
ORTHODOXY AND MODERNITY

THEIR CONTACT FACETS IN RUSSIAN SOCIETY

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Abstract

The manifestation of globalization, the crisis of national cultures, the decline of morality, reassessment of moral values, spiritual impoverishment, pop culture invasion throughout the civilized world are the factors that have affected the current socio-cultural situation. In the attempts to cope with the situation and get it under control, Russia has always had high hopes to revive the spiritual culture of nations inhabiting the country and appreciate the contribution they had made to the national culture treasury and Russian civilization. The purpose of the paper is to prove that, despite the crisis in culture and moral decline in the modern Russian society, Orthodox values are one of the important elements of the axiological base in the development of modern Russia. The study carried out made it possible to come to the conclusion that preservation of Orthodox Christianity as a socio-cultural matrix of Russian society depends on the ability of Orthodoxy to respond in a timely manner to the challenges of our time. The authors also emphasize the idea that the Orthodox ethics has not only formed and consolidated, but is still successfully supporting functioning of the distinctive features in the Russian national character which include spirituality as a super-individuality, patriotism as love and devotion to a homeland and one's own people, great power status as a trust in a strong state, the desire for freedom and independence from external circumstances. The study allowed predicting the growth of socio-and-cultural tensions in 'religious — secular' direction (including scientific).

Keywords: mass consciousness, globalization, socio-cultural, situation, spiritual culture

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1. Introduction

The evolution of mass consciousness in Russia was influenced not only by an ethnic factor, natural environment, social sphere but also by national spirit. The spirit of the nation is largely associated with religious faith, confessional characteristics of the religion professed by the people and accompanying the process of self-determination of the people in the country. The religious factor is a spiritual enzyme of ethnogenesis that catalyses biological energy into the creative process. All European nations, including Russians, have developed under the conditions of a direct impact of Christianity. Eastern peoples were influenced by Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism. It is due to the assimilation of religion by the peoples and nations that exceptionally stable national communities form and develop as a result of the intermingling of diverse tribal groups and rather quickly (several generations) passing through the incubation period. This is how it happened with the Russian people. Metropolitan Ioann, an Orthodox hierarch once said that “in the late Xth century, baptism being a Holy Sacrament, the tribes of Polans, Drevlyans, Krivichi, Vyatichi, Radimichi, and other Slavs immersed the baptismal font and walked out of the tub as a single Russian nation; for six centuries (from X to XVI) they carefully and thoroughly had been pondering over the place and role of Holy Russia in the universe...” [1]

Orthodoxy contributes to inner certainty of the mentality of the Russian people’s mass consciousness and determines the Russian nation’s spiritual potential. This is that inexhaustible spring that would satisfy the spiritual thirst of the Russian nation in its difficult and often tragic history. Russian mentality is closely connected with the Orthodox Christian faith playing the role of an internal spiritual core, or, in philosophical terms, spiritual substance. The substance is what underlies the mentality of a nation, is enduring and eternal in the mentality of the people that is able to withstand all changes and pass unharmed through all the phases of nation’s history [2]. The reason for distinctions and specific features of national history as well as minorities in the country stems from religious faith in substance (the concept of religious substance).

For Russian Orthodoxy, the 20th century is a time of unprecedented upheavals and trials. Generations of Russian people grew up beyond the pale of the Christian Church. Many sectarian organizations have appeared in Russian society, and they involved primarily young people in their ranks. The most common feature shared by them is their purpose to subdue as many people as possible, to control their consciousness. A sect leader successfully manipulates people who are, by all counts, intelligent, successful, and often progressive. It is a common knowledge that the best guys enslaved are usually pure and inquisitive, but vulnerable, suggestible, easy to convert; they are passive followers who, in general, could represent a risk group of any society. According to F.V. Kondratyev (Doctor of Medical Sciences and the Head of the Expert Department of the State Scientific Centre of Social and Forensic Psychiatry n.a.

