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## Sobornost as an Anthropological and Ecclesiological Concept in the Works of Nikolay Berdyaev

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**ABSTRACT:** The article presents an examination of “sobornost” in the works of Nikolay Berdyaev in the context of his anthropological and ecclesiological views. This approach was outlined in the studies of the 20<sup>th</sup> — early 21<sup>st</sup> century, but hasn't been sufficiently developed. Sobornost, which Berdyaev himself labeled as the quality of the personal conscience as it stands in the presence God and as the essential characteristic of the Church, is interpreted on the basis of his works in which he expounds his views on man and the Church, the observations of scholars who have addressed the topic earlier also taken into account. It is shown how, drawing on the experience of sobornost, Berdyaev resolves the collision between the personal freedom and the unity of people. The structure of the article is largely based on Berdyaev's own remarks about the significance of gnoseology, ethics and eschatology in his teaching on man and the Church, and to a certain degree is of a heuristic nature. The philosopher's anthropological and ecclesiological views, with their key concept of “Christology of man”, are characterized, and then his understanding of sobornost is reconstructed from three perspectives. First, the gno-seological interpretation of sobornost is considered (Berdyaev's specific understanding of gnosis, his statement about the correlation between cognition (gnosis) and the levels of community between people, as well as his concept of “sobornal gnoseology” are analyzed). Second, the ethical meaning of sobornost is shown (the correlation is traced between the ethics of law, the ethics of redemption and the ethics of creativity, on the one hand, and the implementation of sobornost and the actualization of personality, on the other hand; the meaning of “sobornal

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gnoseology” for Berdyaev’s teaching on ethics is shown). Thirdly, the specific eschatological character of Berdyaev’s sobornost is explained, to which a number of researchers drew attention (the anthropological grounds of this eschatologism, the “profitable” and open, divine-human nature of “active-creative eschatology” are shown).

KEYWORDS: N. A. Berdyaev, sobornost, ecclesiology, Christian anthropology, church, man, personality, uncreated freedom, cognition, conscience, church gnosis, ethics, eschatology, creativity, Ungrund

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## Introduction

The goal of this article is not an historical-theological analysis of N. A. Berdyaev’s ideas about sobornost, i. e., who influenced his thought, when and how his views were refined, etc. Rather, this article is an attempt at a maximally systematic and exact interpretation of Berdyaev’s views within the larger context of the philosopher’s works. This approach is relevant because it is desirable to move from the narrow context of quoting separate passages and aphorisms to a more full-bodied and integral understanding of his mystical intuition and the experience to which it points. It seems that the particular value of this experience is in how it is the medium by which Berdyaev solves the difficult anthropological and practical ecclesial question of simultaneous personal freedom and interpersonal unity, and shows how personal freedom is not a threat to unity, nor unity a threat to personal freedom.

It seems that the most systematic interpretation of sobornost in Berdyaev’s works arises in the context of his anthropological and ecclesiological views; in laying out these views he often makes reference to our topic. Berdyaev’s anthropological and ecclesiological viewpoints are tightly intertwined, and it is hardly likely that either could be properly understood without also grasping this interdependence. We could say that the main particularity of Berdyaev’s ecclesiology is, in fact, it’s

anthropological aspect<sup>1</sup>; while his teaching on the human person, the creativity of the human person, and the communal nature of the personality, as expressed in his “Christology of man”<sup>2</sup> and Divine humanity<sup>3</sup>, unite his anthropology and ecclesiology in a particular way. Sobornost happens in the Church understood as a divine-human process [Berdyaev 1994, 215] and Berdyaev sees this as divine-human, mystical experience<sup>4</sup>, rather than as some sort of rigid hierarchical or democratic attempt at church governance, i. e., he relates all this to the sphere of divine anthropology rather than, for example, to the canons of the church or dogmatics. For Berdyaev, the external structure of ecclesial life is secondary to this divine-human experience of sobornost, and even in its optimal expression this external structure<sup>5</sup> isn’t seen as the full embodiment of the mystical experience of sobornost [Berdyaev 1997, 86].

The understanding of sobornost in the works of Berdyaev has practically escaped the attention of Russian theologians. In philosophical works, Berdyaev is mentioned alongside a number of other theoreticians of sobornost, including A. S. Khomyakov, V. S. Solovyov, Fr. Sergius Bulgakov, S. N. Trubetskoy, B. P. Vysheslavtsev, where his interpretation of sobornost is unavoidably considered in a fragmentary way or in overview, without systematic analysis of his thoughts in their native context, where they have more integrity, and without taking account of significant particularities in the language he uses<sup>6</sup>. In philosophical dictionaries, the entry for sobornost<sup>7</sup> generally presents Berdyaev’s contribution by citing one or two quotations taken out of context. A terse definition of Berdyaev’s sobornost as “free sociability”<sup>8</sup> in contrast to “sociability

1. See, for instance: [Berdyaev 1994, 216].

2. Please see: [Berdyaev 1916, 75; Berdyaev 1931, 58; Berdyaev 1994, 144; Berdyaev 1996, 120; Berdyaev 2008, 132].

3. See, for instance: [Stark, 217]. Here Berdyaev, of course, is developing the thought of V. S. Solovyov, as he himself specifies [Berdyaev 2008, 127].

4. In the tradition of A. S. Khomyakov’s understanding of sobornost as an “ontological quality of the Church” [Berdyaev 1994, 209] Berdyaev also links sobornost with anthropology, primarily crediting Khomyakov as the source for his understanding of sobornost as mystical experience [Berdyaev 1997, 86] and for noting how this is linked with freedom [Berdyaev 1997, 76].

5. We must note that the best method of structuring church life, as Berdyaev would have it, isn’t some sort of cult of equality and loss of internal hierarchy (which is in no way to be equated with external administrative hierarchy) — he insists that gifts must be discerned and recognized. See, for instance: [Berdyaev 1927, 302].

6. See, for instance: [Bojko; Zasukhina; Evreeva; Lazareva; Golovich].

7. See, for instance: [Lazarev].

8. The insufficiency of this paraphrase of “free unity” from Solovyov is at minimum due to the difference between Solovyov’s contemplation of the world as more cosmologically oriented, and Berdyaev’s contemplation of the world as more eschatologically oriented. For Berdyaev it is of principle importance that the eschatological and existential-personal experience of sobornost leads to the very boundary of the fallen objective world order, to which any external sociality or objective historical understanding of unity relates. And although it is possible to find instances in which Berdyaev uses the word “social” in a metaphorical, figurative sense in expressions such as “spiritual life is metaphysically social” [Berdyaev 1994, 209], it doesn’t seem that the word can be used in a precise or organic sense in order to characterize Berdyaev’s thought as a whole.

of necessity”, which S. S. Horuzhy proposed [*Horuzhy 2005*] is original, but obviously also demands contextualization and refinement. Moreover, in a majority of dissertations, Berdyaev’s view of sobornost is considered in a socio-cultural, political, historical-philosophical and aesthetic context<sup>9</sup>, more rarely in an ethical context<sup>10</sup>, and is never considered in Berdyaev’s native ecclesial and divine-human context.

