

Conference “Tolstoy and Christianity”
An International Conference
College of the Holy Cross
April 21-22, 2017 (Friday-Saturday)

Predrag Cicovacki [Philosophy Department] and Olga Partan [Modern Languages, Russian] will organize a conference with the working title “Tolstoy and Christianity.” The intellectual focus of the conference would be on Leo Tolstoy’s (1828-1910) quest to re-examine and re-vitalize Christianity. It is well-known that around his fiftieth birthday Tolstoy underwent a severe crisis, which he resolved by re-discovering Christianity and which he described in his book, *A Confession*. With unparalleled devotion, Tolstoy started reading the Bible and issuing a challenge to return to the original message of Christ. His reformist Christian zeal was manifested not only in his non-fiction writings (e.g., *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, *The Gospel in Brief*, *The Law of Love and the Law of Violence*) but also in his fiction (for example, his novel *Resurrection*, his novella “The Kreuzer Sonata,” his stories “The Three Hermits,” “Father Sergius” etc.) Tolstoy’s rereading of Christianity turned out to be highly controversial. The moralizing mission of Christianity has traditionally been sustained at the expense of the view that nature is innocent: Christianity regards the natural impulses as sinful, as something that has to be either overcome or restrained. Many of those who defend the innocence of nature (e.g., Hermann Hesse, Joseph Campbell, and others inspired by Oriental traditions) reject the moralizing mission of Christianity, and to a great extent reject Christianity itself. Tolstoy had a highly original, almost paradoxical view: he defended the moralizing mission of Christianity (even in his works of art, for which he was ostracized by numerous art critics), while also maintaining the innocence of nature; instead of blaming our “fallen” nature for our sins, Tolstoy put the blame squarely on our social institutions, such as State and Church. We propose to organize a conference that would, through the analysis of Tolstoy’s works – of fiction and of non-fiction – examine the viability and fruitfulness of Tolstoy’s approach to Christianity. (Olga Partan would lead the examination of the relevant literary works of Tolstoy, while Predrag Cicovacki would lead the reevaluation of Tolstoy’s relevant works of non-fiction.)

We believe that the topic of this conference relates directly to the mission of the Rev. Michael C. McFarland, S.J. Center for Religion, Ethics and Culture, for it focuses on the complex interrelation of religion, ethics, and culture, thereby “contributing to the ongoing renewal of liberal arts education and the human quest for self-understanding.”

We would like the primary audience to be our students, but in a way that would not exclude broader public. In the Spring 2017, Prof. Cicovacki will teach an Honors Seminar, “Tolstoy and Christianity,” while Prof. Partan will teach an intermediate class, “Tolstoy’s Life and Work.” Thus we hope that at least 30 Holy Cross students would directly benefit from having some of the best Tolstoy scholars address these issues in the conference format. Since many of the Tolstoy’s works relevant for our

topic are well known and continue to be read by most diverse audiences, we believe that our conference would attract attention and would benefit a wider College and Worcester community.

So far, we have not looked for other sources of founding for this conference (with one exception, to be explained below). The idea for the conference is quite new, and we thought that need to secure the support of the Holy Cross community first, before we look for the additional sources of support. What we have done is to talk to the vice-president of the Museum of Russian Icons, in Clinton, MA, and they have welcomed the idea of the conference and would like to support it (say by having one day, the second day of the conference, held in the Museum, with the possibility of them providing food for all the participants and guests). They would also be interested in supporting the publication of the conference essays in the form of a book. (They have done it with the book based on the 2008 conference, "Art, Creativity, and Spirituality in Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*," An International and Interdisciplinary Conference, April 10-12, 2008, held at College of the Holy Cross; the published book was entitled: *Dostoevsky's Brothers Karamazov: Art, Creativity, Spirituality*, edited by P. Cicovacki and Maria Granik [Heidelberg: Winter Verlag, 2010], pp. 232.)

At this stage of planning, it is very difficult to submit a realistic budget. We are planning a two-day conference (Friday-Saturday), with eight speakers (four per day, two per session). Our preliminary list of the speakers (see the attachment for the precise list) involves four speakers from abroad (two from Russia, two from England), and four from the US (one from Harvard University, one from Columbia University, one from New School for Social Research, one from Northwestern University). We anticipate that, in the worst case scenario, all eight speakers may need full accommodation for three days and nights, that their transportation expenses would be fully covered, and that we would award them a modest honorarium (\$400 per speaker, for the US speakers, \$800 per speaker for the foreign speakers).

This means, roughly:

Lodgings (Hilton; \$142 per night/per person; times 8 persons and three nights)
\$3288

Honorarium (4 times \$400 + 4 times \$800) \$4800

Travel expenses: (domestic, four times \$250; England 2 times \$1000; Russia, two times \$1500) \$6000

Dinner (two times for 20 persons, \$30 per dinner) and Lunch (2 times for 15 persons, \$20 per lunch) \$1800

Posters and advertising \$200

An entertainment for the Friday night, in the form of a concert of classical music:
Beethoven, "The Kreuzer Sonata" (piano and violin), which inspired Tolstoy to write
his most controversial piece of writing, novella "The Kreutzer Sonata."

\$5000

Rough estimate of the total cost:

\$21,088

[Part of this cost may be taken over by the Museum of Russian Icons; also, the music
concert may be co-sponsored with the HC Music Department]

Prof. Partan and Prof. Cicovacki plan to edit a volume with all presented papers and
publish it as a book.