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RUSSIAN RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY: FAITH VS INTELLECT

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Abstract

Aim. Reveal the position of Russian religious philosophers in relation to the complex dialectics of faith and reason in the cognitive process.

Methodology. The corpus of texts by Russian philosophers of the 19th – first half of the 20th centuries is analyzed. The research was carried out using the methods of historical and philosophical reconstruction and comparative analysis.

Results. The analysis showed that the task of Russian philosophy – the optimal ratio of faith and reason in the cognitive process – was solved, as a rule, in two ways: either through their identification, or through their unacceptable distance from each other. This methodological task presupposed not the rationalization of Christianity, but the Christianization of thinking, the transformation of logic, rationalized philosophy into contemplation, the combination of reason with the apophatic sphere. The ways of solving these problems presupposed further ways of solving questions about the possibility of mystical experience, about the reality of conscious communication with God, about the ultimate vocation of man and humanity.

Research implications. Based on patristic antinomianism, the ways of mutual integration of faith and reason are indicated, which are different ways and means of gaining true knowledge

Keywords: faith, reason, knowledge, knowledge, apophatic theology, all-unity

РУССКАЯ РЕЛИГИОЗНАЯ ФИЛОСОФИЯ: ВЕРА VS РАЗУМ

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Аннотация

Цель. Выявить позицию русских религиозных философов в отношении сложной диалектики веры и разума в познавательном процессе.

Процедура и методы. Проанализирован корпус текстов русских философов XIX – первой половины XX вв. Исследование проводилось с использованием методов историко-философской реконструкции и сравнительного анализа.

Результаты. Проведённый анализ показал, что задача русской философии – оптимальное соотношение веры и разума в познавательном процессе – решалась, как правило, двумя способами: либо через их отождествление, либо через их неприемлемое отдаление друг от друга. Эта методологическая задача предполагала не рационализацию христианства, а христианизацию мышления, трансформацию логики, рационализированной философии в созерцание, совмещение разума с апофатической сферой. Пути решения этих задач предполагали дальнейшие способы решения вопросов о возможности мистического опыта, о реальности сознательного общения с Богом, о конечном призвании человека и человечества.

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Теоретическая и/или практическая значимость. На основе святоотеческого антиномизма обозначены пути взаимной интеграции веры и разума, представляющих собой разные пути и способы обретения истинного знания.

Ключевые слова: вера, разум, знание, познание, апофатическое богословие, всеединство

Introduction

In Russian philosophy of the middle of the 19th – the first half of the 20th centuries as the heiress of patristic thought, there are various options for substantiating the idea of the unity of faith and reason. We know of two ways of such justification: the first was an attempt to completely eliminate the contradiction between faith and reason, which inevitably led to their unjustified rapprochement and even identification, or dissolution of one concept in another. This path was chosen by Vladimir Soloviev, the Trubetskoy brothers, Semyon Frank, Viktor Neshelov. The second way brightly highlighted the antinomy, irreconcilability of these epistemological concepts, insisted on the fundamental differences between faith and ordinary knowledge and its irreducibility to reason (Pavel Florensky, Sergei Bulgakov). For the sake of justice, it should be noted that the «antinomy», while strengthening the moment of contradiction in this unity, does not completely destroy this unity.

Consistent unity

Consider the first trend, which sought a consistent unity of faith and reason. It was based, with the exception of Neshelov, on the idea of total unity and, therefore, contained an element of rationalism in matters of cognition. And even Alexei Losev, who believed that Vladimir Soloviev's idea of the incomprehensible "nothing" excludes the possibility of rationalism and logic as the only evidence of truth, nevertheless, when analyzing the relationship between faith and reason in Soloviev, he notes: "Conceptual philosophy had such an independent meaning for Solovyov that, in essence, she did not need the authority of faith", and here he adds, "but this did not mean for him that reason excluded faith and revelation, but

only that reason, freed from all authority and presented to its own freedom, itself comes to the same worldview, which was demanded by the authority of faith ... Ideally ... Soloviev thought for himself such a conceptual system of reason, which is quite parallel to faith and revelation, but created by the own efforts of the reason itself" [4, c. 335].