It is primarily western researchers who have more often analysed Berdyaev’s concept of sobornost in a systematically theological fashion. In a dissertation which was written by Fr. Bernhard Schultze, S. J., while Berdyaev was still alive, called “Nikolay Berdyaev’s View of the Church” (1938), Schultze notes that the subject of sobornost is not only present explicitly in Berdyaev’s works, as his discernment of the “Church in her mystical nature”<sup>11</sup>, but also implicitly, in the very structure of his thought. Schultze writes, “Berdyaev always thinks in a “sobornal” way, whether he is expressing his ideas as a metaphysician or an aesthete, or appealing to us as a sociologist and philosopher of history” [*Schultze, 134*]. We also note the study of Perry Troutman (1964), which was one of the first attempts to consider Berdyaev’s anthropological views, and sobornost within this context, from a specifically theological perspective, comparing his thought to that of Lotan Harold DeWolf and Paul Tillich [*Troutman*]. James McLachlan, in analysing sobornost in Berdyaev (1989), connects it with a communitarian, rather than an “isolated” view of the nature of the human person [*McLachlan, 244*]. In 2007, Paul Scaringi [*Scaringi, 87–88*] points to the “vital importance” of the concept of sobornost for understanding Berdyaev’s thought on the human person and freedom. He calls sobornost a “paradigm” by which Berdyaev affirms the anti-individualistic nature of freedom, which on the contrary for Berdyaev is rooted in interpersonal relationship, “a paradigm for relationship that values relationality, the person, and her freedom”. Scaringi sees the strength of Berdyaev’s thought as having its locus in this particular viewpoint [*Scaringi, 190*]. Moreover, he insists that “Berdyaev’s thought is much more comprehensible from a contemporary theological perspective, rather than a philosophical one”, saying that, “a theological framework is required to evaluate his thought” [*Scaringi, 13*]<sup>12</sup>. He writes that “regardless of Berdyaev’s biases (against Theology. — S. A.), in a contemporary context his thought does fit within the broad enterprise

9. See, for instance: [*Shaposhnikov; Kireev; Anisin; Lugovoy; Horuzhy 2012*].

10. See, for instance: [*Kuzmina*].

11. See, for instance: [*Berdyaev 1994, 208*].

12. He takes this perspective, juxtaposing Berdyaev’s thought with the theology of Jürgen Moltmann, and in particular Berdyaev’s sobornost and Moltmann’s “open friendship”.

of what is today considered “theological”, and “what is clear is that his vision of freedom is theological” [*Scaringi*, 134].

It’s also worth mentioning less standard research, such as the comparative analysis of sobornost in Berdyaev and Japanese philosopher and intellectual historian Tetsuro Watsuji, as accepted and understood by Filipino theologian Anton Luis Sevilla (2010) [*Sevilla*]. Swiss scholar Regula Zwahlen has also published a series of works comparing Berdyaev’s anthropology and that of Fr. Sergius Bulgakov [*Zwahlen 2012; Zwahlen 2016; Zwahlen 2020*] <sup>13</sup>. Nina Dimitrova (2016) places Berdyaev’s thought within the context of an “anthropological turn” in western theology, attempting to demonstrate the unique place of 20<sup>th</sup> century Russian religious anthropology and in particular the ideas of Berdyaev and Frank, as they are constructed upon the idea of divine humanity that goes back to Solovyov [*Dimitrova*].

The simultaneous anthropological and ecclesiological approach to sobornost in Berdyaev which is taken in this paper, is hinted at in 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century works, but has been too little developed. Despite the enormous number of works about Berdyaev’s anthropology and several on his ecclesiology, in the works known to us, these two critically important themes in his thought have not yet been analysed wholly and in terms of their interconnection; a number of authors of significant works on his ecclesiology, however, have said that it is necessary to take his anthropological views into account <sup>14</sup>.

This paper is an analysis of the works in which Berdyaev expresses his most important thoughts on ecclesiology and anthropology, beginning with “The New Religious Consciousness and Society” (1907) and continuing thereafter with “The Philosophy of Freedom” (1911) <sup>15</sup>; “Aleksey Stepanovich Khomyakov” (1912), in which Berdyaev not only elucidates the way in which the heritage of Khomyakov and the Slavophiles is principally important for him,

13. Zwahlen is one of a very few who have attempted to consider the development in the views of these two philosophers on the subject in question, although her conclusions in regard to Berdyaev are not without their difficulties. It seems that the primary inaccuracy in her interpretation lies in her understanding of *Ungrund* as ontological, which Berdyaev himself admonished against. See, for instance: [*Zwahlen 2020*, 178].

14. See, for instance: [*Schultze; Nichols*, 137]. At the same time, scholars point to the fact that the vector of Berdyaev’s ethics and anthropological thought as a whole indicate sobornost [*McLachlan*, 244–245], and that it is impossible to understand his teaching

on the human person, freedom and creativity without an analysis of his teaching on sobornost and “communitarianism” [*Tsonchev*, 2–5, 230–234].

15. Some would say, in this work we can see only an early iteration of “The Destiny of Man” (1931), meaning it doesn’t have any final self-contained significance. It does, however, show sources of Berdyaev’s thought which are not articulated in later works. Fr. Steve Janos, in particular, draws attention to this in his “Commentaries” on the English translation of the book. See: [*Janos*, IV–VI]. Chapter 7, entitled “Mysticism and the Church” is worthy of special attention.

but also develops his own views, and in particular his views on sobornost, eschatology and gnoseology; “The Meaning of the Creative Act” (1912–1913)<sup>16</sup>, in which he first expresses his key anthropological concept — “Christology of man”; “The Meaning of History. The Experience of the Philosophy of Human Destiny” (1923)<sup>17</sup>; “Salvation and Creativity — Two Understandings of Christianity” (1926) — an article<sup>18</sup> in which Berdyaev poses the problem which he subsequently elucidates in his works “Freedom and the Spirit. Problems and Apology of Christianity” (1927) and “The Destiny of Man. An Experience of Paradoxical Ethics” (1931); “Solitude and Society. Philosophic Experience of Solitude and Society” (1934); “Slavery and Freedom. The Experience of Personalist Metaphysics” (1939); “The Beginning and the End. Essay on Eschatological Metaphysics” (1941); “The Russian Idea (Fundamental Problems in Russian 19<sup>th</sup> Century and Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Thought)” (1946); “Truth and Revelation. Prolegomena to the Critique of Revelation” (1947); “The Realm of Spirit and the Realm of Caesar” (1947).