Serbsky), recruitment by sects is facilitated by the individual's special neurotic state, mainly, as a result of some psychological trauma, uncertainty in the future, the sense of loneliness and uselessness, misunderstanding in the family, and other psycho-traumatic circumstances [3]. It is this sort of people who are prone to feel their emotional dependence on their own sects. They are happy in a 'cult family' where everything seems increasingly clear, simple and quiet. It is a proven fact that a person who gets into a sect gradually loses his individuality, and his consciousness is easy to manipulate.

Unfortunately, a lot of totalitarian sects prohibited by law, home-grown or coming from abroad, feel at ease on the territory of Russia; they are mimicking various charitable organizations that help orphans and disabled, or they may pretend that they are helping to gain an education and delivering lectures on 'sacred knowledge'. Their 'adherents' freely enter private apartments, distribute leaflets about educational institutions, or even rent the largest cultural institutions. Only some representatives of the Orthodox Church and experienced psychologists are able to help the unhappy parents who are knocked down to save their children, but they start doing it only when people are already in trouble. Preventive work, anti-sect movement, that is able to counteract destructive sects, in fact, has not been properly conducted yet. This is a form of addiction, a 'spiritual drug' addiction, and is no less evil than alcohol or ecstasy.

2. Research methodology

The methodology used is based on a systematic approach that combines:

- structural and functional analysis organically connected with the principle of historicism, socio-economic determinism; it considers the phenomena in their internal inconsistency and taken together they form a dialectical methodology for the study of social phenomena;
- hermeneutic methods to study, understand and interpret texts, as well as the meaning of symbols, images, and phenomena.

This approach allowed the authors to identify the essential aspects of the role of Orthodoxy in the formation of Russian mass consciousness, consider their dialectical relationship, and overcome the constraints inherent in the heuristic potential of certain methodological areas.

General methodological methods of comparison, analysis, synthesis, comparative-typological and concrete-historical approaches were used in solving the research problems.

In addition, the authors used a socio-cultural approach which is essential to develop the idea of spiritual culture and, specifically, religious-and-spiritual sphere as the basis to form meaning-life values, norms of behaviour, guidelines for self-determination and self-realization of an individual. The axiological approach in this regard is an appropriate one to be used in considering Orthodoxy and Orthodox ethics as one of the most important sources of norms and values of the Russian citizen's life.

3. Literature review

Since the time when P.Y. Chaadaev's ideas were published [4] there have been on-going attempts to negatively assess the importance of Orthodoxy in Russian history; and its logical consequence is expressed through the assertion that Orthodoxy has become almost the main reason for Russia's economic and cultural backwardness and withdrawal from the 'universal' civilization. At the same time, it has always been considered to be a very important fact that though Russia adopted Christianity from the hands of the decrepit Byzantium a church service, a service of worship, in the Russian Church is conducted in a language close to Russian, the Church Slavonic language [4, p. 586].

According to S.A. Levitskiy [5, p. 53], while Western Nations got the ideas of enlightenment from Rome, Russia adopted Christianity from Byzantium where rhetoric and grandeur often obscured thought [6]. An additional reason for the lag is associated with the Cyril and Methodius heritage, the fact that the Bible and the Good News, the Gospel, were obtained not in Latin and Greek translation, but in the Macedonian dialect of the Bulgarian language which then was understandable to the Old Russian people (now known as Old Church Slavonic) [5, p. 63]. Since enlightened Russians were not familiar with the Latin and Greek languages, they did not have the chance, compared to people in West Europe, to assimilate the cultural heritage of antiquity.

In our opinion, such arguments do not correspond to historicism approach in the analysis of social phenomena. First of all, history does not like the subjunctive mood, and it is hardly a scientific approach in relation to historical events to argue from the position of 'what would happen if'. The adoption of Eastern Christianity is an accomplished historical fact which must be taken for granted, be accepted as a given.

In addition, Orthodoxy, although powerful, is not the only determinant of the peculiarities of Russia's historical path. Could the adoption of Catholicism rather than Orthodoxy prevent the Tatar-Mongol invasion or weaken the influence of unfavourable natural and climatic factors? If no, then talks about Orthodoxy as a reason for Russia's lagging behind turns out to be a conjecture humiliating the dignity of the Russian people. On the contrary, Orthodoxy has had a positive multilateral impact on all aspects of Russian's life, and the latter is much discussed in Russian literature.

