

THE PROBLEM OF THEODICY IN RUSSIAN RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY OF LATE XIX TO EARLY XX CENTURIES

EUGENE ZAITSEV

Zaoksky Adventist University, RUSSIA

Abstract

Particular interest in the problem of theodicy often manifested during periods of social crises and cataclysms. Evidence of this is the main milestone in understanding the problem in the history of philosophy and, in particular, the increased attention of Russian religious philosophers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It was at this time that Russia faced serious socio-political problems that forced many philosophers to return to the eternal questions of good and evil, freedom and responsibility, suffering and redemption, and sin and virtue. The result of this was a significant number of philosophical works devoted to the problem of theodicy. The works of famous Russian religious philosophers, such as Vladimir S. Solovyov, Evgenii N. Trubetskoy, Semyon L. Frank, Nikolay O. Lossky, Nikolai A. Berdyaev, Pavel A. Florensky, Fyodor M. Dostoevsky reflected this problem.

Keywords: theodicy, Russian religious philosophy, Solovyov, Trubetskoy, Frank, Lossky, Berdyaev, Florensky, Dostoevsky

1. Introduction

The problem of theodicy, that is, the existence of evil in a world created by a loving and omnipotent God, has always worried humanity. However, par-

ticular interest in the problem of theodicy has been manifested during periods of social crises and cataclysms. Evidence of this is the increased attention of Russian religious philosophers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries to this problem. It was at this time that Russia faced serious socio-political problems, including the brutal murder of the Russian Tsar Alexander 2, the growth of the revolutionary movement, the Russo-Japanese War, the first Russian Revolution of 1905, the First World War (in which Russia lost 2 million soldiers), and the Bolshevik revolution of 1917. This is only part of the social upheavals that forced many philosophers to return to the eternal problems of good and evil, freedom and responsibility, suffering and redemption, sin and virtue. The result of this was a significant number of philosophical works devoted to theodicy. This problem is reflected in the works of famous Russian religious philosophers such as Vladimir S. Solovyov, Evgenii N. Trubetskoy, Semyon L. Frank, Nikolay O. Lossky, Nikolai A. Berdyaev, Pavel A. Florensky, Fyodor M. Dostoevsky.

We cannot agree with them on everything. In their reasoning, there is often much speculation. The revealed truth of God's Word is mixed with philosophical fabrications. Nevertheless, all these thinkers sincerely tried to solve the problem of the existence of evil in a world created by a loving and omnipotent God. It is extremely important for us to look at how the above-mentioned authors approached the question of God's justification and what assumptions guided them when solving the problem of theodicy. This can help in a more thorough and profound understanding of such an important and complex issue.

2. Vladimir Solovyov's Metaphysics of "All-unity"

One of the central figures in Russian philosophy of the 19th century is Vladimir S. Solovyov (1853–1900).¹ Solovyov solves the problem of theodicy within the framework of his metaphysics of *all-unity*.² Solovyov interprets all-unity as the unity of truth, goodness, and beauty. Solovyov's philosophy of unity has a dual character. On the one hand, there is the desire to remain

¹ According to Paul Valliere he is "the towering figure" in Russian modern thought. See Paul Valliere, "Introduction to the Modern Orthodox Tradition" in John Jr. Witte and Frank S. Alexander, eds., *The Teachings of Modern Christianity on Law, Politics, and Human Nature*, vol. 1. (New York: Columbia University Press 2006), 511.

² All-unity is a philosophical category expressing the organic unity of a universal world existence. It is presented in various philosophical teachings (the most significant of which are Neoplatonism, Christian Platonism, all kinds of pantheistic and panentheistic teachings).

within the boundaries of Christianity through a specific interpretation of Christian dogmas. On the other hand, there is the use of ideas of the Gnostic and Kabbalistic traditions that are alien to Christianity.³

The problem of evil is one of the central problems solved in line with the metaphysics of all-unity. However, Solovyov's reasoning is far from the traditional theodicy proposed for Christianity by Augustine in the 4th century. According to Augustine, evil is not substantial. Evil is not a being and does not have its own nature. It manifests itself only in *privatio boni*, a deficiency or absence of good.⁴

How does Solovyov understand evil? What is the cause of evil and human suffering? Solovyov says the following about the existence of evil: "Opposing oneself to all others and the denial of these others is the fundamental evil of our nature.... Evil inherent in humanity (moral evil) differs from 'radical [metaphysical] evil' ... by the desire to be only for oneself (egoism), the desire to 'put your exclusive self in the place of everything.'"⁵ Being free, the person transforms metaphysical evil into pain and suffering, thereby being the source of the imperfection of the world.⁶

Solovyov developed the problem of theodicy in the form of justification of good as Kant did. He sought to show goodness as truth. In his work, *Justification of the Good: An Essay on Moral Philosophy*, Solovyov formulates his moral and spiritual concept as follows: "I understand Good in essence; it and only it justifies itself and justifies trust in it."⁷ Absolute good, in his opinion, is God expressing the absolute fullness of being, harmony, and regularity/order of the world. Conformity and likeness to God is the ideal to which we must grow. A person, uniting with the will of God, receives a universal rule of action: following Christian values on the path to joining

³ Dominic Rubin, *Holy Russia, Sacred Israel: Jewish-Christian Encounters in Russian Religious Thought* (Brighton, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2010).

⁴ Augustine, *De nat. boni*, 3. Gilson E. *Introduction à l'étude de saint Augustin* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 2016), 187.

