

## NININS 2020

### International Scientific Forum «National Interest, National Identity and National Security»

### SOBORNOST AS THE BASIS OF RUSSIAN IDENTITY: HISTORY AND CURRENT STATE

Oleg V. Parilov (a)\*, Ruslan V. Sobko (b), Zhanna V. Nikonova (c), Irina A. Savchenko (d)

\*Corresponding author

(a) Nizhny Novgorod Academy of the Ministry of the Interior of Russia, 3 Ankudinovskoe shosse, Nizhny Novgorod, 603950, Russia, E-mail: olegparilov@yandex.ru

(b) Religious Organization – the Theological Educational Organization of Higher Education "Nizhny Novgorod Theological Seminary of the Nizhny Novgorod Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church", 5 Pochvalinsky syezd, Nizhny Novgorod, 603001, Russia, E-mail: fraterlaurentius@gmail.com

(c) Linguistics University of Nizhny Novgorod, 31A., Minin street, Nizhny Novgorod, 603000, Russia, E-mail: nikonova67@mail.ru

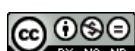
(d) Linguistics University of Nizhny Novgorod, 31A., Minin street, Nizhny Novgorod, 603000, Russia, E-mail: teosmaco@rambler.ru

### Abstract

The article deals with the concept of "sobornost" as the foundation of Russian national identity. The "sobornost" concept dialectically combines the idea of human unification with the uniqueness of each person. According to Slavophiles peasant community came closest to realizing the principle of sobornost. This type of community offered social patriotism based on love and cooperation, social activity, sincerity and sacrifice. Unfortunately, the Slavophile dream about communitarian principle was not realized during the 20th century. To some extent, Russian religious philosophy must be blamed for this, because it prioritized Messianic goals for Russian nation. The idea of human unity was transformed into the speculative global idea of all-unity, Cosmos, Euro-Asian civilization, and a union of all oppressed nations. Disastrous consequences enforced destruction of the Russian community first caused by P. Stolypin's reform; hereafter by Soviet kolkhoz system, industrialization; social chaos at the end of 20th century. The most important consequence is the atomization of the Russian community, a tragedy for us. Dissociation among isolated individuals inevitably leads to social degradation, disruption of patriotism, the destruction of the Russian national identity. Today's Russian philosophy should focus on rehabilitating the sobornost principle as an alternative path to human unity.

2357-1330 © 2021 Published by European Publisher.

**Keywords:** Christianity, communism, Russian identity, Sobornost



This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 Unported License, permitting all non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

## 1. Introduction

Sobornost, as the primary source of Russian national self-consciousness, was the focus of domestic conservative thought during the 19th and 21st centuries. Russian culture is being developed in the framework of Orthodoxy, which is also grounded in the sobornost concept. However, over two centuries the concept of sobornost has transformed the national philosophical discourse. This fact has a negative impact on the current socio-political development of Russia.

## 2. Problem Statement

Historically, life in Russia was based on the principles of sobornost. Russian culture has created a unique image of a collegiate community. However, modern globalization is characterized by a fatal fragmentation. It is fraught with social degradation and irreversible decomposition of the Russian nation as a historical actor. Philosophical rehabilitation of sobornost, as well as adaptation of sobornost principles to contemporary Russian society, is required.

## 3. Research Questions

The concept of sobornost is a core concept of Orthodoxy, reflects the Nicene Creed. The conceptualization of "sobornost" in Russian philosophy was developed in the first half of the 19th century by the Slavophiles. Overall, it was understood as a dialectical combination of concerns for the individual and concerns for the community. Slavophiles also examined the practical realization of sobornost principles in social life. During the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the concept "sobornost" obtained global dimension under the influence of the new concepts of Russian Messianism and established a tendency to abstract philosophical reflection: like "All-Unity" (Soloviev), Cosmos (Russian cosmism), Eurasian civilization (Eurasianism), the union of all oppressed (Russian communism). Modern Russian conservative philosophical thought still follows the tendency to give the concept of sobornost a universal messianic meaning.

## 4. Purpose of the Study

The article aims to study the concept of sobornost as the foundation of Russian self-consciousness; to consider philosophical and historical roots associated with the decomposition of sobornost elements; to formulate the objectives of restoring Russian social sobornost.

## 5. Research Methods

The philosophical and theoretical basis for the research is a civilizational approach that affirms fundamental spiritual factors rooted in the national culture as key drivers of the historical process. Also, in this paper, we used the following methods: comparative-historical; philosophical and hermeneutic; analysis, synthesis, analogy.

