1946). and V. Soloviev, *Il Significato Dell'amore E Altri Scritti* (Milan: 1983).

1.1 The Meaning of Love as Scola's Preferred Path to the Nuptial Mystery

Scola begins his fourth chapter, “The Dynamisms of Nuptiality: Affection, Love, and Sexuality,” by confronting the paradox of the human experience of love, which is reminiscent of Augustine’s confrontation with the experience of time in *The Confessions*: as a fundamental human experience it is both universally known and yet seemingly impossible to define adequately. He refers briefly to the respective inquiries into the meaning of love of Josef Pieper, C.S. Lewis, and Soloviev, deliberately choosing scholars from diverse cultural, linguistic, and Christian traditions, who proposes possible paths for navigating its methodological and terminological obstacles. In particular, he looks at their justifications for choosing to interpret and use the term “love” analogically. Of the three, he concludes that the most satisfactory solution is found in Soloviev’s essay, *The Meaning of Love*, in which he argues that “sexual love” is the “form” and “type” of human love.

Scola’s explanation for how Soloviev arrives at this insight, however, is not entirely accurate. He is correct when he writes that Soloviev’s explicit intention is “to limit his theme to the love between man and woman,” but this is true only insofar as Soloviev’s ultimate aim is to define the meaning of human love itself, and not merely the meaning of “sexual love,” as he himself states in his conclusion.⁸⁵⁷ Scola suggests that Soloviev, in pursuing this one goal, was confronted with the “necessity” of “placing this form of love in relation to others, as well as plumbing more deeply the meaning of the relation between man and woman,” and of having to develop an “integrated anthropology on which to base his

⁸⁵⁷ Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 60. “Having connected (individual sexual) love with the true essence of universal life in the idea of universal *syzygy*, I have fulfilled my immediate task of defining the meaning of love, since what we understand as the meaning of any subject is precisely its inward bond with universal truth.”

theory of sexual love.”⁸⁵⁸ This interpretation does not take into account Soloviev’s already well-developed methodology of free-theosophy, nor the principles of Trinitarian all-unity and divine-humanity, which determine his entire synthesis, all of which preceded the formulation of his thesis in *The Meaning of Love*. His “integrated anthropology” preceded his theory of sexual-spousal love and union, which can be rightly interpreted as the fruit of the consistent and creative application of the methodological principles of his synthesis.⁸⁵⁹ Although Scola is justified in crediting Soloviev with identifying spousal love as the most adequate methodological paradigm for reflecting on the phenomenon and meaning of love in general, Scola’s commentary on how Soloviev justified his insight into love’s paradigm is based upon a less than adequate grasp of the scope and meaning of the Russian thinker’s work.

1.2 *Scola’s Selective Integration of Soloviev’s Ideas Concerning Sexual-Spousal Love*

Beginning with his acceptance of Soloviev’s insight, Scola goes on to justify the paradigmatic character of spousal love in the context of contemporary Catholic theology. He builds on the dogmatic developments and “theological novelties” concerning the *imago Dei* in *Gaudium et Spes* and the magisterium of John Paul II, most notably in his documents, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, *Familiaris Consortio*, and in his Wednesday catecheses on the “theology of the body.”⁸⁶⁰ There he identifies certain constitutive and inseparable principles

⁸⁵⁸ Scola, 56.

⁸⁵⁹ See above pp. 97-101.

⁸⁶⁰ Scola, 207-09. He lists John Paul II’s principle interventions, which opened new horizons for dogmatic reflections on the human person, marriage, and family, as the Wednesday catecheses on the body and love (theology of the body), *Familiaris Consortio*, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, *Redemptoris Mater*, Letter to Women, *Donum vitae*, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, *Evangelium Vitae*.

in spousal union by virtue of which, through the power of the Spirit, it may be understood to be both an *imago Trinitatis* as well as a living *analogia* of the “great mystery” of Ephesians 5: *nuptial love* (in which *eros* and *agape* are integrated and bodiliness is an essential dimension), *sexual difference* (which includes the principle or “communion quality” of “identity and difference” or “asymmetrical reciprocity”), and *procreation* or fruitfulness. When Scola’s formulation of these principles and their implications in *The Nuptial Mystery* are considered, it becomes apparent that Soloviev’s principles are largely consistent with and therefore constitute an anticipation of Scola’s contemporary Roman Catholic theological understanding of the significance of both nuptial love and sexual difference.

However, Scola repeatedly insists that “sexuality, love, and procreation are essentially related, such that it is not possible in an objective and absolute sense to subtract one or another from the circumincession of the three without substantially changing the essence of each.”⁸⁶¹ Moreover, he goes on to argue that if the principle of procreation is not affirmed in this inseparable unity, then “reciprocity becomes mere complementarity” and in reality spousal love and union are reduced to a “fantasy” and “phantom” reminiscent of Aristophanes’ myth of the androgyne in Plato’s *The Symposium*.⁸⁶² For this reason, Scola’s affirmation of Soloviev’s insights into spousal love and union as the *analogatum princeps* of love itself needs to be qualified by this significant difference in understanding. The next section will consider briefly the corresponding principles in their respective theses, considering how they diverge on the meaning of procreation, and sketching out the implications for Soloviev’s theory as a resource for Catholic theology.

⁸⁶¹ Ibid., 125.

⁸⁶² See Ibid., 94, 129. Cf. Plato, *The Symposium*, 189d.

1.2.1 *Spousal Love and Sexual Difference*

Scola, in agreement with Soloviev, argues that the “paradigmatic nature of nuptial love ... offers us a high road to enter into the complex world of the inclination to love: this involves not only the study of love in itself, but also its affective and sexual roots.”⁸⁶³ Aware of the complexity and unavoidable ambiguities of his subject, Scola qualifies this in the following way:

It would be presumptuous, if not downright erroneous, to believe that we have thus found the way to conceptually deduce the existential simplicity of the experience of love. We have only opened a way toward understanding the phenomenon of love, which remains before us in all its splendid and elementary complexity. It does not take much to become aware of this. The intertwining of affection and sexuality in the manifestation of love, evident in the love between man and woman, immediately evokes a network of questions and problems so vast that it remains as discouraging as it is fascinating.⁸⁶⁴

In order to justify following this “high road,” he argues for two theses that are essential to Soloviev’s theory as well, namely, the essential unity of love (which justifies its use as an analogical term, as well as the possibility of integrating *eros* and *agape* in spousal love); and the significance of *bodiliness* as constitutive of love’s nuptial paradigm, insofar as the body is understood in the hierarchical unity of the person as the “sacrament” of the whole ‘I’, which “allows for relation with others and with reality itself.”⁸⁶⁵

Soloviev arrives at his own definition of love by investigating and analyzing it in light of his metaphysics of Trinitarian all-unity and divine-humanity, which reveal absolute love as the exemplar of ideal being. Properly understood, he concludes that any *inner* unity,

⁸⁶³ Scola, 57.

⁸⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁶⁵ Scola, 129.

any unification of the many coming *from within*, is love.⁸⁶⁶ Thus the various distinct forms of love are one in essence. Once the distinction between false egoism and true individuality or personhood is properly understood, the desire for union, for the good of the other, and for the good of the self are not mutually exclusive but reveal love's power to realize ideal, all-one being. For Soloviev, Nygren's radical separation of *eros* and *agape* would have to be based not only on a faulty anthropology but an inadequate metaphysics. Scola arrives at a similar conclusion, not by way of an exemplarist metaphysics, but through a phenomenological analysis of the dynamics of human love based on Thomistic principles (which are also ultimately grounded in Thomistic metaphysics).

Unlike the Russian Orthodox Soloviev, for whom scholastic theology possessed little value or authority, Scola chooses to root his theology of marriage and family in Catholic tradition by way of Thomas Aquinas. In addition, and more importantly for Scola's argument, Thomas provides a consistent rationale for the interdependence of *eros* and *agape*, an essential element of Scola's nuptial theology. In general, Scola's intention is to integrate what Rousselot calls the "physical" conception of love (implying a continuity between love of self and God) and the "ecstatic" conception (implying a radical break between the objects of love) in order to "surmount them in a more complete and harmonious vision of human love."⁸⁶⁷ He argues that the fundamental experience of *affectio* and love properly speaking, as diversely manifested in love of self, neighbor, and God, form a "dynamic and complex unity" rooted in the teleological dynamic of human existence.

⁸⁶⁶ See Meerson, 65. Meerson argues that Soloviev's understanding of the scriptural truth "God is love" (1 John 4:16) refers to the divine essence of the Trinity stems from his retrieval of medieval love mysticism, most notably St. Bernard of Clairvaux.

⁸⁶⁷ Scola, 67.

Even on the level of the most disinterested spiritual love, man continues to follow his own good; in this he follows his ultimate objective end and his subjective beatitude. Notwithstanding this, the intentionality of such a love is not necessarily turned toward the self in a greedy egoism, but can be turned toward the beloved—a beloved who is loved disinterestedly.⁸⁶⁸

From this perspective, Nygren's fundamental error, for Scola, lies in "identifying one's own good with the egotistical love of self," thus Nygren does not allow for an "adequate personalization of love" that affirms the "biological-psychological-spiritual totality of the person."⁸⁶⁹ Moreover, this limited perspective fails to acknowledge that the dialectic between "need love" and "gift love," *amor concupiscentiae* and *amor amicitiae*, *eros* and *agape*, "physical" love and "ecstatic" love, is but the "reflection, on the level of the transcendental of the good,⁸⁷⁰ of the law of dual unity proper to man and to every contingent being."⁸⁷¹ This law appears in spousal love and the sacrament of marriage as a divine-human dynamic, because the Spirit "makes the spouses participate in the nuptial relation of Christ the Bridegroom and the church-bride, helping them to integrate *eros* and *agape*."⁸⁷² Scola's vision of spousal love and union here recalls Soloviev's notion of love as an essentially divine-human or theurgic task, which is indivisibly *amor ascendens* and *amor descendens*, reflecting the existential distinction (but not separation), between the phenomenal and ideal

⁸⁶⁸ Ibid., 68.

