Vol. 8 (1) 2021

ARTICLES

BOOK REVIEWS

STATE, RELIGION and CHURCH

Vol. 8 (1) 2021

Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration

ISSN 2311–3448

STATE, RELIGION and CHURCH

Vol. 8 (1) 2021

ISSN 2311–3448

STATE, RELIGION and CHURCH

Vol. 8 **(1)** 2021

Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration

Moscow, 2021

State, Religion and Church is an academic peer-reviewed journal devoted to the interdisciplinary scholarly study of religion.

Published twice yearly under the aegis of the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration.

Address: *State, Religion and Church* Editorial Office. Institute of Public Administration and Management. Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration.
Prospekt Vernadskogo 84. Building 8, Room 2023. 119606 Moscow, Russia.

Website: www.srch.ranepa.ru

E-mail: religion@ranepa.ru

Indexed in *Erih Plus* and *ATLA Religion Database*.

Table of Contents

Articles

Book Reviews

Reference Information

Natalia Dushakova

How Religion Becomes Visible: Old Believer Communities in Social Media

Translated by Anna Amramina

DOI: https://doi.org/10.22394/2311-3448-2021-8-1-4-22

Natalia Dushakova — Laboratory for Theoretical Folklore Studies, School of Advanced Studies in the Humanities, Russian Academy of National Economy and Public Administration (RANEPA) (Moscow, Russia). nataliadusacova@gmail.com

The article discusses how Old Believers create a space of new visibility for their religion in social media. The author analyzes online and offline practices as complementing each other, examining the Facebook pages of those communities and settlements in which anthropological fieldwork was previously conducted (the Northwestern Black Sea region). Based on Heidi Campbell's theoretical approaches and using materials from online observations and field research as sources, the author analyzes two approaches of Old Believer self-representation in social media: 1) a digital narrative created on behalf of the religious community that is institutionally encouraged and an authorized way to make religion visible in public space, 2) and a digital narrative about the community's everyday life and Old Believers' lived religion. Despite all the differences, in both cases visible religion is being constructed online for both internal and external users.

Keywords: mediatization of religion, social media, visible religion, digital narrative of a religious community, lived religion, Old Believers.

One of the consequences of the mediatization of religion is its increased visibility in the public space. Nowadays, a social media user can not only learn more about this or that Old Believer

community but can even "step into" a church through numerous photographs and videos of sermons available online. Typically, Old Belief churches prohibit filming during services (it is however possible with the priest's blessing), and members of other denominations are only allowed to witness the service from the parvis. This latter rule was institutionally formalized by a decree of the Metropolitan Council of the Russian Orthodox Old-Rite Church (ROORC) from February 2015, which states: "We request non-Old Believers to stay in the narthex for the entire duration of the service, to refrain from entering the temple, venerating the icons, and performing any visible prayer rituals." In many cases, more visual information can be found on social media than standing on the parvis.

Two interconnected questions expectedly arise in this context: (1) how representatives of religious communities ensure their group's presence in social media, giving it more visibility in the public space, and (2) what effect this increase in visibility has on these religious communities.

There have been numerous studies on the impact of the Internet on religious practices by English speaking experts (Dixon 1997; Houston 1998; Dawson 2001; Babin and Zukowski 2002; Young 2004; Herring 2005; Laney 2005). They focus on various aspects of the perception of Internet technologies and consider the Internet as a context for creating communities. Multiple empirical studies into online Christian practices have been conducted. Heidi Campbell and Paul Teusner reviewed these works in detail in a chapter of a monograph on Christian reflections on virtual life (Campbell and Teusner 2011). The study of post-Soviet interconnections between religion and media has generated a few works as well. In particular, an issue of the online journal *Digital Icons* was dedicated to digital Orthodoxy in Russia, including the official position of the Russian Orthodox Church on the Internet, religious practices using digital technologies, and forms of self-expression in digital media (Strukov 2015). It is also worth mentioning E. Grishaeva and V. Shumkova who have been studying online practices of Christian communities (Grishaeva and Shumkova 2018).

To date, there is no scholarship on the uses of the Internet and social media in Old Believer communities. At the same time, this area is of interest because it encompasses several relevant problems, among which are the emergence of new everyday practices in religious communities, the understanding of these practices, and the interaction of conventional behavioral patterns with technological innovations, the search for new methods of inclusion in a community, strategies for ensuring the presence of religion in the public space, and, expectedly, the changes that modern technology and its usage cause in religious com-

munities themselves. The fact that very diverse opinions on the use of the Internet and social media exist among Old Believers—from full or selective acceptance to motivated rejection—makes the exploration of this range of issues even more interesting.

Methodological approaches

Analysis of the manner in which religion is represented in social media and the impact that the use of media technologies and public visibility have on these communities is based on materials from online observations, anthropological fieldwork, and interviews of Old Believers in Moldova and Romania recorded during expeditions between 2008 and 2019. In this paper, I analyze online pages of the communities and settlements, in which I previously conducted field research. Ethnographic observations allow the scholar to understand what goes on online and make it possible both to differentiate between participants of online communication and to understand the broader context of the interaction. Rather than contrasting between offline and online practices, this approach allows scholars to analyze them as complementary practices that function in different contexts (Georgalou 2017; Yus 2011). Moving away from strict differentiation of online and offline practices is motivated by the impossibility to distinguish between them due to their close ties in daily life. For example, one could conduct a church service and post its video recording on a Facebook page. There are numerous variations among the further usage of this video: it can be watched by parishioners who missed the service or by those who were there and want to rewatch it. This example shows that certain posts and webpages can be considered an extension of religious practices.

I base my analysis of how Old Believers ensure the presence of their faith on social media on Heidi Campbell's theoretical frameworks. In her studies on the usages of social media by various congregations she calls for paying attention not only to religious tradition (in this case it would be the Old Belief or, more specifically, the traditions of the Belokrinitsky Old Believers) but also to practices among specific groups (e.g., among the Belokrinitsky Old Believers in Chisinau) (Campbell 2010, 20). Campbell pointed out that approaches and objectives for using social media can vary in communities within one religious tradition depending on a range of factors, such as how they determine the boundaries of the community or their perspective on religious leaders and text media (Campbell 2010, 15). The scholar offered her own approach to examining the engagement of religious communities with

new media, the Religious-Social Shaping of Technology (RSST). This approach incorporates the reactions of representatives of religious communities to media technologies and the beliefs and concepts that influence their choices. If the perception of a technology in a community is influenced by religious and sociocultural factors, the community itself is shaped by the influence of the media technology. To address the questions of how a community forms responses to new media technologies, Campbell suggests exploring the history, traditions, beliefs and concepts, discourses, and the process of negotiation and assessment within a community (Campbell 2010).

I explore several Old Believers' positions, concerns, and the process of creating norms for engaging with social media using decrees of Councils, information on church activities, observations, interviews of the Belokrinitsky and Novozybkovsky Old Believer communities in Moldova and Romania, and data from online observation of what Old Believers from the same regions post on their social media accounts.

Ethically, I adhered to certain important principles. During oral interviews, some of my interlocutors expressed a desire to stay anonymous, thus their identification will be withheld from the paper. In these cases, I disclose only the region and omit the name of the specific settlement. The absence of established ethical guidelines for online observations, in my opinion, calls for discussions of solutions for potential problems in each individual case. In this paper, I analyze in detail only those open-access community accounts on social media, whose objective is to inform a wider audience about their culture and religion. The matter of whether to disclose the names of people who post on these open-access sources was settled in favor of open data, as relevant comments are made in the public space, and as the oral interviews and online observations led me to conclude that the participants of online communication are aware of this publicity.[1]

Attitude toward the Internet: the official position of ROORC

Digital media functions as one of the current channels of missionary activity. The presence of religion online is thus endorsed institutionally.

Matters of using the Internet have been discussed in recent years at Moscow Metropolitan Councils of the Russian Orthodox Old-Rite

1. Apropos, the recommendations on bibliographic descriptions and citation rules developed at the School of Cultural Studies at the Higher School of Economics: https://culture.hse.ru/standart_bibliograf_opisanija.

Church. The texts of ROORC decrees on communications and the publication of the 2011 Council show an interest in new media. For example, a decision was made to "broaden the utilization of possibilities of modern information resources for preaching salvation" (ROORC Council 2011). In 2013, the Council agenda already contained a separate item on the positions on the Internet and its advantages and drawbacks were discussed: "The clergyman pointed out that any given virtual action on social media leaves an indelible trace in monitoring systems and information storage. Thus, in his opinion, people should understand that a person's behavior online should be even more responsible than in daily life" (ROORC Council 2013 b). The corresponding decree of the Council states: "Christians should be spiritually vigilant while using the Internet" (ROORC Council 2013 a). In 2019, the item "on the actions of Old Believers on the Internet" was discussed and the following decision was made: "To call upon Christians to approach their comments on the Internet and other media responsibly, upholding Christian ethics and bearing in mind that, as the Scripture says, 'every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgement'" (Matthew 12:36) (ROORC Council 2019). In conjunction with developing an official Church position and discussing acceptable ways of ensuring the presence of Old Belief communities online, a variety of online courses were organized for Old Believers and anyone interested.

In September 2019 the department of education at the ROORC Moscow Metropolis launched an online Sunday school for adults, in which lectures were offered on exegesis (Acts of the Apostles), the Old Testament, the liturgy, and Church Slavonic for anyone who was interested. The recorded lectures were posted on a website (*nashavera*.com), on social media (VKontakte), and on YouTube after the webinars.[2]

The online course "foundations of church journalism" was also organized by the ROORC Moscow Metropolis in 2019. Anyone could attend after filling out a questionnaire and submitting a statement of purpose. The main target audience was active Old Believers who were "planning to learn or already engaged in the media space (managing the parish website, writing news columns, posting comments on social media)."[3] Those in attendance included Old Believers from several regions of Russia and abroad, including Moldova. In lectures on church journalism, it was emphasized that the main goal of religious mass me-

2. More on the course at http://rpsc.ru/news/mitropoliya/sm-january2020/?fbclid=IwARodjfwkcBCnoISr7KEUUtNBaC2XYAm4e1Bok1XdS3ROwLp4KGsE6w1u3H4.

3. See details on the ROORC website http://rpsc.ru/news/mitropoliya/journalist-2019/.

dia was preaching and that it was important to understand precisely what should and should not be said on social media about the Old Belief.

As Campbell showed, official discourses and practices play an important role in forming responses to the challenges of using modern technology. An analysis of the official position of the ROORC on the Internet and online resources allows scholars to discuss the willingness to and the promotion of using social networks in missionary activities. However, there are a variety of opinions on this among Old Believers, including among priests. On the one hand, many clergymen speak against life in isolation and often are active users of social networks and moderators of Old Believer community websites. On the other hand, there are priests in the same region who express negative views on using social networks and on distributing information about the Old Belief on the Internet.

Old Believer attitudes toward the Internet: A view from the field

One of the circumstances that complicates the situation, making it more interesting at the same time, is that representatives of some communities, predominantly rural ones, still perceive the Internet (and social networks) as a negative component of modern life. It is an example of what Campbell, echoing John Ferré, called an approach to media technology as a separate way of cognition, in which religious communities are suspicious of media because they shape the culture and promote values that contradict religious convictions (Campbell 2010). Having studied Old Belief communities in Moldova and Romania since 2008, I came across such views on modern media among Novozybkovsky Old Believers in the village of Sarichioi (Tulcea County, Romania) and among the older generation of Belokrinitsky Old Believers (villages of Cunicea, Egorovca, Dobrogea Veche in the Republic of Moldova, and the city of Bender in the unrecognized Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic) (Gergesova 2019).[4]

Here are two cases to consider:

1. Sarichioi, October 2008. Finishing an interview with a member of a Novozybkovsky community at her home, I asked per-

4. This is not characteristic for all Old Believers in this community. In particular, there is an article on the Old Believers' website ruvera.ru about Old Believers in Irkutsk which says that Novozybkovsky Old Believers "use modern communication technology—watch television, use Internet and cell phones. As the community leader says, 'God gave them, we should use them.'"

mission to take a photograph of my interviewee. She gave her permission and added: "Just don't put me on Facebook! I know these… I don't even have Internet on my phone, no Facebook, it's only to make phone calls. You see—I don't even have a TV at home, that's how we live" (female, born 1962, Novozybkovsky community).

2. Cunicea, August 2017. "Don't, don't photograph me!" [Why not? You'd have a picture as a keepsake.] "No-no! I've been told what goes on in that Internet! Don't, I don't want it, I am scared, it'll be time for me to die soon, I don't need this. Forgive me Lord!" A little later my interviewee explained: "This is pride, we are not supposed to" (female, born 1931, Belokrinitsky community).

In the first case the Internet and Facebook appear in the same typological range as television, which is seen among Old Believer communities in the region as "Satan's eye" or a "manifestation of devilry." In the second case the Internet is not a neutral platform either, but the motivation is different. It loses neutral status precisely because of the concomitant public visibility. As my interviewee expressed, the desire to be publicly visible is a sin ("this is pride"). The second case becomes even more interesting upon examining earlier field studies. In 2011 the same resident of Cunicea, who refused to be photographed in 2017, permitted photography. One can assume that in this case the danger of being put online raised a restriction and led to an even higher degree of seclusion.

