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УДК 234.12

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**УЧЕНИЕ ОБ ОПРАВДАНИИ В МАГИСТЕРСКОЙ  
 ДИССЕРТАЦИИ СЕРГЕЯ СТАРГОРОДСКОГО И ЕГО КРИТИКА  
 В РУССКОЙ ПРАВОСЛАВНОЙ ЦЕРКВИ**

Статья носит обзорный историографический характер и представляет собой попытку показать особенности восприятия «Православного учения о спасении» Патриарха Сергия Старагородского православными богословами XX–XXI вв. Большинство исследователей отмечают, что работа Старагородского является важной вехой, отмечающей переход православной сотериологии от влияния Запада и юридического понимания оправдания к независимому «органическому» пониманию оправдания в восточном православии. Однако оценка такого перехода варьируется от благожелательного признания до полного отрицания. Тем не менее, интерес к наследию Старагородского достаточно велик, о чем свидетельствуют публикации и конференции последних лет. Наследие Старагородского малоизучено в англоязычном мире и представляется, что данный обзор поспособствует росту научного интереса к его диссертации и богословию.

Ключевые слова: православная академия, диссертация, богословие, живая церковь, обновленцы

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*DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION IN SERGIUS STRAGORODSKY'S  
 MASTER'S THESIS AND ITS CRITIQUE  
 IN THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH*

The article is an overview of historiographical nature and attempts to identify the features of the emergence of the «Orthodox doctrine of salvation» by Patriarch Sergius Stragorodsky by Orthodox theologians of the 20–21<sup>st</sup> centuries. In most cases, it is noted that Stragorodsky's work is a sharp transitional milestone, marking Orthodox soteriology from a journal of Western and legal justification to an independent organic understanding of justification in Eastern Orthodoxy. However, the assessment of such a transition varies from benevolent recognition to complete rejection. Nevertheless, the interest in Stargorodsky's legacy is quite large, which is confirmed by the publication and conferences of recent years. The legacy of Stargorodsky is little studied in the Russian-speaking world and it is assumed that this review contributes to the growth of scientific interest in his dissertation and theology.

*Key words:* Orthodox Academy, dissertation, theology, living church, renovationists

The life of Patriarch Sergius overlapped the crucial period of history of Russia — the dramatic change of the course of its civil history and the turbulent period in the history of the church.

Sergius Stragorodsky, born Ivan Nikolayevich Stragorodsky (January 11, 1867 – May 15, 1944) can unmistakably be listed among the most controversial Patriarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church. There are several most important aspects of his life and ministry that are subject of controversy:

- His Master's degree thesis on the Orthodox teaching of salvation;
- His participating in the so-called Living Church (or Renovationist schism);
- His collaboration with the Stalin's regime.

However, the most important theological work of Patriarch Sergius, his famous *Orthodox Teaching of Salvation*, received little or no attention by researchers whose native language is English.

In 1895 Stragorodsky defended his Master's thesis in theology. It is to our advantage that the official documents of both favorable and critical reviews of Stragorodsky's thesis in theology are available for our use. His «Orthodox Teaching of Salvation» was positively evaluated by Metropolitan Antony Khrapovitsky, Rector of the Academy, and neutrally assessed by V. Sokolov, an extra-ordinary Professor in the Department of History and Comparative Western Confessions.

It is significant to observe that he received his Master's degree after the reform of the theological education in the Russian Empire in 1869. The reform elevated the levels of both pedagogy and scholarship in theological institutions. Until 1869, for example, the Doctor of theology was an honorary degree, awarded on the basis of the significance of the works written by the given theologian. After the reform, however, both Master of theology and Doctor of theology became the degrees which needed to be earned by way of conducting an independent research and defending the submitted thesis and dissertation. The process also included preliminary review of the thesis, its publication, and the official oral disputation in front of scholars who do not agree with the conclusions of the research. The educational reform of 1869 extended even to the minor, so-called «candidate's degrees» in theology. Lower in standard than the master's and doctor's degrees

to be sure, but these degrees also included a process of peer review and academic discussion by the same Academic Council that awarded Master and Doctor of theology degrees<sup>1</sup>.

