

# THE SYNTHESIS OF BINARY OPPOSITIONS «TWO IN ONE», «THREE IN ONE» AND «FIVE AGAINST FOUR» IN D. MEREZHKOVSKY'S RELIGIOUS PUBLICISM

*Mykola Rashkevych<sup>1</sup>*

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## Abstract

*The article presents a differentiation of connotations for the following numbers: one, two, three, four and five from the Dmytro Merezhkovsky's journalistic program. The implicative nature of the numbers is already established. On its basis there is the synthesis of binary oppositions with religious and philosophical directions and additional extrapolation of the number system into Russian political and cultural areas in the first half of 20th century. The purpose of this article is to differentiate multiple connotations of author's images and to demonstrate examples of their use. The subject of this study is also to show the ways of reality reflection in the symbolist journalism. The article presents numerical symbols in D. Merezhkovsky's publicism.*

**Key words:** symbol, number, The Third Testament, «new religious consciousness», God-Man, man-deity.

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The symbolization of cognition with the purpose to form a specific recipient world outlook was and remains one of the most important problems of modern journalism; publicism in particular. The features of perspective (retrospective) and imagery were always characteristic for publicistic texts – the moral authorities of humanity certainly used special linguistic means. Aristotles called the ability to make basic poetic met- aphors a special poetical gift. However, one should consider Dmitry Merezhkovsky a true master of “conceptual metaphors” and symbolism. One of the important aspects of symbolistic interpretation of reality represented in works of art and journalism of an ethnic Ukrainian is the numerical symbolism - this article is dedicated to the research of its connotations.

One of the important aspects of symbolistic interpretations of the reality, represented in the fiction and journalism texts of Dmytro Merezhkovsky, was numerical symbolism. The author modeled the unique semantics by means of synthesis of Christian faith and out-of-Christian esotericism (peoples' notions, world culture heritage and ancient philosophy), that is why the achieved result enables to comprehend in full measure the quantitative and qualitative indication of the worldview of the thinker.

Numbers in the journalistic discourse of Dmytro Merezhkovsky are used not only for better understanding of textual semantics, but also for comprehension of the evolutionary principles with the outlook ideologies (such as religious, philosophical, political, cultural, etc.) reflected in them. It is important to research these categories not by communicative text analysis (where they are explicated verbally) but rather by detecting them in the Merezhkovsky's religious-philosophical system. It means that the disclosure of semantics of numbers-symbols in the context of symbolism of journalistic works of Russian Symbolism founder enables the reader to comprehend the valuable purpose of his journalistic and public activities that is the prevention and overcoming of Bolshevik dictatorship in Russia.

### **«One» as a symbol of the emigration and nation unity**

In Dmytro Merezhkovsky's publicistic discourse "one" as a symbol is interesting not as nominative, but in the context of the already mentioned system-forming principles «two in one» and «three in one». "One" for Merezhkovsky is the exit from the deep religious, spiritual, cultural, political and social crisis, in which the society was immersed, due to its binary nature and its identity as «Kingdom of the Spirit» and «Kingdom of Caesar» outlined by M. Berdyaev. In this way, in the article «Backblocks» (1928), sympathizing with anti-Bolshevik Russian emigration author is trying to define the key task of the one in his traditional way of philosophical synthesis: «Two Russias, two emigrations, external and internal are fulfilling the same matter; no matter how many times they were segregated or they divorced themselves, these two Russias are the only one, and their way is only one as well – the way of a grain... So do not forget that our [emigration] death is the death or the life of Russia; so do not forget that it is possible to smolder, however it is possible to grow as a green sprout through the darkness of the Backblocks up to the sun...» [Merezhkovsky, 1928].

### **Ideological antinomies and synthesizing potential of number «two»**

Universe, according to Merezhkovsky, consists of multiple antinomies, which are based on number "two". This tendency could be also formally observed on the headline level of the publicistic works: «Two Islams», «Two renunciations», «Two Russias», «Nationalism and religion», «Cross and pentagram», «Reformation or Revolution», «The Tragedy of chastity and lust», «Christianity and Caesarity», «East and West», «War and Religion», «Not peace, but a sword», «devil and God» and others.

It should be noted that the phenomenon of duality is not only typical for Russian cultural space of Christianity era (even imperial double-headed eagle as a symbol of territorial claims to the East and the West did not become the result of crystallization of the national spiritual heritage, but it was adopted from Byzantium). Furthermore, number two occurs quite often in the pagan culture. This is due to the fact that the very essence of our ancestors' lives was determined by struggles between two principles – Good and Evil. Hence there are ambivalent mythological images of Whitegod and Blackgod, alive and dead etc. Linguist V. Toporov states that number two fits well into the basis of binary oppositions of mythopoetic and early scientific works beginning with the general idea of monads mutual parts (male - female as two gender categories, sky - earth and day - night as spatio-temporal components of the cosmos structure etc.) and up to the themes of parity, twinning, duality [Toporov, 1980].

