

Lev Karsavin

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Abstract and Keywords

A historian of Western Medieval history by training and a religious philosopher by vocation, Lev Platonovich Karsavin (1882–1951) explored the interconnectedness of history and religion throughout his life. He developed his ideas focusing on the notions of theophany and theosis, where the divine revealed itself in history and history moved towards divinization. Karsavin's writings reflected influences of such diverse thinkers as Nicolas of Cusa, Bonaventure and Angela of Foligno, or Vladimir Soloviev and Oswald Spengler. Building upon their ideas, Karsavin created an original philosophy of personalism, which was based on the concept of 'all-unity'. Central to it was the idea of the 'person' both as an individual and a collective entity. This chapter examines Karsavin's life and thought, first in pre-revolutionary St. Petersburg, through the experiences during the Russian Revolution, during his exile in Berlin, Paris, and Kaunas, and finally to his incarceration in Stalin's Gulag camp where he was sent after the end of the Second World War and where he perished. It pays close attention to a number of crucial points of Karsavin's intellectual odyssey including the impact of the revolution on Karsavin's thought, the development of his concept of 'all-unity', his historiosophy, his engagement with ecumenism as well as his involvement with Eurasianism. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the rediscovery of Karsavin's philosophical legacy in post-Soviet Russia.

Keywords: all-unity, divinization, ecumenism, Eurasianism, Gulag, historiosophy, medieval history, personalism, Russian Revolution

AMONG the thinkers of the Russian religious Renaissance of the early twentieth century, the life and ideas of Lev Platonovich Karsavin (1882–1952) were unusual. By family background Karsavin belonged to the artistic circles at the tsarist court in St. Petersburg. By education and original profession he was a historian of the Western Middle Ages. Unlike other Russian religious thinkers, in his youth Karsavin did not engage in radical leftist politics. Although interested in religiosity as a historian, only during the revolution of 1917 did he turn towards religious philosophy proper. Among the intelligentsia, he gained notoriety for publishing an erotically charged philosophical treatise that contained echoes of his adulterous affair with a young student. Karsavin's philosophy of 'all-unity' (*vseedin-*

stvo) is unique, too, as it owes as much to the Russian philosophical tradition of Vladimir Soloviev as to philosophers and theologians of the Western Middle Ages, most prominently Nicholas of Cusa.

Karsavin's intellectual development has often been described as an alternation between being a historian and a philosopher (Khoruzhii 2004, 269–70). This chapter attempts to modify this interpretation, arguing that already as a historian Karsavin was implicitly a religious philosopher and that the study of religious philosophy and history were for Karsavin conceptually intertwined. Karsavin's thought developed around the notions of theophany and theosis, where the divine revealed itself in history and history moved towards divinization.

Religiosity and Revolution

Lev Karsavin was born in 1882 in St. Petersburg into the family of Platon Karsavin, a dancer at Petipa's ballet troupe, and Anna Karsavina, allegedly a distant relative of the Slavophile Aleksei Khomiakov. Whereas his younger sister, the famous ballerina Tamara Karsavina, followed in the footsteps of her father, Lev appears to have inherited the spirituality of his mother (Karsavina 1931, 108).

(p. 511) In 1901 Karsavin enrolled in the historical-philological faculty of St. Petersburg University, where he became one of the most talented students of the prominent medievalist I. M. Grevs. Karsavin specialized in the history of Western Europe, studying the fifth-century Gallo-Roman aristocrat and bishop Sidonius Apollinaris, an important figure in the transition from late Roman antiquity to the early Middle Ages (e.g. Karsavin 1908). For his further studies he switched to the history of Medieval Italian religiosity and in 1913 defended his Master's thesis, *Essays on Religious Life in Italy in the XII–XIII Centuries*. His thesis, based on profound archival research in European archives, earned Karsavin professional acclaim. Already in this work Karsavin formulated one of his central precepts: the unity of 'religious life'. Although religiosity manifested itself in different forms, from heretics of all kinds to the orthodox views of the Catholic Church, Karsavin claimed that together they constituted a 'common religious fund' (*obshchii religioznyi fond*). All religious movements, in his view, partook equally in the unprecedented religious revival of the late twelfth and early thirteenth century (Karsavin 1912, XVIII).

While in his earlier research Karsavin followed in the footsteps of his teacher, his doctoral dissertation, *The Foundations of Medieval Religiosity in the XII–XIII Centuries, Primarily in Italy* (1916), revealed an innovative methodological approach. This work has recently even been considered the first 'culturological' study in Russian scholarship, comparable in its holistic and anthropological approach to the later work of the French Annales school, with its history of mentalities and total history (Iastrebitskaia 2001). In his ambitious dissertation Karsavin tried to determine the particular features of a given culture through its religiosity and 'typical' religious figures, bringing together the general and the individual. He argued that the common religious fund 'exists in every member of a

given group', and under certain circumstances reveals itself in his 'characteristic religious reactions', or 'the totality of his religious experiences' (Karsavin 1997b, 29).

To get a sense of this 'fund' that characterized every epoch it was necessary to study the 'average person' (*srednii chelovek*), who never existed empirically, yet methodologically corresponded to concepts such as 'man of the Renaissance' or 'the Humanist' (Karsavin 1997b, 29). Karsavin claimed that although 'the average person' was embodied in every real representative of the group, it was the most prominent persons, such as the clergy or educated lay people, who allowed study of these features with particular clarity (Karsavin 1997b, 30, 40). Among Karsavin's most often quoted representatives of medieval religious life were St. Francis of Assisi and his followers, such as Angela of Foligno, but also Bernard of Clairvaux and Bonaventure, to name only a few.