### “The Christology of Man” as the Foundation of Sobornost

The most important interpretations of sobornost in Berdyaev are ecclesiological and anthropological. As such, he calls sobornost an “ontological quality of the Church” [*Berdyaev 1994, 209*] and “the immanent quality of the personal conscience as it stands in the presence of God” [*Berdyaev 1931, 181*]. It is no mistake that these definitions appear in chapter 10 of his book “Freedom and the Spirit” (1927)<sup>19</sup>, in which he lays out the interconnections between his ecclesiological ideas, and in his primary anthropological work “The Destiny of Man” (1931)<sup>20</sup>. Berdyaev’s unique understanding of sobornost is integrally linked to his views on the Church and on the human person.

Berdyaev’s anthropology draws on an interest in the particulars of New Testament revelation of the human person, which, in his opinion, is insufficiently developed in the thought of the Church Fathers

16. Berdyaev himself dates the work, which was published in 1916, to 1912–1913 [*Berdyaev 2008, 287*]. It follows from his later works, for instance, “Dream and Reality” (chapter 11) and “The Russian Idea”, that the author in his final years also endorses the views expressed in “The Meaning of the Creative Act”. In terms of ecclesiology, chapter 14 is particularly important.

17. Especially chapters 1, 5 and 6.

18. Fr. Vitaly Borovoy considered this article to be a flagship work of Berdyaev [*Borovoy, 29*].

19. Some scholars think that this book is Berdyaev’s most systematic theological work. See, for instance: [*Reichelt, 408*].

20. In laying out his views for the Berline philosophical dictionary, Berdyaev calls this book one of the primary examples of his philosophical worldview. See: [*Poltoratskii, 146*].

[*Berdyaev 1931, 55*]. Noting that historical Christianity “teaches almost exclusively about the human person as a sinner in need of redemption”<sup>21</sup> in a legal or guardian-like style [*Berdyaev 2008, 133*] Berdyaev affirms that “the divine-human adoption of man in Christ... reveals the mystery of man as first-born”, carrying him up “to head-spinning heights, right up to the Holy Trinity” [*Berdyaev 1916, 73*], and he wants to perceive “the mystery of the divine nature in man”, and even speaks of a sort of “dogma of man similar to the dogma of Christ” [*Berdyaev 1916, 75*]. In his book “The Meaning of the Creative Act” (1912–1913), for the first time he uses the expression “Christology of man”, and has in mind that it is impossible to conceive of man outside of the revelation of Christ<sup>22</sup> — we need to see what was newly revealed to man and in man when God became Man [*Berdyaev 1916, 75–76*]. Berdyaev’s entire anthropology is shot through with interest in the divine-human nature of the human person<sup>23</sup>: “The fundamental myth of Christianity is the drama of love and freedom being played out between God and man, the birth of God in man and the birth of man in God” [*Berdyaev 1994, 129*].

In thinking about the human person in light of Christological revelation, Berdyaev comes to radical conclusions in relation to the freedom of the human person; in particular, he rejects any understanding of freedom as having to do with the choice between good and evil or obedience or disobedience to the will of the Creator, and on the contrary affirms an understanding of freedom as the ability of the human person to introduce something entirely new not only into the creation, but even into the Life of God<sup>24</sup> himself, i. e. the ability of the human person to create ex nihilo, in the likeness of God’s creativity. The understanding of freedom as a force to create ex nihilo lies at the foundation of Berdyaev’s teaching on the human person<sup>25</sup> and how human

21. In this paper citations from Berdyaev are translated by G. Williams.

22. Just as the question about God is impossible to pose “separately from the question about man”: “The existence of the human person, taken in its depth and not in a superficial way, is the single witness to the existence of God” [*Berdyaev 1951, 28*].

23. Fr. Sergius Bulgakov’s anthropology is shot through with similar intuitions: “Man is also created as God-man in the sense that he fits a spirit of divine origin into his corruptible body and soul” [*Bulgakov, 258*]. As Katarzyna Stark notes, along with V. S. Solovyov, Fr. Sergius Bulgakov, P. N. Evdokimov, Berdyaev “interprets the idea of God-Man... as the existential experience of God’s encounter with man,

perfectly actualized in the person of Jesus Christ” [*Stark, 217*].

24. The understanding of freedom and creativity in Jürgen Moltmann in many ways comes close to that of Berdyaev. See Paul Scaringi’s interesting comparative analysis: [*Scaringi, 227*].

25. Although Berdyaev is not always consistent in his use of words (in different contexts he either likens or distinguishes between the words “lichnost” (human person) and “chelovek” (human being), on the whole his affirmations allow us to conclude that “lichnost” is associated particularly with “New Testament man”, who participates in divine-human experience of freedom and creativity, i. e., in whom humanity is disclosed more fully. A lichnost is, in fact, an authentic

nature is filled with grace, which literally “radiates”<sup>26</sup>: “The human person always and in everything should be a giver of life, radiating forth the creative energy of life” [Berdyaev 1931, 273], i. e., Berdyaev understands the likeness of man to God in an active fashion and connects it with exertion of man’s creative energies.

Berdyaev’s unique way of expressing himself in words<sup>27</sup> is also associated with his anthropological understanding, and appeals to the spiritual experience of the human person, and to “the authenticities of life itself, rather than to metaphysical categories or to ontological instantiations” [Berdyaev 1994, 133]. The world of concepts and manifestations is secondary to the human person’s experience of existence<sup>28</sup>. It is only in this context that we can accurately understand how Berdyaev uses the “myth”<sup>29</sup> of the uncreated (i. e., “impenetrable” for God and not under God’s power) freedom, “nothingness”, or *Ungrund*. In doing so Berdyaev develops an intuition which is close to the mystical understanding of Jakob Böhme. The goal for which Berdyaev needs *Ungrund* is the substantiation of the possibility of human creativity, which is correlated with the creativity of God, in terms of its significance. It’s difficult to agree with Zwahlen’s interpretation, which seems to bring meonic freedom together with the forces of chaos which have broken into the world as a result of the fall of man [Zwahlen 2020, 177–178]<sup>30</sup>. The meon, or “nothingness”, isn’t a black hole which incomprehensibly threatens or inspires the elements into creativity, or clustered energy, or a force which is active of its own accord. *Ungrund* is rather the possibility of creativity which is accessible only to the integral human per-

and integral human person. See, for instance: “Man finds infinite immanent help within himself if he is bold enough to open all the forces of God and the authentic free world, loosed from the chains of the world of phantoms, through creative action... And we can and must feel ourselves as authentic persons with that kernel of lichnost, with existing and not just phantasmal religious will” [Berdyaev 1916, 10]. It is to the lichnost in particular that radical saying about its non-belonging and non-subordination to the fallen world order of “ontological being”, understood in terms of objectification or secondary reality relate: “Lichnost is outside of being and stands against it” [Berdyaev 1939, 69].

26. It is typical that he uses his sayings “radium in the spiritual world” and “grace-infused radiating energy” to refer to freedom, creativity, love — in fact to any human action (at base divine-human action) of the spirit — which describes and constitutes “lichnost”, lifting it out of the current natural (fallen, or objecti-

fied) world order. See, for instance: [Berdyaev 1931, 149–151, 154, 283].