⁸⁶⁹ "The mistake usually made in speaking of love is identifying the love of one's own good with the egotistical love of self. Thus the love of one's own good is eliminated, as a factor that makes love inauthentic. Nygren founds his destruction of the Catholic concept of love precisely on this erroneous presupposition: 'Hence arises the problem that has made itself felt in different contexts and cannot in any circumstances be rightly substituted for one another' (*Eros and Agape*, 30-31)." Ibid., 69.

⁸⁷⁰ This notion of the good vis-à-vis the law of dual unity recalls Scola's discussion on the "vertical dimension" of man as *imago Trinitatis*. Ibid., 29-30. "The communion between man and woman, as the primordial expression of every possible communion between human beings, realizes the *imago Trinitatis* when founded on the love of the divine Good, which is the love of charity. In the Trinity the three persons are united in the love of a single divine Good, identical in each one. The 'children of God' who live in communion actuate this dimension of the *imago Trinitatis* (cf. [*Gaudium et Spes*] 24), which is eminently fulfilled in the conjugal communion (cf. [*Gaudium et Spes*] 12)." Ibid., 29.

⁸⁷¹ Ibid., 122. Scola summarizes his notion of "dual unity" on 21-31.

⁸⁷² Ibid., 274.

dimensions of the human being in the process of becoming.⁸⁷³ Since both Scola and Soloviev agree that spousal love, the most physical of loves, is the paradigm of this unified essence of love, they also need to identify the significance of *bodiliness*.

Although the Augustinian-Thomistic tradition that locates man's divine likeness ultimately in the *mens*, the rational nature of man, should not be ignored, Scola insists that the human person as the divine *imago* "must also be considered in his entirety, as *corpore et anima unus*,"⁸⁷⁴ and insofar as he is created from the beginning as man and woman."⁸⁷⁵ In terms of its correspondence to the significance of bodiliness in Soloviev's theory, the key point, which Scola repeats often throughout *The Nuptial Mystery*, is the incarnational or sacramental logic that flows from the body as the "sacrament of the whole person."⁸⁷⁶ Since man exists bodily as man and woman, their original unity is the "primordial sacrament" by which they symbolize, manifest, and participate in the "mystery hidden in God from eternity," i.e., the *sacramentum magnum*.⁸⁷⁷

⁸⁷³ Soloviev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 46. See above p. 205.

⁸⁷⁴ See *Gaudium et Spes*, 14. "Though made of body and soul, man is one. Through his bodily composition he gathers to himself the elements of the material world; thus they reach their crown through him, and through him raise their voice in free praise of the Creator. For this reason man is not allowed to despise his bodily life, rather he is obliged to regard his body as good and honorable since God has created it and will raise it up on the last day."

⁸⁷⁵ Scola, 27 (emphasis in original). Cf. John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, Encyclical Letter on the Dignity of Women (August 15, 1988), 7: "For every individual is made in the image of God, insofar as he or she is a rational and free creature capable of knowing God and loving him. Moreover, we read that man cannot exist 'alone' (cf. *Gen* 2:18); he can exist only as a 'unity of the two', and therefore *in relation to another human person*. It is a question here of a mutual relationship: man to woman and woman to man. Being a person in the image and likeness of God thus also involves existing in a relationship, in relation to the other 'I'. This is a prelude to the definitive self-revelation of the Triune God: a living unity in the communion of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit" (emphasis in original).

⁸⁷⁶ See *Ibid.*, 41, 129, 130n.69, 133, 135, 216, 262, 332, 358, 364, 366-67, 373-74, 387-88.

⁸⁷⁷ Pope John Paul II says: "The sacrament, as a visible sign, is constituted with man, inasmuch as he is a 'body', through his 'visible' masculinity and femininity. The body, in fact, and only the body, is capable of making visible what is invisible: the spiritual and the divine. It has been created to transfer into the visible reality of the world the mystery hidden from eternity in God, and thus to be a sign of it." John-Paul-II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans., Michael Waldstein (Boston, MA: Pauline Books and Media, 2006), 203.

Based on this understanding of the significance of bodiliness, Scola declares that an exponent of an integrated vision of spousal love and union as *imago Dei* need not be “afraid of maintaining, in a *hierarchical unity*, the physical (bio-instinctual), erotic, and oblationary dimensions of love.”⁸⁷⁸ This unity of love, in which every aspect of the concrete human individual is included and engaged, is not static but is understood in the context of the dynamic and sacramental character of the divine *imago*. This understanding “leans on ontological bases,” but its realization is both a divine work of the Spirit and a human calling and task. From the point of view of human sexuality, Scola calls this divine work the “transfiguring dynamism of the redemption.” He writes: “in the supernatural rhythm of God’s incarnation into the farthest depths of man, an analogous penetration is accomplished on the part of the Spirit.” He continues: “all that is bodily is penetrated by the Spirit, transfigured and transferred into the Son’s kingdom.”⁸⁷⁹ But this transformation is not accomplished without the participation of the spouses, since the *imago Dei* is a “quality of the personal being of both man and woman,” and is also “a call and a task.”⁸⁸⁰

Bodiliness, and thus the spousal union in “one flesh,” is essential because it makes possible this actual, visible, sacramental realization of the human person’s being in the image of God, and even as *communio personarum*.⁸⁸¹ Although Soloviev approaches the notion of bodiliness from a radically different direction (namely, that of his incarnational

⁸⁷⁸ Scola, 125 (emphasis added).

⁸⁷⁹ Ibid., 79.

⁸⁸⁰ Ibid. (emphasis added). “*The image and likeness of God in man*, created as man and woman (in the analogy that can be presumed between Creator and creature), thus also expresses the ‘unity of the two’ in a common humanity. This ‘unity of the two’, which is a sign of interpersonal communion, *shows that the creation of man* is also marked by a certain likeness to the divine communion (*‘communio’*). This likeness is a quality of the personal being of both man and woman, and is also a call and a task.” *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 7 (emphasis in original).

⁸⁸¹ Scola, 40.

aesthetics of free theurgy), he arrives at the same conclusions.⁸⁸² In other words, his understanding of bodiliness vis-à-vis the divine-human realization of the *imago Dei* in man and woman and their spousal unity anticipates and is confirmed by Scola's argument. For both thinkers, the full significance of the body is revealed in human sexuality as fulfilled in spousal union.

The most unequivocal affirmation of Soloviev's theory in Scola's work is directly connected to the meaning of spousal love and union in terms of its "communion quality" as *imago Trinitatis* and an *analogia* of the *sacramentum magnum*, such that the *imago Dei* is only completed and perfected in interpersonal communion.⁸⁸³ "Identity and difference" or "asymmetrical reciprocity, inasmuch as it is the central nucleus of sexual difference taken up in to the experience of love," Scola argues (following the reasoning of Soloviev, whom he cites here), "demonstrates that the spousal dimension has every right to be considered the *analogatum princeps* of every love, from physical love to the complete oblation of the mystical wedding feast of the Lamb, who is Christ the Bridegroom of the church-bride."⁸⁸⁴

As such, this spousal dimension signifies man's "communion quality" as *imago Trinitatis*, revealing that human existence in dual unity is an *analogia* of God's existence in the relations of the Trinity.⁸⁸⁵ Soloviev describes the same reality in his own terms. Man and

⁸⁸² See above, pp. 208-11.

⁸⁸³ Scola, 12. Cf. *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 7.

⁸⁸⁴ Scola, 122. The correspondence between Soloviev and Scola on this point is clear from the latter's definition of terms. Reciprocity means that "there exists another modality other than my own for embodying the total identity (*corpore et anima unus*) of the human person, namely, that of the woman. ... Asymmetry consists in the fact that sexual difference, in a significant and immediate way, testifies that the other always remains 'other' for me." Scola, 92-94.

⁸⁸⁵ "The fact that man 'created as man and woman' is the image of God means not only that each of them individually is like God, as a rational and free being. It also means that man and woman, created as a 'unity of the two' in their common humanity, are called to live in a communion of love, and in this way to mirror in the world the communion of love that is in God, through which the Three Persons love each other in the intimate

woman are “are homogenous and of equal significance” (identity, reciprocity), but “*all-round* different with regard to form (both in the natural and spiritual order)[difference, asymmetry],” which makes possible the “authentic realization of true human individuality” or “perfect marriage” [“one flesh” union and nuptiality].⁸⁸⁶ Thus the form of authentic human being is the all-one form of Trinitarian being or absolute Love.

