

**Reflections on V. Solovyov's 'Christocentric' Eschatology:  
Focusing on *Three Conversations on War, Progress and the End  
of World History with the Inclusion of "A Brief Tale about the  
Antichrist"***

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**- Abstract -**

This paper aims to reflect on Vladimir Solovyov's final eschatology in his Christian apologetic work, *Three conversations on War, Progress and the End of World History with the Inclusion of "A Brief Tale about the Antichrist"*(1900) from a biblical viewpoint based on Christocentrism and biblicism. From the viewpoint, Solovyov's eschatology contains more Christocentric ideas on human salvation, good and evil, antichrist, and apocalypse than his previous sophiology, which proves his sincere conversion to Christianity. However, diverse discourses, such as Russian Orthodox eschatology, modern idealism and moralism, and mysticism, are integrated into his 'Christocentric' eschatology, which is partially attributed to the eclectic trend of religious cultures at the turn of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The differentiation of biblical, ambiguous and non-biblical ideas in his eschatology will reveal its ambiguity more clearly.

**Key words:** Biblical Christianity, Christocentrism, Eschatology, Russian Religious Philosophy, Good and Evil, Antichrist

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## 1. Introduction

The end of 20th century and the beginning of the 21th century have witnessed a flood of fake apocalyptic prophecies on global catastrophes. The prevalence of new eschatological variants testifies to humans' innate propensity for religious thought patterns (*homo religiosus*) and the importance of establishment of reliable and coherent worldviews (Jacoby 2010: 41-51). This paper aims to reflect on Vladimir Solovyov (1853-1900)'s eschatology in his Christian apologetic work, *Three conversations on War, Progress and the End of World History with the Inclusion of "A Brief Tale about the Antichrist"* (*Три разговора о войне, прогрессе и конце всемирной истории, со включением краткой повести об Антихристе*) (1900; Hereafter, "*Three Conversations*"). The approach is a biblical viewpoint on the basis of Christocentrism and biblicism in the vein of the early church (Rhodes 2006: 22-34; Jacoby 2010: 104-123).<sup>1)</sup>

In the second half of 19th - beginning of 20th centuries, so-called "fin de siècle," Solovyov's initial religious philosophy, with sophiology and ecumenism of 'Universal Church' as essential ideas, marked the opening of the new era of Russian religious philosophy (Figs 2002: 420; Billington 1970: 464-472). However, in the 1890s he got disappointed at his sophiologic utopian vision and attempted to transform it into 'Christocentric' alternative, rejecting his mystic sophiology. Thus he presented his 'Christocentric' eschatological ecumenism in his literary and prophetic work, *Three Conversations* just before his death in 1900 (Флоровский 2009: 788; Шестов 1927: 4-25). Still, in spite of his desire for sincere belief in Christianity, his apocalyptic worldview is not exactly correspondent even to Russian Orthodox eschatology, which has been indicated by many Russian religious philosophers

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1) No human interpretation of the Bible could reflect God's will completely. Christians can only approach it through continuous spiritual growth and sincere studies of the Bible (Kinnard 2000: 66-69). My biblical viewpoint may also contain ambiguous and non-biblical ideas. Just I will suggest my temporary 'biblical and Christocentric' viewpoint, which is open to reflection and correction.

and other critics (Трубецкой 1913a: 421-424; Трубецкой 1913b: Figs 2002: 324-326; 박종소 2001: 85-89; 박종소 2003: 44-45).

From my viewpoint, most contemporary Russian religious philosophers detected Solovyov's ambiguities even in his last 'Christocentric' eschatology. Especially those who distanced themselves from the dominant eclectic Russian religious culture could perceive his ambiguities with more insight.

Representatively, Florovsky, who identified the patristic byzantine Orthodoxy as a legitimate Christian faith and insisted on its restoration in the contemporary depraved Russian Orthodox Church, criticized both Solovyov's previous sophiology and final "eschatological ecumenism" for derailment from Christian integrity (Флоровский 2009: 485-492, 788). Florovsky's opinion is persuasive in general, even if his byzantine Orthodox viewpoint should be also reflected on critically.

Shestov, another contemporary Russian religious philosopher defined Solovyov's last work as self-confession of his 'Christocentric' eschatology in artistic form. Shestov from his anti-dogmatic viewpoint criticized Solovyov's self-contradiction in that he preserved modern moralism and rationalism unconsciously in his 'Christocentric' eschatology in spite of his firm criticism of Tolstoyan moralist pacifism (Шестов 1927: 4-25). Shestov penetrated Solovyov's self-contradiction exactly.

On the other hand, some representative contemporary Russian religious philosophers, including Trubetskoy, Berdyaev, S. Bulgakov and Florensky, formulated the mainstream of Russian religious philosophy and inherited Solovyov's legitimacy of sophiology and some utopian ideas from their own viewpoints. Even if they diagnosed the modernity's dark side rather exactly from their religious philosophical viewpoints with their outstanding talents and erudition, their alternatives were further from the biblical eschatology than Solovyov's final 'Christocentric' and Florovsky's patristic Orthodox ones.

Given the new trend of theological turn in the Humanities in the West and Russia since the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, Solovyov's religious philosophy has come to the fore as a new attractive theme of all-encompassing interdisciplinary studies across theological, philosophical, and

literary fields. Simultaneously, the forgotten authoritative criticism of his viewpoint by other Russian religious philosophers drew new attention. Actually, Solovyov was regarded as “enigmatic” forerunner of Russian religious philosophy (Котрелев 2006). On the other hand, literary critics were more interested in his previous symbolic and mystic literary works than his last ‘Christocentric’ work.

