

FREEDOM IN PRAYER. PRACTICAL ELEMENTS IN GOGOL'S PRAYER

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ABSTRACT: Freedom in Prayer. Practical Elements in Gogol's Prayer.

The article discusses the need to renew the soul and heart through prayer. Gogol lived in private prayer. He also prayed for others. He even encouraged them, saying that he was interceding for them (family, friends, readers). Practical elements of prayer are very often found in the works of Gogol. They, in turn, show the life and work of the writer, and practical elements for the daily prayer of the believer can be extracted.

Keywords: *Gogol, prayer, God, the Bible, time, blessing.*

Introduction

Freedom¹ is the God-given capacity of man's will, without which he could not consciously and willingly strive for the good, and thus could not become virtuous. Created in the Image of God, man also possesses the gift of free will.² „If man was created in the Image of the blessed and pre-essential Godhead, and the Godhead is free and has a will by nature, then man, as the Image of the Godhead, is free by nature and has a will” (St. John Damascene).³

Gogol not only prayed, it is obvious that there is no complete list of his prayers, but he wrote down many of his prayers (as can be seen from

1 Ioan-Gheorghe Rotaru, *Om-Demnitare-Libertate (Man-Dignity-Freedom)*, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Risoprint, 2019, pp. 201-215.

2 Ioan-Gheorghe Rotaru, “Religious liberty - a natural human right”, *Jurnalul Libertății de Conștiință (JLC)*, Ganoune Diop, Mihnea Costoiu, Liviu-Bogdan Ciucă, Nelu Burcea (coord.), Les Arcs, France, Editio IARSIC, 2015, pp. 595-608.

3 Николай Кавасила, Свобода (Nikolai Kavasila, *Libertatea*), <https://azbyka.ru/svoboda>

the description above), he also confessed to others that he prayed for them. Nikolai Gogol left behind a rich source of definitions and characteristics of prayer.

The nineteenth-century writer Nicolae Gogol was born in 1809 in Veliki Sorocinti, the Russian Empire, but now this area is part of the Poltava region (Ukraine), and died in 1852.⁴ Although his life was relatively short, Gogol managed to bring a fresh theological air to Russian literature. And not just fresh, but a deep, loud word that everyone can understand.

In his book, Nicolae Gogol - *The Spiritual Biographical Experience*, Professor Voropaev clears the troubled waters of the views of Gogol's contemporaries, who believed that their friend, Gogol, "was a classic satirist, an exponent of vices, social and human, a brilliant humorist, etc.," but as Voropaev considers, on the other hand, Gogol was "the initiator of the partristic tradition of Russian literature", also "a religious thinker, publicist and even author of prayers", which his "contemporaries did not-they admitted", moreover, they didn't even think it would be true.⁵

Professor Voropaev directs contemporaries and lovers of Russian playwright's literature to the work and true work of Gogol, who visibly describes two major parts of his life and work. Voropaev strongly argues that Gogol's work was primarily aimed at leading people to God and eliminating shortcomings in personal life or purity of soul, secondly.⁶ This contradicts the accusations in some books that Gogol is an enemy of God and that all his work is a heresy. In this regard, the following parts will describe in detail the arguments announced in the introduction of the chapter.

Gogol and childhood

It was during this period that Gogol was born, and his childhood was in the spectrum of an atmosphere of "deep Christian piety, and the Bible was an integral part of the family structure of Gogol-Yanovskys."⁷ And I. A.

4 Serge Tomkeyeff, *A short history of Russian Literature*, Forgotten Books, pp. 106-116.

5 V. A. Voropaev, *Nikolai Gogol. The experience of spiritual biography*, Polomnik, 2014, p. 2. For more details see the show: Vladimir Voropaev: *Gogol and Orthodoxy*, Katekhon-TV, 58,), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HgZ2Hwk8PLk> (accessed on 13.10.2020).