Moreover, both Scola and Soloviev have the same understanding of what characterizes and limits this analogy. The “communion quality” of spousal union manifests a Trinitarian principle and is not a direct analogy in the sense that it implies an introduction of sexual difference per se into Trinitarian relations (though Scola goes so far as to discern what von Balthasar calls “nuptiality” in the Trinity.)⁸⁸⁷ This “nuptiality,” or what Soloviev would call all-unity, is revealed and incarnated in the *sacramentum magnum*. As a result, both Scola and Soloviev argue that the “relationship between the man-woman and Christ-church pairs is now so closely linked that each of the two mysteries can be understood only in the light of the other.”⁸⁸⁸ When Scola concludes that “asymmetrical reciprocity ... is the meaning of nuptiality,”⁸⁸⁹ and Soloviev concludes that “true individuality” or “perfect marriage” is “a particular determinate image of all-unity (*vseedinstvo*),”⁸⁹⁰ they do so on the basis of a Trinitarian *analogia entis*.

In the chapter, “A Description of the Nuptial Mystery,” Scola explains why the “concrete experience of the man-woman relationship” is the *analogia princeps* of nuptiality

mystery of the one divine life. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God through the unity of the divinity, exist as persons through the inscrutable divine relationship. Only in this way can we understand the truth that God in himself is love (cf. 1 Jn 4:16).” *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 7.

⁸⁸⁶ Soloviev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 19 (emphasis in original).

⁸⁸⁷ See Scola, 132-33.

⁸⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁸⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁸⁹⁰ Soloviev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 17.

“in all its various types” in terms of Chalcedonian Christology and Trinitarian ontology. The logic of his argument closely follows and confirms the corresponding principles in Soloviev’s notion of divine-humanity and Trinitarian all-unity, but only up to a point. It also leads Scola directly to one of his main theses, and his consequent fundamental but implicit critique of Soloviev’s theory, i.e., the essentiality of procreation or fruitfulness in the “great mystery” of nuptiality in all its forms, human and divine. He begins by identifying the revelation of the modality of divine-human unity in Jesus Christ according to the Council of Chalcedon as the appearance in history of the “original experience of dual unity.” For this reason, the unity of natures in the one person of Christ—*inconfuse, immutabiliter, indivise, inseparabiliter*—“appears as the source from which springs the dual unity between Christ the Bridegroom and his bride the church.”⁸⁹¹

Since, according to von Balthasar, whom Scola cites, the fullness of the mystery of man and woman “is only attained in the mystery of Christ and his Church (Eph. 5:27, 33),” Scola argues that the four Chalcedonian adverbs serve to illuminate the original biblical commandment to man and woman to become “one flesh.”⁸⁹² In describing the Trinitarian source and meaning of this divine-human dual-unity, Scola gives an accurate formulation of Soloviev’s notion of Trinitarian all-unity as absolute love:

It is the event of Jesus Christ that allows us to catch a glimpse, however inadequate, of the fact that the Trinity presents an experience of love in its most complete form, according to the perfection that consists in a difference between the three persons which does not destroy, but rather exalts, the unity of the one God. For this reason the triune God is the ultimate explanation of all possible difference, and therefore also of dual unity. God’s triunity is the ultimate guarantee that difference does not do away with the contingent being. On the contrary, difference exists for the sake of its

⁸⁹¹ Scola, 100.

⁸⁹² Ibid., 101.

truth and fulfillment. In this sense difference within perfect unity, which characterizes the triune God, tells us who God truly is; he is purest love.⁸⁹³

It is at this point that Scola and Soloviev part ways at the most fundamental level.

While for Soloviev the principle of Trinitarian all-unity determines the very essence and meaning of sexual-spousal love and union, it may be said that he does not follow the logical implications of *imago Trinitatis* to the end.⁸⁹⁴ For Scola, von Balthasar articulates these implications in his analogy between the life of the Trinity and the conjugal act of man and woman in relation to the begetting of a child. The third person, whether the divine Person of the Spirit, or the person of the child, reveals the ultimate meaning of the *difference* present in dual unity, both divine and human: “the reciprocal love between the Father and the Son is the perfect bond which begets a perfect fruit, the Holy Spirit, who is himself God.” This principle of fruitfulness, which manifests itself in human sexuality and spousal union paradigmatically as procreation (though not limited to procreation), is thus essential to every form of love. It is the “full ‘face’ of asymmetrical reciprocity.”⁸⁹⁵

1.2.2 *The Essential Unity of Love, Sexuality, and Procreation*

Scola’s most forceful and concise articulation of the implications of the essential unity of nuptiality in the circumincession of the three inseparable elements of love, sexuality (asymmetrical reciprocity), and procreation (fruitfulness), is in the chapter, “The Nuptial

⁸⁹³ Ibid., 102.

⁸⁹⁴ Although the notion of *imago Trinitatis* is implicit in his notion of Trinitarian all-unity as divine exemplar of all being and the formal principle of “true individuality” and humanity as an organic whole, Soloviev’s only explicit mention of the *imago dei* as “an image of the triune God” is found in *The Meaning of Love*: “This triune faith is now a certain intrinsic act; and with this act, the first ground is laid toward the true reunification of man with his other and the restoration in him (or in them) of *the image of the triune God*.” Soloviev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 43-44 (emphasis added).

⁸⁹⁵ Scola, 125.

Mystery and Fruitfulness.” Here he confronts the challenge of biotechnology, which has made it possible to separate these same elements. To say that man and woman in their spousal union constitute an *imago Trinitatis* is to say that they are a *communio personarum*,⁸⁹⁶ participating in and reflecting by way of analogy the perfection of the *communio personarum* in the divine Three in One.⁸⁹⁷ Divine *communio* is “perfectly fruitful” in the person of the Holy Spirit, who is the expression and fruit of the love of the Father and the Son; while the *communio* of nuptial union echoes this only “within a radical dissimilarity, in its structural openness to the child.” In a word, the *communio personarum* of man and woman “realizes the human person’s being in the image of God” because it is a “communion between two persons of different sexes which is open to a third person.” The crux of Scola’s argument here is that the full meaning of dual unity is only revealed in the trinitarian communion quality of the *imago Dei*: it is a “reciprocal fruitfulness, and fruitful because it is asymmetrical.”⁸⁹⁸

The implications of this intrinsic connection between difference or asymmetry and procreation or fruitfulness constitute a profound critique of Soloviev’s theory, although Scola does not mention it explicitly. He declares unequivocally that if the meaning of sexual difference is separated from procreation and fruitfulness, spousal love cannot be the *analogatum princeps* of love. This is so because, as has been revealed in the Trinitarian *communio personarum*, “difference,” as an essential and permanent aspect of dual unity, and

⁸⁹⁶ Cf. *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 7.

⁸⁹⁷ “*Communio personarum* exists in its perfection in the Three in One, because the Father gives himself completely to the Son without keeping anything of his divine essence for himself. The Father generates the Son. The Son himself gives back the same, perennial divine essence. This exchange of love between the two is so perfect as to be fruitful in a pure state: it gives rise to another person, the Holy Spirit (*donum doni*). Unity and difference coexist in this perennial event of being and letting be, which (inconceivable to us) implies a difference in perfect identity.” Scola, 131-32.

⁸⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 132 (emphasis added).

which is the foundation of the “insuperable, dramatic otherness” of the other, is *constituted* by the “third factor,” the child as the fruit of spousal love and union. “To break the circumincession of the three factors (love, sexuality, procreation), Scola insists, “is equivalent to negating them.”⁸⁹⁹ If the aspect of difference or asymmetry is negated, then what remains is not reciprocity, properly speaking, but a reductive form of complementarity, which leads to the search for the phantom of androgyny.

Only difference, inasmuch as it expresses an objective openness to fruit (procreative fecundity), indicates the place of the other to love: the ‘being there’ of the man for the woman and vice versa. Without this, the two *could not but conceive of themselves (androgynously) as two halves seeking a lost whole.*⁹⁰⁰

The central lacuna in Soloviev’s theory according to Scola’s argument in *The Nuptial Mystery* thus becomes clear. For Soloviev there is no meaningful distinction between mere physical reproduction, which corresponds to man’s animal nature, and procreation or fruitfulness, such that the latter can be understood to possess any intrinsic or essential connection to the meaning of sexual-spousal love. “It is obvious,” Soloviev declares, “that in a *perfect* marriage in which the inner completeness of the human being is finally attained through a perfect union with the spiritualized material essence, reproduction becomes both unnecessary and impossible” because its “supreme purpose has been achieved” and it no longer needs to “reproduce life in time” but “re-create it for eternity.”⁹⁰¹ This reductive notion of human procreation would appear to undermine the theological value of his theory as a whole (while not negating the value of its individual insights) and relegate his notion of “true individuality” and “perfect marriage” to a form of Platonic

⁸⁹⁹ Ibid., 129.

⁹⁰⁰ Ibid. (emphasis added).

⁹⁰¹ Soloviev, *Opravdanie*, SS VIII: 455 (emphasis added).

androgyny. By briefly considering his understanding of procreation, as well as the significance of the social sphere for “true personhood,” it is evident to what degree this critique is valid and to what extent it ought to be qualified.

It is plausible that this lacuna in Soloviev’s theory may be explained by the profound influence of the Greek patristic tradition, in which procreation and death were understood to be inextricably linked. Scola notes this tendency in the tradition as well, citing those Church Fathers with whom Soloviev was well acquainted: the Cappadocians, Origen, Maximus the Confessor, and John Damascene.⁹⁰² Their dilemma is Soloviev’s as well: death appears to be a law of the species, but also a consequence of sin. In his original state, man did not die as he does in the historical state, thus how can procreation be compatible with immortality?⁹⁰³ More to the point, how could procreation in any way be introduced into the divine and eternal Trinity, even by way of analogy? According to Scola’s argument, Soloviev does not take into account the unique place of the Holy Spirit as the expression and fruit of the divine love and union of the Father and Son, nor the full soteriological significance of the *sacramentum magnum*. Soloviev thus cannot conceive of a resolution to the dilemma of the connection between mortality and procreation that would integrate procreation into his theory of the *individual* significance of sexual-spousal love and union.