⁵ V. S. Solovyov, *Chteniiia o bogochelovechestve [Readings on God-Manhood]* (St.-Peterburg: Hudozhestvennaia literatura, 1994), 153–54 (translation is mine).

⁶ This analysis presupposes Leibniz' threefold distinction of moral, physical, and metaphysical evil. Kant knows only two of them, he indicates the Latin *malum* could be translated by two German words: "übel" (nasty) and "böse" (evil). The metaphysical boundaries (i.e., the finite nature of our cognition) are a given, but not *per se* evil. That is not to say that uncertainty does not trigger a lot of foolish and evil behavior.

⁷ V. S. Solovyov, *Opravdanie dobra. Nравstvennaia filosofiia [Justification of Good. Moral philosophy]*, Soch. v 2-h tomah. T. 1. (Moscow: Mysl', 1988), 79. Vladimir Solovyov, *Justification of the Good: An Essay on Moral Philosophy*, trans. by Nathalie Duddington (London: Constable and Company, 1918; repr. by Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2005).

the absolute fullness of being. Thus, “God is an absolute all-unity, the world (which includes absolute unity as an idea) is an all-unity in the process of development and formation.”⁸

Here, it is important to pay attention to one of the main ideas of his religious philosophy, Sophia—the Soul of the World—which he understood as a mystical cosmic being that unites God with the earthly world.⁹ Sophia represents the eternal feminine in God and, at the same time, God’s plan for the world. Here, we are faced with Solovyov’s very ambiguous position on the issue of God’s goodness. In God as the Absolute, Solovyov believes, two opposites are combined, i.e., the Absolute has a dual nature.¹⁰ The Absolute must “have its other in itself.” This “other” is designated by Solovyov as “primary matter,” “potency of being,” and “becoming all-unity.” For self-revelation, God needs an “other.” The consequence of God’s self-revelation is the falling away of Sophia.

In his theodicy, Solovyov quite consistently reproduces the Gnostic myth of the fall of Sophia. Sophia, who belongs to the divine sphere and is even identified with one of the persons of the Holy Trinity, falls away from God, gaining independence from the divine principle and establishing herself outside of God. Thus, God turns out to be the first and main cause of evil. Solovyov tries to rehabilitate God by attributing all the blame for existing evil to Sophia, but the very characterization of Sophia as Divine in essence, woven into divine unity, makes the apology of God’s goodness impossible.

Speculating on the theme of Sophia, understood by Solovyov in the context of Gnostic and Kabbalistic teachings, Solovyov proposes a solution to the problem of theodicy, which actually affirms the dialectic of good and evil inherent in the very nature of God as the Absolute. This philosopher solves the problem of evil on fundamentally different, non-Christian grounds. Solovyov refused to recognize the devil as the God’s enemy. In his sophiological scheme, the devil becomes in some way unnecessary.

⁸ G. V. Valeeva, *Dukhovnyye tsennosti v kontekste russkoy filosofskoy mysli XIX-XX vv. i sovremennogo obshchestva* [Spiritual values in the context of Russian philosophical thought of 19th–20th centuries and modern society] [Electronic resource] // *Gumanitarnyye vedomosti TGPU im. L. N. Tolstogo*, 16:4 (2015), 32–40. URL: [http://www.tsput.ru/fb/hum/4\(16\)_2015/index.html#32](http://www.tsput.ru/fb/hum/4(16)_2015/index.html#32) (reference date: 30.08.2023).

⁹ Cf. A. V. Akhutin, “Sophia and the Devil: Kant in the Face of Russian Religious Metaphysics,” *Soviet Studies in Philosophy* 29.4 (1991): 59–89.

¹⁰ This idea Solovyov drew from Friedrich Schelling.

3. Evgenii Trubetskoy and the Possibility of Choice

According to Evgenii N. Trubetskoy (1863–1920), the goal of the world process, like Solovyov's, lies in God-manhood or all-unity. He notes that God, as the beginning and the end of world history, creates the world in which He is revealed and incarnated, as well as human being and his freedom, which is a necessary condition for the implementation of all-unity. Trubetskoy resolves the issue of reconciling Divine foreknowledge with the freedom of the created being as follows: "Freedom is violated if Divine foreknowledge would be the cause.... Actions, like all the events in general in time, are not performed at all because God foresees them: on the contrary, God sees them because they are being performed."¹¹ Denial of human freedom would mean the impossibility of any justification of God. Trubetskoy is sure that God is not responsible for existing evils since a person, endowed with freedom, independently realizes his goals: "The source of sin is not the Divine, but the freedom of the creature, its self-determination and falling away from God."¹²

Trubetskoy is convinced that freedom is given to humans so that they can become friends and allies of God. He says: "That gift of freedom given to human, which at first glance seems incompatible with the thought of God's love, in fact represents its necessary discovery and manifestation: only in relation to a free being can love be revealed in all its fullness."¹³ Without free will, humans could not realize the ideal of friendship and love, thanks to which the contradiction between creature and Creator is removed. "The condition for the possibility of friendship between God and man," writes Trubetskoy, "is the possibility of self-determination on both sides—therefore, the possibility of choice on the part of man."¹⁴ But if humans are given freedom, then sooner or later, they will sin. Trubetskoy partly understands this and therefore admits that by allowing the freedom of the creature and self-limiting His divine fullness, God allowed not only the possibility of evil but also its very reality. In his opinion, the only way for God to avoid guilt is to place responsibility for evil on the creatures.