6 V. A. Voropaev, *Nikolai Gogol: Experientă biografiei spirituale*, Moscova, Pilgrim, 2008, pp. 29-30.

7 Ekaterina Ivanovna Golubeva, *The Biblical Text in the Works of N. V. Gogol*, Moscow, 2016, 10.01.01, p. 15.

Vinogradov confirms this, saying that “in his childhood and adolescence was laid the foundation of the vision of the world,” the faith in God, and the reading of the Gospel.⁸ All this was due to the Christian roots and spiritual values that Gogol inherited from his parents, grandparents, and relatives, because his ancestors were largely clerics: his great-grandfather was a priest, his grandfather studied theology, and his father did a seminar in Poltava. In addition, Gogol’s mother “was a religious woman who often frequented monasteries.” In addition, “the family used to read the Bible together, which was always on their table.”⁹

In addition to the theological education that Gogol received in his parental home, he was also educated in the ways of the Lord and in the Bezembodko High School of Higher Sciences in 1820, where Gogol studied (between 1821 and 1821). 1828). Studying God’s law twice a week was mandatory, as was daily gospel reading. And in the places where the students were accommodated, they had small house churches, where, in the morning and in the evening, regardless of the day, prayers were read (certain collections of prayers).¹⁰

Nicolae Gogol’s life, as can be seen from the annals of Russian literature, is full of moments of dissatisfaction, self-pity or even self-condemnation. When he did not understand what Russia (more precisely the people in it) wanted from him, he was automatically filled with dissatisfaction and self-condemnation, because he did not see the point. But with all his commotion, peace, tranquility, and joy lit up his face. He could be upset, but after a very short time he returned to his original joy, because, as the literary critic Zolotusskii writes, “his laughter begins with rejection, with the assertion of his innocence towards generally accepted values, signs and authorities.”¹¹

Main part

First, prayer is very important and is never useless. This is the song of longing that the believer should always sing to Christ. With prayer, a believ-

8 I. A. Vinogradov, *N. V. Gogol and Orthodoxy*, Moscow, Father House, 2004, pp. 154-306.

9 Gogol in memoirs, journals, contemporary correspondence, Complete systematic collection of documentary evidence. Scientific critical edition in 3 volumes. Volume 1, published by I. A. Vinogradov in Moscow, 2011, p. 84.

10 I. A. Vinogradov, “Religious education of Gogol in the Nizhyn gymnasium of higher sciences”, *Gogol and Orthodoxy*, Moscow, 2004, pp. 179-180.

11 I. P. Zolotussky, *Poetry of prose*, Soviet writer, Moscow, 1987, 4603010101-224, pp. 4-5.

er goes through life's circumstances, and with prayer he suffers or goes to death.¹²

In the Bible, prayer is worship, which includes all the attitudes of the human spirit as it approaches God. The Christian - the child of God - worships God when he worships Him (this is the first part of prayer), confesses his sins (the second part of worship), praises Him (the third part of worship) and perseveres in prayer (a component that must always exist in the life of a believer). This activity is in fact the highest activity of which the human spirit is capable, and can be called fellowship with God. Moreover, man prays because God has already revealed himself to him and changed his life.

Secondly, Gogol defines prayer as a great power that helps a believer to overcome victoriously through life's obstacles and draw closer to Christ. Also, *through* prayer (thirdly),¹³ a person glorifies the greatness of Christ and the blessing of God the Father.¹⁴ He adds: "Prayer is a way to develop your steadfastness and greatness, a way that always brings victory without zeal and fervent faith. Prayer is the inspiration with which a person adorns the wheat of his daily life."¹⁵

Vladimir Voropaev¹⁶ in *Gogol's Prayer*. The Orthodox book review, claims that Gogol's most striking prayer is "To Thee, O Mother of the Most Holy,"¹⁷ widespread in the manuscript tradition called "Gogol's prayer" and

12 .А. Ю, Лабынцев, Л. Л. Щавинская, Н. В. Гоголь и славянские литературы, Москва: Индрик, 2012 (A. I, Labyntsev, L. L. Shavinskaya, N. V. Gogol and Slavic Literature, Moscow: Indrik, 2012), pp. 211-212.

13 They cannot find God without prayer; prayer is precisely the means by which they seek and find God (Matt. 7: 7-8). Prayer is a pledge and bonds by which Eternal Love draws us to Itself and wants to keep it with Itself as long as possible.

14 Мильдон, В. И. Заклинание и молитва. Об одном из архаических источников поэтики Гоголя. Дом Н. В. Гоголя — мемориальный музей и научная библиотека (V. I. Mildon, *Conjuration and prayer*. About one of the archaic sources of Gogol's poetics. House of N. V. Gogol - memorial museum and scientific library): [сайт]. URL: <http://domgogolya.ru/sci-ence/researches/1458/#05> (дата обращения: 13.11.2020).

15 А. Ю, Лабынцев, Л. Л. Щавинская, Н. В. Гоголь и славянские литературы (A. I, Labyntsev, L. L. Shavinskaya, N. V. Gogol and Slavic Literature), p. 212.

