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Vladimir T. Zolotnitskii: In the Service of Virtue

ABSTRACT: Vladimir Trofimovich Zolotnitskii (ca. 1741–after 1796) was a military man and civil servant, who authored and translated several works, particularly in his early years. His views concentrated on morality. He distinguished three natural duties: to God, to oneself, and to others, and discussed them in some detail. His proofs for the immortality of the soul are interesting, particularly the proof based on the perfect goodness of God, since, although not entirely original, they appear to be among the first proofs discussed in Russian literature.

KEYWORDS: Natural law • virtue • the immortality of the soul • eschatology

Vladimir Trofimovich Zolotnitskii was born ca. 1741, in the family of a country priest in the Ukraine. He was educated at the Kiev–Mohyla Academy and continued his education at the newly established Moscow University. From 1760 he taught German in the Gymnasium at the University, then in the Sukhoputnyi Noble Cadet Corps in Sankt Petersburg, and later in the Collegium of Revenue (kamer-kollegia) in Moscow. From 1764 he served as a translator and then as a secretary of general Petr I. Panin. In 1769 he participated in the expedition against the Turks. In 1771–1772, he served in the Dnieper Pikemn regiment. From 1773 (with a break from 1777 to 1780, because of health reasons) he held various posts in the Novorossia province: in the chancellery, as a procurator, and as the head of a civic court. He died after 1796.

Author and translator

The majority of Zolotnitskii's works – original works and translations – were published within a fairly narrow time span (1761–1768), when he was in his twenties. Afterwards, he published only two short works, one on the immor-

tality of the soul in 1780 and an admonition to his son in 1796, shortly before his death.

Zolotnitskii published some of his translations from German in the *Useful Entertainment* (*Poleznoe uveselenie*), in an anthology edited by the professor of the Moscow University, Johann Reichel, and in the *Miscellanies* (*Smes'*). His translations were for him actually an opportunity to voice his views, particularly those concerning moral issues. For example, an article "On an excessive desire," although signed as translated by the student Zolotnitskii,¹ has only a relatively small translated insertion, which is a fable about two Indians.² Two short fables in the *Useful Entertainment*, although indicated as translations, were very likely authored by Zolotnitskii himself, since in style, size, and content they resemble the fables from his *New Fables* and *The Condition of the Human Life*.³ His most notable translation is that of the work of Ludvig Holberg. The translation is accurate but, as Zolotnitskii remarked in his note to the reader, in a very few places some phrases were softened, since they had been considered inappropriate for the Russian public. For example, a historian Rapin said that queen Elisabeth prohibited the display of her naked body after her death, "whereby a conclusion was made that she had some fault and because of that her resolve never to marry was strengthened"⁴; the quoted phrase is translated as "because she perhaps had some secret reason for it," meaning the prohibition (H 1.116).⁵ Another example: a historian

¹ О излишнем желании, И. Г. Рейхель (ed.), *Собрание лучших сочинений к распространению знания*, Москва 1762, pt. 2, pp. 279–289.

² J. G. Herder, A. J. Liebeskind, Hamet und Raschid, in their *Palmblätter*, Jena 1786, vol. 1, pp. 10–13.

³ *Баснь о добродетели, науке и чести; Баснь 2* [о солнце и гордой звезде], "Полезное увеселение" 1761, no. 4, pp. 142–144; *История о молодом человеке Ироне*, Nov., pp. 149–152 was probably also authored by Zolotnitskii.

⁴ L. Holberg, *Verglichene Geschichte verschiedener Heldinnen und anderer berühmten Damen: nach dem Beyspiel des Plutarchs*, Kopenhagen; Leipzig 1746, vol. 1, p. 117.

⁵ The following references to Zolotnitskii's works will be used:

D – *Доказательство безсмертия души человеческой, взятое от намерения Божия, с каким он изволил создать мир сей, и из врожденных человеку совершенств и способностей*, Санкт-Петербург 1780, also in: Т.В. Артемьева (ed.), *Мысли о душе. Русская метафизика XVIII века*, Санкт-Петербург 1996, pp. 149–157.