The man-woman polarity is linked to the mystery of the Christ-Church relationship (Eph 5), where nuptial love not only reaches its fullest form, *but where at the same time its connection with death through the closed circle of generations for the sake of the species is broken*. This is so not only because death is conquered in Christ, but also and more precisely because Christ inaugurates a new form of fruitfulness which is not identical to human procreation. This is a fecundity for the kingdom, which

⁹⁰² For a more detailed summary and critique of the notion that sexuality and sexual difference was a consequence of original sin, see Angelo Cardinal Scola, *Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Theological Style* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1995), 92-94, n.16.

⁹⁰³ Scola, *The Nuptial Mystery*, 48.

becomes the eschatological sign of the marriage between Christ and the Church; it is a virginal fecundity or nuptiality, which is not at all asexual.⁹⁰⁴

Soloviev's understanding of procreation stems directly from this inability to reconcile theologically the connection between procreation and death.

In *The Justification of the Good*, Soloviev states his understanding of procreation bluntly: "the carnal means of reproduction is for the human person an evil."⁹⁰⁵ He argues that this is attested to by the universal experience of sexual shame, insofar as sexual reproduction represents the "predominance of the senseless material process over the self-control of the spirit."⁹⁰⁶ Also, like the Greek Fathers, he emphasizes its inseparable connection to mortality and the destruction of the individual for the sake of the species.⁹⁰⁷ As such, he holds that human reproduction, with its intrinsic relationship to individual mortality, is contrary to the dignity of man—who in truth as an individual has infinite value—and is ultimately destructive of human love and life. He concludes that our "moral relation" to it must be "absolutely negative."⁹⁰⁸

However, since it is not within our power as individuals to transform our carnal life into spiritual life, which alone would make possible the abolition of sexual reproduction, then doing so cannot be considered a moral law; however, we ought to at least "adopt the path that leads to its limitation and abolition."⁹⁰⁹ One of the criteria that make a marriage "true" for Soloviev is that it "consciously aims at the perfect union of man and woman," and

⁹⁰⁴ Ibid., 13 (emphasis added).

⁹⁰⁵ Solov'ev, *Opravdanie*, SS VIII: 79.

⁹⁰⁶ Ibid., 79.

⁹⁰⁷ He gives a clear summary of his understanding of the relationship between sexual reproduction and mortality in *The Spiritual Foundations of Life*. See Solov'ev, *Dukhovnie Osnovi Zhizni*, SS III: 305-15. See above p. 193.

⁹⁰⁸ Solov'ev, *Opravdanie*, SS VIII: 79.

⁹⁰⁹ Ibid.

thus the abolition of reproduction. In this sense, he understands the historical phenomenon of human procreation as, at most, Divine Providence achieving a good end through an evil means.

So long, however, as [true marriage] merely aims at this [perfect union] and has not yet actually realized the idea ... external, physical reproduction is both the natural consequence of the perfection not yet attained and the necessary means for its future attainment. ... The external, temporal succession of generations exists *because* marriage has not yet attained perfection, because the union of individual man and woman is not sufficiently spiritual and inwardly complete to re-create in them the perfect human being in the image and likeness of God.⁹¹⁰

Since for Soloviev procreation exists solely so that future generations might realize what the present generation could not, it has no *intrinsic* significance for the meaning of love. Scola's theology of marriage and family therefore represents a fundamental critique of his theory from the point of view of contemporary Catholic theology and recent magisterial developments related to man as *imago Trinitatis*. More than simply indentifying a lacuna in Soloviev's theological anthropology, this critique implies that Soloviev's rejection of the intrinsic significance of procreation ultimately undermines and leaves open to heterodox interpretation his understanding of the meaning of the other two aspects of nuptiality, namely, spousal love and sexuality.⁹¹¹

There are nevertheless elements of Soloviev's theory not adequately addressed by Scola that make possible a rejoinder and partial correction to his criticism. First, although Scola would argue that he does not provide an adequate theological justification for it, Soloviev does insist that the element of "difference" is permanent and essential, and that the "other" always remains "other" in perfect unity. Indeed, it is an essential principle of

⁹¹⁰ Ibid., 455-56 (emphasis added).

⁹¹¹ See Scola, 127.

Trinitarian all-unity and divine-human union that the individual members of the one body are fully realized and perfected *as individuals* precisely in and through their unity.

Therefore, Soloviev's vision of "perfect marriage" cannot be equated with Aristophanes' description of the original androgyne that "regards man and woman as two structurally unfulfilled halves, driven to search for an imaginary original unity."⁹¹²

Second, although he does not develop the idea further, he does state in *The Justification of the Good* that, as one of the three main elements of the natural relation between man and woman, reproduction is the "*purpose* of the natural sexual relation or its final result," and that, as such, it is not "annihilated" but "transformed" and "perfected" by grace in "true marriage."⁹¹³ Finally, Soloviev's insistence that "true marriage" can only be realized when it is open to and engaged in a mutually enhancing and immediate interaction with the social and universal spheres of human life—the *syzygy* relation—points to an awareness that spousal unity is only fulfilled in its subsequent unity with a "third" element.⁹¹⁴ The role this interaction with the social and universal spheres plays as a necessary aspect of "true marriage" for Soloviev is perhaps comparable to the role procreation plays as an essential element in the unity of love and sexuality in marriage. The basis of this comparison is Soloviev and Scola's respective arguments that the exclusion of this third element would undermine and preclude the realization and perfection of the true meaning of spousal love and union. As Soloviev writes:

Although it is a fact that the most profound and intensive manifestation of love is expressed in the mutual relations of two beings fulfilling one another, in no way does it follow that this mutual relation could separate and isolate itself from everything

⁹¹² Scola, *The Nuptial Mystery*, 374.

⁹¹³ Soloviev, *Opravdanie*, SS VIII: 455 (emphasis added).

⁹¹⁴ See above pp. 267-70.

else as something self-sufficient. On the contrary, such isolation is the ruin of love.⁹¹⁵

For Soloviev, the moral meaning of “perfect marriage” by definition precludes any sort of isolation, exclusivity, or separation, not just between individual persons, but between the communal realities of “true individualities,” social bodies, and the universal sphere. If spouses attempt to isolate themselves in their own personal union—despite its objective impossibility—they contradict the very meaning and essence of their union, and it becomes it remains an impotent, empty, immoral union.⁹¹⁶ This is why the incarnation of the divine *Sophia* as the fullness of the realization of the *imago Dei* in humanity has a triune structure: the ideal meaning of Man, Woman, and Society is realized in the divine-human unity of Jesus Christ, Mary, and the Universal Church.⁹¹⁷

2. *THE GLORY OF THE LORD: LAY THEOLOGICAL STYLES*, HANS URS VON BALTHASAR

Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988) is relevant to this inquiry for two reasons. First, as one of the most influential, prolific, and profound Catholic theologians of the twentieth century, his choice to include Soloviev’s thought in his work, *The Glory of the Lord*, as an exemplary instance of a modern theological aesthetic is in itself a noteworthy affirmation of the value of the nineteenth-century Russian thinker as a resource for contemporary Catholic theology. Second, and more to the point for the present inquiry, von Balthasar’s notion of metaphysics as “meta-anthropology,” and his tripartite theological synthesis crafted in light of beauty, goodness, and truth, resonate profoundly with the

⁹¹⁵ Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 50.

⁹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 51-52.

⁹¹⁷ Soloviev, *La Russie*, 265. See above pp. 142-46.

synthetic methodology and essential principles at work in Soloviev's vision of divine-humanity, his personalist metaphysics of Trinitarian all-unity, and his tripartite synthesis of free theurgy (beauty), free theocracy (goodness), and free theosophy (truth). Unlike Scola's selective use of Soloviev's insights, what can be seen in von Balthasar is the integration of Soloviev's thought as a whole, including his theory of sexual-spousal love, into a contemporary Catholic theological vision that has fundamental and far-reaching significance.⁹¹⁸ While von Balthasar tends, without sufficient justification, to portray Soloviev as a Roman Catholic theologian, and to confuse or gloss over certain problematic aspects of his theory of sexual-spousal love, he does succeed in demonstrating why the Russian religious thinker's universal theological aesthetic marks a significant development in Catholic Christian thought.

Von Balthasar's reflections in his essay on Soloviev, who is one of the twelve luminaries in the rather exclusive and somewhat arbitrary theological "constellation" are found in the second and third volumes of von Balthasar's *Theological Aesthetics: The Glory of the Lord*.⁹¹⁹ The purpose of these volumes is to provide evidence for the essential role played by beauty, as a transcendental quality of Being inseparable from unity, truth, and

⁹¹⁸ David L. Schindler writes that "perhaps it is not too simple to say that, while Augustine initiated a tradition of thought about the good (subjectivity), and Thomas about the true (objectivity), Hans Urs von Balthasar has bequeathed a treasure of reflections regarding the beautiful." See his endorsement of David L. Schindler, ed. *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991).

