
CHRISTIAN NUMBER SYMBOLISM IN THE HIEROTOPY OF ORTHODOX CATHEDRALS

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Abstract

The objective of this research is to carry out an analysis of the usage of Christian number symbolism in the course of the construction of the sacred space in Orthodox cathedrals. It has been found that creation of such spaces in Orthodox cathedrals was based on an ecclesiological idea, which was implemented in a multifaceted way with symbolic and meaningful amplifications due to the versatile figurativeness of the image of Jesus Christ and the Most Holy Mother of God. In general, Christianity has provided a rich cultural heritage, which is still having impact on the formation of the personality of each person and the spiritual life of society as a whole.

Keywords: numbers, religion, faith, architecture

1. Introduction

The defining feature of the medieval Christian mentality was a universal application of the symbolic laws of thought and compliance of all important phenomena from the perspective of the cult with speculative mathematical logic. The first ideas of the sacred properties of numbers go back to ancient times. The source of belief in the secret (true) meaning of numbers was an ancient (Ionic) alphabetic system, which appeared in Greece (Miletus) in the 5th century BC. It was the Milesian system that gained widespread use in the ancient world, especially during the Conquests of Alexander the Great and was borrowed by Egyptians, Persians, Phoenicians, Arabs and Jews. The medieval Armenian, Georgian, Gothic, and Slavic systems were based on this alphabet as well.

Usage of the Greek alphabetic system of denoting numerals provided each word written in ancient alphabets, such as Greek, Arabic, or Hebrew, with a numerical value. Numerical values can always be composite, and in this case, we get a certain number too. This process was called *isopsephy* in Greek. This term originates from the usage of pebbles or stones to study arithmetic and geometry in Ancient Greece. In Latin, such stones were called *calculi*, and from this word,

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the verb *calcularre* (*calculate*) was derived. Later, when this method was used to interpret the Torah, it was called *gematria* (derived from the Greek word *geometria*).

Isosephy made it possible to identify each word with a numerical value. It showed, first, a mystical numerological relationship between words, second, secret meanings of words, and third, their secret correlation with the sphere of ideas, which is reflected by words and, therefore, numbers as well. That is to say, if numerical equivalents of words were identical, these words were understood as semantically equal. For example, the word *θεός* (*God*) in its numerical equivalent means $9 + 5 + 70 + 200 = 284$, *ἀγαθός* (*kind*) - $1 + 3 + 1 + 9 + 70 + 200 = 284$, *ἀγίός* (*holy, innocent*) - $1 + 3 + 10 + 70 + 200 = 284$ [1].

In its accomplished form, the mystico-philosophical theory of numbers and numerical correlations were developed by Pythagoreans. In their cosmological theories, the number was the central concept imbued with ontological, gnoseological and aesthetic meaning and was interpreted as a synthesis of Limited and Unlimited, as a manifestation of the divine spirit in the world, the principle of all existence and the very human soul itself. Hence the belief in the mysterious mystical meaning of numbers and their symbolism connected with this belief. 1 and 10 were considered to be the most sacred numbers. All numbers derived from them were perceived as vessels of divine perfection. In this sense, the number 100, i.e. 10 multiplied by itself, acquired special meaning and symbolized supreme perfection. It should be noted that Pythagoreans assigned a major role in the formation of the divine ten to the number 4 [2].

The systems of sacred numbers developed in ancient cultures were partially adopted, reinterpreted and acquired a new mystico-symbolic meaning in Christianity. This is how Christian numerology emerged, i.e. a stable system of beliefs about the sacredness of numbers. Saint Augustine of Hippo, who died in 430 AD, played an important role in the development of the medieval Christian ideas of numbers and their sacred and symbolic meaning. In his treatises ('On Order', 'On Music'), this theologian relies on mathematical calculations to consider numbers "as a universal law" underlying the spiritual and material spheres of being. In his opinion, "between the temporary numbers of the natural material world and the eternal numbers of the supreme truth", there are ideal numbers of beauty, art, and creative mind, which act as an intermediary between them [3]. Thus, due to the mediation of ideal numbers, the material ones are similar to the numbers of divine wisdom [4].

