
FREE MAN AND TALION PRINCIPLE IN RUSSIAN BIBLICAL DISCOURSE OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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Abstract

The relevance of studying this topic is determined by two factors: 1) the lack of a comprehensive insight into the crisis processes that have struck modern civilization, 2) the genetic affinity of objective contradictions underlying the ideological crises of the turn of the XIX-XX and XX-XXI centuries. The purpose of this study is to identify the conceptual relationship of religious archetypes with anthropological, legal and ontological spheres of biblical discourse of the twentieth century. The all-encompassing reevaluation of values affected the deep structures of human mind and led to the emergence of new ideals. First of all, the destruction affected the philosophical and religious foundations of the European worldview: The rationalistic optimism is displaced by pessimistic idea, the expansion of religious modernism contributes to the successes of occultism and theosophy, Realism is retreating under the pressure of the Decadence. These processes are directly reflected in the rethinking of the human freedom concept, the question of the meaning and measure of justice and the question of the necessary nature of the institutions recorded in the Old and New Testaments. The authors define the particular features of destruction and deformation of conceptually significant relations present in the biblical discourse. The data obtained upon the analysis show that the archetypes of 'man', 'freedom', 'justice' and 'retribution' in the period of ideological crisis tend to displace or destroy the basic archetypes of biblical discourse and form their own religious, philosophical and legal space, seeking to deploy itself in actual existence. The materials of the article are of practical value for researchers of the religious and philosophical discourse of the twentieth century. In addition, the results obtained can be used in the study of general and particular problems of religious and philosophical anthropology, religious teachings on law and religious and philosophical concepts of culture.

Keywords: biblical discourse, freedom, justice, talion, man

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1. Introduction

The crisis processes that have once again struck civilization, on closer examination, turn out to be a natural continuation of the destructive phenomena of *fin de siècle*. However, the search for works devoted to the nature of these phenomena leads us to disappointing results. In the vast majority of cases, the authors of scholarly research limit themselves to a direct comparison of the current situation with the concepts of K. Leontiev [1], O. Spengler [2] or M. Nordau [3]. Of course, such an approach is a valid one, but it seems to us that today the time has come to focus on the particular aspects, directly related to the issues of human existence in actual being.

In the modern world, man faces one challenge after another. However, often it is man who is the full-fledge co-author of most of these challenges [4]. The latter is quite understandable, since the continuous metamorphoses of personal and social consciousness have a direct impact on the surrounding reality [5, 6]. As a result, the process becomes bi-directional, gradually capturing new 'territories'. Today, just it was before, everything is changing: social stereotypes [7], legal norms [8] and even the sacred text [9]; another thing is that the speed of change is out of all proportion to that in past epochs. As far as the quality of the ongoing metamorphoses is concerned, it seems to us that it remains more or less unchanged. A free person, thirsting for justice in accordance with certain universal institutions, first manifested through the voice of the ancient sophists, repeatedly appeared on the historical stage: the creating man (Renaissance), the building man (Modern Time), the rebelling man (Romanticism), and ultimately the free man (the XXth century). The study of the last incarnation through the prism of its interrelations with the biblical discourse of the century is the main objective of this article.

2. Methodological framework

The subject of this work assumes an integrated approach to the material under study as well as equal application of philosophical-and-religious, historical-and-philosophical, historical-and-legal as well as comparative methods. At the same time, the philosophical and religious nature of the analysed phenomena presupposes the contextual predominance of the first method.

The historical-and-philosophical method is used to reveal the role and place of the studied phenomena both in the historical development of philosophical thought and in the chronologically close crisis of rationalist philosophy, thus constituting the genetic affinity of the 'free man' with the anthropological doctrine of pantheism, the emanatic ontology of Gnosticism and the pantheistic foundations of unity.

The historical-and-legal method helps reveal essential elements in the evolution of a legal component of the biblical doctrine, i.e. to trace the nodal points in application and interpretation of the principle of talion, to define the nature of its interaction with moral-and-ethical and ontological levels of biblical

and pantheistic discourses, as well as to distinguish the law of retribution from talionical idea.