System-creational function of the number-symbol "two" in Dmytro Merezhkovsky's works is not accidental, since "two" is the first number in the natural arithmetic range where the number division starts. The concept of the organization of the Universe based on the duality as a dual nature permeates Dmytro Merezhkovsky's fiction and journalistic heritage. Even the author's philosophical system is set up on the basis of the struggle between two opposites – positivism and symbolism, total rationalism and mysticism: he begins from one point just to come up to another one. "Two" for the thinker is, above all,

the synthesis, the desire to overcome ambivalence, which was generated with political, economic or worldview division of society for the purpose of achieving unity of antagonistic principles. That is why the first divisible number for D. Merezhkovsky is not only "two", it is «two in one». The publicist promotes a courageous theory about so called two Russias, two opposite poles – Russia in the past and Russia in the future. In the ideological dynamics these both embody the process of «the negation of the old – approval of the new one, however between them there is savagery limit, volcanic crack, the beginning of earthquake able to change the face of the earth» [Merezhkovsky, 1915]. It is somehow unexpected, but personalized embodiment of the first Russia «savage» is Lev Tolstoi, and the second one is Ivan Turgenev, «the most cultural out of cultural». «Turgenev over the Gospel is like a cock over grain-pearl, Tolstoi is a merchant, who sold all his property just to buy one pearl. He abdicated the culture, abdicated Christ to stay with Christ» [Merezhkovsky, 1915].

Solving the problem of the ratio of culture and religion, D. Merezhkovsky demonstrates two opposite expressions, such as culturality, which forgets about God, and religiosity, which rejects the culture for the sake of its safety. In Russia in the early twentieth century such antinomies coexist simultaneously but based on their essences they are creations of two different time periods: «In the Western Europe religious exemption – Reformation – was preceded by the political release; while in Russia both these releases happen at the same time. Russia gives birth to twins – that is the reason why the birth is so slow and painful» [Merezhkovsky, 1915]. Those two hypostases of Russia as two poles, two opposite principles, which are opposed to each other, is still valid. The author outlines two possible ways of development: «One end is enslaving, the victory of brutal nationalism and militarism [bolshevism – M.R.], which is more terrible than all the other defeats. Almost everything that is said and done is directed to this side, almost all the blood that is flowing is like the water onto the mill ... The other end is liberation. People go to war [civil – M.R.] even unconsciously or semiconsciously for the truth, and the truth will be «upgrading» of Russia – that is what we all hope for» [Merezhkovsky, 1914]. Unfortunately, the development of political events of the twentieth century proved that the victory was «militarism» and «brutal nationalism», so hopes for a true renewal of imperial Russia drowned in the rivers of bloody terror ...

Bringing up the pressing problems of his time, Merezhkovsky tries once again to solve them from the standpoint of synthesis. For example, he considers the eternal proletarian question: «Should we first quench the bodily hunger, and then the spiritual one? No, it should be done together. It is impossible to satisfy soul without satisfying body. There are no two, but one hunger, there is one pleasure» [Merezhkovsky, 1909]. At the same time, number two for Merezhkovsky is also a symbol of Russian intellectuals' tragedy between XIX-XX centuries. «It seems that there is no other such a hopeless situation worldwide than the one with Russian intellectuals – their position is between two burdens: the yoke of autocratic state and the yoke of dark folk element – that not so much hates but rather does not understand. However sometimes incomprehension is worse than any hate. Between those two terrible oppressions Russian society is ground as pure wheat of Lord, – if Lord allows, it will be ground and there will be flour, the flour for bread, that will satisfy at last the big and hungry nation. But for a while the destiny of Russian intellectuals, the fate of the wheat seed is to be crushed and milled – it is the tragic destiny» [Merezhkovsky, 1905].

Such semantics and creational role of "two" in the symbolist journalism of Dmytro Merezhkovsky is a logical continuation of the traditional symbolic content of number two. According to common belief among the Slavic people, double or twin subjects could bring misfortune. There were: «the sinister ideas of the two-soul-men and the eggs with two yolks, which dickens hatched from» [Zhajvoronok, 2006]. All this was enhanced with the belief in the dual essence of life, the struggle between God and Satan. Therefore, it is logical that in social, cultural, religious and political contexts duality was often associat-

ed with misfortune.