Mathematical symbolism of Christian theology was vividly reflected in the architectural art of forms and lines. Already early Byzantine writers deemed it possible to interpret quantitative parameters of the constructional foundation of a cathedral (supporting posts, windows, and portals) as elements that have symbolic correlations in Christian history and Ontology [5].

One of the most notable works interpreting numbers encrypted in the architecture of medieval cathedrals is the treatise 'On the temple' ('De templo') by Bede the Venerable (672/73-735), where this medieval theologian, exegete,

and historian describes Solomon's Temple from the perspective of number symbolism [6]. Bede's 'teachers' were Byzantines, who he calls the Greeks and to whose authority he always appeals. Therefore, the numerological theory of this author was not his own creation but represented the development of the medieval 'number theory' in general.

Following an older tradition, the medieval number metaphysics was based on the principle of so-called theosophical reduction, or mystical identity of any multidigit number with the sum of the digits that it is made of. In medieval symbolic numeral systems, zero (0) was often not taken into account since it did not correspond with any of the letters of the Greek or Cyrillic alphabet [7]. As a result of the practice of throwing aside all zeros, the number 50 was considered to be identical to 5, 70 - to 7, 80 - to 8, and 100 - to the divine number 1, as can be seen from the sacred 100 feet size used as a reference point in the construction of cathedrals. For instance, in Bede's work, there is an example of theosophical reduction, when larger numbers are reduced to smaller ones, and zero is not taken into consideration. Besides, Bede's exegetic interpretation of numbers used in the hierotopy of cathedrals, from preparation for their construction to planning the system of illumination, is especially noteworthy.

Such an attitude to numbers was typical of the medieval mentality for many centuries [8]. As modern hermeneutic research into Old Russian literature has shown, it is full of number symbolism [1, p. 157-159].

Scientists' research is not limited to the analysis of numerical symbolism in Christianity and includes research on the numerical symbolism of Hindu [9, 10], Egyptian [11], Jewish [12] religious buildings.

2. Methods

The methodological basis of this work is represented by the research carried out by Russian authors in the sphere of number symbolism, history and theory of architecture, as well as Old Russian architecture and hierotopy as a type of activity and a branch of research focused on the creation of sacred spaces. In the course of this research, the following methods were used: analysis of sacred and theological texts, analysis of scientific literature on the research subject, and comparative analysis to identify the presence of Christian number symbolism in the hierotopy of Orthodox cathedrals.

The Holy Dormition Cathedral in the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra was chosen as the subject of this research. It is a unique piece of Old Russian architecture, which, despite numerous acts of destruction and abandonment, has been revitalized in new forms and has led liturgical life for many centuries as one of the greatest sacred objects of the East Slavic Orthodox world.

3. Results and discussion

The Holy Dormition Cathedral in the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra acquired a special status in Rus [13, 14].

Taken into account the medieval worldview, the golden belt of the Varangian Shimon taken as the basis for measurements of the Holy Dormition Cathedral could represent something like a cord or a rope - a real tool used for marking the foundation. At the same time, the belt of Shimon had a sacred meaning. In the chronicles, Shimon is mentioned as one of the participants of the Battle of Alta River between Cuman army and the forces of the Yaroslavich brothers in 1068, where the Kievan Rus forces suffered a devastating defeat. When Shimon got wounded and was lying on the battlefield, he saw a church in the sky for the second time. So the Varangian made a vow to build such a cathedral in the Kyiv Monastery of the Caves founded by Anthony and Theodosius of Kyiv if he survived. On his return from the military campaign, he came to the monastery and handed over the relics - the wreath and the belt of the Saviour - to the Venerable Anthony and informed the holy fathers of his intent to build a church in honour of the Most Holy Mother of God. The golden belt was supposed to serve as a measurement for the future cathedral, and the wreath was to be hung over the credence table, i.e. over the altar [15].