27. On the particularities of how Berdyaev uses language, see, for instance: [Arjakovsky, 40–41; Boldyrev, 75–77; Guroian].

28. See, for instance: [Berdyaev 1996, 35].

29. We would underscore that Berdyaev uses *Ungrund* as a myth expressing a specific experience. As Vigen Guroian writes that “we should listen carefully to Berdyaev when he says that the *Ungrund* is not a concept but an intuition, a mythological picture of what is rationally unknowable but utterly important for a proper understanding of personality and freedom” [Guroian, 124]. *Ungrund* “is not a ‘thing’ or a ‘nothing’, but is pure potentiality” [Guroian, 125].

30. For the difference between *Ungrund* freedom and chaos in Berdyaev in the context of the interpretation of the myth of the fall of man, see: [Berdyaev 1931, 30].



son — only to God and to man. People can live, and often go about their lives, avoiding this risky possibility<sup>31</sup>. The only real way in which freedom threatens the human person is the risk that he will reject freedom itself and fail to become most fully himself — to fully live into his fate.

In his understanding of freedom, Berdyaev, as scholars accurately note<sup>32</sup>, casts doubt on the Church Fathers' understanding of the omnipotence and omniscience of the Creator<sup>33</sup>. In this, however, he in no way disparages God's power or wisdom, but finds for them different and specifically divine-human foundations, i. e. he proposes a different understanding of God's power<sup>34</sup>. And this understanding is more sober, daring and fearless than images of authoritarian omnipotence that are borrowed from our fallen world. God isn't only unafraid to share His power with man, but actually thirsts to do so. As such His creation is an act of love which is revealed and fully entrusted to the beloved by the one who loves.

The "New Testament" anthropology of Berdyaev — his "Christology of man" — finds its completion in his ecclesiology, in which a personal understanding of freedom also has strategic significance — an understanding according to which freedom proceeds from the personality as the force of grace, "the creative disclosure of the human genius" [*Berdyaev 1926, 46*], as the transfiguring love not only to God, but to man, "and to animals and plants, and to every blade of grass, to stones, to rivers, to seas, to mountains and fields"; and this freedom is an active freedom, and not the passive allowance and reception of God's healing and salvation [*Berdyaev 1926, 37*]. In formulating a mature concept for an "integral understanding of Church"<sup>35</sup> in the late 1920's, Berdyaev contraposes his understanding with a "differentiated", partial and Old Testament understanding, which doesn't take the "Christology of man" into consideration and subordinates the life of the Church to the task of salvation from evil and sin, in such a way as to reduce the Church and leave the greater and

31. Compare: "Trading at a stall, living an egotistical family life, serving as a bureaucrat in the police force or tax authority — humbly, not arrogantly, not in a daring fashion. ... The stall trader isn't only self-serving but also dishonest, less in danger of perishing eternally than someone who lives his whole life in search of truth and authenticity, who thirsts for beauty in life, than Vladimir Solovyov, for instance. The gnostic, poet of life, one who searches for truth in life and brotherhood between people is often in danger of perishing eternally, insofar as he is proud and not sufficiently humble" [*Berdyaev 1926, 33*].

32. In particular, Romilo Aleksandar Knežević, in his book "Homo Theurgos: Freedom according to John Zizoulas and Nikolay Berdyaev", discusses this subject in detail [*Knežević, 48*].

33. The step, which in contrast to Berdyaev Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) does not make, is the very thing in which Knežević believes the Greek theologian doesn't follow through his own logic [*Knežević, 48*].

34. See also Knežević's book [*Knežević, 144*].

35. See, for instance: [*Berdyaev 1926, 29, 30; Berdyaev 1994, 211*].

most valuable part of human life outside her bounds. He writes that “the interpretation of Christianity as a religion of personal salvation... collides with the very idea of the Church herself” [Berdyaeu 1926, 39]. According to this degraded interpretation, “conventional everyday life — bourgeois-day-to-day living — is respected as more humble, more Christian and more moral than achievements of the higher spiritual life, of love, contemplation, perceptive cognition, creativity — all of which are suspect for supposed pride and lack of humility” [Berdyaeu 1926, 33]. An integral understanding means that the Church is not a part of the world, not “objective reality” alongside other realities, but depth of life<sup>36</sup>; “everything, all the depth of being, the fullness of the life of the world and of mankind, but in a christified and grace-infused condition” [Berdyaeu 1994, 208]. The Church is not “a necessarily given external reality” [Berdyaeu 1994, 208], but an *experience* — the “living out the fate of the world and mankind” [Berdyaeu 1994, 216].

In her mystical life, the Church is not built upon fear of death or the tortures of hell, or by standing in awe before the Creator, but by fellowship and the thirst for grasping the meaning of one’s own life and bringing it to fruition [Berdyaeu 1926, 33–36]. The task of the Church is not simply to hold evil and darkness at bay, but to reveal the positive meaning of that human freedom, which releases the spiritual power capable of overturning the law of this world, itself. It isn’t only man who needs God, but God also needs man — and the internal logic of divine life presupposes the human person’s participation<sup>37</sup>. The human person inherits this logic and also experiences a thirst for “the other”. And coming into participation in the life of the Holy Trinity, the human person is able to reveal sobornost as an “immanent quality of the personal conscience”:

In religious ecclesial experience, when meeting with Christ, the human person is not alone or captive within his own narrow bounds. He is together with everyone who has ever had that same experience and with all the entire Christian world, the apostles, the saints, brothers and sisters in Christ, both those who have died and those who are living [Berdyaeu 1994, 209].

36. See, for instance: [Berdyaeu 1994, 213, 214, 220].

37. See, for instance: “Man is born in God and in doing so enriches divine life. There is a need for God in man and there is a need for man within God” [Berdyaeu 1951, 29].

Through the Church the world is humanified and divinized; through the Church the world experiences “christification” and infusion with grace:

The human person receives power in an internal sense and is freed via divine humanity; in an external sense the whole world, all of society and all history is transformed and freed through human-ness and through the dominion of the human person [*Berdyaev 1939, 41*].

It is of particular importance that Berdyaev’s sobornost, which presupposes a link and interaction between human persons, is also directly tied to the development and multiplication of freedom for each of these human persons.

That which Berdyaev has written about the human person primarily relates to questions of knowing<sup>38</sup>, ethics and axiology, the philosophy of history and eschatology<sup>39</sup>: in considering these various subjects, he endeavours to disclose their New Testament, specifically “Christological” aspect. We might say something similar of his anthropocentric ecclesiology, in which the Church is considered primarily as the “organ” or instrumentality for knowing God and man, as a mystery of interpersonal relationship and the eschatological “divine-human process”. Therefore we can best see the particularity of Berdyaev’s understanding of sobornost if we look at the subjects just named, above.