Similar perceptions of the Internet can be found among Old Believers of other regions and communities, for example, the Chasovenny community, whose members "strive to avoid sharing their personal data. They also do their best not to be photographed, let alone appear online" (Gergesova 2019), i.e., their attitude toward new technologies is shaped by attitudes toward technologies which they already know. Danila Rygovsky argues the same for the Chasovenny community. In his field study he encountered anxiety among his respondents caused by the prospect of their personal information or recordings of their interviews being released online (Rygovsky 2019, 20, 38).

Many Old Believers in Moldova and Romania share a conviction that one should limit Internet usage and abstain from posting on social media during fasts and/or religious holidays. It is hard to determine the origins of this restriction, but in this context, it is indicative that the above-mentioned online course on the foundations of church journalism organized by the Moscow Metropolis of ROORC took a break for a fast. Furthermore, representatives of the Russian Ortho-

dox Church also call for restrictions on social media presence during Lent because "social media is a space that devours time" and fasting gives "powerful external support to try to defeat this time eater" (Interfax Religiia 2020).

Many Moldovan Old Believers come to Moscow at least once in their life, to the Rogozhsky community—a spiritual center for Belokrinitsky Old Believers. Subsequently, norms and regulations that function in the Rogozhsky community become known and in certain cases are transferred by visitors to their own communities ("If it is done this way in Rogozhsky, it is supposed to be this way.") One of the rules that has been transferred to other communities, including ones abroad, is the ban on photography in the temple, which is justified because "photography expels the holy spirit from the temple." Thus, constructing a space for their religion on social media using photos would violate this restriction.

Some Old Believer communities in the region do not have webpages at all, but their nonexistence does not mean that all members of a community are against them. A number of rural church parishioners in Moldova are signed up for the Chisinau Old Believer community webpage, which I will discuss further. Respectively, the existence of a community profile on social media does not mean that the majority of parishioners approve of it or are signed up for it (some are simply unaware of its existence).

I will now focus on the ways of presenting the Old Belief on social media that moderators of existing webpages select, consider the similarities and differences of these ways, and discuss how social media participate in shaping communities, their identities, and borders in interdenominational dialogue.

The digital narrative of community religious life

A common way to give a religion visibility on social media is to create an official page or a group for a community. These pages are often moderated by priests and reflect the activities of the church. When a narrative of the church life of a community emerges and exists in the digital sphere, I call it a digital narrative.

Let us look at the Facebook page of the Intercession of the Virgin Mary Old Believer community in Chisinau. The page was created on 9 November 2013 and on 1 October 2019 had 341 followers. Among them are parishioners of the Chisinau church, members of other Old Believer communities in Moldova, scholars of Old Rite culture, and

people who are interested in the community's life. The "About" section lists it as a "group" and provides the name of the community and the address of the church: "Intercession of the Virgin Mary Old Believer community in Chisinau. 3/5 Mazarachi St., Chisinau." Posts by users occupy a separate field that does not appear on the newsfeed (they can be viewed by navigating from the main page to the "posts" section where the "visitors' posts" column is pinned on the side). Posts by the moderator appear at the top of the list and the page is being maintained on behalf of the community.

The page is populated with professional photographs and/or video recordings of services, cross processions, and significant events from the church life of the community. Visual materials prevail but texts appear as well. An important feature of the presentation of the Old Belief online is the ways of talking about religion that differ substantially from formal religious discourse—not sermons but rather "small pieces of text, videos, and links to other online sources have become the currency of social interaction" on many platforms including Facebook (Campbell and Teusner 2011, 65). However, the page in question also offers posts in which the moderator moves toward a traditional discourse of the clergy (e.g., a selection of professional photographs is supplemented with texts for liturgical singing).

Multimedia data usage creates the effect of co-presence which is supported by comments to posts (see, for example, figure 1).

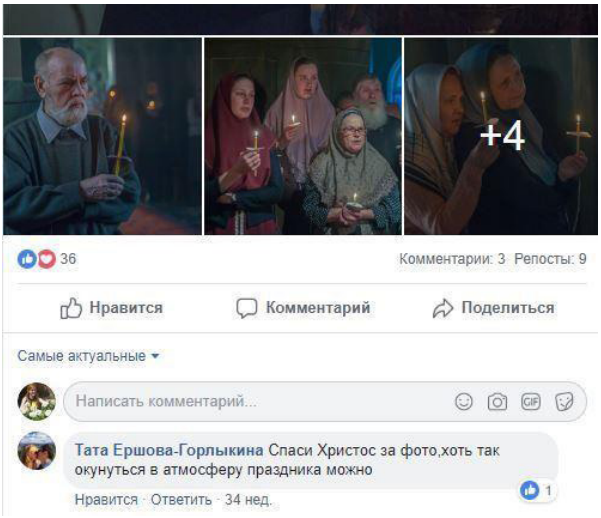


Figure 1. Comment to a post on the Facebook page of the Intercession of the Virgin Mary Old Believer community in Chisinau.

Co-presence becomes important primarily for former parishioners of the church of Intercession of the Virgin Mary (Mazarachi) who left Chisinau and for many Moldovan Old Believers who attend services there periodically.

Public visibility is also constructed by presenting the community on an open-source page, rather than in a group in which the flow of visitors can be controlled.[5] Any Facebook user can visit the page, but the majority of those who like and comment on posts are Old Believers. Members of other denominations do, however, have an opportunity to follow updates and watch videos and photos, including ones taken inside the church. Comments "from the outside" do not receive detailed responses. The following discussion of Old Believers and Molokans provides an illustration (see figure 2).

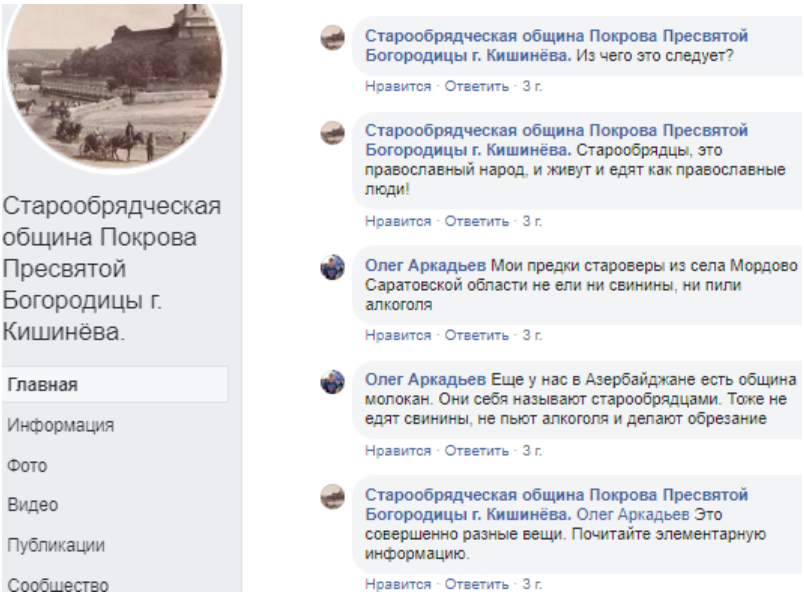


Figure 2. Discussion about Old Believers and Molokans on the Facebook page of an Old Believer community in Chisinau.

Another example is the absence of any reaction from the moderator to a question in a post from April 30, 2016 ("Why do some people have lad-

5. I cannot be certain here that this choice is not predicated by the moderator's technical skills. Nonetheless, the intent of the moderator is less significant for this study than how the page functions and how it enables visibility of religion in the online space.

der rosaries hanging on their wrists? What does this mean?") In my opinion, this steadfast position of the moderator serves as evidence that even though technically the page is open to everyone, its target audience is primarily Old Believers. Outsiders can observe but their presence inside the community should not be felt, so that the page remains a private space.

The influence of media technology on the community that Campbell discusses is fully traceable in the case of the Chisinau Old Believers' parish, especially if offline and online practices are seen as complementing each other. First, the presence of religion on social media allows former parishioners who cannot attend services after moving to a different town or village to stay integrated in the community. Second, Old Believers from other towns and villages who follow the page and the events in the life of the Chisinau parish are included in the community. Third, one can see how representatives of other denominations or, to be more precise, those who overstep the boundaries of the silent and inconspicuous observer are continuously excluded from interactions. In essence, they have access to the same information as the members of the congregation. The difference is that the latter need no additional explanations.

This kind of construction of a digital narrative on behalf of the Chisinau Old Believer community demonstrates a position similar to that of many clergymen in the region. For example, a priest (of the Belokrinitskaya hierarchy) I interviewed expressed the following opinion on Old Believers' social media groups/pages: "People who discuss traditions on social media don't know much themselves. Those who know the traditions will stop talking about them. It's people new to the faith who discuss them." During the interview he emphasized that he never explains the peculiarities of Old Belief traditions to anyone online. However, it is important to draw a distinction here between an understanding of acceptable or necessary presence of information about a community online and on social media specifically, even without giving answers to questions from people "new to the faith"—and rejecting the presence of religion in the online space. During a field study in an Old Believer village in the northwestern Black Sea region, I talked to a priest (of the same Belokrinitskaya hierarchy) who did not approve of his congregation's Facebook page, did not use social media, and considered the information about Old Believer traditions he encountered online to be distorted.

If the online space of a community is visible to all Facebook users and if exclusion, or, more precisely in this case noninclusion, manifests only through refusing to answer clarifying questions, leaders of different Old Believer communities practice other strategies of closing their religious space to adherents of other faiths. Thus, the represen-

tation of a community on the VKontakte social network often appears as a closed group, accessible only to members of the same Old Believer community. For example, there is a closed Pomor community page that people talk about in Novodvinsk (Arkhangelsk region): "Moderators do not accept users who belong to other denominations—everyone who submits a request to join receives a message announcing to which congregation the applicant belongs. Those who try to cheat are quickly identified by the moderator" (Karliner 2016). Whereas Facebook offers several choices—a page (open-access source where moderators have slightly more power to regulate user activity) or a group (there are three types of groups, public, closed, and secret)—Vkontakte only offers a choice between public and closed groups.

Lived religion on a social network

Another way of providing religion a presence in the public space is to discuss on social media the daily life of a village where most inhabitants belong to the same ethno-denominational community. Pages of settlements represent Old Belief as a lived religion through everyday village life. Different strategies are used here to construct an online space, and the absence of community leadership approval of its publications influences the content and its representation.

Let us consider as an example the page of the village of Egorovca in the Moldovan Falesti region. The page was created on January 17, 2011 and by October 1, 2019 had eighty-three followers, mostly current residents of the village and those who had moved to other villages or towns. The "About" section addresses when the village was founded and its location: "Our village Egorovca (founded 1919) is in sunny Moldova, close to the city of Balți in the Falesti region."[6] The page is listed in the categories "Sports and Recreation" and "Eastern Orthodox Church." The history section has texts on the village by Natalia Rozamirina, a reporter from the *AiF-Moldova* newspaper (Chisinau), who lived in Egorovca as a child. Stories about the village are prefaced by the slogan "Let us preserve our native village!" followed by "We look forward to your photos and videos about the life of the

6. The author's language is preserved in the Romanian style of spelling proper names, see: https://www.facebook.com/pg/%D1%81%D0%95%D0%B3%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%BA%D0%B0-%D0%A4%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%B5%D1%88%D1%82%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B3%D0%BE-%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B9%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%9C%D0%BE%D0%BB%D0%B4%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B0-178933328814088/about/?ref=page_internal.

Old Believers' village of Egorovca!" The content of this page is open to all Facebook users, but the target audience is residents of Egorovca (moderators and authors of posts often address them).

On the one hand, opening this page one immediately sees a typical self-representation of a small settlement: festivities, season changes, communal work, or the beginning of the school year are newsworthy events. A series of publications is dedicated to the village's centennial (to preparations, the celebration itself, and congratulating residents). The information on the page is offered via typical social media strategies: photographs (beautiful places, pictures of celebrations), atmospheric posts (can be accompanied by a photo and is usually about love for the village), the fact of the day, an article (in most cases, an expanded history), video (typically, ethnographic materials), and posts with poems appear frequently.

On the other hand, the materials on the page provide information on lived religion: photographs allow one to understand how closely religious regulations are followed in the community (for example, regarding church clothes or the way to tie the headscarf), which church feasts are celebrated, how many people attend services, and which memories those who follow the page share. Below are some examples of such posts (see figures 3 and 4).

Figure 3. Post on the village of Egorovca Facebook page featuring women in headscarves.

Figure 4. Post on the village of Egorovca Facebook page featuring a procession of the cross.

The page moderator inserts Egorovca into the network of Old Believer communities in the region (and of the same Belokrinitsky tradition). In particular, posts about neighbors are almost always about nearby Old Believer villages (see figures 5 and 6) and photographs of sites outside Egorovca are often of churches in other Old Believer communities. The page informs followers about the history, traditions, and events in the communities of the region. Thus, one of the crucial functions of the page is maintaining connections between the community and other Belokrinitsky Old Believers who live in the northwestern Black Sea region.

