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Kozlovskii's secretive Catholicism

Summary: Kozlovski was one of the most widely known Russian diplomats of the nineteenth century. He converted to Catholicism at some unspecified time. He kept his religious convictions private and very little expression of his theological views can be found in his writings. He made in them some terse theological remarks and he was apparently interested in the political and social, rather than spiritual, aspects of Catholicism. Like Chaadaev and Gagarin, he spoke about conversion of Russia to Catholicism as a way from its spiritual, social, and economic backwardness, but he saw such a prospect as hopeless.

Keywords: Kozlovskii, Catholicism, Russian Orthodoxy.

Prince Piotr Borisovich Kozlovskii is a largely forgotten figure today, but during his life, he was a fairly well-known and liked diplomat in European political circles and beyond. Kozlovskii was born in 1783 in Moscow. In 1800, he entered the College of foreign affairs, and in 1803 he was sent to Rome as part of a Russian legation to the king of Sardinia. In 1806, on Napoleon's orders, he accompanied the king Victor Emanuel to Cagliari in Sardinia. In 1812, he was in St. Petersburg, next year, in England, where he received an honorary doctorate in civil law from Oxford University, after which we returned to Cagliari as a minister plenipotentiary. In 1815, he participated in the Vienna conference. With the king of Sardinia, he stayed in Turin until 1818 and then he was sent to Baden and Württemberg until 1820 as a minister plenipotentiary. In 1821, he was removed from his post because of his radical views, after which he traveled in Europe and received friendly reception in various European courts. In 1826 he became again employed by the College of foreign affairs to work in the court of the viceroy Paskevich in Poland. In 1827 he was relieved of his duties. In 1834, on his way to Russia, he had in Warsaw an accident that left him crippled for life. Next year he came to St. Petersburg where he received in 1836 a post in Warsaw. His duties allowed him to travel throughout Europe and in one of such voyages he died in 1840 in Baden-Baden¹.

¹ J. M. McErlean, *Catholic, liberal, European: a critic of Orthodox Russia, the diplomat Prince P. B. Kozlovskii (1783-1840)*, in: *Religious and secular forces in late Tsarist Russia*, ed. Ch. E. Timberlake, Seattle 1992, p. 65-83.

Kozlovskii was one of the few renowned Russian Catholics in his time, although his faith was a fairly well-kept secret. The circumstances of his conversion to Catholicism are shrouded in mystery. In the early 1800s, when he was in Rome as a young man, he studied Latin, history and mathematics under the Jesuit priest Lami, which very likely resulted in his conversion to Catholicism². It was even rumored that he became a Jesuit³. On the surface at least, he was not a particularly religious person. He zealously attended balls and loved to eat which his corpulent figure clearly reflected. He was a lover of conversation and jest, and was even considered “very dangerous to the female sex”⁴. This way of life, if nothing else, contributed to the opinion that he was *nicht allzugläubig*⁵ or, more politely, that “certain elements of the Catholic doctrine remained inaccessible to his reason”⁶. On the other hand, a coreligionist and Jesuit Ivan Gagarin thought that “his convictions were perfectly settled”⁷ and another author saw him as “one of the most spiritual people that Russia ever knew”⁸.

Kozlovskii certainly did not make a show of his faith. This is understandable for a person who wanted to be in the state service as a diplomat, and yet, generally, Catholicism was viewed suspiciously in Russian society and conversion even became punishable, as Ivan Gagarin and Madame Swetchine experienced. Thus, Kozlovskii remained a closet Catholic. He was apparently drawn to Catholicism by spiritual reasons: “He loved life and was afraid of death as a terrible and necessary mystery”⁹. The fear of death is often a reason to seek consolation in religion and its eschatological vision. Nikolai Turgenev wrote that Kozlovskii “simply became a Catholic because of the fear of death! He told me that many times and all his writing concerning religion is a testimony of it”¹⁰. This does not explain much. Because the doctrine of purgatory is specific to Catholicism (both

² Fürst Kosloffsky, *kaiserlich russischer wirklicher Staatsrath, Kammerherr des Kaisers, ausserordentlicher Gesandter und bevollmächtigter Minister in Turin, Stuttgart und Karlsruhe*, ed. W. Dorow, Leipzig 1846, p. 5-6.