Thus, Trubetskoy sees the source of evil in the world not in God but in the free will of humans. However, he opposes the Manichaeian concept,

¹¹ Valeeva, *Spiritual Values*, 86.

¹² Valeeva, *Spiritual Values*, 80.

¹³ E. N. Trubetskoy, *Smysl zhizni [The Meaning of Life]* (Moscow: Institut russkoy tsivilizatsii, 2011), 351.

¹⁴ Trubetskoy, *The Meaning*, 111.

which justifies the existence of evil in the world by necessity and which asserts the eternity of evil: “Such a theodicy is a grave accusation against Him [God], for it represents Him as a cruel tormentor.”¹⁵ He notes that evil must be overcome through a person’s free choice. “This is not freedom from temptation, but the victory of free will over temptation.”¹⁶ Trubetskoy points out that it is common for a person to accept or not accept the divine idea. It follows that freedom is the cause not only of evil but also of good. He talks about positive (awareness of the meaning of life, renunciation of selfishness, striving for Unity and taking the path of God) and negative (meaninglessness of life, selfishness, renunciation of Unity) manifestations of freedom. Thus, positive freedom is good; negative freedom is evil.

Summing up his philosophical quest regarding the problem of theodicy, Trubetskoy notes that “the freedom of a creature to choose evil is not able to violate the fullness of divine life, because it is not able to produce from itself anything substantial, essential, it gives birth only to empty ghosts.”¹⁷

4. Semyon Frank’s Antinomy of Responsibility and Assault

The Russian religious philosopher Semyon L. Frank (1877–1950) developed a unique and quite paradoxical interpretation of the problem of theodicy. He considers this problem as incomprehensible. Frank views the world as “a kind of dark veil” — something in its nature different from God Himself — something internally unreflective, impersonal, purely “factual,” which precisely constitutes the essence of “worldly” existence.¹⁸ “This pure impersonal facticity in its indifference to ‘truth’ and ‘value’ is itself a kind of defect in being, a kind of evil. And this indifference and lack of understanding of the world opens up the possibility for the dominance of all kinds of evil in it.”¹⁹ Thus, Frank builds a unique space of evil — this is the space of the created world.

The presence of evil does not affect the truth of God’s existence because

¹⁵ E. N. Trubetskoy, *Smysl zhizni [The Meaning of Life]* (Moscow: Respublika, 1994), 88.

¹⁶ Trubetskoy, *The Meaning*, 83.

¹⁷ Trubetskoy, *The Meaning*, 92.

¹⁸ S. L. Frank, *Nepostizhimoe [The Unfathomable]* (Moscow: AST, 2007), 468. Semyon Frank, *The Unfathomable. An Ontological Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, trans. by Boris Jakim (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press 1983).

¹⁹ Frank, *The Unfathomable*.

the reality of God is more self-evident than the reality of facts; this is the reality of God as Almighty and All-Merciful. It follows that the connection between God and, so to speak, the bad empirical world is antinomic, trans-rational, and self-evident only as incomprehensible. In other words, "the problem of theodicy is unsolvable rationally, and, as a result, unsolvable at all. To explain evil means to find its basis, its meaning, that is, to justify it. But this contradicts the very essence of evil, as something that should not have happened."²⁰ This thought is consonant with the words of Ellen G. White, who wrote: "It is impossible to explain the origin of sin so as to give a reason for its existence.... Sin is an intruder, for whose presence no reason can be given. It is mysterious, unaccountable; to excuse it is to defend it. Could excuse for it be found, or cause be shown for its existence, it would cease to be sin."²¹

Who is to blame for the existence of evil? In answering this question, Frank refuses to explain the origin of evil with freedom of choice because choice already presupposes the existence of evil. Thus, there is an antinomy between our own responsibility for evil, on the one hand, and the power of evil affecting us, on the other hand. Responsibility for evil rests with that original element of reality, which, although in God (for everything, without exception, is in God), is not God Himself or something contrary to Him. Evil arises from inexpressible chaos, which is, as it were, on the border between God and not God. This chaos is given to humanity as its own self, as a bottomless depth that connects it with God and, at the same time, separates it from Him. This is why guilt in sin and for evil is realized; this awareness leads to the overcoming and elimination of evil by restoring the broken unity with God.

Suffering plays a key role here. Without suffering, says Frank, there is no perfection; God Himself, the God-man, has experienced suffering. But the falling away from being, that is, from God, and the split in unity exists only in our human aspect. In the divine aspect, the total unity remains forever unbroken. In the aspect of His eternity, God is all in all. Despite all the problems of evil, the world in its ultimate basis and essence, is a transformed reality — the kingdom of God. Thus, Frank concludes: "Every solution to the problem of theodicy is, therefore, a conscious or unconscious denial of evil as evil—an impossible and illegitimate attempt to perceive or understand evil as good, an attempt to see the meaning of that, the very essence of which

²⁰ S. L. Frank, *Svet vo t'me. Opyt hristianskoy etiki and social'noy filosofii* (Moscow: Faktorial, 1998), 139.