⁹¹⁹ Although von Balthasar offers a justification for each of his twelve choices, which in part is determined by his intention to give an historical overview of patristic, medieval, and modern theology, he admits that his choice is inevitably somewhat arbitrary, and feels the need to explain some of the more glaring omissions, such as Origen, Maximus (on whom he had already written extensively), Möhler, Scheeben, Claudel, and Chesterton. "But if a transcendental attribute of being [i.e., "beauty"] cannot be defined in a categorical-conceptual way, how much less the *proprium* of the living God [i.e., *doxa*, *kabod*]: the form and content of great theologies will always attest the one miracle in new and different ways and, even in eternity, will not together form a surveyable system. Thus the selection of the twelve representatives of Christian thought discussed in this volume has something arbitrary about it: together they form but a constellation." Hans Urs von Balthasar, *My Work in Retrospect* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993), 82.

goodness, in theology. Von Balthasar chooses these particular clerical and lay representatives of Christian thought because he believes that together they illustrate best how “truly epochal theology is illuminated by the glory of God, is touched in its depths by it and in a mysterious fashion takes something from it and gives it out again.”⁹²⁰

His choice of Soloviev, as with each “luminary,” is based on his estimation of the intrinsic excellence and orthodoxy of his theological aesthetic, and the depth and significance of its timeliness and historical impact.⁹²¹ He correctly interprets Soloviev’s thought as a system that “aims at bringing a whole ethical and theoretical scheme to perfection in a universal theological aesthetic”⁹²²—what Soloviev would call his universal Christian synthesis of the “integral life” of divine-humanity—and whose theme and content is the “progressive eschatological embodiment of the Divine Idea in worldly reality ... the impress of the limitless fullness and determinacy of God upon the abyss of cosmic potentiality.”⁹²³

Emphasizing the influence of Maximus the Confessor on Soloviev’s thought, von Balthasar describes this Solovievian process of divine-human “embodiment” as the “art” of the “kingdom at work,” the “redemption of the cosmos.” This process is informed by the principles of freedom, love, *kenosis*, unity, and reciprocity revealed in Christ’s divine-

⁹²⁰ von Balthasar, *My Work in Retrospect*, 82.

⁹²¹ Von Balthasar notes that Soloviev’s thought is “most astonishing” in its similarity to that of Teilhard de Chardin, none of whose insights, he believes, are alien to Soloviev. He chooses to include the Russian philosopher over de Chardin because he possesses “incomparably greater speculative power,” and because Soloviev’s confrontation with the apocalypse and the Antichrist at the end of his life serves as a “salutary counterpoise to his evolutionism” (a lacuna never resolved in de Chardin’s thought). See von Balthasar, “Soloviev,” 290.

⁹²² *Ibid.*, 281.

⁹²³ *Ibid.*, 283.

humanity.⁹²⁴ Like Maximus, Soloviev “systematically makes the Chalcedonian dogma (that is, the synthesis between God and man in Christ) the foundation upon which the entire structure of natural and supernatural reality in the world is erected.”⁹²⁵ He argues that the only element Soloviev adds to the theological vision of Maximus is the dynamism of the Hegelian notion of “evolution” or “development,” the “progressive embodiment” of the Divine Idea manifested in the “evolution of nature towards man, of history toward Christ, and of the church toward the kingdom of God in its completeness.”⁹²⁶

Here he identifies two key principles, in light of which he reads Soloviev’s thought as a whole, and which determine and mold the form of the Russian thinker’s theological aesthetic: the “Roman form of the Church” with its inherent universality or “catholicity” and the “tension between progress and apocalypse.”⁹²⁷ The former he attributes to Soloviev’s transformation of the Hegelian (and Protestant) “dialectic” of absolute Spirit into the “Catholic” notion of “integration,” a principle that more successfully than dialectic preserves what is transcended. The latter he ascribes to what for him is a fundamental shift of focus in Soloviev’s thought towards the end of his life, from an immanent to a transcendent eschatology, articulated in his prophetic work, *War, Progress, and the End of History: Three Conversations including a Short Story of the Anti-Christ*.⁹²⁸ These principles, in which aesthetics and eschatology coincide in the reciprocal progressive development of universality and determinacy, form the foundation for all of Soloviev’s ideological schemata. These principles, moreover, serve to “chart the world’s divinization” realized in

⁹²⁴ Ibid., 288.

⁹²⁵ Ibid.

⁹²⁶ Ibid.

⁹²⁷ Ibid., 281-82; 296.

⁹²⁸ Ibid., 282-84; 349-52.

principle in Christ, the incarnation of the *Logos*, in whom the “real and ideal have become archetypically one.” Therefore, as von Balthasar correctly points out, each part of Soloviev’s system, *The Meaning of Love* included, is an encounter between the divine principle in its concrete fullness (the incarnate *Logos*) and the human and worldly reality in its concrete fullness (the incarnate *Sophia*).

While von Balthasar’s summary of Soloviev’s thought is largely accurate, the approach he takes in his essay as a whole is determined by the overall purpose of his work, *The Glory of the Lord*.⁹²⁹ To this end, he emphasizes in particular the “Roman” or “catholic” form of Soloviev’s thought.⁹³⁰ In considering Soloviev’s methodology, von Balthasar engages in a certain “speculative reconstruction” in order to unfold the reasons why the Russian thinker arrived at his “Catholic conclusion.”⁹³¹ In doing so, von Balthasar omits or ignores certain problematic aspects of Soloviev’s sophiology and anthropology; and he makes terminological choices that tend to portray the Russian Orthodox philosopher as a credible and exemplary Roman Catholic theologian.⁹³² This tendency is also evident in von

⁹²⁹ Von Balthasar gives a comprehensive introduction to *The Glory of the Lord* in his introduction to the first volume. See von Balthasar, *Seeing the Form*, 17-127. For a summary of *The Glory of the Lord* in the context of his trilogy that seeks to develop a theology in light of the three transcendental of beauty (*Herrlichkeit*), goodness (*Dramatik*), and truth (*Logik*), see von Balthasar, *My Work in Retrospect*, 80-87; Louis Dupre, “The Glory of the Lord: Hans Urs von Balthasar’s Theological Aesthetic,” in *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work*, ed. David L. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 183-206; Aidan Nichols, *The Word Has Been Abroad: A Guide through Balthasar’s Aesthetics* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1998); Scola, *Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Theological Style*, 34-44.

⁹³⁰ Von Balthasar speculates that the reason why Soloviev is the only Russian to leave us with an aesthetic system is explained by his unique “feeling for the specifically Roman form of the Church,” not from the purely aesthetic point of view, like the Romantics or *Action Française*, but from the ethical, social perspective, and he might well add, dogmatic.” Von Balthasar, “Soloviev,” 281.

⁹³¹ Aidan Nichols, *The Word Has Been Abroad: A Guide through Balthasar’s Aesthetics*, 114.

⁹³² In addition to presenting evidence from within the thought of Soloviev himself, von Balthasar chooses to accept the “proof” offered by Heinrich Falk that Soloviev “actually converted in earnest to Catholicism.” Von Balthasar, “Soloviev,” 282n.5. See H. Falk, “Wladimir Solowjews Stellung Zur Katholischen Kirche,” in *Stimmen Der Zeit* (1949), 421-35. Without a sufficient understanding of Soloviev’s ecclesiology, characterizing his acceptance of Roman primacy as a conversion to “Catholicism” is misleading, since

Balthasar's interpretation of *The Meaning of Love* itself, which at times is ambiguous and confused. The confusion may have been exacerbated by his reliance on the German translation or even by his stated dependence on Stremoukhov's work, *Vladimir Soloviev et Son Oeuvre Messianique*.⁹³³

Nevertheless, by presenting Soloviev's entire synthesis, and in particular his theory of sexual-spousal love and union in the context of a theological aesthetic, von Balthasar underlines what is perhaps the most fruitful avenue for the exploration of Soloviev's thought as a resource for contemporary Catholic theological anthropology. With his incarnational vision of spousal love as a divine-human or free theurgic "art" and task, Soloviev directly addresses the crisis that inspires von Balthasar's entire project, namely, how the eclipse of beauty in modern life and thought has left truth and goodness isolated and fragmented and therefore unconvincing and impotent, degenerating into the dead letter of various forms and degrees of dogmatism and moralism.⁹³⁴ For von Balthasar, the anthropological dimension, and in particular, the spousal dimension of this vision is especially timely and relevant since the "form of marriage," from which derives the entire "beauty of human existence" is "today more than ever entrusted to the care of Christians."⁹³⁵

The following section will first consider briefly von Balthasar's depiction of Soloviev as a "Roman Catholic" thinker in order to distinguish between what is von

"Catholicism," as most understand the term, is certainly not synonymous with the Solovievian vision of the "Universal Church," which includes and does not differentiate itself from the Eastern Orthodox Church.

⁹³³ His reliance on Stremoukhov is evident from the text, and reflects what he himself states at the outset: "What is not translated of the major works had to be taken on the basis of the painstaking and brilliant analyses of Soloviev's work by D. Stremoukhov." See Dmitri Stremoukhov, *Vladimir Soloviev Et Son Oeuvre Messianique*, Publications De Lat Faculte Des Lettres De L'universite De Strasbourg, Fasc. 69 (Paris: Societe de'Edition, Les Belles Lettres, 1935).

⁹³⁴ See von Balthasar, *Seeing the Form*, 19.

⁹³⁵ Ibid., 28.

Balthasar's attempt to establish the latter's theological *bona fides* and the substance of his interpretation of Soloviev's thought. Second, it will analyze his understanding and presentation of Soloviev's theory, which he presents in the context of his methodology, sophiology, and aesthetics respectively.