16 Russian literary critic, specialist in the field of Russian literature of the XIX century, professor at Moscow State University, „M. V. Lomonosov”. Chairman of the *Gogol Commission of the Scientific Council of the Russian Academy of Sciences*, „History of World Culture”. Member of the Writers' Union of Russia.

17 For the first time this prayer was printed (without the name of Gogol) in 1894 in the printing house of the Kiev-Pechersk Lavra on a separate sheet of a large format called "The Song of Prayer to the Blessed Virgin Mary the Mother of God" (now stored

which has become perhaps his most famous work in the Slavic (and not only) countries”¹⁸

In another article, Gogol’s opera researcher Dr. V. A. Voropaev adds:

„Gogol’s prayer to the Most Holy Mother of God is widespread in mass manuscript religious books of the Eastern Slavs, well known among Orthodox believers in Poland, and has been translated into English. It is included in various poetic anthologies. Perhaps it was this prayer that Gogol had in mind under the title «My Prayer» in his «Table of Contents <to a collection of poems>», apparently written in the early 1850s... We can conclude that of all Gogol’s works, his poetic prayer to the Blessed Virgin became the most famous and popular among the people. As a «genius exponent of folk consciousness» (let us remember again this capacious formula of M.M. Bakhtin), he not only came out of folk culture, having organically assimilated the traditions of Ukrainian, Russian and all-Slavic folklore, but also became an integral part of this culture in his work, was accepted by it. In this his genius, his inseparable connection with the people was manifested. The world literature knows no similar examples.”¹⁹

A. Labyntsev²⁰ and L. L. Shavinskaya²¹ argue that this prayer was

in the memorial center “Gogol’s House” in Moscow). Without the name of Gogol, the prayer was also published in public church publications. In 1897, the historian A. A. Tretyakov published it in the magazine “Russian Archive” (No. 8) with a note that the prayer was communicated to him by the hieromonk of the Gethsemane skete of the Holy Trinity St. Sergius Lavra Isidore (Georgian), originally from the village of Lyskovo, whose brother was a valet in the house of Counts Tolstoy on Nikitsky Boulevard, where Gogol died. In the jubilee year 1909, Gogol’s prayer was reprinted, with some corrections, in the newspapers *Moskovskiye Vedomosti* (March 20), *Russkoye Znamya* (April 30) and *Siberian Pravda* (June 14), and then placed as an appendix in Gogol’s book *Reflections on the Divine Liturgy*.

18 В. А. Воропаев, *Молитва Гоголя. Православное книжное обозрение* (V. A. Voropaev, *Gogol’s Prayer. The Orthodox book review*), 2017, No 3, pp. 24-32.

19 V. A. Voropaev, *Молитва Гоголя ко Пресвятой Богородице в славянском фольклоре и литературном предании*, <http://www.rv.ru/content.php3?id=11978>.

20 Specialist in the field of cultural studies, Slavic philology and bibliology. Explores the history, culture and literature of the East Slavic peoples in a wide chronological scope, their relationship with Western countries, issues of Russian-Ukrainian-Belarusian cultural interaction.

21 Candidate of Philology, Senior Researcher of the Department of Eastern Slavicism, has been working at the Institute of Slavic Studies since 1993.

the most read and well known among Orthodox believers.²² But in the jubilee year 1909, „Gogol's prayer was reprinted, with some corrections, in the newspapers Moskovskiye Vedomosti (March 20), Russkoye Znamya (April 30) and Siberian Pravda (June 14), and then placed as an appendix in Gogol's book Reflections on the Divine Liturgy.”²³

Fourthly, this prayer has a deep and theological text. A prayer that helps a person to have a real relationship with God, namely:

“Instruct on the path of salvation ...
And the book of conscience is all a burden
He will expose my sins.
Wall You are the faithful and the fence!
I pray to you with all my soul:
Save me, my joy,
Have mercy on me!”²⁴

The *fifth* practical element of Gogol's prayer is weapons or, as Gogol calls it, „the invisible power of Christ, with which a person will never perish.” Because with this weapon, a child of God, „can gradually destroy all obstacles on the way”. Thus, Gogol assures his readers that Christ the Savior „will draw closer to those who pray and seek help in the Holy Scriptures.” Because God wants to support His children and prevent the devil from attacking them. The conclusion that Gogol comes to is the name of two popular camps. The first are those who pray to Christ and receive His help, and the second camp is the so-called Christians who do not pray and who practically “will turn away from Christ and Christ will return from them”. For Gogol, this description is very simple and practical. He claims that “Christ does not force anyone to be happy” (this is the moment of prayer),

22 Лабынцев, Ю. А., Щавинская Л. Л. «Гоголевская молитва» в народных литературах восточных славян, Н. В. Гоголь и славянские литературы. М.: Индрик, 2012 (I. A. Labyntsev, L. L. Shavinskaya, "Gogol Prayer" in the folk literatures of the Eastern Slavs, in N. V. Gogol and Slavic literature. Moscow: Indrik, 2012), pp. 206–212.

