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ST JUSTIN THE NEW ON INTEGRAL KNOWLEDGE

St Justin Popović is known for his fierce critique of Western humanism and rationalism. The criticism of these two ideas, on which the modern Europe is founded, dominates his thought at all stages of his career, from his formative years in Oxford and doctoral studies in Athens, until his imprisonment by the Communist regime at the monastery of Čelije. However, the main lines of his criticism of Western intellectual tradition were outlined during the twenties and the thirties of the twentieth century. By then Fr Justin not only accepted the Slavophile critique of the West, but he also drew on some ideas about European decline of Oswald Spengler and Maurice Maeterlinck. In the short essay 'On the Cultural Crossroad' published in 1929, the young Fr Justin expresses his opinion about the rising awareness about the pessimistic future of European civilization:

„Before the WWI the downfall of the West was sensed only by the melancholic Slavonic visionaries. After the war this was realized and sensed by many Europeans. The most brave and most honest among them is Spengler, who has recently alarmed the world by his startling book *Der Untergang der Abendlandes*. In this book he points and proofs by means of European science, philosophy, politics, technique, art that the West falls and declines. From the WWI Europe is in the state of death rattle. The Western of Faustian culture, according to Spengler, which begun in the tenth century after Christ, it declines and downfalls now and it will completely disappear by the end of the twenty-second century. Following the European culture, argues Spengler, begins the Russian culture, the culture of Dostoyevsky, the Orthodox culture“¹¹³.

Fr Justin grasp of the inner contradictions of humanism, rationalism and individualism makes him foresee the final bleak consequences of these predominant aspects of European culture. According to St Justin, by proclaiming the human being the supreme value of this world and, at the same time, by acknowledging the content of this value as being relative, human-

¹¹³'Na vododelnici kultura,' ('On the Cultural Crossroad') originally published in 1929 in: *Vesnik Srpske Crkve* (The Herald of the Serbian Church), 3–4 (1929), 97–112. Reprinted in Justin Popović, *O duhu vremena*, Beograd: Politika, Narodna knjiga 2005, 49–63, 59.

ism leads to anarchism. Moreover, the logical conclusion of humanism is nihilism, because there is no concrete humanistic value to agree upon. Due to the absolute separation between truth and love, rationalism leads to relativism and idolatry. In Justin's view, individualism ends in the necessity of self-preservation, which abolishes freedom and reduces love for others to bare sentimentalism.

Fr Justin's critique of the West was not inspired, or it was not *only* inspired by historical circumstances that defined the relationship between the Orthodox, particularly Serbian people, and the West, such as the imperialistic inclinations of western powers or doctrinal differences with Roman-Catholics and Protestants as Klaus Buchenau has argued,¹¹⁴ but rather by his deep concern for the destiny of Europe.

By maintaining that the remedy for European maladies is in the culture of Dostoyevsky or the Orthodox culture, St Justin Popović superimposes the Russian ideas of theo-humanism (Godmanhood), integral knowledge and all-unity to the Western notions of humanism, rationalism and individualism. However, he transforms all three Russian ideas by means of apostolic and patristic teachings, into genuinely Christian principles, claiming that, it is precisely these Christian principles that undergird the intellectual unity of Europe.

My intention here is to investigate how St Justin developed his idea of integral knowledge, first by drawing on Dostoyevsky and the Russian thinkers, and next by relying on patristic tradition.

The idea of „integral“ knowledge is conceptualized by the Slavophiles Ivan Vasilievich Kireyevsky and Aleksei Stepanovich Khomyakov as an alternative to the abstract-logical rational systems of thought that are considered a typically western product. It is further developed by Vladimir Soloviev (1853–1900), who believed that the all-unity of the entire created order is an ontological precondition for any kind of knowledge. The integral knowledge according to Soloviev is based on the interaction of reason, will and faith. The idea of integral knowledge was particularly reinforced by Soloviev's intellectual heir and one of the most significant thinkers of the Russian religious philosophy, Fr Pavel Florensky (1882–1937). For Florensky the integral knowledge is nothing but an offshoot of the same basic longing to penetrate the depths of reality and know its inner secrets¹¹⁵. Florensky considered knowledge an authentic continuation of a subject and an authentic unity of subject's energy with energies of comprehended reality¹¹⁶:

¹¹⁴ Klaus Buchenau, *Kämpfende Kirchen. Jugoslawiens religiöse Hypothek*, Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang 2006.