In the view of religious and historiosophical nature of literary and journalistic work, for Merezhkovsky the number-symbol “three” became the most widespread in the symbolic encoding of life. Both Christianity and all the spiritual culture of the Slavs are permeated with the idea of triplicity. A divine triune of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, mythopoetic cultural signs such as three paths to choose from, threelight sun, three horses, three sisters, three heroes, three puzzles, magical number nine and three-nine often occur in folklore. Number three also became a breakthrough point in the Bible: three kings who brought three gifts to the newborn Messiah (gold, frankincense and myrrh), three members of the Holy Family (Mary, Joseph, Jesus), Peter’s three denials, Christ’s three fallings on the Way to Calvary, three crosses on Calvary, inscription on the cross in three languages (Hebrew, Greek and Latin), the crucifixion of Jesus at the age of thirty-three and his resurrection on the third day at three o’clock in the morning etc. «Scientists explain the sacralization of this number by observing long biological evolution of life. «The existence of two (mother and father) almost inevitably leads to the emergence of the third (son) ... Triad has the ability to resolve conflict created by dualism ... It symbolizes the creation of the spirit out of the matter, active out of passive» [Symbol dictionary].

### **Symbol «three» – the concept of the Third Testament**

For Merezhkovsky number three is the arithmetical framing of the new religious doctrine that is a natural continuation of old Christianity, the doctrine which was built on the base of number two. The author’s version of the Third Testament is hereditary change of the principle «two in one» into principle «three in one». On this occasion Merezhkovsky writes: «In the representation of Christianity it is not one, but rather one out of two expressions of the Divine essence: (Christianity) revelation of the second filial hypostasis in the New Testament was preceded by the first revelation, meaning the Father in the Old Testament. And on the metaphysical limit of the New Testament an extremely important question appears: whether the disclosure of full divine essence is confined only to the two Testaments? Shouldn’t it meet the numerical Tripartite, which is opened to Christianity in three aspects as a phenomenal triplicity of three Testaments? Similarly, the first hypostasis was opened in the Old Testament, the second was opened in the New Testament, so won’t the third one be opened in the upcoming Third Testament?» [Merezhkovsky, 1908].

Consequently, Merezhkovsky’s religious and philosophical system of the Third Testament is devoted most of all to resolve the conflict of duality. For the thinker number three became the natural consequence of many years of journalistic synthesis of global antinomies. On this occasion M. Berdyaev notes that «All religious thoughts of Merezhkovsky turn in the grip of a single scheme, aesthetically attractive opposition of polarities, thesis and antithesis, a mystical exciting waiting for a synthesis, revelation of the third secret and mystery of polarity combination» [Berdyaev, 1916]. Thus, there is the author’s main ideological principle of unity of «two shallowed principles of world culture [religion and public – M.R.] shifting from the shared positivistic shoals into common religious deepness» [Merezhkovsky, 1905].

Therefore, access to the triplicity is the cornerstone method of the founder of the «new religious consciousness». «Merezhkovsky is constantly committed to the synthesis that combines thesis and antithesis into triplicity. He makes it possible to understand that in this contradictory duality the third secret is hidden, which is the exit from two opposite mysteries, from the antithesis. Merezhkovsky lures and tempts everyone with his secret, slightly shows it, and then covers it again with the mist, duality and vagueness of phrases ... The mystery of the spirit and the mystery of the flesh, the mystery of the sky and the mystery of the earth, the mystery of the personality and the mystery of the society, upper and lower abyss – those are the contradictions where the essence of Merez-

hkovsky's thinking is displayed ... Cliché is created and by its help almost automatically the way out is found - from two hopeless secrets into the third secret, out of two mutually exclusive antitheses into the synthesis of D.M. himself» [Berdyaev, 1916].

So "three" is a symbol of synthesis, upon which the theory of the Third Testament should be crystallized. According to Berdyaev «new religious revelation may only be the revelation about a person as a divine hypostasis. The new revelation is only an ex- pression of human creativity. The third Testament is the testament of human creativity» [Berdyaev, 1916]. The logical continuation of this thesis seems to be a statement of inductive axiom, for which the principle of «three in one» is the central structural-cre- ational and sense founding core of Merezhkovsky's doctrine. «Most often in the Christian tradition the trinity principle is associated with the Holy Trinity. While for Merezhkovsky it applies to the whole model of his future religion ... The author divides the church history into three periods: time of God the Father, time of God the Son and time of God the Holy Spirit. «Three Testaments» correlate with each of those periods: the first Testament is for the religion of God in the world; the second one is for the religion of God in human – God-man; the third one is for the religion of God in humanity – God-humanity... The Father is embodied in the Cosmos, The Son in the Logos, The Spirit in the conjunction of the Logos with the Cosmos, in a single cathedral Universal creature – Incarnation» [Goncharov, 2009].