This paper aims to shed light on Solovyov’s eschatological ecumenism in *Three Conversation* from my biblical viewpoint, differentiating biblical, biblical-mythical (ambiguous) and non-biblical (mythical) ideas on good and evil, antichrist, Universal Church, and end of the world in his last work, which will reveal the ambiguity of his apocalyptic vision.

## 2. Biblical Reflections on Evil and Apocalypse

So-called ‘Christian’ cultures which were formulated and inherited over the period of more than 2,000 years tend to approve and intensify the eclectic interpretation of the Bible.<sup>2)</sup> Given the ambiguous landscape of Christian cultures, I will present my understanding of biblical ideas on good and evil, salvation, apocalypse, etc. My biblical viewpoint does not reflect the biblical meaning completely, which is open to continuous reflection and correction in theory and practice.

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2) In the history of Christianity some Church Fathers’ and theologians’ interpretations of the Bible have been legitimized as ‘doctrines’ in Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant churches. According to John Barton (2005: 4-7), “with the victory of Christianity over the pagan Roman world, a new problem occurred <...> the problem centered on the relationship between the biblical and classical worlds <...> With the revival of learning associated with the ninth century, the value of classical literature, as an alternative path to truth, was almost universally accepted. In its new Christian synthesis of Jewish and pagan worlds, Europe had acquired at the same time a ‘key,’ a theory or rather set of literary critical theories by which both sacred and profane texts must now be read.”

### 2.1. Biblical Ideas on Good and Evil, Salvation and Church

From my biblical viewpoint, God exists as an absolute Creator and Sovereignty, supported by ministering angels in the heaven (Hebrews 1: 14). God created human beings as the only creatures after His image, entrusting them to control the world as His agents, stewards and co-workers in the world.

However, Satan and other evil spirits, angels who rebelled against God and became impostors, deceivers, slanderers, and tempters, tenaciously conspire to destroy human beings by driving them to doubt God's love and omnipotence.

In the era of New Testament, Jesus Christ, Holy Son, came to the world as human beings' scapegoat to atone for all their sins. Through his crucifixion and resurrection he became the bridge of salvation to those who personally believe in him as Savior and are reconciled with God. Those who want to be saved should be justified through personal belief in Jesus, repentance, and baptism. The first stage should be followed by the second stage of continuous sanctification, which means spiritual growth after Jesus Christ in accordance with the Bible. Those who take the path of justification and sanctification can be identified as disciples-Christians in the full sense of the word. Only they are God's chosen holy nation and royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9-10; 1 John 3:1-3).<sup>3)</sup>

In comparison with the biblical idea of salvation, the idea of transfiguration prevalent in Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches is not totally biblical as it annuls the inevitability of Jesus Christ's crucifixion and human repentance of sins for his salvation. Human beings cannot be justified through mystic encounters with any holy entities: angels, Saint Maria, saints, and Sophia, and even Jesus Christ.

In addition, in the era of New Testament there is no more spiritual hierarchy between Israelite and other nations. Apocalyptic discourses identifying the Israelite people as chosen people superior to Christians of

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3) 1 Peter 2:9 "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." (*The Bible*, New International Version)

other nations are not biblical. National demarcation in the world is meaningful only as a useful device for human salvation (Acts 17:26-27).<sup>4)</sup>

Furthermore, church should be separated from state and nation in the world as the only kingdom of God and Jesus' body (Mark 1:15, Mark 10:15, Romans 4:8, Colossians 1:18).<sup>5)</sup> Any disciple of any nation should be integrated into church as an organic part. However, churches are also vulnerable to evil spirits' temptation in the world as each disciple remains sinful by nature and will commit sins. Thus the consecration of churches in the world is not biblical.

Furthermore, in the New Testament, rituals and services in churches could be diverse in forms, as long as observing inviolable biblical principles. Rather, disciples are encouraged to transform imperfect church traditions in accordance with biblical principles.

## 2.2. Biblical Understanding on Apocalypse

The end of the world is one of the crucial themes of theodicean and apologetic debates in the Christian history. Many Church Fathers and theologians have suggested diverse apocalyptic discourses according to their interpretation of biblical prophecies.

According to a Christocentric theologian, Kinnard (2000: 112-114), most discourses on apocalypse can be classified into the four schools of Bible reading: contemporary historical (preterist), continuous historical (historicist), futurist, symbolic (idealist) ones. Kinnard may support partial preterism as he insists that "apocalyptic writing depicted the end of one specific nation's

4) Acts 17:26-27, "From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us."

5) Colossians 1:18, "And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy."

world, but not the end of the world.” One evidence presented by him is that biblical prophecies on the end of the world are limited to several parts in the New Testament, including Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 20 and the whole Revelation. They are mainly addressed to early Christians who endured the atrocious persecution by the Roman Empire in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. From Kinnard’s viewpoint, the prophecy of devastation and tribulation was realized in AD 70, when Roman soldiers devastated Jerusalem for Israelites’ rebellion.