The daily life narrative of the village includes not only religious topics but also memories of the kolkhoz (see figure 7), stories about beekeeping, fruit sale advertisements, and so on. The fact that a religious leader does not populate the page exclusively with information about church life or rules of a specific Old Believer tradition, points to the narrative of this page reflecting lived religion.

Juxtaposing this digital narrative with the data from a field study in Egorovca, I can indicate that the page offers information about those Old Believer communities, which maintain the closest cultural and economic ties. As for restrictions on using the Internet and social media, I did not detect any notion of them in this particular village.

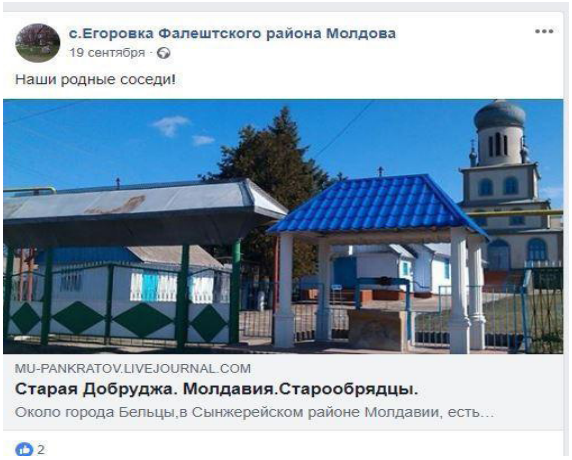


Figure 5. Post on the village of Egorovca Facebook page, captioned "Our dear neighbors," containing a Live Journal article about Old Believers near the town of Balti in the Synzhereisk region of Moldova.

Figure 6. Post on the village of Egorovca Facebook page featuring a performance at the village's centennial by visitors from the village of Pocrovca. Also included is a brief history of Pocrovca and its Old Believer community.

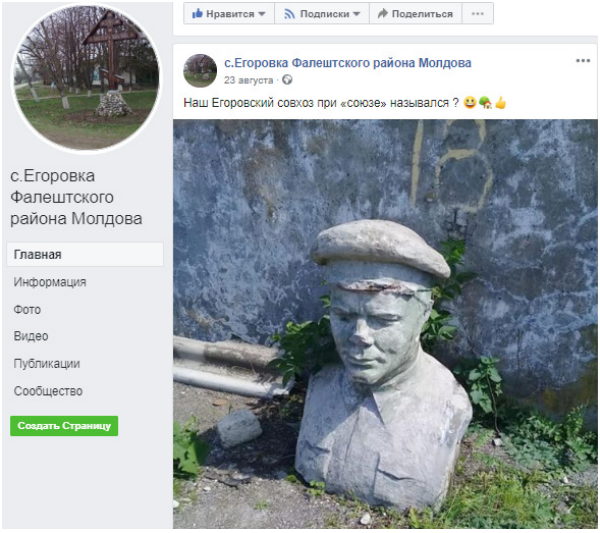


Figure 7. Post on the village of Egorovca Facebook page about the Egorovca kolkhoz.

Based on field data, moderators of neither discussed pages follow the widespread restriction on using the Internet and social media during fasts and/or holy feasts in the region. Photos and videos of important church life events appear on the Chisinau community page on the following day or even the same day. Some of the photographs are posted in the Egorovca community page awhile after a holy feast, but religious and secular holiday greetings are often posted on the day of the celebration, and I noticed no breaks in posting activity during fasts on either discussed page.

Conclusion

Despite the differences in goals and methods of content presentation, in both cases the presence of the Old Belief online is noticeable not only among the group but also outside its boundaries. In situations where broadcasting religious practices on social media is controlled (as in the Chisinau parish), most Old Believers in the region promote the expansion of practices in the media space. Yet, among more conservative Old Believers, who follow the ban on using social media, placing it in the same typological range as television and other modern technologies, there is no information on the actions of the community to expand online religious practices (for example, conducting a service and posting a video of it on Facebook). However, if present-

ing information about religion via photographs, videos, links, and short texts can be perceived as contrasting with more conventional religious discourse, it performs its functions seamlessly on social media. In the case of representing religion on social media via a digital narrative on daily life, all the above-mentioned types of communications seem quite natural. It can be established that the normalization of the Internet among most Old Believer communities occurs without constructing any specific theological discourse on the issue.

As field studies show, further expansion of the presence of the Old Belief on social media is predictable. Some local community members mentioned in interviews their intention to create relevant pages and groups on social media, but they are faced with an entire range of challenges concerning the boundaries of the constructed online space: how to represent their community online, what to discuss and what to avoid, and how to draw the line between themselves and members of other denominations.

The process of discussing new norms and boundaries of using social media alongside relevant practices of creating community pages and groups also instigate change in the offline sphere. First and foremost, it is tied into the comprehension of a system of boundaries. On the one hand, faced with the threat of being pulled into the public online space, communities develop rules meant to protect them from unwanted publicity (e.g., direct prohibition of being photographed or using social media). Motivations for prohibitions vary from the fear of disapproval or a desire to refrain from prideful behavior to wanting to preserve what Herzfeld called cultural intimacy (Herzfeld 1997). On the other hand, appreciating the new opportunities provided by social media, many members of Old Believer communities find it important to create their own narratives of their culture, breaking established stereotypes or offering information about themselves that serves as a trustworthy source on the Old Belief.

References

Babin, P. and A. A. Zukowski. 2002. *The Gospel in Cyberspace: Nurturing Faith in the Internet Age*. Chicago, IL: Loyola University Press.

Campbell, H. 2010. *When Religion Meets New Media*. New York: Routledge.

Campbell, H. A. and Teusner, P. E. 2011. "Religious authority in the age of Internet." In *Virtual Lives: Christian Reflections,* edited by R. B. Kruschwitz, 59–68. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press.

Dawson, L. 2001. "Researching Religion in Cyberspace: Issues and Strategies." In *Religion on the Internet: Research Prospects and Promises, Religion and the Social Order*, vol. 8, edited by J. Hadden and D. Cowan, 25–54. New York: JAI Press.

Dixon, P. 1997. *Cyber Church: Christianity and the Internet*. Eastborne, UK: Kingsway Publications.

Georgalou, M. 2017. *Discourse and Identity on Facebook*. London, New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

Gergesova, L. 2019. "Kak zhivut sovremennye staroobriadtsy" ["How modern Old Believers live."] *Russkaia vera* [*Russian faith*], 2 Jan, https://ruvera.ru/articles/kak_jivut_sovremennye_staroobryadcy.

Grishaeva, E. I. and V. A. Shumkova. 2018. "Tserkov' 'VKontakte'. Issledovanie samoprezentatsii pravoslavnykh prikhodov v sotsial'noi seti vk.com" ["Church 'VKontakte.' The research of self-presentation of Orthodox parishes in the social network vk.com."]. In *Mediatizatsiia kul'tury: konstruirovanie novykh tekstov i praktik: Materialy Mezhdunarodnoĭ nauchnoĭ konferentsii (Moskva, 30 noiabria — 2 dekabria 2018 g.)* [*Mediation of culture: construction of new texts and practices" Material for the International research conference (Moscow, November 30-December 2, 2018)*], edited by I. S. Dushakova and N. S. Dushakova, 36–42. Moscow: Izdatel'skii dom "Neolit".

Herring, D. 2005. "Virtual as Contextual: A Net News Theology." In *Religion and Cyberspace*, edited by M. T. Højsgaard, M. Warburg, 149–165. New York: Routledge.

Herzfeld, M. 1997. *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation-State*. New York: Routledge.

Houston, G. 1998. *Virtual Morality: Christian Ethics in the Computer Age*. Leicester, UK: Apollos.

Intercession of the Virgin Mary Old Believers' community. 2020. https://www.facebook.com/Старообрядческая-община-Покрова-Пресвятой-Богородицы-г-Кишинёва-545640012186688/.

Interfax-Religiia. 2020. "RPTs prizyvaet ogranichit prisutstvie v sotssetyah vo vremya posta" ["ROC calls for limiting presence on social media during fasts"]. I*ntefax-Religiia*, March 3, http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=74355&fbclid=IwAR2HXt-ozelbYkiZRwoVK8PBh-TVSX0hk5jJ_AML-h3vcAqyyY7oDmlZxXA.

Karliner, D. 2016. "Chto ni dom — to obychai. Pochemu svoi krest, platok i svoia chashka vazhny dlia staroverov-pomorov" ["In each house a ritual. Why one's own cross, headscarf, and cup are important for Pomor Old Believers."] In *Zapovednik*. https://zapovednik.space/material/chto-ni-dom-to-obychay.

Laney, M. 2005. "Christian Web Usage: Motives and Desires." In *Religion and Cyberspace*, edited by M. T. Højsgaard, M. Warburg, 166–179. New York: Routledge.

Metropolitan Council of the Russian Orthodox Old-Rite Church. 2015. "Decrees of the Metropolitan Council of the Russian Orthodox Old-Rite Church, February 2015," February 4-5, http://rpsc.ru/docs/sovet_mitropolii/sm2015_february/.

ROORC Council. 2011. "Decrees of the ROORC Council, 2011," October 18-20, http://rpsc.ru/docs/sobory/os2011/.

ROORC Council. 2013a. "Decrees of the ROORC Council, 2013," October 16-17, 2013, http://rpsc.ru/docs/sobory/os2013/.

ROORC Council. 2013b. "Second meeting of the ROORC Council," October 16, https://ruvera.ru/news/vtoroe_zasedanie_osvyashennogo_sobora.

ROORC Council. 2019. "Decrees of the ROORC Council, 2019," October 22-23, https://ruvera.ru/articles/postanovleniya_sobora_rpsc_2019.

Rygovskiy, D. 2019. "Tekhnika i ee reprezentatsiia kak istochnik religioznogo opyta v eniseiskom staroobriadchestve" ["Technology and its representation as a source of religious experience for Old Believers of Yenisei Region."] *Gosudarstvo, religiia, tserkov' v Rossii i za rubezhom* 37(4): 19–44.

Strukov, V., ed. 2015. *Digital Icons. Issue 14. Digital Orthodoxy: Mediating Post-Secularity in Russia*. https://www.digitalicons.org/issue14/.

Village of Egorovca (Falesti region, Moldova). https://www.facebook.com/cEгоровка-Фалештского-района-Молдова-178933328814088/?ref=br_rs.

Young, G. 2004. "Reading and Praying Online: The Continuity in Religion Online and Online Religion in Internet Christianity." In *Religion Online: Finding Faith on the Internet*, edited by L. L. Dawson and D. E. Cowan, 86–97. New York: Routledge.

Yus, F. 2011. *Cyberpragmatics: Internet-Mediated Communication in Context*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Olga Bogdanova

Mediatization of Pastoral Care in the Russian Orthodox Church: The Reasons Behind "Ask the Priest" Websites

Translated by Patrick Brown

DOI: https://doi.org/10.22394/2311-3448-2021-8-1-23-43

Olga Bogdanova — Lomonosov Moscow State University (Russia). otheodorova@gmail.com

The article examines the mediatization of pastoral care in the Russian Orthodox Church drawing upon "ask the priest" websites. The study is based on the theory of mediatized worlds in the framework of social constructivism. Various forms of communication between the priest and the audience are analyzed, as well as the reasons why both sides choose online communication. The analysis leads to the conclusion that the mediatization of pastoral care is due to a combination of two types of motivations: developing new forms of comfortable communication within the parish or overcoming crises that may occur in the parish. Overall, there is a general crisis of communication in the Russian Orthodox Church, and the actors are looking for new forms to cope with it. The use of new media is one of such strategies.

Keywords: mediatization of religion, pastoral care, mediatized world of the parish, Russian Orthodox Church.

Introduction

Recently, scholars have investigated interactions between the Russian Orthodox Church and media at various structural and individualized levels, including that of lay believers (Shtele 2017; Luchenko 2015). Sites on which priests answer questions in text, audio, or video format offer a new scholarly perspective into the mediatization of ministry. Studying communication with the priest is critical since it is the primary manner through which Church tradition is transmitted and therefore occupies an essential place in Church communication. The phenomenon of communication with a priest through media has a long history in Church tradition and literature, dating

back to texts belonging to the "question to spiritual authority" genre (e.g. *Guidance toward Spiritual Life: Answers to the Questions of Disciples* by Saints Barsanuphius and John from the sixth century and *Questions and Answers of Falassius* by Monk Maximus the Confessor from the seventh century). Such works relayed spiritual aesthetic experience. Contemporary "questions to the priest" are a new stage in the development of this communicative practice. In a modern, media-saturated society, these questions have relocated to the digital environment, creating an impetus for analyzing the methods and reasons for the mediatization of this type of communication.