Karsavin's scholarship was well acclaimed and promised a successful academic career. Already then he was teaching in various institutions of higher education in St. Petersburg, including the Bestuzhev Courses and Petrograd University. Yet, his interest in religious history was more than just a professional choice; it also satisfied a personal quest for spirituality, as Karsavin confessed in 1908 in a letter to his adviser: 'I'm pleased that I took up religious history: this perfectly fits my character, as I feel inside myself religious inclinations and sometimes indulge in sceptical mysticism' (Iastrebitskaia 1994, 48-9).

(p. 512) It is no surprise then that before the First World War Karsavin had already participated in the activities of the St. Petersburg Religious-Philosophical Society.

His evolution from the primarily academic study of religion towards the experience of religion manifested itself in his translation of the Italian mystic Angela of Foligno's *Revelations of the Blessed Angela*, undertaken in 1917 and published in 1918. As Karsavin later confessed, this translation, 'more than anything else introduced me into the world of religious life and Christian metaphysics' (Lasinskas 2011, 115).

In Angela's mystical *Revelations* Karsavin discovered two ideas that would become central elements of his own later philosophical writings: the emphasis on the perfection of the Trinity and the celebration of 'Love' as the perfect way to experience Divinity. In her mystical experience, Karsavin explained, Angela's soul 'encountered [...] the Holy Trinity and herself in its midst' (Karsavin 1997a, 113). Angela's mystical experience was the experience of love both towards God and the world, 'the comprehension of some dual-unity' that 'opened up to her in the analysis of humility and love' (Karsavin 1997a, 115, 128). There is no doubt that Karsavin strongly fell under the spell of Angela's writing and her mystical experience of God and that he considered his translation a step towards his identification with the medieval mystic. He called himself one 'of the sons of the great and holy mother Angela' and ended his introduction with the words 'Sancta Angelica, ora pro nobis!' (Karsavin 1997a, 131).

The Russian Revolution added particular urgency to Karsavin's religious search and had a crucial impact on his life and ideas. His religious sentiments now became public, part of a broader religious 'awakening' among members of the local intelligentsia, as the sociologist Pitirim Sorokin, a close observer, later recalled: 'Intellectuals and students, previous-

ly atheistical to a degree, now became religious. Professors Losky [N.O. Losskii], [I. M.] Grevs, Karsavin, and others, began to preach in the churches, a thing never heard of before' (Sorokin 1950, 272). In early 1918, Karsavin was a founding member of the Brotherhood of St. Sophia and in 1920 he became one of the founders of the Petrograd Theological Institute (the former Theological Academy), where he taught a course on the 'Foundations of Christianity' (Khoruzhii 2012a, 471).

Yet together with religious enthusiasm the revolution also raised difficult moral and political questions. In particular, after the Bolshevik takeover Karsavin was confronted with profound moral choices: Could one 'accept' the revolution? Or should it be resisted, perhaps even by force? Could revolutionary violence be justified by the revolution's benevolent effects in a distant future? In an essay published only posthumously Karsavin rejected the view that for the sake of the revolution and a bright future public morality could be separated from personal morality. He categorically rejected violence (even for beneficial goals) and insisted that only religion can serve as the foundation of absolute morality and moral obligations (Karsavin 1993f).

Karsavin's attitude to the new Bolshevik regime, however, was ambiguous. On the one hand, he deemed the Bolsheviks 'highly ignorant', 'uneducated', exhibiting 'despotism and fanatical intolerance', 'unscrupulousness', 'slyness' and 'falsity'. On the other hand, however, he found them the only force able to 'preserve Russian statehood and culture'. Despite their communist ideology they were expressing certain 'elemental strivings of (p. 513) the Russian people' and realizing 'the pursuit of social reconstruction and even social truth, the instincts of statehood and great power aspirations'. Unconsciously the Bolsheviks gave voice 'to certain basic religious ideals and quests of the Russian people' (Karsavin 1993a, 307-10).

In his assessment of the Russian Revolution, Karsavin may have been inspired by the writings of Joseph de Maistre, whose *Considerations on France* he studied during the revolutionary period (Karsavin 1989, 95-100). Just like de Maistre, Karsavin attempted to ground his moral considerations on religion rather than rationalism. In two dense essays written at that time, Karsavin explored the issue of morality, moral action and the problem of free will, criticizing and rejecting central concepts of the Western Enlightenment tradition, which he saw embodied primarily in the writings of David Hume and Immanuel Kant.

Karsavin's 'On Good and Evil' is essentially a critique of the Kantian categorical imperative as overly formal and insufficiently related to the absolute. Evil, Karsavin argued, does not exist by itself, only good exists. What is perceived in the empirical world as evil is in fact insufficiently, incompletely realized absolute good, for lack of human effort (Karsavin 1994e, 270).

In 'On freedom' he criticized Hume's and Kant's ideas of causation, arguing that they turn human actions into unconnected and isolated rational decisions. In his view, however, the human soul experienced events and actions as a continuous process, where past, present, and future are 'intuitively' perceived and cannot be neatly and mechanically dis-

tinguished. The human soul, Karsavin insisted, consists of both will and reason and these cannot be divided. Moreover, Karsavin claimed, human spiritual life is not, as Kant argued, separated into the noumenal and phenomenal spheres. There is no gap between the two spheres and the empirical continuously transcends into the all-united (*vseedinoe*) (Karsavin's term for the Kantian noumenon) (Karsavin 1994f, 235).

Metaphysics of All-Unity

Further developing his metaphysics of all-unity, in 1922 Karsavin published *Noctes Petropolitanae*, a philosophical treatise on metaphysical (and physical) love. Not least because Karsavin discussed his views on divine love next to and intertwined with more mundane forms of love, including allusions to a love affair with one of his female students, this work acquired notoriety among the Russian literati.