¹¹⁵ **Pavel Florenski**. Obshchechelovecheskie korni idealizma, *Bogoslovskii vestnik* 1:2-3 (1909) 284–97, 409–23, 420.

¹¹⁶ **John Tkachuk**. Love from Knowledge: an introduction to Father Pavel Florensky, *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, 44, 3–4 (2000), 329–342, 337–342.

Thinking is an unceasing synthesis of the known with a knower, and, consequently, is deeply and through and through penetrated by the energies of the knowing personality. As such, it cannot be abstract, colourless, and impersonal, 'an acknowledgment in general,' since I know that it is I who takes careful stock of reality"¹¹⁷.

The full exposition of Florensky's account of the concept of integral knowledge may be found in his masterpiece „*The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*“ (especially in the letters two, three and six). Bogdan Lubardic in the recent study 'Pavel Florensky and the Patrological Works of Justin Popovic' convincingly argues for the decisive influence of Fr Paul on Fr Justin¹¹⁸. Thus, my aim here is not to point out the similarity between the two thinkers, but rather the differences they have in approaching the subject of the integral knowledge.

During his early days in Oxford, while working on his dissertation '*Philosophy and Religion of F.M. Dostoyevsky*' (published in 1924), St Justin faced the problem of the relationship between reason and faith. He maintained that only by means of the ascesis (*podvig*) of faith, the human being resurrects himself from the tomb of egoism and egocentrism of his reason. St Justin argued that there are three requirements, which should be fulfilled through the *podvig* of faith. The first step is to stop trusting reason, because if one does not detest oneself and one's reason, one cannot start loving Christ¹¹⁹. The second level is to make faith the source of a new reasoning, much deeper than the one based on the rational faculty. St Justin explains this level by quoting the famous maxim of Anselm of Canterbury: *credo ut intelligam*. Finally, at the third level faith and knowledge are drawn together and all the borders of knowledge established by reason vanish. This level culminates in the understanding of faith as glorifying the true God. St Justin describes this level by inversion of Anselm's words in the new statement: *Intelligo ut credam*. Therefore, from his earliest works the idea of integral knowledge for St Justin presupposed a process of acquiring the virtues of faith and love as opposed to the rule of reason, as well as distinguishing between the two sorts of knowledge. He further developed

¹¹⁷ **Pavel Florenski**. Razum i dialektika, *Bogoslovsku vestnik* 3, 9 (1914), 96. Cited in: **Tkachuk**. Love from Knowledge, 338.

¹¹⁸ **Лубардић, Б.** Павле Флоренски и патролошки радови Јустина Поповића: историјат једне рецепције – прилог разумевању почетака 'неопатристичке синтезе' у српској теологији ('Pavel Florensky and the Patrological Works of Justin Popovic: The History of a Reception – A Contribution to Understanding the Beginnings of 'Neo-patristic Synthesis' in Serbian Theology'), у: **Б. Шијаковић** (уред.), *Српска теологија у двадесетом веку – истраживачки проблеми и резултати*, том 9, ПБФ БУ, Београд, 2010, 66–165.

¹¹⁹ *Filozofija i religija F.M. Dostojevskog*, in: Justin Popović, *O duhu vremena*, Beograd: Narodna knjiga, Politika, 2005, с. 26.

his ideas in his patristic studies written during the late twenties and early thirties of the twentieth century.

There are numerous ways for Fr. Justin's return to the authorities of the Church Fathers, but as Bogdan Lubardić demonstrates, the most apparent one was Justin's reception of Russian religious thought¹²⁰. Thus, the neo-philocalic spirituality of Seraphim of Sarov, Paisius Velichkovsky, Theophanes the Recluse and the holy Fathers of the Optina Hermitage¹²¹, who also inspired Justin's great role model Dostoyevsky, and the spoken word of Metropolitan Anthony Khrapovitsky and other Russian theologians in Serbia¹²², inspired Fr. Justin to look for the foundation of his theological ideas in the works of the Church Fathers. Fr Justin approached the Church Fathers as contemporaries, searching in their teaching for the solution of the actual existential and philosophical problems.