³ М. Морошкин, *Иезуиты в России, с царствования Екатерины II-й и до нашего времени*, Санкт-Петербург 1870, vol. 2, p. 508. Kozlovskii certainly had a soft spot for the Jesuits, considering at least his heartfelt criticism of attacks on Jesuits in France, P. Kozlovski, *Diorama social de Paris*, Paris 1997, p. 122-125.

⁴ Fürst Kosloffsky..., p. 15.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 6.

⁶ L. Pingaud, *Un diplomate russe il y a cent ans en Italie: le prince Kosloffsky*, “Revue d’histoire diplomatique” 1917, 31, p. 37-96, 42.

⁷ J. Gagarin, *Tendances catholiques dans la société russe*, “Correspondant” 1860, 50, p. 510, although Gagarin admitted that “his conduct did not always conform to his faith; man of the world, man of pleasure, he did not restrict himself to the fulfillment of the duties of the Christian life, he certainly could not be accused of fanaticism”.

⁸ X. Marmier, *Lettres sur la Russie, la Finlande et la Pologne*, Paris 1843, vol. 2, p. 92.

⁹ П. А. Вяземский, *Князь Петр Борисович Козловский*, in his *Полное собрание сочинений*, Санкт-Петербург 1879, vol. 2, p. 291.

¹⁰ A letter of N. I. Turgenev to P. A. Turgenev, 16/28 Aug. 1869, В. Я. Френкель, *Петр Борисович Козловский 1783-1840*, Ленинград 1978, p. 130-131.

Protestantism and Orthodoxy reject the concept of purgatory), Kozlovskii's fear of hell might have drawn him to Catholicism and the chance it opens for the expiation of some sins in purgatory, and, thereby, the avoidance of a dismal fate in hell. Also, it is unclear what "writing concerning religion" Turgenev meant. Very little expression of his theological views can be found in his writings. At the beginning of his article "On hope," he only briefly mentioned many people who mix up the notion of hope expressed by "our Religion" with the everyday life understanding of hope. Christian hope is the belief in God's mercy and the Savior's unbounded love for man¹¹. Since he published this article in Russia, "our Religion" is meant to be Orthodoxy, not Catholicism.

In his *Social diorama of Paris* that he wanted to be published, Kozlovskii stated somewhat marginally that materialism is "a sad doctrine" that "does not at all withstand the aversion which any thinking man experiences when listening to its apostles". At the same time, he also said that "only religion can conceive the indestructibility of the soul and with it, the belief in the existence of God, which is inseparable from the former. It is absurd, in my view, to pretend that we could, without the assistance of religion, discover God in all His works, when we would see everywhere only the same law of uniformity and of decay; and to what [purpose] would serve this conviction, even if it were intense and sincere unless we would discover at the same time the idea of punishments and rewards beyond this life; and how to find without faith the source of fear and of hope"¹². Since in the same paragraph he stated that we should be "grateful to the Catholic religion that made faith the gift of heavens given to humanity," it appears that the religion that he meant as conceiving the indestructibility of the soul, etc., was a revealed religion rather than a natural religion. In particular, he seems so have criticized physico-theology, so popular in Russia in the eighteenth century (e.g., Lomonosov, Trediakovskii) as an avenue to the discovery of God in nature. Kozlovskii's was a very strong claim that countered the view expressed constantly in Christianity. Already the psalmist sang about the heavens proclaiming the glory of God, and the apostle Paul spoke about discovering the eternal power and divinity of God through nature. However, physico-theology can lead to the conviction of the existence and majesty of God, but it cannot, by itself and without revealed religion, discover the reason behind all that physico-theology investigates: it cannot say anything about the after-life and man's relationship with God. Also, Kozlovskii could have stated that there are people who scrutinize nature very thoroughly and yet remain irreligious. Physico-theology thus detects harmony, order, and uniformity imposed by natural laws, and then translates those into theological terms by speaking about an author of these laws and this order. Why does an unbeliever not make this step of inferring the existence of God from the order of nature? Because of his unbelief, at least because of a lack of desire to believe and see God in His

¹¹ П. Б. Козловский, *О надежде*, "Современник" 1836, vol. 3, p. 23.