Noctes Petropolitanae, Karsavin's first truly philosophical work, is an examination of the basic foundations of Christian teachings on the Deity. Further elaborating Angela's meditations on 'Love', Karsavin celebrates it as the one principle that allows for unification of human beings among each other and, at the same time, with God. The experience of love, in Karsavin's view, is the experience of all-unity. Love, he claimed, allows one to 'reach the threshold of infinity' and, using the words of Angela of Foligno, to see oneself 'right in the middle of the Holy Trinity' (Karsavin 1994d, 109, 170).

(p. 514) Just as the two lovers partake in the divine all-unity, so mankind as a whole represents the hierarchical form of all-unity, 'a hierarchically built unity of multiplicity: it realizes itself in the multiple mutual complementation of individual units, in an original combination' of states and nations, that is, 'multi-unities', 'unions of love' (*soiuzy liubvi*), as Karsavin called them (Karsavin 1994d, 135). Yet mankind's 'unity of multiplicity' is merely a mirror image of the most fundamental unity in diversity—that of God in His three hypostases, where in a 'dual-unity' 'God-Father surrenders himself entirely to the Son and entirely accepts the Son, who is surrendering himself to the Father'. 'Love is the third hypostasis, re-establishing Divine unity, as multi-unity, as tri-unity of the hypostatic life'. This is why, Karsavin argued, the Catholic Church's doctrine that the third hypostasis proceeds from both the father and the son ('filioque') is so fateful: it causes the 'depreciation of the hypostasis of the Holy Spirit', the negation of Christ's divinity, precluding man's divinization (Karsavin 1994d, 165, 166, 168).

More controversially, Karsavin also proclaimed that because of divine love's dual-united character, love among human beings can never only be purely spiritual. The two lovers desire and possess each other, and only 'in the carnal fusion is the deep and full mutual penetration of the souls' accomplished. In this act 'spirituality and corporality are unified, a new and genuine body in Christ and in the Church is created, repeating the embodiment of the Logos in His Bride' (Karsavin 1994d, 110).

Noctes Petropolitanae is Karsavin's first systematic elaboration on the Trinity as the foundation of, and model for, the relation between human beings among each other and with God. In its formal and stylistic aspects (the 'author' of the text enters in intimate conversation with 'Love') it echoes more general tendencies of Russian symbolist writings, the so-called 'life-creation' (*zhiznetvorchestvo*), where the borders between life and literature are consciously transcended, where life turns into literature and literature shapes life. Karsavin's 'life-creation' manifested itself in the imitation of (and self-stylization after) one of the medieval writers and mystics that he studied and analysed earlier, particularly in his *Saligia, or a Thoroughly Brief and Soul-Enhancing Meditation on God, the World, Man, Evil, and the Seven Deadly Sins* (1919), stylistically fashioned as a medieval *tractatus* (Karsavin 1994h). In its religious interpretation of carnal love, Karsavin echoes the writings of Vasily Rozanov, whereas in his worshipping of 'Love' we can see parallels to the veneration of 'Sophia' or the 'Beautiful Lady' among other symbolist artists and philosophers, such as Vladimir Soloviev or Aleksandr Blok.

Noctes Petropolitanae allowed Karsavin to elaborate his idea of 'all-unity' into a philosophical concept based on his interpretation of the Holy Trinity. In his *Philosophy of History*, written at the same time, but completed and published only in 1923 in exile in Berlin, he attempted to utilize the concept of 'all-unity' as a tool for proper understanding of history. *Philosophy of History* is a critique of positivistic history, which saw the historical process merely as chains of causation. Karsavin argued instead for a non-linear and more dynamic understanding of the evolution of time in history, where history presented itself as 'unity in diversity', both in a synchronic and diachronic perspective. He emphasized that 'all-unity' allowed the historian not only to grasp the essence and direction of the historical process, but to understand it as spatial and temporal totality.

(p. 515) History manifested itself, as Karsavin had shown in his earlier work on medieval religiosity, in individual religious cultures. And these religious cultures, Karsavin now claimed, are a 'theophany, the revelation of the Absolute (in Itself unattainable) in the relative (nonexistent without and beyond It)' (Karsavin 1993a, 168). And here lies the ultimate conceptual foundation of Karsavin's historiosophy, the expression of the entanglement between history and religion: History properly studied, that is, studied in 'individual cultures', each defined and determined by a particular attitude to the absolute, can bring the historian closer to the revelation and cognition of the Absolute (i.e. the Divine). In other words, historical study is theophany. And the more historical collective persons that the historian studies, the closer he approaches this theophany. Ultimately, Karsavin implied, one would need a total knowledge of all historical collectives that ever existed, from the earliest times and on a global scale. Thus, Karsavin the historian was at the same time a searcher for God, whereas Karsavin the religious philosopher, sharpening and systematizing his understanding of all-unity and its personal manifestations, was perfecting the tools for Karsavin the historian.

Applying the concept of all-unity to history, Karsavin described the individual historical subject (or person) as an inseparable component of higher collective entities (such as cultures or nations). These are inconceivable beyond and outside the individual, yet each in-

dividual contains them merely in an imperfect and incomplete manner. Karsavin here uses the terms 'contracted' (*stiazhenno*) and 'state of potentiality' (*possest*), the second being a Latin word devised by Nicholas of Cusa (Karsavin 1993a, 43, 49). However, Karsavin cautioned, it would be wrong to ascribe to these persons increasing or decreasing value, depending on their hierarchical position. After all, neither of these persons (collective or individual) can or does exist without or beyond the other one (Karsavin 1993a, 147–8). Ultimately, all these persons taken together constitute mankind as the highest subject of history, not as a mechanical combination of individual events or material facts, but as 'social-mental development' (Karsavin 1993a, 98). This development occurred without sharp or clearly visible ruptures. History evolves in an 'all-temporal' continuum, where in the present the past is never entirely gone and the future is already perceivable (Karsavin 1993a, 43, 46).