Losev himself, who saw a contradictory unity in the relationship between faith and reason, nevertheless had the impression that "the consent of heart and mind, faith and reason is better, more desirable than their contradiction and enmity, this agreement is the norm, the ideal, what should be, and if so, it means that this agreement is the real goal of our mental labor and, therefore, it is impermissible for us to calm down until we have realized this complete truth for ourselves and for others, until it is carried through the clear light of consciousness" [4, c. 339].

And Vladimir Soloviev, in some of his works, called for achieving this ideal as soon as possible, "forcibly" affirming this unity, without wasting time on discussions about the nature of faith and reason. The philosopher saw the main value of this unity: the opportunity for fundamentally different epistemological categories to combine their capabilities in the cognitive process, thereby constituting a paradoxical unity, a paradoxical harmony of faith and reason.

In essence, these two directions of Russian religious philosophy are two versions of the interpretation of the philosophy of total-unity. And if the first direction is almost completely formed on the methodology of all-unity, then the second brings into it elements of Orthodox energetism and mysticism.

The first trend, which seeks to unite and even identify faith and reason, is associated with the names of the Trubetskoy princes. S. N. Trubetskoy, not accepting either abstract rationalism or mystical idealism,

which absolutized faith, argued the need for an indivisible unity of feeling, thought and faith as a criterion of true knowledge, as a kind of “general transcendental form” of cognition in general. Following Soloviev S. N. Trubetskoy records three sources of our knowledge – empirical experience, reason and faith. Experience and reason perform the function of identifying natural connections between phenomena, and faith – the function of establishing the reality of the creatures that we think and perceive. Let us single out three aspects of S. N. Trubetskoy: a) faith that certifies us in the reality of what exists, that is, it affirms the existence of external objects in general; b) belief in the reality of other intelligent beings; c) faith, convincing of the existence of higher spiritual beings and God. Here S. N. Trubetskoy clearly mixes both different objects of faith, and its different types: faith as a factor of cognition and religious faith, which the philosopher does not contradict each other at all, since “the subject of both has the same general definition – being as real, revealing itself insubstantial subject” [11, c. 668]. S. N. Trubetskoy’s faith is “a direct assimilation of reality and even a condition of our self-consciousness”, and this definition contains “all possible content of Faith”. Faith is interpreted by Trubetskoy in an extremely broad way, since he did not strive to oppose, but to integrate faith and reason as much as possible. However, with this approach, the specificity of religious faith can be leveled out, thinned out, which can lead to the dominance of rationalism, where faith is only a small addition to it. Vasily Zenkovsky once said about this: “the principle of pure rationalism – and, moreover, with the inclusion of the principles of transcendentalism – is expressed here with complete clarity ... We have before us a kind of version of Hegelianism” [2, p. 102]. All these conciliatory syntheses eliminate the contradictions between faith and reason, but in the end we see their identification.

Brother of S. N. Trubetskoy, E. N. Trubetskoy, on the contrary, shares the concept of faith as a factor of knowledge in general, and religious faith. He believed that any act of knowledge necessarily includes an element

of faith, which should not be confused with religious faith. Even within religious faith, the philosopher distinguishes between a logically necessary belief in the abstract Absolute beginning and religious belief in God, since the latter presupposes a moral, trusting, personal relationship to the Absolute as to God, that “brings into it such content that cannot be deduced a priori from necessary logical postulates” [9, c. 490]. True, in his work “The Meaning of Life” one can see a closer connection between faith (revelation) and reason (knowledge). Such a connection is justified by kataphatic theology, for which knowledge itself is carried out through revelation in the broad sense of the word, and religious revelation represents its narrow meaning and is concentrated in the person of Christ, in which the unknown God becomes known. Such revelation is active, that is, it requires certain efforts: God reveals himself only to a rational and thinking person, who is able to see in revelation its highest stage – mystical revelation. Therefore, thought contains a “spark of God”, it is the basis of all logic and intuition, therefore, revelation is not only completely compatible with the forms of our mental activity, but, “thinking about faith, we cannot take a single step without logical necessity ... because logical unity there is a form of truth” [10, c. 253]. So, from the separation of faith and reason, E. N. Trubetskoy, quite in the spirit of the philosophy of all-unity, imperceptibly goes over to their actual merging, but there was no harmonious solution...