In 1895, having come to Russia on vacation, Archimandrite Sergius found time to defend his dissertation entitled «Orthodox doctrine of salvation. The experience of revealing the moral and subjective side of salvation on the basis of the Holy Scriptures and the works of the Holy fathers» at the Moscow Theological Academy.

It is interesting to observe the nature of his work on the Master thesis. Antony Khrapovitsky recalls in the notes to his «Doctrine of Redemption»:

Stragorodsky was made a Master of theology almost by force. That is, when he served one year as the inspector of the Moscow Academy he was sent to a warm climate for temporary sinecure in the abbots of the Embassy Church in Athens. His friends urged him to revise there at leisure his work for a Master's degree. But Father Sergius, in response, waved his hand and said that he would never seek academic degrees. At that time, he was asked to at least publish his candidate's thesis in our new journal, «The Theological Bulletin». To this he consented, and was completely unaware that his articles were preserved in prints, bound together, and submitted to the Council at the end of printing, as a dissertation. The council elects reviewers and opponents, hears their reviews, and by the time the author arrives on vacation, the petition is selected from him and a dispute is appointed. The discussion was so interesting that at the end of it Professor Klyuchevsky told me this: «I literally enjoyed these two hours; in 24 years — the era of academic debate — we have not had anything like this». Such a contrast was the talented author, alien to any ambition, to many masters and doctors of recent years, when the preparation of dissertations almost ceases to be an act of scientific curiosity, but only an official career, and is often performed by hiring for money, which is reflected in the comic episodes on the debates<sup>2</sup>.

This observation shows that the Master's thesis of Stragorodsky was an amplified version of his Candidate's thesis, the editing

<sup>1</sup> Сухова Н. Ю. Система научно-богословской аттестации в России в XIX – начале XX в. М., 2009. С. 301.

<sup>2</sup> Храповицкий А. Догмат искупления // Богословский вестник. 1917. Т. 2. № 8/9. С. 165.

of which was very insignificant. It is also important to observe that Stragorodsky is 28 years old at the time and this is one of his first experiences of theological academic writing. However from 1895 to 1910 it was published four times and remains the most important of Stragorodsky's theological heritage. However, its reception has never been homogeneous — neither at his lifetime nor up to the present. The reception of Stragorodsky's thesis comprises both favorable and critical evaluations by his contemporaries and a wide scale of assessments by modern Eastern-Orthodox theologians.

#### FAVORABLE RESPONSE

Metropolitan Antony Khrapovitsky should be listed first among admirers of Stragorodsky's approach to justification. As stated above it was not merely academic contacts that bound Stragorodsky and Khrapovitsky but also long-lasting friendship. Upon graduation of the Academy Stragorodsky gave to his dear teacher a *panagia* with the image of the Vladimir Mother of God, on which the inscription was made: «To my dear teacher and friend. Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out» (Matthew 25: 8).

Khrapovitsky was the one who inspired Sergius to become a monk and influenced his theological formation. It is thus of no surprise that Khrapovitsky's reference of the Master's thesis was entirely positive.

In his reference paper to Stragorodsky's thesis Khrapovitsky pays tribute not only to the methodology of the work but primarily to the conclusions reached by the author: «In this way, both virtue (good works) and faith are necessary conditions or means of salvation»<sup>3</sup>.

Khrapovitsky's assessment of the thesis surpasses the usual evaluation of an academic paper:

In view of these properties and merits of the work, we recognize it as an outstanding work in the domestic theology, which is destined to occupy a very honorable place in the history of the disclosure of an important subject of spiritual life, and we consider the dissertation of Father Archimandrite fully deserving of the degree of Master of theology<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Сергей Страгородский. Православное Учение о спасении. Казань, 1898. С. 234.

<sup>4</sup> Сергей Страгородский. Православное Учение о спасении. С. 235.

Another devotee of Stragorodsky as a theologian was Professor Vladimir Lossky — a prominent Russian-Orthodox theologian, representative of the Paris school of theology and promoter of neo-patristic synthesis and «theosis» approach in soteriology.

After the death of Patriarch Sergius, Lossky wrote about him in the article «The personality and thought of His Holiness Patriarch Sergius» the following words:

Until the end of time, the Church will preserve the memory of the great saint along with other names that every Christian knows... Everything was great in the life of the great Sergius, who only for the last few months of his episcopal ministry bore the rank of Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia<sup>5</sup>.