One of the greatest values of the Christian East is special attention to different nations and their cultures so that the word of God may sound in all languages. As a result, God and His revelation are adequately proclaimed and fully understood by all people as Christ speaks in the language of different peoples who can read Scripture and worship in their own language using their own peculiar expressions [7]. In the era of the growth of national consciousness, a deep rootedness of Christianity in national cultures is a necessity, and Christianity gives an opportunity of preaching universal human values of Divine Revelation in the national languages.

It should be noted that the Bible was translated into the Russian language much earlier than Luther did it into German. Therefore, initially, the Christian spirit and Christian images stick in people's minds as archetypes in the mentality, not only on a conscious but also on an unconscious level. In addition, it should be noted that Cyril and Methodius, who composed the Slavic alphabet, were also preachers of Christianity and saw the need and importance of literacy as a means of achieving the meaning of God's teaching [8]. In many ways, it is the internal Christianization of the structure of the old Russian language and thinking that explains the specific attitude of the Russian people to religion. The internal Christianization and the Russian language living within the Orthodox reality transformed the very soul of the nation [9]. No wonder the Russian words for 'Christian' and 'peasant' are very similar in their pronunciation.

Together with the Bible, the Russian people received the richest literature in their native language, i.e., books of theological, natural science, historical and narrative content. Moreover, the collection was adequate to what the educated persons in Byzantium read. The books acquired unquestionable authority on the territory of Russia and were perceived as a revelation and revolutionized the mass consciousness. Love for book wisdom is a peculiar feature of Russian saints. Many icons depict saints with a book in their hands. Therefore, the unconscious obeisance to a book wisdom was part of the mental system of the Russian people. Because of this, modern Russian is still easily exposed to the media due to a respectful and trusting attitude to verbal wisdom rooted in the people's soul.

Thanks to Orthodoxy, the Russian people were imbued with universal Christian values while maintaining the cultural and national identity of their mentality. Orthodox self-determination seemed to be entirely appropriate for the Russian people due to the geographical location of Ancient Rus.

Creation of Russian statehood inevitably raised the question of closer contacts with Byzantium including religious ones. At that time, it was the closest Christian country to Russia in terms of socio-economic and political relations. Adoption of Orthodox Christianity strengthened the international stature of the Old Russian state and made it possible to combine the efforts of Kievan Rus and Byzantium in the fight against constant pressure from the Nomadic tribes.

Orthodox self-determination had also been associated with the peculiarities of the religious worldview of the Slavic tribes which later formed the core of the Russian people. Orthodoxy, like no other religion, is likely to correspond to the emotional and artistic structure of the mentality of the East Slavic tribes. Despite the legendary character set out in the 'Tale of Bygone Years', the story of the act of faith by Prince Vladimir has a deep symbolic meaning. The ambassadors that had studied various faiths abroad told him about the beauty of Greek worship, angelic singing and concluded that in the Orthodox Church God is with people, abides in his people. The splendour and aesthetic theatricality of the Orthodox divine service captivated the Eastern Slavs inclined to the emotional and artistic vision of the world.

The first Christian ruler in Kievan Rus, Vladimir I was also struck by the fact that Orthodoxy was a religion of absolute values, a religion of the last judgment and at the same time of forgiveness and salvation. In this capacity, Orthodoxy coincided with the desire for absolute values inherent in our distant ancestors and highlighted it even more intensively. Figurative and symbolic perception of the world, Russian maximalism, and aspiration in attempts to reach the absolute and succeed entirely and immediately were the traits common to Russians; that is why, just by an effort of will, they found fertile ground in Orthodoxy. Therefore, Orthodox self-determination was a historical choice in favour of religion which most fully met the spiritual needs and mental characteristics of the ancient Russian people. Although the Russian people adopted Christianity in the version closest to the Gospel commandments, it should be noted that a Russian Orthodoxy is a national form of Christian religion. All-human values of Christianity on the Russian soil had been nationally coloured, acquiring a unique, inimitable character. Russian Orthodoxy, as a national form of Christianity, differs from the Orthodox faith in Bulgaria, Serbia, Romania, Greece, and other Orthodox countries. The process of religious synthesis of Byzantine Orthodoxy and paganism had extended in Ancient Rus for several centuries. This synthesis resulted in combining and interweaving of diverse spiritual and religious values of Christian and Slavic-pagan origin in the Russian mentality [10]. From this symbiosis, national features of Russian spiritual culture grew like an oak from an acorn. Perhaps, one of the most striking examples of spiritual syncretism of Russian culture is literary images of the Russian writer N.V. Gogol. In all his works, from 'Evenings on a farm near Dikanka' to 'Dead souls', his literary heroes split into night and day incarnations of the human soul. The same feature is characteristic to oral folklore traditions such as, tales, epics, proverbs and sayings of the Russian people which are imbued with the spirit of syncretism of Christianity and paganism. The heroes of Russian fairy tales would pray to the Holy image, that is, following Christian traditions, get into direct personal contacts with representatives of the pagan world (we mean characters like Leshy, Baba Yaga, Koschei the Deathless).