The idea of an integral or 'living' knowledge was one of the main ideas of Russian religious philosophy, which St Justin considers through the prism of patristic tradition. St Justin developed the idea of integral knowledge as contrary to the abstract rational knowledge by supporting it with patristic teachings in two of his early works, his doctoral thesis from Athens '*Personality and Cognition According to St. Macarius of Egypt*' (1926) and '*The Theory of Knowledge According to St. Isaac the Syrian*' (1934). St. Justin commences the latter with the criticism of European philosophical traditions from empiricisms and rationalism, through idealism to phenomenology, remarking that each of these philosophical traditions reduce the human being to only one segment of his being and creates an insurmountable gap between human being and his reality and Truth. Thus, St. Justin repeated the basic postulates of Russian religious philosophy that striving for an integral knowledge provides the necessary corrective for the project of restoration of unity between truth and reality¹²³. This unity between truth and reality is according to St. Justin denied by numerous modern and contemporary philosophies. Following Abba Isaac, St Justin claims that the main reason for the gulf created between the human being and truth is to be found in the human sinful condition, and in the passions that cause the disease of human organs of knowledge. If the diagnosis is that the human passions prevent the true knowledge, then the therapy for curing the soul consists in the acquisition of virtues, and the first of virtues in the way of healing is faith, because „through faith the mind, which was previously dispersed

¹²⁰ **Лубардић, Б.** *Јустин Поповић и Русија: путеви рецепције руске филозофије*, Нови Сад, Беседа, 2009.

¹²¹ **Лубардић, Б.** *Јустин Поповић и Русија*, 109.

¹²² **Лубардић, Б.** *Јустин Поповић и Русија*, 101–7.

¹²³ **Slesinski, R.** 'The Relevance of the Russian Religious Philosophy to the World Today'. – *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 40/3 (1996), 207–211, 209.

along the passions, is concentrated, freed from sensuality, and endowed with peace and humility of thought¹²⁴.

According to St Justin, by faith the human being not only gathers all the dispersed fragments of his fallen mind, but also „conquers egoism, steps beyond the bounds of self, and enters into a new, transcendent reality which also transcends subjectivity“¹²⁵. Faith precedes other virtues, such as prayer, love, humility, grace and freedom, not only in an ontological, but also in a chronological order. St Justin concludes that the true or integral knowledge is only possible through acquiring the holy virtues, of which faith is most important.

The influence of Fr Paul Florensky is evident from the opening chapters of Fr Justin's 'The Theory of Knowledge of St Isaac the Syrian'. Therefore, it would be appropriate to take in account Florensky's ideas exposed in his *Stolp i Utverzhdenie Istini*. Florensky pursued the critique of western philosophy and gnoseology along the lines of his predecessors Kirieevsky, Homiakov and Soloviev. Florensky directs particularly his criticism on the principle of identity ($A = A$), which introduces the denial of being, because A is identical to itself only by the negation of the negation, or being nothing more than just itself.

„The law of identity, which pretends to absolute universality, turns out to have a place nowhere at all. This law sees its right in its actual givenness, but everything given actually rejects this law *toto genere*, violating it in both the order of space and the order of time – everywhere and always. In excluding all the other elements, every A is excluded by all of them, for each of these elements is for A only not- A , then A over against not- A is only non-non- A “¹²⁶.

In contrast, Florensky believes that it is only possible for each A to be identical with A ($A=A$), only if it also the not- A ¹²⁷. He applies the same principle in describing the process of knowing:

„The act is not only a gnoseological but also an ontological act, not only ideal but also real. Knowing is a real *going* of the knower out of himself, or (what is the same thing) a real going of what is known into the knower, a real unification of the knower and what is known. This is the fundamental and characteristic proposition of Russian and, in general, of all Eastern philosophy“¹²⁸.

¹²⁴ The English translation of 'The Theory of Knowledge of Saint Isaac The Syrian' is available in: Father Justin Popovic, *Orthodox Faith and life in Christ*, Belmont, Massachusetts: Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 2005 (3rd ed.), 117–168.

¹²⁵ The Theory of Knowledge of Saint Isaac The Syrian, p. 127.