## Sobornost and Knowing

In Berdyaev, sobornost takes on a gnoseological comprehension. We should mention that he often uses the word “gnoseology”, and various derivatives thereof, not as a philosophical term to speak of the theory of knowledge in terms of symbols and rules according to which it is built, but in a much broader sense. Perhaps it would be most accurate to say that he understands gnoseology as teaching about the human

38. See, for instance, Berdyaev’s “gnoseological” introductions to his main works: “Philosophy of Freedom” (1911), “The Destiny of Man” (1931), “Solitude and Society” (1934), “The Realm of Spirit and the Realm of Caesar” (1947), and also his last fundamental work “Truth and Revelation” (1947), which can also be understood as gnoseological in a broad sense (as in Berdyaev), i. e. dedicated to questions of knowing. It is also worth recalling his work “The Beginning and the End. Essay on Eschatological Metaphysics” (1946), which the author himself calls “an experience

of gnoseological and metaphysical interpretation of the end of the world” and the expression of his “integral metaphysics” [*Berdyaev 1995, 164*].

39. In “The Russian Idea”, Berdyaev also writes about the historiosophical (eschatological) and ethical direction and intention of his thought, and how this relates to the fact that his thought is “oriented anthropologically rather than cosmologically” [*Berdyaev 2008, 288*]. On the significance of ethics in Berdyaev, see also: [*Kuzmina*].

person as a “knower” and that he understands knowing (gnosis<sup>40</sup>) as existential experience which presupposes not so much the registration of facts or a description of objective reality as it does creative activity on the part of the subject of knowing — what we might call “will oriented toward meaning” [Berdyaev 1995, 185]. In other words, human freedom — man’s potential for likeness to God in terms of creation ex nihilo — is realized in this sort of “knowing”. Knowledge, then, is not simply a measurement of fixed reality, but creates and changes that reality. In the act of knowing “something happens with being itself, as it becomes enlightened” [Berdyaev 1931, 4].

Berdyaev inculcates various different types of knowing with this enlightening character, relating it not only to epistemic scholarly or philosophical activity, but also memory desirous of “overcoming death” [Berdyaev 2016, 7], and love that radiates “the energy which pervades with grace and gives life” [Berdyaev 1931, 125], and the moral life, by which “we not only welcome into us and reflect ethical truth”, but “create that truth and the very world of values” [Berdyaev 1931, 17]. Nor does divine revelation “hurl itself” upon people from without [Berdyaev 1996, 44–45], giving them heretofore unknown information: rather, it is a new reality being created by God and man together, which is mutually revealed in fellowship [Berdyaev 1952, 77]. Berdyaev reminds us that “man was always the only organ via which revelation has come to man... and when we have heard the voice of God within ourselves, we were hearing that voice through ourselves — i. e., through man” [Berdyaev 1996, 6]. Truth isn’t given to the perceiver — whether to God or to people — originally: rather it is created by them in the process of knowing. In this sense, in reading Berdyaev it is difficult to get a handle on the boundary between the experience of revelation and perception of God, and the history

40. Berdyaev himself considers the following people, for instance, “gnostics”, “in the sense of religious perception...free theosophy”: St. Clement of Alexandria, Origen, F. von Baader, Vladimir Solovyov. See: [Berdyaev 1926, 33]. Fabian Linde, in an attempt to analyse Berdyaev’s thought in light of Hans Jonas’s understanding of Gnosticism, came to the conclusion that it is not possible to call Berdyaev’s philosophy “gnostic” in the typical sense. Those who refer to Berdyaev as a gnostic almost never take into consideration the fact that he refutes those teachings which are usually considered gnostic, writes Linde. At the same time, he believes that Berdyaev’s philosophy in some way confirms Jonas’s understanding, which draws ancient Gnosticism and modern existentialism

closer together. But the key to the “neognosticism” of Berdyaev, as Linde believes, is in Berdyaev’s own statement that “thought must be fruitfully embodied in integral spiritual experience. Agnosticism itself is a mistaken limitation of human possibility. We need to affirm gnosticism, though that gnosticism must be existential” [Berdyaev 1952, 63]. See: [Linde, 217–219]. According to Fr. Georgy Kochetkov, Berdyaev “revived the dignity of, Christian (non-heretical) gnosticism, having sensed the unity of the world in its hierarchical order as well as life that accords that world. He was building a new construction of non-objectified and non-idealized perception of God, the world, of life, and the human person...” [Kochetkov, 52].

of God's interaction with man, per se, because neither revelation nor perception can be considered in isolation. Neither the revelation of Christ, nor the revelation of God as Trinity<sup>41</sup>, nor the revelation of the Church are instances of "new information" about God which the human person has "grown into". Rather, they are real events in the life of the human person and in the life of God. The "christified" cosmos (infused with Christ) is not only divinized creation, but also *humanized* creation, and is prepared by man bringing meaning and love into the world.

One of Berdyaev's key affirmations as regards gnoseal cognition has to do with its dependence upon the "degree of commonality between people" [*Berdyaev 1939, 97*]. This dependence, however, relates to different types of knowing in various differing degrees, and is greater for those types of knowledge which are related to "the depth of perception of the spirit, meaning and value of human existence", and rather less in the case of those types of knowledge similar to mathematics and the natural sciences [*Berdyaev 1939, 98*]. As such, the achievement of truth that is of a religious character presupposes maximal spiritual commonality and is revealed and find its meaning in embodied life only for those who belong to a religious community, insofar as outside of this community it seems subjective and unnecessary [*Berdyaev 1939, 98*]. In this way a hierarchy of different types of knowledge is established, and those types which are more sensitive to sobornost are considered more valuable and creatively efficacious for life.

Berdyaev uses the expression "sobornal, ecclesial gnoseology" to speak of that sort of thought to which he relates I. V. Kireyevsky, A. S. Khomyakov, V. S. Solovyov, F. von Baader, and F. Schelling's later works [*Berdyaev 2008, 201*]. In fact, this is Berdyaev's own gnoseological method<sup>42</sup>, according to which "fellowship in love and sobornost are criteria for cognition" and the knower isn't the individual "I", but "we" — "fellowship in love" [*Berdyaev 2008, 201*]. Here the Church is conceived of integrally. At the same time, every member of the Body of Christ is a bearer of the sobornal consciousness, "the mind of Christ" [*Berdyaev 1994, 190, 210*]. But the personal conscience remains primary and is the source of sobornal knowing:

41. See, for instance: "When Christianity teaches a Trinitarian Divinity and the redemptive sacrifice of the Son of God, it allows a process within God which is a divine tragedy. <...> And in us, in our depth the same process which is being completed in heaven

is being completed, i. e., of the birth of God" [*Berdyaev 1994, 132*].

42. Already in "Philosophy of Freedom" (1911) Berdyaev calls his method "ecclesial gnoseology".

That which we might call ecclesial conscience... doesn't at all mean that human conscience before being able to stand in purity before God has to settle accounts with the consciences of other people or that of the world, but rather indicates the spiritual and immanent carriage in one's own conscience of the common fate of all brothers according to the spirit. <...> In any case, sobornost doesn't imply any external authority vis a vis the personal conscience [Berdyayev 1931, 181].