This article examines why the audience of these sites and priests choose the online format to communicate. It proceeds from the assumption that amongst the audience there is a demand to communicate with the priest and that from the side of the priest there is a response to that request. The combination of demand and response creates a space of mediatized communication, the prerequisites of which are the focus of this study. Is this an effort to expand traditional offline communication, or does it indicate a desire to reformat it and therefore a dissatisfaction with its actors? What shapes the audience's request and why are the priests ready to answer it? The study of these issues provides insight into church communication and pastoral care in the Russian Orthodox Church today. Can we speak of this as a crisis? And to what extent are these media methods the audience and priests use to overcome the crisis traditional?

Existing scholarship

The preconditions necessary for the mediatization of ministry rest at the intersection of two branches of scholarship — media and religion on the one hand and new forms of pastoral work and activity on the other. Therefore, in order to understand the development of scholarship on the topic, this essay will survey both subject areas.

Relationships between the Russian Orthodox Church and media have been the subject of myriad works devoted to communication within the Church and its interaction with the "outside" world, including with that of secular mass media. A significant subsection of scholarship deals with purely journalistic issues: the development of both a media system and Orthodox mass media, the principle ideological trends of the Church agenda, the specific work of Orthodox editorial offices and press services, the use of media to relay values, informational risks, interaction with secular mass media, and so on (Luchenko

2015; Shtele 2017; Tkachenko 2015; Grishaeva and Shumkova 2018; Zhukovskaia 2016; Dobrokhotova 2012).

In sociology the theoretical foundations for studying the interaction of religious communities and the media-sphere are well-developed, in particular the theory of mediatization of religion. In Russian scholarship, E. I. Grishaeva and E. A. Ostrovskaya have studied its development and criticism, however, their emphasis is not on online communication but on other issues (Grishaeva 2018; Ostrovskaya 2019). In another article, "Internet Mediatization of Confession in Orthodox VK Communities," E. A. Ostrovskaya examines communication of religious actors on the Internet (Ostrovskaya 2018, 56). And in yet another joint project with A. E. Aleekseeva, "Confession in the Digital Space," the authors examine confession on the VKontakte sites of Yekatrinburg parishes (Ostrovskaya 2018, 205). This is perhaps the only article in which "questions to the priest," the subject of this article, are mentioned. Suslov's compilation *Digital Orthodoxy in the Post-Soviet World* is devoted to the various formats in which the Russian Orthodox Church is present on the Internet; several of these works deal with the connection between the priesthood and mass media, but none address the issue of pastoral care (Suslov 2016). For example, M. E. Morozova examines the image of the priest in mass media, including in online media, but does not touch on pastoral care (Morozov 2016).

Pastoral practices are considered in N. N. Emel'ianov "The Harvests Are Many, but the Labors Few: The Problem of Priest-Lay Interaction in Contemporary Russia," P. Vrublevskaia's "Investigating the Church Community in a Small Town: The Role of the Priests and Other Aspects of Orthodox Communality," collected articles in *Parish and Community in Contemporary Orthodoxy: The Roots of Russian Religiosity*, and Y. I. Grishaeva's "The Role of Communication Practices in Shaping the Identity of Orthodox Believers" (Emel'ianov 2019; Vrublevskaia 2015; Agadzhaniana 2011; Grishaeva 2016). These authors discuss personal, offline communication with a priest but do not consider issues of online communication. Archpriest Nikolai Emel'ianov, the author of what is perhaps the most detailed study to date on communication with priests, argues that confession is the only form of communication with a priest (Emel'ianov 2019, 133). This paper contends that it is necessary to add to this, online communication with the priest. Its relevance is demonstrated by the fact that the query "questions to the priest" yields 2 million results on Yandex and 87 million on Google. Yet, the mediatization of pastoral care and the sites of interest to this study are not considered in any of the aforementioned

works. Thus, this article charts a new sphere in the study of the mediatization of religion, and in particular the mediatization of pastoral care.

Theoretical framework

As this study examines the implementation of pastoral care through the media, it employs the theory of mediatization as a theoretical approach. Within the framework are two fundamentally different approaches — institutional and socio-constructivist (Hepp 2013, 616). The first contends that media as an institution subordinates other institutions, including the church, to its logic (Hjarvard 2008). The influential logic of media and other related concepts received significant criticism in scholarship (Lövheim 2011) (for a Russian language critique of mediatization see E. I. Grishaeva) (Grishaeva 2018).

Two points are essential for this research. The paper presupposes that the actors themselves choose the communication format and transform it, i.e. they are not passive recipients of the external logic of the media, (Hjarvard 2008) and that parish communications are in the sphere of church communications. Thus, this paper takes a social-constructivist approach. It considers media in the entire context of societal communication, as one of many communication tools (Hepp 2013, 618). It analyzes how media is used through the concept of "mediatized worlds," (Krotz and Hepp 2013) that is the spaces of societal life, "which depend on the articulation through media communication" (Hepp 2013, 621). In their article A. Hepp and F. Krotz develop the concept of mediatized worlds as a communicative network — "structured fragments of living worlds, associated with a pool of intersubjective knowledge that must be kept in mind, with specific social practices and thick cultures" (Krotz and Hepp 2013, 120). In their study, it is important not only how media works, but how the actors of communication, who can be involved in different formats of communication, behave (what Lahire described as the heterogeneity of the actors of communication) (Lahire 2011). This is essential for this study since both the audience and priests communicate in offline and online formats.

In a number of studies emphasis is placed on the subjectivity and the role of actors in communication as opposed to the "logic of media." Thus, A. Hepp describes the mediatized world through the framework of communicative figuration and notes that the actors are its structural basis. R. Silverstone and M. Lövheim underscore in their works the importance of subjects, asserting that the actors directly impact

how mediatization manifests (Silverstone 2005; Lövheim 2011). With this in mind, this study considers parish communications carried out through media or the mediatization of the parish as taking place in the context of parish communications as a whole. The parish in this study is a community of people who attend services in a particular church and receive guidance in their spiritual lives from the priests of that church. Since a priest in the Orthodox Church realizes his activities as a member or leader of a particular parish (cleric of a particular church), this study considers communication with him to be parish communications and defines this as mediatized ministry,[1] that is, pastoral care carried out with media tools. In some cases, pastoral care is performed in relation to the parishioners of the parish in which the priests serve, and in others, it is performed on the behalf of those who do not belong to the parish or the Church in general (as in real life both a parishioner and a non-parishioner can turn to a priest).

This study examines mediatization not from the perspective of its results or how it happens, but rather asks why it occurs in the Russian Orthodox Church and what prerequisites enable its development, in this case from the perspective of the audience's request and the responses (and requests) from priests. To do this it analyzes the intentions of the audience and the priests based on the answers they gave about why they chose to communicate online. Such a study will make it possible to understand whether mediatized ministry is simply an extension of offline ministry, or whether the request for it indicates a dissatisfaction with offline communications and a desire to overcome them with the help of media.

Since the study is interested in the reasons for turning to mediatized forms of pastoral care, it also considers the motivations for using the Internet among representatives of the religious community. In Russian language scholarship E. I. Grishaeva and A. G. Busygin studied the use of Internet resources by Orthodox believers but "questions to the priests" were not analyzed (Grishaeva and Busygin 2020, 14). Their research, based on use and gratifications theory, focuses more on the results of access to the Internet rather than on the reasons behind its occurrence (Grishaeva and Busygin 2020, 9). This study found no scholarly works that investigated the prerequisites of mediatized min-

1. This study considers pastoral services in the context of parish life, since in the Orthodox Church a priest is always associated with a particular parish and there is no scenario in which someone is ordained outside of the parish. This understanding of the priesthood has existed since ancient times and was confirmed in the Sixth Cannon of the Council of Chalcedon (451 CE).

istry in the Russian Orthodox Church, and therefore this study was carried out on the basis of its own methodology. Since this article examines mediatized pastoral care only at the present, the research is of a synchronic nature (Hepp 2013).

Empirical base

Surveys of those who visited the "Questions to the Priest" section of the Orthodox journal "FOMA" foma.ru[2] and of the priests who answered audience questions make up the empirical base of this study. The study is based on an anonymous survey and an interview with some priests who participated in the survey. The survey was conducted from 27 November 2019 to 7 January 2020. The study examines this period, which corresponds with the Nativity Fast, because it is a time when practicing Orthodox Christians and non-church goers are disposed to ask questions of spiritual significance. A survey was included in the "Questions to the Priest" section and visitors were asked to complete it (see appendix 1). The survey was completed by 396 people. For the present study, the answers to questions five, six, and eight are most important. Additional data made a more complete picture possible (the degree of church attendance and the presence or lack thereof a spiritual father made it possible to tie the respondents' intentions to features of contemporary church life). In total, 295 respondents (71.9 percent) answered the question "Why did you decide to ask your question to the priest online?" These answers form the basis of this study.

As the data shows the "Questions to the Priest" section of the website foma.ru is in demand among active Christians, those who observe major holidays, the nonbelieving, agnostics, and those who do not consider themselves to be of any religion. Of the respondents, 55.7 percent identified themselves as practicing Orthodox Christians (they attend church weekly or several times per year, participate in divine holy services, confess, and receive communion). Several more responded separately that they were on the parish staff, sing in the choir, and participated in divine services every Sunday. Of the other respondents, 19.3 percent answered that they went to church at Christmas and Easter to light candles; 10.16 percent attended according to their mood or went rarely; 8 percent believe in God but do not attend; 1.6

2. "FOMA" is one of the largest Orthodox mass media sites (the monthly audience includes 2.5 million readers, 112,000 VKontakte subscribers, 68,000 on Instagram, 39,000 on Odnoklassinki, and 17,000 on Facebook) and it is one of the Top-3 Runet web projects about religion, according to Yandex. https://radar.yandex.ru/top_list?thematic=religion.

percent called themselves atheists; and 0.3 percent did not accept religion, but respect faith. That those in the last two categories turned to an Orthodox priest reflects the high level of confidence in the Russian Orthodox Church.[3]

This paper also employs a parallel study of 50 clergymen of the Russian Orthodox Church, who have experience answering questions from visitors to various online projects (see appendix 2), and in-depth interviews with 10 of those priests. These interviews did not impact the overall picture of the questionnaires but clarified some points. The study foregrounded the geographic diversity of the respondents as the surveys and interviews were conducted online, making it possible to communicate with priests from different regions, including those outside of the Russian Federation. While the place of worship is not important when it comes to online communication, it seemed pertinent that clergymen from different types of locations resorted to online communication.

The survey also tracked a host of other factors (age, tenure, etc. . .). Of the responding priests, 52.2 percent were between 30 and 40, 32.6 percent between 40 and 55, 8.7 percent between 20 and 30, and 6.5 percent older than 55 years of age. Those surveyed also had different tenures: a plurality (37 percent) had tenures between 10 and 15 years, 26 percent between 5 and 10 years, 15.2 percent between 15 and 20 years, 10.9 percent more than 20 years, and 10.9 percent had less than 5 years of experience. These factors reflect both ministerial and life experience. To conclude, 50 percent of the priests interviewed answered questions mainly within the framework of their own Internet project, 33 percent within the framework of a collective project, and 17 percent within the framework of mass media. There are cases in which priests use both their own project and mass media, but this study asked them to answer which format they considered to be their primary one. The study also revealed that priests preferred to combine different re-

3. These data suggest that there is a certain level of trust or at least interest in Church opinions on various societal issues. This corresponds to the data of a survey conducted between September 26 and October 2, 2019 by the Levada Center (Activities of public institutions), https://wciom.ru/news/ratings/odobrenie_deyatelnosti_obshhestvennyx_institutov/. As the survey demonstrates the level of trust in the Church is not too high (40 percent versus 48 percent in 2018) but it cannot be considered low. Among the institutions considered the Church takes fourth place (out of 19). According to VTsIOM data for November 2019, 62.7 percent of Russians approve of the activities of the Russian Orthodox Church (Nativity Fast 2019), see https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=10038.

sponse formats, primarily video and text, with the audio format being the least popular.

Discussion of the results and conclusions

The survey was especially interested in the prerequisites for going online. As noted, "Why did you decide to ask your question to the priest online?" was the primary question of interest in the audience survey. The question was open, with no ready-made options, in order to highlight the respondents' reasoning. In turn, these reasons permitted the study to discuss the preconditions underlying the audience's request for a mediatized form of ministry. In the survey of priests, similar data was obtained from the question "Why did you start answering questions online? What does this practice mean to you?" These were also open responses. The answers from the priests reveal both why they were ready to respond online and whether they responded to the demand of the audience, or whether they themselves desired a mediatized format to communicate with the flock (both real and potential).

1. The audience's reason for formulating the request

The reasons the audience espoused were divided into two categories: 39.6 percent emphasized reasons that had hindered offline communication with the priest and 60.4 percent expressed reasons that underscored their attraction to the online format.[4]

Those who responded with reasons that hindered communication with the priest are divided into two groups: 1). Reasons from the audience and 2). Reasons from the side of the parish. And those who expressed that the online format was attractive are divided into three groups: 1). The possibilities of the Internet, which allow one to cope with factors that prevent offline communication with a priest (that is, reasons from the first category ["reasons from the side of the parish"]); 2). Additional opportunities presented by the Internet not associated with parish obstacles; and 3). Spontaneous choice (that is, knowing that there is an opportunity to ask a spontaneous question to a priest online).