²¹ Ellen G. White, *Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1950), 492.

is meaninglessness."²² This conclusion brings Frank's position closer to the Irenaean theodicy, which proposes to see the potential good in evil.²³

5. Nikolay Lossky's Idea of Substantial Agent

An attempt at a philosophical understanding of theodicy is also made by the famous Russian thinker Nikolay O. Lossky (1870–1965). Lossky approaches the problem of theodicy through the categories of good and evil. Good deserves approval and a worthy existence, while evil deserves blame and an unworthy existence. However, when dealing with the complex content of life, it is easy to fall into the mistake of not noticing the evil disguised as good or not appreciating the good even when it has its shortcomings. In order to avoid making a mistake, Lossky proposes to approve a kind of "absolutely perfect and comprehensive" measure of goodness, which will become the basis for all other assessments. He calls this highest good God. "God is Good itself in the comprehensive meaning of this word: He is Truth itself, Beauty itself, Moral Good, Life, etc. Thus, God, and precisely each person of the Holy Trinity, is an all-embracing Absolute Value in its own right."²⁴ In his work, *God and Cosmic Evil*, Lossky admits that "the world lies in evil."²⁵ The philosopher sets himself on the task of answering the question of how it is possible for God, being Almighty, All-Good, and All-Knowing, to create a world in which so much evil is committed so that, nevertheless, God was not in any way the cause or creator of evil.

He placed the idea of God-manhood at the basis of his theodicy. At the same time, Lossky writes:

The doctrine of the God-man, in the form in which it is widespread and factually shared by many Christian believers, does not give a clear answer to the question of how the God-man, the son of God, contributes to the perfection of the whole world, the first moment of its existence, moreover, it also contains new mysteries, it belittles both the Logos and His humanity, and then raises doubts and leads to the falling away from

²² Frank, *Nepostizhimoe*, p. 472.

²³ The "Irenaean Theodicy" is not an alternative to the argument of free will, but presupposes it as a constitutive component. The existence of free will allows the genesis of morality.

²⁴ N. O. Lossky, *God and Cosmic Evil* (Moscow: Republika, 1994), 344.

²⁵ Lossky, *God and Cosmic Evil*, 3.

Christianity of many people when they begin to try with their minds to think through the foundations of Christianity.²⁶

Like many philosophers, Lossky sees free will as the cause of evil. He explains his concept of freedom this way:

We must remember that freedom is really freedom — an open path up or down, presented to the independent, unforced decision of God's creatures. In freedom lies the possibility of both the highest good and the lowest evil. God has endowed his creatures, together with freedom, with all the means for the existence of good; if, despite this, any creature embarks on the path of evil, then the beginning of this evil lies only in this creature itself, and responsibility for evil falls entirely on it. However, the very blame of the being who committed evil already contains, according to Augustine, praise to God, since only a being endowed with freedom to realize good can commit evil. The possibility (but not the reality) of evil is the condition of the possibility and reality of good.²⁷

Lossky solves the problem of theodicy in the context of his metaphysical system. Lossky's metaphysics is a variant of Leibniz's constructions. He uses the meaning of the term "monad," replacing it with the concept of "substantial agent," at the same time significantly complementing Leibniz's monadology in that he emphasizes the greater creative power, activity, and freedom as its main quality.

The concept of a substantial figure, along with the Absolute (God), is basic for Lossky in his system of justification of God. The substantial agent is created by God, but this is not yet an actual personality, but only its potential. A real personality is a being who freely, consciously, and independently uses his/her powers to realize absolute values and is guided by them in his/her life. The substantial agent must independently and freely use its God-created properties in order to prove to be a real person. If God directly created a real person, this would conflict with his/her free will. Depending on whether a person chooses absolute or relative values, it belongs either to the kingdom of God, in which absolute values flourish, or to the kingdom of sin, inhabited by sinful, egoistic beings who have fallen away from God.

Many substantial agents have misused their freedom and realized the actuality of evil. According to Lossky, we ourselves have created our own

²⁶ N. O. Lossky, *Izbrannoe [Selected Works]* (Moscow: Pravda, 1991), 382.

²⁷ Lossky, *Izbrannoe*, 566.

imperfect life. We ourselves are the authors of evil, and all the suffering we experience is a sad but well-deserved consequence of our guilt. According to Lossky, he developed a theory of free will that refutes determinism and explains in detail why beings created by God can only be free agents.

6. Nikolai Berdyaev and the Meaning of History

Russian religious philosopher Nikolai A. Berdyaev (1874–1948) connects the problem of the justification of God with the meaning of history. In his work, *Philosophy of Freedom*, in the chapter “The Origin of Evil and the Meaning of History,” Berdyaev states the fact that humanity is passionate about the idea of progress and reveals the “perniciousness” and “vanity” of this idea: “Each generation is eaten by the next generation, manures the soil for the flowering of the young life with its corpses.”²⁸ As he notes, to understand the world, its creation, and the meaning of its history means to justify God for existing evil, especially for the Fall, which is the beginning of world history. Consequently, world history is the history of sin. “The basis of history in sin, the meaning of history is in the atonement of sin and the return of creation to the Creator.”²⁹ This presupposes its movement toward atonement and the end of history, which is, therefore, an obligatory, meaning-forming element of history. Berdyaev speaks of a certain feeling of “some terrible crime” that is characteristic of all living beings and that “everyone participated in this crime and is responsible for it.”³⁰

That is why Berdyaev once again repeats the need to recognize the original sin and, as a result, evil; otherwise, the meaning of history disappears: “If there were no evil afflicting our world, then humanity would be content with natural peace. The natural world, free from all evil and suffering, would become the only deity for man. If there were no evil and the grief generated by it, then there would be no need for deliverance.”³¹

Sin, according to Berdyaev, occurred as a result of the self-affirmation of the creature, as a result of the falling away from God of the *World Soul*, demonstrating simultaneously its free will. As a result, world/cosmic evil appears in three forms:

²⁸ N. A. Berdyaev, *Filosofia svobody* (Moscow: AST, 2007), 115. Nicolas Berdyaev, *The Philosophy of Freedom*, tr. by Stephen Janos (Mohrsville, PA: Frsj Publications, 2020).