Sergius Stragorodsky was the one whose position Lossky defended in the sophiological controversy with Bulgakov. It is his work «Orthodox teaching on Salvation» that influenced Lossky's soteriological views considerably. Stragorodsky develops «the moral-subjective» soteriology as opposed to the Western forensic concept of salvation. The critique of the forensic idea of salvation is the main content of his work. Following Metropolitan Sergius Stragorodsky, Lossky characterizes Bulgakov's method of theologizing as working outside tradition and subordinated to an alien philosophical system<sup>6</sup>. It was on the basis of the report of Lossky that Sergius anathematized sophiology in 1935.

#### CRITICAL RESPONSE

Professor Vasilij Sokolov was one of the official opponents of Stragorodsky during the defense of the thesis. He summarizes the conclusion of the paper in a similar manner to Khrapovitsky: «The basis of the research is the identity (oneness) of salvation and moral perfection». Sokolov pays what is due to academic merits of the paper however he does not share the enthusiasm of Khrapovitsky. Moreover he openly criticizes the conclusions and states one-sidedness of the paper:

It seems to us that due to the intense struggle against the so-called legal theory and some enthusiasm for the accepted rule, the author's

<sup>5</sup> Патриарх Сергей и его духовное наследство. М., 1947. С. 263.

<sup>6</sup> Zaitsev E. Analysis and Evaluation of Vladimir Lossky's Doctrine of Theosis; PhD diss. Andrews University, 1998. P. 78.

work is one-sided and therefore makes a somewhat peculiar impression on the reader. The author touches so little on the objective side of the atonement that the reader completely forgets about it and is sometimes inclined to think that, as if, in the course of the author's thoughts, there is no longer any room for it. In Orthodox theological courses, it is commonly expressed that the Lord Jesus Christ is our Redeemer, who offered Himself to God as a sacrifice for the sins of all people, and gave them mercy and forgiveness, and brought satisfaction to the offended truth of God. The Lord accomplished our salvation.... as the High Priest, offering Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the world, and in this way satisfied us with the truth of God... Between the two, not only this aspect of the subject is not revealed, but sometimes there are expressions that can give rise to perplexity to unsteady and dogmatic readers<sup>7</sup>.

But the most systematic and consistent critic of Stragorodsky's exposition of Orthodox soteriology was Archbishop Seraphim Sobolev (1881–1950). His written response to Sergius' thesis consisted of eleven chapters. In the conclusion he writes:

Of course, the most important error among all others is his denial of the legal concept of life, contrary to Divine Revelation and patristic teaching. This error, as we have noted, leads to the overthrow of all Divine economy, because it rejects one of the foundations of our redemption and salvation — Divine justice.

Therefore, we cannot call the «Orthodox Doctrine of salvation» by Archimandrite Sergius Orthodox, and we consider that this teaching is contrary to the Holy One. According to the Scriptures and the patristic teaching, it must be rejected by the Orthodox Church<sup>8</sup>.

Firstly, one should note that this severe criticism Bishop Sobolev could afford only in 1943 being abroad and secure from Sergius's authority.

Secondly, if we study the criticism of Bishop Sobolev we will have to acknowledge the shallowness of his research and argumentation. It covers only the first chapter of Stragorodsky's thesis and mainly revolves around the concept of forensic approach. For Seraphim Sobolev it is the greatest vice of Stragorodsky that he denies the scholastic

<sup>7</sup> Сергей Страгородский. Православное Учение о спасении. С. 237–238.

<sup>8</sup> Соболев С. Искажение православной истины в русской богословской мысли. URL: [https://azbyka.ru/otechnik/Serafim\\_Sobolev/iskazhenie-pravoslavnoj-istiny-v-russkoj-bogoslovskoj-mysli/](https://azbyka.ru/otechnik/Serafim_Sobolev/iskazhenie-pravoslavnoj-istiny-v-russkoj-bogoslovskoj-mysli/) (дата обращения: 22.12.2021)

legalism for it is — according to Sobolev — the very Orthodox teaching of God's justice revenging the wicked and bestowing honors to the good.