In addition, the apostle John warned disciples of false doctrines in his epistles (1, 2, 3 John) and Revelation, especially docetism denying Jesus Christ’s humanity and Gnosticism insisting on the dualist separation between spirit and body (Kinnard 2000: 107-108; Osterhaven 1982: 48-49). John’s apocalyptic prophecy in the Revelation also aims to encourage his contemporary disciples to endure hardships and prepare for Jesus’s coming.

And most images and symbols in Revelation, such as antichrist, millennium, 666, Armageddon, derived from prevalent Jewish apocalyptic literature, need a figural reading according to preterist school, rejecting literal reading according to futurist school (Kinnard 2000: 110-118). The apostle John identified “antichrists” as all those who deny that Jesus is the Christ. That is, antichrists can be found at any times and any places.

On the contrary, the futurist school applies the literal reading of symbols and figures in the Bible, identifying the battlefield of Armageddon, the “New Land” and “Millennium” with the State of Israel. It also identifies the symbol of Babylon with Superpowers in the world, such as USA, UN, and EU.”

When it comes to the chronical order of Armageddon, Rapture, Millennium and Tribulation, there are three categories in general: premillennialism; postmillennialism; and amillennialism. The first two hypotheses are established in the literal reading of the Millennium, while the last one in the figural reading. According to Kinnard (2000: 19-21), amillennialism and preterism are more correspondent to the whole biblical principles. Dispensational premillennialism and futurism are integrated into one apocalyptic discourse, identifying Israelite people as chosen people even in the era of New Testament. Postmillennialism characterized by utopianism on the future is

basically mythical and ungrounded due to its yawning discrepancy with the intensifying devastation and tribulation in reality.

Conclusively, from my viewpoint, Kinnard's partial preterism and amillennialism is very convincing in principle. Just the other historicist, idealist and futurist schools also could be valid even partially. For example, the description of war between God and Satan over human beings in Revelation 12:7-12 can mean not just the early disciple's hardships according to preterist school, but the whole spiritual war between God and Satan according to futurist school. Thus, my apocalyptic viewpoint could be identified as partial preterism and amillennialism more open to other schools than Kinnard's one.

### **3. Biblical Reflections on Solovyov's Last Eschatology**

Solovyov's last eschatology testifies to his sincere search for sheer Christianity even if his approach remained eclectic in some crucial ideas. His self-contradictory conclusion may be attributed mainly to his ambiguous cognitive framework derived from Russian Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, mysticism, idealism of Schelling or Hegel, etc. I will reflect on Solovyov's ideas on good and evil, antichrist, Universal Church, and apocalypse in the self-confessional novel, *Three Conversations*, taking into consideration its religio-cultural context and Solovyov's influence with colleagues and heirs. My goal is to differentiate biblical, biblical-mythical and mythical ideas in his final eschatology.

#### **3.1. Russian Eschatological Ideas at the End of 19<sup>th</sup> century**

In Russian society, even in the modernized period of 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries Russian Orthodox 'saints,' regarded as completely transfigured sacred entities, prophesied on geopolitical and economic issues. Their prophecies contain diverse ambiguous or mythical ideas according to apocalyptic discourses of

russocentric dispensational premillennialism and futurism in literal reading modes of symbols: conflicts of West-Russia-East, Russia's messianic role for Europe against Chinese attack, the appearance of Antichrist from China, China's economic or military occupation of Siberia because of Russians' sins, Russia's maintenance of original homeland in the European and Southern parts, Russians' ultimate victory, etc. (Moss 2008).<sup>6)</sup>

From my viewpoint, such russocentric apocalyptic prophecies reflect human nature of narcissism and self-glorification. Representatively, Slavophiles in 1840s presented the ambiguous or mythical idea of Russian peasants' community (соборность) as a sacred archetype of Russian people, into which Orthodox-centric apocalyptic prophecies were integrated with German idealism. Furthermore, they initiated the nationalist ideas of "Russian national identity," "Russian ideas," and "Russian mentality" in the same way, which are ambiguous or mythical.

Likewise, Westerners, who had initiated eurocentric Russian development models in the vein of Enlightenment and Orientalism in the 1840s, got to accept the Slavophile mythical idea of Russian peasants' community in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. And from the beginning they advocated the imperial government's policy of the subordination of neighboring Slavic and non-Slavic nations into the Russia Empire.

At that time, given the intensifying crises in religio-cultural, economic, political, military dimensions, more radical Russian intelligentsia articulated political, economical and social blueprints for Russia's institutional transformation, imbued with apocalyptic mysticism. Russian populists (народники), anarchists, and Marxists, as well as symbolists and religious

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6) Representatively, Elder Aristocles of Moscow (+1918) prophesied that "An evil will shortly take Russia, and wherever this evil goes, rivers of blood will flow. It is not the Russian soul, but an imposition on the Russian soul. It is not an ideology, nor a philosophy, but a spirit from hell. <...> Russia and China will destroy each other. Finally, Russia will be free and from her believers will go forth and turn many from the nations to God. <...> The end will come through China. There will be an extraordinary outburst and a miracle of God will be manifested. And there will be an entirely different life, but all this will not be for long."

philosophers, were influenced by such Russian orthodoxy-based apocalyptic prophecies even just as collective unconscious. As a result, according to Berdyaev (1937: 129) and Florovsky (Флоровский 2009: 375-376), in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian intellectuals “began to look for entirety, totalitarianism, not in revolution but in religion.”<sup>7)</sup>

Especially, given the intensifying premonition of upcoming socio-political crises, deterioration of Russian Orthodox church, imperial power's and colonialism and competition with Western and Japanese powers, and prevalence of Western positivism and materialism, Russian religious philosophers wanted to establish their own Russian Orthodox-centric apocalyptic visions through robust interdisciplinary studies (박종소 2009: 239-240). According to Bienstock (1940: 2), “these three central ideas – God-manhood, Church and Expectation of the End – represent the essential content of Russian religious philosophy.”