H – introductions and comments in: Лудовик Голберг, *История разных героинь и других славных жен*, Санкт-Петербург 1767–1768, vols. 1–2. Prefaces' pages are not numbered and they are indicated in this article in square brackets.

Na – *Наставление сыну*, Печатано в Екатеринославской Типографии 1796.

No – *Новыя нравоучительныя басни с прибавлением особливых к ним изъяснений*, Санкт-Петербург 1763.

O – *Общество разнovidных лиц, или Разсуждения о действиях и нравах человеческих*, Санкт-Петербург 1766.

Camden did not mention Rizzo, “this Italian favorite/lover (*Liebling*),”⁶ who was referred to simply as “this Italian” (H 2.91; however, the word “favorite” is not altogether abandoned, e.g., on p. 88). Thus, Zolotnitskii’s changes are far from drastic. Two other book-long translations are Seneca’s *De beneficiis* translated from German⁷ and Henry Fielding’s *A Journey from this World to the Next*, also translated from the German language.⁸

Natural law

The natural law is the knowledge of natural laws observed in the original state of nature, and of the processes and events associated with them. It consists of knowledge of good and bad actions in analyzing their inner structure, and thus it gives us rules for following the former and avoiding the latter (Sok 2).

This is a somewhat curious definition, since it blends together natural and moral laws.⁹ On the other hand, Zolotnitskii could say that because the most morally perfect God created the world, natural laws are the consequence of the moral nature of God, and thus the natural aspect of natural laws is inseparable from morality. After all,

natural laws are exactly divine [laws], since God determined them in human nature: from this it follows that someone acting according to natural laws acts according to God’s will (11).

R – *Разсуждение о бессмертии человеческой души, которое утверждает особливо чрез доказательство Божияго бытия, открывающегося нам из многочисленных созданий*, Санкт-Петербург 1768, also in: Артемьева, *op. cit.*, pp. 158–167. Artem’eva’s anthology does not include the second part, *О исполнении своего назначения или о последовании Богу*.

Sok – *Сокращение естественного права выбранное из разных авторов для пользы российского общества*, Санкт-Петербург 1764.

Sos – *Состояние человеческой жизни заключенное в некоторых нравоучительных примечаниях, касающихся до натуральных человеческих склонностей собранных в пользу общества*, Санкт-Петербург 1763.

⁶ Holberg, *Verglichene Geschichte*, p. 151.

⁷ *Дух Сенеки, или изрядныя нравоучительныя разсуждения сего великаго философа*, Москва 1765.

⁸ Г. Филдинг, *Путешествие в другой свет или Иулиан Отступник, Остроумная повесть*, Санкт-Петербург 1766.

⁹ Zolotnitskii’s definition “establishes the moral evaluation of the laws of nature. Mixing natural laws with normative (juridical, moral) [laws], what is and what should be, constitutes the fundamental contradiction of natural doctrine,” А. В. Малинов, *История русской философии. XVIII век*. Санкт-Петербург 2012, p. 77. Zolotnitskii could say that he was not really interested in the natural doctrine.

In any event, the most fundamental natural law in life is to know yourself, from which are derived all natural duties of man, which reiterates Seneca's statement used as the motto for the *Abridgment of the Natural Law*: perfect understanding of oneself is the most important knowledge in the world. This self-knowledge led Zolotnitskii to the recognition of various inclinations in human life, and he distinguished three such natural inclinations and thereby three natural duties: to the highest being, to oneself, and to the neighbor (Sok 3–4, Sos 2, No 34, Na 7).

God

People were created and endowed with reason and immortality by the perfect, omnipotent, eternal, and supremely wise being (Sos 29) who should be honored, which is the first natural human duty (30; Sok 2). God exists, He is the supremely good Being, who is constantly active (D 3–4/149). He is greater than any greatness, incomparable, incomprehensible by any human mind. He is supremely merciful, His love for people has no measure (Na 9). He is always and everywhere with us (8).