¹² P. Kozlovski, *Diorama...*, p. 185.

works. Therefore, believers would not as much discover God in nature, as they would appreciate Him through nature and its orderliness. Kozlovskii could have also claimed that God is discovered in nature because of the concept of God inscribed in every person's soul; therefore, such discovery would be an anamnesis of sorts.

However, the most personal, although brief, religious statement can be found in his letter to his sister Anna, in which he described his 1812 experience of the storm on the sea: "The divine providence in which I always put my hope saved me at the threshold of death, as it were, and the merciful eye of the Savior looked not at my innocence, but at [my] faith that I never lost". "In all circumstances in my life, I got used to seeing a design of the Most High and nothing else"¹³. These would be the only written statements that could justify the claim that Kozlovskii was "one of the most spiritual people". The problem is that his published legacy is not very impressive.

During his lifetime Kozlovskii published some youthful poems and then anonymously three brochures: *Letter of a Protestant from Germany to the monsignor bishop of Chester* (1825), *Letters to duke de Broglie concerning the prisoners of Vincennes* (1830), and *Belgium in 1830* (1831). After his return to Russia, he published three articles intended as popularization of science in Pushkin's journal *Sovremennik*: a long review of the French journal *Annuaire du Bureau de longitudes* for year 1836, a presentation of probability calculus "On hope" (1836), and "Brief outline of the theory of steam machines" (1837). Most of his writings were letters and diplomatic telegrams, many of them still unpublished.

Another reason for the paucity of religious views expressed in Kozlovskii's writings was his reluctance to investigate religious issues. As he phrased it, "I do not enter here theological questions which are completely alien/unknown to me"¹⁴. The tenor of his writings seems to indicate that he considered, maybe with some exaggeration, all theological questions to be alien to him, not only some of them. If this was the case, no discussion of theology, Catholic or otherwise, can be expected from Kozlovskii. We must be satisfied with terse theological remarks, like the one made on the occasion of his daughter Sophie's acceptance of the Catholic faith: he rejoiced over this fact since he considered Catholicism to be "the most certain of all" faiths¹⁵.

Kozlovskii was not altogether silent about religious issues, but he discussed them from a political and social rather than from theological perspective. His *Letter of a Protestant from Germany* is a good example of such an interest.

In his 1825 speech, the bishop of Chester, Charles Bloomfield, urged the House of Lords to refrain from the legislation of a Roman Catholic Relief Bill. He advocated the view that would "continue and perpetuate the exclusion of

¹³ P. Kozlovskii's letter to Anna, 20 Nov. 1812, "Русский Архив" 1915, no. 8, p. 391.

¹⁴ P. Kozlovski, *Diorama...*, p. 125.

¹⁵ A letter quoted in *ibidem*, p. 9.

