

ADAM DROZDEK

MADAME SWETCHINE AND HER FAITH

I. A LIFE

Madame Swetchine¹ was born in 1782 as Sophie Soimonova to Petr Soimonov who became a private secretary to tsarina Catherine II. She was a well educated, precocious child who as a teenager was fluent in several languages. The family was part of the court under Paul I. At that time, at the age of seventeen, Sophie married general Swetchine who was over twice her age. In spite of the difference in age, the marriage turned out to be happy and harmonious for over half a century². As it was frequently the case with Paul I, he exiled her father from his post and from the court, which led to her father's death, which, in turn, led to her keen interest in religion. Sophie was a maid of honor of tsarina Maria, wife of Paul I. She was actively involved in charitable works before and after the Napoleonic invasion but also nourished her friendship with many intellectuals including French Catholics who found in Russia their second home after French Revolution.

Swetchine very keenly interested in religious issues from an early age, and „at the age of nineteen, she threw [her]self into the arms of God” (F 1.127/

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¹ София Петровна Свечина, transliterated as Sofiia Svechina, pronounced as Svyechina; however, a widely accepted French spelling, used also by Swetchine herself, will be retained.

² Late in her life, in 1850, she wrote concerning the marriage where age difference is an issue: „experience showed me that the arguments waged against it are the weakest. The nature of character, education, atmosphere in which one lived” should be taken into account (L 2.94).

101; L 1.56)³. Her interest in Catholicism was awakened and strengthened through the influence of chevalier d'Augard, a former officer of the French navy and from 1791, an aid to the director of libraries in St. Petersburg; through Gabriel Gruber, a Jesuit, who had wide influence among Russian aristocracy; and, most importantly, through Joseph de Maistre, ambassador of the king of Sardinia since 1803. She studied intensely Claude Fleury's church history, which was strenuously objected to by de Maistre for the approach used by Fleury⁴ and for using this reasoning as the way of arriving at faith. This even led to a rift between Swetchine and de Maistre, which was eventually healed before de Maistre's death in 1821. In 1815, she converted to Catholicism⁵. Since her conversion coincided with the expulsion of Jesuits from Moscow and St. Petersburg (and later, from Russia) and with a general hostility toward Catholicism, and also with some career problems of general Swetchine, she left Russia with her husband in 1816 for Paris where she lived for forty years. The Swetchines found there good atmosphere since it was a time of Bourbon restoration (1815-1830), when Catholicism was reconstituted as an official religion, and they were also able to renew social ties with the French acquaintances they knew in Russia who had recently returned to France. In 1817, the Swetchines returned for a year to Russia. Once they were back in Paris, for several years they searched for a place of permanent residence, sometimes in the process using the hospitality of their friends when they needed a temporary residence. There, somewhat sponta-

³ The following abbreviations will be used:

F – [Alfred] de Falloux, *Madame Swetchine, sa vie et ses ūvres*, Paris: Didier 1860, vol. 1-2. Vol. 1 was translated into English as A[lfred] de Falloux, *Life and letters of Madame Swetchine*, Boston: Roberts Brothers 1867, and vol. 2 as [Alfred] de Falloux (ed.), *The writings of Madame Swetchine*, Boston: Roberts Brothers 1869. In references to this book, the number after a slash indicates a page number of the English translation; however, quotations have been retranslated.

J – [Alfred] de Falloux (ed.), *Madame Swetchine: Journal de sa conversion: méditations et prières*, Paris: Didier 1863.

L – [Alfred] de Falloux (ed.), *Lettres de Madame Swetchine*, vol. 1-3, Paris: Didier 1881. This edition combines letters from a 1862 two-volume edition of *Lettres*, letters from [Alfred] de Falloux (ed.), *Lettres inédites de Madame Swetchine*, Paris: Didier 1866, and most of the letters of Swetchine, sometimes with excisions, published later in Édouard Camus (ed.), *Correspondance du vicomte Armand Melun et de Madame Swetchine*, Paris: Leday 1892.

⁴ Fleury's twenty-four-volume history ended up in the index of forbidden books.

⁵ On 8 Nov. 1815 she performed her abjuration (F 1.187/142; J 63). In a letter to Alexis Golitsyn from 8. Nov. 1837, she wrote about the twenty-second „anniversary of the only day for which I wanted to be born” (L 3.297); M[arie]-J[oseph] Rouët de J o u r n e l, *Une Russe Catholique: la vie de Madame Swetchine (1782-1857)*, Paris: Desclée de Brouwer 1953, 157-158.