Yet despite history's 'all-temporality' Karsavin allowed for the identification of several historical stages that every historical collective person would undergo. Initially, a collective person is wholly religious. But then in its 'organic period' the religiosity differentiates itself and ceases to be all-encompassing, and a separate religious sphere emerges that advances in various fields, such as dogma, cult, and religious morality. Increasingly, religiosity loses its dominating position within the collective person and moves towards its death in the last 'moment' of its development, characterized by irreligiosity (*areligioznost'*) (Karsavin 1993a, 206).

Karsavin exemplified these stages in the example of Western Europe. Here the late Middle Ages represented the 'organic period', already threatened by the challenges of the Renaissance, where the worldly elements gained dominance over the spiritual ones. Nicholas of Cusa, Karsavin claimed in his study of Giordano Bruno, was the only Western thinker of the period who was able to solve the central problem of the Middle Ages, to synthesize the absolute and the empirical. In his writings 'the gravitation towards the absolute prevails', yet at the same time he is 'already revealing in the Deity the meaning of the world'. Nicholas of Cusa's philosophy doesn't solve the philosophical issue of all-unity, but outlines a programme of how it could be solved in the future. Unfortunately, Karsavin remarked, this synthesis never took place. It is the tragedy of the Renaissance that the 'struggle of two implacable principles—the aspiration towards the Divine and the aspiration towards the world' was never solved. Karsavin saw this tragedy exemplified in the thought of Bruno, whose ideas moved towards the worldly principle, neglecting the Divine (Karsavin 2016, 257). It is quite obvious that Karsavin himself aspired in his philosophy to pick up the project of this synthesis, where Cusa had left it.

To be sure, Karsavin was convinced that 'Christian religious culture represents the apogee in the development of mankind', revealing the fullest formal structure (*stroenie*) of All-Unity. Yet it did not and could not express the absolute in its totality, and non-Christian religious cultures were valuable by themselves and revealed other important aspects of all-unity (Karsavin 1993a, 207).

In his booklet *East, West and the Russian Idea* (1922) Karsavin further developed his historiography. Whereas in his opinion the Western branches of Christianity were in decline and about to dissolve into pure rationality and empiricism (as a consequence of their defective understanding of, and living towards, theosis), in the East, and in particular in Russia, the situation was different. Here earthly existence in all its imperfection, including all spheres of human life, society, and the state, was always imbued with a sense of the divine. For Orthodox Christianity 'the unity of the cosmos is conceived not as a system of atoms (as it is characteristic for the West), but as a concrete unity of multiplicity, as all-unity' (Karsavin 1993d, 197). Yet, Orthodoxy's success is far from certain. Although it preserved the Christian tradition in its purest form, Eastern Orthodoxy and its culture since the seventh century remained in a state of potentiality only. It is characterized by a certain 'passivity' and 'indolence' (*zakosnelost'*), exemplified by the 'legendary Russian slackness' (Karsavin 1993d, 200). In contrast to the excessively worldly character of the Christian culture in the West, Orthodoxy has almost an excessive inclination towards theosis that often leads to a deplorable neglect of the human sphere and serves as a justification of inhumanity (Karsavin 1993d, 203).

After the revolution Karsavin saw Orthodox Russian culture standing at the crossroads and called on it to 'reveal' and 'actualize' its potential. It either would accomplish its universal task by adapting and complementing the qualities of Western Christianity (as Karsavin cautiously hoped), or, as had happened in the West before, it would reveal only its own qualities. It might even remain in a state of passive inertia and risk perishing (Karsavin 1993d, 211).

In all of that Karsavin saw a high degree of urgency. Just like the West during the Middle Ages and the emergence of the Renaissance, Russia was determining its future for centuries to come: 'We are living through perhaps the deepest crisis of our historical life, our thirteenth-sixteenth centuries. It is possible that we will not survive this crisis. [...]

(p. 517) But if there are great dangers, there are also great hopes and we need to believe in them, basing ourselves on the idea of all-unity' (Karsavin 1993d, 216).

Expulsion and Exile

Living in revolutionary Russia, Karsavin had 'accepted' the revolution and Soviet power as loyal citizen of the new state. Still, his convictions, which he never concealed, could not gain him the favour of the new authorities. His religious writings, first of all his *Noctes*, attracted contempt from the communist press, where Karsavin was reviled as an 'obscurantist academic' or 'medieval fanatic' (Vaganov 1922, 54). It should not have come as much of a surprise that in late 1922 Karsavin was expelled from Soviet Russia, as one of the passengers of the infamous 'Philosophy Steamer'.

During his first decade abroad, first in Berlin, later in Paris and then in Kaunas, Karsavin did what he had called for in his early post-revolutionary writings. He tried to study and develop the legacy of Christian thought, focusing on the Orthodox tradition, from the Fathers of the Church to late imperial Russian spiritual traditions. In doing so, he aimed at

awakening Russian Orthodoxy from its alleged indolence in the hope of leading it (and with it Russian religious culture) into the bright future he envisioned for them.

In his mission, Karsavin was active in three fields: in numerous books and articles he systematized his philosophy of all-unity and studied the traditions on which he aimed to ground it. Second, he propagated his views on past, current, and future Russian religious culture broadly among the émigré public as well as among European educated circles. Third, he participated in the so-called Eurasianist movement where he applied his theory to current politics and developed his thought into a coherent political ideology.