¹²⁶ Florensky, P. *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth: An Essay in Orthodox Theodicy in Twelve Letters* (translated by Boris Jakim), Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997, p. 23.

¹²⁷ Florensky, P. *The Pillar*, p. 36.

¹²⁸ Florensky, P. *The Pillar*, p. 55.

It may be noticed that both Fr Justin and Fr Paul start from the principle of getting out of themselves, by overcoming subjectivity through the opening to the other as a prerequisite for any knowledge. For Fr. Paul, the human knowledge of truth is inaccessible without faith, because only living religious experience guarantees knowledge of any dogma. Fr. Paul follows St. Gregory of Nyssa¹²⁹ in equating love with knowledge and understanding knowledge only as an act of love. According to Fr Paul the lovers, in the very act of love, which is the single, eternal and infinite act, become consubstantial among themselves and with God, in whom each „I“ is one and the same with the other „I“, but again different¹³⁰.

By following St Isaac, Fr Justin argues in the same vein that one who loves is in God because God is love, which is like God, eternal and infinite.

„In the kingdom of love the antinomies of the mind disappear. The man who strives in love enjoys a foretaste of the harmony of Paradise in himself and in God’s world around him, for he has been delivered from the hell of self-centeredness and has entered into the paradise of divine values and perfections“¹³¹.

Both authors agree that human knowledge is insufficient, and that knowledge, which comes through Jesus Christ, bears the fullness. By relying on St Isaac Father Justin distinguishes between two sorts of knowledge, one natural, which precedes faith and another, spiritual which is born of faith and it represents ‘the perception of mysteries’¹³².

Although both authors agree that the Person of Jesus Christ is most important in the process of cognition, Fr. Paul also maintains that the true knowledge is acquired on the theoretical path of teodicy, which consists of our admittance to the life of the Holy Trinity. On the other hand the practical way of anthropodicy, which is based on Christ’s salvific work and our loving embrace of Him represent only the means of our salvation¹³³. So Florensky carries out his gnoseological project not by establishing the possibility of knowledge on Christ, but on a symbolic-logical form in which the bearer of Truth is the dynamic identity of the triad I-You-He, which primarily exists in the form of Father-Son-Holy Spirit. In contrast to the abstract logical model of acquiring the truth that Fr. Paul promotes, Fr. Justin provides an ascetic-virtuous model to the truth that culminates in the God-man Jesus as „the only incarnation and personification of eternal truth

¹²⁹ **Gregory of Nyssa.** *On the Soul and Resurrection*, PG 46, 96C.

¹³⁰ **Florensky, P.** *The Pillar*, p. 68.

¹³¹ *The Theory of Knowledge of St Isaac the Syrian*, p. 130.

¹³² *The Theory of Knowledge of St Isaac the Syrian*, p. 140.

¹³³ **Slesinsky, R.** Fr Pavel Florensky: A profile. – *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly*, 26, 1 (1982), 3–27, 22.

in the world of human realities"¹³⁴. For this reason, Fr Georges Florovsky considered that, although Fr Paul Florensky's deeply reflects the Trinitarian dogma as the truth of reason, he overlooks the importance of the Incarnation on his way to the role of the Spirit as Comforter. Therefore, Fr Georges concludes that the image of the God-man Christ remains as a vague shadow in the background of Fr. Paul's theory of knowledge.

Unlike Fr. Paul, who in his analysis lacks the Christological foundation of truth, Fr. Justin claims that only in the God-man and by the God-Man, human being acquires integral knowledge as the holy knowledge of God-human truths. According to St Isaac this knowledge is the perception of eternal life, which itself is the perception of God. Thus, St Justin concludes his study on integral knowledge by the words:

„This knowledge is an integral knowledge, for it rises on the wings of the divine and human virtues and passes without hindrance through the barriers of time and space, entering into the eternal. It is of this integral knowledge that St Isaac is thinking when, in defining knowledge, he says that it is, 'the perception of eternal life', and when, defining truth, he calls it, 'the perception of God'"¹³⁵.

While in the early stage of his career St Justin depends on the views on knowledge of St Macarius of Egypt and St Isaac the Syrian, in the later works (*Dogmatics III* and *The Orthodox Church and Ecumenism*) he draws more on ideas of St Maximus the Confessor.