With or without His creation God is the same, with the same perfection. The world was created for the glory of God and for the happiness of creation. God is glorified when His infinite perfections are discovered and appreciated. So, “the glory of God consists in illuminating his perfections.” That is why humans have the reason to be able to comprehend God and His actions. Other beings were created for the beauty and perfection of the world, partially for the service of humans, partially to show God's wisdom through them (D 10–12/151). God's creating power is unlimited and Zolotnitskii believed that there are rational beings on other planets, using Chrysostom as his patristic authority (Sos 151), and that the Most High created this world as only one among His innumerable creations (H 2.[1]).

Among all the obligations imposed on us by nature, the first place is occupied by piety (благочестие, O 1) or worship (почитание, Sok 18), understood primarily as the inner experience, not outward manifestations. A person can build a church, but it may be funded using stolen money (O 2). A man can go to church every day, but it may be because he can see there a young widow (3). True piety

includes something known for eternity and consoles us in adversary situations. What can be more pleasant than looking at my Creator with the impartial spirit, pure and chaste conscience? What is more perfect than when all my actions are compliant with his laws? What can be more useful than when I open the eternal book of his cre-

ation and learn from it? Piety should be the foundation of all our actions (4).

And hence, Zolotnitskii's exclamation: When thinking about the Highest Being that created me, my Father and Lord, I also think that I exist to contemplate God, i.e., to scrutinize His wise creation, to know His majesty and to be grateful for His goodness. Faith and experience convince me that I was not created only for this brief life (D 5/149).

Oneself

The second natural duty is to oneself: being created by God, the perfect Being, every person should take care of himself and strive for perfection (Sos 30).

We always have an inclination to what appears to be pleasant and fitting for our perfection, and we have a disinclination towards things which appear to be contrary to our well-being (S 2). The good is the object of our desires and every person has the natural inclination to know it; evil, on the other hand, is what repulses our spirit (3, Sok 26). By nature, we do not have an inclination to evil as such, but to evil that is disguised as good (No 120; cf. Hol 1.334); we are often mistaken in considering something as good, believing that it contributes to our happiness (Sos 4), but guided by common sense, a person can never abandon good (5) and choose evil (6). If evil is chosen, it is not because it is evil, but because of the good that is associated with it, e.g., a merchant cheats because of the benefit he obtains from cheating, and not because cheating is evil (7). A person commits suicide not because it is evil, but because it is considered to be the way of escaping problems (8). However, suicide is evil and there is really no excuse for suicide (15). When in a big trouble, people simply do not follow reason and commit suicide (18) as the result of despair (19; cf. H 1.280). The suicidal person should remember that death is the destruction of human perfection. "Even our church prays every day for the prolongation of our life, and by all laws humans should preserve it as long as possible" (H 1.402).

Happiness is the satisfaction stemming from the possession of the true good, and people always desire happiness. However, true happiness lies in spiritual satisfaction (Sos 9); therefore, when pursuing happiness, we should observe the rules of virtue (10), which "the eternal wisdom gave us" (11); if these rules are followed, that is, if people follow the will of God, they become temples of virtues (R 39). Thus, virtue should be the light of reason in making any decisions. Reason's right choices will be confirmed – or rejected – by conscience, the judge of human actions. Thus, there is no man who could not make a distinction between good and evil, since his conscience will judge

him when he does something bad (64). This, however, is not an unqualified assertion, since even conscience's light may be dimmed: conscience does not work in some people (O 97).

Cleobulus considered it to be a general rule that "true well-being consists in moderation, which is the best virtue."¹⁰ Excess leads to vices (Sos 46). Guided by his understanding of virtue, Zolotnitskii is full of advice: "Flee [bodily] delights like mortal pest and try primarily to perfect your spirit" (22). Be always magnanimous, not wanting revenge, get out of the way of evildoers (107). Watch your tongue (N 109). Flee evil deeds (111). Don't anger people who can harm you (122). If someone does you any harm, he can be defeated by your meekness rather than by revenge, which only would enflame the hostility (123). Behold the word of the Lord: don't repay evil with evil (124). Be satisfied with the station of life appointed to you by Heaven (129). Avoid those who speak ill of others (O 74). Make haste slowly (108; No 83). Haste and slowness are both vices; moderation is the best way to accomplish something (O 110). Solitude brings inner peace (Sos 50). However, since peace of mind comes through moderation (45), then solitude should perhaps be exercised moderately.