## 6. Findings

Sobornost, along with statesmanship and Orthodox spirituality, is a basic feature of Russian culture, and Russian mentality. The Russian national self-consciousness is in its core "sobornoе". Sobornost is a complex of the individual and the community, a real unity, brotherhood of people. In this active unity, the personal uniqueness of each member is being kept. Sobornost unity presupposes that the people who are its members accept the common higher values, but at the same time, the unique features of each person are preserved" (Shaposhnikov, 1996, p. 53). In this way, sobornost overcomes the extremes of individualism and collectivism that eliminates the personality. In some cases, the Russian Sobornost is a result of social and natural-climatic factors. An unpleasant climate, harsh land, permanent exogenous invaders required union among individuals. Furthermore, the Russian Orthodox Church provides significant collective resources. The concept of "sobornost" is represented in the Orthodox Christian Creed: "I Believe In One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church".

A rural community represented the social and historical embodiment of the sobornost principle throughout almost the entire Russian history (until the 19th century). Community is a union of a relatively small number of people connected by the same interests, cultural, spiritual kinship. The key principle of community-building is people' active solidarity and involvement in each other's daily life. An example of the implementation of the community principle is the Early Christian Church. The Apostle Paul, writing his Epistle to the Corinthians, does not mean the entire Corinthian population, but rather a small community of Christians sharing one faith, living the same life. Such a community actualizes the category "neighbour." In Jesus' parable of the Merciful Samaritan, he says: a true neighbour is one who has shown mercy, involvement and sympathy for another human being. The other factors – monotheism, monolingualism – are of secondary importance. Slavophiles captured the nature of the Russian community in the first half of the 19th century. They described the peasant community as "the best form of collective life" (Khomyakov, 2004, p. 63). This community, in their opinion, is a society where the principles of Christian love are realized. Its structure corresponds to that of the Church. It is a spiritual union that opposes private selfish goals. However, the Slavophiles did not idealize the Russian community – they do not exclude the malformation of peasants. "Mir" offers possibilities that can form the best possible virtues for its members: the desire for social activity, ability to protect common interests, patriotism, fairness. These virtues, according to philosophers, should be inspired by a natural instinct. Community is for Slavophiles the highest ideal: "The difficulty to achieve the full realization of community ... Should not present a discouragement," writes Aksakov, "as it is impossible to be a perfect Christian, however, it is the duty to strive for this ideal forever" (Brodsky, 1910, p. 108). Slavophiles have articulated their ideal – the diffusion of the community principle will presuppose the domination of the "spirit of sobornost" in society. The main principle of social relations will be "self-denial of individuals in favor of others". And then the spiritual task of the Russian land will be "fulfilled" – "the manifestation of Orthodox society, bound by the law of living unity and based on the foundations of community and family" (Brodsky, 1910, p. 109). The state in its entirety should be built on the community principle. For this purpose, peasant communities should be united into volosts, the latter – into provinces, the latter – into a universal community – the state. The majority of the Slavophile

intellectuals welcomed the community and the communal principle of life. Thus, Rozanov wrote: "The community is a religious and moral brotherhood; there is ... a church attached to human labor" (Rozanov, 1995, p. 464). Thus, throughout at least another 10 centuries of Russian history, the community was the relevant social realization of the principle of sobornost. Atomization of the Russian society, the crisis of sobornost, as well as corruption of the Russian community, have become one of the most harmful social and spiritual consequences of the 20th-21st centuries. The fault lies in the specifics of Russian religious ideologies, a philosophy that reflects the specific features of the Russian mentality. The idea of Russian Messianism replaced the idea of a vivid unity of people. Russian Messianism, meanwhile, provided the solution of universal problems and global unity, clearly manifested in the Russian Middle Ages. A Messianic, universal and eschatological context is represented by the Philotheos' concept "Moscow – Third Rome" (16th century). In this concept, Russia was established as "the transmitter and protector of true Christianity ... only Christian kingdom, in this sense, it is the Universal Kingdom" (Berdyaev, 1999, p. 13). Appreciating the idea "Moscow – the Third Rome", Berdyaev notes "After the Jewish nation, Russians are most suitable for the Messianic idea. It goes through the whole of Russian history" (Berdyaev, 1999, p. 13).

Slavophiles, who praised the Russian community as an image of the spiritual embodiment of the real sobornost, were eventually seduced by the worldwide messianic agenda of the Russian folk. According to the Slavophiles and their interpretation of the concept "Moscow – the Third Rome": Russia, which follows its spiritual way, its path, is supposed to achieve world spiritual supremacy, using Orthodox doctrine as a basis. They concluded that the historical mission of the Russian people is to elevate the Kingdom of God throughout the history: "Russia, which received true Christianity ... should represent it for the entire world" (Khomyakov, 1994, p. 100). An abstract philosophical concept replaces the idea of a real brotherhood of people.

