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***Report on the thesis for the Doctor of Theology (habilitation) by Vsevolod V. Zolotukhin***

Dr. Zolotukhin has written a remarkable thesis for his Doctor of Theology. It is based on impressive familiarity with primary sources mostly in German but also to an extent in Dutch. His knowledge of secondary literature is also comprehensive, but I should point out that, due to his topic, there are aspects of his thesis for which there exists hardly any published scholarly work. This fact impressively indicates the remarkable degree of novelty in Zolotukhin's work. I shall say more about this in a moment, but overall, I estimate that this is a piece of scholarly work with an unusual degree of originality. It is nowadays not easy to break new ground in any humanities subject simply due to the huge and steadily growing amount of specialist literature being produced in many countries and languages all the time. As for the overall field into which the thesis falls, much research has been devoted to 19th century history of Protestant German theology primarily in German language scholarship, but research in English has been catching up fast, and by now specialist studies on most of the major figures of the time exist, and many of what Zolotukhin calls 'second-rate' figures have also been the subject of at least one doctoral thesis or been discussed in thematic studies.

How has the author managed to add to the existing literature in a significant way? The question he is investigating is a highly interesting and significant one: what is the historical connection between Christian theology and the modern, principally secular study of religions? While there are many good reasons to postulate that the latter grew from the former, the question nevertheless is not often pursued in any historical detail. Part of the reason is ideological. Scholars of religion today are mostly keen to emphasise the *distinction* between their own field and theology which to them seems less academic and more confessional. Theologians on the other hand, often consider the study of religions a problematic approach so they too are usually not keen to investigate their disciplinary closeness. As a result, neither discipline seems to have developed a historiography that focuses on the moment when the two parted ways.

Zolotukhin thus does not have much competition in his attempt, but this does not lessen his accomplishment. His initial hypothesis is plausible enough: that for key approaches to religious studies, notably psychological ones, the specific tradition of German Lutheran theology was key. Few would perhaps disagree with his diagnosis that Protestant and especially Lutheran faith tended historically towards an emphasis on the *inner* disposition of the believer, of called 'faith'. Zolotukhin connects this Lutheran concern for interiority with another celebrated historical datum, namely the impact of Kant's critical philosophy.



Ultimately, the complex history his thesis narrates is supported by these two pillars: on the one hand, the Lutheran concern for the inner life of faith, on the other hand, the acceptance of the Kantian critique of rational theology. There is something brilliant in the relative simplicity of this construction. Zolotukhin begins his account with some pre-Kantian thinkers including representatives of Pietism and Neology. His short section on Spalding, the great Enlightenment theologian already illustrates one of Zolotukhin's great strengths: to identify important evidence for his topic where the reader perhaps wouldn't immediately expect it. Spalding is seen as a rationalist, certainly not a pietist, but Zolotukhin points out that he wrote 'on the value of feelings in Christianity'. Here as elsewhere, Zolotukhin is careful to avoid simplistic dualisms: pietism vs. Enlightenment; or even, more importantly: sentimentalism vs. moral religion.

After these introductory comments on the pre-Kantian history of his problem, Zolotukhin divides his thesis into two main parts (which he calls chapters). The first of them deals with the immediate aftermath of Kant's Copernican revolution. The main character inevitably is Friedrich Schleiermacher. It's perhaps difficult to say much that is new on Schleiermacher's understanding of the 'feeling' of the universe in his *Speeches* or the 'feeling absolute dependence' in the *Glaubenslehre*. What in my view is most remarkable is how Zolotukhin emphasises the interest in the *empirical* and psychological side of his problem. It is often said that for Schleiermacher, 'feeling' is *not* primarily an emotion but a transcendental term by means of which he responds to Kant's critique of rational theology. Zolotukhin doesn't deny that. In fact, he is as insistent as anybody on the significance of Kant for Schleiermacher's theory. But his point is that in the shadow of Kant, so to speak, the empirical dimension of this 'feeling' had to become an importance topic, and he does a great job showing that this is indeed what happens in Schleiermacher.

It is characteristic of Zolotukhin's approach that he does not simply focus on Schleiermacher to establish his theory. Rather, he introduces the reader to a plethora of individuals, some little known, some practically entirely forgotten to flesh out his narrative. In the sections of the first chapter, these individuals include people like Jacobi and Fichte, but also Fries, de Wette and the Kantian philosopher, F. Bouterwek. There is practically no literature on Bouterwek, on Fries and de Wette too, there is very little. Zolotukhin therefore had to rely on his own reading of their German publications to make his case. The result is absolutely worth his effort. What his approach accomplishes is to give a sense of the breadth in which these theologians and philosophers moved at the time in a certain direction. Between them there were many divergences and disagreements, but what Zolotukhin shows is that overall they lay the foundations of what later will become the study of religion.

Specifically, they all in different ways work on the subjective dimension of religion, its inner life, its affective dimension. Here, we can see early forms of 'psychology' of religion emerging. At the same time, they seek to establish a study of 'religion' as a phenomenon beyond the specificity of a particular faith let alone a particular church. Here, Zolotukhin emphasises the emergence of a discipline called 'philosophy of religion' as the non-theological study of forms of religion universally understood.