Roman Catholics from certain offices of trust and power,” because “civil rights are limitable by expediency,” namely the Catholic priesthood aims at “the subversion of the Protestant church and the erection of their own upon its ruins,” and the bill “proposes to admit a powerful and active body of foes into the very citadel of our Protestant faith”¹⁶. The *Letter* was basically a call for tolerance. Kozlovskii, a Catholic, wrote it not only anonymously but also as a German Protestant (“an inhabitant of the shores of Rhine”)¹⁷ who was concerned that Bloomfield’s speech undermined the Protestant faith. Bloomfield “inadvertently, no doubt gives to the hand of Catholics the same weapons that we used against them with such success in the sixteenth century” since his speech “contains word for word the doctrines that we victoriously conquered at the beginning of the Reformation”. Therefore, upon reflection, “giving an example of humility, Your Highness will not hesitate to cure, through solemn retraction, the deep wounds that his language should inflict on our cause”¹⁸. If in Germany and the Low Countries, which suffered more than England from religious wars, “a minister or a man of the state would venture to announce an intolerant opinion and call Catholics papists or reforms heretical, he would not only be excluded from the council of the sovereign, but would be crushed with disdain by all enlightened people of his faith; and if by chance there existed an absurd law that would require each [civil] servant to declare in his oath of fidelity what he believes about the eucharist, the adoration of images, the cult of the saints, and other similar dogmas, and that a man of the state would seriously reestablish or defend such relics of barbarism, he would be thought as devoid of reason”¹⁹. “As long as there is a Bible to read, people truly pious to preach, and a reason to follow, the reformation will have nothing to fear from the thirty Catholic members [of the Parliament], but certainly [should fear] the scandal and the disgust engendered by prejudicial discourses of the would-be zealots in some souls not as strong as benevolent”²⁰. Kozlovski also called the reader’s attention to the fact that English writers and intellectuals are widely studied throughout the world, but not theologians. “We find it repugnant, Monseigneur, to admit the supposition of some Catholic writers who maintain that this invincible sterility [of English theologians] is due to the dryness of our faith and Your Highness will prefer without a doubt that we explain that by numerous domestic duties to which the life of reverent prelates is consecrated, by their political work in the House and, in particular, by immense administration of their properties”²¹.

¹⁶ Charles Bloomfield, speech of 17 May, 1825, *Fürst Kosloffsky...*, p. 167.168.175.188.

¹⁷ [P. B. Kozlovskii], *Lettre d'un protestant d'Allemagne à Monseigneur l'évêque de Chester*, in: *Fürst Kosloffsky...*, p. 44.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 24-25.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 29.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 39.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 34.

It appears that the real target of this criticism – a target as important as the church of England – was the Russian Orthodox church, which, at that time, was sterile and devoid of spiritual dimension and the overloading of the Russian clergy by administrative duties could be used as an explanation of this state of the Orthodox living faith. Possibly, an important reason for Kozlovskii to join Catholicism was the dryness of Orthodoxy and its lack of intellectual dimension reflected in the fact that Russian theology – like the theology of the British Isles – was not investigated by anyone.

The dependence of the church on the political power may have been another reason of aridity of religious life in England. After all, since Henry VIII, for reasons born in his bedroom, the king has been the head of the church. English bishops “have to be connected very closely to the power which supports them and blindly obey the ministry that created them, can remove them, can enrich them and on which they constantly depend all their lives as another employees of the state; in France, as soon as the miter is put on, the one dressed with this sacred attribute is elevated above the power that creates him and appears to depend only on heaven”²². When criticizing the dependence of the English church on the government, Kozlovskii criticized the same dependence of the Russian church, the dependence introduced by Peter I with the ecclesiastical help of Prokopovich. In such an environment, the church became primarily a political tool used to control subjects rather than an institution whose primary concern was enhancing the spiritual life of believers. Kozlovskii addressed the problem directly by saying that “Peter the Great, after much hesitation, destroyed the patriarchate of Moscow, in order to unite, on the same head, the crown and the tiara. The political autocracy thus openly usurped that unlimited spiritual power which it had coveted for so long – a monstrous union, unknown before among the nations of modern Europe”²³.

The problem of intolerance – the main topic of the *Letter* – was explicitly raised when discussing Russia. Kozlovskii pointed to “intense intolerance of the Russians”²⁴. Kozlovskii could point to the vehemence waged against the

²² P. Kozlovski, *Diorama...*, p. 119.

²³ [A.] de Custine, *Russia*, London 1844, vol. 1, p. 105. Custine reported the views of one prince K***, whom he met on a steamboat, and who was immediately identified as the prince Kozlovskii, e.g., by Dorow who included extracts from Custine’s book in his little anthology, and by an anonymous reviewer of Custine’s book in “Quarterly Review” 73 (1844), p. 328. The reviewer also claimed that Kozlovskii, “a notorious wag, amused himself to his heart’s content with mystifying the exquisite *gobemouche* at his elbow on deck”. Although some stories told by Kozlovskii were told tongue in cheek, his religious views were not incompatible with his views stated elsewhere, and it can be assumed that when telling them to Custine, he was far from amusing himself. Also, Custine’s reports can be assumed to be very close to what Kozlovskii actually said if Custine was true to his own statement: “The descriptions of what I saw were made upon the spot, the recitals of what I heard each day were committed to paper on the same evening” (p. xviii). Cf. J. M. McErlean, *op. cit.*, p. 83-89.