The symbolist value of number three might be fully observed in the concept of The Forthcoming Ham. In the article under the same title, Merezhkovsky states the obvious:

«The world ruler of darkness of this age is a forthcoming to the kingdom citizen, that is The Forthcoming Ham. This Ham in Russia has three faces. The first face is the truth above us i.e. the face of autocracy, the dead positivism of formality, the Great Wall of China or the table of ranks separating the suffering Russian people from Russian intellectuals and Russian Church. The second face is the past i.e. the face of Orthodoxy that gives to Caesar what is for God - that is the church about which Dostoevsky said as if it was «paralyzed»... Spiritual slavery is the source of freedom; spiritual philistinism is the source of generosity. It is the dead positivism of Orthodox formality, which serves to the positivism of autocracy formality. The third face is the future – (...) – it is the most terrible of the three faces» [Merezhkovsky, 1905]. So the Forthcoming Ham is «three in one», three essences together creates the one.

However, according to the laws of Merezhkovsky's system (built on binary oppositions) Triune principles of spiritual philistinism deeply require the corresponding triune nature of spiritual generosity: «The three principles of spiritual philistinism are united against the three principles of spiritual generosity that is: the earth, nation – as a living flesh, the church – as a living soul and the intellectuals – as the living spirit of Russia. To make it possible for the three principles of spiritual generosity and freedom to combine against the three principles of spiritual slavery and rudeness the common idea is required, and this common idea can be given through religious revival together with the social revival. Neither religion without society nor society without religion can save Russia; only religious society can do this» [Merezhkovsky, 1905]. Expansion of the semantic space of number-symbol three by spreading the idea of trinity from purely religious sphere to the sphere of morality indicates switching the accents from purely divine to the human sphere. In fact, it is the effort to synthesize two ways of understanding and explaining the world: theocentrical and anthropocentrical.

### **Cross against the pentagram («bolsheviks») – «four» vs. «five»**

Numbers four (linked to the symbol of the cross) and five (due to the symbolism of pentagram) acquire the specific symbolical pattern for Merezhkovsky. Dmytro Merezhkovsky offers an explanation of the symbolism of number four in his article «Cross and Pentagram»: «Tetragram, number four is the number of the cross, the number of space. Son of God is crucified on the four-part cross. God gave His only begotten Son

for the sake of the world. Mystery of plurality is unity; the mystery of the cross is love. Love on the cross is dying for the world ... The world is multiplicity, the world is a war and death. But the cross is the unity over multiplicity, resurrection over death, peace over war. After space there is Logos, after four there is Three in One and One in Three, the only light shines three times (...)» [Merezhkovsky, 1921]. Recalling the philosophical drama of Goethe's Faust, Merezhkovsky extends the symbolism of number four. This is not only a religious cross, but the cross is the space, which is a symbol for four elements: fire, earth, air and water. «Tetragram, Pythagorean quarter signifies the transcendental nature of the world. The world is kept on the cross: four corners of the world, four elements of nature. (...) God is crucified on the cross of the world. Life of the world is the death of God» [Merezhkovsky, 1921]. Finally, "four" is a symbol of something simple and axiomatic, the truth in the last instance: «Claim inspiringly: two on two is four, that is such an exhausting work. That Bolshevism is the death, not only for Russia, but for the whole cultural humanity... If Bolshevism is a disease only for Russians, but not for the whole world, therefore by beating the attack of the Soviet hordes and concluding an honorable peace, Poland might save itself and Europe and become a stronghold against the new invasion of barbarians. And in case if two plus two is not five, but four, neither Poland nor Europe will have peace as long as Bolshevism exists. Until it exists – they will not, and vice versa» [Merezhkovsky, 1920].

Number five is opposed to number four as well as the pentagram is opposed to the cross. «In Babylonian cuneiform five-pointed star means «God», and in Babylonian magic pentagram, which depicts five planetary spheres with all of celestial mechanics, signifies the perfect knowledge, the perfect power, god-like power of man over the world as Man-deity» [Merezhkovsky, 1921]. All the existence of Europe, according to Merezhkovsky, is determined with this opposition. «The light of the cross is fading in the West and «the light from the East» moves to it as a bloody-red star. Pentagram is against cross, Man-deity is against God-man, the Internationale is against the universal church». So numbers four and five, except for having religious symbolic sense, gain the sense of something specific, historical and political such as the contrast between humane traditions and feral Bolshevism.

Thus, the journalistic discourse of Merezhkovsky is permeated with symbolism of numbers, which is crucial not only in terms of author's transferring the content of the concepts like Russia, Europe, Christianity, etc., but also in terms of the logic of building a unique ideological system. The determining principles of religious and philosophical concepts of Merezhkovsky have become the principles of «two in one» and «three in one», as symbols of binary oppositions and the synthesis of opposites through the output to the third single entity. Dmitry Merezhkovsky is one of the most consistent representatives of the neochristian course in the first quarter of twentieth century. In the process of understanding the socio-political and cultural-artistic events of his time from the standpoint of deep faith and heightened civil conscience, the thinker lined up the system of journalistic works, which are full of church-religious symbols and deep Christian metaphors. These tools have become the main instrument of the author's communication.

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