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HRYHORIJ SKOVORODA — PHILOSOPHER OR THEOLOGIAN?*

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True scholarly research must strive to rectify or complete accepted scholarly, scientific, or popular views. In fact, one of its most important tasks is constant verification, perfection, and development of the heritage of knowledge. It is therefore often necessary to perform a somewhat radical evaluation of conclusions of various branches of knowledge, or to compose a fuller and more exact characterization of an individual, or to elucidate the creativity and heritage of a personage in scholarship, art, social and political life, etc. Such evaluation, of course, often necessitates correction or even rejection of antiquated views. Or it introduces classification closer to objective reality and not tinted nor dictated by an ideology accepted *a priori*, by philosophical or scientific systems, nor by other purely subjective motives.

This paper is a result of such considerations and of initial investigation of the character and literary heritage of Hryhorij Skovoroda. This figure, who is certainly the most distinguished and most original Ukrainian thinker, is characterized by almost all scholarly and popular publications as a "philosopher" and the "founder of the so-called philosophy of the heart"¹, a Western mystic in Ukraine², a writer³, etc.

The most absurd evaluation of Hryhorij Skovoroda is proposed by the "Soviet scholarship", which tentitiously claims that "philosophical views of Skovoroda evolved in the direction of materialism and were characterized by a constantly sharper presentation of social problems and a striving to definitively liberate himself from the bondage of idealism and religion."⁴

The last authoritative word of free Ukrainian scholarship on this subject was a brief characterization of Hryhorij Skovoroda by I. Mirtschuk:⁵

The greatest Ukrainian philosopher was Gregory Skovoroda (1722 - 94), a contemporary of Kant; his influence spread to other Slavic countries. Born into a Kozak family in the province of Poltava, he studied at the Kiev Academy and later abroad, in Vienna, Munich, and Breslau. Skovoroda, who is generally known as the "Ukrainian Socrates", wrote his works in the form of dialogues and made a profound anthropologism the source of his philosophical contemplation. To him man is the greatest riddle in life, and self-knowledge the most important means for its solution. The philosophical system of Skovoroda embraces three aspects: the ontological, the cognitive, and the ethical. According to him, man is a microcosm reflecting the macrocosm. In order to get to know the universe one must first know man, that is, oneself. Self-knowledge, therefore, was for Skovoroda the first aim of philosophy which he approached with the Socratic maxim "Know thyself." The universe had two aspects for him, one visible and material which was worthless, and the other invisible and spiritual, which was of inestimable value and to which alone man's life should be dedicated. However, the search for truth is not an end in itself, but only a means which prompts us to exercise our wills and to use our hearts. The great value of Skovoroda's philosophy lies, therefore, not in his theoretical speculations, but in his practical quest for happiness. It is happiness, which, according to Skovoroda, is the aim of our lives; not, however, the happiness which results from material satisfaction, but that which comes to us when we fulfil our inner quest, and, through it, God's will. Thus self-knowledge and living one's life according to the natural order and therefore in accord with God are the major premises of Skovoroda's thought. He was a keen student of the Bible which he carried with him wherever he went.

The remark concerning Skovoroda's unceasing love of Sacred Scripture is of great importance.⁶ Was Skovoroda a philosopher or a theologian?

The fundamental distinction between theology and philosophy can be reduced to the mode of knowledge and to the fount of truth. The theologian discerns the acceptance of the divine self-