23 *Prayer of Gogol to the Most Holy Theotokos in Slavic folklore and literary legend*, https://vk.com/wall-85000957_31424?lang=en.

24 Гоголь, Н. В. Полн. собр. соч. и писем: в 17 т. Сост., подгот. текстов и коммент. И. А. Виноградова, В. А. Воропаева, Киев, 2009–2010 (N. V. Gogol, All collection and letters: in 17 volumes (v. 6). Comp., Prepared. texts and comments. I. A. Vinogradova, V. A. Voropaeva, Kiev, 2009–2010), p. 415.

but he says that those who pray are in fact people drawn by the Holy Spirit, and they are people for whom Christ Himself prayed.²⁵

In one of Gogol's letters to "V. A. Zh-mu" there is evidence of the place where he asks for help and mercy - prayer as a means of intercession (this is the sixth practical element of Gogol's prayer): "Brother, thank you for everything! At the grave of the Lord, I ask for help." In practical terms, his prayer life consisted not only of a standard in terms of reading or saying prayers written by others, but prayer was a way of life. Prayer personified his moment of worship and running to the cross of Christ, to the throne of His grace. Basically it represented his daily life, or his way of life.²⁶

For Nikolai Gogol, prayer was extremely important and holy. In one of his letters, he wrote: "Remain in prayer for a long time. You better say from the bottom of your heart: God, have mercy or God will help every deed or action, no matter what happens during the day, and your deeds will pray for you by themselves and instead of all words." The encouragement (seventh practical element) he gives to his sister strengthens the inner person or the spirit person. It was his concern for himself and his family, his friends, his readers. The Russian prose writer always returned to his note in the text of the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:16, in which he wrote: „Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day" (New International Version). Therefore, the inner man needs nourishment, guidance and strengthening, which is achieved only through nourishment from the living Word of God.²⁷

For Ukrainian and Russian novelist, the reading of Holy Scripture was of paramount importance. He was very fond of Paul's psalms and epistles. And in a letter to his younger sister Olga Gogol, January 20 AD. 1847 (Naples), Nicholas wrote: "Read the New Testament every day and

25 А. Ю. Лабынцев, Л. Л. Шавинская, Н. В. Гоголь и славянские литературы (A. I. Labyntsev, L. L. Shavinskaya, N. V. Gogol and Slavic Literature), p. 212.

26 Гоголь Духовная проза. Сост. и коммент. В. А. Воропаев, И. А. Виноградов; Вступ. ст. В. А. Воропаева. Москва: Русская книга, (*Gogol Spiritual prose. Compiled by and comments V. A. Voropaev, I. A. Vinogradov; Entry. Art. V.A. Voropaeva. Moscow: Russian book, 1992.*) 1992, pp. 48-49.

27 О. В. Гоголь, Гоголь, В. Н. Русской Мысли, 20 января н. ст. 1847 г., No 100, 1896 (O. V. Gogol, Gogol, V. N. Russian Thought, January 20, n. Art. 1847, No 100, 1896.), pp. 163-168.

let it be your only reading. In it you will find everything how to be with people and how to help them. The epistles of the Apostle Paul are especially good for this.”²⁸ And, as can be seen from the history of his life: “The gospel was always with him in his pocket, even on the road. When he rode with us to Sorochintsi, he read the Gospel in a chariot.”²⁹ This reflects the connection between reading and studying scripture and prayer. These two are continuous in the life and work of the Russian playwright of the nineteenth century [On the life and correspondence of Gogol, see the book: I. A. Vinogradov,³⁰ *Gogol in memoirs, diaries, correspondence of contemporaries*. Complete systematic body of documentary evidence. Scientific critical edition.³¹

Conclusion

So, summing up the preliminary results, we can conclude that prayer was the clean and pleasant air that the Russian classic used. He was not ashamed to pray. He honored prayer. He practiced this according to the Bible text: “Pray without ceasing” (pray continually) (1 Thessalonians 5:17, New International Version).