The comparative method in conjunction with the principle of sufficient reason helps ensure: 1) correctness of matching of the intermediate results that provide the basis for scholar description of the ‘free man – the talion principle’ system and its interconnections with the biblical discourse of the twentieth century; 2) objectiveness in identifying the extent and nature of the biblical discourse deformation under the influence of such archetypes as ‘man’, ‘freedom’, ‘justice’, and ‘retribution’; 3) validity of the findings, according to which the mentioned archetypes produce the reality centred around the ‘free man, carrying out fair retribution’.

3. Three probes into the contemporary discourse

3.1. The free man in the context of the spiritual crisis of fin de siècle

The question of freedom has been raised many times in the history of human thought and has been solved as many times. However, after some time, it became clear that the solution did not meet expectations, and the cycle began all over again. It was only in Modern Times that Spinoza, as it seemed, finally resolved the issue [10]. The idea of freedom as the knowledge of necessity suited almost everyone, since it clearly separated freedom from will, thereby reconciling not only the individual and civil society, but also man and the Supreme Being. However, the pantheistic principles of Spinoza’s thesis contained a powerful destructive potential, which fully manifested itself during the crisis of Western European rationalism and the onset of the philosophy of unity. The mystical feelings that were gradually gaining strength were based not only on occult practices and theosophical concepts. One of the key pillars of European, including Russian, mysticism became Neoplatonic and Gnostic pantheism. In this regard, the worldview of a certain part of the Russian intelligentsia turned out to be the most receptive to the pantheistic worldview [11].

Unlike Western European thought, which was mainly limited to one-time experiences of transition ‘beyond good and evil’, Russian thought for many years systematically worked on the creation of a new reality. Resorting to the legacy of V. Solovyov [12] and K. Sluchevsky [13], we can easily identify the starting points of the reasoning, namely, the need to revise the traditional ontology, the need to abandon the traditional epistemology, and the assertion of a paradoxical system of values. Thus, in the essays of Solovyov and Sluchevsky, the Supreme Being of the Testaments is replaced by either an impersonal being or a Supreme Power. At the same time, the idea of creation gives way to emanation. Thus, the physical world initially acquires the status of degraded ‘light’, existing with the sole purpose to restore the lost unity with the original source. Anthropological discourse of the mentioned authors is no less indicative. As early as in the Critique of Abstract Principles, Solovyov declares the possibility of attaining a divine-human state through theurgical activity, saying, “The arrangement of all

our reality is the objective of universal creativity, the subject of great art - the implementation of the divine nature by man in all empirical and natural reality, the deployment of the divine power by man in the very real existence of nature - free theurgy" [12, p. 743]. In turn, K. Slucevsky considers man an essential prerequisite for the sustainable existence of the 'heavenly world - natural world' system: "The nature was created lying dead / Yet not imbued with consciousness and sense. / Thought still remained a precious jewel of / The realms of spirit, and then there we soared! / When after thousands of thousands of quests / And trials and, so say, by sense of touch/ Eventually thought broke through in man / Encompassing the air of these two worlds / Some common veins came into play in them / Thought rushed through veins like blood in human's body/ Transfusing to and fro between the worlds." [13, p. 21]

On the other hand, K. Slucevsky continues his ontological reasoning declaring that man is only *a mean* to achieve the main goal of the existence of the emanatic universe, the driving force of which is the struggle of two aeons (God and Satan) for the sake of returning to the Pleroma: "And long unwinding path was preordained: / Through thought to immortality", and therefore Satan "and God were in need of man: / To whom the man commits himself would win" [13, p. 21]. A conscious being, Slucevsky's man is closer to the aeon of Satan than to the aeon of God. That said, the author's essays obviously feature two types of people. The first type is a man of the soul, devoid of the spiritual (i.e. rational) principle; the second is a thinking (i.e. spiritual) man, who is able to make a choice and, consequently, is free. The latter circumstance points to the ontological unity of the 'thinking man' and the figure representing the global evil in Slucevsky's works, for freedom is one of the main attributes of the satanic mind. It is very important that Solovyov's theurgic idea in no way contradicts Slucevsky's concept, since the individual possessed by God is restricted in his/her actions only by the unlimited will of the Supreme Being.

D. Merezhkovsky brings the idea of a free man to its logical conclusion: "You are yourself your God, you are yourself your neighbour / Oh, be your own Creator, / Be the abyss above, be the abyss below, / Your own beginning and your own end" [14], thus anticipating the demiurgic ambitions of the next century.