Let us consider the number symbolism in the Holy Dormition Cathedral of the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra. According to the Lives of Kyiv-Pechersk Fathers, the width of the cathedral should be equal to 20 belts of Shimon, the length - to 30 belts, the height - to 30 belts as well, and 'together with the walls' - to 50 belts. The last 'discrepancy' led to a scholarly discussion. For example, B.A. Rybakov believes that the primary source describes a part of the perimeter of the facade, which determined the main parameters of the building: the height of two walls up to the gables and the width of the facade [16]. However, it is not clear why the parameters of the width should be taken into account when the issue at hand is its height, and the width has its own measurement - 20 belts of Shimon. M. Kholostenko holds to another view, which seems more convincing to us. The scholar thinks that the height of the cathedral amounting to 50 belts denotes the outer height of the facade (along the axis of the central nave or the transept nave) with the addition of the total height of the building [17]. This conclusion seems logical from the perspective of the medieval mathematical metaphysics, which considered the whole to be equivalent to its part.

Since we are looking at the symbolic aspect of measurements of the Dormition Cathedral, we relied on the fact that the legend mentions both numbers 30 and 50 when describing the height parameters of the cathedral. Further, we will see that both these numbers play an important role in the interpretation of the semantic image of the Dormition Cathedral since they represent its different symbolic aspects. The performative interpretation of number symbolism of the Holy Dormition Cathedral we suggest is possible due to the medieval worldview, which considered dynamic components to be essential characteristics of hierotopical projects. It was the performativity, dramatic variability, and lack of rigid fixation of images that formed a living, spiritually intense environment [18].

According to Bede, the number 30 also denotes the age of Christ when He was baptized by John. As Bede puts it, by being baptized at the age of 30, Christ consecrated water for us as the laver of Salvation. Therefore, the length of 30 elbows means baptism, which serves as deliverance from sins. It can be concluded from this passage that the numbers present in the measurements of a sacred object are in each case interpreted with respect to its main semantic content [6, p. 57].

The primary source devoted to the construction of the Holy Dormition Cathedral provides numerical parameters of the measurements of the cathedral, which cannot be accidental. V. Kirillin assumes that these proportions partly correlate with the proportions of Noah's Ark: 50-300-30 (Genesis 6.15) and partly - with the proportions of Solomon's Temple: 20-60-120 (2 Chronicles 3.3-4).

In his book 'On the temple', Bede the Venerable interprets the parameters of Solomon's Temple. In Chapter 6 of the first book, he writes, "And the house that king Solomon built for Jehovah was 60 cubits in length, and 20 in breadth, and 30 cubits in height" [6, p. 22]. According to Bede, 60, the number denoting the length of the temple, is equal to 6 and symbolizes steadfastness of the Holy Church and the intense work carried out by the builders. Bede reduces 20, the number of cubits that refers to the breadth of the temple, to 2, and this number denotes love for God and one's neighbour. According to Bede, the height of the temple is 30 cubits, which can be reduced to 3, and this number symbolizes the Holy Trinity - the pinnacle of all hopes. The theologian points out that each of these numbers (6, 2 and 3) is multiplied by 10 in the Bible since one can attain salvation and eternal life only through faith and following the 10 Commandments [6, p. 26].

Comparison of the Holy Dormition Cathedral with Solomon's Temple adheres to the old ecclesiastical tradition to correlate any Christian cathedral with the main Old Testament sanctuary. At the same time, Solomon's Temple relates to Tabernacle, the symbolic foretype of which was Noah's Ark.

Notably, the parameters of the Holy Dormition Cathedral, expressed by numbers 20 (the width), 30 (the length) and 30 (the height) are numerically identical to the measurements of the largest area of Solomon's Temple - the Sanctuary (Hekhal), where the religious services were held. It was 30 elbows long, 20 elbows wide and 30 elbows high.