The pagan origin of religious faith had largely determined the spontaneity and irrationalism of the national mentality and can be traced in the mystical attitude to nature and life i.e., to agricultural work, family and marriage relations, sleep, food and many other aspects of everyday life. Each natural element (earth, wind, fire, water), as well as animals, insects, trees, were endowed with spiritual properties and perceived as something personal and alive. There was a tendency, in the paganism of the past, to impose familiar human qualities on natural objects that may not have them, for example, to regard a tree as if it could perceive in the way that animals do, or even as if it were self-conscious beings. Pagans believed that each thing had its counterpart in the form a household deity (Domovoi, a deity, or spirit, which protects the home, looking after the entire household or certain key members), Kikimora (known as a forest spirit and her husband is Domovoi, or she may be the Leshy's

wife living in the marsh), mermaids, witches, and the like. Among them, Domovoi is a favourite character of Russian folklore who takes different forms, requires food, cries, and laughs, is good or evil, rides a horse, torments some people.

I.V. Kireevsky also put forward a question of radical difference of Orthodoxy from other directions of Christianity and saw it as a triumph of rationalism over internal spiritual reasons. A Russian Orthodox loves and believes with all his heart. The heart can symbolize all feelings in general and religious feelings in particular. V. Vysheslavtsev [10, p. 387] points that it is from there that love comes. People love God and neighbours with all their heart, have a love for them in their heart; the heart is a place for consciousness and conscience. In Western civilization, it is the mind as a set of cognitive faculties including consciousness, perception, and thinking that occupies the central position in religion and interpersonal relations. The Catholic and Protestant Western countries could express their spiritual development quoting Leonardo da Vinci: “great love is the daughter of great knowledge” [11]. Eastern Orthodoxy claims to the contrary; the ‘great knowledge is born of great love’. The importance of religious emotions, the role of one’s heart and feelings in the religious act to comprehend and believe in the Divine Spark within every spirit is what makes Orthodoxy unique and underpins Russian mentality of the mass consciousness. Russian elders and spiritual fathers argued their understanding of the true religious experience with the statement ‘you need to have your mind in the heart’. The heart with its sensitive and contemplative principle is the dominant force in the Orthodox religion and Russian national consciousness.

Christian faith is a ‘true humanism’; the predominance of sensual contemplation in the perception of Christian truth is not evidence of the inferiority of the Orthodox faith, but rather a prerequisite for deep religious conviction of the Russian people. Orthodoxy does not reject mind, but only one abstract thought, idea, is not able to give rise to faith since thinking is primary in science but not in religion. A cordial loving contemplation is primary in the Orthodox Church, around it a strong-will attitude is being formed around it, and only then the beloved and the experienced is being reasonably understood and interpreted. Therefore, Orthodoxy is characterized by a serious and reverent attitude to dogmas and their perception as absolute maxims. From religion, the spirit of minimalism penetrates deeply into the mentality of mass consciousness and routine life of the Russian people. A Russian is prone to believe that life has unique tasks to fulfil and assigns them specific meaning.