neously, she opened a salon in 1826 which became a very popular. The large success of her salon was due to the personality of the hostess, in particular, to her mediating and peacekeeping skills, whereby all possible intellectual conflicts were quickly resolved so that her salon became „neutral ground in the middle of Paris, not neutral as to sentiment and idea, but neutral as to passion” (F 1.314/230). Although „all political parties could there develop their principles or make their apologies, [...] their grudges or their anger did not have the right to cross the threshold”⁶ and „the wind of moderation [...] blew often in the salon of Madame Swetchine”⁷. Her constant guests included such luminaries as Chateaubriand, Albert de Broglie, and Alexis de Tocqueville, and influential figures of the Catholic church such as Félicité Lamennais, Fr. Henri Lacordaire, Louis de Carné, Franz de Champagny, bishop Félix Dupanloup, Jesuit Fr. Gustave Ravignan, Armand de Melun, Dom Guéranger, Charles de Montalembert, and many others. Through them she exercised an influence upon the religious and even political scene of France⁸. She was a spiritual advisor to many⁹. Catholic authors regularly handed her their manuscripts to elicit her opinion before publication¹⁰. Religious discussions were very frequent, and so the salon had spiritual character with a „pronounced theological coloring”¹¹. Such atmosphere was not to everyone’s taste, particularly because one door of the salon led to the chapel which was consecrated in 1835 by the archbishop of Paris. The chapel was used often by Swetchine herself and her guests for spiritual fortification; one visitor exclaimed that „this is not a salon; it is a religious circle, a branch of

⁶ Albert de Broglie, Une âme chrétienne dans la vie du monde, *Revue des deux mondes* 33 (1861), 907.

⁷ [Augustin] Bonnety, Esquisse sur la vie de Madame la Comtesse de Swetchine, *Annales de philosophie chrétienne* Dec. 1857, 482.

⁸ „Under the July monarchy, and until the first years of the second empire no important affairs of the Church of France was undertaken or decided without her being consulted. No religious action and even no inner attitude of any consequence was adopted without her support in the crucial moments of their lives by men like Armand de Melun, Charles de Montalembert, Henri Lacordaire, Prosper Guéranger, Alfred de Falloux and by many others”, André Rayez, France, in: *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, Paris: Beauchesne 1964, vol. 5, 976.

⁹ Albert de Broglie, *Mémoires*, vol. 1, Paris: Calmann-Lévy 1938, 276; André Duval, Madame Swetchine, *La vie spirituelle* 63 (1983), 149.

¹⁰ Bonnety, *op. cit.*, 463. Analysis of Lacordaire’s writings is a recurring topic in Swetchine’s letters to him, [Alfred] Falloux (ed.), *Correspondance du R. P. Lacordaire et de Madame Swetchine*, Paris: Didier 1864.

¹¹ [Charles]-Augustin Sainte Beuve, Madame Swetchine, sa vie et ses oeuvres, in: *Nouveaux lundis*, vol. 1, Paris: Lévy 1884, 211.

the church [...] a vestibule of Paradise, a house of charity for the use of people of the world"¹². Due to Swetchine's progressing illness and more and more prolonged periods of withdrawal to solitude for meditation, in the 1850s the salon was open less frequently and closed after her death in 1857.

Swetchine was involved in charitable work and took care of a deaf-mute girl, Parisse, in her home. She was intensely serious about her faith, however, „without any other proselytism except for the power of example, elevation of character, gift of sympathy and rectitude of judgment, she strengthens spirits weakened by doubt, consoles those who suffer, she accomplishes many a conversion to her God"¹³. She „never preached [...] but she awakened, she fortified, she inspired the best sentiments, rendering them, by her example, appealing and accessible"¹⁴. For example, in her correspondence with her friend Roxondra Sturdza, later Madame Ebling, she discussed religious matters but without being insistent about her Catholic faith. Roxondra remained devoted to the Orthodox church all her life, and yet despite a difference in religion, Swetchine and Sturdza never ceased to be friends. Warm and eliciting trust, Swetchine became a confidante to many. One example is Tocqueville who in his letter confided to her his religious doubts. Not to tarnish the image of her husband, his wife, after his death, did not allow the fragment of the letter with this revelation to be published¹⁵.

Swetchine did not publish anything during her life. However, she was a compulsive writer and note taker. Always a voracious reader, Swetchine made notes of her readings with excerpts and her observations. She had these notes bound in notebooks beginning in 1801, which amounted to thirty-five volumes (F 1.38/34). Also, she wrote hundreds of letters, not all of them preserved. The three volumes of *Lettres* published by Falloux and letters published by de la Grange¹⁶ run for over twenty two hundred pages. This is an extremely abundant amount of material; however, because letters and notes were made frequently on the spur of the moment, there is no overall

¹² S a i n t e B e u v e, *op. cit.*, 227.

¹³ V i c t o r d u B l e d, Le salon de Madame Swetchine, *Cosmopolis* 12 (1898), 406-407. In this way, she was a living embodiment of her maxim that „there is in example a power that surpasses all other [powers]; unawares, we reform others when walking upright" (F 2.54/33).

¹⁴ F a l l o u x, *Mémoires*, vol. 1, 165.

¹⁵ The fragment appeared in the full text of the letter in Alexis de Tocqueville, *Oeuvres complètes*, Paris: Gallimard, vol. 15.2, 1983, 315, cf. p. 248. In 3.540-541, the excision is not even indicated.

¹⁶ [Edouard] de la G r a n g e (ed.), *Nouvelles lettres de Madame Swetchine*, Paris: Amyot 1875.

organization of the notes into chapters and sections. Swetchine's reflections published by Falloux were largely organized by Falloux himself with the help of others¹⁷.

Swetchine was well read; she knew current cultural trends and was very well versed in the European political scene¹⁸. Swetchine proposes no theological breakthrough in her written legacy – and such a thought would be far from her mind. She did not intent to make any changes to her new-found faith. She wanted to understand it better and follow it more faithfully.