2.1 *Soloviev as Roman Catholic Thinker*

Von Balthasar justifies his portrayal of Soloviev as a Roman Catholic thinker⁹³⁶ primarily by arguing that the latter's conversion "in earnest" to Catholicism and his arrival at the "Catholic conclusion" is reflected in the identifiably "Catholic" form and content of his thought, as opposed to Protestant (seen, for example, in his critique of Hegel) and Eastern Orthodox (seen, for example, in his rejection of nationalism and in his *apologia* for Roman primacy).⁹³⁷ His contention that Soloviev embraced the Roman Catholic Church because Catholicism provided him with a link between the formal Hegelian principles of universality and development is, as Nichols rightly points out, a matter of speculation.⁹³⁸

⁹³⁶ One of the ways in which von Balthasar portrays Soloviev as a Catholic thinker is often to substitute the term "catholic" for "universal" when describing his thought. In Russian, there are two terms which may be translated as "catholic." One refers to the historical reality of the Roman Catholic Church, i.e., *kafolicheskaiia*. The other term, *vselenskaia*, retains the original Greek meaning of the term "catholic" in terms of "universal." Soloviev always uses the latter term. For example, whenever Soloviev refers to the "Catholic Church" he uses the Russian term *Vselenskaia Tserkov*, which is usually correctly translated as the "Universal Church." See Solovyov, *God, Man and the Church*, 136-71. Another notable detail in this portrayal is von Balthasar's raising the question whether Soloviev's three famous visions of divine *Sophia* were in actuality the much more easily digestible Catholic phenomenon of visions of the Blessed Mother. He argues that Soloviev's understanding of the inner connection between Mary and *Sophia* makes this a viable possibility. However, anyone acquainted with the content of Soloviev's visions realizes that this interpretation is far from likely. His vision of *Sophia* has much more in common with ineffable mystical experience than a Marian apparition. See von Balthasar, "Soloviev," 292.

⁹³⁷ Von Balthasar, "Soloviev," 282.

⁹³⁸ "More typically Balthasar's own is his speculative reconstruction of how Soloviev arrived at his 'Catholic conclusion' which he situates at the intersection of two ideas crucial to the Russian writer's thought. And these were, first, the notion of *universality* which takes the form in Soloviev of distaste for the particularist and (not least) nationalist outlook—Slavophilia, he came to recognize, is an insufficiently 'catholic' attitude; and second, the concept of *development* whereby a relatively undetermined reality becomes at once more

Soloviev's vision of all-unity and divine-humanity is inseparable from his ecclesiology, but it is misleading to interpret the development of his thought as leading him to convert to Roman Catholicism, or to equate his ecclesial vision with the historical reality of "Roman Catholicism" as he knew it. He prefaces his declaration of faith in Roman primacy, for which he argues extensively in *La Russie et L'Église Universelle* (and to which von Balthasar refers extensively for evidence of the "catholic" form and content of Soloviev's theological aesthetic⁹³⁹) by first identifying himself as "a member of the true and venerable Eastern or Greco-Russian Orthodox Church, which does not speak through an anti-canonical synod nor through the employees of the secular power, but through the utterance of her great Fathers and Doctors."⁹⁴⁰ He himself sees no inherent contradiction in his profession of faith in Roman primacy and his membership in the Eastern Orthodox Church, because the Universal Church in which he believes encompasses both. He sums up his ecclesial vision in a letter to Rozanov in the following way: "I am just as far from Latin narrowness as from Byzantine narrowness. ... The religion of the Holy Spirit which I confess is broader and at the same time richer in content than any particular religion."⁹⁴¹ To apply the labels "Russian Orthodox" or "Roman Catholic" to Soloviev with any limited or categorical connotation is to misunderstand his ecclesiology, since his "religion of the Holy Spirit" encompassed the historical incarnations of both Eastern and Western Christianity in a way both concrete and universal.

determinate and more plenary, integrating all partial viewpoints and limited forms of actualization into an organic totality in, once again, a 'catholic' fashion." Nichols, 114.

⁹³⁹ The entire section on Soloviev's ecclesiology, in which he emphasizes his adherence to Catholic dogmas such as papal infallibility and the Immaculate Conception, is based on *La Russie et L'Église Universelle*. See von Balthasar, "Soloviev," 328-38.

⁹⁴⁰ Soloviev, *La Russie*, 150.

⁹⁴¹ Vladimir Solov'ev, *Pis'ma Vladimira Sergeevicha Solov'eva*, 43. See above pp. 28-29.

Von Balthasar is right to emphasize the unity of the two formal principles of universality (“broader”) and development or evolution (“richer in content”) in Soloviev’s theological aesthetic; but these principles of all-unity lead the Russian thinker not so much to a “Roman Catholic” conclusion, but to an all-inclusive “catholic” vision of the Universal Church (*Vselenskaia Tserkov*), an ecumenical vision of the Mystical Body that inspired his efforts to reconcile the Churches of East and West in his own lifetime. Von Balthasar himself understands this nuance, as he shows in his summary of Soloviev’s ecclesiology in *La Russie et L’Église Universelle* and *Spiritual Foundations of Life*,⁹⁴² but his contention that Soloviev is a “Roman Catholic” thinker is in itself misleading. It is only accurate if by “Roman” and “Catholic” is understood the all-inclusive, concrete, and *universal form* of catholicity (which also includes Roman primacy), a catholic principle that remains a divine-human manifestation of Trinitarian all-unity.

2.2 Von Balthasar’s Interpretation of Soloviev’s Theory of Sexual-Spousal Love

Von Balthasar directly addresses Soloviev’s theory of sexual-spousal love in the context of his methodology and critique of Plato, his sophiology (metaphysics and anthropology), and most significantly, following Stremmooukhoff, in his aesthetics as a “theurgic art.” In each case he displays a correct understanding of its basic principles, despite certain terminological and conceptual inaccuracies. His aim is to present it as a fully integrated element of the harmonious whole that is Soloviev’s theological aesthetic, since his emphasis is on communicating the latter as a seamless and exemplary theological vision of Christian totality. To this end, he affirms and repeatedly emphasizes the method and form

⁹⁴² Von Balthasar, “Soloviev,” 328-38.

of Soloviev's synthesis, his successful integration of "all partial truths in one vision," that makes him second only to Thomas Aquinas as the "greatest artist of order and organization in the history of thought."⁹⁴³ At the same time, he tends to gloss over, omit, or ignore certain aspects of the theory which are problematic but potentially fruitful. These lacunae, which are partially justified by the limitations of any concise summary, include ignoring the implications of the theurgic significance of the masculine and feminine roles in spousal union vis-à-vis the *sacramentum magnum* and overlooking the absence in Soloviev's theory of any intrinsic connection between the meaning of spousal love and procreation, love and fruitfulness, which is of the essence of the theological anthropology outlined at the Second Vatican Council and developed in the teaching of Pope John Paul II.

2.2.1 Soloviev's "Catholic" Methodology and the Integration of Eros

Von Balthasar's first explicit mention of Soloviev's theory of sexual-spousal love comes in the exposition of his "Catholic" methodology of integration, of which he gives an excellent and accurate summary.

There is no system that fails to furnish him with substantial building material, once he has stripped and emptied it of the poison of its negative aspects ... just as, through the skill of composer and conductor, all the instruments of an orchestra articulate precisely that symphonic consonance (for the production of which their parts were differentiated in the first place) as a consequence of the ideal pattern worked out beforehand. It is not so much that integration is made possible by the capacity to distinguish necessary and unnecessary aspects in a system ... Far more importantly, such integration is achieved by a technique of allocation to each element in turn a place in the system in accordance with its value and specific gravity. And by this means, the limitation of the particular original world view appears of its own accord in the perspective of an inclusive totality of vision.⁹⁴⁴

⁹⁴³ Ibid., 284.

⁹⁴⁴ Ibid.

As a particularly telling example of this critical process of integration, he looks at how Soloviev, the “ostensible Platonist,” takes Plato to task more severely than any other thinker, while incorporating his original insight into *eros* as the “urge” or “longing” (*Drang*) for the Idea as the good and the beautiful. Here von Balthasar correctly identifies and provides the hermeneutic key to Soloviev’s theory of love, namely, that the principles of Chalcedonian divine-humanity constitute the implicit methodological principles guiding and governing the formulation of every facet of his synthesis, including his theory of sexual-spousal love.