Excessive conjugation of faith and reason, in which their specificity and irreducibility to each other are erased, is also characteristic of the philosophy of S. L. Frank. The philosopher is trying to prove that faith can complement the activity of the mind, “fill the areas not covered by it, but it cannot directly contradict knowledge”, and “you can find knowledge that does not kill faith, and faith that does not contradict knowledge”, which he tried to realize in his “scientific metaphysics”, where faith is tested and strengthened by knowledge [15, c. 337]. In addition, faith is positioned by S. L. Frank as direct knowledge of God, which is “freely

attested by the human soul itself” [15, c. 227]. The philosopher does not agree that faith is a judgment about a transcendental subject that cannot be verified by direct experience. As a follower of the philosophy of total-unity S. L. Frank overly immanentizes spiritual experience and the concept of the Absolute. Of course, with such a position, faith will be absorbed by reason, and its ontological and epistemological foundations will completely disappear. Like Pierre Abelard (*intelligo ut credam!*), Frank needs knowledge, not blind faith, he wants to “already know that God exists, and therefore it is possible to believe” [15, c. 233]. Faith and reason are not opposed here either ontologically or epistemologically, since “faith only supplements the life wisdom of the unbeliever with reliable knowledge of another reality” [15, c. 245].

If S. L. Frank, faith acts as a kind of knowledge, then in V. I. Nesselov, who also closely brings these factors of cognition together, on the contrary, knowledge is included in the sphere of faith as its kind. Based on the patristic tradition, organically combining speculation and revelation in gnosis, V. I. Nesselov in his work “The Science of Man” proves that “every belief, even the most naive, in its foundation and in its logical structure is always and certainly knowledge”, therefore, faith cannot be opposed to other acts of knowledge or absorbed by them. And if faith arises and develops as knowledge, then it cannot exist along with knowledge as its special expression. Thus, faith and knowledge “exist and can exist only in relation to different objects, but do not exist side by side, like two different forms of cognition, but together, as two different moments of the same process of cognition, which, by the difference of its moments, is also as a process of developing faith, and as a process of forming positive knowledge” [8, c. 96].

The ratio of faith and reason (knowledge) is not antinomical, and even less hostile, but to assert the opposite, from the point of view of V. I. Nesselov, it means to fall into a “glaring misunderstanding”. However, from these completely fair judgments, the philosopher deduces an unexpected thesis: “knowledge is

faith itself, but not faith in general, but faith in the highest degree of its thoroughness” [8, c. 103]. And again the border between faith and reason (knowledge) was thinned to the limit, the transcendental character of faith almost disappeared, and as a result, we again received a simplified interpretation of the inner spiritual world of a person, devoid of seeking and doubt. In Nesselov, who tried to derive the “formula” of reasonable faith, faith is reduced to the level of common sense, which leads to a simplification of the truths of faith. The philosopher even harbored hopes of proving the existence of God in the future “with the compulsory evidence of a visible object” [8, c. 353], which puts faith in the position of a transitory stage in a long process of cognition.

Like many other philosophers, V. I. Nesselov was unable to correlate two aspects of faith: faith as an element of any knowledge and mystical faith, woven into the canvas of a certain religious denomination. But after all, only a clarification of this specificity will make it possible to draw a conclusion either about the non-fusion of faith and reason, or about their syncretic unity. It is not surprising that a trend has appeared in Russian religious philosophy that substantiates the dualism of faith and reason, their antinomy.

The origins of this trend are found in the works of F. M. Dostoevsky, who sought to “love life more than its meaning”, to love it “before logic ..., certainly, before logic”. According to the writer, faith must be completely free, it must not depend on any evidence: “the roots of our thoughts and feelings are not here, but in other worlds. That is why philosophers say that the essence of things cannot be comprehended on earth”¹. Georgy Florovsky, speaking about F. M. Dostoevsky, examines his position through a metaphysical prism: reason is capable of destroying personal freedom, it is impossible to substantiate the existence of God with its arguments, but “if it were possible, then this logically proven God would not be a living God” [14, c. 72].

