Spirituality of Eastern Europe and Russia as Traditional Basis of Russian Spiritual Culture

Liudmila Shukshina, E.V. Mochalov, M.A. Eldin and Olga Mizonova
Mordovian State University N.P. Ogareva, st. Proletarskaya, 63, Saransk, 430016, Mordovia, Russia

Abstract: The adoption of Christianity by the Eastern European nations - the Bulgarians, Serbs, Russians and the nations of Russia was happening during a historically long period of time in the territory of Eastern Europe. During the first stage pagan nations got acquainted with Christianity in their contacts with the Slavs. The second stage is connected with the active government Christianization of a centralized state and the modernization of the spiritual traditions and cultures. The problem of this work is the Russian religious tradition in the confessional specifics of the Russian culture. Religiosity as an area of scientific research is relevant because the definition of the specifics of definitions of this problem is still poorly studied. The study of religious culture, self-determination of moral traditions and nationality is the specifics of national representativeness and value standards, the perspective of considering (interpreting) them is relevant. The religious culture of Russian ethnoses is very important as a subject of spiritual culture that is analyzed by the authors of the article.

Key words: Spirituality - Eastern Europe - Spiritual culture

INTRODUCTION

The spiritual situation of the time that has developed in the present system of human relations and modern Russian society should be considered critical. The ways to overcome crisis lie in the context of returning to the roots of the Russian spiritual and moral culture. The high achievements of European and Russian cultures make us turn to the following aspect: how the values of religion may be an incentive of culture making human activity in the area of the modern spirituality of society, the tool for recreating the universal sociocultural space. From this point of view, the theoretical discourse on the problems of the role of the religious publicity in modern times is highly relevant. According to J. Beckford, one of the forms of “managing differences” under the policy of multiculturalism is on one hand in the recognition of religious organizations “a community of believers” and on the other hand in inviting them to cooperate in the area of prevention of the extremist activity, providing civil loyalty of migrant communities and conducting interconfessional meetings and roundtables [1].

Depending on the political mobilization and its initiator according to H. Tsusiro there may be six types of interaction within the religious publicity: 1. religion mobilized by politicians, 2. culture, mobilized by politicians, 3. religion mobilized by culture, 4. politics mobilized by religion, 6. culture mobilized by religion [2].

At the same time, a special difficulty is in the comparison of the traditional and innovational foundations in culture when considering tradition as unchangeable essence of culture [3]. The absence of self-identification in culture of modern times, threatening by mass destruction of identities, according to J. Tomlinson, occurs when the gap between traditional practices and world outlook leads to the loss of cultural meanings and the erosion of tradition [4].

In modern times the trends of high economic and political uncertainty in changing of cultural and behavioral patterns caused by globalization and ecumenical trends were observed [5]. This fact strongly affected the complication of the conflict in polyconfessional and multinational regions of the former
USSR (the Caucasus, Central Asia, partially Volga region), where especially among youth social groups the extremist and fundamentalist values became dominant.

In the history of the XX\textsuperscript{th} century the tendencies of secularism and anticlericalism seemed leading. However, the pace and the extent of the process appeared to be somewhat exaggerated. Persistent attempts during the Soviet period to cement the international and secular modernism in the value system of socialization were significant but they did not lead to the final leveling of the factors of the ethnoconfessional nature. Let us recall that by the beginning of the 90s of the last century Russian society had lost the tradition of unity and that fact became more acute because of the convergent trend in ideology and moral processes.

In understanding the processes of sociocultural development of any state of Eastern Europe outside the borders of historical conditions and the influence of the spiritual heritage of the past it is extremely difficult and counterproductive to consider the specifics of the national confessional culture. The modern author of the research on the history of Russian philosophy E.V. Mochalov notes: “All the Byzantine theology sought a harmonious combination of spiritual and physical in man. It sought to deify flesh and to exalt the spiritual”[6].

The spiritual culture of nations was to a large extent affected by the historical conditions of development. The basic principles of Orthodoxy as a spiritual tradition were formulated in the twelve points of the Creed, adopted during the first two Ecumenical Councils in Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381). In the religious and cultural traditions of the Orthodoxy of the nations of Eastern Europe the worship and the ritual were formed that take a dominant position. The Worship and rituals in the tradition of the orthodox confessional culture are longer than in other Christian denominations and include many rituals. Holidays are very important, among which the celebration of Easter is most important holiday. Holidays were created to provide a stimulating religious and emotional impact on believers.

In the early Byzantine epoch IV-VII basic principles of the orthodox dogmatics were developed, the philosophical foundation of Christian apologetics were laid by the synthesis of neoplatonic categorical apparatus and the ancient literary heritage of the Bible. The most typical approach is «the encyclopedism» of Byzantine thinkers. Thus, one may recall voluminous philosophical collections of John of Damascus and Patriarch Photios of Constantinople. It was Byzantine society where by the IXth century the orthodox spiritual tradition developed by the diligence of Cyril and Methodius acquired the forms that would become the necessary condition of Slavic and ancient Russian religious cultures.