The above-mentioned facts suggest that although the parameters of the Holy Dormition Cathedral do not fully coincide with the numerical characteristics of the Noah's Ark or the parameters of Solomon's Temple, in the symbolic sense the Dormition Cathedral contains their number symbolism and can be correlated with Solomon's Temple, Tabernacle and Noah's Ark. On the other hand, the numbers mentioned in the Lives of Kyiv-Pechersk Fathers refer to real measurements of the Holy Dormition Cathedral.

Therefore, the symbolism of numbers outlined in the Lives of Kyiv-Pechersk Fathers should be interpreted together with breaking down the images-paradigms inherent in the hierotopical concept of the Holy Dormition Cathedral.

It is noteworthy that the Lives of Kyiv-Pechersk Fathers describe a certain pattern of counting in the course of the construction of the Holy Dormition Cathedral, which can symbolize the vector of sacred movement. D. Likhachev points out that if the main parameters of the Dormition Cathedral are added up, the number 100 comes to the surface. Indeed, if we calculate the total of the width of the cathedral (20 belts), its length (30 belts), and height (50 belts), we will get 100 [2].

This observation made by D. Likhachev is conceptually important for the subject of this research due to the medieval practices of attaching deep symbolic significance to numbers that serve as a foundation for sacred objects. The main semantic meaning of any Christian cathedral is that it represents the image of New Jerusalem in a mystical way. Symbolically, medieval theologians compared the number 100 to New Jerusalem, where the righteous enjoy bliss. Bede the Venerable interprets this number in this sense when he writes about the decoration of two pillars in Solomon's Temple with pomegranates, "...and the 400 pomegranates for the two nettings, two rows of pomegranates for each netting, to cover the two mouldings of the capitals atop the columns" (2 Chronicles 4.13). Bede says that the pomegranates that decorated the pillars (400 = 4) symbolize adherents of both Testaments, the Old and the New, and the number 100 (4 x 100 = 400) symbolizes their eternal bliss in Heaven. Besides, the two pillars were decorated with two rows of pomegranates, the number of which amounted to 100. This means that all believers reside in the Kingdom of God: both who believe in the Old and the New Testaments.

From the perspective of this research, it is important that similar symbolism of the number 100 was also implemented in the architecture of medieval cathedrals. According to the research conducted by N. Nikitenko, the 100-foot size of the main elements of the central core of the Saint Sophia Cathedral in Kyiv symbolizes the divine fullness and perfection of New Jerusalem [19]. It sounds convincing because the number 100 symbolizes integrity of the Universe as Cosmos arranged by God. We suppose that the image of New Jerusalem was also implemented in the main measurements of the Holy Dormition Cathedral in the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra.

In the light of the above, the observation made by D. Likhachev about the total of 100 made up by the parameters of width, length and height of the Dormition Cathedral takes on special significance. Therefore, the main image-paradigm of this cathedral is New Jerusalem, and this image can be identified by adding up its main parameters. This conclusion is conceptually important from the perspective of identification of number symbolism of the Holy Dormition Cathedral. Different images-paradigms implemented in this cathedral can be identified through the analysis of sacred numbers resulting from adding up the width, length, and height of the Dormition Cathedral in various combinations. However, it goes without saying that these combinations were not random, i.e. they are thoroughly thought-out from the perspective of the medieval imagery.

The primary source first mentions the parameters of width of the Dormition Cathedral, and then - its length and height, which means that movement starts from the north to the south along the western facade, then continues from the west to the east along the southern facade, and finally, can be followed from the floor to the summit of the dome, which, epitomizes the idea of transition of the soul to New Jerusalem represented by the number 100, where the movement reaches its 'final destination'.