II. GOD AND MAN

That God exists was obvious to Swetchine as it should be obvious to everyone: „Under transparent veils of nature, God is perceptible to all; intelligence discovers him, order and beauty disclose him” (J 360). God revealed Himself in nature, and orderliness of nature proves His existence, whereby Swetchine endorsed the classical proof from design for the existence of God.

God is the creator of the universe, infinite, eternal, immutable, just, and omniscient. He is a providential God – and in her letters, Providence is the most frequently used synonym for God – „who orders our existence to almost imperceptible details” (L 2.186). He is interested in the human condition and in improving it to the point of self-sacrifice through the redemptive work of Christ. With her firm belief in the Trinity, she saw God Himself on the cross. „Jesus Christ, our savior, our friend, our father, our true friend; Jesus Christ is not only God who became man, he is God who remained man as much as it is necessary to be one to understand our poor humanity, to show it the royal road of its divine nature” (J 277). God is full of grace, merciful, attentive to the needs of mortals, waiting for them to turn to Him for help. God is the ruler of the universe and wants to be involved in all its aspects, in particular in the lives of those whom He created in His image¹⁹.

¹⁷ In this somewhat thankless editing task, they „were guided by no indication, no order, no prevision” ([Alfred] de Falloux, *Mémoires d'un royaliste*, vol. 2, Paris: Didier 1888, 284), since „almost all the [fragments] were improvised by jottings of the pen, without connection, without method” (de Falloux, Préface to *Journal*, ii).

¹⁸ „Connected to all that is the most illustrious in her old and new fatherland, she perfectly knew the affairs of the world and of the Church”, [Charles] de Montalembert, *Le testament du P. Lacordaire*, Paris: Douniol 1870, 74. This was certainly helped by her personal acquaintance with many European statesmen (F 1.422/310).

¹⁹ „God to Sophie Swetchine was part father, part Tsar, part companion, and part mentor;

God created man and the world for man out of His love (J 403), and thereby He placed a limit on His own omnipotence. Since the humanity of the human being is expressed in the freedom of human will, God leaves it to the free decision of man to decide on accepting God's salvation: „God himself, powerful and merciful that he is, cannot save us without ourselves and the power that comes from him is not without hindrance and without limits” (J 262) since „the power of God stops only before the freedom of man” (L 2.197). Between man and God is human will which decides whether to follow God or one's own passions. God does not impose His will on this decision. The supreme honor of man is in his moral freedom. We can even say that God temporarily sacrificed to this honor His own glory and happiness which He had destined for man (J 90). Even bad choices are honored by God even if these choices contradict His divine will.

Man is the crown of creation, an intelligent being, but the defining characteristic of humanness is the will and its freedom. „The body is born enslaved, the soul – free” (J 124). The body is enslaved since it is part of the physical world and as such, a subject of natural laws. The soul, however, although it is influenced by the body, is a free agent and has the final say in all decisions. „Man is [his] will, he is freedom; we can say that the one who does not will, does not live and the man who is not internally free, does not live. A slave of passions [...] lives the life of the forces that subjugate and enslave him” (J 247).

Man is an image of God because he is free (F 2.257/152) and freedom distinguishes man from the rest of creation (2.258/153). However, paradoxically, the freest act is resigning freedom (2.270/160). Freedom is intimately connected with obedience; „without a law to direct it, freedom would be nothing more than a fatal gift” (2.292/175). To avoid entrapments of the free will, a guidance is needed, and an infallible guidance can be found in God's word and God's law. Only then our life becomes meaningful and successful. „In the world of God, our will should place us among his fish, with all of our freedom given to him so that he can make us a pike or even a whale” (L 3.201).

The role of reason is to lead people to such submission of freedom to obedience to God. Religious obedience (J 247) is a reasoned obedience to a supreme law (J 248). When exercise of God's will is desired, then „the

but most importantly, God was close at hand and accessible through study as well as prayer”, Stephanie M. Lin, *Authors of their own lives: Russian grandes dames en route to Paris (1816-1837)*, PhD diss., Durham: Duke University 2006, 36.

blind and complete abandon is nothing more than [the matter] of logic” (L 2.170-171). Blind obedience is not unreasonable; blindness means here consistency in the exercise of logic; blindness means following deductive rules dictated by logic. Man is a rational being and his rationality should and must not be suspended in the matter of faith. As Swetchine wrote about her faith, it „is not so ill-assured that I can fear to investigate the bases upon which it rests. [...] Christian religion is not only the religion of love, but also that of science. The more I learn, the more I reflect ... the more I believe” (F 1.134/105; L 1.223).

Sharpening reason, growing in knowledge, nurturing intellectual life is a means to nurturing faith and walking in faith. „To believe through intelligence and to nourish oneself with reasons we have to believe, it is to render homage to God [...] The faster the flight of the intelligence, the stronger the thought, the more it grows, the more need there is that the growth of piety should serve as its ballast and counterbalance” (F 1.391/287; L 3.188). As Swetchine advised someone, we should „get used to mature reflection, not take someone’s word for something, and after creating small tribunal inside yourself, [we should] go there frequently” (L 2.359).