After the fall of Byzantium in the XIII\textsuperscript{th} century under the strikes of the Fourth Crusade (1204) it was Russia that remained the stronghold of the Orthodox culture opposing to the West. The situation was even more complicated by the fact that the Catholic hierarchy tried to subjugate Russian principalities. Later the attempts to control the curia of Russian politicians did not stop, the texts of papal letters “to Russia” continued the line of pressure from the See of Rome, the Orthodox tradition was proclaimed in them as “ancient evil”. Moreover, an economic blockade of the Russian principalities: in the south the Latin Empire blocked the way of the Russians to the Black Sea region and in the North-West region of Eastern Europe in the Baltic states it did the groups of German knights. However, the Russian ruling elite and a large part of the ancient Russian society despite outside pressure preserved the commitment to the Orthodox culture and ethics.

History makes sharp, unpredicted turns. The nation, as it seems, doomed to disappearance suddenly rises and enters a new period of fruitful life. Instead of the Byzantine Empire in the thirteenth century the so-called Latin Empire appeared, most of the territory of which was divided between the Crusaders (mostly French). But in Asia Minor a small country survived – a part of the Byzantine Empire that was called by historians the Nicaean Empire. It was squeezed between the Seljuk Turks and the Latins who had seized Byzantium. Moreover, the Holy See encouraged the Mongols to march against it in order to eradicate the remnants of the Orthodox “schism”. Nevertheless, the Greek-Byzantines withstood it, the Latin Empire existed for only 58 years and in 1261 the Byzantine Empire was restored under the rule of the new Palaeologus dynasty. Byzantium was destined to exist for two more centuries. In particular, in this period appeared the profound theological system of St. Gregory Palamas and the movement of Hesychasm on Athos.

The Byzantine Empire ceased to exist in 1453 not because of its inner immanent fallacy; it was crushed between merciless “military millstones” of the East and the West: at that time hardly any society or state could resist such a bilateral pressure at all. However, the Byzantine spiritual heritage had a determining influence on the spiritual life of Russia that was gathering strength to get free from the Mongol yoke. In Russia the followers
of the Byzantine Hesychasts were St. Sergius of Radonezh and later – St. Nilus of Sora. It was the Byzantine Empire of the last two centuries of its existence from which Russia got the second spiritual impulse after its christening that determined its destiny for many centuries. The role of the Nicaean Empire as a guardian of the spiritual heritage of antiquity and Byzantineism, in the history of the Middle Ages is not limited by only restoration of the Byzantine state. Not less important is the fact of salvation and further development of the traditions of the Eastern Christian culture, that strengthened in Muscovite Russia as well.

In several modern studies on the causes of the fall of the Byzantine state the fact that Byzantium was lost because of the policy of the Uniate compromise pursued by the Palaeologus dynasty that split the late Byzantine society. In growing political disunity and spiritual and moral decline the state of the Romans experienced the last stage of its history. The Late Byzantine culture appeared the last flower on the body of the dead plant. The basis of the Eastern Christian societies was the traditional ethos of incorrigibility and correctness of the established by religious people at the councils way of thinking and human existence. When this consciousness in society is fragmented, the moral component of public consciousness is in decline [7].

After the capture of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453 Muscovite Russia remains the only sovereign Christian Orthodox state, the center of post-Byzantine confessional legitimacy. Unlike similar in their culture and origin Balkan countries, Russia never claimed to be “Byzantine heritage” during the existence of Byzantium de facto. The Russian kingdom having established itself in the European East became without any usurpations the only Orthodox state. After the territorial expansion of the Russian state, after the fall of the khanates of the Volga region and Siberia the Russian tradition is considered since that time not less dominant than the Byzantine one. Russia itself becomes the world and the “oecumene” (by L. Gumilev).

In Eastern Europe Russians sought to defend their traditions and their house – the Russian state - in a rather difficult situation of religious and political pressure both from the east and from the west. Russia due to the difficult conditions of its formation (domination in Eastern Europe by the Ottoman Empire and the Golden Horde and also the iron pressure of the west) lost much possibility to strengthen its political and legal culture because it was cut off from the world centers of cultural and economic life. We have already underlined the fact that the Byzantine Empire with which Russia had rather intense communication in the period of the Grand Duchy of Kiev, was ruthlessly crushed by the Italo-Western Frankish feudal lords and merchants in the XIIIth century, was completely destroyed by the Turkish Hordes in the XVth century (1453) no longer being the source of only constructive reception of civilizational achievements of antiquity. Though there were a lot of more advanced elements of the civil universalization of society and legal experience since the time of antiquity.

The Russian religious ideal of the world's collective being as a blooming garden, “planted grapes”, that appears in the ideological foundations of social consciousness of the Russian ethnos appeared close not only to the Russians but to other nations of Russia. Despite the fact that the formation of this idea occurred within the church doctrine lasting from the times of the Eastern patristics, the specified social dominant was not at all clerical but it kept the national, spontaneous, sometimes even utopian ideas about the public world pattern.

