

L. P. Karsavin on Dogma and the Christian Roots of European Culture

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Підсумок

А. Валевиčius, автор цієї статті про російського мислителя Л.П. Карсавіна, є професором богослов'ї в Університеті Шербрук, в Кебеку, Канада. У статті описані погляди Карсавіна відносно природи догмів як таких, поняття все-єдиства, і християнських корінів європейської культури. Карсавін народився в Петербурзі в 1882 р., де закінчив студії з історії і богослов'ї. 1922 р. його вигнано з Радянського Союзу. П'ять років пізніше він перебирає кафедру історії в університеті в Кавнасі, в Литві. По Другій Світовій Війні його вивезено советами до Абезського лагера в Арктиці, де він загинув 1952 р. Карсавін розвинув глибокі поняття про все-єдинство й про синтезу всього, які знаходять своє підложжя в три-єдинстві. Основа всієї дійсности і основний абсолют – це триєдинний Бог. У Христі знаходимо уосіблення й поєднання абсолютів правди, краси й добра. Воплочення лучить віру й розум – бо Слово («розум») стало плоттю. Християнство поєднало геленізм, юдейство, орієнтальні релігії і західню релігійність, і перебороло індивідуалізм і релятивізм геленістичної філософії. Ці плоди й вияви поєднання та синтези поволі затрачуються в європейському мисленні, де наприклад вперше квестіонується науку про Святу Трійцю. В модерній добі постає прірва між вірою й знанням, що веде до раціоналізму і емпірицизму.

Наука про *filioque* прийнята на Заході – це, на думку Карсавіна, вияв недоцінення особи Святого Духа. Другорядність Святого Духа, якого завдання мало б бути обожествлення світу, веде до відлучення світу від Бога. Космос перестає бути епіфанією – богоявленням. Згодом сама Церква стає зівітченою «установою» від якої відлучується державу і суспільство взагалі. Карсавін вважав, що справжня християнська наука, це «панентеїзм» – Бог у всьому. У системі Карсавіна теїзм, натомість, це світогляд, який робить з Бога предмет, а пантеїзм, який легко, але мильно утотожнюється з пантентеїзмом є проти справжньої природи. речей.

Life

Lev Platonovitch Karsavin, son of a ballet dancer and brother of the famous ballerina Tamara Karsavina, was born in St. Petersburg in 1882. He grew up under the modest circumstances of an artistic family. After completing his studies in history at the University of St. Petersburg, he left for Italy and specialized in medieval western European history, working primarily in the Vatican archives. His first two historical studies were: *Traits of Religious Life in Italy in the XII-XIII Centuries* (1912)¹, and *The Foundations of Medieval Religiosity in the XII-XIII Centuries with Emphasis on Italy* (1915)². Soon after the publication of the latter work which was his doctoral thesis, Karsavin became a professor of history at the University of St. Petersburg.

Karsavin also received a doctorate in theology from the St. Petersburg Theological Academy which was a very rare event for a layman. In the few years before the Revolution, Karsavin was among the founders of a religious-philosophical society to which he dedicated a great amount of his energy. When the Revolution of 1917 disrupted regular university activities, Karsavin began to dedicate himself exclusively to religious and philosophical themes. It was during this period that he wrote books such as

¹ *Ocherki religioznoi zhizni v Italii XII-XIII vekov*. St. Petersburg, 1912.

² *Osnovy srednevekovoi religioznosti v XII-XIII vekakh preimushchestvenno v Italii*. Petrograd, 1915.

Saligia (Or a Brief and Edifying Treatise on God, the World, Man, Evil and the Seven Deadly Sins), 1919³; *An Introduction to History*, 1920⁴; *Roman Catholicism*, 1918⁵; *Medieval Culture: Monasticism in the Middle Ages*, 1922⁶; *Of Science, Doubt and Faith*, 1925⁷; *The East, the West and the Russian Idea*, 1922⁸; *Dialogues*, 1923⁹; *Giordano Bruno*, 1923¹⁰; *The Philosophy of History*, 1923¹¹; and *Noctes Petropolitanae*, 1922¹². This last work, which is a metaphysical treatise on love, unfortunately had a negative effect upon Karsavin's reputation as a philosopher and probably accounts for his subsequent writings, which were philosophically much more systematic and substantial, being neglected by his peers.¹³ Thus Karsavin never acquired the fame of other Russian thinkers such as Berdiaev, Bulgakov or Frank.

In 1922, Karsavin was exiled from the Soviet Union. He settled at first in Berlin and then in Paris. For a while he was active among the Russian exile intelligentsia as a member of the Eurasian Society, but, being a very individual thinker, soon lost contact with them. In exile, Karsavin earned his living by writing for different periodicals and encyclopedias in German, Italian and Czech. He wrote the following books: *On First Principles*,

³ *Saligia*. Petrograd: Nauka i shkola, 1919.

⁴ *Vvedenie v istoriiu*. Petrograd: Ogni, 1920.

⁵ *Katolichestvo*. Petrograd, 1918. Reprint: Bruxelles: Zhizn' s Bogom, 1974.