²⁹ N. A. Berdyaev, *Filosofia svobody* (Moscow: AST, 2010), 172.

³⁰ Berdyaev, *Filosofia*, 119.

³¹ Berdyaev, *Filosofia*, 162.

- 1) "Evil is a falling away from absolute existence, accomplished by an act of freedom";
- 2) "Evil is a creation that has deified itself";
- 3) "Evil is a violation of hierarchical subordination."³²

The main source of evil, for Berdyaev, is in the first definition of evil as a falling away from absolute being. Here, the emphasis is placed on the self-affirmation of the creature, which is the main cause of evil. In his work, *The Human and the Divine*, he says that it consists "in a false self-affirmation, in spiritual pride, which posits the source of life not in God, but in selfhood, in oneself."³³ Berdyaev separately examines the phenomenon of human suffering. He writes: "I suffer, therefore I exist."³⁴ Suffering is, as it were, an important element of existence, communion with the World's sorrow, making one feel in suffering the unity of the whole world and even God, who is forced to accept suffering. As Berdyaev himself believes, the idea of God's suffering, to some extent, solves the problem of theodicy. Berdyaev rejects the idea of suffering as punishment for sins and comes to the idea that there is not only the powerlessness of humans before evil, but there is also "the powerlessness of God himself as a Creative force."³⁵ Nevertheless, the new proof of the existence of God put forward by Berdyaev—the existence of evil—seems peculiar. The question of evil can only arise within the framework of a religious system. Without an appeal to religious concepts and ideas (especially Christian ones), it is generally impossible to talk about any evil. Otherwise, evil thins out, turning into a faceless fact, a natural necessity.

7. Pavel Florensky's Burden to Reach the Hearts of the Intelligentsia

The problem of theodicy occupies a serious place in the works of the famous Russian religious philosopher, scientist, and priest Pavel A. Florensky (1882–1937). Florensky devoted his master's thesis to this issue, which he called *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*. For Florensky, theodicy was the

³² Berdyaev, *Filosofia*, 128.

³³ Berdyaev, *Filosofia*, 164.

³⁴ N. A. Berdyaev, *Ekzistencial'naia dialektika bozhestvennogo i chelovechskogo* (Moscow: AST, 2005), 394. *The Divine and the Human* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1949/San Rafael, CA: Semantron Press, 2009).

³⁵ Berdyaev, *Ekzistencial'naia*, 400.

science and art of truly understanding Christianity and its role in the real spiritual development of humans.

Developing the idea of theodicy, Florensky saw the comprehension of its content in the unity of two ideas or paths—theodicy and anthropodicy. The first path is our ascent to God. This path can be considered to be theoretical. This path could lead to an understanding of the purpose of religion, the essence of dogmas, the meaning of knowing the Truth, and overcoming doubts, which, in turn, could lead to the transformation of a person through the experience of living faith and self-awareness. The second path, the descent of God to us, is essentially practical, more difficult, and connected to the structure of the inner spiritual world of humans.

According to Florensky, both

theodicy, as the path upward, our ascent to God, and anthropodicy as the path down, as the descent of God to us, are accomplished by the energy of God in the human environment. How is this possible? ... How can a weak human face come into contact with God's truth? ... Of course, neither the path of theodicy nor the path of anthropodicy can be strictly isolated from one another. Every movement in the field of religion antinomically combines the path of ascent with the path of descent. By being convinced of the truth of God, we thereby open our hearts for the descent of grace into it. And vice versa, by opening our hearts to grace, we brighten our consciousness and see God's truth more clearly.³⁶

Florensky's interest in the problem of theodicy, on the one hand, was an expression of the need for the movement of the progressive part of society towards new spiritual values; on the other hand, it reflected confusion in the face of the danger of the growth of terrorism, and the influence of dogmatism, nihilism, and Marxism in the country. Florensky's main goal was to reach the hearts of the intelligentsia, which was already in search of a way out of the spiritual crisis. He believed that only the intelligentsia could become a lighthouse for society, although it itself needed self-education to increase its educational role in society. Florensky's theodicy was designed for personal self-improvement. It was built on the basis of an original system of knowledge of God—knowledge of God through the combination of church-

³⁶ Pavel A. Florensky, *Stolp i utverzhdenie Istiny. Opyt pravoslavnoy teoditsei* (Moscow: AST, 1990), 819. See Pavel A. Florensky, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth: An Essay in Orthodox Theodicy in Twelve Letters*, trans. by Boris Jakim (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

liness, science, symbols, the practice of self-purification, and self-improvement. Only through this can God be justified.