However, given his prior decision to frame Soloviev as a Catholic thinker, he chooses to describe Soloviev’s integration of Platonic *eros* by reading into it the explicitly biblical notion of *agape*, something Soloviev himself does not do. Von Balthasar summarizes the thesis of *The Life Drama of Plato* accurately; but he writes that, according to Soloviev, the reason why Plato could not fully understand the mystery of *eros* as “generation in the Beautiful” is because the philosopher had not, and could not have, undergone the necessary “radical conversion” to a biblical religion that transfers the initiative from a God-seeking *eros* to the gratuitous descent of a divine *agape* seeking humanity. Soloviev himself seems to believe that Plato might have been capable of rationally discerning the ideal truth of *eros*, but that he would not have been able to *realize* that truth in actuality. Soloviev argues that such realization in beauty, which includes the unification of the male and female and corporeal and spiritual principles, is by definition a theurgic or divine-human process, fully contingent on the active power of an “eternally existing divinity.”⁹⁴⁵ Lacking this active and interior divine principle, Plato’s efforts to

⁹⁴⁵ Solov'ev, *Drama*, SS IX: 234-35.

realize the ideal meaning of *eros* would have been, Soloviev concludes, “like trying to lift one’s self up by one’s own hair.”⁹⁴⁶

While it is true that Soloviev recognizes and clearly implies the role of *agape* in this divine dimension of love’s meaning, it is worth noting that he never articulates a meaningful distinction or relationship between *eros* and *agape* so as to “baptize” Plato’s insight into the former. Rather, the only reason he chooses to differentiate *eros* from all other forms of love, including *agape*, is in order to emphasize the theurgic significance of *eros*, its relationship to bodiliness (*telesnost*) and orientation to integration and unity, as opposed to the more “spiritual,” or less physical, *agape*, *philia*, and *storge*.⁹⁴⁷ Nevertheless, von Balthasar is right to identify the incarnation of the *Logos* (what he, not Soloviev, calls the “gratuitous descent of *Agape*”) as that which reveals, for Soloviev, the intrinsic limitation of Platonic idealism and turns it on its head: “In Christianity, Plato’s ideal world is transformed into the living, active kingdom of God, which does not operate ‘over against’ the material being of the factual reality of this world with indifference, but rather endeavors to make this world the vessel and the vehicle of absolute being. ... The harmony of the ideal world, the inner unity of all things, reveals itself in Christianity through the power of the divine-human personhood of Christ as its living reality.”⁹⁴⁸

2.2.2 Soloviev’s *Sophiology* and the Meaning of *Eros*

Von Balthasar gives a comprehensive summary of Soloviev’s *sophiology* and his vision of creation as a universal process of cosmogonic evolution and hominization. Von

⁹⁴⁶ Ibid., 234. See above p. 253.

⁹⁴⁷ See Solov'ev, *Drama*, SS IX: 229-30. See above p. 185.

⁹⁴⁸ Von Balthasar, "Soloviev," 287.

Balthasar notes that this vision is also determined and conditioned by divine and creaturely freedom, a form of freedom perfected (in principle) in the incarnation of the *Logos* and ultimately fulfilled in divine-humanity or the kingdom of God.⁹⁴⁹ In this context, he includes a brief synopsis of Soloviev's ideas about *eros* in relation to humanity's sinful, mortal condition of egoism in all its manifestations, metaphysical, existential, and moral. Von Balthasar continues to use the term *eros* despite the fact that, in the works he cites, Soloviev himself does not. Moreover, von Balthasar does not acknowledge the significance of the terms Soloviev does choose to describe the kind of love in question, namely, "sexual" (*polovaia*) and "spousal" (*supruzheskaia*).

Von Balthasar's apparent oversight of the significance of the latter term emerges here, since he confuses Soloviev's notion of marriage vis-à-vis *eros*, assuming that Soloviev equates the natural, social institution of marriage with sacramental or "true marriage." Although he correctly sketches the various aspects of the problem of egoism for human individuality, and the false solutions that, in and of themselves, only mask the problem of mutually exclusive isolation and egoism, i.e., sexual union and reproduction, von Balthasar fails to acknowledge the essentially sacramental and spousal nature of Soloviev's theory of love as an integral part of the divine-human redemptive "solution" that heals egoism at its root.

This lacuna on the part of von Balthasar comes further into focus when he claims that for Soloviev "marriage is not a real means of salvation" and that "the sacrament of marriage does not alter any of this," i.e., does not transform the "root of all suffering" that is

⁹⁴⁹ Ibid., 300-25.

egotistic existence in all its manifestations, and that “sexual continence is far better.”⁹⁵⁰ 311

What is required, he continues, is to “elevate” the meaning of *eros*, “purified and clarified by sexual continence into true love,” which passes “beyond” marriage and negative asceticism. In reply, it must be said that sexuality and marriage, as natural and social human realities, are not redemptive in themselves, but they become a means of redemption when they are integrated into sacramental or “true marriage,” as Soloviev defines it in *The Justification of the Good*. “True marriage” is by definition a divine-human reality, made possible by grace, that includes, affirms, purifies, and perfects natural sexuality and social marriage and in so doing gradually transforms egoistic existence into the true human individuality of spousal union.

Von Balthasar clearly is relying in his presentation of Soloviev’s views solely on the text of *The Life Drama of Plato*, and an incomplete reading of *The Meaning of Love*. For that reason, he does not give a correct theological interpretation of the terminology of free theosophy and does not take into account the clarifications regarding Soloviev’s theory of sexual-spousal love and sacramental marriage in *The Justification of the Good*, and *La Russie et L’Église Universelle*. There it can also be seen that sexual continence is only one aspect of the complex ideal relation of spouses to sexuality in “true marriage,” wherein they strive, through the power of grace and their own *podvig* of kenotic, sacrificial love, for its “transubstantiation” and “transfiguration” (and not rejection or denial) in the one-flesh moral and spiritual unity of spousal love.⁹⁵¹

⁹⁵⁰ Ibid., 320.

⁹⁵¹ Solov'ev, *Opravdanie*, SS VIII: 455.

Von Balthasar goes on to summarize Soloviev's notion of transformed *eros*, concluding that it leads to that "rare and supreme possibility of authentic love, in which the eternal, androgynous syzygy which is the heart of *eros*, now redeemed from its fallenness to sexuality, is taken up into God, into the relation of *Logos* and *Sophia*."⁹⁵² This formulation is confusing at best. Soloviev nowhere describes the heart of *eros* as the "eternal androgynous syzygy." It is not entirely clear why von Balthasar uses the word "syzygy" here; it is a well-defined term that refers to the relation between the individual and the social or universal. It is one particular aspect of the meaning of sexual-spousal love as fully revealed in the *sacramentum magnum*.⁹⁵³ Also, when referring to the union of Christ the Bridegroom with the Church-incarnate *Sophia* as his Body and Bride, one should only use the term "androgynous" if Soloviev's distinction between "*true* androgyny" (rooted in the *imago Dei*) and Platonic or other non-Christian notions of androgyny is kept in mind.⁹⁵⁴

Furthermore, for the Russian Orthodox philosopher, creation and *theosis*, while distinct, are in actuality inseparable. They remain ultimately incoherent in isolation from one another. Thus, the theological notion of *eros* being "taken up into God" and into the "relation of *Logos* and *Sophia*" do not give enough weight to the immanence of the *Logos-Sophia* relation in humanity, and Soloviev never describes its theurgic transformation in these terms. The phenomenon of sexual-spousal love and union is nothing less than the individual manifestation and revelation of divine-humanity in the process of becoming, of the realization of the mystical union of the *Logos* and the divine *Sophia* within creation. Von

⁹⁵² Von Balthasar, "Soloviev."

⁹⁵³ See above pp. 267-70.

⁹⁵⁴ See above pp. 263-67.

Balthasar understands this dimension of Soloviev's thought very well in general terms, but he fails to flesh out its implications for his theory of sexual-spousal love.

2.2.3 Eros as "*Theurgic Art*" in *The Meaning of Love*

Von Balthasar, following Stremoukhoff, rightly identifies Soloviev's aesthetics as the proper context in which to understand fully the thesis of *The Meaning of Love*, in which the "authentic personal love of man and wife appears as the central 'theurgic' work of art."⁹⁵⁵ Although he continues to limit himself to the one term, *eros*, which appears in *The Life Drama of Plato* and nowhere else, and for some unknown reason refers to *The Meaning of Love* as Soloviev's "*Essay on Eros*," his summary of its basic principles and content is accurate. He correctly makes the connection between what constitutes a "true work of art" and the theurgic task of love. A true work of art is a "perceptible representation of an object from the perspective of its ultimate condition or (which is the same thing) in the light of the world beyond."⁹⁵⁶ Similarly, the theurgic task of love aims at the creative incarnation of the ideal essence or divine *imago* of the beloved.⁹⁵⁷ But once again von Balthasar incorporates the notion of *agape* to try to balance Soloviev's theory and render it more palatable to his Catholic readers. He also ignores two highly significant, problematic, but potentially fruitful elements of Soloviev's theory, namely, how he defines the gender-specific roles of husband and wife in the theurgic art of spousal love, and his categorical denial of any intrinsic connection between sexual-spousal love's ideal meaning and procreation or fruitfulness.

⁹⁵⁵ Ibid., 347.

⁹⁵⁶ Soloviev, *Obshchi Smysl' Iskusstva*, SS VI: 85.

⁹⁵⁷ Soloviev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 27.

Here von Balthasar does highlight the Solovievian notion of androgyny, which, he says, brings to conclusion the Western theme of androgynous unity in humanity, as seen in Plato, Dante, Böhme, Novalis, and von Baader. Although von Balthasar does not mention the connection between the Chalcedonian principles of true unity and spousal union (unity “without confusion, change, division, or separation,” which includes the reciprocal relationship between the perfection of both the individual and the whole), he does correctly note that Soloviev’s notion of androgynous unity does not imply any sort of transcendence of the person as such.⁹⁵⁸ He recalls the anthropological principle that the human being can “infinitely perfect its life and nature without transcending the limits of its human form,”⁹⁵⁹ which results in a dual-unity of persons, and not the annihilating unity of two halves disappearing into an original whole. He also underlines the principles of faith and ideality, although he does not acknowledge the element of grace in the former, and the significant aesthetic connotation of transfiguration (*preobrazhenie*) in the latter.⁹⁶⁰

His insertion of *agape* into Soloviev’s theory here is more speculative than in the above instance where he interprets Soloviev’s baptism of Platonic *eros* in *The Life Drama of Plato*, since he wants to extend the ideality of sexual-spousal love as the revelation of the beloved’s *imago* to a universal Christian love of neighbor. Concluding that the theurgic task of *eros* is to make the beloved’s ideality true, von Balthasar writes that “the Christian, therefore, is obliged because of this to see his neighbor as God the Father sees him in his redeeming Son, and to take this ideal vision as a guide in his actual dealings with others.”⁹⁶¹

⁹⁵⁸ Von Balthasar, “Soloviev,” 248.