⁶ *Kultura srednikh vekov*. Petrograd: Ogni, 1922.

⁷ *O somnenii, nauke i vere*. Berlin: Evraziiskoe knigoizdatel'stvo, 1925.

⁸ *Vostok, zapad i russkaia ideia*. Peterburg: Academia, 1922. Available from University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

⁹ *Dialogi*. Berlin: Obelisk, 1923.

¹⁰ *Giordano Bruno*. Berlin: Obelisk, 1923.

¹¹ *Filosofia istorii*. Berlin: Obelisk, 1923.

¹² *Noctes Petropolitanae*. Peterburg, 1922.

¹³ See Gustav Wetter, "Zum Zeitproblem in der Philosophie des Ostens: Die Theorie der 'Allzeitlichkeit' bei L. P. Karsavin," *Scholastik* 20-24 (no. 3 1949) 345-66.

1925¹⁴; *Peri Archon, Or Ideas on Christian Metaphysics*, 1928¹⁵; and *On Personality*, 1929¹⁶.

In 1927, Karsavin was offered two chairs in history; one at Oxford and one at Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas, Lithuania. Much to the dismay of this family, he chose Kaunas. His family at first refused to go, and stayed behind in Paris. Later, however, his wife and two of his three daughters joined him. It was at Kaunas that Karsavin began to dedicate himself to the study of history once again. Having learned Lithuanian after only one year, he began to write his monumental five-volume *History of European Culture*¹⁷ in Lithuanian, which was published between 1931 and 1941. His last religious and philosophical work was *The Poem of Death*, 1932¹⁸.

In 1947 or 1948, Karsavin was arrested and eventually sent to the Abezi labour camp in the polar circle. There he died on July 12, 1952.¹⁹ During his prison years, he managed to write a number of short philosophical treatises and a series of sonnets.²⁰

Karsavin as Historian

From his *History of European Culture* alone, one can see that Karsavin was a great historian. Unfortunately, this work is virtually unknown outside of a small circle of readers. Even the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* (Bolshaia sovietskaia enciclopedia) makes no mention of it. The depth and scope of this voluminous

¹⁴ *O nachalakh*. Berlin: Obelisk, 1925.

¹⁵ *Peri Archon (Ideen zur christlichen Metaphysik)*, Humanitariniu mokslu fakultetrai, vol. V, III. Kaunas. 1928.

¹⁶ *O lichnosti*, Commentationes ordinis philologorum universitatis lituanae lib. V, III. Kaunas, 1029.

¹⁷ *Eurpos kulturos istorija*. 5 vols. Kaunas: Spindulys, 1931-1937. Volume one has been reprinted: Vilnius: Vaga, 1991.

¹⁸ *Poema o smerti*. Kaunas. 1932.

¹⁹ In 1990, "Foyer Oriental Chrétien" in Bruxelles published the memoirs of A. A. Vaneev, who had spent two years living alongside Karsavin: *Dva goda v Abezi. Pamiat' o L.P. Karsavine* (Two Years in Abezi: Reminiscences of L.P. Karsavin). The book makes for extraordinary reading.

²⁰ Those that have "survived" are contained in Vaneev's book.

work of Karsavin has been compared to the work of the English historian Christopher Dawson (1889-1970) who also described, with great erudition, the Christian roots of European culture.²¹

However, Karsavin is not just an ordinary historian. The *leitmotif* of his thought is pan-unity (a discussion of which shall follow later). In this *History of Philosophy*, he writes: [T]he highest aim of historical thinking is to apprehend the whole cosmos, the whole created pan-unity, as a single developing subject."²² Karsavin's conception of historical development differs sharply from the positivist conception of progress. Nicholas Lossky, in his article on Karsavin, wrote: "[I]n the pan-unity every moment of development is recognized as qualitatively equivalent to every other and not one is regarded as merely a means or a stage of transition to the final end; empirically, the moments have a different value according to the extent to which pan-unity is revealed in them."²³

Karsavin likened the development of history to the "organic" development of an individual. As the personality of a person is realized in the specific moments of his existence and activity, so too are individuals the realization of one of the specific moments of the "supra-personality, "the social aspect. "Living and realizing my own ideals, I am an individual personality. Living and realizing the ideals of my nation, I am a social personality."²⁴ Similarly, in history we observe the development of a society, of a nation, of humanity, just as we observe the development of an individual biography. The "supra" or "general" is realized in its "individualization" or individual moments (in societies). These individual moments in turn have already been or are conditioned by this "supra" individual (the sum of history in the process of realizing itself). Basically it is the schema of unity in plurality, but this plurality is only possible due to the antecedent unity. In other

²¹ See Juozas Jakštas, *Lietuviu tautos praeitis* [The Past of the Lithuanian Nation] Vol. 6, Book 1 (1977) 53-71.

²² L.P. Karsavin, *Filosofija istorii*, 77. Hereafter: *Philosophy of History*.

²³ Nicholas Lossky, "L.P. Karsavin" in *History of Russian Philosophy* (New York: International Universities Press, 1951) 308.

²⁴ *Istorijos teorija* [Theory of History] (Kaunas, 1929) 10.