In this world order the understanding of the social essence of the person does not contradict the universe remaining in harmony with it. The essence of the Russian religious specifics is understanding the person in spiritual sense of the ideal (perfect) image of the person. As far as the specifics of the Russian understanding of humanity one can say with certainty that ideally it was really a deeply humanistic, close to the early Christian understanding of the essence of humanity. It was, so to say, the certainty in the human ability to be like a saint, a hero of hagiography or an ascet.

It should be noted that the moral and relative function of the Russian spirituality is especially important in the analysis of the modern situation of religious and social traditions. In this aspect the Russian Orthodox Holy Fathers heritage has a unidirectional vector of influence: “healing the human soul”. This peculiarity of the Orthodox culture was clearly underlined in the works of the Russian philosophical thought.

In Russia they relied on the years of experience of communication with the East and the Byzantine Empire because the latter took into consideration the peculiarities of social and cultural foundations of nations. Where the expansion of the Latin Catholic tradition was observed the consequences of such intrusion into southern Russian regions were destructive and disintegrative, for example
after the adoption of the Union of Brest-Litovsk, that influenced the fate of the spiritual unity of the Eastern Slavs up to the present day.

Christianity in Russia should not be considered as having more connivance than, for example, Christianity in the West. It did not have more connivance than religious of the East. One should look for the reasons in the peculiarities of the Russian religious and moral tradition that gave birth to the phenomenon of the Russian social ideal called “the Third Rome” as well as the historical circumstances that determined the Russian way of spiritual and cultural development of the society.

The problem situation of changing the spiritual orientation and demoralization of the population in the post-Soviet regions at the end of the XXth century by fundamentalism became more complicated also due to the fact that secular, civil and public morality in the post-Soviet countries became fragmented. A vivid example is the absence of loyalty in business and even more in family relationships, the dominance in interpersonal relationships of the principle that you can only rely on yourself.

The religious culture of many Russians of the beginning of the XXIth century was in such a state of neglect that if we speak about the consciousness of today the picture is rather blurred. It is impossible to say with precision that certain groups of people are religious and people of other groups are convinced atheists [8]. In fact, there are lots of people living among myths, rumors, prejudices, painful disappointments and precepts. All this to a large extent determines the spiritual atmosphere of the day.

In modern Russia there is a number of most spread non-traditional organizations: “Jehovah’s Witnesses”, “Church of Scientology”, “Moonie’ Church”, “Krishnaism”, “Luciferianism” etc. The future and the present young generations of the Russian citizens choose non-traditional moral and religious preferences differently and not without harm for their social and moral state [9].

And yet in spite of the above-mentioned tendencies in modern Russian confessional culture the Russian Orthodox religious tradition acts as the moral dominant of the sustainable nature of the spiritual life of the person. Of course, the state religion in a multiconfessional country like Russia is unacceptable. But what religions to separate and in what way is a difficult question. It is necessary to take into consideration the fact what place it occupies in the history of Russian culture and not to declare a religion any association that appeals to God. One can say similar things about atheism which is rather not a religion but anti-religion. One can say the same about declarations and statements of the cloud of pseudo-religious foreign crooks that appeared in Russia.

Despite this reality it is important to understand what the Russian Orthodox culture is. The Byzantine spiritual heritage gave the formative beginning to our culture where the elements forming it developed, including sects. In the above plan we noted that the sustainable side of culture – cultural tradition due to which the translation of the human experience in history occurs and every new generation of people may actualize the experience relying in their activity on the created by the previous generations. In this case for the Russians the unique experience of the Byzantine religious and moral tradition seems most valuable.

Of course, every citizen has the right to believe what he wants to believe in. However it does not meant that the rich should buy up everything in culture and engage themselves in proselytism. There is such a thing as state protectionism that takes place in those countries where the Orthodoxy is essential in the history of society (Greece, Cyprus and partially Finland). It exists not only in the religious sphere but in the economy and in the political practice. Especially interesting from this point of view is the experience of Greece where the Orthodox population is 80%. It does not mean imposing a religious paradigm or moral and psychological induction of the population, it means multilateral support of tradition historically embodying the national culture of the majority of the peoples in Russia.

In connection with the development of inter-ethnic, inter-regional relationships, the cultural dialogue based on the understanding the Russian confessional basis of the creation of the new civilization space in Russia remains the most important. In many ways the effectiveness of social and humanitarian research depends not only on socio-economic factors but also on the circumstance how closely we will take into consideration historical lessons and the state of spiritual and moral atmosphere in the areas of inter-confessional and inter-ethnic dialogue of Eastern Europe and Russia.

One should remember that historically the Russian state initially with the dominance of the traditions of Orthodoxy was formed as multi-confessional and the presence of tolerance in the relations between people of different religions is a must for peace and stability of the Russian society.
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