The number 100, which can be identified in the sacred measurements of the Holy Dormition Cathedral, might also denote the climax of the feast of the Dormition - ascension to New Jerusalem of the Mother of God and, at the same time, the most important moment of a liturgy - the epiclesis, when bread and wine turn into the flesh and blood of Christ. In the mystical sense, this transformation is seen by the Church as the main event in the history of mankind - incarnation of God. Therefore, the number 100 also symbolizes the altar of a cathedral as a place where this great sacrament takes place. These facts demonstrate mutual penetration of the themes of the Dormition of the Mother of God and the Incarnation of Jesus Christ featured in the liturgy of the feast in honor of which the Holy Dormition Cathedral was built.

Interestingly, the number 100 can also be identified in the measurements of the perimeter, i.e. the foundation of the Holy Dormition Cathedral. By adding up the length of all its facades ($20 + 20 + 30 + 30$), we will also get 100. In this case, it appears that the number 100 denotes Sophia, the Wisdom of God - the foundation of the Universe and the Church. Such an assumption is possible because the theme of Christ was one of the main themes in the course of the creation of the sacred space of the Holy Dormition Cathedral. In this sense, the number 100 encoded in the measurements of the Holy Dormition Cathedral is also a symbol of the Mother of God, thanks to whom the Incarnation of Jesus Christ is possible, and who the Church is compared with in the Christian exegesis.

We found that, apart from the number 100, other numbers can also be identified in the measurements of the Holy Dormition Cathedral, which explain the symbolism of this cathedral as New Jerusalem. The liturgical movement carried out from the west to the east transforms the movement of the earthly course to its climax. This movement is seen as ascending - from the worse to the better since from the perspective of medieval perception different cardinal points had different evaluative meanings. The south was considered better than the north, and the east was opposed to the west, as Heaven and hell. Moving according to the value framework along the lateral facade of the Dormition Cathedral (from the west to the east) and further up ('from Earth to Heaven'), let us add up the length parameter (30 belts) and the height parameter (the total height of 50 belts). The result is 80, or 8.

In the context of Christian knowledge, the number 8 and its multiples 80, 800 and 8,000, being sacred biblical numbers, are endowed with a complex symbolic and associative meaning. First, it is associated with the image of Christ and His residence in the earthly world. In this sense, the number 8 is

Christological. Second, the number 8 is associated with the biblical fact of Salvation, hence its soteriological character: eight people were saved from drowning in the Flood (Genesis 7.13, 8.18), which was also mentioned by the Apostle Peter (1 Peter 3.20, 2 Peter 2.5).

In the Christian tradition, the number 8 is associated with Resurrection and serves as a symbol of baptism. According to the teachings of the Church, the climax of the Apocalypse will come when New Jerusalem comes down from Heaven to Earth. At that moment, the last day of the world existing now - day seven - under the influence of the Holy Spirit will turn in 'day eight' - the first day of a new aeon or a renewed world.

The number 8 acquires a special meaning in the context of the feast of Pentecost, which commemorates the birth of the early Church. This holiday is also associated with the expectation of the End of Days and the advent of New Jerusalem. Pentecost is perceived by ecclesiastical tradition as the end of a sacred long thorny path towards the salvation of the world carried out by Jesus Christ.

We assume that in the hierotopy of the Holy Dormition Cathedral, the number 80 (or 8) implements the eschatological theme of Pentecost like the height of the cathedral amounting to 50 belts. The number 50, as well as the number 8, can be found in the measurements of the Dormition Cathedral in the course of the movement to divine perfection embodied by the highest point of the cathedral. The highest pinnacle of this movement coincides with the final point of earthly history - advent of New Jerusalem identified with the final religious feast - Pentecost.