3.2. The talion principle in the spiritual quest of the twentieth century

Retribution, performed according to the 'measure for measure' principle, has played an important role in the emergence and development of society for thousands of years. The principle "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" [15], first recorded in the times of Hammurabi, was embodied in the laws of the Old Testament, Evangelistic preaching and numerous utopias that were based on the 'Paradise lost' archetype.

Depending on the goals of the legislator, the original form and particular functions of the talion could be changed. In the Mosaic Law, for example, the cruel law of retribution was watered down by equivalent retaliation; in the Gospel doctrine, it took on the appearance of allegory; in the utopian quest, it turned into

the principle of the existence of an ideal universe. However, the purpose of talion has always remained the same: restoration of justice, elimination of injustice and preservation of the world order established from above.

The Silver Age of Russian culture, formed under the direct influence of the concepts of V. Solovyov [12] and K. Sluchevsky [13], provides many examples of the original understanding and embodiment of the talionic idea. In the ideas of F. Sologub [16], A. Blok [17, 18], N. Gumilyov [19] and M. Voloshin [20], the law of retribution becomes a power, which even the Supreme Being cannot resist. Proceeding from the traditional biblical discourse, the authors create a specific universe, which exists due to retribution and in the name of retribution.

Severely criticizing the Evangelical concept of eternal life, Sologub asserts the idea that “vengeance and retribution” (Deuteronomy 32.35) of the Christian deity are the apotheosis of injustice, because life is the most terrible of punishments. This statement is underlain by Gnostic pantheism. The latter is clearly evidenced by a number of the poet’s program texts (‘I have solved part of the riddle...’, ‘My Supreme Will...’), as well as the original author’s myth about the creative Serpent (‘The Serpent reigning over the Universe...’), synthesizing the teachings of the ophites and Albigenses [16, p. 72; 21; 22].

For Blok, inevitable retribution becomes the purpose of the existence of the theurgist, disappointed with the Eternal Femininity, as well as the purpose of the development of the actual being, literally and figuratively burdened with ‘vampirism’. The world of the Fair Lady, who took and destroyed the soul of the mystical groom, must be irretrievably destroyed in the flame of the world fire. The same fate must befall the real world, since it is the embodiment of the dark side of Soloviev’s Eternal Femininity, which manifests itself as Sophia, but in fact is an aeon formed in the “radiance of nothingness” [18, p. 200].

Gumilyov’s legacy presents a different version of the revaluation of values. The God of the Testaments in the poet’s religious and philosophical system is a usurper who has expelled the true ruler Lucifer. It is especially important that Gumilyov’s ideas are far from traditional Satanism, since they assume neither parody of rites, nor mechanical redistribution of functions, etc. And though Gumilyov’s Christian deity, like angels, has an initial point in time: “It was even before Adam / It wasn’t then God in heaven, but Brahma” [19, p. 246] - it isn’t a creation of Lucifer. For this reason, the application of the talion principle to the deity has some peculiarities. Instead of the classic retribution ‘measure for measure’: “He who builds the tower shall fall. / Frightening will be his way down, / And at the depth of the world’s well / He will curse his maddened mind. // The destroyer will be crushed, / Overturned by broken walls” [19, p. 88], he uses here the ‘like by like’ punishment. In other words, the creature, having an initial point in time, and therefore in space, is doomed to become finite. The first stage of retribution is the restriction of the deity to the space of heaven, and the final one - locking it within the boundaries of the word and death by the hand of man: “But we did forget in earthly worries:/ Only Word is blessed under the Sun, / And the Word is God, tells us the story / In the Gospel, left to us by John. // We imprisoned it in meagre limits / Miserable fence of real world, / And like bees in

empty hives smell badly / Badly smell the dead forever words.” [19, p. 312] It is curious that the world, once subject to this deity, is also doomed, as it together with all its inhabitants is destined to plunge into the fearful light of the pillar of fire. Only those who have preserved the *freedom of perception* will be endowed with life in a renewed existence.