4. In the empirical material, it turned out that respondents either spoke of what hindered communication with the priest at the parish level or what drove them to ask a question online. There were no answers that contained reasons for both categories.

The set of reasons for communicating online from the side of the audience is presented in table 1.

Table 1. Audience's reasons for communicating online

Reasons hindering communication with a priest offline	Attraction of mediatized ministry	
1. Reasons from the audience: — psychological, — physical restrictions.	1. Possibilities of the Internet, which allow one to cope with factors that prevent offline communication with a priest: — accessibility and efficiency, — convenience.	
	2. Additional features:	
2. Reasons from the side of the parish: — lack of time among priests, — pastoral incompetence (*nekompetentnost'*), — lack of information about the possibilities of communicating with a priest.	Paradigm of personal communication: — write to a specific priest, — compare opinions — reach out about concerns.	Paradigm of mass communication: — read ready-made answers, — make answers public.

A more detailed description of the reasons demonstrates more accurately the demand from the audience. To begin, this paper considers reasons that hinder communication in the parish.[5]

Psychological reasons — psychological barriers arise because the respondents perceive the priest as a special figure, with whom communication transcends the familiar and therefore causes discomfort. Many respondents expressed feelings of fear, shame, and embarrassment that arose when asking questions of a priest in person. In one such response, this fear was tied to a near reverence for the clergyman: "I really understand that these are God's people, that they are graced, and am very afraid to somehow say something wrong or to

5. When naming reasons for this category, respondents often indicated several reasons at once, making it impossible to calculate the total number of responses for each reason. Therefore, we have focused only on the general content of responses.

say something irreverently." Mediatized communication however, "removes these fears."

Responses also referenced *physical restrictions* associated with either illness or with being a long distance from the church, having to attend during a work shift for example.

The reasons from the side of the parish include insufficient time for the priest, pastoral incompetence, and a lack of information regarding how to communicate with a priest. The respondents associate the *lack of time among priests* with the intense workload of the priest, or the situation whereby the parish confession is the only time to communicate with the priest (as pointed out by N. Emel'ianov, see above), and that in that time there is not sufficient time to ask questions.

Pastoral incompetence is associated with the fact that priests cannot and do not want to answer questions and that they do not meet the expectations of the flock. Regarding expectations, one informant emphasized that not only was information insufficient, pastoral attitude was as well: "To give a good answer, one should love the people as much as possible, empathize with them, and understand the problem of the parishioner."

The aforementioned responses indicate a crisis of ministry: people desire it, but those desires are often not realized. Of the respondents, 55.7 percent identified themselves as churched but only 28 percent had a confessor (a priest to whom they regularly confess and with whom they consult their church life). As such, a significant number of those who regularly lead a church life do not enjoy access to one of its main components — the spiritual guidance of the priest, which is one of the main forms of human initiation in Orthodoxy. The lack of communication with a priest or the perception that communication is insufficient is itself frightening and uncomfortable and potentially leads people to look for answers outside of the parish, in particular on the Internet.

An *informational deficiency* seems to be more common among the unchurched, who lack information on how to "technically" organize a meeting with a priest. Of the respondents, 2 percent answered that they simply did not know how to come to church and pose a question to a priest. This indicates that in churches and on parish sites there is a lack of information on how to talk to a priest or invite a priest to one's house if there is no opportunity to meet in a church.

The remaining references to the mediatized form of pastoral care are associated with the opportunities that the Internet offers (see the right column of Table 1). Of the respondents, 15.5 percent referenced the *lack of obstacles impeding online communication* and another 9.3 percent

emphasized the *convenience of writing*. In the words of one respondent, mediatized communication with a priest allows one to "quickly, very quickly" get an answer to a question while spending a minimum amount of effort (without leaving home). Based on the experience of an editor for the "Questions to the Priest" section of the website foma.ru, the author of this article asserts that some questions are asked out of an unwillingness to independently search for answers in literature or on a search engine. On the one hand, there is a desire for the opinion of a priest, and on the other, a desire to obtain information with minimum effort and time. And of course, the Internet solves communication problems for those, who, for physical reasons, cannot get to the church. The written format also facilitates anonymity and thus removes feelings of shame and fear. Furthermore, written communication permits the inquirer to formulate a complete and structured question, and for the respondent to carefully consider the question and prepare an answer, which in turn solves the problem of lack of time among priests in the parish.

However, it is important to note a certain gap between desire and reality, which A. Hepp and F. Frontz identified. In real life the priest may not always be available, but if there is a confession or conversation with him, it occurs in the here and now. In online communication, the audience can contact the priest at any moment (by sending a question to the site through a special forum), but this does not guarantee that the priest will answer immediately. In addition, there is a possibility that for technical reasons the question may not reach the priest. Hepp's and Krotz's phenomenon of communication dispersion is evident: media make it possible to communicate with a person who is not present, which means that the interactivity of personal communication is absent (Krotz and Hepp 2013). That absence of interactivity makes a live dialogue with a priest impossible. Moreover, whereas communication offline can be accompanied by a joint prayer, in the online environment it is limited to the answer to the question. In fact, mediatized communication does not solve the primary request — personal communication with the priest. Moreover, it does not provide proper pastoral guidance in the long-term and is depersonalized.

Other possibilities of the Internet that are not associated with overcoming the crises of parish communication can be divided into two paradigms — personal and mass communication. The *paradigm of personal communication* includes three possibilities that can be realized at the parish level: to write to a specific priest (4.6 percent of respondents), comparison of opinions, (5.4 percent), and reaching out about concerns (7.0 percent). The ability to *write to a specific priest*

is comparable to consulting a specific clergyman. The opportunity to *compare opinions* is attractive because it is easier to do online than it is to go to different churches.

Interestingly, in some cases the priest's response in the online environment is viewed as more credible. The following statement seems indicative of this: "I am from an ultra-Orthodox family. To me it seems that I have been deceived about Orthodoxy for my whole life." This demonstrates that a person familiar with Orthodoxy since childhood and who knows how to locate a priest and speak with him, believes that the priests in real life lack the authority required to get at the truth. Therefore, the respondent turns to a completely unfamiliar priest with his or her most vital questions.

The desire to *reach out* is not associated with the lack of opportunity to communicate in the parish, but rather with the lack of a person to whom to voice one's concerns. An analysis of the questions on the website foma.ru received during the Nativity Fast reveals that 24.8 percent concerned difficult situations in interpersonal relationships (50.5 percent of questions in this category) and complex mental states (13.7 percent). Some appeals represent an attempt to reach out about painful things and to request empathy and prayer when there is no one else to turn to. This category includes, among other things, questions from people who are in an extremely difficult psychological state, including those on the verge of suicide, (i.e. questions such as "Father, bless my decision to kill myself" and "What do I do if I think about suicide?") Contacting the site may be the first encounter of people with the Church and it is essential that they turn to a priest.

It could be assumed that the desire to write to a specific priest and compare opinions indicates a yearning to reformat communication with priests, but this is not the case. In Orthodoxy, the Holy Scriptures, dogmas, and cannons are irrefutable authorities, and saintly texts contain descriptions of personal spiritual experiences and strategies of spiritual life that a Christian can consult. The monk is entirely obedient to his confessor and the laymen has the opportunity to consult various spiritual authorities. By the late nineteenth century, the practice of going to elders for advice or writing letters to them, already supplemented confession in the parish. Without diving deeply into such interactions, this study notes that in the church community plural opinions could be sought out on secondary (nondogmatic and noncanonical issues). Thus, the desire to compare opinions is nothing more than a reproduction of a communicative paradigm that already existed in the Church.

The paradigm of mass communication includes responses about the ability to *read ready-made answers* (10.8 percent) and a desire to *make the answers public*. Such possibilities can only be realized through media and serve to transform communication with the priest from private to public when the content is shared. This is a conscious choice of the audience. Two informants wrote that they asked their question online because they thought the answer might be of interest to others. In the words of one: "I thought the answer to this question might be helpful to others." This is of interest because the person immediately focuses on the paradigm of mass communication and perceives the answer to his or her question as addressed not only to him or her personally, but to the entire potential audience of the mass media through which the question was asked.

Of the respondents, 7.1 percent identified *spontaneity* as a reason for mediatized communication with a priest. These respondents accidentally entered the site and decided to ask a question without specifying specific motives. It is significant that they chose to ask an Orthodox priest specifically, rather than reading information on the Internet. This is consistent with Heidi Campbell's conclusion. Based on her study of the Christian blogosphere, she concludes that while most earlier works have argued that the digital environment presents challenges for religious authority, "the Internet instead can serve as a source to empower religious authorities" (Campbell 2010, 269). We can observe this in the "Questions to the Priest" section of foma.ru, in which both the churched and the unchurched (44.3 percent of respondents) recognize priests as authorities. It is noteworthy that both churched and unchurched respondents considered priests authorities in matters unrelated to spiritual life: in fact, 56.1 percent of questions submitted to the site during the study period do not relate to church life. The priest is asked about difficult situations in the family and at work, overcoming trying psychological states, treatment of mental illness, etc. . ., even though these questions should have been addressed to appropriate specialists. This suggests that the audience recognizes the priest as an authority in general, not just on Church issues. These data correlate with the results of sociological polls, which claim that among Russian society there exists a certain level of trust or, at least, interest in the Church's opinion on various issues. Thus, it seems that the audience has a desire for pastoral guidance and communication with the priest, and that among both the churched and unchurched,

the priest appears to be a spiritual authority whose opinion is trusted and used for guidance.

At the moment, however, there are a number of barriers to clear, convenient, and accessible communication with the priest in the parish. Due to the special relationship between people and the priesthood, people experience psychological barriers, such as fear and timidity when in front of them. At other times difficulties arise when a person is physically unable to get to church or does not know how to talk to the priest either in the parish or by inviting him to his or her home. Furthermore, the organization of parish life in a number of churches is such that there is not sufficient time for a conversation with the priest. In some cases, the priest do not want or cannot answer people's questions and in others the priest in real life does not meet the person's expectations.

All this leads both to dissatisfaction among the audience with communications at the parish level and a search for ways to overcome that dissatisfaction. In the present, the audience turns to the possibilities of the Internet since it is a familiar and comprehensible communication tool. Thus, a desire manifests to communicate with a priest in a mediatized format, which is convenient, accessible, and capable of providing personal communication to the extent that people do not receive it in the parish. Online Communication with a priest is appealing to the audience and is a less costly way to obtain crucial information: one can get the opinion of a specific priest or compare the opinions of several without leaving one's home, and while maintaining anonymity which removes psychological barriers.

The answers reveal that the respondents are not critical of the possibilities of online communication. At the same time, the paradoxical request escapes the attention of the audience: it is impossible to get full-fledged personal communication by mediatizing it. In fact, mediatized communication does not have unlimited possibilities, but rather its own set of limitations.

Summarizing the above, the audience's demand for mediatized ministry consists of two components — a desire for personal communication with the priest and for that communication to take place in an accessible, convenient, and comprehensible format.

2. Reasons why priests communicate with parishioners online

The reasons why priests communicate with parishioners online fall into two categories — responding to the audience's request for online

communication and responding to their own. All the reasons are presented in table 2.[6]

Table 2. Reasons why the priesthood chooses online communication

Responding to the audience's request	Desires of the priesthood
1. Online ministry is part of missionizing. 2. Response to inquiries from specific media and church administrations.	1. Desire to expand missionary opportunities. 2. Desire to increase the audience. 3. Desire to solve personal problems.

The *response to the audience's request* is formed either directly, as the priest's response to the request (when answering questions online is considered part of missionary work), or indirectly (when representatives of specific media or the church administration ask the priest).[7]

All the priests who participated in this survey said that online answers were a continuation of their pastoral work in the parish. In the words of one: "Missionizing on the Internet is a fulfilment of the Commandment 'Go and make disciples of all nations'..., it is the natural continuation of pastoral ministry or a component of it." When discussing the demands of the audience, priests claim that today many people are accustomed to online correspondence and thus they try to conform to that format. In the words of one priest: "Obviously there is a need for this: people ask a lot of questions, indicating that for some reason they cannot get appropriate answers in their parish or simply decide not to come to the church; this is a response to the demands of time and the people."

6. Since the same answer often contained several reasons, it is impossible to calculate the percentage of responses for each reason, so the paper identifies the content of the reasons given.

7. Specifically, the "Questions to the Priest" section of the foma.ru site arose because the paper and the Synodal Department began to receive questions requesting the answer of a priest.

In some cases, beginning work on the Internet is done in response to direct requests from mass media or other projects in which people write "questions to the priest." In fact, this is still a response to the demands of the audience, only it is mediated by media representatives and the hierarchy. As one priest testified: "I responded to a request from mass media; they contacted me from the 'Father Online' project and I responded with pleasure. Helping people is an important component of priestly ministry." Representatives of the church administration also requested that priests answer questions online. According to one: "I was offered it by the hierarchy of our diocese, and I agreed!"