The subject of sobornost attains an even more global meaning in the Russian Christian philosophy of the 2nd half of the 19th – early 20th centuries. Solovyev sacrifices for the sake of an abstract all-unity not only the idea of Russian community but also the Russian ethnos in general (Parilov & Sobko, 2011). Solovyev's principle of sobornost, as Shaposhnikov writes, "acquires all-inclusive meaning" (Shaposhnikov, 1996, p. 32). Solovyov dreams about universal theocracy, and Russia's mission is to be a force that unites West and East. It must sacrifice itself to Christian universalism by rejecting national egoism (Solovyev, 1911).

On the one hand, Dostoevsky wrote: "One could imagine to whom, but not too soiled people, to preach the Russian community, the principle of communality". Moreover, indeed, Dostoevsky wrote:

If you destroy the community, the nation will immediately be corrupted within the single generation... Does not exist (in the community) the grain of something unique... the new future, an ideal... that we alone can realize, we alone can bring forth, as it will be no war, no revolt, but... great and universal harmony (Dostoevsky, 1993, p. 266). He dreams about universal brotherhood at the edge of human history as a result of creative efforts.

Cosmos (Russian cosmism) (Tsiolkovsky, 2018) became the subject of interest in the twentieth century. Global ideas obscured, all in all, the idea of real fraternity among people: apocalypse, eschatology, omniscience, Cosmos, Eurasian civilization as integer (Savitsky, 1997). Speculative models

of idealistic philosophy inspired by faith in God, Messianic expectations of Russian nation, consolidation and redemption of the whole mankind, harmony reached by all-unity were swept away by the hurricane of Russian revolution. The nation, which was marked as "the God-bearer" walked not the way pointed by Dostoevsky and Solovyov, but by Lenin and Trotsky, and they aimed to acquire not universal truth and the kingdom of spirit, but land and freedom. Communist ideology, established in Soviet times as "the only true", alas, inherited the same globalist thought. By postulating the universal brotherhood of all oppressed communist ideology simultaneously gave birth to an unprecedented social alienation, to a class war in which the brother went against his brother. There were attempts to establish local self-government before the October Revolution. However, afterwards, the whole country became one big household community, on the background of which local communities were lost entirely. The possibility of making workers' associations, alas, failed to be realized. Workers' unions should generally reflect the interests of the local labour community by representing their interests.

Eventually, those transformed, at best, into the social agency responsible for organizing workers' rest and activities, for the worst, into an administrative surplus. In modern post-Soviet Russia, while completely ignoring real sobornost – a community of neighbours (i.e. living next door), global messianic expectations arose again: "The Russian idea is a desire for a universal unity of mankind, for a universal fraternity of nations, for a better life not only for oneself but for everyone... The great goal of the Russian concept is a universal unity, which should be rooted in a high-level social harmony... A perfect man of the Newest Age is a holder of a collective global sobornost" (Pischik, 2019, p. 173).

Social processes in the 19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> centuries were equally devastating for the Russian community, and the collective consciousness. P. Stolypin neglected the Russian community tradition at the beginning of 20 century. Kara-Murza (1993) gives the following data: about 10 % of peasant families left the peasant community from 1907 to 1915.

If we consider peasants, who made up 85 % of Russia's population at the beginning of the 20 century, to be reasonably thinking people, we must recognize the fact: since they resisted the Stolypin reform, it was contrary for their interest (Kara-Murza, 1993, p. 4).

After the 1917 revolt farmers were gathered together in collective farms, where rigid bureaucratic pressure prevailed, and as a consequence, inner intellectual freedom and responsibility were levelled out, whereby spiritual life was reduced to the economic demands. National industrialization policy resulted in killing the village as a social institution. Therefore, the 1930s (mass repressions) made irreversible mental changes.

Especially disastrous for the community consciousnesses were the nineties and millennium. Total dissociation was, at first, a consequence of chaos – social, economic, political; at second, a result of huge stratification by mass propaganda of individualism and consumption. The last manifestations of "local" communalism – at the level of both homes and families – have disappeared. Joint festivals and cleanups (subbotnik), yard sports teams, neighbourhood communication, have gone into oblivion for some 30 years. Current life is such that a great influx into metropolises is paradoxically combined with absolute atomization. The Internet era also gave birth to a monster – a human-machine isolated from the world: "openness" to the world, thousands of "friends" (subscribers) turned actually into an individual's communication with a smartphone screen.