Here, as we have already said, Sergius is trying to prove that legal good-doing has no moral Christian value. To this end, he calls the good work of reward and punishment pagan, and the representative of this good work calls the selfish and the enemy of God, and depicts him with the features of the scribes and Pharisees, to whom the Lord spoke, «You do the works of your father...»<sup>9</sup>

If the self-lover, whom Archimandrite Sergius considers a representative of legal good-doing, is so hostile to God, then how can we assume that he, although not free from selfishness and other passions, although slavishly, still serves God, cuts off his self-loving desires, thereby destroys sin and fulfills the Divine law, i.e., does the works of God, and not the devil's. It is obvious that there is a contradiction here, which has its root in a wrong idea of the spiritual life. The passion of selfishness attacks all people and even the true ascetics of Christ. But if a person struggles with it, fulfills the law of God, although with compulsion ... then he cannot be called a selfish person<sup>10</sup>.

Bishop Viktor of Glasov (Ostrovidov) — unlike Bishop Seraphim — reacted to Stragorodsky's thesis already in 1911. He published an anonymous article (subscribed it as «Wonderer») in heterodox old-believers' magazine «Church». The article entitled «New Theologians» focused on the unusual soteriological approach of Antony Khrapovitsky and Sergius Stragorodsky. Ostrovidov foresaw the destructive consequences of the new teaching.

The article stresses the novelty of the approach:

A new theological trend has recently been created in the Russian Church, the reason for which was the desire to somehow revive the dead theological science in the minds of believers, freeing the Christian faith itself from its obscurity and formality. The main creators of the school of this direction are the Archbishops Anthony (Khrapovitsky) and Sergius (Stragorodsky), whose scientific works, as if, can be considered a revival of the true patristic teaching<sup>11</sup>.

Bishop Viktor articulates the deviation of Stragorodsky and Khrapovitsky as an attempt to exclude the supernatural from

<sup>9</sup> Соболев С. Искажение православной истины...

<sup>10</sup> Соболев С. Искажение православной истины...

<sup>11</sup> Островидов В. Новые богословы // Церковь. 1912. № 16. С. 381–383.



the discourse of salvation and explain it in terms of practical spiritual life. The main bulk of the article illustrates this understanding on the example of Stragorodsky's treatment of the Sacrament of Baptism. Ostrovidov contrasts it with numerous Church Fathers who describe it so that «through the holy sacrament of baptism, «all that is necessary for the salvation of man passes from Christ the Lord to the believer who is baptized, and is assimilated to him not nominally (that is, in words), but essentially». Thus — according to Bishop Viktor — it is quite the opposite to Stragorodsky's opinion which he quotes:

After all, the soul is not some substance, so that such a voluntary transformation of a person is possible in it, «the archbishop theologizes. And a person cannot be a passive object for the action of a supernatural (Divine) power... and baptism itself is not some external magical action on the person being baptized»... it is «a great test of a person's conscience, a turning point in life. After all, if the holy sacrament of baptism, in itself, in its essence, through the faith of the baptized person or his recipients in the Crucified One, gave a real complete renewal of life, then a person would only be a weak-willed object of someone else's influence, and the sanctity received by him in this way would not differ in any way from the sanctity born, which has no moral dignity»<sup>12</sup>.

Likewise Ostrovidov criticizes Stragorodsky's exposition of justification:

Hence it is clear that «if justification is not a magical matter, but a moral one, if its essence is a change in the life definition of a person, a change that is only completed by grace, but is produced by the will of a person», then the cleansing of the sins of the baptized person, of course, does not require the cleansing sacrifice of Calvary. For in justification, according to the teaching of the new theologians, everything depends not on the assimilation of the fruits of the redeeming death of the God-Man, but on a moral mental break<sup>13</sup>.

Ostrovidov compares the new teaching to Socinianism which downplays the redemptive meaning of Christ's sacrifice and emphasizes its moral-didactic meaning.

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<sup>12</sup> Островидов В. Новые богословы // Церковь. 1912. № 16. С. 381–383.

<sup>13</sup> Островидов В. Новые богословы // Церковь. 1912. № 16. С. 381–383.

It was the observation of Viktor Ostrovidov that the theologian of the Russian Church Abroad — Vladimir Moss — took as the basis for his article «The pelagian roots of Sergianism».