Another piece of advice: when in misfortune, think about hundreds of people who are in the same situation. Thus, be patient and don't allow defeat. True happiness lies in steadfast (Sos 77), peaceful and virtuous state of the human spirit. No one will take away this treasure from you (78).

Another one: violation of the law leads to punishment, e.g., overeating has unpleasant consequences (Sos 33), so, we should not eat too much. This, however, is not a call for asceticism: moderation should also be applied to eating too little. There are also inclinations stemming from interaction with the world; their object is often useless and even harmful, and is only related to the satisfaction of the body (36). When exercised with moderation, these inclinations lead to genuine satisfaction. Pleasures of this kind are pleasant while they last, but afterwards they are forgotten (37). Nothing in this world brings perfect happiness (40).

Society

Having realized that one cannot live without others, a person should respect the society and love his neighbor, which is the third natural duty (Sos 30). Happiness is not a simple individual endeavor. Cooperation of people is needed to reach individual happiness, and that includes cooperation to defend

¹⁰ Actually, "moderation is the best [thing]" (Diogenes Laertius 1.93).

the society from enemies (22), to enable agriculture, production of goods, and trade. “We were not born into this world to live only for ourselves, but living in the society, we should be useful to it” (O 36), to the extent that people should occupy themselves primarily by what is useful, only secondarily with what is pleasant (14).

Natural law requires that we do what is needed for our perfection (Sos 27), and thus we should want good for ourselves and for others (28) or, as stated with an allusion to the Sermon on the Mount, “what we want for ourselves, it should be done to others” (O 37, Sok 35). In other words, we should love people, since hating people is against our self-interest (Sos 23).

Both on the individual and the societal levels, making a case for learning and for sciences is very important. Knowledge and sciences are gifts of God, which illuminate us and make us rational; they are “the natural food of the human soul” (Sos 113). Nations blossom due to sciences (114): “Sciences whom Heavens love, / You are useful for the entire world, / Blossom in all countries / And give us good fruit” (115). Even more importantly, in the spirit of physico-theology Zolotnitskii said that natural science will amaze us; by investigating natural phenomena we’ll discover Greatness and Power (Na 41) of the Greatest Creator; through this we will truly honor God (42).

Natural laws state that a sovereign watches over his subjects and can use them and their property according to the interest of the state and for his own needs (Sos 76), which is stated by the Savior, who tells us to give to Caesar what is Caesar’s (77). Therefore, monarchs should always be respected and people should obey them, even unto death (Na 17; Sok 117).

The position of the monarch is central for the social order. To assure unity among people, the supreme wisdom of God arranged for some people to be rulers and for others to obey them (No 129). This is because God creates Himself in authorities; they are His manifestations (лицо), the anointed set up and consecrated by God Himself (Na 15) because “the rule of government ... is an Image of the rule of the Most High” (16) or the highest power is an image of the Divinity (H 2.[8]).

The human situation complying with the created order is called prosperity (благосостояние) and the abandonment of means to assure this order is a disaster (нещастие) (H 2.[1]). This prosperity depends primarily on the monarch ([3]). The first task is to ensure security ([4]). This is the reason for the strength of the government – meaning the monarch – and for making unions between nations ([5]). Different ranks and functions in a particular country serve this purpose ([6]). The monarch should also care for the order in the society ([7]). There are nations which can be models of prosperity. And with clear allusion to Russia and to Catherine II, who six

years earlier had ascended to the throne, Zolotnitskii rhapsodized that in one such model nation the Highest Authority said that if there is a more prosperous nation than Her nation, it would be Her fault. She is respected by Her nation ([10]). Peace-loving neighbors respect the country where love and meekness rule from the Throne, which is surrounded by justice, loyalty, and modesty ([11]). Although written in 1768, before the partition of Poland, it is interesting if any nation would have been able to see love and meekness radiating from the Russian throne.

