

**MAN AND THE CHURCH
IN THE CHRISTIAN THOUGHT OF NICHOLAS BERDYAEV**

An international scholarly conference on the 150th anniversary of the philosopher's birth

Workshop
Berdyaev's Ecclesiological Findings
5 March, 2024

Sobornost occupies the central position in Nikolay Berdyaev's ecclesiological thought; he called sobornost both an inherent property of the Church and a quality "of the personal conscience, standing before God." At the same time, although Berdyaev found the sobornal principle to be inherent to the Russian people, pointing to their communitarian nature, i.e. the ability for deep and sincere fellowship, spiritual brotherhood and penchant for life in community, he did not always find these same qualities in the Russian church. Berdyaev believed that historical Christendom had developed "a Monophysite understanding of the Church", issuing in distrust and suspicion of man's active creativity, and that this was the primary factor hindering "the development of people's fellowship in love as the positive content of ecclesial life".

Wishing to see a unity of divinity and humanity in the Church, in which there would be a place for freedom, creativity, and authentic knowledge acquired through experience in love, Berdyaev thought a great deal about how to restore the principle of the human person within the Church. In considering the present and future of the Church, he affirmed the necessity not only of its "sacral, priestly, life-blessing spirit", but also of its "prophetic, transfiguring and operative life-changing spirit".

Our workshop is designed to provide a forum for discussing Berdyaev's opinions on the fate of the Church within history, and for considering how his ecclesiological findings might, even now, serve toward the restoration and renewal of ecclesial life.

Moderator:

Dmitry Sergeevich Gasak, SFI First Vice Rector

Questions for discussion:

1. The church unity about which the Creed speaks has been understood in different ways at different times in church history, and there have been various different types of attempts to embody this unity. During the Constantinian era of church history, this unity was embodied most obviously in parish-diocesan church structure. Berdyaev, bearing witness to the end of the Constantinian era, thought a great deal about the problem of church unity, its essence and how it might be made manifest. What foundations for church unity do we find in Berdyaev's existential philosophy? What is the role of the human person's freedom in achieving sobornost and unity in the Church?
2. Berdyaev wanted to see the Church not as merely confessional, and not as some sort of corporation or "just another objective reality", but as an attempt to access life's highest qualities – that depth and fullness of life which is "life engraced". At the same time, he recognised that the Church "should not exist only for a chosen few, but for all people

and for the whole world” and that within history, it was necessary for the Church to organise the lives of whole great masses of people, handling all the associated tasks. Does Berdyaev’s creativity provide us with ways to bridge the gap between the contradictory “aristocratic” and “democratic” dimensions of Church life?

3. Following the example of St. Paul, Berdyaev thought a lot about the action of the Spirit beyond the visible boundaries of the Church through such gifts as gnosis, prophecy, genius, and love. In this context, how did Berdyaev pose the problem of the boundaries of the Church and what paths did he foresee for its solution? To what extent are Berdyaev’s findings applicable to life in Russia in the 21st century? How might we pose boundaries for ecclesial creativity?