The Roman-Catholic theologian, professor and Jesuit priest Alois Bukowski in his «Die Genugtuung für die Sünde nach der Auffassung der russischen Orthodoxie» (1911) generally gives a critical overview of Stragorodsky's thesis<sup>14</sup>.

#### EVALUATION BY MODERN EASTERN-ORTHODOX THEOLOGAINS

The reception of Stragorodsky's thesis in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>th</sup> centuries parallels the fluctuation of the previous generation of theologians. The opinions range from fervent repulsion (V. Moss), to neutral recognition as the trend of time (A. Leonov) and jubilant panegyric (P. Gnedich, N. Lisovoy, A. Osipov).

It is interesting to observe that in his critique of followers of Stragorodsky — neo-sotererologists, as he calls them — Vladimir Moss compares them to Protestants:

...the new soteriologists try to relegate justice to a role subsidiary to love in the mystery of our redemption...

As the echo of the Beatles' pop song suggests, this is a very modernist, ecumenist-Protestant attitude. In our ecumenist age love has become the catch-phrase and the cure-all. All we need is love...<sup>15</sup>

Vladimir Moss articulates the distortion of «Orthodox» distinction between redemption and deification:

The Holy Fathers teach that our salvation takes place in two stages: (1) our redemption through the Sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross, and (2) our deification through participation in the Life of the Holy Spirit in the Church. Phase 2 could not take place before phase 1 was completed; for the vessel of human nature had first to be cleansed through the Sacrifice of Christ before the new wine of the Holy Spirit could be poured into it. For before the Cross «the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified» (John 7. 39).

<sup>14</sup> Гнедич П. В. Догмат искупления в русской богословской науке. М., 2007.

<sup>15</sup> Moss V. The new soteriology. 2009 // URL: [https://www.academia.edu/10214003/the\\_new\\_soteriology](https://www.academia.edu/10214003/the_new_soteriology) (дата обращения: 22.12.2021)

The new soteriologists, by contrast, place all the emphasis on deification. Moreover, just as their concept of deification overshadows that of redemption through the Cross, so does it overshadow that of the Last Judgment and the final reward of saints and sinners in the life to come<sup>16</sup>.

Florovsky's criticism of Stragorodsky's exposition of justification is more moderate but still calls such an approach «reductionism» (reducing theology to asceticism) and «moral monism»:

But the objective side of the process remains too much in the shadow... It seems that the decisive factor in the sacrament is the moral revolution, the decision to «stop sins». By repentance, a person is renewed, «the thread of life is broken, as it were»ю The promotion of grace only secures the decision of the will, the «cause of freedom».

However, it is quite wrong to reduce the entire content of the father's theology to asceticism, which is interpreted psychologically. For the fathers, their metaphysical realism is no less characteristic. Moralism and psychologism are the least likely to be justified from patristics. The exaggerated voluntarism in asceticism itself is hardly acceptable either. Contemplation, after all, remains the limit of ascent. And, in any case, dogmatics cannot be replaced by asceticism, and should not be dissolved in asceticism. Such a temptation is always an indicator of theological decline. There are also decadent features in the Russian school of «moral monism». There was no contemplative inspiration, and too much psychological introspection. This was an unmistakable echo of Western theological sentiments, of excessive attention to the problem of justification. It was necessary to return to the fathers more fully and with more humility<sup>17</sup>.

The successor of Sergius — Patriarch Alexy Simansky — highly estimates Stragorodsky's contribution to the Russian-Orthodox theology:

The ideas expressed in it («Orthodox teaching of salvation») become the common property of Russian theological science, so that there is... not a single work on... soteriology that does not contain references to the work of Patriarch Sergius. This is because the author

<sup>16</sup> Moss V. The new soteriology...