Among Karsavin's philosophical works of the inter-war years a prominent place is occupied by his *On First Principles*, a fundamental and systematic exposition of Christian faith whose title implicitly refers to Origen. In 1925 the first four chapters were published, the remaining five appeared in a German summary in 1928 and the complete work in 1994 (Karsavin 1928; Karsavin 1994a). In its scope and ambition it is comparable to Bulgakov's *Unfading Light*, trying to define the essence of religion, Christianity, God, and Man. Like Bulgakov, Karsavin, too, asked the question of 'How is religion possible?' Hoping that the era of 'criticism' was over, he proposed a new motto: 'Back to Christian dogmatics', an only thinly veiled critique and rejection of neo-Kantianism and its call for a return to Kant (Karsavin 1928, 4).

Like Karsavin's *Philosophy of History*, *On First Principles* is an eclectic text. The first four chapters are based on seminars and lectures he had taught before 1922 at Petrograd University and the Petrograd Theological Institute (Karsavin 1994a, 363-4). They explore central aspects of Christian religion and religiosity, explaining theological concepts such as all-unity, Deity, Godmanhood, theophany, creation, theosis, and freedom, as (p. 518) well as the relation between faith and knowledge, personhood, the Holy Trinity, and absolute truth. The remaining chapters reflect Karsavin's philosophical development since the revolution and discuss the more dynamic aspects of his thought, including his reflections on the creation of the imperfect world, its decline into sin, suffering and death, redemption, and transfiguration through Christ's death. The book concludes with a reflection on the 'Holy Universal Orthodox Church'.

In *On Personhood* (1929), another major work published abroad, Karsavin explained his philosophical ideas in a more concise exposition. He focused on the central concept of the person in its hierarchical synchronic and dynamical diachronic appearances. This text systematized ideas expressed in earlier works such as *Noctes Petropolitanae* and *Philosophy of History*, and also included a more detailed exploration of collective persons (now called 'symphonic' or 'social persons'), their relation with the individual—all of them as being mirrors of the Divine. Only as part of a collective person and in confrontation with other individuals, Karsavin argued, did the individual manifest himself. Likewise, the 'social person' manifested itself only in and through the individuals that it consisted of (Karsavin 1992b, 113-14).

All these manifestations take place in time and they occur continuously without interruptions, although they can be divided into 'beginning, apogee and end'. 'Personal being is a dialectical process [and] in its concreteness a historical process' (Karsavin 1992b, 175). It is marked by the dialectics of 'dis-unification' (*raz''edinenie*) and 're-unification' (*vos-soedinenie*) of being, it is 'development' and 'history' (Karsavin 1992b, 184). All forms of being, both divine and earthly, follow the same dynamics, alternating between being and non-being, between birth and death. Sergei Khoruzhii has aptly described these two processes of empirical and divine dynamics as a 'double spiral'. 'The global dynamic is structurally arranged in two mutually contrasting branches: God's being-nonbeing-being; and the creature's nonbeing-being-nonbeing. This integrated double spiral is History or the Drama of Personality. The sacrificial death of God is the nodal point of unity—a death postulated as the necessary and crucial (but not final!) event in the Drama of Personality. That is why the whole essence of personal being is formulated in Karsavin's motto: *Life-through-Death*' (Horužij 2009, 102–3).

In his last explicitly philosophical work, the *Poem on Death*, Karsavin focused on the element of death. Formally continuing and concluding his *Noctes*, Karsavin again engages in self-stylization and lyrically reflects on issues that are the subject of his more scholarly works: questions of art and poetry, and of good and evil. His female hero reappears, now under the Lithuanian name of 'Elenite'. Yet the central element, just as in his *On Personhood*, is the issue of life and death, rather in the religious sense of 'Death as Love' (§§ 99 and 100). In its deepest sense, this poem draws upon the author's personality, his doubts and questioning, from his encounter with God towards his ultimate 'free' acceptance of God (§§ 160 and 180). The poem concludes with the 'author's' regret that he had rejected 'Elenite' (his lover from *Noctes*?) out of egoistic motifs (§ 186) and now he seeks his own sacrificial death as punishment for his imperfections. After all, he claims 'punishment [...] in its essence is the self-denying, Divine Love for God, which conquers death by Death' (Karsavin 2013, 472).

(p. 519) Whereas all three above-mentioned works aspire to a general philosophy of Christianity, in several other works Karsavin more explicitly focused on Orthodoxy and the Russian Orthodox Church. In 1924, he began to lecture on patristics at the Russian Scientific Institute in Berlin and in 1927 published *Holy Fathers and Teachers of the Church*, a concise study of the emergence of Christian thought and dogma, from Gnosticism in the second century to John of Damascus in the eighth century. Yet, as part of his effort to revive (Russian) Orthodox thought and theology, it is more than a work of scholarship. In the introduction he explained that every human being and every historical period can only partially and fragmentarily absorb the Christian Truth. A particularly important contribution to the grasping of the Truth is represented by the Holy Tradition and the Fathers of the Church, who not only produced theological and philosophical knowledge but led exemplary lives in closest contact with the Church—doing so not as individuals but conciliarly (*soborno*). The study of the Fathers, in Karsavin's view, was more than an academic exercise; it contributed to 'the Christianization of the world' and as such was essentially theosis (Karsavin 1994i, 12, 13, 15). This book should have earned him a teaching position in patristics at the newly founded Saint Serge Institute in Paris, but personal rival-

ries with Bulgakov and Florovskii, who ultimately got the position, together with Karsavin's poor moral reputation after the publication of his *Noctes*, prevented his appointment (Klement'ev 2008, 404–14).

Less voluminous but equally important for Karsavin's effort to revive Orthodox thought was his republication of Aleksei Khomiakov's treatise 'On the Church', accompanied by extensive notes and an instructive introduction. Karsavin praised Khomiakov as modern-day Father of the Russian Church and explained the text's value as a contribution to the enchurchment of the Russian people and a means to avoid spiritual destruction under the Soviet dictatorship (Karsavin 1994c).