In relations with other people Zolotnitskii advocated caution and moderation. He referred to the law of the Lord “Don’t judge lest you be judged” (O 44). This is because no conclusion concerning people should be made based on appearances, which are often deceptive (in which he used the statement made by Holberg in his preface not included in Zolotnitskii’s translation, H 1.145, cf. 1.223–224, 2.43–44) . These appearances are like the door to the inner constitution of a man, but we cannot quite see through this door what is going on inside without entering there (1.146). A positive and benevolent attitude towards others should be a guiding principle in interactions with people. Thus, when seeing someone in a misfortune, people should help such a person as much as they can, without waiting for any explanation what circumstances led to this misfortune (No 100). If people are not quite willing to extend their helping hand, they should imagine themselves in this situation. Thus, Zolotnitskii’s admonishes: help your neighbor since, firstly, this is God’s commandment and, secondly, for your own sake to be helped when you are in the same predicament (101).

Eschatology

The duty to oneself, and to others, involves the issue of the soul and its eternal life. However, is the soul immortal? Zolotnitskii offered three proofs for the immortality of the soul based, in his mind, on sane reason and justice:

1. The soul is the subtlest being, a simple substance endowed with reason and will (R 16/164); it has no parts, so nothing can undermine its eternity (Sos 136). This is one of the earliest arguments for the immortality of the soul, and was used by Plato, later by Descartes, and Anichkov, and afterwards by Zolotnitskii, Kandorskii and Shcherbatov.

- 2.

It would be contrary to the Majesty and Wisdom of the Divinity if the soul, such a grand creation, by which we have a relation, in some way, to the Creator, would turn into nothingness after the death of the body (Sos 135), or would be affected by eternal insensitivity; however, since the Wise Creator made all the spirits for eternal glory of His supreme

Being, then it can be concluded from it that the human soul will be preserved by God in His eternal perfection (136).

Some say that the soul after death has no senses or feeling, but this would be imperfection, and such imperfection can hardly be ascribed to the perfect Creator (R 16/165).

3. Divine justice requires that the soul should receive its reward in eternity, according to its merits (Sos 136). For Zolotnitskii this, in fact, is the decisive argument for the immortality of the soul. Some say that the soul is mortal, since it is imperfect. Zolotnitskii turned this argument around: the imperfection and limitations of the soul on earth are precisely the indication of its immortality. By itself, this is not sufficient: the idea of the mortality of the soul is rejected when “we connect our fate with the perfections of God” (R 15/164). We cannot know God perfectly in this body, and cannot have perfect happiness for which we were created; this seems to be confusing. Therefore, God’s plan can be realised by the perfection of the glory of God in rational beings, and in order for them to be perfectly happy there will be time when, free from the body, we’ll be able to know and glorify God freely and be happy forever (D 20/153). The desire of perfect happiness was not put in the human soul in vain (155). The soul has an inborn desire for perfect good. If such a desire is implanted by God, then its object, the perfect good, must exist. Since this good is not in this world, it should be achievable after death, hence, the soul is immortal (R 18/165).

Generally, Orthodox ecclesiastic writers did not discuss proofs for the immortality of the soul. In that respect, Zolotnitskii was in the forefront of the investigation concerning this issue. He may have taken a cue concerning the argumentation in favor of the immortality of the soul from Anichkov who, in his early student article published in the *Useful Entertainment*, said that the immortality of the soul is an incontestable truth and no one doubts it, and yet he offered some arguments for its immortality.¹¹ The argument based on the perfection of God seems to be originally introduced in Russia

¹¹ The main argument for him was the simplicity of soul’s makeup. He also said that “the soul not only is imperishable according to its essence [as a simple substance], but it is particularly protected by God; it is because if only the soul would turn into nothingness, then the entire world created for this reason that it could know through it the majesty of God would not be a great example in the proof of His divine power” and “there is no being which would directly depend on another being and thereby would not have certain image of it on itself ... For the reason for which God created a rational being, for the same reason [He] retains the reason of this being with which it is endowed,” Д. Аничков, *Разсуждение о безсмертии души человеческой*, “Полезное увеселение” 1761, no. 4, pp. 33–35.

by Zolotnitskii, although it was used often in the West,¹² and later it was widely used by other Russian authors, to mention just Anichkov, Bratanovskii, Maikov, Shcherbatov, and Bolotov.