In the process, most of Russian religious philosophers tried to integrate the Russian or byzantine Orthodox cultures with other pre-modern and modern cultures into their own all-encompassing religious discourses. However, the diverse cultures which the philosophers integrated into their discourses, such as Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant traditions, mysticism, idealism, Enlightenment, symbolism, modern natural science, etc., cannot be integrated into one discourse without inner conflicts because of their different preassumptions of the world and humanity. Consequently, most religious philosophers' discourses became complicated and self-contradictory.

Similarly, Solovyov had initiated the complicated sophiological utopianism and Catholic-based ecumenism of ‘Universal Church’ through his pioneering interdisciplinary studies. His initial sophiologic utopianism had an enormous

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7) In principle, Western anthropocentric philosophies were also derived from pre-modern biblical-mythical cultures in perverted forms. Modern idealists accommodated the biblical ideas of human dignity, free will, salvation, etc. at their disposal, articulating the non-biblical ideas of human sovereignty and subjectivity. Communist vision of utopian society was derived partially from the Christian idea of “new heaven and new earth” in the Revelation.

influence on contemporary intellectuals and heirs both in essays and literary works. However, given the formidable risk situation in 1890s, he got disappointed at the utopian visions and decided to transform his complicated ecumenism into more Christocentric and transdenominational eschatological ecumenism, which is portrayed in his last work, *Three Conversations*.

From my biblical viewpoint, his conscious criticism of Russian Orthodox-centric nationalism and his sincere conversion to Christianity in his last years can be identified as biblical. However, he could not totally distance himself from the collective unconscious of Russian messianism and sophiologic culture. That is one of the main reasons why he has not been regarded as a typical representative of Russian religious philosophy even after his conversion to Russian Orthodoxy (Котрелев 2006).

### 3.2. Biblical Ideas on Evil and Apocalypse

In this work, Solovyov presented some crucial biblical ideas oriented toward Christocentrism, such as the relationship between good and evil, universal church, apocalypse, antichrist, etc. Especially, he described the ontological binary oppositions: Christ's self-sacrificial love and antichrist's self-love; good and evil; truthful belief and fake belief; evil's temporary victory and ultimate defeat, etc. In the preface, Solovyov called readers' attention to evil forces' deception of people through false moral atmosphere.

ввиду заражения нравственной атмосферы систематическою ложью общественная совесть громко требует, чтобы дурное дело было названо своим настоящим именем. Истинная задача полемики здесь – не опровержение мнимой религии, а обнаружение действительного обмана. <...> если бы мне удалось раскрыть чьи-нибудь глаза на другую сторону дела и, дать почувствовать иной обманувшейся, но живой душе всю нравственную фальшь этого мертвящего учения в его совокупности – полемическая цель этой книжки была бы достигнута. (2017: 4)<sup>8</sup>

8) Владимир Соловьев (2017) *Три разговора о войне, прогрессе и конце всемирной истории, со включением краткой повести об антихристе*, М.: Православная

This quoted text confirms his goal of creating this work, which is to disclose the deceptivity of false religion prevalent in contemporary society. His criticism of the contemporary false culture motivated him to articulate Christian apologetics against anti-Christian discourses.

Naturally, Solovyov criticized the depravity of not just secular, but ecclesiastical authorities. In that respect, he diagnosed the suppression of freedom of religion as harmful to the Russian Empire.

“Остающиеся у нас ограничения религиозной свободы – одна из самых больших для меня сердечных болей, потому что я вижу и чувствую, насколько все эти внешние стеснения вредны и тягостны не только для тех, кто им подвергается, но главным образом для христианского дела в России, а следовательно, для русского народа, а следовательно, и для русского государства, <...>” (2017: 3)

Assumedly, the creation of this fiction itself was his resistance against the policy. He exerted his abundant imagination and free thoughts to the utmost to envision his own ‘Christocentric’ eschatology. He described contemporary opposing viewpoints in the form of sincere debates of five representatives of each viewpoint in the frame novel, *Three Conversations*, while presenting his own apocalyptic vision in the legendary tale, “*A Brief Tale about the Antichrist*.” The five discussants are a general (Russian Orthodox nationalist), a politician (Enlightenment optimist), a young prince (moralist advocating Tolstoyan pacifism),<sup>9)</sup> aristocratic lady (intellectual woman with strong curiosity and wit), and a respectable man, Mr. Z (Christian apologist and moralist as Solovyov’s double). In the tale on the end of the world, there is a clear demarcation between good characters (minor faithful Christians) and

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художественная литература, С. 4. Hereafter, the source will be referred to in this shortened form: “(2017: page).”

9) Solovyov criticized Tolstoism emphatically through the young prince’s failure in self-defence in the debates with other four characters. In addition, according to Park, the outstanding activities of Antichrist as genius, social reformist, ascetic and philanthropist are reminiscent of Tolstoy (박종소 2011: 36-45).

evil ones (emperor Antichrist, invisible Satan as his Father and mentor, magician Apollonius as Antichrist's primary accomplice, and major 'Christians' deceived by Antichrist).