Although abroad since 1922, Karsavin remained convinced of the particular spiritual and religious revival Russian Orthodoxy had experienced during and through the revolution. He reported numerous miracles that in 1923 were taking place in Soviet Russia, where church cupolas that had lost their golden hue all of a sudden began to shine brightly. The same was true for icons that had over time darkened but now miraculously regained their previous brilliance. These miracles were not limited to Soviet Russia but also happened abroad: Karsavin reported similar events in Berlin, where icons owned by Russian exiles brightened without human interference. Karsavin left no doubt that he was firmly convinced that 'Divine miracles are possible and do happen' (Karsavin 1926, 118–19).

In his enduring religious exaltation Karsavin engaged intensively with the Russian émigré community in Berlin, reading numerous lectures for various émigré organizations, such as Berdiaev's Religious-Philosophical Academy. He also actively participated in the local Russian Orthodox parish and co-edited the journal *Herald of Orthodoxy*. The topics of his lectures and other public events were wide ranging, from his historical and philosophical ideas to comments on the current situation of the Russian Orthodox Church (Klement'ev 2008). He also widely propagated his ideas in a series of popular (p. 520) essays both in Russian (e.g. Karsavin 1994g) and in various European languages, such as Italian, Czech and, in particular, German (e.g. Karsavin 1925).

Several of Karsavin's German language publications were the result of his ecumenical encounters with German Protestants in Berlin, in particular the so-called 'Hochkirchlich-Ökumenischer Bund'. At this organization's meeting in June 1925, Karsavin presented a lecture 'On the Essence of Russian Orthodoxy', which contained the basic ideas of Karsavin's religious philosophy, but also emphasized the common moments between Orthodoxy and Protestantism, such as their shared 'understanding of the relation between faith and morality', their 'rejection of any rational concept of law and the emphasis on the idea of freedom'. Like Orthodoxy, Protestantism, too, rejects all kinds of 'exclusivity, in particular that of the Roman pretensions of exceptionality' (Anon. 1925, 111).

Karsavin's ecumenical encounters were motivated by his philosophy of all-unity, which claimed that although (Russian) Orthodoxy has preserved the Christian Tradition in its purest form, each of the other Christian denominations contributes their unique and valuable moments. During the revolution Karsavin had already explained this fact in a booklet on Catholicism, where he argued, 'Every religion contains Divine truth' (Karsavin 1997a,

10). The truth of Catholicism was that it more sharply expressed 'the idea of the unity of all in Christ' and that it placed the human being into the most prominent position as 'king of nature' (Karsavin 1997a, 12, 14). Yet this emphasis on the empirical, Karsavin complained, also had its negative consequences, not least of which was the Inquisition. It also drew the Catholic Church into secular struggles over power, leading to separation of church and state and the dogma of papal infallibility. 'Catholicism', Karsavin concluded elsewhere, 'is a human religion, all too human' (Karsavin 1993c, 132).

Still, Karsavin's occasionally sharp criticism of the Catholic Church did not prevent him from engaging with Catholic theologians, neither in the 1920s nor later. In 1939 and 1940, Karsavin conducted a particularly interesting intellectual exchange of letters with the Austrian Jesuit Gustav Wetter, who questioned Karsavin's theories from a Catholic perspective and who suspected him of harbouring pantheistic views, a charge that Karsavin tried to disprove (Gavriushin 1994).

Just as Karsavin's ecumenical contacts are rooted in his philosophy of all-unity, so his association from 1923 until 1929 with the Eurasianist movement can be seen as a logical outcome of his historiosophy. Many of Karsavin's ideas, such as his belief in the decline of Western Europe and in Orthodox Russia's potential to create a new religious culture, were shared by the Eurasianists, who claimed that Russia was neither 'Europe' nor 'Asia', but a continent *sui generis* in between with a unique spiritual mission. Like Karsavin, the Eurasianists 'accepted' the revolution, rejected the restoration of the old regime and endeavoured to transform the new regime by awakening and guiding the revolution's religious potential away from the misguided ideas of communism towards a genuine Orthodox culture. At the same time, Eurasianism as a political movement provided Karsavin with an opportunity to apply his metaphysical concepts to contemporary politics, to use them as the philosophical underpinnings of Eurasianism's political programme for a post-Soviet Eurasia. In the manifesto *Eurasianism: An Attempt at a* (p. 521) *Systematic Exposition* (1926), for instance, he explained the reasons for the Russian Revolution and outlined the institutions of a future Eurasian state, including the role of the Orthodox Church in it. Yet, by 1929 it became clear that the imminent transformation of the communist Soviet Union into an Orthodox Eurasia was not forthcoming. The movement experienced a painful split in early 1929, and already a few months later the more radical leftist faction, to which Karsavin belonged, had all but ceased to exist (Baissvenger 2012). By then Karsavin, too, had left the movement and refocused his attention away from the polemical squabbles of émigré politics to the *longue durée* of European history.

Since early 1928 Karsavin was again academically employed as professor of history at the University of Lithuania (subsequently Vytautas Magnus University) in Kaunas. By all evidence Karsavin's employment in Lithuania, which lasted until his arrest by Soviet authorities in 1949, was a success story (Lasinskas 2011, 24–52). He adapted well to the new environment, quickly acquired fluency in Lithuanian and became a revered teacher. He actively participated in university life and even contributed to the creation of Lithuanian

words for philosophical concepts, activities that later earned him the epithet 'Lithuanian Plato' (Khoruzhii 2012c).