²⁴ A. de Custine, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

Old Believers (schismatics), the attitude against Protestantism and Catholicism, both fought fiercely by Russian Orthodoxy as heresies, and the recent expulsion of Jesuits. Actually, as a diplomat, Kozlovskii was obligated to defend the official policies of the state; however, when asked to defend the 1815 exile of the Jesuits from St. Petersburg ordered by Alexander I, he “was not afraid to tell the prince Nasselrode that he did not find one enlightened man who would approve of this expulsion which was favored only by people who, having no religious principles, considered it to be a political measure aimed at refraining the influence of monks”²⁵. In Kozlovskii's opinion, this “intense intolerance of the Russians” was really the intolerance of the Russians, not just a matter of the official policy of the state, considering his statement that “no government has a power to fight against public opinion in matters of religion”²⁶.

Kozlovskii was not shy to criticize his home country. Indignant Aleksandr Turgenev spoke about Kozlovskii's “indignation against Russia” and his attacks against Russia and its people,²⁷ and Nikolai Turgenev about Kozlovskii's opinion that “the Russian nation has no character”²⁸. However, Kozlovskii proposed a solution for the betterment of his people and country. “Passionate about the representative government, he lamented over Russian servitude and would want to inject the foundations of the universal civilization and political liberty in his country by abolishing slavery and by replacing the Greek religion and ignorance of priests with the Catholic religion and an educated clergy by restraining, starting today, the unlimited despotism of sovereigns with organic laws”²⁹. Ignorance of the clergy was a constant theme raised by Russian intellectuals long before Kozlovskii, to mention only Kantemir and also ecclesiastical figures such as Prokopovich and Iavorskii. The idea of the introduction of Catholicism in Russia was something new, but not unprecedented to mention only Chaadaev and Gagarin. However, how realistic was it to make Russia Catholic? In Kozlovskii's view, not very: “We shall see an European revolution before we shall see the Emperor of Russia acting in good faith with a Catholic power; the Protestants are at least open adversaries; besides, they will more readily reunite with the Pope than the chief of the Russian autocracy; for the Protestants, having beheld all their creeds degenerate into systems, and their religious faith transformed into philosophic doubt, have nothing left but their sectarian pride to sacrifice to Rome; whereas the Emperor possesses a real and

²⁵ Letter of prince de Gabriac to the duke de Richelieu, 10 June 1816, L. Pingaud, *Un diplomate russe*, p. 92; P. Kozlovski, *Diorama...*, p. 123 note 115.

²⁶ P. Kozlovski, *Diorama...*, p. 117.

²⁷ Letter of Aleksandr Turgenev to Nikolai Turgenev, 1827, А. И. Тургенев, *Письма к Николаю Ивановичу Тургеневу*, Лейпциг 1872, p. 52-53.

²⁸ Letter of Nikolai Turgenev to Sergei Turgenev, 17/29 Nov. 1811, Н. И. Тургенев, *Письма к брату С. И. Тургеневу*, Москва 1936, p. 107; Г. Струве, *Русский европеец; материалы для биографии и характеристики князя П.Б. Козловского*, Сан Франциско 1950, p. 40.

²⁹ Letter of prince de Gabriac to the duke de Richelieu, 16 July 1816, in P. Kozlovski, *Diorama*, p. 17.

positive spiritual power, which he will never voluntarily relinquish. Rome, and all that can be connected with the Romish church, has no more dangerous enemy than the autocrat of Moscow – visible head of his own church”³⁰. It can certainly be disputed whether Rome has no greater enemy than “the autocrat of Moscow,” but Kozlovskii sentiment that the autocrat would not relinquish his power in the name of civilizing Russia is undeniable. After all, Peter I’s decision to abolish the office of the patriarch was done in the name of civilization.