Voloshin’s poem ‘The Ways of Cain’ [20, p. 305-344] provides the completion of the lines outlined by the predecessors. ‘The tragedy of material culture’ manifests itself here as a complex variation of Cain’s story, tracing its origins to the Book of Genesis. A distinctive feature of Voloshin’s narrative is a greater focus on the legal component. The author analyses the historical development of the ‘law-retribution-justice’ triad from different perspectives. He places it in a magical context, immerses it in the world of Indian mythology, and evaluates it in the context of Hobbes’s discourse [23] and philosophy of law. However, at the end of the day Voloshin comes to the conclusion that the basis and purpose of the legal triad is the principle of talion, embodied to the greatest extent in the justice of the transfigured man, who “saw the sun inside himself / In the animal circle... // ...and judged himself” [20, p. 344].

3.3. Biblical discourse of the twentieth century

The Holy Scriptures have repeatedly become the subject of religious, philosophical and poetic speculation. The first examples of speculative experiments can be found in the legends of the ophites, who in fact applied the scheme of mirror parody to Genesis: Yahweh is stupid, ugly and evil, while the Serpent (Ophiomorphos) is clever, handsome and good; the Fall is a good deed, while the expulsion from Paradise is the highest point of unjust retribution, etc. The tradition established by the ophites was continued in lores of Cainites, the Gnostic gospels, as well as in the Manichaeism, Bogomil, Albigensian and Khlysty writings. In the twentieth century, not only prominent representatives of the Silver Age particularly tended to Gnostic reinterpretation of the biblical narrative, but also the authors of dystopias. At the same time, it should be noted that in the case of the latter, Gnosticism was more an ideological reference point, rather than the building material.

The most notable contribution to the deformation of the established biblical discourse was made by the followers of V.S. Solovyov [12] and, first of all, A. Blok [17]. His lyrical trilogy is an experiment of creating a kind of ‘Gospel of Alexander’. Mystifying the reader with the ‘thesis-antithesis-synthesis’ triad, the poet builds a grandiose temple of dark Sophia (quasi-thesis) and extends its power to the world of natural spirits (quasi-antithesis). After that Blok, through the second baptism (physical death), ‘materializes’ the creature, which, subjected to crucifixion with simultaneous burning on a snow (!) fire, goes towards the ‘third baptism’, i.e. the true Death, to finally dehumanize himself in the terrible world (quasi-synthesis) [17, p. 216].

For a decade and a half, Gumilyov vividly described the coming Outcome of the Morning Star and solved the problem of theodicy by justifying Lucifer.

Biblical archetypes in Gumilyov's writings became an integral element of the paradoxical system. Thus, the archetype 'Paradise Lost' was gradually replaced by the author's archetype 'New Paradise', which would be found by liberated Lucifer and his entourage. Gumilyov's eschatology, embodied in the texts of the Pillar of Fire, did not assume Armageddon, the coming of the Antichrist and the Last Judgment [19, p. 309-346]. Restoring justice once trampled upon by Yahweh, the Morning Star meets little resistance, since the Logos (God embodied in word) has already perished.

In the works of Sologub, the deformation of biblical discourse was mainly represented by the author's apocalyptic. The poet parodied the visions of John the Evangelist ("When with the little ones of the heaven I took up arms against hellish creeps...") and predicted the coming victory of "the fiery breath of freedom" and "the holy light of knowledge", whose name is Lucifer [21, p. 25, 74]. At the same time, Sologub's biblical discourse encompasses Genesis and the four Gospels. In the first case, the poet transforms the story of a man's birth, who turns out to be the creation of Lucifer [21, p. 36], and in the second one, the story of Judas, who angered the Creator by not committing murder with his own hand [20, p. 301].

A. Tolstoy ('Aelita') [24] and Y. Zamyatin ('We') [25] also focus only on individual fragments of the Holy Scripture. The former demonizes the narrative of the Exodus by replacing Moses with Magatsitl, the Son of Heaven. The latter doesn't touch on the original biblical text itself, rather offering a pseudo-exegetical commentary, according to which Paradise as a place of absolute unfreedom is the abode of absolute happiness.

4. Discussion

The topic we studied was selectively covered in the special literature. Usually, the researchers mainly focused on specific or related problems. Thus, the works of P. Novgorodtsev [26, 27] touch upon the issues of the relationship of biblical discourse with the emergence of the social idea as well as the place and role of freedom in the theocratic utopia. Y. Trubetskoy [28] studied the peculiar features of the revaluation of values in the doctrine of V. Solovyov.

Contemporary research discourse around the subject studied is usually associated with philosophical [29] or philosophical-and-legal questions [30], and the archetypal level is considered only in its relationships with the talionic system [31].