More importantly, during his Lithuanian years Karsavin authored a multi-volume *History of European Culture*, covering the period from the Roman Empire until the dawn of modernity in the fifteenth century. Unfortunately in its entirety this *tour de force* is still available only in Lithuanian. (A final sixth volume was lost after Karsavin's arrest: Khoruzhii 2004, 270.) Yet, a Russian translation of the first volume (Karsavin 2003) and a useful outline of the remaining volumes (Ivinskii 2003, 29–39) reveal this work as an extensive and detailed study, based on Karsavin's earlier historiography (*Philosophy of History and Giordano Bruno*). It traces the emergence of European religious culture from Roman antiquity until its fateful transition into modernity in the fifteenth century, that is, the 'tragedy of Renaissance' (Ivinskii 2003, 8–20).

Little do we know about Karsavin's life under Soviet and German occupation in Lithuania from 1939 to 1945 except that in October 1940, together with the entire Faculty of Humanities, he moved from Kaunas to Vilnius. He evidently did not compromise himself by collaboration with the German occupation authorities and during the entire war years continued to work on his historiographical project of global history as theophany.

Among the central works of this period is an originally untitled work that has recently been named either *Universal History of Culture: Pre-History. Antiquity* (Ivinskii 2003, 20–6) or *Metaphysics of History* (Lasinskas 2011, 62). It remains unpublished. Besides discussing the emergence of Christianity and its role in history, it also studies Hellenistic culture in its relation both to Christianity and the cultures of Asia. This work can be interpreted as an extended introduction to Karsavin's *History of European Culture*, which it puts in a more global context (Ivinskii 2003, 21–6). Yet it can also be seen as the 'metaphysics of history' that Karsavin had described in 1923 as the highest form of historical reflection, 'the concrete study of the historical process in light of the highest metaphysical ideas' (Karsavin 1993a, 15). In this work, finally, he moved further towards a global history, exploring the 'truths' that non-Christian religions contained.

(p. 522) In another untitled treatise written soon after the end of the Second World War, Karsavin elaborated on the metaphysics of time and picked up on other ideas that he had developed in his *Philosophy of History*. In the words of Sergei Khoruzhii (who suggested the title *On the Metaphysics of All-Temporality* for this work) it centred on the 'concept of time as all-temporality'. Karsavin examined 'all-temporality' in the writings of Marcel Proust, discussed the concepts of memory and remembering but also revisited other topics that he had dealt with before, such as the idea of perfection and the metaphysics of death. He also outlined new major themes for an even more fundamental examination of basic philosophical concepts (Khoruzhii 2005).

After the end of the Second World War and with the Soviet annexation of Lithuania Karsavin had again become a Soviet citizen. Although he remained critical of the Soviet regime, we have no evidence for disloyalty. Nevertheless, with the tightening grip on intellectuals in the post-war years, the Soviet authorities again viewed Karsavin and his

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family with suspicion. Contacts with his former fellow Eurasianist (and now son-in-law) Petr Suvchinskii in Paris led to the arrest of Karsavin's daughter Irina in March 1948 and of Karsavin himself in July 1949. In March 1950 he was convicted of counter-revolutionary activities as a member of the Eurasianist movement and sentenced to ten years in a labour camp.

While in prison Karsavin suffered from open tuberculosis and in August was transferred to Abez', a special camp for prisoners in poor health, located in the northern Komi region. Despite the adverse conditions of captivity, Karsavin continued to develop his philosophical ideas. In prison Karsavin had turned his philosophical ideas into a 'Crown of Sonnets' (Karsavin 1990) and in the camp he continued to write on philosophical issues. Although limited in their scope, these works possess a new and fascinating quality of austerity. In the words of Sergei Khoruzhii, now Karsavin's system 'achieves a mature concluding synthesis' characterized by 'depth of thought [and] clarity of exposition' (Khoruzhii 2004, 270). His 'Lord's Prayer' is a particularly fine example of these qualities (Karsavin 1972).

In spite of hardships and continuing deterioration of his health Karsavin conducted philosophical discussions with his fellow inmates, among them the artist Nikolai Punin and Lithuanian inmates who protected and venerated him as their fellow citizen. He befriended Anatolii Vaneev, a young engineer from Leningrad, who became his devoted pupil. After Karsavin's death in July 1952, Vaneev preserved many of his teacher's writings and authored a moving memoir about their intellectual interactions in the camp (Vaneev 1990).

Influences, Contexts and Afterlife

Influences, both conceptual and terminological, in Karsavin's writings and philosophy abound, but they are not always openly acknowledged. For instance, from Nicholas of Cusa, Karsavin adopted the concept of 'possest', that is, actualized-possibility or God (p. 523) (Khoruzhii 2012b, 53). Cusa was also the source of Karsavin's other central concept of 'contraction' (*stiazhennost'*) (Melikh 2003, 69–92). From Giordano Bruno, Karsavin borrowed the understanding of time as '*conglomeratio et exglomeratio centri*', a dynamic principle according to which time is not conceived in a straightforward manner. Rather every moment transits into the following moment as if from the periphery of a circle first to that circle's centre point and then back from the centre to the consecutive moment (Khoruzhii 2005, 317–18). Finally, Karsavin's 'Love Paradigm' emerged under the influence not only of the writings of Angela of Foligno, but also continued the traditions of Bernard of Clairvaux, Bonaventure, and Richard of St. Victor (Meerson 1998, 144).