In the tale, Solovyov presents how to build up the Universal Church by the end of the world in accordance with his understanding of the Revelation. He presents the main characteristics of the three established churches through the Antichrist's offer of the most precious gifts to three representative ecclesiastics: spiritual authority to Catholic Pope Peter II; Eastern ecclesiastical antiquity to Orthodox Venerable John; and free studies of Holy Scriptures to evangelical protestant Professor Pauli. And the representatives were convicted of faithful Christians by their refusal to the Antichrist's seductive offer and built up one spiritual community under the Antichrist's atrocious persecution. They are rewarded with salvation after Jesus' second coming.

The minor faithful Christians' transdenominational unification based on Christocentrism is in a binary opposition to the Antichrist's perverted unification based on anti-Christocentrism. The evil emperor accuses Christ and Christians of stubborn moralism, seducing major 'Christians' to seek unconditional peace and solidarity with one another. In that respect, Solovyov's eschatological ecumenism is very biblical.

### 3.3. Ambiguous and Mythical Ideas

However, Solovyov reveals his previous Russian Orthodox-idealist cognitive framework even in the work, which makes his 'Christocentric' eschatology ambiguous and mythical at some aspects.

First, Solovyov's moralist understanding of Jesus Christ and antichrist in the work is ambiguous. In the following text, Solovyov's double, Z debates the prince's identification of Jesus Christ as supreme moralist, paraphrasing it in Z's own terms.

Г[-н] Z. Я отвечаю, что желал бы, чтобы это было сказано еще лучше, именно прямее, проще и ближе к делу. Вы ведь хотели сказать, что

моралист, действительно верящий в правду Божию, должен, не останавливая злодея силою, обратиться к Богу с молитвою, чтобы злое дело не совершилось: или через чудо нравственное – внезапное обращение злодея на путь истинный, или чрез чудо физическое – внезапный паралич, что ли... (2017: 15)

In this furious debate, Z presents his biblical understanding of Jesus Christ as Holy Son who came to the world for human salvation. However, in the underlined sentence, Z's explanation of the process and goal of human salvation through his crucifixion and resurrection is imbued with moralism, which is ambiguous. Z's moralist viewpoint on Jesus Christ's resurrection and its effect is more definite in the following paragraph.

Г[-н] Z. Наша опора одна: действительное воскресение. Мы знаем, что борьба добра со злом ведется не в душе только и в обществе, а глубже, в мире физическом. И здесь мы уже знаем в прошедшем одну победу доброго начала жизни – в личном воскресении Одного – и ждем будущих побед в собирательном воскресении всех. Тут и зло получает свой смысл или окончательное объяснение своего бытия в том, что оно служит все к большему и большему торжеству, реализации и усилению добра: если смерть сильнее смертной жизни, то воскресение в жизнь вечную сильнее и того и другого, Царство Божие есть царство торжествующей чрез воскресение жизни – в ней же действительное, осуществляемое, окончательное добро. В этом вся сила и все дело Христа, в этом Его действительная любовь к нам и наша к Нему. (2017: 66-67)

In the underlined sentences Z insists that Jesus Christ through his resurrection saved human beings collectively from the evil, ensuring them to live good lives in this world. This idea is imbued with moralism, humanism and collectivism. The original biblical understanding is that he who believes in Jesus Christ as Savior can revive spiritually thanks to God's grace and will be transformed completely from perishable into imperishable body in Jesus' second coming. Solovyov's emphasis on good deeds and his idea of collective salvation may be attributed to the integration of modern idealism

and Russian Orthodox-centric nationalism into his 'Christocentric' eschatology.

Z's moralist understanding of the relationship between Jesus Christ and human beings is also confirmed clearly in his comparison of Christ and Antichrist in the legendary tale.

Самолюбивое предпочтение себя Христу будет оправдываться у этого человека еще таким рассуждением: «Христос, проповедуя и в жизни своей проявляя нравственное добро, был исправителем человечества, я же призван быть благодетелем этого отчасти исправленного, отчасти неисправимого человечества. Я дам всем людям все, что нужно. Христос, как моралист, разделял людей добром и злом, я соединю их благами, которые одинаково нужны и добрым, и злым. Я буду настоящим представителем того Бога, который возводит солнце свое над добрыми и злыми, дождит на праведных и неправедных. Христос принес меч, я принесу мир. Он грозил земле страшным последним судом. Но ведь последним судьей буду я, и суд мой будет не судом правды только, а судом милости. Будет и правда в моем суде, но не правда воздаятельная, а правда распределительная. Я всех различу и каждому дам то, что ему нужно». (2017: 74-75)

In the underlined sentences, Z identifies Antichrist as impostor of Jesus Christ, imitating him in perverted way, which is biblical. On the other hand, Z's Antichrist identifies himself and Jesus Christ as binary oppositions by the standard of morality. Antichrist criticizes Jesus Christ as stubborn moralist obeying his despotic Father's cruel order of self-sacrifice, whileas praising himself as "a man of irreproachable morals," enjoying divine omnipotence given by his Father, Satan and gratifying all the people's desires with his abundant gifts.