It appears that Kozlovskii was interested primarily in the political and social, rather than spiritual, aspect of Catholicism as a future religion of Russia. When listing Russia’s ills in his unpublished *Examination of the history of Russia*, he did not even mention religion. In Russia, there were no independent classes of people (lawyers, scientists, physicians, writers); there was only “an absolute subordination and slavish complaisance or criminal revolt;” the country where “the nation remains in slavery, where there is no law, no justice, cannot be considered a civilized government”³¹. Europe did not know such slavery, and Kozlovskii apparently saw Catholicism as the ideological reason explaining this. Why did he not view the Protestantism of England he liked so much, or of Germany as favorably? Probably America was for him an example of a primarily Protestant country in which slavery was ingrained as deeply as in the Orthodox Russia, which made for his Protestantism in general a tainted ideology. Catholicism appeared to him a way out of this social abomination³².

It is interesting, however, that Kozlovskii did not quite approve of Chaadaev, whose ideas he considered strange and whom he thought to have “an absurd drive for martyrdom”³³. What Kozlovskii might have meant was the fact of not having such views, but publishing them, which resulted in punishing the publisher and in the official declaration that Chaadaev was a madman. There were certain points of disagreement between Chaadaev and Kozlovskii, which Kozlovskii might have considered strange (Kozlovskii contrasted the original freedom of Slavs to slavery of his times; his view that Russian despotism was derived from the Mongolian period; Kozlovskii’s contrast made between Russia and Poland, and his Polonophilia),³⁴ but he hardly would consider them an expression of Chaadaev’s drive for martyrdom. Going public with extremely controversial views was the major difference between Chaadaev and Kozlovskii. Interestingly, Chaadaev, who was not himself a Catholic,

³⁰ A. de Custine, *Russia*, p. 81-82.

³¹ В. А. Мильчина, А. Л. Осповат, *Из наследия П.Б. Козловского*, in: ed. Ю.М. Лотман, *Тютчевский сборник*, Таллинн 1990, p. 306.

³² Kozlovskii very likely would have agreed with the sentiment expressed by Daniel Rancour-Laferriere in the title of his book, *The slave soul of Russia*, New York 1995. For Kozlovskii, Catholicism was a way to convert this slave soul to a nonslavish attitude.

³³ Letter of Kozlovskii to Viazemskii, 26 Nov. 1836, П. Я. Чаадаев, *Статьи и письма*, Москва 1989, p. 505.

³⁴ Г. Струве, *Русский европеец*, p. 46.

voiced so openly and forcefully his pro-Catholic opinions. Kozlovskii, who was a Catholic, spoke about Catholicism only in private, only surreptitiously. Maybe because he saw such a task as hopeless: “a true patriot wants the best for his country and restrains from the contemptible flattery that can deceive both the nation and the tsar – although in Russia, ah, there is no nation that could hear such a patriot”³⁵.

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³⁵ В. А. Мильчина, Осповат, *Из наследия П.Б. Козловского*, p. 306.

Ukryty katolicyzm Kozłowskiego

Streszczenie

Piotr Kozłowski był jednym z najbardziej znanych rosyjskich dyplomatów XIX w. Przyjął on katolicyzm, aczkolwiek nie wiadomo dokładnie kiedy, nie ujawniał się bowiem zbyt wiele ze swymi religijnymi przekonaniem. W pozostawionych przez niego pismach niewiele można znaleźć wypowiedzi natury teologicznej. Wypowiedzi te są bardzo zwięzłe i wydaje się, że był głównie zainteresowany politycznym i społecznym raczej niż teologicznym aspektem katolicyzmu. Podobnie jak Czaadajew i Gagarin, wypowiadał się w kwestii nawrócenia Rosji na katolicyzm – jako o sposobie wprowadzenia kraju z duchowego, społecznego i ekonomicznego zacofania. Nie sądził jednak, by oczekiwanie to było realistyczne.

Słowa kluczowe: Kozłowski, katolicyzm, prawosławie rosyjskie.