<sup>17</sup> Флоровский Г. Пути русского богословия. М., 2009 // URL: [https://azbyka.ru/otechnik/Georgij\\_Florovskij/puti-russkogo-bogoslovija/](https://azbyka.ru/otechnik/Georgij_Florovskij/puti-russkogo-bogoslovija/) (дата обращения: 22.12.2021)

is always faithful to the patristic teaching. He didn't want to say anything of his own his new faithfulness to the teaching of the Holy Fathers and consistency in his teaching were the new words that the Russian theology had long been waiting for. In this work, the ideas and concepts that should be put into practice are indicated the foundation... of the whole doctrine of the atonement. God is love, and He is unchangeable In His relationship to the creature, there is no split between love and truth. Redemption is the work of God's love and mercy for the sinner, the restoration of his fallen nature without violating his freedom<sup>18</sup>.

Metropolitan Guriy (Egorov) in his article «Patriarch Sergius as a theologian» (1947) characterizes Stragorodsky's understanding of salvation as the «classical Orthodox view on salvation». Metropolitan Guriy provides a detailed analysis of the thesis and agrees with its interpretation of justification as a moral entity. The relationship of God and humanity are mistakenly described by Roman-Catholics and Protestants through the lens of legalism when in reality — in both the Holy Scriptures and Church Fathers — have the nature of morality. The actual righteousness and holiness are in themselves — the result and the reward that are to follow, salvation itself. Thus Metropolitan Guriy qualifies Stragorodsky's teaching of justification and salvation as the most accurate exposition of the teaching of the Orthodox faith:

The work of Patriarch Sergius is one of the best works in Russian theological literature. The question of personal salvation is difficult and complicated, especially by the diversity of opinions of Western theologians. The work of Patriarch Sergius gives an Orthodox answer to it, which is independent and in many ways sounds quite new for our school (scholastic) theology<sup>19</sup>.

The Mater thesis of Stragorodsky was first republished after the Soviet Union in 1991 on the initiative of Archimandrite Innokentiy Prosvirin with the astonishing edition size of 200 thousand copies. Prosvirin, who was in charge of publishing of the Russian-Orthodox church at the time, considered Stragorodsky's understanding to be the standard reference of Orthodox soteriology. In his interview to the church historian Nikolay Lisovoy he praises

<sup>18</sup> Алексий, патриарх Московский и Всея Руси. Слова, речи, послания, обращения, статьи. М., 1954. С. 109–110.

<sup>19</sup> Патриарх Сергий и его духовное наследство. М., 1947. С. 122–123.

Stragorodsky and summarizes his teaching of salvation in the following way:

The main idea that runs through all the research in the book «The Orthodox Doctrine of Salvation» is the idea of the same feat and beatitude, Eternal Life and just the true Christian life<sup>20</sup>.

Likewise Nikolay Lisovoy himself in his «Overview of the main directions Russian theological academic science in the 19<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> century» calls Stragorodsky's thesis: «significant contribution to Orthodox theology that still retains its significance for the Russian Church.»<sup>21</sup>

An influential professor of the Moscow Academy — Aleksey Osipov, an author of vast number of books and numerous video lectures on theology — repeatedly quotes Stragorodsky's thesis «Orthodox teaching of salvation»:

But in Judaism and paganism, and then in Catholicism and Protestantism, the Divine commandments are considered as a law given to man from outside, the violation of which (sin) is an insult to God and entails a corresponding punishment from Him. In this connection, Patriarch Sergius (Stragorodsky) quotes the words of St. Gregory of Nyssa: «For what follows out of necessity, we call retribution out of perversion (meaning)». But it is precisely this legal, crudely anthropomorphic Old Testament understanding of sin that is affirmed in the Catholic Catechism: «Sin is an insult to God»<sup>22</sup>.

Hence there is a deep distortion of the understanding of the salvation accomplished by the Lord Jesus Christ. If the patristic teaching speaks of salvation as the healing of the damaged human nature and its deification, then in Catholicism and Protestantism it is interpreted, first of all, as the removal of guilt from a person for his sins and deliverance from the torments of hell. Patriarch Sergius

<sup>20</sup> Курочкина О. В., Соломина О. Л. «Русское спасение»: Беседа архимандрита Иннокентия (Просвирина) с Н. Н. Лисовым о духовном наследии Патриарха Сергия (Страгородского) // Вестник церковной истории. 2007. № 3(7). С. 141.

<sup>21</sup> Лисовой Н. Н. Обзор основных направлений русской богословской академической науки в XIX – начале XX столетия. М., 1947. С. 45.