If the soul is mortal, we are like actors who play some role and disappear, fools of fortune, created to be unhappy (D 31/156). This leads to atheism (33/156). Life is like a theater, where a comedy is being played (Sos 92). Death is inescapable, but it is just a transition to the blessed eternity, from a foreign land to the fatherland, in which, after all earthly woes, people will rest in infinite peace prepared for them before ages (No 115). What is greater than souls after death? They will live in safety, in true happiness, enlightened with knowledge, and will live forever in countless perfections (116). Reward will be in “the temple of eternity” (Sos 55). Evildoers will be punished, if not in this life, then “in eternal life” (69). Happy is he who awaits death without fear (126).

There is life after death, but not the same to all (Sos 139). In the next life, everyone will receive a reward, not according to his status (Sos 37), but according to the justice of his works (38). For a reward, the soul goes to its eternal fatherland, to the gathering of souls (Sos 137). The soul has to be immortal, and after separation from the body it will receive clarity of vision. According to the gospel of Jesus Christ, we will see God face to face [1. Cor. 13:12] (153). Then “the theater of God” will be revealed to us and we will understand the workings of the world. Beings from different worlds will meet then in perfect joy, and will sing praises in one choir to God (D 22–23/154).

On the other hand, through vices, the likeness to the Creator can be lost, which will lead to eternal torment and despair, where there will be no hope (Sos 140; D 35/156). Also, those who are afraid of future punishment speak about the mortality of the soul. The Creator will avenge this denial of His plan (R 21/167). This can be prevented by coming to Christ, who will purify people’s conscience from deadly deeds, and who will take away fear. We are sinners and we should repent, and then immortality will be the best consolation (D 35–36/157).

Zolotnitskii appears to have agreed with the official church eschatology on the eternal reward and punishment; however, there is a departure in one important respect. Zolotnitskii apparently believed that the soul by itself, freed from the confines of the mortal body, is elevated to eternity; the

¹² It was called an ethical argument by S. Formey, *Der christliche Philosoph*, Göttingen 1754, vol. 1, p. 190. See also, for instance, H. F. Reischauer, *Vernünfftige Gedanken über die Werke der Natur*, Lemgo 1747, p. 13; J. A. Hoffmann, *Zwey Bücher von der Zufriedenheit nach den Gründen der Vernunft und des Glaubens*, Hamburg 1766⁴ [1722], p. 269. Cf. Clement, *Strom.* 6.68; Lactantius, *Div. inst.* 7.9; Athanasius, *Contra gentes* 32.

Christian theology speaks about the new body received after death by the soul.

It is interesting that, although Zolotnitskii was a firm believer in the afterlife, he stated that the belief in the immortality of the soul should be an official position of the government, regardless of the conviction of the powers involved. He said that, if God and immortality are denied, nothing will prevent some people from taking advantage of others, since civic laws would be followed only by necessity, not by conscience. Even if faith were “created by politics,” denying it because of one’s own needs is irrational: this undermines the foundations of well-being of the society. The laws say that we should respect God and the sovereign, live virtuously, and avoid injustice with the expectation of the last judgment. This, and not the fashionable enlightenment ideas, should be taught in schools (D 40–42/158).