The priesthood's own desires consist of three components — a desire to *expand missionizing*, to *expand the audience*, and to *solve personal problems*.

The *desire to expand missionizing* derives from the constant search for new forms to transmit Church tradition, which has existed throughout the history of the Church and is of upmost importance in priestly activities. Sometimes it is connected with the particular circumstances of the ministry of a priest in a parish, where opportunities for missionizing are limited. In the words of one priest: "I wanted to expand the audience for preaching, while serving on a remote island. It helps the people and myself. It gives me great experience, and for the people, Internet preaching is a step on the way to God and the Church. There is a lack of offline pastoral demand to realize the missionary itch and the call of Christ to go and teach all nations."

The *desire to expand the audience* is related to the financial aspect of life in the parish in which a priest serves. When people talk about promoting a brand or person on social networks that usually entails a direct commercial benefit. Expanding the audience is relevant for pastors appointed as church rectors because it increases the opportunity of finding benefactors (sponsors) for the construction and maintenance of the temple. As one respondent said: "The opportunity to make new acquaintances supports fundraising for the restoration of the temple and diocesan social activities." (At the same time, participation in projects that answer questions from the audience are carried out free of charge, [irregular or insufficient funding is one of the characteristics of Orthodox mass media]).

A *desire to solve personal problems*, for example, overcoming personal crises by helping people, is yet another reason why priests choose online communication. In some cases, it is even considered entertainment; according to one respondent, he chose to communicate online "out of boredom."

Thus, the prerequisites for the mediatization of pastoral services on the part of priests consist of two components — the response to the audience's request (both direct or mediated by the media and the church administration) and that of the priest's own desire. The priest's own desire as well as the audience's request, are associated with a desire to overcome some of the limitations and crises of both parish and personal life.

It is essential that priests strive to ensure that the person eventually comes to the church. Unlike the audience, they do not see mediatized communication as a full-fledged substitute for personal communication; the mediatized form is perceived as a temporary, intermediate stage. In the answers they give on the Internet there is often a call to join church life in reality. Thirty-eight interviewed priests said that they had cases, when after communication on a site, personal communication ensued, and the person came to the church.

Discussion of results and conclusions

The study of the prerequisites for the mediatization of pastoral activity in the Russian Orthodox Church has come to the following conclusions. The mediatization of ministry arises from a combination of two factors: a desire on the part of the audience (both the extant and potential flock) and from the side of the priesthood. Reasons from the audience rest on their desire for pastoral care in a mediatized form, and from the perspective of the priesthood, they are a response to both the desires of the audience and the priests.

The audience's request consists of two components: a desire for personal communication with a priest and for a comprehensive and convenient format for such communication. The audience's request for a mediatized format of communication is based on dissatisfaction with parish communication (associated with the crises of parish life and parish communications). That dissatisfaction is associated with the lack of time and incompetence of some priests. There are also psychological barriers that derive from the audience's perception of the priest as a special figure. In some cases, communication is also hindered by insufficient information on how to communicate with a priest. Turning to the media is an attempt to overcome these crises with the assistance of comprehensible and accessible tools which compensate for what is lacking in parish communication. This is not a radical transformation of extant communication — in many ways, the mediatized format is a continuation of parish communications, as people still bring their questions to priests.

The media is considered to be a tool that allows one to overcome the factors that hinder parish communication (associated with its organization, with its accessibility, and with its psychological limitations) and one that provides additional possibilities. If overcoming the shortcomings of parish communication is associated with the search for convenient personal communication with the priest, the search for additional possibilities in online communication led to, among other things, a transition to mass communication, in which one can read the answers to others' questions and in which the answer to one's own question will be public. In a number of instances, mediatized communication occurs spontaneously, when a person decides to take advantage of an opportunity discovered by chance.

The audience is not critical of the opportunities of media communications, but they overlook that this type of communication has its own limitations and serves as neither a substitute for full-fledged personal communication nor, most critically, for pastoral care.

The prerequisites for the mediatization of ministry on the part of priests are a response to the direct or indirect request of the audience and their own request, which is associated with the desire to overcome the limitations and the crises of both life in the parish and their own personal lives. In response to the audience's request and their own requests, the missionary opportunities that media provide are of upmost importance. In mediatized pastoral work, priests see a tool that makes it possible to realize their pastoral potential and ultimately lead a person to a traditional parish life. Unlike the audience, priests do not see mediatized communication as a full-fledged substitute for personal communication; the mediatized form of pastoral care represents a temporary, intermediate stage.

Thus, the prerequisites for the formation of sites with "questions to the priest" and the mediatization of ministry are associated with personal reasons on the part of the audience and priests, and with a certain crisis of parish communications in the Russian Orthodox Church. The actors of communication do not passively endure this crisis; rather they search for ways to overcome it using the possibilities of media. At the same time, there is a certain transformation of communications with the priest, in particular it shifts from personal to mass communication.

The question which is beyond the scope of this study is whether the use of media is the only model actors use to overcome this crisis, or have people employed other strategies as well, and which of these do they recognize as most effective. In the diachronic aspect, based on the materials

of this article, one can investigate the questions of how crises were overcome in previous eras and how typical are those models that the Church is implementing now. Further study of the sites on which the audience asks questions to priests can provide rich material in the field of psychology, the organization of parish life and pastoral care, the perception of the priesthood, the specifics of pastoral care in the media, and on a number of new topics, and as such, seems to be a promising area of research.

References

Agadzhanian, A., and K. Russele, eds. 2011. *Prikhod i obshchina v sovremennom pravoslavii: kornevaia sistema rossiiskoi religioznosti* [*Parish and community in the contemporary Orthodoxy: the system of Russian religiosity*]. Moscow: Ves′ mir.

Campbell, H. 2010. "Religious authority and the blogosphere." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 15(2): 251-276.

Dobrokhotova, M. A. 2012. "Rol′ SMI v pozitsionirovanii Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi v rossiiskom obshchestve 2000-kh godov" ["The role of mass media in the positioning of the Russian Orthodox Church in Russian society in 2000s"]. *Vestnik Permskogo universiteta* (1): 289–297

Emel′ianov, N. N. 2019. *"Zhatvy mnogo, a delatelei malo": Problema vzaimodeistviia sviashchennikov i mirian v sovremennoi Rossii* [*"The Harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few": The problem of the priest-lay interaction in contemporary Russia*]. Moscow: Izd-vo PSTGU.

Grishaeva, E. I. 2016. "Rol′ kommunikativnykh praktik v formirovanii identichnosti pravoslavnykh veruiushchikh" ["The role of communication practices in shaping the identity of Orthodox believers"]. *Nauchnyi rezul'tat. Sotsiologiia i upravlenie* 2(4): 47–51.

Grishaeva, E. I. 2018. "Vozmozhnosti i granitsy primeneniia teorii mediatizatsii k issledovaniiu religii v publichnom prostranstve: opyt skandinavskikh stran" ["The possibilities and limits of the application of the theory of mediatization to the investigation of the religion in the public space: the experience of Scandinavian countries"]. *Vestnik Leningradskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta im. A.S. Pushkina* (1): 132–141.

Grishaeva, E. I., and A. G. Busygin. 2020. "Internet v pravoslavnom prikhode: osobennosti vzaimodeistvie pravoslavnykh pol′zovatelei s Internet-tekhnologiiami" [Internet in the Orthodox parish: the specific interaction between Orthodox users and Internet technologies], *Nauchnyi rezul'tat. Sotsiologiia i upravlenie* 6(1): 3–15.

Grishaeva, E. I., and V. A. Shumkova. "Traditsionalistskie pravoslavnye media: struktura diskursa i osobennosti funktsionirovaniia." ["Traditional Orthodox media: structure of discourse and its special functions"]. *Monitoring obshchestvennogo mneniia* (2): 283-300.

Hepp, A. 2013. "The communicative figurations of mediatized worlds: Mediatization research in times of the 'mediation of everything'." *European Journal of Communication* 28(6): 615–629.

Hjarvard, S. 2008. "The mediatization of religion: a theory of the media as agents of religious change." *Northern Lights: Film & Media Studies Yearbook* 6(1): 9–26.

Krotz, F., and A. Hepp. "A concretization of mediatization: How mediatization works and why 'mediatized worlds' are a helpful concept for empirical mediatization research." *Empedocles. European Journal for the Philosophy of Communication* 3(2): 119–134.

Lahire, B. 2011. *The Plural Actor*. Cambridge: Policy Press.

Lövheim, M. 2011. "Mediatisation of religion: A critical appraisal." *Culture and Religion* 12(2): 153–166.

Luchenko, X. 2015. "Orthodox Online Media on Runet: History of Development and Current State of Affairs." *Digital Icons: Studies in Russian, Eurasian and Central European New Media* (14): 123-32, http://www.digitalicons.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/DI_14_6_Luchenko.pdf.

Morozov, M. E. 2016. "Obraz sviashchennika v sredstvakh massovoi informatsii" ["The image of the priest in mass media"]. *Monitoring obshchestvennogo mneniia* (136): 184–193.

Ostrovskaya, E. A. 2018. "Internet-mediatizatsiia ispovedi v srede pravoslavnykh setevykh vk.com soobshchestva" [Internet mediatization of confession in Orthodox VK communities"], *Logos et Praxis* 17(3): 45–58.

Ostrovskaya, E. A. 2019. "Mediatizatsiia pravoslaviia — eto vozmozhno?" ["Mediatization of Orthodoxy, is it possible?"], *Monitoring obshchestvennogo mneniia* 5(153): 300–318.

Ostrovskaya, E. A., and E. V. Alekseeva. 2018. "Ispoved′ v tsifrovom prostranstve: edinitsy strukturirovannogo nabliudeniia" ["Confession in the digital space: units of structured observation"]. *Vestnik arkheologii, antropologii i etnografii* 4(43): 204–212.

Shtele, A. 2017. "V poiskakh novogo iazyka: mediinaia strategiia patriarkha Kirilla" ["Looking for new language: the media strategy of Patriarch Kirill"]. *Carnegie.ru*, https://carnegie.ru/2017/05/16/ru-pub-69951.

Silverstone, R. 2005. "Mediation and Communication." In *The International Handbook of Sociology*, edited by C. Calhoun, et al., 188–207. London: Sage.

Suslov, M., ed. 2016. *Digital Orthodoxy in the Post-Soviet World*. Ibidem-Verlag. Stuttgart.

Tkachenko, L. A. 2015. "Mediatsentr eparkhii: sushchnostnye kharakteristiki i osobennosti funktsionirovaniia (na primere pravoslavnykh eparkhii Zapadnoi Sibiri) ["Media center of the Diocese: main features and specific functions (the example of orthodox dioceses in Western Siberia)"]. Diss. kand. filol. Nauk. Ural'skii federal'nyi universitet.

Vrublevskaia, P. 2015. "Issleduia tserkovnuiu obshchinu v malom gorode: rol′ sviashchennika i drugie aspekty pravoslavnoi obshchinnosti" ["Investigating the Church community in a Small Town: the role of the priests and other aspects of orthodox communality"]. *Laboratorium* 7(3): 129–144.

Zhukovskaia, E. 2016. "Upravlenie riskami v informatsionnoi politike instituta tserkvi (na primere Moskovskogo patriarkhata)" ["The management of risks in the informational politics of the Church (the example of the Moscow Patriarchate"]. Diss. sots. nauk. Moskovskii gosudarstvennyi universitet.

Appendix 1. Questionnaire for readers of the site foma.ru

1. Gender (male / female).
2. Age.
3. Education.
4. Place of residence.
5. Are you churched? (A. Yes, I participate in divine services almost every week, I confess and receive Holy Communion at least once a

month, B. Yes, several times a year I participate in services, I confess and receive Holy Communion. C. I go to church for Christmas and / or Easter, sometimes I go to light candles. D. Sometimes I go to church "according to my mood." E. No, but I believe in God. F. I am an atheist. G. My own version).

6. Do you have a confessor (a priest to whom you regularly confess)? (Yes/ no)

7. What is the subject of your question? About what did you ask? (About spiritual life / Other)

8. Why did you decide to ask your question to the priest online?

Appendix 2. Questionnaire for clergy

1. Your age.

2. Experience in the priestly ministry.

3. Place of service (city, town, village in Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, in a CIS country or in another country).

4. Are you a married priest, celibate, or a monk?

5. Do you answer questions online? (Several answers are possible.)

6. Do you answer questions online within the framework of your own project (your website / channel) / within the framework of a collective project in which priests answer questions / within mass media (several options are possible)?

7. In what format are your answers — text, audio, video? (Several options are possible.)

8. Why did you start answering questions online? What does this practice mean to you?

9. What are the main differences between answering questions online and in person? What are the pros and cons of online responses?

10. In your opinion, why do people prefer to ask a priest questions online and not in-person?

11. Do you notice thematic differences between the questions that you are asked in-person (in conversations, in confession) and online? Is there a tendency for online questions to focus on certain topics? What are these topics?

12. Were there any cases when, after online communication, a personal one was struck up (meeting, correspondence) or did you find that a person who had not previously been churched went to church?

