

Teresa Obolevitch, *Faith and Science in Russian Religious Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 240 pp., ISBN: 9780198838173, \$93.00 (hardcover).

Teresa Obolevitch's new book is an overview through the centuries and the schools of thought of how Orthodox Russians consider secular knowledge and, specifically, scientific knowledge. It challenges the established idea that Russian Orthodox theologians and thinkers influenced by Orthodox mysticism distrust science and rationalism as well. Obolevitch is not a newcomer in the field. She has already published important articles on the subject in Polish and English and also a monograph of reference in French, *La philosophie religieuse russe* (Paris: Cerf, 2014).

What makes the specificity of the background of Russia vis-à-vis Western Europe in regard to the science-religion relationship is the Orthodox tradition and that modern European science was introduced as late as the eighteenth century. Despite this late encounter, the first chapter of Obolevitch's book tackles medieval Russia. Obolevitch deals with the influence of the Greek fathers from Basil to Gregory Palamas and, through them, of Greek rational thought.

Chapter Two deals with the Enlightenment period when science was introduced in Russia. The first great Russian scientist, Michael Lomonosov, Western educated, claimed that the Bible should not be understood literally but rhetorically. During that period, Russian thinkers tried to conciliate the Bible and science, influenced by their Western contemporaries.

In contrast to Western Christianity, Orthodox scholarly theology in Russia was not taught in universities but in theological academies controlled by the church. In Chapter Three, Obolevitch presents facts that show a certain independent spirit existed in these academies and that some professors were not hostile to Darwinism.

The following chapters present the ideas of specific thinkers and schools. Chapter Four presents Peter Chaadaev, the first great figure of Russian philosophy. Chaadaev believed that faith and reason were two reliable paths. He wrote that "when reason tries to know God all by itself, it makes a God with its own hands" (p. 42).

The Slavophile movement that emerged against the Westernisation of Russia at the beginning of the nineteenth century is the subject of Chapter Five. Slavophiles popularised *Philokalia*, an anthology of patristic texts of the Hesychast tradition on prayer and life devoted to God. They thought that *askésis* (the spiritual and physical exercise of the Hesychasts) was more important than *mathésis* (secular learning).

As Obolevitch remarks, Russian literature is an important part of Russian philosophy, and, therefore, in Chapter Six, she deals with Fedor Dostoevsky

and Lev Tolstoy. It is commonly believed that Dostoevsky banned any rational activity because it distorts truth that is beyond comprehension, but Obolevitch remarks that Dostoevsky's position against science was more complex: he thought that God made the human brain capable of grasping only three dimensions, yet more dimensions exist. Contrary to Dostoevsky, Tolstoy believed that Christian truths could be rationally verified. He opposed the Trinitarian nature of God and the dual nature of Christ because it was not rational. As Dostoevsky did, he disliked the necessity and determinism of science. Concerning Darwinism, Tolstoy opposed it for moral reasons.

Chapter Seven presents the Russian philosopher Vladimir Soloviev, who tried to synthesise various philosophical and religious cultures. Soloviev's aim was for 'all-unity' and for integral knowledge that comprises philosophy, theology, and science. Soloviev believed in the rationalisation of faith and turned into a defender of a religious understanding of Darwinism.

Soloviev's efforts for synthesis were continued by Nikolai Lossky, whose thought is presented in Chapter Eight. Lossky tried to synthesise and reconcile physics and metaphysics and, therefore, science and dogma and justify the truths of faith by philosophical means.

The seminal figure of Pavel Florensky, the priest who was hired by Leon Trotsky to help with the electrification of the USSR and executed by the Stalinist regime in 1937, is presented in Chapter Nine. Although sharing Soloviev's all-unity project and the conviction that science and theology are complementary fields of knowledge, he did not believe in a fully explanatory system but in the unknowability of God. Florensky's ideas about the compatibility of science and Christianity led him to defend long out-dated theories of a geocentric system.

The ideas of Semen Frank are presented in Chapter Ten. Influenced by both Eastern and Western Christianity and follower of the all-unity effort, he believed that philosophy must participate in the quest for religious salvation.

Chapter Eleven tackles Russian existential philosophy and, especially, Nikolai Berdyaev and Lev Shestov. Berdyaev believed that freedom was the absolute principle, pre-existing God. Lev Shestov contested the "tyranny of reason" (p. 127) and believed that any scientific truth did not have absolute validity.

The theology of *imiaslavie* (from Greek *onomatodoxia*—to believe in the name) was born during the nineteenth century. According to *imiaslavie*, the name of God is the incarnation of God. In Chapter Twelve, Obolevitch examines the theologian Sergius Bulgakov's and the philosopher Alexei Losev's positions regarding language and the relation of these positions to their views about science. Bulgakov thought that *imiaslavie* reflected the core of Orthodox mysticism, in opposition to European rationalism. Losev developed the