Russian philosophy traditionally opposed Russian sobornost to Western individualism. In reality, in modern Europe and the United States local community is represented much better than in Russia. Thus, an American sheriff is, first of all, a representative of the local community and protects its interests. Russian police officers represent the people as a kind of abstraction since they function as a punitive governmental institution.

Unfortunately, the parish community has also become a fiction in Russia: people who are close to each other at the Divine Liturgy are often not acquaintances.

Migrant workers from the Caucasus and Central Asia, who have poor knowledge of Russian, who are not rooted in our culture, who initially had nothing (neither housing nor work) after some adaptation feel more comfortable and protected than the natives. All the above-mentioned deprivations are counterbalanced by the compatriotic fraternity, ethno-communal assistance to all of them. At the beginning of the 2000s, Solzhenitsyn wrote:

We need a strong local government, growing from the bottom up if we want the country to flourish. This kind of local governance – independent from governmental administration – according to Article 12 of the Constitution, none do create it. However, only people's self-governance growing out of local self-governance, then regional self-determination – only such hierarchy interacting with the hierarchy of government can allow people determining their future (Solzhenitsyn, 2001, p. 4). The absence of such local self-governance is not due to external evil will, but because of the absence of its fundamentals – local communal elements.

We cannot be considered a nation without having a sense of unity; we are an electorate, just a population open to social experiments and exogenous invasion. Thus, at the present stage, Russian philosophy should switch from universal global ideas to questions of real communities and focus on the brotherhood among neighbours, i.e., those who live next door. This process would be more productive than promoting abstract all-Russian patriotism and Russian Messianism.

## 7. Conclusion

Sobornost is the primary feature of the Russian national consciousness, Russian culture. Orthodox Christianity, history, environmental conditions have formed Russians as sobornost persons. Rural communities achieved more than other social, institutional principles of sobornost. Afterwards, due to the influence of Russian messianic ideas, the concept of sobornost acquired a global interpretation and turned into an abstract philosophical concept. Dramatic events of the 20<sup>th</sup>–21<sup>st</sup> century were catastrophic for sobornost. The modern fragmentation of Russian society is fraught with the decomposition of the Russian nation as a historical subject. Methodological reflection aimed at revitalizing sobornost is a way to national survival.

## References

- Berdyayev, N. A. (1999). *Russian idea*. AST.
- Brodsky, N. L. (1910). *Early Slavophiles: A.S. Khomyakov, I.V. Kireevsky, K.S. and I.S. Aksakovs*. Print. house of the I. D. Sytin partnership.
- Dostoevsky, F. M. (1993). *Collected works*. In 15 volumes. Vol. 14. St. Sci.

- Kara-Murza, S. G. (1993). *Soviet civilization.*: [http://www.situation.ru/app/rs/books/sc\\_a/sc\\_a3.htm](http://www.situation.ru/app/rs/books/sc_a/sc_a3.htm).
- Khomyakov, A. S. (1994). *Works*. In 2 volumes. Vol. 1. Moscow Philos. Foundat. Medium, J. of Philos. Iss.
- Khomyakov, A. S. (2004). *Selected articles and letters*. Nizhny Novgorod: Publ. house Gorodets.
- Parilov, O. V., & Sobko, R. V. (2011). The ideological continuity of V. S. Solovyov and Joachim Florsky. *Solovevsky studies*, 2(30), 26–32.
- Pischik, A. M. (2019). The Evolution of the Russian Idea. *The Russian World: the Dynamics of Scientific Cognition* (pp. 168–173). Arzamas Branch of Nizhny Novgorod State Univer. N. I. Lobachevsky.
- Rozanov, V. V. (1995). *Collected works*. In 30 volumes. Vol. 4. *On writing and writers*. Republic.
- Savitsky, P. N. (1997). *Continent Eurasia*. Agraf.
- Shaposhnikov, L. E. (1996). *The philosophy of collegiality: essays on Russian identity*. Publ. House of St. Petersburg State Univer.
- Solovyev, V. S. (1911). *Russia and the ecumenical church*. Print. house A. I. Mamontov.
- Solzhenitsyn, A. I. (2001). *Our spirit is stronger than oppressive being*. <http://viperson.ru/articles/aleksandr-solzhenitsyn-nash-duh-silnee-gnetuschego-bytiya>
- Tsiolkovsky, K. E. (2018). *Will of the Universe*. AST.