Conclusively, Solovyov's understanding of Jesus Christ and Antichrist is ambiguous, imbued with modern moralism, which is contradictory with his firm criticism of Tolstoy for utopian moralism.

Second, he laid the foundation of his 'Christocentric' eschatology on the Russian Orthodox-centric eschatology: dispensational premillennialism and futurism. These discourses are characterized by the basically literal reading of

apocalyptic symbols in the Bible. In the preface Solovyov proclaimed his goal of writing this fiction in accordance with the dispensational premillennialism.

Внутреннее значение антихриста как религиозного самозванца, “хищением”, а не духовным подвигом добывающего себе достоинства Сына Божия, связь его с лжепророком-тавматургом, обольщающим людей действительными и ложными чудесами, темное и специально греховное происхождение самого антихриста, действием злой силы приобретающего свое внешнее положение всемирного монарха, общий ход и конец его деятельности вместе с некоторыми частными чертами, характерными для него и для его лжепророка, например, “сведение огня с неба”, убиение двух свидетелей Христовых, выставление их тел на улицах Иерусалима и т. д., – все это находится в Слове Божиим и в древнейшем предании. (2017: 5)

In this text Solovyov identifies God’s Words with ancient legends as sacred traditions. From my biblical viewpoint, biblical apocalyptic texts need exactly biblical reading, while ecclesiastical legends are open to free reading and transformation. His identification of God’s Words with patristic traditions including ancient legends in the tale testifies to his interpretation of the Antichrist’s coming in accordance with the dispensational premillennialism and futurism, prevalent in Russian Orthodox culture.

Furthermore, Solovyov’s identification of Bible, patristic traditions (ecclesiastical legends) and human reason as equal components of Christianity also testifies to his ambiguous understanding of Christianity, which may be attributed to the his eclectic combination of theocentric Christian cultures and anthropocentric moralism.

Just his portrayal of Antichrist in literal reading mode is different from Mr. Z’s figural understanding of antichrist as opponents to Jesus Christ in accordance with apostle John’s idea. Solovyov’s different understanding of antichrist in the two texts may be attributed to the difference of genres: the main work consists of 5 characters’ debates, while the inner text is a legendary tale open to free reading and transformation. However, given

Solovyov's adherence to the Orthodox culture identifying the Bible with patristic traditions, it is concluded that Solovyov applied the futurist reading to his understanding of antichrist.

In addition, in the five heroes' polyphonic conversation and apocalyptic vision on humanity, there are several crucial biblical-mythical ideas on key issues: humanity in the progress or regress; war and peace; Russian national identity and the West-Russia-East relationship, etc.

Representatively, Solovyov matches some symbols with historical facts, such as evil forces' attack to all the nations with Mongolians' invasion into European nations in accordance with the historicist school. Solovyov aimed to warn people of the impending crisis to the West and Russia at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, he himself did not grasp the meaning of the biblical apocalyptic texts.

Especially, Solovyov expresses his fear of the prevalence of Mongolian powers over Russia and the West throughout the Eurasian continent in his poem, "panmongolism" (1894)<sup>10</sup> and in this work. He implores European and Russian nations to be alert against Japanese who will appeal to Asian nations for the invasion of European countries with the banner of panmongolism. Solovyov's apocalyptic prophecy on the clashes of Western and Mongolian nations reflects his reliance on the dispensational premillennialism and futurist reading of the Revelation.

Во всем том, что говорится у меня о панмонголизме и азиатском нашествии на Европу, также следует различать существенное от подробностей. Но и самый главный факт здесь не имеет, конечно, той безусловной достоверности, какая принадлежит будущему явлению и судьбе антихриста и его лжепророка. В истории монгольско-европейских отношений ничто не взято прямо из Св. Писания, хотя многое имеет здесь достаточно точек опоры. В общем эта история есть ряд основанных на фактических данных соображений вероятности. Лично я

10) The epigraph of this novel is the first lines of the poem, which is as follows: "Панмонголизм! Хоть имя дико,/ Но мне ласкает слух оно,/ Как бы предвестием великой/ Судьбины Божией полно..."

думаю, что эта вероятность близка к достоверности, и не одному мне так кажется, а и другим, более важным лицам... <...> Важно для меня было реальнее определить предстоящее страшное столкновение двух миров – и тем самым наглядно пояснить настоятельную необходимость мира и искренней дружбы между европейскими нациями. (2017: 6)

Partially, Solovyov's apocalyptic idea of the conflict between Europe and Asia may prove insightful and accurate, given the real Japanese military occupation of Asian countries until the end of World War II and the establishment of the European Union. In addition, Solovyov warned the danger of panmongolism in the second conversation of the main text, mainly between Enlightened Politician and Mr. Z. Their common fear of panmongolism is justified in the end.

However, in general, the historic situation of conflicts and results turned out totally different from neither his fearful scenario of Asian forces' firm alliance under the banner of pan-mongolism nor his optimistic scenario of European and Asian nations' strong consolidation under the banner of Universal Church. Each nation, European or Asian, sought its own interests, disintegrated from virtual allied forces. Solovyov's eschatological vision of conflicts between Christian Western and primitive Asian nations, assigning special mission to Russian nation, is mythical, imbued with Russian messianism and Orientalism.

Interestingly, Solovyov relied on stereotyped phrases on national properties, prevalent in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with a smack of irony: “рассудительные китайцы, китайская хитрость и упругость, японская энергия, подвижность, и предприимчивость, ликующие французы.” These stereotyped national properties are clearly mythical from the biblical viewpoint.

