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The Image of Christ. 19th Century Imagination of the Sacred in Russia and the West – A Comparative Study

In the Eastern and Western art alike, the image of Christ has had a prominent role ever since the emergence of Christianity. Both the West and Russia saw a decline in religiousness in the 18th century. The image of Christ suffered the same fate and receded from the pedestal of the most important art themes. Russia saw the provincializing of icon painting that lost its former might, just like the West ceased to actively search for a Christ image that would reflect the original situation and moved onto imitating traditional schemes laid out in the 17th and the beginning of the 18th century. As early as the end of the 18th century in Europe and from the 19th century in Russia, a new turn emerges: culture, especially fine art, begins to rediscover its original and fictitious roots in faith – Christianity. This *renovatio fidei (religium)* brings about a new understanding of Christ as a figure and new representations in fine art and literature.

The figure of Christ has undergone dynamic changes in the 19th century, which had a specific form in different culture areas in the ever-changing social atmosphere in Europe of the 19th century, although these changes were Europe-wide in that it sparked a debate of authors such as Strauss, Renan, Hegel or Solovyov. These changes of the image of Christ that are reflected in art are what I would like to focus on. Attention would be paid mostly to the image of Christ in Russian art, taking into account the parallel phenomena in these areas that were connected and reflected in Russia itself – German lands and France.

For outlining the changing notion of Christ's image in Russia and Europe of the 19th century, we must deal with documents known to artists like Ilya Repin, Vasiliy Polenov, Eugene Delacroix or Puvis de Chavannes. However, I would like to focus on artists such as Renan, Strauss, Dostoyevsky or Solovyov. Understanding Christianity and the image of Christ itself had often been facilitated for these artists by the theological, philosophical and social milieu, in which they artists played a major role. The authors and artists to whom I want to devote my study were among the educated group of both Russian and European

society and they approached the portrayal of Christ in a creative way. Therefore, their artwork must be understood as a personal credo of the artist in question, not as a passive mirror of their philosophical beliefs. That said, in depiction of Christ, most of the artists reflected a notion of religiousness that corresponded with the above mentioned philosophical theses. That way it was made possible that Repin's portrayal of Christ is connected to Sergey Solovyov's theo-humanity, and Polenov's representation of Christ convenes with Strauss's proposition of a historical Christ. Western artists like Delacroix and Puvis de Chavannes worked with the image of Christ much in the same way. I want to outline the reception of Christ's figure as it's reflected by documents that most impacted the public opinion at the time and were also popular with artists. That is why I want focus my study on the works of Renan, Strauss, Dostoevsky or Solovyov.

The attention will be also paid to the transformation of the image of Christ in the early Soviet propaganda, when the attributes usually connected with Christ were used for representation of party's cadres. I would like to conclude my study by this issue, ended by Lenin's death and his first portrayals, while in the depiction of Lenin, we can find the legacy of Christian iconography.

The focal point of my work will be paintings that depict Christ as an expression of the period religious sentiment. Because of that, I want to delve into the response to these paintings, as it may be most telling about how people understood the image of the Savior at the time.