How can one create this tribunal? „It is in true solitude, in severity of true privations, does intelligence clear up and becomes sure of itself” (L 2.129). Swetchine spoke here from experience, since she withdrew into solitude quite often. Solitude by itself is not sufficient. „The first merit, the only security is to obey the inner voice when humility and faith through the voice of spiritual guide maturely stated that this inner voice is really an echo of the voice of God” (L 2.287). Spiritual guidance is needed and this can be a person, like de Maistre in the case of Swetchine, or a book, like Fleury’s ecclesiastical history, or the Scriptures. The moment will come that – with the assistance of God – the confidence in the truth of Christianity will prevail.

Because the earth is but a temporary station in human life, the goal of faith is happiness in the life to come. „Glory of the earth is to make us have a presentiment of heaven” (J 312) since „life is a plant whose fruit ripens for eternity” (J 282). Therefore, we should not be afraid of death since death is „the veil of immortality on this side of the solemn passage” (F 2.203/118). However, only a Christian can both love life and desire death (F 2.42/25).

Since happiness after death should be a motivating factor for the life of faith, it would be desirable to know what is the nature of this happiness; however, Swetchine is not altogether clear on that point. Life in heaven, she stated, is life of „ineffable delights” (J 403). In heaven, the soul does what it wants, with no obstacles. The soul exists entirely for God without ceasing

to exist for itself. From a plant to man, everything strives for perfection. What one achieves on earth is ended. In heaven, what consummates is the beginning of infinite happiness. There is rest there, but, first of all, life that returned to its principle, God (J 313).

Apparently, the life in heaven is the awaited future after death, but, as Swetchine observed, the Word promises the resurrection of the body (F 2.383/231)²⁰ and there will be new heavens and a new earth (F 2.357/215). What is the eschatological connection between the life in heaven, new heaven and new earth, and the life of the resurrected body? Swetchine did not address these problems which, admittedly, are traditionally puzzling.

There will be last judgment (F 2.119/68) and, presumably, some sentences will be not so positive. If heaven exists, does hell also exist? It does. Hell is „the necessary and logical result of immortality that retains memory of its individuality. In effect, immortality implies individuality that cannot be separated from memory; and, indeed, the memory charged with a guilty past that becomes our punishment – wouldn't it require the greatest of miracles to make disappear the memory of this past to efface the fatal and infinite traces of the consequences of the sin!” (J 314). The soul separated from the body will see much better the sinfulness of man and will be pained beyond the most cruel torment of the body. „If God did not create hell, the sinner would create it in his own heart through the memory of his grave faults left without reparation and expiation”. Even before a judgment, the sinner is already a subject of punishment. „God thus leaves the human soul to its natural fate, which it prepared to itself”. One word of regret could efface all, at least to put the soul in a happy aptitude of expiating sufferings (J 315). Hell is for those who want their perdition; this unfortunate choice is free (J 317).

Although reason should be used as a means to arrive at faith and deepen it, reason is not infallible and „our ignorance in all things helps our submission and if it is fitting that we act according to the light of our reason, it is much more fitting that we learn to defy it” (L 2.306). Paradoxically, then, reason should be followed as much as it should be defied. Where is the guide? Making errors is so universal that God established the authority of the Church so that the error would not harm individuals and masses (J 125). In fact, the investigation of the nature and the history of the Church lead Swetchine to Catholicism.

²⁰ A mention of the „resurrection of the bodies” is also made in passing without any discussion (L 2.317-318).

III. ORTHODOXY VS. CATHOLICISM

Swetchine's conversion to Catholicism was a fairly long process. She tried to be a good Orthodox believer, followed the rites of this church, but did not have a sense of fulfillment. Orthodoxy „did not match the needs of [her] intelligence” and she tried „to destroy stone by stone the Church by incredulity and false mysticism” (J 62). Finally, in 1815, she withdrew from St. Petersburg for six months to the Bariatinskii estate to grapple with what she called a year earlier her „religious oscillations” (L 1.135). Having mentioned these oscillations, she praised Sturdza's brother for making her a better Orthodox believer. That is, it appears that she wanted to resolve her religious uncertainties by strengthening her Orthodox faith²¹. She planned to make notes during her study of Fleury, and these notes she considered to be „a true monument of my vacillations, of the inconceivable mobility of my spirit and in particular an irrefutable proof of prodigious efforts I made to pacify myself in religion in which I was born and to reattach myself to it in good faith” (J 4, 52-53). It is said that one doubts the religion into which one was born, but the proper way toward certainty is examination and study, which anyone could do (J 11, 12, 25). The choice of true church should be based on „reasonable conviction [...] when the bases of this conviction are solid and appear to be based on exact knowledge of times that preceded ours” (J 12). In her observations concerning conversion, Swetchine very likely referred to de Maistre who was convinced that conversion is a matter of sudden illumination rather than reasoning²². She wrote that „the Catholics invite us to cede without reflection to inspirations that lead to them, but aren't we often led astray by a strong attraction which seems invincible! And if examination does not prepare the weapons for our reason to protect the movements of our heart, if it does not assure us of the bases, of what solidity will then be in our eyes the edifice so erected perhaps solely by our imagination” (J 13). Swetchine misrepresented here the position of Catholicism that, in fact, places significantly more emphasis on reasoning than the Orthodox church²³. Swetchine, however, did not entirely disagree with de Maistre.