¹ Достоевский Ф. М. Полное собрание сочинений и писем: в 30 т. Т. 14: Братья Карамазовы: роман в 4 ч. с эпилогом / гл. ред. В. Г. Базанов. Л.: Наука, 1975. С. 290.

Antinomies of Faith and Reason

Metaphysical experiments in the field of the antinomy of faith and reason were subsequently carried out by P. Florensky and S. Bulgakov. Such an antinomy, by the way, is very characteristic of Eastern Christian thinking, and its insufficient number gave rise to numerous heresies and dogmatic discussions. Within the framework of their epistemology, quite consonant with the patristic antinomical tradition, Russian religious philosophers of the 19th – first half of the 20th centuries, proved that the single truth must be sought in heaven, and here on earth there are only fragments of it, difficult to compare with each other [7, c. 280]. This thesis gives rise to antinomies, which include some dogmatic positions: tri-hypostasis and consubstantial, indivisible and unmerged unity of the divine and human nature in the person of Christ, etc. P. Florensky in the essay “The Pillar and the Affirmation of Truth” even posted a table of biblical contradictions, saying that only “at the moment of grace-filled illumination, these contradictions in the mind are eliminated, but not rationally, but in a super-rational way” [13, c. 159]. In this case, the very definition of faith, which the philosopher gives, relying on the Bible, comes into conflict with reason: “faith is the fulfillment of the expected and confidence in the invisible” [13, c. 69].

The “antinomian” philosophers more subtly grasped the specifics of faith, since they proceeded mainly from religious experience, and not philosophical speculations, but at the same time they belittled the importance of reason in spiritual knowledge. Inevitably, this “mystical alogism” begins to suffer from the opposite extreme of the destruction of the meaning of reason, which can distort the very conscience, since faith, divorced from knowledge, may well degenerate into superstition and completely lose its lofty mystical meaning.

According to modern researchers, the isolation in consciousness of only two polar opposite cognitive functions – faith and reason – is wrong, this is the legacy of the Kantian

methodology, which must be overcome as soon as possible. We can agree with this statement, since our epistemological palette is much richer, between pure logic and pure mysticism “there is a vast variety of intermediate forms, the defining norms of which are richer and more flexible than the three laws of formal logic, and at the same time – more obligatory and comprehensible than the inscrutable ways of mystical contemplation” [16, c. 104]. These intermediate forms include philosophical reason, which welcomes antinomies as an incentive. Apparently, P. Florensky’s mistake was a misunderstanding that faith, being at a level above reason, is not at all antagonistic to it, it is only “free in relation to it, not bound by its limitations” [16, c. 107]. From this misunderstanding follows P. Florensky’s confusion of the super-rational with the anti-rational.

However, it would be an oversimplification to identify the epistemological position of P. Florensky with the position of Tertullian (“Credo, quia absurdum est”), since only the first stage of faith is associated with a complete denial of the role of reason in matters of faith. At the second stage, the awareness of the subject of faith is realized, here faith becomes a “source of higher understanding” and correlates with the principle of “Credo ut intelligam” by Anselm of Canterbury. At the third stage, faith is “comprehended”, it becomes the worship of God and is closely intertwined with knowledge: “The boundaries of knowledge and faith merge. The intellectual partitions melt and flow; the whole reason is transformed into a new essence” [13, c. 62]. The principle “Intelligo ut credam” becomes the highest epistemological level, where faith and reason (knowledge) merge into one.

A little later, P. Florensky will confirm his position within the framework of Christian Platonism and sophiology, when he tries to logically bring reason under Christian theology and prove that reason itself, by its inner nature, is poured into the dogma of the Trinity: “the self-truth of Truth is expressed ... in a word ... consubstantial. Thus, the doctrine of the Trinity becomes the common root of religion and philosophy, and in it the

primordial opposition of the one and the other is overcome" [12, c. 137].