⁹⁵⁹ Solov'ev, *Smysl*, SS VII: 12.

⁹⁶⁰ See above pp. 225-27.

⁹⁶¹ Von Balthasar, “Soloviev,” 349.

There is truth in his contention that Soloviev, “in accordance with the most characteristic concerns of his program, has allowed the power of (platonic) *eros* to merge into the power of the *agape* of the Sermon of the Mount.” Soloviev does understand the meaning of all forms of human love in the redemptive light of divine-human love. But when von Balthasar tries to extend the phenomenon of idealization beyond the pathos of sexual-spousal love, he takes a step that Soloviev himself does not take.

Indeed, one of the reasons for sexual-spousal love’s unique designation in Soloviev’s theory as a theurgic art is precisely the phenomenon of the beloved’s idealization by the lover. Soloviev gives no indication that he believes this visible revelation of the ideal essence in the material, which is analogous to the integral vision of artistic inspiration, occurs in any other form of love. Unless the distinction between sexual-spousal love as a theurgic art and human love in general in all its manifestations is kept in mind, trying to reduce the former to the latter obscures the more radical implications of his theory. Soloviev’s argument is unambiguous when it comes to the paradigmatic and unique theurgic significance of sexual-spousal love and union, and any interpretation that would overlook the formal distinctions between it and other forms of human love, or that would downplay the theurgic dimension and attempt to salvage a primarily moralistic interpretation of his theory, would empty it of its intended meaning.

The weaknesses of von Balthasar’s treatment of Soloviev as a whole, including his attempt to portray him as a credible Roman Catholic theologian, and his terminological inaccuracies and omissions, do not undermine the substance of his analysis. He has shown that whether Soloviev’s theory of sexual-spousal love is approached in the context of his

methodology, his Christological sophiology and ecclesiology, or especially in the context of his aesthetics of free theurgy, one encounters a vital and inseparable dimension of a universal theological aesthetic that resonates in a profound and all-encompassing way with the visions of the greatest modern Catholic minds. In this sense, his portrayal of Soloviev as an exemplary “Catholic” thinker is somewhat justified.

3. CONCLUSION

Having reflected on the respective treatments of Soloviev’s theory of sexual-spousal love and union in the works of such significant contemporary Catholic thinkers as Scola and von Balthasar, several important reasons why Soloviev is a valuable resource for contemporary Catholic theology can be discerned, keeping in mind his limitations as a theologian, strictly speaking. The most telling limitation, as has been noted in Scola’s treatment, is the absence of an understanding of the intrinsic meaning of “fruitfulness” and its connection to procreation (and thus family) in his theory of sexual-spousal love and union, a limitation that, for Catholic theologians like Scola, amounts to an underdeveloped theology of *imago Trinitatis*.

Nevertheless, having considered Soloviev from the standpoint of Scola’s nuptial theology, it is possible to appreciate the ways in which his theory of sexual-spousal love is a valuable resource for contemporary Catholic theology. It is a remarkably prescient anticipation not only of developments in twentieth-century theology vis-à-vis the *imago Dei*, which have been confirmed by the magisterium of John Paul II, but also of the purpose and content of the first encyclical of Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*. The first half of this

encyclical is intended, in the words of the Pope, to “clarify some essential facts concerning the love that God mysteriously and gratuitously offers to man, together with the intrinsic link between that Love and the reality of human love.”⁹⁶² In doing so, the encyclical constitutes an authoritative affirmation of precisely those insights into love with which Scola credits Soloviev, namely, that love, including *eros* and *agape*, is diverse in form but one in essence, and that the love between man and woman, which is fully revealed as spousal love in the *sacramentum magnum* and reflects the Trinitarian mystery of the divine *communio personarum*, is paradigmatic of love in general.⁹⁶³

Perhaps the most Solovievian element of the Pope’s teaching, however, is that, far from being mutually exclusive, as they have been portrayed for centuries in Christian tradition (Nygren), *eros* and *agape* are in actuality purified and perfected in their distinct forms only in their inner unity, what Soloviev would call their “all-one” unity, i.e., without confusion or separation.⁹⁶⁴ In addition, Soloviev, like Benedict XVI, understands the necessity of discerning and articulating the theological meaning of the phenomenon of *eros*,

⁹⁶² *Deus Caritas Est*, 1. The second part of the encyclical “treats the ecclesial exercise of the commandment of love of neighbor,” which is to say, the diakonia or service of charity. The practical goal of this teaching is to “call forth in the world renewed energy and commitment in the human response to God’s love.” *Deus Caritas Est*, 1.

⁹⁶³ According to David C. Schindler, “the point of this early section of the encyclical is to insist that, although the terms *eros* and *agape* may set into relief different aspects of love, in the end they do not represent different kinds of love. Rather, as the pope states forcefully at the outset of the encyclical, there is ultimately just one love, with a variety of dimensions that are all necessary in order to sustain the full meaning of love.” Schindler, “The Redemption of *Eros*,” 378. “Benedict XVI is against identifying *eros* with selfish and possessive pride or opposing it to *agape*, understood as unselfish and specifically Christian love. Rather, he upholds the *gratia supponit naturam* principle according to which human nature has been so offended by original sin that human *eros* needs the individual to make the effort to lead it back to its truth. ... Thus, *eros* itself, understood as the desire for communion with the other, is seen as part of God’s original plan and is therefore deeply valued from the very beginning,” Jaroslaw Merecki, “Has Christianity Poisoned *Eros*?,” in *The Way of Love: Reflections on Pope Benedict XVI’s Encyclical Deus Caritas Est*, ed. Livio Melina and Carl A. Anderson (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 60. See also *Deus Caritas Est*, 1-17.

⁹⁶⁴ *Deus Caritas Est*, 1-17. For an analysis of the presuppositions about nature and grace in *Deus Caritas Est*, see Serge-Thomas Bonino, “‘Nature and Grace’ in the Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*,” *Nova et Vetera* 5, no. 2 (2007), 231-48.

its integration into a vision of sacramental marriage, and why this is crucial for overcoming the secularization of the world and the cultural isolation of the Church.⁹⁶⁵

Von Balthasar, for his part, has shown that Soloviev's vision of sexual-spousal love and union as a divine-human or theurgic task, the form of "true art," is a valuable resource for theologians seeking to address prevailing reductionist notions of human love because it goes a long way in overcoming what Soloviev would call the "abstract principles" of dogmatism and moralism, abstractions that have proven themselves powerless in the face of the radical and profound contemporary challenges to the Catholic understanding of personhood, gender, sexuality, and marriage. Moreover, he has shown how this theory is not born of an unconnected or chance insight but is the fruit of a consistent and comprehensive application of Soloviev's methodology of free theosophy as well as of his theological aesthetic of divine-humanity with its metaphysical and aesthetic principles of Trinitarian all-unity and free theurgy, respectively. As such, von Balthasar confirms that Soloviev is a valuable resource for Catholic theologians, whether they focus on the personalist and theurgic aspects of his theory of sexual-spousal love and union, or delve into its underlying principles. Indeed, drawing on both Scola's and von Balthasar's analysis, it can be affirmed that in various Solovievian notions, such as his Trinitarian metaphysics of all-unity, his notion of humanity as Man, Woman, and Society, and his argument for the necessity of the *syzygy* relation to complete and fulfill true spousal love and unity, the seeds can be discerned

⁹⁶⁵ On this point, see Howsare's article, in which he argues that "Benedict's particular construal of the eros-agape relationship is uniquely suited to provide a Christian response to secularism that neither preserves Christian distinctiveness at the cost of its worldly mission, nor emphasizes the Church's worldly mission at the expense of its identity *as Christian*." Rodney Howsare, "Why Begin with Love? Eros, Agape, and the Problem with Secularism," *Communio* 33, no. 3 (2006), 424-25.

of a fully developed Catholic theology of marriage in which the significance of fruitfulness and procreation is fully articulated.

The above chapters have endeavored to analyze and evaluate the various influences on and sources of the methodology that inspired and shaped Soloviev's theory of sexual-spousal love and union, as well as its theoretical foundations, context, and content, and to consider and critique the treatments of his thought as a resource for contemporary Catholic theology by such prominent Catholic thinkers as Scola and von Balthasar. Despite the ambiguities that pervade Soloviev's sophiology, the unresolved questions regarding gender roles, and the explicit denial of any intrinsic theological significance in human procreation in particular and spousal fruitfulness in general, Soloviev's theological aesthetic of sexual-spousal love and union is a rich, extraordinarily prescient, and fruitful resource well worth mining. Indeed, as Scola and von Balthasar both affirm in the context of their respective projects, Soloviev's theory represents an important contribution to the Church's response to the questions, problems, and challenges of an age in which the nature and integrality of the human person are threatened by secular ideologies, new technologies, rapidly encroaching "virtual realities," and a notion of personhood that is increasingly disembodied, abstract, and reductive.

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