Integral, sobornal knowing rests upon “freely chosen” faith [Berdyayev 1911, 217], “a certain direction of spiritual will”, and “entrance into the divine life” [Berdyayev 1951, 10]. Berdyayev distinguishes this from knowledge which is based upon external coercion and authority [Berdyayev 2008, 201]<sup>43</sup>, where subject and object are juxtaposed [Berdyayev 1911, 95]. The organ of integral knowing, or “knowing and evaluation” in Berdyayev's anthropological view is the *conscience* (or the *heart*, or *integral spirit*) [Berdyayev 1934, 18]. Berdyayev insists that the conscience needs to manifest “moral inventiveness”, and that sobornost appears as the creative activity of “original and virginal conscience” [Berdyayev 1931, 142–144], which brings us to issues of ethics.

### The Ethical Meaning of Sobornost

It's worth mentioning that Berdyayev understands ethics broadly, or perhaps more properly stated, in an integral fashion — as teaching not only about ethical life and morals, but about “discernments, estimations and meaning. In essence, therefore, the entire world — in which discernments happen, valuations are made, and meaning is sought — relates to ethics” [Berdyayev 1931, 18]. He calls ethics “teaching on the human person, to a significant degree” [Berdyayev 1931, 61]. Behind this understanding stand two intentions: first to affirm the moral significance of knowing, of artistic creativity and “of everything that creates higher values” [Berdyayev 1931, 141], and second to affirm the personal and creative and therefore, as we shall see, sobornal character of moral life itself.

“Every individual person should act morally as he himself would, and not as another person would: his value-bearing act should flow out of the depth of his moral conscience”. This ethical maxim is formu-

43. Please see: “The religious tragedy of world history is found in and comes down to the fact that it is impossible to find any authority in the empirical world which could be the absolute criterion for ecclesiality” [Berdyayev 1907, 193]; “the very concept of church

authority seems to be philosophically ridiculous and internally contradictory, but the rejection of authority in no way leads us to subjectivism and illusionary thinking” [Berdyayev 1907, 198].

lated by Berdyaev as part of his “Experience of a paradoxical ethics”, in a certain juxtaposition to Kant’s categorical imperative [*Berdyaev 1931, 143*] <sup>44</sup>. In doing this, however, he admonishes against confusing personal ethics (“being true to oneself”) with individualistic ethics. For Berdyaev, being true to oneself also often entails self sacrifice. As an example, he uses the tragedy of a character from his beloved Norwegian playwright, Henrik Ibsen:

Ibsen’s *Peer Gynt* wants to be original and affirms individualism. But individualism always kills personality and individuality. *Peer Gynt* was never really himself. He loses his personality and just drifts [*Berdyaev 1931, 144*].

In speaking about the “moral ingenuity” of conscience, Berdyaev affirms that ethics, to a large degree, is dynamic reality — incomplete, open and in the process of creation by the human spirit. The conscience doesn’t merely acclimate to a predetermined world of values and human interrelations; the conscience itself discovers and creates laws according to which relationships can be structured [*Berdyaev 1931, 142*], and in this creativity and search the conscience can delve deeply or be formed in a more superficial way, it can manifest itself either in sobornost and personality, or individualistically. Berdyaev discerns three degrees of sobornost which accord to different depths of personality and degrees of unity — beginning from the more segmentary which is in submission to the necessity of authority, up to the more grace-infused and free: the ethics of law, ethics of redemption, and ethics of creativity.

In that which Berdyaev calls the “old-testament-pagan” ethics of the law [*Berdyaev 1994, 226*], we easily see the primary principle of secular law and Mosaic ethics: my freedom ends where another person’s begins. This is the principle of preservation of life from tyranny and chaos. This is rule which has accommodated itself to the fallen world that has no knowledge of the truth revealed in Christ, that it is “more blessed to give than to receive” <sup>\*1</sup>. We are trained to look at man as a consumer or “user” of freedom. We are accustomed to seeing man’s “radiating” nature oppressed, and man himself more often “consuming” the light of life rather than radiating it [*Berdyaev 1916, 72*] — as posing a threat to his brother rather than being a source of grace-infused power. For this reason, external law is necessary, in order

\*1 Acts 20:35

44. Compare: “The Gospel ethics of redemption and grace directly contradict Kant’s formula: it is impossible to act in such a way as it would become a maxim

for the behaviour of everyone at all times. We can only act individually, and every ‘other’ must act in a different way” [*Berdyaev 1931, 114*].

to regulate undesirable manifestations of man's freedom. In this graceless<sup>45</sup> state of the world and of man, Berdyaev finds primary witness to the fall of man and his degradation, but understands this fall not in terms of categories of guilt and justification, but as: man's loss of his light-bearing power; his inability to be the source of life and freedom; and the disruption of creative energy.

The fundamental contradiction of the ethics of law, which leaves no room for the conscience to consider this form of ethics as final, is formulated as early as in St. Paul<sup>\*2</sup>: the law doesn't give the human person strength and capacity to embody that good which is demanded of him [*Berdyaev 1931, 103*]. But even the ethics of law, despite the individualized and graceless character of relationship to which it is tuned — despite general necessity which is no more in tune with a unique human destiny than so as to guard the human person from the tyranny of his brothers — even this must be recognized as the achievement of human conscience at a certain particular stage of human self-knowledge and societal life.

The more community-oriented and therefore more grace-filled ethics of redemption we might describe in the following way: my own freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the "other", and therefore demands that he be let free. And how could we fail to mention, at this point, Pushkin, whom Berdyaev refers to as "the only Russian writer of the Renaissance type" [*Berdyaev 2008, 55*]:

I'm open now, my heart console  
Not I, would grudge God's very will  
If I might grant to just one soul  
In God's creation freedom, still?<sup>46</sup> [*Pushkin, 7*].

Entering into the experience of redemption also entails the birth of the personality, because it heals the primary loss which keeps the person from becoming fully a person — that very discord in which Berdyaev sees the central and most significant (more significant than sin, per se) trait of fallen man and the fallen world. This healing can be understood as a broadening of conscience, in that it entails the discovery, within the conscience, of man's ability to incorporate into himself the creation, which fell away from him in the fall [*Berdyaev 1994, 136*]. The tragedy of the ethics of redemption is its thirst to overcome the (evil-itself)

45. See, for instance: "The law indeed means that God has deserted man" [*Berdyaev 1931, 112*].

46. Translation of G. Williams.

\*2 Compare Romans 7:14–19



division into good and evil — a task which is insurmountable within the bounds of this word; it's here, specifically, that Christianity begins.