Elena Ostrovskaya

Media Practices of Russian-Speaking Orthodox Jews: Women's Groups and Rabbis' Blogs on Facebook and Instagram

Translated by Jan Surer

DOI: https://doi.org/10.22394/2311-3448-2021-8-1-44-69

Elena A. Ostrovskaya — St. Petersburg State University (St. Petersburg, Russia). e.ostrovskaya@spbu.ru

This article focuses on the media practices of Russian-speaking Orthodox Jews seeking patterns of observance relevant to secular modernity. The author applies the conceptual framework of "communicative figurations" to describe the process of everyday Torah observance in post-Soviet countries, Israel, the United States, and Western Europe. Empirical research on media repertoires reveals that members of post-Soviet Orthodox communities use Facebook and Instagram to maintain closed women's groups and rabbis' blogs focused on observance. Women's groups frame everyday observance in terms of modesty, family purity, the kosher home, and the like. Personal rabbis' blogs introduce practices of "digital Judaism" that include Torah lessons, the daily page of the Talmud, question and answer exchanges, and so forth. Content-based textual analyses uncover thematic intersections, the circulation of stories, and reciprocal hyperlinks between both types of groups. The media practices of women's groups and rabbis' blogs link the local Russian-speaking Jewish communities with a transnational Orthodox constellation.

Keywords: Russian-speaking Jews, Orthodox Jews, communicative figuration, closed Facebook groups for Orthodox Jewish women, rabbis' blogs, Facebook, Instagram, digital Judaism.

One of the key issues among Orthodox Jewish communities is the problem of observing the commandments of the Torah in secular societies. Post-Soviet Orthodox Jews also contribute to the discourses on this topic, as they rebuild their communities anew

after periods of religious persecution or an existence of enforced dissidence and opposition to the ideological system.

Contemporary Orthodox Jews identify themselves by their association with the practices of specific communities, guided in their worldview by authoritative rabbis. These communities shape values and identities and monitor the conformity of the lifestyle of "the observant" to the doctrinal provisions of the written tradition. In the era of globalization, these practices have a distinct transnational dimension. As applied to post-Soviet Orthodox Jews, this means the assimilation and reworking of models of instruction in tradition and community life gleaned from foreign, Russian-speaking yeshivas in Israel, the United States, and Western Europe. The institutionalization of post-Soviet communities of Orthodox Judaism began in the 1990s amid the "revival of organized Jewish life" (Khanin 2008, 57–8) and resulted in the emergence of a new sociocultural model of the reproduction of Judaism in a modern secular society.[1]

Most of the Chabad and Lithuanian post-Soviet communities were established with the support of Israeli, American, and European Orthodox enclaves of the Jewish diaspora (Ostrovskaya 2018). In their current existence, they are in regular contact with these enclaves; this includes guest visits and long-term stays of foreign rabbis and mentors in Russia and CIS countries, the supervision of educational practices by yeshivas in Israel, the United States, England, and elsewhere, the training of Jewish immigrants from post-Soviet countries in Israeli Orthodox yeshivas, and participation in shabbatons and workshops arranged by Russian-speaking Orthodox organizations in Israel and the United States for learning the practices of observance. Everyday communications of the members of the new Jewish communities intertwine with many of the practices of religious, Russian-speaking enclaves of the Jewish Diaspora. The Internet and new media technologies serve as key intermediaries of communication about the tradition of daily observance of the commandments of the Torah.

1. Targeted study of post-Soviet communities of Orthodox Jews began only in the 2000s. To date, there have been only a small number of uncoordinated studies of observant Jewish communities in Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Odessa. Among them are the works of G. S. Zelenina, articles in the special issue "Iudaizm posle SSSR: staroe i novoe, religioznoe i natsional'noe" ["Judaism after the USSR: Old and New, Religious and National"] of the journal Gosudarstvo, religiia, tserkov' v Rossii i za rubezhom (2015), (see http://www.religion.ranepa.ru/ru/taxonomy/term/1708), the works of N. O. Arkin, and articles by E. A. Ostrovskaya (for the titles of some of the works of these authors see the "References" section).

Israeli and American communities of immigrants from the former Soviet Union played a significant role in creating the digital dimension of Russophone Orthodox Judaism. Through their efforts, yeshivas and kolels were created for Jews who "returned to tradition" (*ba'alei teshuvah*) and wanted to become observant. They developed specialized websites and kosher mobile apps and started conducting online trainings and webinars. The media environment of Russian-speaking Orthodox Jews they constructed gave post-Soviet *ba'alei teshuvah* access to individual online training and direct contact with authoritative rabbis from non-CIS countries. Along with the new opportunities offered by digital Russian-language Judaism, however, the question of its relevance among post-Soviet observant Jews arose.

In this article, I wish to highlight the results of my study of post-Soviet Orthodox Jews and their diasporic patterns of the reproduction of tradition. The investigation focuses on the media practices through which Russian-speaking Orthodox Jews form a modern model of everyday observance of the Torah commandments. How popular and relevant are the digital practices of Judaism and the specialized media offered by foreign mentors? What role do new media and opportunities for social network communications play in the social construction of the contemporary version of Orthodox observance of the commandments? Are Russian-speaking Orthodox Jews included in the broad context of modernity, or, on the contrary, do they create and strengthen the boundaries of a cultural "ghetto"? The answers to these questions can be obtained only through empirical research on the digital communications of Russophone Orthodox Jews. One of the difficult obstacles along the way is the choice of a methodology adequate to resolve these questions.

Research methodology

The study of the digitization and mediatization of religions is a relatively new development in sociological research. This is largely due to the balancing of articles and monographs between descriptions of the digital dimension of religions and attempts to establish concepts. The most discussed are Stig Hjarvard's theory of mediatized religion and Heidi Campbell's approach to the religious-social shaping of media technologies. Sociological articles about the digital practices of a particular religion usually contain an overview of the conceptual theses of these authors. The choice in favor of Hjarvard's theory or Campbell's approach depends directly on the formulation of the re-

search problem and the focus of the inquiry. Most studies that focus on examining the role of religions in the public space and their media forms tend to draw on Hjarvard's theory. Interest in specific religious communities' strategies of Internet and media usage, however, leads to the interdisciplinary field of "digital religion" and the Campbell approach (Campbell 2010).

One should note that Campbell herself has authored articles on the digital practices of Orthodox Jews, and her approach[2] has played a significant role in consolidating the uncoordinated efforts of researchers of modern Judaism.[3] This approach brought together a group of scientists who wanted to conduct a comparative study of the processes of digitization in Orthodox and non-Orthodox branches of Judaism.[4] These studies have shown that the nature of the interaction with the Internet and new media depends directly on the assessment of modernity that a particular movement in Judaism espouses. Thus, the ultra-Orthodox communities of Israel and the United States believe that modernity is fraught with secularization and the destruction of Judaism. They view the Internet and new media as modernity's offshoot, dangerous and harmful to the traditions and foundations of the community. A vivid illustration of this attitude is the ban on using the Internet and mobile phones for non-work purposes. By formatting media technologies to fit their objectives, communities have created a "kosher Internet" and "kosher cell phones" (Rashi 2013; Rosenthal and Ribak 2015). Communities of non-Orthodox branches of Judaism — the Modern Orthodox, Reform Jews, and communities of Conservative and non-denominational Judaism — tend toward a positive acceptance of modernity and its innovations (Abrams 2015). They bring their religious practices into the online format, using media technol-

2. The religious-social shapping of technology approach involves correlating the offline and online communications of a religious community according to four parameters: the history and tradition of the religious community under study; key religious doctrines and patterns that influence the forming of relationships with the Internet and media; formats for the use of new media by the religious community; and community discourse about new media technologies. For a detailed description of the approach, see Campbell 2010a.

3. Sociological interest in the digitization of modern Judaism began in the 2000s. Initially, sociologists focused exclusively on analyzing the digital practices of Israel's fundamentalist ultra-Orthodox communities. The article that initiated discussion of the media practices of Israel's ultra-Orthodox communities appeared in 2005. See Barzilai-Nahon and Barzilai, 2005.

4. The results of their joint projects were included in the collective monographs edited by H. Campbell. See Campbell 2013 and Campbell 2015.

ogies to expand the topics of communication and remove community boundaries.

Between these extreme poles — the ultra-Orthodox and the non-Orthodox — lies the position of the communities of Orthodox branches of Judaism in Israel and the United States. They do not oppose the innovations of modernity but strive to preserve the boundaries of traditional identity — reliance on the authority of the rabbis and community consolidation. Thus, their strategies of media technology use have a pragmatic rationale — technology is regarded as a useful resource for drawing non-religious Jews to Judaism (Campbell and Bellar 2015).

As mentioned above, articles employing Campbell's approach contain descriptions of the digital practices of specific communities in various branches of modern Judaism. They focus primarily on comparing offline and online communications within local communities. The problem here is that Campbell's approach omits from consideration the transnational diasporic context of modern observant Jews' communications. And it is precisely in this context that the digital practices, discourses, and media environments of these communities develop.

The extremely popular Hjarvard theory is constructed differently. It concerns the mediatization of religion as the historical process of its progressive secularization. As a result of this process, the media, like certain autonomous social institutions, assume many of the functions of religion (Hjarvard 2008, 10). Hjarvard's formulations have formed the basis for several projects on the mediatization of religions in Scandinavian countries. A significant contribution of these projects, among others, was the conceptual revision of the institutional theory of the mediatization of religion (see, for example, Lied 2012). The well-known Swedish sociologist of religion Mia Lövheim has openly criticized this revision. She holds that this approach does not give access to the individual digital practices of religious actors and the religious media they create. In her view, one must consider the mediatization of religion as a two-way process in which religion is formatted by the logic of various media, but also itself transforms these media to construct its own meanings. According to Lövheim, the approach that allows one to look at the mediatization of religion in this way is Andreas Hepp's version of the social-constructivist approach (Lövheim 2014, 565).

The starting point of Hepp's constructions is the sum of the tenets of the social-constructivist approach. Here, mediatization is understood as a historically and culturally determined meta-process of societal change, occurring in all spheres of social life, including reli-

gion. This process transpires in three waves — mechanization, electrification, and digitization. During the digitization wave, mediatization reaches such a depth of penetration into the sociocultural environment that an unprecedented interweaving of actors, media technologies, and social practices takes place. In other words, social practices never previously related to media become media practices (Hepp 2020, 5–6, 11, 85).

In grappling with the methodology of studying the "deep mediatization" stage of society, Hepp proposes the concept of communicative figurations (Hepp 2020, 103–5). According to Hepp, communicative figurations are the "patterns of processes of communicative interweaving that exist" due to various media and have distinct "'thematic framing' that orients communicative action"; in and through communicative figurations, people construct sociocultural worlds that are symbolically significant to them (Hepp 2014, 88). Each such figuration has four "features": forms of communication, media ensembles, a constellation of actors, and a thematic framing (Hepp 2014, 89–90). With the term "forms of communication" Hepp signifies "'communicative actions' or 'practices', which develop into more complex patterns (patterns of communicative networking or discourses, for example)" (Hepp 2014, 89). Media ensembles form an environment through which the communicative figuration of a particular social sphere (religious, political, economic, etc.) is realized. He emphasizes that deep mediatization is characterized by multiple media, or a diverse media environment. Hepp interprets media ensembles as subsets of a media environment that are employed by a collective or an organization (Hepp 2020, 89–90). A constellation of actors is a network of interconnected individuals who communicate with each other and can be formed by individual actors, collectives, or organizations. Each figuration has only one constellation of actors that perceive themselves as part of it. The thematic framing provides a reference point for the meaningful interaction of the actors and also serves as the meaning of the figuration (Hepp and Hasebrink 2014, 260–62).

Hepp developed an algorithm for the empirical study of communicative figurations in collaboration with Uwe Hasebrink (Hasebrink and Hepp 2016). Among the numerous media introduced by the wave of deep mediatization, they propose to distinguish between those that mediate the practices of an individual and those that see frequent use in the media practices of the social sphere. Thus, it makes sense to begin an investigation by identifying individual media repertoires, which can be remarkably diverse in their composition. The individu-

al is included in the figuration of different social spheres through different media. Individual media repertoires discovered through interviews allow the researcher to take the next step — to conduct surveys concerning the subjective meanings that an individual attaches to the use of specific media. This will necessarily bring the sociologist to the level of a figuration, inasmuch as subjective meanings are constructed in the communicative practices of a constellation of actors. Hepp and Hasebrink propose conducting the study of the figuration's media ensemble through interviews about the purposes of using specific media in the practices of the figuration on topics relevant to the figuration (Hasebrink and Hepp 2016, 7–15).

The formulation of Hepp and Hasebrink seems to me very productive in two respects. It contains not only an algorithm for studying a figuration, but also a methodology for determining its boundaries. In an empirical study, the boundaries of a communicative figuration can be narrowed to the scale of a group or digital collective or expanded to the scale of the media practices of a social field or system (see Hepp and Hasebrink 2018, 23–4). In the context of my study of Orthodox diaspora communities, the opportunity to enter the field through the study of individual media repertoires permits the identification of those media practices that involve individuals in the communicative networks and discourses of the figuration of Russian-speaking Orthodox Jews. These networks and discourses are not tightly bound to the communications and boundaries of the local community; rather they take shape through the media practices of members of Orthodox communities in various countries, in which enclaves of the Jewish diaspora exist.