It should be added that the number 8 is also a symbol of consecration as unity with God. It resonates with the symbolism of the number 5, which is interpreted as *hieros gamos* (holy marriage), the union between Christ and the Church, Heaven and Earth. The meaning of the number 5 in the hierotopy of the Holy Dormition Cathedral also focuses on one of the leading themes of Pentecost - the theme of the Eucharist, since in Christianity this number was interpreted as a symbol of Eucharistic transformation - transition of all Christians to eternal life. Let us remember the evangelical parable about five loaves of bread that were used to feed five thousand people, the parable of five wise men and five foolish virgins, the one of a slave who added five more talents to the five talents he had, the ritual of blessing five loaves of bread during a night-long vigil, the usage of five prosphoras in the course of the offertory rite during liturgy and iconostases made up of five rows of icons [7].

The theme of Pentecost in the semantics of the Holy Dormition Cathedral morphs into the theme of the Mother of God associated with the Church since the number 5 symbolizes the Holy Mother. Such symbolism has also translated into Christian pieces of architecture and art. For example, there are five altars in the Saint Sophia Cathedral in Kyiv. The connection of the number 5 with the Mother of God is also proved by a large number of five-dome cathedrals in Byzantium and Rus.

Interestingly, the apocalyptic number 12 can also be identified in the architectural and artistic concept of the Dormition Cathedral.

It should be noted that the 'main numbers' of the Dormition Cathedral presented in a certain order - 20, 30, and 50 - correspond with the following letters of the Greek alphabet: K, Λ and N. We assume that this fact shows that the prayer '*Κύριε ἐλέησον*' ('*Lord, have mercy*') was implemented in the hierotopy of the cathedral. The letters K, Λ and N mark the beginning, the middle and the end of the sacred formula (it is a well-known fact that reduction of phrases was possible through omitting the letters that had secondary meaning in terms of understanding the whole phrase). Thus, construction of the cathedral was compared with continuous prayer and was perceived in a liturgical sense. It should be mentioned that the development of the Lavra caves was also associated with continuous prayer. Therefore, the same hierotopical principles were used in the course of the creation of different sacred dominant features of the ancient monastery. Moreover, the prayer '*Κύριε ἐλέησον*' itself includes 12 letters, i.e. contains the sacred number of New Jerusalem - 12.

In our opinion, the above-mentioned facts show that the process of construction of the Holy Dormition Cathedral was compared with the Eucharist and associated with the idea of creation of the Church and Its implementation in New Jerusalem.

According to the Revelation, the idea of divine fullness is behind the parameters of the wall of New Jerusalem since this wall contains the apocalyptic number 12 multiplied by itself, "And he measured the wall thereof, a hundred and forty and four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of the angel" (Revelation 21.17). Besides, by multiplying the length of the Dormition Cathedral by its height measured in feet (120 x 120) we get 14,400 feet or the number 144, which symbolizes the wall of New Jerusalem.

According to the Book of Revelation (Apocalypse), the number 144 symbolizes the fullness of the righteous who will enter the Kingdom of God. Interestingly, the number 144 refers to both horizontal and vertical measurements of the Dormition Cathedral since it represents the result of their multiplication. In our opinion, this can symbolize glorification of saints both on earth (the horizontal measurement) and in Heaven (vertical measurement), according to the teachings of the Church.

The eschatological theme of New Jerusalem and 144 thousand (i.e. fullness) righteous people residing in the heavenly city implemented in the hierotopy of the Dormition Cathedral resonates with the theme of post-mortem retribution. Thus, the practice of burying the deceased in this cathedral acquires a special mystical meaning. Judging by the Lives of Kyiv-Pechersk Fathers, being buried in the Holy Dormition Cathedral is seen as a guarantee of entering Heaven.

While completing the analysis of the symbolic elements of the Dormition Cathedral, the meaning of the dome in Orthodoxy should be explained separately. According to Orthodox symbolism, the dome indicates to Christians the need to strive from the earthly to the heavenly.

Table 1. Numerical symbolism of the number of domes of Orthodox churches.