²¹ Tatyana V. B a k h m e t y e v a, *Madame Swetchine, „Mother of the Church”: a case study of religion, identity, and female authority in nineteenth-century France and Russia*, PhD diss., Rochester: University of Rochester 2006, 67.

²² [Augustin] B o n n e t t y, *Esquisse sur la vie de Madame la Comtesse de Swetchine, Annales de philosophie chrétienne*, Dec. 1857, 444.

²³ However, as she stated elsewhere, „the Catholic religion fulfills all the needs of the

She could argue that such an illumination has to be preceded by a preparatory period of studies and meditation. In fact, she wrote on 31 Aug. 1815 in her notebook, „a happy day when the darkness of my spirit yielded and dissipated to the *fiat lux* spoken by a celestial voice in the depths of my conscience” (F 1.187/ 141). Conversion was a matter of the heart (J 44), to be sure, but it was not based on mere sentimentality. As she wrote, „if we pretended in vain that religion is a matter of sentiment, we should follow without examination the [religion] of our fathers. Where would Christianity be if this axiom prevailed?” (J 57). Sentiment was actually so strong that she stated with exasperation, „I love ardently my church, and yet I am powerfully drawn to another” (J 53).

Bonnetty expressed his doubts that studying Fleury led her to become a Catholic, but as later in life she told him, „yes, you read Fleury with the help and commentaries of count Maistre with his principles and in particular with [the help of] his vivid and penetrating conversations and you will see how the errors of Fleury clearly demonstrate numerous truths”²⁴.

And so, during her retreat, she studied Church history intensely. As mentioned, she wanted to strengthen her Orthodox faith, and, at first, she first believed that, after schism, „the greatest of all evils” (J 6), „there are no examples of wisdom and virtue that were not given by several bishops of whom the Greek Church is proud” (J 18), and „the apostolic truth of the Greek Church is proven not by philosophical reasoning, but by the authority of the Scripture and the tradition [...] and is guaranteed by the historic monument of the first centuries” (J 21). However, the study of the history of the church allows one to see „a magnificent and truly divine design” (J 23). Through her studies, she became convinced that „the center of religious unity is in Rome” (J 5), which is expressed in the primacy of the pope. „The Gospel very clearly establishes the primacy of Peter”, and denying the primacy of the pope means „rejecting the many testimonies of holy Fathers and the councils which declared so often that Peter spoke through their mouth”. It is unjustified to reduce this primacy to the purely honorific (J 35). Swetchine saw the reestablishment of the unity of the church to be quite possible. The only doctrine that divides the East and the West Christianity is the doctrine of the procession of the Holy Spirit, and the doctrine was never settled by an authority recognized by both East and West (J 6). „It would thus suffice

spirit: the need of belief, and the need of thinking” (J 123).

²⁴ B o n n e t t y, *op. cit.*, 447.

to recognize again the supremacy of the pope and the Roman Church as the center of unity – things which appear to be incontestable – and then it would be left to the pope the judgment concerning the most difficult problems” (J 6). The Eastern church could keep its rites and ceremonies (J 7). The multiplicity of Christian churches testifies to the possession of partial truth: however, this multiplicity is detrimental to the Church (J 9). The knowledge of the truth should not be too difficult – God made it accessible to all; what is needed is „the ardent desire to know it and the firm will to submit oneself to it once it is known” (J 10).

Swetchine became convinced that the real reason for the schism was the ambition of Photius and the ambition of the rulers in Constantinople to free themselves from the supremacy of the pope (J 40). Patriarchs of Constantinople were dominated by emperors who did not leave any room for independent decisions. It is hard to imagine what would have become of the Church if its supremacy had radiated from Constantinople (J 44). The church of Constantinople went astray more often than any other church, whereas errors of church of Rome were „always partial and never undermined the principle of its existence” (J 45), and „its doctrine remained pure in spite of the vices and crimes of some of its pastors” (J 47). On the other hand, one is struck by a „complete and absolute sterility” of the Eastern church since the schism (J 45) when „after the separation from the West, it was plunged into deep darkness through this fact itself” (J 46), and thus its name, Orthodox, i.e., having the correct opinion, is simply pompous (J 29).

IV. UNIVERSALITY OF THE CHURCH

The Church, according to Swetchine, is characterized by four attributes: unity, sanctity, universality, and apostolicity (J 10). „One of the most essential things, in my opinion, is not ever allow to lose this character of universality so striking in the Catholic system, where humble and sweet God is no less the God of the armed, where the God of the small [and] the poor is at the same time the God of the rich [and] the wise” (L 2.404).