“The most advanced moral consciousness”, but also “youth” and “virginity of the soul” Berdyaev calls the ethics of creativity [*Berdyaev 1931, 151*]. It is within this type of ethics that we find the height of the human person's battle “to be firstborn, for primordially, purity of moral conscience and moral thought” in combatting against “frigid collective moral conscience and thought, the spirit of the age, and public opinion” [*Berdyaev 1931, 144*]. “It is only the human person who is authentically creative and who has a prophetic spirit in terms of inventing moral life”; the human person is the “firey centre of the cosmos” [*Berdyaev 1931, 144*]. The tragedy of the ethics of creativity comes when conflict arises between higher values which can be recognized as equally worthy a person's creative efforts [*Berdyaev 1931, 150*]: this ethics presupposes the sacrifice of good things in the service of better things, and that which is better is determined within the personality of the human being [*Berdyaev 1931, 142*].

A question which would be hard not to ask here is, “how does the human person protect himself from relativism, if the criteria of authenticity and truth are located within him?” The ethics of creativity, therefore, sharply pose the problem of faith in the human person — a faith the complexity of which is particularly compounded by experience of life under the law, in a fallen world full of discord, which is used to believing in truth in terms of external and mandatory criteria. Berdyaev affirms that truth “isn't given objectively, but won creatively”, is the “creative transformation of reality” [*Berdyaev 1996, 21*], and is created by the sobornal, divine-human organism [*Berdyaev 1996, 71*]. Truth is dependent both upon revelation — i. e., upon that which the Lord wishes to reveal here and now, and upon the gifts of the particular human person, i. e., upon how a person answers God's call and offers his heart to God. The latter, as has already been stated, is again dependent upon the degree of connection between people. The ethics of creativity is connected with the unique gifts of the human person and his calling and with the opening out and discovery of the personality; but the human person isn't fully autonomous<sup>47</sup>,

47. According to Berdyaev there are two possible ways around subjectivity. The first is objectification, i. e., to step out into society which has its societally mandatory norms, where “the human person cannot find himself”. The second path is by moving into transcendentality: “This path lies at the heart of exis-

tence, and on this path lies the meeting between God and man and man and other men, with a world that lies in internal existence. This is not a path of objective communication, but of existential communion. The human person becomes authentically himself on this path” [*Berdyaev 1939, 27*].

and it is specifically “through freedom of personal conscience that the human person participates in the sobornal spirit, and not through societal coercion or societal authority” [*Berdyaeu 1931, 145*].

The ethics of creativity “presume an infinite task stretched out before the human person, and the cosmos is incomplete” [*Berdyaeu 1931, 153*], i. e., Berdyaeu is interested in the human person not only as an individual or a participant in a social and intellectual process, but as one who participates in creation and in the Church as “a divine-human process”. For this reason, Berdyaeu’s anthropology is impossible to conceive of outside of his ecclesiological perspective — outside of his “ecclesial gnoseology”, in which the Church — “the new people of Christ” and “fellowship in love”, also acts as an integral subject which creates and perceives, alongside the conscience and spirit of the human person.

In the ethics of creativity, the link between freedom and sobornost is clearly evident: my freedom starts in the other person and is increased by his freedom<sup>48</sup>. Berdyaeu even speaks of the “erotic” character of the ethics of creativity, in contrast to the ethics of law: the ethics of creativity is directed toward another human person and presupposes love “to the person himself as a value in and of himself — as opposed to seeing the value as being simply God “in” the person — i. e. not only to the good in him, the truth in him, and that which is super-human in him. And therefore, it is unknown why the human person is loved — he is loved for no reason at all” [*Berdyaeu 1931, 149*]. This is a direct manifestation of human creativity *ex nihilo*.

It is the ethics of creativity in particular, in which is revealed the positive meaning of freedom and the source of sobornost — given what Berdyaeu says about the Church in its mystical nature — that should be recognized as ecclesial ethics and in and of itself “New Testament”. And not only in that sense that it is accesible to those who have achieved commonality in the “new spiritual people coming from Christ” [*Berdyaeu 1994, 222*], but in the sense that the ethics of creativity builds the Church as the space for life according to one’s calling, and a space for communion in meaning and calling (and somtimes for non-envious competition). And a more timely question for today which Berdyaeu sees here is not a check on the authenticity of the perception,

48. In some sense the question of which comes first: freedom or sobornost, when applied to the works of Berdyaeu, looks like the chicken and egg question. But it is interesting that Radoje Golovich in a recent survey article writes that, “the authentic logic of freedom

in Berdyaeu flows out of sobornost”, and interprets sobornost as the “authentic metaphysical and spiritual human nature” and “a quality internal and spiritual principle” in which can be found “the essence of the human person” [*Golovich, 122*].

but how to have the spiritual daring required for the discernment, “the will for genius”, and the strength of love necessary in order to acquire the gifts of Holy Spirit [*Berdyayev 1911, 3*].

### The Eschatological Sense of Sobornost

Among the most important observations made in theological analyses of sobornost in the works of Berdyayev, it’s worth mentioning that some scholars point to its eschatological vector (in contrast to, for instance, sobornost in Khomyakov<sup>49</sup>) and to its experiential-personal character rather than its objective-historical character, which certainly “does not mean that it (authentic sobornost-like community — S.A.) leaves no trace at all in history” [*Pattison, 184*]. The eschatological sense of sobornost is first and foremost, that it is an appeal to this world, i. e. “to the condition of disassociation and enmity” and to the “prison” in which the human spirit and history find themselves [*Berdyayev 1916, 7*].

For Berdyayev it is important that this appeal is made specifically by the human person, who signifies the end “of this world”, and “a rift in the material world” [*Berdyayev 1931, 51*]. Man “cannot reconcile himself with that which is corruptible and perishable, and with death, i. e., with the ultimate disappearance of himself, and all creation in the past, present and future”. [*Berdyayev 1994, 222*]. History is finite not in and of itself and not only because God is “bigger” than history and poses His own tasks for history, but perhaps because man finds history to be too small for him and searches within history for the meaning which is hidden and repressed by it. The human person has the ambition to judge history, and in this sense the apocalypse cannot be understood merely as God’s judgement over history, but only as a divine human judgement. This judgement begins with the appearance of the God-man Christ in the world, and implies not judicial process, but ifusion with grace<sup>50</sup>.

Sobornost is truly a more abundant and blessed order of being, in which grace is understood not as “power from without”, but as “the discovery of the divine within the human person” [*Berdyayev 1951, 35*], and as a force from within capable of overcoming the discord between people who are united as a “new spiritual race beginning

49. See, for instance: [*Calian, 36; Scaringi, 189*]. In truly considering himself to be an inheritor of Khomyakov in terms of his thinking on sobornost [*Berdyayev 1997, 76*], Berdyayev radically departs from him on the question of eschatology, seeing

in Khomyakov “too much... everyday optimism, which merges into historical optimism” [*Berdyayev 1997, 127*].

50. Compare: John 12:31.

with Christ”<sup>51</sup>. It is very important for Berdyaev that God’s incarnation be understood not only as His kenosis and salvific operation which functions to remove the consequences of the fall of man, and not as the supernatural integration of divine nature into man’s nature, but as a divine-human achievement and “great profit” not only within the human person, but also within God. The birth of man in God fulfils and completes “a tragic incompleteness within God” [*Berdyaev 1916, 124*]. The Church isn’t simply an attempt to “fix” the world which has been broken through the fall of man, but a gain also in relation to paradise:

The Holy Trinity wasn’t revealed within paradise and the Son wasn’t revealed as endless love and sacrifice. <...> The tale of paradise is expressed in such a way as if there were only God the Father — or not even God the Father, because without the Son there is no Father — as if there were just creative power” [*Berdyaev 1931, 41*].