At the center of Florensky's theodicy is the substantiation of the ideal of Christ as the God-man and His mission on earth. The main task is to teach believers to live a God-like, grace-filled life and to move in their development toward the divine-human image. Florensky, analyzing the New Testament episode of the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan, when Christ fulfilled "all righteousness," believes that this is precisely what the truth was. It was *kenosis*, "adopting the form of a slave." That was the greatest feat in the history of humanity. Christ came not to dominate but to serve. Florensky considers the transition of the Son of God to the state of *kenosis* as an expression of His inner nature, that is, the realization of His Theanthropic essence. Florensky's theodicy is a kind of Christodicy—the justification of Christ as a unique image of the God-man, a specific historical person in the flesh and Spirit, where the construction of one's own likeness to God depends on the conscious assimilation of the ideal of Christ, the actualization of His character, which a person must develop in himself, improving his moral qualities.

8. Fyodor Dostoevsky and the Source of Evil

In analyzing the problem of theodicy and attempts by Russian religious philosophers of the 19th to 20th centuries to resolve it, it is impossible to ignore the work of the outstanding Russian writer Fyodor M. Dostoevsky (1821–1881). His work can rightfully be called unique. Dostoevsky was not just a writer, a master of words who sought truth in the dialogue of human souls; he was the creator of a new artistic model of the world. Dostoevsky writes about the everyday life of his contemporaries, but at the same time, he poses eternal questions to the reader, trying to grasp the fundamental problems of humanity's past, present, and future. The writer repeatedly addresses the problem of the meaning of life and the justification of God and the world of God in the face of the suffering that exists in it, especially the suffering of the innocent. Since childhood, the book of Job was one of Dostoevsky's favorites.

Dostoevsky denies the idea that evil is necessary for there to be complete harmony in nature or so that through evil one can come to true knowledge of good. He proceeds from the fact that God cannot be the cause of evil. His main idea is that only a free person can be the source of evil. Commenting on Dostoevsky's views, Lossky writes the following:

After all, when a person is free, he bears direct responsibility for the actions he has committed. In no case should crimes be justified by the influence of the external environment and society, because by taking such a justification seriously, all responsibility for his/her activities is removed from the person. Thus, according to Dostoevsky's views, a person is free, he/she can choose between good and evil. Only he is the master of his choice, and no one can influence him.³⁷

Through all the works of Dostoevsky, there runs the motif of finding the "inner Kingdom of God."³⁸ Dostoevsky is in love with the beauty of the world. He is drawn to the light and joy that can bestow the kingdom of God within humans. He devotes his entire life and all his work to finding out the reasons that alienate a person from God, giving rise only to alienation and loss of spiritual values. That is why, even after many decades, Dostoevsky's work does not lose its relevance, giving food for thought to a person living at the present time.

Dostoevsky is known all over the world as the author of socio-philosophical and psychological novels, in which he assigns a huge role to "small and poor" people. This paradigm of his work was set by his first work, *Poor Folk*. The novel is written in epistolary form. Makar Alek-seevich Devushkin and Varenka Dobroselova write letters to each other (there are fifty-four of them in the novel), in which they share their joys and troubles, experiences, thoughts, and discoveries. The novel is distinguished by its deep psychologism: all attention is paid to the inner world of the characters, their feelings, and emotions.

The central problem of the work is poverty. Here, it is a factor that gives rise to a special human condition, mental poverty. Physical poverty, constant hunger, poor living conditions, shabby clothes, and holey shoes become less significant for the hero compared to the state of hopelessness, defenselessness, and humiliation to which they condemn a person. The author criticizes the existing system, where rich people, indifferent, greedy, and evil, humiliate poor and defenseless people. The latter, in their situation, lose all hope for the best, cease to value themselves, and easily lose dignity and honor.

Nevertheless, the main hero of the novel does not want to put up with the existing order. For the first time in Dostoevsky's work, words were put into Makar Devushkin's mouth that pose the problem of theodicy: "Why

³⁷ N. O. Lossky, *Tsenmost' I Bytie* (Moscow: AST, 2000), 106.

³⁸ Based on the Christ's words "the kingdom of God is within you" in Luke 17:21 (NIV).

does it all happen that a good person is in desolation, but to someone else happiness is coming itself?"³⁹ This question is reminiscent of Asaph's question in Ps 73. In the society described by Dostoevsky, justice works for rich people, while the poor are completely deprived of it. The author does not provide a solution to the problem of the existence of injustice, but the heroes find their salvation in each other. Communication and mutual assistance help them to live on, overcoming the darkness that has gathered around them.

Thus, in his first novel, *Poor Folk*, Dostoevsky mentions the problem of theodicy but does not yet try to reveal it fully. Here, he only raises the problem of the injustice of the world, the suffering of innocent "little" people, without trying to find the cause of suffering or the source of the existence of evil. A possible solution to the problem could be that two desperate souls find salvation in each other, and cruel reality and inhumanity can only be overcome if a person can find within himself the strength to sincerely love and do good, which can lift even the "smallest" person above misfortune.

The last novel by Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, became, according to researchers, the most perfect work of the writer, which contains the spiritual richness of all the works he had previously created. *The Brothers Karamazov* is called a theodicy novel.⁴⁰ As an epigraph to the novel, Dostoevsky uses a quote from the New Testament: "Truly, truly, I say to you: if a grain of wheat, falling into the ground, does not die, then only one will remain; and if he dies, he will bear much fruit" (John 12:24). However, this parable has a continuation that logically completes it: "He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (John 12:25). Thus, Dostoevsky's novel becomes, as it were, an illustration of a parable: it talks about the eternal quest and torment of the human soul. The writer addresses the problems of human existence and raises the question of the cause of evil and suffering in each of his works, starting from the very first. However, *The Brothers Karamazov* absorbed the experience of all previous works and reflected the problem of theodicy much more deeply.