The universality of the Church has a temporal and spatial aspect. As to the temporal dimension, it is expressed by the fact that, in a way, Christianity started at the beginning of humankind, in particular, with the fall of the first man and a hope for a redeemer. This hope is found in different parts of the world (J 94). In particular, it is found in India (J 95). The fall „was almost immediately relieved by divine promises and the highest truths were entrusted

to men to be transmitted through the way of kinship” (J 98). These truths were distorted during transmission. In some nations, promises were falsely fulfilled: in some, morality was dissolved. As a result, the Hebrew plural for God resulted in the three Hindu gods, and a promise made to Eve resulted in an incarnation of Vishnu (J 99). Indian and Greek spirituality separates body and soul, but Christianity speaks about their unity in the promise of double apotheosis (J 105), where Swetchine invoked the concept of deification used in the Orthodox theology. Universality points to the fact that in human nature there is a root of monastic, i.e., solitary life, and the beauty of the bond that brings together people to live and pray together. This is reproduced in so many forms in so many places and thus has a root in the depths of the soul. Christianity is supernatural, infinitely elevated above man by its truths and virtues that it teaches (J 109). Christianity is born out of the need of a mediator (J 138). The mediation can only be an atonement whose necessity goes back to the fall. The mediator, who is all God and man, could make himself obey God and want to sacrifice himself for men and thus the mediator becomes the point of convergence of mercy and adoration (J 139).

The universality of the Church is enhanced by the immutability of its nature. All its apparent innovations are deductions from fundamental principles. Each law has an immutable part and a part that enters the domain of time (J 160). What changes in the Church is not of the same essence as what does not change. Discipline that represents the mores of the Church is essentially flexible and should follow the movement of time and place. However, the „oriental dissidents” don’t want any change (J 161-162), although „there is freedom allowed for the Church in respect to all that does not concern dogma” (L 2.249). Promises given to the Church express an assurance of living and eternal cooperation. „Christ is each day with his Church; he is with all the living members; he is with all and with everyone, advancing his work, perfecting it and leading it to the end of all things, i.e., to the consummation of the beautiful and the good in Him”. The Catholic doctrine and morality are marching on, and innovations are consequences better deduced, secondary principles better assimilated to the principle from which they stem (J 163). Practices and dogmas are based on infallibility promised by Christ for His church (J 51). The church „modifies itself without altering itself” (J 164)²⁵. Because of the immutability of basic principles, in Catholic reli-

²⁵ This apparently is an echo of the French saying, the more something changes, the more it is the same.

gion, all times constitute a harmonious whole whereby Augustine is equally valid for today as Bossuet. „There is only the eternal word” (J 144), and on this Word both Augustine and Bossuet based their investigations.

The spatial aspect of the universality of the Church is an opposite to the national character of churches. The more a religion is national, the less it is true. In such religion, the human element absorbs the divine element impregnating it with accidents of time and place, although the Jews, a source of the Christian people, are an exception (J 143). Nationality „necessarily degrades the divine institution to the point of not being only a political crank whose handle is in the hands of a sovereign”²⁶. „There are no nationalities for the Church; it sees only one family in human kind” (L 3.463). Catholicism makes nationality irrelevant by standing outside of all nationalities (L 2.122).

Universality of the Church is expressed also in the fact that although Christianity does seek to influence society, it is not interested in imposing a particular political system. Christianity transforms the world by transforming conscience, aiming at the salvation of the soul which indirectly has social consequences (F 2.229/135). Christianity identifies with no particular political system. Christianly can thrive in any political system (2.230/136). It accomplishes its goal without violence (2.236/140).

Universality of the Catholic church speaks to its validity over other religions, and, on a personal note, this universal character allowed Swetchine to be at the same time French and Russian²⁷. Also, on the same note, in her letters, matters of theology, dogmatics, apologetics, and Church history are seldom discussed and, if raised, then only as marginal remarks. In fact, when her letters were our only guide to her beliefs, it would be no doubt that she is a believer striving for following the will of God, but very little would be garnered about the nature of her beliefs. Very often the religious discussion was conducted in a universalist setting so that we may not be even certain whether she is a Christian, let alone, a Catholic, an Orthodox, or a Protestant. She frequently referred to God, seldom to Christ (sometimes as Lord or Master), the Holy Spirit, Mary, or the saints. The religious reflections in her letters are primarily limited to the personal life. She frequently advised patience, humility, perseverance in face of adversity, endurance in face of suffering, trust in God, paying attention to God’s voice and God’s will, prayer, following conscience, and generally, to leading a virtuous life.

²⁶ Quoted by Rouet, *op. cit.*, 296.

²⁷ Bakhmeteva, *op. cit.*, 194.

V. REACTION IN RUSSIA

Swetchine never cut off her ties with Russia. On the prosaic note, the Swetchines estate was in Russia, and it was a source of income for them to live quite comfortably in Paris to the extent that, as she wrote, „money for life comes to me as if it fell from the sky” (L 2.103). When in 1830 tsar Nicholas I, as a reaction to the establishment of the king Louis-Philippe, considered a usurper, forbade Russian citizens to stay in and to visit France, Swetchine seriously considered a return to Russia²⁸, but through an influence of countess Nesselrode, the Swetchines received an exemption from the ukase²⁹. It is possible that disobedience could have caused confiscation of the Swetchines’ estate, yet she was forced to plead her case before the tsar personally in 1834, through which action she was successful, returning next year to Paris never to return to Russia. When in Russia, happy to see her friends, she wrote that „all this does not make me unfaithful to France in the middle of which I did not cease to live, neither for a day, nor for an instant” (L 3.147). Imbued in French culture in early childhood (aristocracy in Russia at that time spoke French, sometimes not even knowing Russian), she considered France as her true home, but the second home: „no foreigner ever loved [France] as much as I do” (F 1.252/190); „your country became mine so much that outside of it I am everywhere a foreigner” (L 2.16); „I am a Russian among the French” (F 1.378/278); „Not only my heart remains Russian but never has it been more so; everything that concerns the prosperity of the country, particularly its dignity, resonates in my heart as if it were void [...] My keenest interest concentrates on Russia” (L 1.419). The Crimean war: „for everyone [...] it is war; for me, it is civil war” (F 1.434/319). Even late in life, in 1849, she considered herself uprooted with „all [her]