Number of domes	What symbolizes	Examples
1	the One Essence of God, Christ as the Head of the Church	Church of the Intercession on the River Nerl, Church of the Holy Spirit in the Trinity Lavra of Saint Sergius, Dmitrievsky Cathedral in Vladimir, Kazan Cathedral on Red Square in Moscow
2	two natures of the God-man Jesus Christ, two areas of creation (angelic and human)	Church of Cosmas and Damian in Staraya Panekh (Moscow)
3	Holy Trinity, but not always churches can be Trinity ones	Saint George Cathedral of the Yuriev Monastery in Veliky Novgorod
4	four Gospels, four cardinal points	New Fair cathedral (or cathedral church) on the Strelka in the name of Saint Alexander Nevsky (Nizhny Novgorod)
5	one of the domes rises above the others. This dome symbolizes Christ as the Head of the Church and the four evangelists.	Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, Assumption Cathedral in Vladimir, Assumption Cathedral of the Moscow Kremlin
7	seven Sacraments of the Church, seven Ecumenical Councils, seven virtues, seven weeks of Great Lent, seven ranks of angels, seven deadly sins	Cathedral of the Apostles Peter and Paul (Mtsensk), Ascension military All-Cossack Cathedral (Novocherkassk)
9	the image of the heavenly Church, consisting of nine ranks of angels and nine ranks of the righteous people	Church of the Saviour on Spilled Blood, Cathedral of the Intercession of the Most Holy Theotokos (St. Petersburg), Cathedral of the Annunciation in the Moscow Kremlin
13	sign of Jesus Christ and twelve apostles	Church of the Iverskaya Icon of the Mother of God of the Nikolo-Perervinsky Monastery (Moscow)
25	the central dome can mean Jesus Christ, and the remaining domes are 12 apostles and 12 prophets	Church of the Intercession in the Bogoslovka estate (Leningrad region)
33	number of earthly years of Jesus Christ	Church of the Transfiguration (Kizhi), Transfiguration Church of the Ust-Medveditsk Saviour Transfiguration Monastery (Volgograd region)

The number of domes reveals the hierarchy of the construction of the heavenly church in number symbolism. The different number of domes of an Orthodox church is due to those to whom they are dedicated. The temple with several domes is a typical form of Russian temple architecture, distinguishing it from the temple architecture of other Orthodox peoples and Christian denominations.

Initially, the Dormition Cathedral was single-domed, symbolizing the Christ as the head of the Church. Such temples were usually built in the pre-Mongol era and were a symbol of the One God and the perfection of creation. After the fire of the 18th century and the reconstruction, the Dormition Cathedral completely changed its appearance and became seven-domed.

In the Christian sacred books, the number seven is mentioned many times: “whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold” (Genesis 4.15), “... and the seven years of abundance passed ... and the seven years of famine began” (Genesis 41.54), “And you shall count seven Sabbaths of years for yourself, seven times seven years; and the time of the seven Sabbaths of years shall be to you forty-nine years” (Leviticus 25.8).

A comparative analysis of the numerical symbolism of the number of domes of Orthodox churches is given in Table 1.

4. Conclusions

Summarizing the aforesaid, creation of sacred spaces in Orthodox cathedrals in general and in the Holy Dormition Cathedral in particular was based on an ecclesiological idea, which was implemented in a multifaceted way with symbolic and meaningful amplifications due to the versatile figurativeness of the image of Jesus Christ and the Most Holy Mother of God.

The contemporaries of the Holy Dormition Cathedral understood its number symbolism amazingly conveyed by its imagery very well. At least, it is suggested by the obvious architectural ‘replicas’ of the cathedral. For example, the cathedral in Suzdal was nearly an exact copy of the Dormition Cathedral. In our opinion, the measurements of an Orthodox cathedral, i.e. its **length, width, and height** denote not purely mathematical numerical parameters but the leading images-paradigms they represent, which were used as the basis for the hierotopy of the cathedral. Therefore, these measurements were sacralised and had to be reproduced in the course of construction of other Orthodox cathedrals in Ancient Rus.

Analysis of the implementation of other sacred numbers in the hierotopy of Orthodox cathedrals can become a potential direction for further research.

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