An important semantic significance in the above-mentioned work is carried by the meeting of the Karamazov family with the elder Zosima in the second book of the novel, "Inappropriate Meeting," where discussions about misfortune and suffering begin. Elder Zosima says that the cause of

³⁹ Fyodor M. Dostoevsky, *Bednye ljudi* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya literatura, 1977), 91.

⁴⁰ Volf Schmid, *Proza kak Poeziia. Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Chekhov, avangard* (Saint Petersburg: Inapress, 1998), 77.

human dissatisfaction is lies, primarily lies to oneself. If a person lies to themselves, it means that they are afraid to see themselves as they really are. A person who deceives themselves becomes unsure of themselves. They develop many fears, and irritability and anger are added to this. So, one of the reasons for the existence of evil and suffering is human lies. This is not surprising because lying is the main attribute of the enemy of God, and it was thanks to it that the serpent in the Garden of Eden was able to win the first people to his side. That is why the writer, through the mouth of elder Zosima, encourages people to look at themselves without lies and try to know themselves.

Readers are struck by the depth of the confession of Ivan Karamazov, the middle brother, a man of science, a philosopher, and an atheist. He is the author of the poem "The Grand Inquisitor," where the old cardinal criticizes the actions of God, in his opinion, indifferent and cruel, and of Christ demanding too much from people. Ivan talks a lot about the terrible acts that humanity commits, from which innocent and defenseless people suffer. He sees only evil around him; therefore, he does not understand how God can exist in such a world. In his confession, Ivan appeals to the text of the Holy Scripture, which indicates his knowledge of the Bible. However, when turning to it, he always interprets it in a sense convenient for himself, without expressing confidence in what is written.

Ivan talks a lot about the existence of evil in the world: "I think that if the devil does not exist and, therefore, man created him, then he created him in his own image and likeness."⁴¹ Completely turning over the biblical text, which says that man was created in the image and likeness of God, he puts man in the role of "creator," and this is the next thought that confirms the idea already given in the words of elder Zosima that man himself is the source of evil in the world. However, there is a fundamental difference between Ivan and the elder: Ivan, in his judgments, constantly strives to take the place of a judge, while the elder warns people against condemnation.

Among the biblical books that Dostoevsky refers to in all his works, the book of Job occupies a special place in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Elder Zosima remembers it in his last conversation. It is loved by Gregory, a pious servant, and quoted by the devil in Ivan's hallucinations. The author introduces this book into the context of the work in order to demonstrate the fact that grief and suffering in a person's life can turn into joy. We can talk about certain

⁴¹ Fyodor M. Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazovs* (Minsk: Sovetskaia Enciclopedia, 1981), 336.

conscious parallels between the book of Job and the novel *The Brothers Karamazov*: in the latter, there is also a man who, like the righteous Job, is forced to overcome enormous difficulties, not only his own but also his relatives, without having sinned against God. This is Alyosha Karamazov in this work.

Another hero of the novel, Dmitry (also called Mitya) Karamazov, experiences a spiritual rebirth, which leads a person to a state of fullness of life. He, being in a state of deep despair, does not see a way out of this situation. However, the writer shows that it is precisely in those darkest times of his life, when he is humiliated and trampled, that man is most capable of finding light since he is more naked before God, who opens the door to His world for humanity. Mitya has a dream in which he witnesses the suffering of a child and his mother. This image symbolizes Dmitry's spiritual renewal. As a result of his spiritual transformation, Mitya begins to echo elder Zosima's words about the guilt of each person before others.

In the novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky not only poses the problem of theodicy but also looks for the reasons for the existence of evil and suffering in the behavior of his heroes. Everyone here bears the burden of their own suffering; everyone has their own character, vices, and desires. The author gives the floor to all his characters and, despite the fact that they all look at the world through the prism of their own worldview, almost everyone agrees that the source of the existence of evil is man himself and only when a person can look at himself without lies will he stop judging others, and only by looking at his own sins, will he be able to defeat evil.

The work of Dostoevsky, in its entirety, is addressed to people with pure hearts who have experienced suffering and found the strength to seek salvation. In his works, divine light and biblical truth burst into a world dominated by money, power, selfishness, and jealousy, illuminating the goodness, hope, and love that still exist in the world. Again and again, readers have been enthusiastic about the emotional intensity (*nadryv*), which is constantly kept at full speed in Dostoevsky's novel work with themes such as illness, obsession, passion, perversion, crime, suicide, remorse, repentance, and self-sacrifice. Crime, disease, sexuality, religion, and politics are deliberately used to captivate the reader. Of course, not everyone liked the heated atmosphere of the novels, which are full of religious, psychological, philosophical, and often also literary thoughts.

Dostoevsky spent his entire creative life denouncing evil. Each of his characters tried to move from a state of melancholy and guilt to life in its entirety, to find the meaning of life, and live in harmony with oneself. Thus, Dostoevsky's work embodies the eternal search for "heaven on earth," and

in this search, the primary role is played by the writer's dialogue with the Bible and an attempt to comprehend the painful and, in fact, insoluble problem of theodicy.