²⁸ „It was for me to obey the command of the Emperor which is direct and personal” (L 2.136). „Whatever he orders, he will find in us submissive and faithful subjects profoundly respectful to the will in which they read the will of Heaven” (F 1.379/279). „None of these considerations will stop my husband and me, if the steps that you are so good to undertake were unsuccessful”, she wrote to Nesselrode 25 Nov. 1830, *Letters de Madame Swetchine*, vol. 1, Paris: Didier 1862, 261; Lin, *op. cit.*, 75. In the 1881 edition of the *Letters*, the beginning of this letter that includes this statement is omitted, and the rest of the letter is printed as a continuation of the letter before it (L 1.451).

²⁹ For which she thanked her in a 1830 letter (L 1.466). Nesselrode apparently was also instrumental in the Swetchines’ leaving Russian for the first time, since in 1850 Swetchine wrote about her that she owed it to her that she could experience for the last thirty freedom, rest, and security (L 2.328).

links broken” (L 2.91) and in 1856, she discussed a problem „as a Russian” (L 2.512).

How was she viewed by Russians? It is interesting to see what was the reaction in Russia to the publication of Falloux’ biography right after her death. A lengthy review of the book was published by countess Sailhas de Tournemire, née Elizaveta Sukhovo-Kobyлина, a writer who used a pen name, Evgeniia Tur. This is an all-out vitriolic attack aimed at Swetchine in particular and at Catholicism in general³⁰. According to Tur, „Swetchina was Russian only by name” (362) and so was her father. Two stories from Swetchine’s childhood recounted by Falloux, meant to show Swetchine’s honesty and courage, indicate „incorrect development which could lead her to Catholicism”. More generally, „we always thought that, notwithstanding the outward appearance of humility, which the Catholic clergy flaunts about, characterizes itself in particular with pride, selfishness and vanity”. These traits could be observed in young Sophie (365). She was grieved by the death of his father and searched for God, but „it is obvious that she did not search for Him in her heart, she did not search for Him where only He can be found, but gave herself up to fruitless wisdoms of a sick mind that was misled, gave herself up to some casuistic tricks that surely could not heal the sick heart” (370). She clung to an environment „in which there is form without serious content, there is a phrase instead of a thought, selling instead of education, obsolete caste prejudices instead of enlightened concepts, Catholic darkness instead of true religiosity, stupid, meaningless attachment to an old order of things, hatred and contempt to anything new” (384). Falloux said she was of an extraordinary mind. However, in Tur’s view, when reading her works „it becomes clear that it was not developed, nor deep, nor wide, nor clear [...] It was shallow, whimsical, fanciful, confused” (390). Women like her could only do damage if they lived in Russia, deceive others, and throw them off the straight path. Therefore, „fatherland did not lose anything by losing her, she was not a daughter of Russia. We should thank her for leaving without doing the least damage” (391).

This sentiment is concurred by other authors. Mordovtsev stated that after Swetchine converted to Catholicism, becoming a renegade, „she definitively ceases to be Russian and even definitively loses her sympathy to her fatherland, to her nation, to all of Russia”³¹. She was not influenced by the

³⁰ Евгения Тур, Госпожа Свечина, *Русский вестник* 26 (1860), no. 7, 362-392.

³¹ Д. Мордовцев, Русские женщины нового времени. Биографические очерки из русской истории. Женщины девятнадцатого века, С. Петербург: Черкесов

warmth of mother, thus there was no fatherland for her (68), although, „she had a true fatherland, the fatherland of the mind and heart – France, and the very heart of this fatherland – Paris and Catholicism”. She herself spoke about her French heart (69). „Russia can truly regret that Swetchine was of no use for it” (73).

An anonymous author was certain that her charitable work „was only done with some profit in mind”. Abandoning the faith of her fathers testifies about her treacherous character. Although Jesuits is a male order, an assumption was made that „she was enlisted in the order” and „belonged with her body and soul to the Jesuits”³². The author expressed an opinion that her letters indicate mediocrity since they are empty are gossipy (277). „Russia did not lose anything” by losing her. If she stayed in Russia, with her backward faith she could only confuse people by preaching ignorance, superstition, obscurantism, and hatred. The readers should be warned because Falloux’ book was published as a bait aimed at Russian women to bring them to Catholicism³³.

Count Dmitrii Tolstoy admitted that she was „bright, erudite, and estimable woman”, although an unremarkable writer. However, unlike other authors, he considered it to be a loss for Russia that such a mind did not serve its church and society. Russia simply did not appreciate her talents, and it was unforgivable that she chose to leave the country to use her talents elsewhere, driven by her vanity³⁴.