<sup>22</sup> Осипов А. И. Сокращенное учебное пособие по апологетике для выпускного курса семинарии (бакалавриата) Московской духовной академии. М., 2019 // URL: <https://alexey-osipov.ru/books-and-publications/knigi/uchebnoe-posobie-po-apologetike/> (дата обращения: 22.12.2021)

(Stragorodsky) rightly wrote that instead of God, they seek impunity. Therefore, salvation is «deliverance from the suffering caused by sin». God «is only a means to achieve well-being»<sup>23</sup>.

«The Doctrine of Atonement in the Russian theology» by Peter Gnedih can be without exaggeration called the most thorough study of the matter in the Russian literature on history of theology. It is not only the most important theological works that are in the scope of the research but also the least noticeable papers and articles that are carefully examined by the author. The way Gnedich interprets the history of the doctrine in the Russian theology presents a gradual liberation from the bonds of Roman-Catholic and Lutheran scholasticism an forensic approach and returning to the patristic theosis approach. The thesis of Stragorodsky along the works of Khrapovitsky, Svetlov and Nesmelov mark the turning point in the history of the doctrine. Peter Gnedich admits that the thesis does not exclude some shortcomings but considers to be the greatest exposition of the Orthodox soteriology of the time<sup>24</sup>.

On May 20, 2015, Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia consecrated a stele in memory of Patriarch Sergius in Ulyanovsk. And on August 13, 2017, in Arzamas, during the celebration of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Patriarch Sergius, Patriarch Kirill held a divine liturgy and unveiled a monument to Patriarch Sergius. In a short speech Kirill paid tribute to Stragorodsky's service as the Patriarch and called him «an outstanding son of our church». However the lack of any reference to his theology and consistent underlining his contribution to the survival for the church during the Soviet Time makes it clear that it is predominantly Stragorodsky's administrative achievements that are honored in such a way.

Priest Pavel Khondsinskiy admits that Stragorodsky's thesis «to this day... is recognized as a reference work (exemplary work) in the field of Orthodox theology» but takes the side of Stragorodsky's critics and makes the following conclusion on his soteriology:

The dissertation of Archimandrite Sergius «The Orthodox Doctrine of Salvation» claims to reveal the patristic soteriology, but it does not contain not only patristic, but also any clear teaching about

<sup>23</sup> Осипов А. И. Сокращенное учебное пособие...

<sup>24</sup> Гнедич П. В. Догмат искупления...

the fall, nor about the state of man after the fall, nor about the atonement, nor about the assimilation of the fruits of the atonement by man.

2. The author's thesis that freedom precedes grace has a precariously Pelagian connotation.

3. The theory of gradual moral progress with an imperceptible transition to eternity, which is put forward in the dissertation, also finds no support in the patristic teaching<sup>25</sup>.

There are also a few articles by Russian-Orthodox theology students devoted to soteriology in Stragorodsky's thesis by A. Loginov, R. Sobko, P. P. Shitikhin of 2008 that present a general overview of the role of Stragorodsky's thesis and defend its accordance to the teaching of the Russian-Orthodox church. Besides, at the nation-wide scientific conference dedicated to the legacy of Stragorodsky in Arzamas in 2017 it was any single article out of 59 reports dedicated to the contribution of Stragorodsky to soteriology. The report, however, presented an eulogy to Sergius's exposition of Russian-Orthodox understanding of salvation:

Spiritual and moral theology Archimandrite Sergius caused a sharp controversy. The range of opinions about his «Orthodox Doctrine of Salvation» is extremely wide, but apparently positive and even enthusiastic reviews prevail, especially from his contemporaries.

Perhaps the theology of Sergius of Stragorodsky is not without its drawbacks. But his works were undoubtedly an important milestone in the development of Russian theology. His idea of salvation through faith and love, his ardent desire to unite with Christ and live for Him; his great interest in the inner life of man, transformed by God's Love; his desire to theologize from the patristic experience; his overthrow of the formal legal concept of life, based on the dry abstract categories of reward, merit; his position that righteousness and holiness do not require a reward, but are themselves bliss, the only possible organic state of the human personality — all these theological ideas were not only bold, original, and modern, but have not lost their relevance to this day<sup>26</sup>.