9. Some Critical Observations and Summary

The positions we have examined on the issue of theodicy of key figures in Russian religious philosophy of the late 19th–early 20th centuries, show once again how complex this problem is for humanity. The presence of evil in the world created by a loving and omnipotent God certainly requires an explanation. Trying to find an adequate solution for this problem, a whole plethora of Russian thinkers made attempts to defend the loving and all-good character of God from accusations of involvement in evil. The solutions that these philosophers offer do not always seem convincing and do not satisfy the restless human heart. This is partly due to the fact that many of them, although they try to think within the framework of the Christian tradition, introduce into their reasoning elements alien to biblical Christianity.

Thus, Vladimir Solovyov, within the framework of his philosophical system of all-unity, developed the idea of God as a kind of metaphysical principle, as the Absolute, permeating all that exists. This offers a solution to the problem of theodicy in a way that affirms the dialectic of good and evil, inherent in the very nature of God as the Absolute. The problem of evil is solved by this philosopher on fundamentally non-Christian grounds. In fact, Solovyov departs from the personalistic characteristics of both God and God's adversary, the devil and Satan. Refusing to recognize the devil, presented on the pages of Holy Scripture as a personal being opposing God, he speculates around the theme of Sophia, developing it in the context of Gnostic and Kabbalistic teachings. The characterization of Sophia as imbued with the principle of divine unity makes the apology of God's goodness, as a result, impossible.

The problem of theodicy in Evgenii Trubetskoy is solved within the framework of his teaching on God-manhood, which, however, goes beyond the Christological understanding and approaches Solovyov's idea of all-unity. However, he departs from the doctrine of the divine Sophia, understood in esoteric terms, directing his reasoning within the framework of the freedom of created beings. Responsibility for the evil that exists in the world is thus placed on the free will of the beings created by God. Freedom is understood by Trubetskoy as a necessary condition for the realization of the

ideal of friendship-love between God the Creator and the world of His creation. This idea brings the thinker closer to the biblical understanding of divine-human relationship.

Semyon Frank refuses to explain the origin of evil by freedom of choice, because choice already presupposes the existence of evil. Reasoning about the problem of theodicy, he comes to the conclusion that this problem is insoluble in principle. To explain evil means to find its basis, its meaning, i.e., to justify it. This idea, as we have emphasized, is consonant with the words of Ellen G. White, who wrote about the impossibility of logically justifying the origin and existence of sin, considering the emergence of sin an incomprehensible mystery. Frank concludes that, despite the problem of evil, the world in its ultimate essence is a transformed being, the Kingdom of God.

Nikolay Lossky, like many other philosophers, sees the cause of evil in the free will of people. Human beings themselves created their imperfect life, they themselves are the culprit of evil and suffering. Lossky proposes a theory of free will, which, as he himself believes, refutes determinism and thoroughly explains why beings created by God can only be free agents. Lossky builds his position under the influence of Leibniz's system, replacing his monadology with the concept of a "substantial agent." A substantial agent had to independently and freely use his God-given properties in order to prove to be a real person. In his reasoning, Lossky, however, departs from the biblical anthropology and orthodox position on the issue of the creation of humanity, according to which human beings were directly created by God in His image and likeness as free beings.

Closer to the biblical understanding of the problem of evil is the position of Nikolai Berdyaev, who connects the problem of justifying God with the meaning of history. He actively uses the biblical category of sin, declaring that the basis of history is in sin, and the meaning of history is in the atonement of sin and the return of creation to the Creator. We can agree with the philosopher's statement that the main cause of evil is false self-affirmation, spiritual pride, which places the source of life not in God, but in the self, in oneself.

Quite interesting and valuable for us are the discussions on the problem of theodicy of Pavel Florensky. At the center of Florensky's theodicy is the justification of Christ as the God-man and His mission among people. It is *kenosis*, "taking the image of a slave" that represents the greatest feat in the history of mankind. Christ did not come to rule, but to serve. Florensky considers the transition of the Son of God to the state of *kenosis* as an expression of His inner nature, that is, the realization of His God-human essence. Thus,

Florensky's theodicy is a kind of Christodicy — the justification of Christ as an individual image of the God-man, a specific historical person in the flesh and Spirit. The emphasis on Christ's mission, and especially His death on the cross, gives true keys to solving the problem of theodicy. We can say that the cross of the God-Man is the most convincing theodicy. The construction of one's own likeness to God depends on the conscious assimilation of the ideal of Christ, which human beings must develop in themselves, improving their moral qualities.

Finally, we have given attention to the works of the famous Russian writer and existentialist philosopher Fyodor Dostoevsky. His novels are about the eternal quests and torments of the human soul. The writer addresses the problems of human existence, raising the question of the reasons that distance humanity from God, which give rise only to alienation and a loss of spiritual values. The motif of humans finding the "inner Kingdom of God" runs through all of Dostoevsky's works. Dostoevsky is in love with the beauty of the world created by God, he is drawn to the light and joy that can grant the Kingdom of God within the human soul. We are convinced that Dostoevsky's works do not lose their relevance, giving food for serious reflection to a person living at the present time.

To summarize, it should be said that at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries in Russian religious thought, there was a pronounced interest in the problem of theodicy. This interest was facilitated by the tense situation in society, serious socio-political cataclysms, and the obvious increase in evil among people. A variety of options for explaining evil and justifying God were proposed by Russian philosophers who tried to comprehend and resolve the very complex and painful problem of theodicy. There is much speculation in their reasoning, and we cannot agree with everything. One thing is clear: theodicy still remains the most pressing problem of humanity, and the search for answers to questions that arise again and again will continue.