Like many other Russian thinkers of the Silver Age, Karsavin and his philosophy of 'all-unity' are indebted to Vladimir Soloviev (Meerson 1998, 144). Yet, surprisingly, Soloviev's name is rarely mentioned in Karsavin's works. In fact, Karsavin's attitude to Soloviev is complicated and changed over time. Only in the mid-1920s did he comment explicitly on his famous precursor, calling him 'a beautiful and strange phenomenon of Russian intel-

lectual history', a 'brilliant and ingenious dialectician' who dared to be an 'enchurched Christian' during 'the reign of unrivalled positivism'. Yet Karsavin regretted that Soloviev gravitated towards Catholicism and neglected the specific qualities of 'Russian national culture', confessing a universal, that is, Western European culture instead (Karsavin 1927, 114–15).

Rather than crediting Soloviev, Karsavin lauded Dostoevsky as one of his intellectual inspirers. In an essay on Dostoevskii, Karsavin elaborated on several topics that would later be central to his own philosophy, such as the phenomenon of the person, the idea of the Russian people as expressing the Christian ideal of society, and the meaning of history (Karsavin 1993e). Furthermore, Karsavin credited Dostoevsky with having correctly grasped and criticized the main traits of the 'Catholic idea' even if the writer failed to sufficiently appreciate Catholicism's positive features and ultimately was unable to solve the religious challenge posed by Catholicism for Russian Orthodoxy (Karsavin 1993c, 151–2, 156).

Several modern non-Russian thinkers also played an important role in the genesis of Karsavin's philosophy. Karsavin's historiosophy, for instance, owed much to Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West*. Karsavin praised him as 'one of the most talented historians', whose 'brilliant and paradoxical comparisons splendidly elucidate the essence of history [and] lead to the understanding of its nature'. At the same time, Karsavin complained, Spengler was a 'good-for-nothing philosopher (moreover not without megalomania)' (Karsavin 1993d, 163), presumably because the German thinker viewed individual cultures in historical and cultural isolation, and thus would not share Karsavin's idea of mankind as the 'all-united subject of history' (Karsavin 1993a, 97).

Similarly ambiguous was Karsavin's attitude to the philosophy of Henri Bergson. On the one hand he praised him for ascertaining that quantitative-spatial concepts cannot be applied to the life of the soul (Karsavin 1994f, 220). At the same time he reproached him for not knowing and applying ideas that Karsavin himself had developed in his philosophy of all-unity. For instance, Karsavin conceded that in the concept of the *durée* (p. 524) *réelle* Bergson had brilliantly formulated the intuition 'of the all-temporality of the soul' and the 'understanding of the soul's life (*dushevnoi zhizni*) as a continuous, uninterrupted process', and yet Karsavin complained that Bergson 'due to his unfortunate custom ... doesn't think it through to the end and doesn't elaborate it metaphysically' (Karsavin 1994f, 222–3, 233).

Among contemporary Russian thinkers Karsavin was personally close to Semen Frank, with whom he also shared the influence of Cusa's ideas, although Frank interpreted them differently and was less interested in church dogmas (Rubin 2013, 76). Relations with Sergei Bulgakov were more difficult: Karsavin was critical of Bulgakov's 'sophiology' and the latter resented Karsavin's often provocative behaviour (Rubin 2013, 373). Berdiaev was one of the most passionate critics of Eurasianism, including Karsavin's role in the movement and his concept of 'symphonic persons' (Rubin 2013, 359n305). Still, Berdiaev, himself an outsider among the Russian religious intelligentsia, opened the pages of his

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journal *The Way* to discussions of Karsavin's ideas and those of other Eurasianists (Baissvenger 2012, 178).

Karsavin's personal relations with Georgii Florovskii were even worse (Klement'ev 2008, 405), although both shared a profound interest in patristics, and a number of their theological arguments are quite similar. It might not be accidental that Karsavin's image of pre-revolutionary Russian Orthodox theology as being in Protestant theology's 'captivity' (Karsavin 1994*g*, 355) is strikingly echoed by Florovskii's notion of its 'Babylonian captivity' (in *The Ways of Russian Theology*).

Finally, Vladimir Lossky had much in common with Karsavin: both were critical of Bulgakov and his teachings, and both shared an interest in (neo-)patristics. This may not be a coincidence: Lossky had been Karsavin's student at Petrograd University from 1918 to 1922 (Rubin 2013, 377–83).

Despite his tragic death in a remote Gulag camp beyond the Arctic circle, Karsavin's posthumous legacy was rich and manifold. Central was the impact of Anatolii Vaneev who, after returning to Leningrad from the camp, transmitted Karsavin's philosophy to a younger generation of Soviet citizens (Vaneev 1990, 375–81). In Moscow, too, Karsavin's ideas were well known. Beginning in the 1970s, Sergei Khoruzhii and other members of Christian circles in the Soviet capital, inspired by Aleksandr Men, collected, studied, and discussed Karsavin's works and ideas. Some studies on his philosophy were even published in samizdat (Khoruzhii 1994, 129).

In the West, too, Karsavin's post-war fate was known. Among those who learned of it from Vaneev was the Russian-German former Nazi diplomat Erich Sommer, who arrived at Abez' soon after Karsavin's death. After being repatriated to Germany in 1958, he informed the Western world about Karsavin's fate (Sommer 1958). Sommer also transferred some of Karsavin's late manuscripts to Gustav Wetter, who continued to study and explain Karsavin's philosophy of all-unity (Wetter 1990).

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union most of Karsavin's writings have been reissued and are now readily available. In recent years his fascinating life and thought have become the subject of numerous academic studies (Khoruzhii 2012a, 479–513) and several documentary films, in particular the four-part series 'Symphonic Person' by Vladimir Sharonov (Sharonov 2012–2015). It may still be too early to assess the extent to [\(p. 525\)](#) which Karsavin's thought, together with the tradition of Russian religious philosophy that he embodied, can be revived and developed in post-Soviet Russian thought—a hope Khoruzhii expressed in 1989 (Khoruzhii 1989, 92).

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