In *The Orthodox Church and Ecumenism*, with the help of St Maximus' concept of faith as the foundation for the truth, St Justin criticizes the rationalistic tendencies to exclude faith and love from the process of acquiring knowledge.

„The heretico-humanistic separation and detachment of love from truth is a sign of the lack of theanthropic faith and of the loss of theanthropic balance and common sense. At any rate, this was never, nor is it the way of the Fathers. The Orthodox are rooted and founded only „with all of the saints“ in truth, and have proclaimed in love this theanthropic life-saving love for the world and for all of the creation of God from the time of the Apostles until today. The naked moralistic, minimalistic, and humanistic pacifism of contemporary Ecumenists does only one thing: it brings to light their diseased humanistic roots, which is to say; their sick philosophy and feeble morality „according to the human tradition“ (Col. 2:8). They reveal the crisis of their humanistic faith, as well as their presumptuous insensibility for the history of the Church, which is to say, for its apostolic and catholic continuation in truth and in grace. And the holy, apostolic, patristic, God-mindedness, and common sense are proclaimed by the mouth of

¹³⁴ The Theory of Knowledge of St Isaac the Syrian, p. 150.

¹³⁵ The Theory of Knowledge of St Isaac the Syrian, p. 166.

St. Maximus the Confessor in the following truth: 'For faith is the foundation of the things that follow, I mean hope and love, which certainly sustain the truth' (*Cap. X, I, 26; PG 90,1189A*)"¹³⁶.

The main problem for such a reduction of human capabilities to acquire the true knowledge of the reality in the western European civilization is the replacement of the God-man Christ, with the European man. According to St Justin, this humanistic faith lies in the roots of Papism, Protestantism, Ecumenism and other heresies. Being deprived from its supreme theo-humanistic content, such faith cannot serve as foundation for other virtues, nor it can lead to them. As a consequence of perverted faith love appears reduced to bare sentimentalism. This is the case with other virtues too. St Justin argues that until the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, the virtues were „mere fictions, unrealistic concepts, and lifeless ideas“. They also remained in these forms in „all non-Christian religions, and in all non-theo-humanistic philosophies, ethics, sociologies, cultures and civilizations“¹³⁷. St Justin develops his teaching on the holy virtues relying again on St Maximus, who maintains that Jesus Christ is the essence of all virtues (*Amb. 7, PG 91, 1081c*). Thus, Christ is accessible to us either by being received through the holy mysteries, or by being embodied through the holy virtues. These two ways complement each other, and it is hardly possible to live the life of a Christian without practicing them both. St Justin supports his concept of truth with two ideas from St Maximus: one according to which Christ is the essence of all virtues, and another which claims that faith as one of the most important virtues is the foundation for truth. Drawing on these ideas St Justin argues that truth is the heart of each godly virtue, and therefore of faith and love as well¹³⁸. When faith in the God-man Jesus Christ is substituted by the humanistic faith in the European man, and the mere sentimentalism replaces the true love or how St Apostle Paul calls it „the love of the truth“ (2 Thess. 2.10), then, St Justin concludes, truth is to be found in „a thought, an idea, a theory, mind, science, philosophy, culture, man, humanity, the world, or all the worlds, or whoever or whatever or all this altogether“¹³⁹. On the contrary, if one acquires faith, love, prayer, repentance, and other virtues, he will be led to all-virtue, which is the Lord Jesus Christ. Being the heart of each godly virtue, truth cannot be anything else than the person of the God-man Christ, the second person of the Holy Trinity. Thus, the God-man Christ as the Truth Himself and the Life Himself is the heart of every virtue.

¹³⁶ *Pravoslavna crkva i ekumenizam*, c. 125. The English translation of the chapter 'Humanistic ecumenism' of the book *The Orthodox Church and Ecumenism* is available in *Orthodox Faith and Life in Christ*, p. 172.

¹³⁷ *Pravoslavna crkva i ekumenizam*, c. 59.

¹³⁸ 'Humanistic ecumenism', *Orthodox Faith and Life in Christ*, p. 170.

¹³⁹ 'Humanistic ecumenism', *Orthodox Faith and Life in Christ*, p. 171.

In the 3rd volume of his *Dogmatics*, in the chapter dedicated to the holy virtues St Justin elaborates this subject thoroughly and with more references to St Maximus.