The problem of deformation and destruction of biblical discourse was touched upon in literary, philosophical, religious and cultural works [32-34]. In addition, S. Slobodnyuk's monographs provide a detailed study of the Gnostic archetypes that form the discourse of the Silver Age and the 'parallel' religious philosophy of modernism in the Russian literature, the problem of talion in the artistic universe, as well as the formation and development of theocratic utopia [35-37]. However, no comprehensive studies have been conducted to date to examine the perspective we have chosen.

Thus, the proposed work for the first time: 1) sets and resolves the question of the existence and functioning of the 'free man - talion principle' system through the prism of its relationship with the biblical discourse of the twentieth century; 2) identifies and describes the particular features of deformation of biblical discourse under the influence of such archetypes as 'man', 'freedom', 'justice', 'retribution', producing the reality, which is centring around 'a free man, carrying out a fair retribution'.

5. Conclusions

The changes in biblical discourse revealed in this work are related not only to the question of human freedom, the question of the meaning and measure of justice, and the question of the necessary nature of Christian institutions. The repression and destruction of the basic archetypes have radically changed the attitude to the central utopian idea, which declares the possibility to find the Paradise lost. The legacy of F. Sologub [21], A. Blok [17] and N. Gumilyov [19] provides three types of utopia of the Paradise *sought and found*. Sologub creates a voluntarist utopia, because it is the free will of man that creates and determines everything in the created continuum of space and time. Blok writes a utopia of fair retribution, while Gumilyov - a utopia of equal retribution. However, the comparison shows that there is a conceptual kinship between the types mentioned.

First, once implemented, these utopias immediately lose their ideal nature. Sologub's 'legend in creation', both in prose and in poetry, degenerates into a world groaning under the yoke of evil Adonai. Gumilyov's Columbus (poem 'The Discovery of America'), who seemingly received the lost Eden as a reward for his achievements, actually finds the cursed earth [19, p. 191-198]. Blok's dark Paradise will disappear in the flame of the world fire to the cries of the twelve apostles of the revolution [17, p. 351].

Secondly, such utopian sentiments directly reflected a complex worldview myth that combined the social aspirations of the twentieth century with the teachings of bliss in the New Testament. Indeed, the socialist declaration of "the right of those deprived to joy" [38] seemingly is in line with eight of the nine commandments of the Sermon on the Mount. However, we must not ignore the significant differences between the Evangelical and Communist understanding of this right. In the first case, "blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matthew 5.3); in the second - 'from each according to their ability, to each according to their need'. Moreover, as we know from history, the crisis ideology easily forgot about the commandment of love, preferring to transform the path of talion indicated by Christ: "And if your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away <...>. And if thy right hand offends thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee." (Matthew 5.29-30). The logic of deformation is simple and clear: why start with yourself, if you can start with the oppressors and exploiters, becoming free and happy.

It should be emphasized here that 'freedom' in the context of the quests of the twentieth century is not just a concept, an ideal, a goal or a dream. In essence,

freedom is a kind of absolute that determines the aspirations of social consciousness, whatever form it takes [39]. In addition, the twentieth century gives a new meaning to the concept of freedom, namely, freedom is the highest justice. On closer examination, we can see that one of the main goals of religious and philosophical quests of the twentieth century was the achievement of freedom as the quintessence of happiness, granted to a free person once he obtains 'Paradise', which, of course, is unattainable, but this fact was eagerly forgotten [40-42].

The conclusion is clear: the idea of possible freedom, embodied in the public consciousness, provoked utopian sentiments that in turn influenced the formation of the utopia of the 'free man', who, in full accordance with the principle of talion, 'expropriates expropriators' to create a utopia of earthly Paradise. The deconstruction of biblical discourse, which placed human freedom at the forefront, predetermined the destruction of utopian thought. Thus, the necessary preconditions were created for the development of theocratic dystopia, the main features of which were outlined in the 'One State', described by Y. Zamyatin [25], and brought to a logical conclusion in 'Dune' by F. Herbert [43].

We consider that the materials of this article are of practical value for researchers studying religious-and-philosophical, philosophical-and-legal as well as aesthetic quests of the twentieth century. The results obtained herein can be applied in interdisciplinary studies devoted to the relations of religious and religious-and-philosophical thought of the twentieth century with fiction literature and other areas of culture.

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