4. Discussion

Folk festivals, dancing, bonfires jumping, curling wreaths, horseback riding during Maslenitsa, etc. prove their pagan roots. For Russians, their life was closely connected with house, forests, water spirits as they had daily contact with them. These spirits seemed to be evil and dark, but sometimes they were kind and bright. Nevertheless, despite the fact that there are pagan roots in the

Russian mentality, still, it is Christian spiritual values that make top-priority [12]. The profound influence of the Orthodox Church on the formation of the mentality of the Russian people is the proof for the last argument.

It should also be noted that Eastern Christianity, in comparison to the Western, pays special attention to the uplift of believers in the perception of what Jesus Christ taught. Comparing to the Christian religion in the West where the main attention is paid to the sufferings and passions of Christ, in the Orthodox East a stronger emphasis is placed on the idea of Resurrection. Orthodox Church has never organized Inquisition as it was with Catholicism and Protestantism, never burned witches and heretics. Moreover, all sorts of attempts to push through this ‘great invention’ of Western culture immediately met the sharp protest from the part of the Russian Church [13].

Russian people are prone to devotional obedience, humility, and respect for community decisions. However, the reverse side of this gift, according to Berdyaev, is that “the Russian soul is rebellious, searching, it is the soul of a stranger ... never satisfied with anything average and relative...” [14]

A significant influence on the mental properties of the Russian mass consciousness was also exerted by the peculiarities in traditions and religious ceremonies of Orthodox life. Orthodoxy is characterized by an extremely high assessment of the importance to follow ceremonies and rituals as they are factors to nurture the religious feelings of believers. Religious ritual is sometimes called a spiritual medicine that cures the Russian soul. Prayers, Church singing, burning lamps and candles, beautiful icons and frescoes are sacred actions that have supernatural magical power and impact on believers. Therefore, the Orthodox Church with conservative perseverance has been clinging to rites, ceremonies, and rituals never allowing to change any detail in them. They are absolutely confident that the old ‘formulas’ have proved to have a profound impact, a saving power, while the new ones might be less effective and do not provide the feeling of saving grace. There could not be a better helper in meeting the demands related to preserving mental values of Russian society, very traditional in essence, than Orthodox conservatism.

The heart of the Russian Orthodox rites and sacramental rituals is a worship service, and experiencing emotional inspiration while participating in it makes it a unique religious action. It is possible to distinguish the features of Orthodox divine service which influenced both features of religious consciousness and mental traits of the Russian people. First of all, it is an unsurpassed beauty due to which the Orthodox Liturgy is considered as the manifestation of the beauty of the spiritual world, i.e., ‘Heaven on Earth’. The peculiarity of Orthodox worship is also associated with religious realism. While worshipping the Biblical scenes are not only called in mind but, being clothed in artistic images, are as if re-committed. As a result, the believer becomes a living witness of the birth of Christ, his death and resurrection.

Finally, we cannot miss the topic of the cosmism of Orthodox worship. Liturgy addresses not only to a man and his soul but also to every part of the Divine creation by means of the human soul, since man is an incarnate spirit, a

cosmic being; Cosmos (space, Universe) lives in him, and it is sanctified, for the Lord is the Saviour not only of the souls but also of the bodies and the whole world. Therefore, the universality of the Orthodox Liturgy manifests the perfection of Christianity because the Church sees the cosmic power in man. These features of the Orthodox service, superimposed on the impressionable Slavic soul, strengthened such mental properties of the Russian people as religiosity, contemplation, sensitivity, and obedience.

However, despite the importance of the cult in explaining the specifics of the religions professed by peoples, the essence of religions cannot be constrained or reduced to it. To characterize the uniqueness of a particular religion, it is important to understand the specifics of the spiritual traits of the people professing this religion. It is important to carefully investigate this phenomenon because “religion with its doctrines and rituals belongs to the most potent cultural forces – for better or worse – influencing people’s values and subsequently their attitudes, convictions, and interactions” [15, p. 621]. Even Orthodoxy, despite the unity in the religious cult, is experienced differently by the peoples professing it in different countries. Moreover, what is more, we can discuss mental differences of peoples professing different versions of Christianity, i.e., differences in the mentality features between members of the Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant churches.