„Faith in the only true God – the God-man Jesus Christ, is all-virtue (svevrline) of all true Christians, and first of all the holy confessors. In this virtue are rooted all other virtues. Therefore, faith is among all holy virtues – the all-virtue. As such, faith leads and directs a Christian through the ascesis (*podvigs*) of all holy virtues. This is very obvious in the life and teachings of St. Maximus the Confessor. He announces: Faith in people is the beginning of all their good deeds; nothing is in front of it, nothing is equal to it (*Thal.* 51, PG 90, 488B). The Lord gave us the means of salvation, and gave us eternal power to become children of God, (Jn. 1,12) our salvation is in our will. Let us give the fullness of our beings to the Lord, in order to receive Him fully. Let us become gods for His sake, because He, by His very nature God and the Lord, for this sake became a man (*Liber Asceticus*, 42 43; PG 90, 953B). God is the cause of virtue. Virtue is eternal; time is not older than virtue; God is its only Creator (*Capit. theol. et oecon.*, I, 48; PG 90, 1101A). For what does not exist is not older than virtue and goodness and holiness and immortality... God dwells in man through the virtues – ἐνδμεῖ διὰ τῶν ἀρετῶν, but He does not reside in the one who does not practice the virtues (*Capit. theol. et oecon.* II, 58, 1149B)“¹⁴⁰.

It is obvious from the quoted passage that St Justin is very much indebted to St Maximus. St Justin relies on St Maximus' claim that the faith precedes all other virtues [*Thal.* 51, PG 90, 488B] and that faith is the mother and the crown and the perfection of virtues [*Loci Communes*, PG 91, 952A]. Taken in the context of our salvation, faith, according to St Justin, is not only belief in divine salvific work, but also belief in our capacity to contribute to our salvation by acquiring virtues. Thus, by becoming gods, human beings fulfill the purpose of their creation. Since they continue to perfect themselves throughout all eternity by love of God and other virtues, faith as the crown and the perfection of all these virtues does not stop to exist. Faith is transformed then from the belief in our salvation to the belief in progress 'from glory to glory' in the eternal union with God.

According to both saints virtues are the straight path to salvation. St Justin expresses this by referring to St Maximus again:

„By feeding his being with holy virtues, man comes to the proper knowledge of God and the proper knowledge of man. The gnoseological importance of the holy virtues is immense. St. Maximus states: By the practice of virtues one acquires an understanding of the divine dogmas (*Opusc.*

¹⁴⁰ *Dogmatika* III, under the heading 'Svete Vrline' (Holy Virtues). The online version is available at: <http://www.svetosavlje.org/biblioteka/AvaJustin/DogmatikaPravoslavneCrkve/DogmatikaPravoslavneCrkve.htm> 12 September 2012.

theolog. et polemica 1, PG 91, 12A). The likeness of God and true knowledge is acquired by practicing virtues, and it is happening by god-making grace (*Ep.*, 91, 280A). All the saints, by means of virtues, adorn themselves magnificently and gloriously with the beauty of the divine goodness (*Myst.* 20; PG. 91, 696D)¹⁴¹.

According to St Maximus, whom St Justin follows, the understanding of divine dogmas is acquired only by practicing virtues. The understanding of divine dogmas consists of two elements, one concerned with the proper knowledge of God, and another concerned with the proper knowledge of human being. By practicing virtues one acquires the proper knowledge of both God and human being, which in last instance is the knowledge about the final union between God and human being. This knowledge is our realization that, as St Maximus claims, „we were created to become partakers of God’s nature, and participants in God’s eternity, and to show ourselves through deification by grace as likened to God“ (*Ep.*, PG 91, 609C). It would not be exaggeration to conclude that St Maximus has probably a crucial influence on St Justin in developing his teaching on holy virtues as imperatives for salvation (*Amb.* PG. 91, 1065).

In conclusion, St Justin theory of knowledge was a constant of his interest from his early until his late works. While in the early works one may detect the influence of Russian theological and philosophical thought, the late works were more in the spirit of apostolic and patristic teachings.

¹⁴¹ *Dogmatika* III, under the heading ‘Svete Vrline’ (Holy Virtues).