Masonic connections

There is no record about Zolotnitskii’s membership in a masonic lodge, and the lists of masons provided by Vernadskii, Bakounine/Bakunina, and Serkov include his name, but with a question mark. However, it would be difficult to disregard masonic influence on his ideas. He was one of the young collaborators with the *Useful Entertainment*, along with such budding literary figures as I.F. Bogdanovich, A.A. Rzhetskii, V.I. Maikov, and D.I. Fonvizin. The content of this journal allowed one author to state that

motifs of personal perfection, futility of earthly things, propaganda of models of virtue, of the idea of friendly brotherhood of members of a limited circle of people, reflections on the afterlife to which a man must prepare himself during his earthly existence – all of it are typically masonic moods, and compel us to see in the Kheraskov circle a secret masonic group. In some measure all its participants were associated with masonry in later years.¹³

Zolotnitskii was also in the Sukhoputnyi Noble Cadet Corps, and he published in the Corps’ printing house. At the end of the reign of Elizabeth (1740–1760) there was a masonic lodge, the core of which consisted of members of the Cadet Corps: Sumarokov, Melissenov, Svistunov, and later Elagin, Kheraskov, and Rzhetskii.¹⁴ It is even stated that the Corps became “a true

¹³ А. В. Западов, *Творчество Хераскова*, in: М. М. Херасков, *Избранные произведения*, Ленинград: Советский писатель 1961, p. 16; endorsed by М. Schrubka, *Studien zu den burlerken Dichtungen V.I. Majkovs*, Wiesbaden 1997, p. 22.

¹⁴ А. Н. Пыпин, *Русское масонство; XVIII и первая четверть XIX века*, Петроград 1916, pp. 92–93.

nest of masonry.¹⁵ With the Corps' intense cultural activities, it is impossible to assume that masonic ideas of such prominent figures as Sumarokov and Kheraskov did not influence Zolotnitskii.¹⁶ After Zolotnitskii left Moscow, he worked for general Petr I. Panin, who also was a mason, a member of one of the lodges of the Elagin system, and it is very likely that some of their conversations touched upon masonic ideas. Incidentally, one of Zolotnitskii works, his *New Fables*, is dedicated to Nikita I. Panin, brother of Petr, and a more prominent figure on the Russian political scene – also a mason.

Russian masonry could be considered a way to fulfill some spiritual longing, which fulfillment the participants did not find in the official church. The masons spoke about the vanity of the world, about living on earth with the thought about death, and the eternal mind constantly in their minds, about the brotherhood of people, particularly the members of their lodges, and about virtue, moderation and respect for science as an important means to better appreciate God's providential work, about the sacredness of life, good deeds, about the love and respect of others. They wanted their lives to be permeated by piety. Kheraskov's circle seemingly understood the religious aspects of life in somewhat universalist terms, which is reflected in Zolotnitskii's writings. He constantly spoke about God, the Creator, the Highest Being, and the like, but very seldom did he mention Christ: only once as Jesus Christ, sometimes as the Savior, sometimes indirectly as the author of some Biblical statements. In fact, Christ is mentioned less often than Jupiter, although, admittedly, the name of Jupiter appears primarily in Zolotnitskii's *New Fables*, and in the many illustrative fables in *The Condition of the Human Life*. The church is almost never mentioned, although he did urge his son to attend church: stay away from freethinkers, he said, which is "a blind delusion, desperate mindlessness and eternal perdition. Rather be a true member of Christianity and its Church"; be in church at appointed times, even more often (Na 11). He must have meant the Orthodox church, although he never mentioned Orthodoxy. A son of a priest as he was, he must have been familiar with the Bible fairly well, but only infrequently did he quote it. The patristic tradition is altogether ignored, except for an isolated reference to Chrysostom – an all-favorite patristic author in Russian ecclesiastical writings – and an oblique reference to church fathers in the statement that the church laws are due to men guided by natural and revealed reason (Sos 31). The salvific work of Christ is a bit sidelined by Zolotnitskii

¹⁵ В. И. Сахаров, *Русское масонство в портретах*, Москва 2004, p. 289.

¹⁶ Sumarokov was a mason from 1750, Kheraskov from 1775, but masonic ideas can be detected in his literary output from the very beginning.

(it is mentioned just once, Na 10), and good works and the service to virtue acquire a prominent position, and constitute the way to ensure well-being in this life and eternal happiness in the next. 

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