Here it is impossible not to mention S. Bulgakov as a supporter of "mystical antinomianism". For him, like P. Florensky, faith cannot obey the categories of discursive, logical, cognition. At the same time, faith does not go down to the level of "subjective belief, taste or whim", but acquires an objective nature and, in fact, is the revelation of God to man. At the same time, S. Bulgakov believes that belief as a form of knowledge without proof, "outside logical achievement, outside the law of causality and its persuasiveness", is not rigidly opposed to reason, but is positioned as an expression of "higher rationality" [1, c. 28]. Reason as the lowest level of reason from another plane of knowledge ignores faith, opposes it to itself, because "what you can believe in, you cannot know, it goes beyond knowledge, and what you can know cannot and should not be believed" [1, c. 28]. God as a transcendental reality cannot be the subject of scientific knowledge, he is cognized only by faith, which is "confidence in the invisible as visible, expected and hoped as the present". And this prompts S. Bulgakov to think that faith is not hostile to reason, but merges with it and passes into it. Here we see that P. Florensky's rejection of "reasonable faith" is melted by S. Bulgakov into the triumph of "believing reason" (remember the Eastern Christian gnosis).

Antinomy in the theory of knowledge is a paradoxical phenomenon, but quite useful for our topic: Russian philosophy, unlike Western scholasticism, did not draw demarcation lines in the cognitive process, did not violate its integrity and did not assert the self-sufficiency of either faith or reason [17]. Both P. Florensky and S. Bulgakov tried to replenish and transform the mind, to restore the broken unity of faith and knowledge, although they revealed the fundamental contradictions of this unity [3].

The contradictions between faith and reason led to contradictions between philosophy and religion, which is unacceptable, just like their confusion. In the works of Orthodox theologians of the first half of the 20th century –

G. Florovsky and Vl. Lossky – there are hints of such a contradiction, the reason for which is the confusion of different levels of belief – faith as an element of knowledge and religious faith.

G. Florovsky was convinced that "only in faith is the comprehension of meaning", and "knowledge slides on the surface", that one must believe "in spite of the groans of reason", and religious revelations "are decisively incompatible with the logical framework" [14, c. 82–83]. Much more valuable to him is the naive childish faith, the faith of the coal miner.

At Vl. Lossky's faith and mysticism lie outside the boundaries of metaphysics and logic, in "another sphere of being". It is faith that "feeds thought" on the path to contemplation of divine life [5, c. 277], since no speculative philosophy can rise to the mystery of the Holy Trinity [6, c. 137]. However, Vl. Lossky was convinced that discussions about the relationship between theology and philosophy were unnecessary, they were not relevant in the Orthodox East, since the apophatic principle was a solid foundation for the holy fathers in their philosophies without any risk of being poorly understood. And, on the contrary, it was precisely the departure from apophatism that gave rise to both religious philosophy and conceptual theology, and in the long term – the unnatural opposition of theology and philosophy, faith and reason.

Conclusion

The wise, time-tested patristic epistemological tradition says: cognition based on gnosis does not cultivate ignorance and blindness, but as a special kind of cognition it involves both the senses and the mind. True, this mind is a transformed, religious one: "the thought should also open towards the truth, or rather, neither the one nor the other separately, but our whole being is in a single burning" [5, c. 272]. So Russian philosophy, taking patristic antinomianism as a basis, comes to the unification of faith and reason, which is carried out on the basis of apophatic knowledge or scientific ignorance, gnosis of

the transcendental world, comprehension of the incomprehensible.

The task of Russian philosophy – the optimal balance of faith and reason in the cognitive process – was solved, as a rule, in two ways: through their identification, or through their unacceptable distance from each other. This methodological task presupposed not the rationalization of Christianity, but the Christianization of thinking, the transformation of logic,

rationalized philosophy into contemplation, the combination of reason with the apophatic sphere. The ways of solving these problems presupposed further ways of solving questions about the possibility of mystical experience, about the reality of conscious communication with God, about the ultimate vocation of man and humanity.

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