Common spiritual roots of Orthodoxy, Catholicism, and Protestantism are based on the general Christian principle of love. However, it is a common knowledge that people love and believe differently; love may be rational or as a consequence of willpower, and love may come from the ‘bottom of the human heart’. All the branches of Christianity equally raise their faith to Christ, but it is important to consider not only the fact what you believe in but also what is involved in it, i.e., what forces of your soul implement your faith [16]. It should be borne in mind that the three branches of Christianity involve different forces of the human soul in their religious acts. Nevertheless, these are not irreconcilable as such. It would thus be wise to walk in the footsteps of those who have since centuries ago strived to work for ecumenical understanding and cooperation – such as the Protestant reformer, Martin Chemnitz, whose theological approach exhibited “a relevant ecumenical potential for the dialogue between Eastern and Western branches of Christianity, beginning with theological hermeneutics (above all with respect to the relationship Scripture and tradition) and continuing on to Christology, Sacramentology, Christian liturgy and ethics” [17, p. 146].

Finally, there is an opinion expressed that it is time to begin serious work against spiritual violence in this country, and it should involve religious leaders, specialists in the field of education, education (especially Orthodoxy), medicine, psychology, creative, educated people, leaders of social movements, i.e., representatives of all levels of the society. In order to counter destructive religious impacts, some experts recommend a new subject on the fundamentals of religious cultures and secular ethics to be introduced at schools. In 18 regions of Russia, in the experimental mode, this subject is to be included in the

curriculum. But does this fact reveal the complete loss of the Orthodox orientation of Russian people's mentality? The answer is negative, for the Orthodox faith, as a social institution, doesn't seem to be alone in the attempts to spread the Orthodox spirit among the Russian people. In Soviet Russia, many Russians could not regularly visit the church, but lots and lots of them read books of the famous Russian classical writers, and these were the books imbued with the spirit of Orthodox ethics.

Moreover, the masterpieces of classical and folk music, painting and drama have also been the subjects of mass spiritual consumption. This caused the fact that, despite the common atheistic Soviet past, there has never been a complete break in the inheritance of Orthodox spiritual values by the Russian people. The latter proven fact raises the hope that the spiritual revival of the Russian people will be implemented on the basis of a deep and conscious return to national roots, and that the Russian Orthodox Church currently gaining its strength will make a significant and appropriate contribution in accordance with its high spiritual mission.

5. Conclusions

Summing up the study conducted with the aim to understand the origins of Russian mass consciousness mentality we can conclude that it has been formed under the influence of material (natural and social) and ideal (primarily religious and spiritual) determinants.

Orthodox ethics has had a great impact on the development, consolidation, and support of a number of features in the Russian national character. These include: spirituality as super-individual; patriotism as love for one's own people; statehood as trust in a strong ('autocratic') state; the desire for freedom and independence from external circumstances; the desire for justice and equality; sacrifice combined with the belief in the indestructibility of the Russian people; 'mobilization' community spirit, etc. The 'Russian idea' conceptualized in the 19th century by Russian thinkers, symbolizing the idea of society as a universal community of people, united them around the spiritual goals concerning human existence and helped disclose the interrelation of Orthodoxy and Russian national character.

It took more than a thousand years for Slavic people to form as nations. Most of Slavic-speaking peoples had common spiritual values based on Orthodox beliefs: Russians, Belarusians, Ukrainians, Serbs, and Bulgarians joined the core called Orthodox faith to form a historical spiritual unity. Therefore, Orthodoxy played an extremely important role in the formation of Slavic civilization in Eastern Europe.

Based on the analysis, one can predict that in the future Orthodoxy will retain its positions in Russian society and will compete with other confessions and non-traditional religious movements to gain influence for shaping the consciousness of Russians. At the same time, the tasks of innovative development in Russia will require a renaissance of the scientific worldview,

and the chances of the latter to become the ideological basis of a new Russian civilizational project will be equal to Orthodoxy. In the future, the growth of socio-cultural tensions in ‘religious — secular’ direction (including scientific) is possible and expected. In this regard, a question may arise to be solved; it concerns with the effective cultural synthesis of Orthodoxy and Science as multi-level socio-cultural systems.

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