<sup>25</sup> Хондзинский П. В. Православное учение о спасении» архимандрита Сергия (Страгородского) и его критика священноисповедником Виктором (Островидовым) и архиепископом Серафимом (Соболевым) // Вестник ПСТГУ. 2014. Вып. 2 (57). С. 100.

<sup>26</sup> Парилов О. В. Темы вечной жизни и спасения в богословском насле-

On May 14, 2019 the Institute of Russian History of the Russian Academy of Sciences held the conference «Patriarch Sergius (Stragorodsky). Time and Legacy (to the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death)» but most of the reports were devoted to the questions of politics and ecclesiology.

«The Dogmatic Theology» of Oleg Davydenkov which is one of the most influential textbook for higher theological institutions in the Russian-Orthodox church allocates Stragorodsky's soteriology to the so-called «organic theory». According to Davydenkov it is shared by a number of modern Eastern-Orthodox theologians (Losskiy, Florovsky, Meyndorf) and is a reaction to the one-sidedness of both — «legal (forensic) theory» and «moral theory».

The proponents of this concept, which can be conditionally called «organic», in the doctrine of the atonement proceed from the fact that it is impossible to reduce the atonement to a single event of the earthly life of Christ, including the death on the Cross at Calvary, even if this event occupies an important place in the economy of the salvation of the human race<sup>27</sup>.

In 2018 priest Vadim Kikin defended a Candidate's dissertation «The doctrine of original sin in Russian Orthodox Academic theology of the second half of the 19 – early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries» where Stragorodsky's soteriology is classified as one of the representatives of «organic» theories.

#### CONCLUSIONS

The very first conclusion that one can make is that Patriarch Sergius Stragorodsky should be listed among the most prominent and influential theologians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is undeniable that Stragorodsky possessed unique intelligence, remarkable eloquence, outstanding knowledge of languages and patristic literature as well as critical thinking which enabled him to suggest a new approach to the doctrine of justification in the Russian-Orthodox discourse. The nov-

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дии Патриарха Сергия (Страгородского) Материалы Всероссийской научно-практической конференции с международным участием «Патриарх Сергий и церковно-государственные отношения в XX веке: трудный путь к сотрудничеству». Арзамас, 2017 // URL: [https://kon-ferenc.ru/konferenc25\\_04\\_17\\_2.html](https://kon-ferenc.ru/konferenc25_04_17_2.html) (дата обращения: 22.12.2021)

<sup>27</sup> Давыденков О. В. Догматическое богословие. М., 2007. С. 285.



elty of the approach lied in the attempt to distance from both Roman-Catholic and Protestant discourses and come up with an «organic» theory that equated salvation and holiness, justification and sanctification. The impact of the thesis is unprecedented and can be traced in almost all following soteriological academic papers in the Russian-Orthodox tradition. It can be unmistakably called a milestone between the old imperial Russian-Orthodox soteriology and a new soteriology of the Soviet Russian period — emancipated from the influence of Roman-Catholic and Lutheran theology.

As for the Lutheran perspective the way Stragorodsky treated the doctrine of justification can be viewed only as a beautiful, eloquent but still a fundamental fallacy aberrating Biblical exposition of this doctrine. In contrast to the interpretation of the Book of Concord Stragorodsky's thesis depicts justification rather as a continual process dependent on the moral decision and free will of a person. It refuses to distinguish between the justification and sanctification describing the process of salvation in terms very close to Osiander's heresy of «indwelling Christ» and Eastern-Orthodox «theosis».

The very first words of the Master's thesis of Sergius Stragorodsky cite Apology of Augsburg confession calling the question of personal salvation *praecipuus locus doctrinae christianae*. But this is, perhaps, the only thing in which Stragorodsky's soteriology agrees with the Lutheran Confessions.

It is especially important to identify the errors of Stragorodsky's approach in the light of new challenges to confessional Lutheran theology: «the new perspective on Paul» and «the New Finnish Interpretation of Luther». There is a certain charm and beauty of these theories that seemingly evade the sharpness of the contradiction between the Roman-Catholic and Lutheran understandings of justification. But it is a very subtle temptation that aims at stealing the beatitudes of the achievements of Luther's Reformation and distorting the sweet Biblical truth of justification through Christ alone.

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