Natalya Trunova in her article, *Prayer of Gogol to the Most Holy Theotokos in Slavic folklore and literary legend*, outlines the freedom Gogol had in prayer and how he used prayer to have a personal relationship with God - a very special and unique relationship:

28 Николай Гоголь, Гоголь Полное собрание сочинений в четырнадцати томах. Том 13. Письма 1846–1847. М., Л.: АН СССР, 1952 (Nikolai Gogol, *Gogol Complete works in fourteen volumes*. Volume 13. Letters 1846-1847. M., L.: AN SSSR, 1952), p. 83.

29 Гоголь-Головня Из семейной хроники Гоголей. Мемуары Ольги Васильевны Гоголь-Головни / Гоголь-Головня, Васильевна Ольга, Чаговец, Всеволод. Киев: 1909 (Gogol-Smut From the family chronicle Gogol. Memoirs of Olga Vasilievna Gogol-Golovnya / Gogol-Golovnya, Vasilievna Olga, Chagovets, Vsevolod. Kiev: 1909.), p. 55.

30 Russian Soviet critic, theoretician and literary historian, author of poetry.

31 Виноградов Гоголь в воспоминаниях, дневниках, переписке современников. Полный систематический свод документальных свидетельств. Научно-критическое издание. В. 3т. Т. 1. М.: ИМЛИ РАН, 2011 (Vinogradov, *Gogol in memoirs, diaries, correspondence of contemporaries*. Complete systematic body of documentary evidence. Scientific critical edition. V. 3, vol. 1. Moscow: IMLI RAN, 2011).

„The Gogol Prayer became especially popular at the very beginning of the twentieth century. It was very actively copied throughout the last century. Moreover, manuscripts preserved in separate private archives belong to students of parish schools, that is, they were made a century and even more than a century ago. For a long time, the text of this prayer in the popular literary environment remained almost unchanged, only in some cases it was the inspirer of certain authors to create certain variations on its basis. In general, the “Gogol prayer” is a rare example of a rather strict canonicity of the original, which can be in the space of folk literature, where all texts, except patristic ones, are anonymous, including this “Gogol” one. The poem prayer of Gogol is now known in many handwritten, typewritten and electronic copies.”³²

Gogol, as a religious thinker and publicist, the founder of the patristic tradition of Russian literature, drew the attention of his people (Ukrainian and Russian) to the key element of Christianity - prayer. It seems that none of the Russian writers of the 19th century described or drew the attention of readers to the practical elements of prayer, as Nikolai Gogol did. As such, he remains one of the most prolific writers to have identified a key element of Christianity, namely prayer.

God gave man free will³³, among other characteristics³⁴, so that man could freely³⁵ and consciously resemble God, get spiritually closer to Him -as his Creator and the Source of all benefits, so that he could, with the help of divine grace, realise his creative powers.

32 Natalya Trunova, *Prayer of Gogol to the Most Holy Theotokos in Slavic folklore and literary legend*, https://vk.com/wall-85000957_31424?lang=en.

33 Ioan-Gheorghe Rotaru, “Key aspects of the Freedom of Conscience”, *Jurnalul Libertății de Conștiință - Supliment (Journal for Freedom of Conscience)*, Editions IARSIC, Les Arsc, France, 2016, pp.30-37.

34 Cristian-Vasile Petcu, „Cadrul juridic al dialogului ecumenic creștin” (“The legal framework of Christian ecumenical dialogue”), In volumul Simpozionului Internațional “Itinerario e il contenuto del formare ecumenico-studi ecumenici - Venetia”, Istituto di studi ecumenici S. Bernardino, Veneția, 2008, pp. 422 – 450.

35 Ioan-Gheorghe Rotaru, “Libertatea religioasă – temelie a demnității umane” (“Religious freedom - the foundation of human dignity), in Daniela Ioana Bordeianu, Erika Androne, Nelu Burcea, *Manual pentru liderul Departamentului de Libertate religioasă*, Casa de editură “Viață și Sănătate”, București, 2013, pp. 210-215; Marilena Marin, “Drepturile omului între abuz și nediscriminare” (“Human Rights Between Abuse And Non-Discrimination”), *Managementul Intercultural*, Volumul XVI, Nr. 2 (31), Brașov, 2014, pp. 209-213.

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