Tur’s article is accompanied by a short disclaimer of the editor (Mikhail Katkov) stating that the paper was interesting but „a bit one-sided and not entirely justified” (392). This led to Tur’s violent rebuttal³⁵, which, in turn, led to a measured response of the editor in which he agreed with Tur’s views, but not with her tone (469), and, in essence, he maintained that alt-

1874, 65; the chapter on Swetchine contains basically text lifted from Tur’s article, although Mordovtsev is more restrained with his use of invectives than Tur.

³² А н о н и м о у с, Несколько замечаний по поводу статьи графа Дмитр. Толстого о госпоже Свечиной в 1-м номере Нашего времени, *Северная пчела* 1860, 70, 278.

³³ А н о н и м о у с, *op. cit.*, no. 47, 185.

³⁴ Дмитрий Т о л с т о й, Отзыв на книгу Madam Swetchine: sa vie et ses oeuvres, publiées par le C-te de Falloux, *Наше время* 1860, no. 1, 8-9. French translated of this note is in J[ean] Gagarin, Tendances catholiques dans la société russe, *Correspondant* 50 (1860), 307-309.

³⁵ Евгения Т у р, Письмо к редактору, *Русский Вестник* 26 (1860), no. 8, 406-411.

though Swetchine was Catholic, she was not fanatic and belonged to a liberal wing of Catholics and thus was not too bad a person³⁶.

Afterwards, the subject was dismissed altogether by Chernyshevsky³⁷. He briefly stated that the Russian public would not have any use from reading her works even if elsewhere they would be found useful. After all, she was „a stupid woman and poor writer” (253). She is „an unimportant subject” and why even discuss her views? The two parties in *Russkii Vestnik* say basically the same (254). Considering the fact that Tur’s paper was written in „moderate tone and with delicate phrases” (255), had the editor the right to add his disclaimer, mild as it was? The thrust of Chernyshevsky’s paper is an answer to this question.

During Swetchine’s life, Russia was silent about her conversion, but Falloux’s book led to the unleashing of vitriolic comments on her personality and her faith. One reason could be very prosaic, particularly in the case of Tur, married to a French husband. Swetchine was not insignificant in the Parisian life to such an extent that her biography was published by a member of the French Academy and, incidentally, many biographies soon followed. Therefore, that may have elicited simple jealousy of someone with ambitions but unable to acquire such a level of esteem. Another reason is Russian nationalism that was intricately intertwined with the Orthodox faith. The defense of this faith was a defense of fatherland; abandoning it was treason. Therefore, as mentioned by the anonymous author from *Severnaia Pchela*, Falloux’ book could be an effective propaganda to bring other Russians, women in particular, to the Catholic fold³⁸. However, the interest in Swetchine in Russia soon waned, and she was seldom mentioned afterwards. A recent monograph gives a short dispassionate description of her conversion, but, still, a remark apparently counts her among those characterized by „fanatical commitment to the truths of Catholic faith”³⁹. However, to this day, her impor-

³⁶ [Михаил Катков,] По поводу письма г-жи Евгении Тур, *Русский вестник* 26 (1860), 468-488; French translation of Katkov’s response is included in Augustin Galitzin, *Madame Svetchine et la critique en Russie, Correspondant* 51 (1860), 285-300.

³⁷ [Николай Г. Чернышевский,] История из-за г-жи Свечиной, *Современник* 81 (1860), no. 6, 249-278. The Katkov-Tur exchange rather than Swetchine is also the subject of И. Май, Краткое сказание о последних деяниях „Русского вестника”, *Московские ведомости* 1860, no. 109, 858-862.

³⁸ *Russian criticism of Falloux’ biography was caused by the critics’ „uneasiness about the possible proselytizing effect it could have on its Russian readers”*, В а к х м е т у е в а, *op. cit.*, 373.

³⁹ Екатерина Н. Ц и м б а е в а, *Русский католицизм. Идея всевропейского*

tance and impact on the religious life of the French and the Russians is still being marginalized in Russia.

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ZOFIA SWIECZINA I JEJ WIARA

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Zofia Swieczina (1782-1857) od dzieciństwa związana była z dworem carskim. W 1815 przyjęła katolicyzm i wkrótce potem wyemigrowała wraz z mężem do Francji. W Paryżu otworzyła salon uczęszczany przez wielu znanych intelektualistów, gdzie dyskutowano przede wszystkim kwestie religijne i sprawy związane z polityką kościelną. Swieczina nic nie opublikowała za swego życia, lecz pozostawiła po sobie ogromną ilość notatek i listów. Była świetnie odczytana i interesowała się wszelkimi aspektami teologii, lecz nie pozostawiła po sobie systematycznego wykładu teologii. W niniejszym artykule zaprezentowane zostały niektóre tematy dyskutowane przez Swieczinę: kwestia stosunku człowieka do Boga, sprawa relacji między Kościołem Katolickim a Kościołem Prawosławnym oraz kwestia uniwersalizmu Kościoła. Artykuł prezentuje również gwałtowną i wrogą reakcję w Rosji na wydanie przez de Falloux pism i listów Swiecziny.

Key words: Catholicism, Orthodoxy, Russia, Paris.

Słowa kluczowe: katolicyzm, prawosławie, Rosja, Paryż.