Life in paradise, which Berdyaev calls “vegetative and unconscious”<sup>52</sup>, as opposed to life within the Church — the New Testament — remains, as he notes, “complete in Old Testament categories and not structured in the image of the Divine Holy Trinity” [*Berdyaev 1931, 41*]. Josephine Gabelman associates the eschatological meaning of Berdyaev’s understanding of the emergence of personality with the Pauline “putting off the old self” and “putting on the new self”<sup>\*1</sup>, i. e., with “receiving through grace a new and truer self”. She notes that for Berdyaev, as for St. Paul, “the creation of the new man has an eternal dimension, and insofar as the kingdom of man (Caesar, this world. — S.A.) is bound to the finite, the emergence of personality heralds the presence of an infinite (transformative. — S.A.) power” [*Gabelman, 121*].

David Bonner Richardson correctly points to the fact that in Berdyaev “theory of knowledge and knowledge itself... is one with his mystical

\*1 Col 3:9–10

51. “Theological doctrine says that man is saved through Christ and reconciled with God through Christ’s sacrifice. But at a deeper level it is revealed that man is saved not through Christ but in Christ, within a new spiritual race which comes from Christ, in a new spiritual nature, and in a new spiritual life” [*Berdyaev 1994, 222*].

52. In Berdyaev’s paradoxical understanding of the fall of man as not only loss of freedom, but also “the exit from preconscious natural paradise” [*Berdyaev 1931, 306*] we can see the reminiscences of Kant, who interpreted the myth of the fall of man

as about the appearance of man’s consciousness (see, for instance, “The Presumed Beginning of Human History” (1786)). On the parallels between Berdyaev and Kant in terms of their understandings of the gnoseological consequences of the fall of man and in particular on the subject-object method as a result of the “conscience being split in two”, “resulting from the mythical event of the fall and the deviation of man’s will from a striving for knowledge of truth toward a striving for knowledge of objects”, please see: [*Silantyeva*].

philosophy of history in the final position” [Richardson, 138]<sup>53</sup>. It is worth adding that the eschatology of Berdyaev is not only connected with his gnoseology but also with his ethics: although he underscores that within history the three types of ethics exist concurrently [Berdyaev 1931, 86], it is specifically in that they are “lived out” and eradicated, i. e. in the motion from one to the next, that we see motion towards the end of history and experience eschatological tension. The meaning of history is actually the battle for freedom, for a more blessed, sobornal order of being, the epicentre and source of which is the Church as the existential experience of the meeting between God and man, as divine-human effort to bring discord and competition between people to an end.

It is symptomatic that Resurrection, victory over death as the ultimate division, is also seen through the lens of sobornost: “In ecclesial experience I am not alone, but with all brothers and sisters in the spirit, everywhere from all times” [Berdyaev 1994, 209]. This victory over death itself in the context of “active-creative eschatology”<sup>54</sup> appears as the creative task of achieving sobornal brotherly love and an entirely different order of being. It is exactly in this way that Berdyaev understands the “conditional” interpretation of the apocalypse of N. F. Fyodorov: “If Christian humanity unites in the common brotherly deed of victory over death and general resurrection, then it can escape the fatal end of the world, the appearance of antichrist, judgement day and hell” [Berdyaev 2008, 254–255].

In Berdyaev’s eschatology, revelation about the human person and about the Church cannot be divided and they correspond to each other: it is specifically in the Church that creative revelation about the human person must be made manifest, and this is the “single path to rebirth and development of the stagnant life of the church” [Berdyaev 1916, 322–323]. “Active-creative eschatology” means that the events of divine-human history itself: the creation of the world and of the human person, the fall of man, all of the wealth of Theophany, God becoming Man, His death and Resurrection, the sending of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples, the birth of the Church and the expectance of the end of time — all this has to be conceived of in an existential manner, as the internal experience of the human person and as real events within divine life<sup>55</sup>. The eschatological longing of the germinating human

53. Speaking of his own thought, Berdyaev basically equates eschatology and the philosophy of history. See: [Berdyaev 1969, 5–6].

54. See, for instance: [Berdyaev 2008, 251].

55. See, for instance: [Berdyaev 1994, 132].

person can only be satisfied in Christ, who comes into the life of the human person, captivating the person and calling him to follow Him. But Christ can't simply be read out of holy writ — He reveals Himself where two or three are gathered together in His Name, i. e., within the communities of the saints (all faithful Christians):

The reality of Jesus Christ is shown by the faith of the Christian community but outside of it is seen only in historical reality, almost unnoticeably. <...> The Life of Jesus Christ is not subject to historical objectification, and remains in the realm of existential experience — not only personal, but communitarian (sobornal) [*Berdyayev 1996, 98*].

The most disturbing thought that Berdyayev has is that God is “not a cosmic administrator” [*Berdyayev 1939, 75*], and in this sense He is neither omnipotent nor omniscient. But in light of his teaching on sobornost it is clear that this doesn't belittle or disparage God's power in the least, but only addresses us to a new understanding of this power: God creates “a second god” and is not afraid of sharing life with him. The Church is nothing other than the discovery of this new specific type of power.

## Conclusion

Berdyayev connects his teaching on freedom, creativity and knowing with the Christian revelation of the fact that the human person is placed in this world as a sort of elder, and the realization of his personhood is made dependent upon sobornost — the degree of commonality between people, which is achieved in the Church, within “the new people of Christ”. Berdyayev contrasts ecclesial gnosis to typical subject-object “knowing” (objectification), which happens according to the laws of the fallen world. For Berdyayev, ecclesial gnosis is understood as creative intervention into being, directed eschatologically toward overcoming the disconnectedness and discord which is the ruling order of the fallen world. Ecclesial gnosis, by contrast, is “knowing” that produces the Christification of creation.

Berdyayev's eschatology shifts the focus from both extreme theocentrism, where the end of the world is located in complete dependence upon the will and actions of the Creator, and of secular anthropocentrism, which conceives of the end of the world as an event within the confines of history. The events of mystical history relate to the divine-human existential experience: the birth of God in man and man

in God, the fall of man understood as the release of strife that disrupts their creative forces, and the overcoming of that strife in Christ and the Church, which foreshadows the new revelation of grace. It isn't man who is dependent upon society and cosmic processes, but history and the cosmos upon the interpenetration of life and the fates of people in Christ.

The longing for this interpenetration characterizes sobornal gno-seology, ethics and eschatology of Berdyaev, which together form not simply a theological system, but call our ecclesial consciousness toward the comprehension of the logic of creativity and brotherly love felt in the Realm of the Spirit.

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