In this respect, we can come to the conclusion that Solovyov did not establish a reliable and coherent biblical eschatological worldview.

### 3.4. His Romantic Irony through self-transformation

It is assumed that Solovyov created the character of Antichrist after his model, being aware of his own danger to claim equal rights for Christ in regard to his genius, creativity, good appearance, prestigious growth environment, academic achievement, popularity in contemporary Russian religious, intellectual, literary, and socio-political fields (Jakim 2014: 3). Mr. Z is identified to be Solovyov's double, presenting Solovyov's last idea on "Universal Church," which ironically turns out correspondent to Antichrist's non-biblical idea on it, with the only decisive difference in their motivations: for good or evil?

In fact, in his earlier times Solovyov refused to compromise with the contemporary imperial and Orthodox authorities in his 'peculiar' ideas, such as Catholicism-oriented idea of Universal Church and criticism of the imperial policy of violent suppression of oppositional parties. In his youth, his esoteric sophiology, assumed to be based on his mystic encounters with Sophia, had attracted attention of those who are engaged in the religious-mystical and creative fields, while driving the imperial and Orthodox authorities to put him on their guard.<sup>11)</sup> On the other hand, in his last days, he decided to transform his mystic and erotic ideas to more Christocentric ones.

Nevertheless, in this last work, Solovyov revealed his previous sophiologic ideas ironically in both affirmative and negative ways. In the tale, he gave the significant name of Pansofii (Пансофий) to the priest who composed the apocalyptic tale in affirmative way. The name of "Pan-sophia" is reminiscent of his previous worship of Sophia. In addition, in the frame story, Mr. Z presents a mythical anecdote of two hermits, imbued with humanism, mysticism and idolatrous worship of Sophia, also reflects his constant mysticism, eroticism .

In the beginning of the tale, Solovyov addresses the European and Asian

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11) Allegedly, he met female figures embodying Sophia several times and devoted his platonic love to her in his whole life.

nations' political conflicts and eclectic cultural integration as the evidence of apocalyptic situation. One of the eclectic mixtures is the recurring ancient Alexandrian syncretism, which is criticized as one aspect of Antichrist's evil control of nations by Solovyov.

Но своим новым сочинением он привлечет к себе даже некоторых из своих прежних критиков и противников. Эта книга, написанная после приключения на обрыве, покажет в нем небывалую прежде силу гения. Это будет что-то всеобъемлющее и примиряющее все противоречия. Здесь соединятся благородная почтительность к древним преданиям и символам с широким и смелым радикализмом общественно-политических требований и указаний, неограниченная свобода мысли с глубочайшим пониманием всего мистического, безусловный индивидуализм с горячою преданностью общему благу, самый возвышенный идеализм руководящих начал с полною определенностью и жизненностью практических решений. (2017: 76)

In the underlined sentence, Antichrist applies all-encompassing eclectic approach to different traditions and cultures, including ancient legends and symbols, radical socio-political discourses, free thinking, mysticism, individualism, Utilitarianism, and sublime idealism. He does not differentiate between good and evil, not burdening people with any moral tasks.

However, his evil strategy for nullification of moral binary opposition is a little correspondent to Solovyov's all-encompassing interdisciplinary approach to the same objects. Here, we can perceive Solovyov's potentials to be antichrist in his strong will for self-discipline and self-completion.

Interestingly, he confesses the difficulties in understanding the biblical apocalyptic prophecies. Mr. Z' final opinion on antichrist reveals Solovyov's self-reflections on his own limitations in spiritual, intellectual, ethical, emotional or physical dimensions.

“Не все то золото, что блестит. Блеска ведь у этого поддельного добра – хоть отбавляй, ну а существенной силы – никакой.” (2017: 87)

However, Solovyov's self-reflections are not perfectly Christocentric. Representatively, in the preface Solovyov criticizes Russian readers for their critical response to his work.

Эта повесть (предварительно прочтенная мною публично) вызвала и в обществе, и в печати немало недоумений и перетолкований, главная причина которых очень проста: недостаточное знакомство у нас с показаниями Слова Божия и церковного предания об антихристе. (2017: 5)

In this paragraph, assumedly, the majority of contemporary Russian readers did not understand Solovyov's more Christocentric eschatology. Solovyov attributes the mutual misunderstanding to the readers' ignorance of biblical message and ecclesiastical legends about antichrist, not perceiving his own faults. From the biblical viewpoint, his ambiguous eschatology itself is attributed considerably to the readers' misunderstanding of his worldview. Both Solovyov's half success and contemporary Russian readers's ignorance are to blame for their mutual misunderstanding.

Conclusively, from the biblical viewpoint, in his last work Solovyov could not establish a coherent Christocentric eschatology, himself perceiving his limitations to some extent. His ambiguous and mythical ideas, and his partial self-reflections testify to human inborn limitations and strong influence of contemporary socio-cultural influence on human minds and thoughts.

Given Solovyov's half success, his 'Christocentric' eschatological ecumenism needs more careful reflection to understand his achievement and faults, which will be secured by careful biblical reading.