What is missing at this point follows directly from this analysis. On the one hand, there is as yet no 'psychology' understood as an empirical discipline. On the other hand, there are



lacking the philological foundations for a more properly universal approach to religion in past and present (the only partial exception is Tholuck - he too must count as a neglected figure, certainly in the way Zolotukhin presents him, as an early Orientalist). Thus, the first chapter concludes with the summary that only a preliminary stage of the development has been reached, but at the same time, the elements are in place that will continue to influence subsequent developments.

The second part (second chapter) picks up where the first one ended. Zolotukhin begins by noting the revolutionary advances in the early 19th century in linguistics and philology which, he argues, only opened up the conditions for the much broader approach to religion that is subsequently found in people like Max Müller who, of course, is a central figure in Zolotukhin's narrative. While Müller is often seen as having crossed the boundary out of theology (the positions he held at Oxford were all outside the Theology Faculty), Zolotukhin takes great care to show how deeply his thought is still rooted in the kind of German Protestant theology initiated by Schleiermacher. To this end, the reader is introduced to further individuals among them the prolific but again mostly ignored theologian and philosopher, C. H. Weiße.

The second main protagonist of the second chapter, is Peter Cornelius Tiele. It is interesting that the two people who sustain Zolotukhin's narrative for the latter half of the 19th century were both *active* outside Germany. Zolotukhin reflects on the fact that his account takes him to the Netherlands and justifies it with the argument that it's intellectually close to Germany, but is there a case to be made that conditions *outside* Germany were more hospitable to this kind of academic innovation at the time?

The second chapter continues with a discussion of some individuals who were active at the turn of the twentieth century and, in fact, for several decades of that century. Perhaps the author is stretching his narrative somewhat, but it is clear why he wanted to take his account to this point: at the beginning of the twentieth century, people finally begin to apply psychological methods to religious studies. This innovation first occurs in the US (but, Zolotukhin insists, partly under German influence), and in any event it is soon reintroduced into Germany where people like Georg Wobbermin, W. Stählin and F. Traub are all still operating within theology. The same can be said for Ernst Troeltsch - he too finds space in the second chapter - although he later migrates into philosophy.

The account ends with the so-called Dorpat school, Karl Girgensohn and Werner Green, the latter alive until 1961! These two individuals once again embody Zolotukhin's central thesis in being theologians who nevertheless work practically as psychologists of religion. They also, still, draw on the twin influence of Kant and Schleiermacher.

Zolotukhin does not say much anywhere in his thesis about why he ends his account where he does. I suspect this is because he prefers to leave open the teleology of his narrative. As it is, the story he narrates so competently and impressively, can be understood in various ways. For example, one could see its upshot of a disciplinary transposition, i.e. a discourse that grows within theology but which eventually needed a different institutional environment. From theology to religious studies, could be the heading in this case. Or one could speculate that religious studies ultimately always remains theological regardless of

where exactly it is conducted. One could, moreover, see the drift towards the study of religions approach as a dangerous deviation from what theology ought to do and end with a figure like Karl Barth who made this point his theological programme.

If one were to ask which of these is Zolotukhin's view, the reader of his thesis would find it hard to identify an answer. There is no indication that he advocates the third position, or at least he gives no hint in that direction. There certainly is a whiff of the second position, especially where he acknowledges the problematic value judgments entering into the early discussions of religions which are usually underwritten by an explicit or implicit commitment to the superiority of Christianity and indeed of Protestantism. But the reader doesn't get the sense that for Zolotukhin these observations delegitimise the whole development as he regularly appeals to the inevitable limitations of an author's historical standpoint.

Ultimately, it may be best to identify Zolotukhin's perspective as genealogical. This would also mesh with his conclusion where he claims to have shown that the transition from theology to study of religion could only have happened within German Protestant theology. Whether this is indeed the case, it perhaps a bit harder to prove than the author thinks. What, for example, about the French development which is an interesting parallel case where deeply religious intuitions (e.g. in Louis de Bonald) subsequently led to secular thought forms (in Saint-Simon and Auguste Comte).

These questions are not, however, meant to distract from the extraordinary achievement of this thesis. They are, rather, a sign that at the end of every important scholarly study, more questions open up than were previously answered. In my view, there is no doubt that Vsevolod Zolotukhin deserves to be awarded the title of Doctor of Theology based on this thesis. It is a work of stunning learning, admirably clear in its structure. The author constantly shows his ability to handle extensive and complex sources utilising them in the service of his own theory. It probably goes without saying at this point that his grasp of German also seems to be perfect based simply on the evidence from his thesis. The texts with which he had to interact are often complicated and hard to understand even for a native speaker, not to mention the fact that the language they use can now often appear archaic. Throughout the thesis, I was unable to find any major errors or omissions which is all the more impressive given the extraordinary range of thinkers and problems covered.

In sum, this is one of the most impressive theses I have seen in a very long time. There is evidence of research skills at every level, Zolotukhin has fascinating ideas; his historical instincts are superb; and his own account remains accessible even where he deals with highly complicated matters. An outstanding piece of work for which I have the highest respect.

Berlin, 3 October 2023



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