<Table 1> Categorization of Solovyov's Ideas in *Three Conversations*

category	properties
biblical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. Desire for Christian apologetics in anti-Christian culture</li> <li>- Christ as Savior vs antichrist as impostor</li> <li>. Ontological differentiation of good and evil</li> <li>- evil's temporary dominance and ultimate defeat by God</li> <li>- superiority of Jesus Christ and His Gospels</li> <li>- rejection of unconditional harmony and peace with evil</li> <li>. Will for truthful belief, rejection of deceptive beliefs</li> <li>. Freedom and encouragement of theologian studies</li> <li>. Deep insights of the Europe in the 21<sup>st</sup> century</li> <li>- triumph and bankruptcy of materialist institutions</li> <li>. Awareness of human nature of egoism and narcissism</li> <li>- self-awareness of his own potentials to be antichrist</li> </ul>
biblical-mythical, ambiguous, eclectic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. Belief in Christ, imbued with moralism and idealism</li> <li>- Christ's identity as good celebrity and moral preacher</li> <li>- more concerns with people (народ) than with God</li> <li>. Self-contradictory criticism of moralism (Tolstoysm)</li> <li>. Ideas of transfiguration</li> <li>- feminine symbol of "Woman clothed with the sun"</li> <li>. Eschatology of dispensational premillennialism and futurism</li> <li>- Superiority of Israelite as chosen people after Christ</li> <li>- Literal reading of some apocalyptic symbols in the Bible</li> </ul>
non-biblical, mythical, eclectic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. Combination of hesychasm, humanism, sophiology, eroticism in Z's anecdote of two hermits in the desert</li> <li>. Latent Eurocentrism and russocentrism</li> <li>. Illusion of national unification as Universal Church</li> <li>- disregard of internal disintegration of egocentric nations</li> </ul>

#### 4. Conclusion

This paper aimed to reflect on Vladimir Solovyov's 'Christocentric' eschatology in his last work *Three Conversations* from my biblical viewpoint, discerning biblical, biblical-mythical and mythical elements in the work.

In the apocalyptic fiction, Solovyov portrayed the establishment of real universal church by a few faithful believers in opposition to official universal church established by Anti-Christ and his adherents in three established churches. The faithful Christians' ecumenical achievement after the model of early church in the 1<sup>st</sup> century proves Solovyov's sincerity in his conversion to Russian Orthodoxy.

However, his eschatological ecumenism remained ambiguous in general. His idea of organic evolution of human history and binary opposition of West-Russia-Asia (China, India, ect.) remained the same. He assigned a special spiritual mission to Russian nations in spite of his criticism of mythical Russian messianism. Such ambiguities may be caused by his failure in transforming his cognitive framework into the completely Christiancentric framework in accordance with biblical principles. In addition, they are partially attributed to his combination of the Russian Orthodox eschatology of dispensational premillennialism, modern idealism and moralism, mysticism, etc.

Nevertheless, in spite of his ambiguous eschatological ecumenism at some points, his concentrated effort to understand and present the Christocentric eschatological ecumenism in accordance with the Bible in this religious philosophical novel guarantees his Christian identity. Given his sincere desires for true belief but half success, his ambiguous legacy needs to be inherited reflectively and selectively, which will contribute to the development of genuine Christocentric eschatological ecumenism totally on the basis of the biblical reading of the Bible.

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## 개요

블라디미르 솔로비요프의 ‘그리스도중심적인’ 종말론 고찰:  
『적그리스도에 대한 짧은 이야기를 포함한 전쟁, 진보,  
세계역사의 끝에 대한 세 편의 대화』를 중심으로

이 경 완\*

본 논문은 블라디미르 솔로비요프의 기독교 변증론적인 작품 『적그리스도에 대한 짧은 이야기를 포함한 전쟁, 진보, 세계역사의 끝에 대한 세 편의 대화』에 나타난 그의 종말론을 성서적인 시각에서 성찰하는 것을 목표로 한다. 그 시각에서 그의 종말론은 그의 이전 소피아 승배 이념보다 인간의 구원, 선과 악, 적그리스도, 종말에 대한 보다 그리스도중심적인 이념을 내포하고, 이로써 그의 기독교로의 개종의 진정성을 확인하게 된다. 그러나 그의 종말론은 러시아 정교, 근대의 관념론과 도덕주의, 신비주의 등이 결합되어 있기 때문에 성서적인 종말론과 완전히 부합하지는 않는다. 이것은 19~20세기 전환기의 지배적인 종교 문화를 일부 반영한다. 그의 종말론에서 성서적인 이념과 비성서적인 이념을 구별함으로써 그의 종말론의 양가성을 확인할 수 있다.

주 제 어: 성서적 기독교, 그리스도중심주의, 종말론, 러시아 종교철학, 선과 악, 적그리스도

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한림대학교 러시아연구소 연구원. 서울대학교에서 러시아 문학박사 학위를 받았다. 현재 주요 관심분야는 19세기 러시아 문학의 니콜라이 고골, 기독교 인문학, 극동시베리아의 지속가능한 발전을 위한 학제간연구이다. 최근 저서와 논문으로는 『성서적인 문화비평, 고골의 기독교 서사시-소설 창작 기획』, 「오도옌스키의 『러시아의 밤』에 나타난 낭만적 아이러니와 종말론적 세계관: 「최후의 자살」, 「이름없는 도시」를 중심으로」, 「학문의 소통과 통섭을 위한 성서적인 모델: 러시아 극동지역에서의 한러 협력을 위하여」 등이 있다.

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