Subject boundaries, research stages, methods

The study of the media practices of Russian-speaking Orthodox Jews was a continuation of my research on the Lithuanian, Chabad, and Hasidic communities of St. Petersburg, Minsk, and Kyiv, conducted in the years 2015–2018 (see, for example, Ostrovskaya 2016; Ostrovskaya 2017). My initial interest focused on the religious identity and everyday practices of post-Soviet Orthodox Jews. As the collection of biographical interviews progressed,[5] it became increasingly clear that the vast majority of respondents came from Jewish families who did not keep the commandments and were unfamiliar with the Jewish (*evre-*

5. For a detailed consideration of the use of biographical narrative and different types of samples from the environment of observant Jews, see Ostrovskaya 2016a.

iskii)/Judaic (*iudeiskii*) way of life. The revival of Jewish life initiated in the 1990s soon revealed that the present generation had lost connection with previous patterns of reproducing tradition and community life. The decision to become observant has always led respondents to the need to learn how to be observant. It was in interviews with Orthodox Jews that I first became familiar with the concept of the "minimum of observance." Most respondents stated that the model of observance may vary in different communities, but that there is a minimum set of doctrines and practices that are mandatory. Among these are dietary and behavioral restrictions (*kashrut*), the commandments of the Sabbath (*Shabbat*), the regulations for Jewish holidays, circumcision (*bris*) and thrice-daily prayer in the synagogue for men, a Jewish wedding (*chuppah*), a Jewish home, the rules of family purity, the prescriptions of modesty for women, and the visit to the *mikvah* (ritual bath) for married women. The minimum of observance is the primary object of study and practical assimilation at the stage of returning to tradition.[6] Even for the observant with fifteen to twenty years of experience, however, the halakhic aspects of the minimum of observance remain the object of the most intense interest.

During study of the daily reproduction of the "minimum of religious practices" in post-Soviet Orthodox communities, I encountered the specific involvement of modern media in the communications of the observant. For example, the messaging app WhatsApp was regularly mentioned in connection with an account of men's and women's closed chatrooms, to which only members of a particular community have access. Male respondents from Lithuanian and Chabad communities used WhatsApp to organize, discuss, and implement Torah and Talmud study sessions. Women's chats on WhatsApp covered procuring kosher foods, the donation of clothing and other items, meetings of women's clubs at synagogues, the problems of a Jewish daycare or school in the community, and the like.

In interviews women respondents from the Lithuanian and Chabad branches invariably mentioned Facebook and Instagram. Explaining to me the regulations of female modesty, the respondents showed a wig, a *kisui rosh* (head covering), which is used in everyday life. They also stressed the difficulty of finding kosher head coverings and proper clothing in regular stores. They acquired these obligatory items of women's observance through Instagram and WhatsApp. To my ques-

6. For more detail on the minimum of religious practices in the daily life of Orthodox Jewish communities, see Ostrovskaya 2018, 238–39.

tions seeking to clarify how to learn about the rules and "kosher-ness" of items, the respondents recounted discussions in women's groups and blogs on social networks. Later, at their own initiative they included me in closed women's groups on Facebook. This allowed me to observe the groups over a three-year span, revealing communicative interweaving, practices, media, and actors from different countries and Orthodox communities.

In 2019, following the Hepp and Hasebrink algorithm, I conducted a targeted study of individual media repertoires and their communicative meanings. At this stage, I completed forty online interviews with members of the Lithuanian, Hasidic, and Chabad communities of St. Petersburg, Minsk, and Kyiv. The sample included those involved in Orthodox community life in these cities and those with authority in their milieu due to the strictness of their observance of the commandments or their status in their community. I conducted interviews via Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp and asked respondents questions regarding their use of the Internet and new media. At this stage of the study, recurring responses were recorded about media mediating communications in communities and diaspora networks, religious media, and the names of popular groups and blogs on social networks. I supplemented the study of the pragmatics of media use with expert interviews with community site administrators, which addressed the issues of the target audience of sites and social network pages and their content and relevance to the implementation of the everyday practices of observance.

"Jewish blogs about Judaism" on Facebook and Instagram were the principal discovery at this stage.[7] The sample for analysis included those named in all interviews without exception. Thematic hyperlinks to these blogs in women's closed groups served as a separate criterion. I conducted an expert interview with each of the bloggers about their attitudes toward the Internet and new media, the practices of digital Judaism, the target audience, and the topics of the blog. Textual analysis of posts from women's groups and rabbinic blogs supplemented this part of the study.[8] The key units of analysis were the topics cov-

7. Upon initial acquaintance with the information in these accounts, I noticed that the descriptive "bio" had the words "blogger" or "personal blog." In the text of the article, I call them "bloggers."

8. The method of textual analysis has proven itself in the research on digital religious practices. Textual analysis involves the interpretation as text of all online communicative content of a blog or group (for example, images, icons, videos, audio, movies, music, and so forth). In addition, it makes possible the exploration of the thematic, visual, and rhetorical content of a blog or group. For a detailed discussion of the specifics of

ered by posts in the groups and blogs for the period 2016–2019, the main media practices, and hyperlinks.

Publication of the research results in the form of an article involves attention to the ethical element. It should be noted that all respondents, without exception, knew that I was conducting a sociological study with the prospect of writing and publishing a text. I obtained the bloggers' permission to include their names in the text and transcripts of quotations from their interviews were agreed upon.

The media repertoires and media ensembles of Russian-speaking Orthodox Jews

An online survey and expert interviews conducted in 2019 revealed the ranking of all media according to the degree of popularity or lack thereof in the daily observance of tradition. The individual media repertoires of the observant are extremely diverse. Respondents gave examples of sites for ordering goods, foodstuffs, clothing, passenger and airline tickets, books, and more. They noted that they have user accounts on various social networks and use mobile applications and software for correspondence and online conferences with family members and friends from their community, as well as with relatives living abroad. Answers to questions about the frequency and purpose of using specific media, however, indicated that mainly WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram were popular in matters of observance.

All respondents without exception named specialized Jewish sites created by Israeli and American Orthodox yeshivas. Respondents of the Chabad persuasion included chabad.org, ru.chabad.org,[9] and jeps.ru in a list of popular sites. Respondents from the Lithuanian branch named the sites toldot.ru,[10] istok.ru, evrey.com, and beerot.ru. These

employing the "textual analysis" method in the sociological examination of online religious communications, see Tsuria et al. 2017.

9. The works of the Israeli sociologist Oren Golan contain an analysis of the creation and developmental dynamics of the site chabad.org, which was launched in 1993 with the blessing of the seventh Lubavitcher Rebbe. Currently, chabad.org is the largest Jewish religious digital resource, providing a digital library, online Torah lessons, a calendar, blogs, "Jewish television," and more. For more information, see Golan 2013.

10. The digital resources of Lithuanian Russian-speaking Jewry have not been subjected to scientific study. According to the self-description on the site toldot.ru, it was established in 2002 for the broad media promotion of the activities of a large Israeli yeshiva of the Lithuanian branch, Toldos Yeshurun. This organization was founded in Israel in 2000 by the most famous Russian-speaking rabbi of the Lithuanian tradition, Yitzchak Zilber. The main goal of its activities is the return of secular Jews from the former USSR to

sites were characterized as intended primarily for "beginners on their way to Jewish life" and as reference tools for more experienced observant Jews. From interview to interview, respondents stressed that they use primarily the digital libraries of these sites and read selectively the opinions of well-known rabbis on certain aspects of observance or articles on the practices of the Jewish calendar.

In expert interviews, administrators of community sites gave the same list of sites and emphasized that "discussions and debates were brought onto social networks." To quote a representative of the PR department of the Chabad St. Petersburg Jewish Community at the Grand Choral Synagogue:

> Before, our community site was more interactive in terms of comments. Now all this is done on social networks. We have a communications committee — people can address questions to community leaders, but basically for certain questions we have established communication channels; people know where to raise their questions: this is mainly the social networks Facebook and VK [VKontakte], [and] also Instagram.

The opinion expressed in the above quotation about conducting discussions on social networks coincides completely with the responses from the online survey. Respondents from different cities emphasized that the discussion of day-to-day observance practices takes place mainly on Facebook and Instagram. One should note that in the replies of female respondents, the names of closed women's groups and the accounts of rabbi bloggers on Facebook predominated. The replies of male respondents identified the names and public pages of rabbi bloggers on both Facebook and Instagram.

The women's section of communications on observance

The media practices of women's groups occur primarily on Facebook. During the years 2015–2016, former female respondents took the initiative to include me in three Facebook groups: "The World of the Jewish Mother," "Shop Shok," and "Kosher Recipes." Each of them is a closed women's group for Orthodox Jewish women belonging to local communities of the Lithuanian, Chabad, and Hasidic movements in

the tradition of observance. For further details, see https://toldot.ru/general/toldotyeshurun/.

different countries. One of the first tasks of the online analysis of these groups was to establish the thematic framing of their communications.

The creator-administrator of the "Shop Shok" group set its thematic frame in the "information" section. The main topic of all the discussions of the group consists of the possibilities and ways of combining the trends of modern fashion in clothing, cosmetics, and cosmetology with the requirements of kosher modesty (*tzniut* or *tznius*) for women. The communications of participants in the "The World of the Jewish Mother" group initially focused on interpreting the application of the Jewish tradition of motherhood and child rearing to solving the problems and difficulties of nursing women, the halakhic component of questions about childhood and adolescence, and marital relations. In both groups, participants could post, upload their photos, videos, and announcements, express opinions, and suggest new topics. The groups' administrators specified no restrictions.

A strict ban by the administrator of the "Kosher Recipes" group on posting on topics irrelevant to the discussion of kosher food and cuisine has regulated the group's communications since its creation in 2014. As a result, the group has not undergone any changes during the five years of its existence. All communications concerned the topics of the kosher status of particular food items, the kosher table, and recipes for dishes for Shabbat and the Jewish holidays. The main media practices included posts with questions about cooking methods, stories about recipes, and videos with procedures for preparing the baked goods and dishes of both everyday and holiday cuisine.

One can determine the constellation of actors in the female branch of the Russophone Orthodox Jewish figuration through the results of interviews with group administrators and through analysis of membership composition, posts, and comments in each of the groups. Observant Jewish women from Russian Chabad communities created some of the first groups. Selective sampling of participants' personal data showed that their geographic location is quite diverse.[11] The groups regularly featured posts and comments from participants living in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, the United States, Israel, and Western Europe.

11. Only a selective sampling was possible, since in some groups the number of participants from different countries amounts to thousands. As of December 2019, the group "Kosher Recipes" brought together 3,836 participants, Shop Shok — 2,342, "The World of the Jewish Mother" — 2,362, "A Fashionable View of Modesty" — 950, and "Stylish Spirituality" — 1,029.

Textual analysis of the groups has shown that over the course of four years, their media practices diversified significantly, the thematic frame blurred, and the composition of their administrative cohorts and active membership changed. Thus, the communications of the group "The World of the Jewish Mother," created by three Chabad women in 2013, amounted at first mainly to infrequent posted announcements and questions about children's films, books, clothing, and the like. In the period 2016–2019, its administrators changed, and the thematic frame expanded to include discussion of the halakhic component of marital relations, the kosher status of cosmetics on certain days of the Jewish calendar, questions about the kosher composition of dishes, approved and disapproved cosmetic procedures, fashion trends and purchased outfits, and the political agenda of everyday Israeli life. The repertoire of media practices also varied — an increasing number of posts appeared retelling the stories from lessons by *rabanits* [*rabanit* or *rabbanit*, the female relative of a rabbi, sometimes also an instructor herself; more rarely, an ordained female rabbi — Translator] posted on YouTube channels.

The "Shop Shok" group led in the years 2015–2016 in terms of the number of subscribers and the intensity of discussions in the comments. As its creators and participants explained to me, at the start everyone wanted to share their "new outfits, manicures, hairstyle, makeup, [and] opinions about beauty products," to ask questions and receive advice in this area. This topic seemed new, attractive, and brought together a digital collective of Russian-speaking Orthodox Jewish women from different countries. In the discussions, the members cited the opinions of Chabad and Lithuanian rabbis on the use of cosmetics, options for head coverings, and so on. Gradually, however, the discussions dwindled, displaced by photos of a new dress, a new manicure, and makeup. In the group, conflicts and disagreements among the participants about the types of clothing that were permissible or unacceptable became more frequent. Subsequently, communications began to appear that strayed from the topics of the group. Participants from different countries posted announcements about chats they created in WhatsApp with the goal of selling or buying wigs and *kisui rosh*, advertising excursions in Israel, and finding partners for shopping together in a particular city in Israel.

In 2016, some of the active members left the group "Shop Shok" when the main "St. Petersburg it-girl"[12] of the Chabad community created a new group, "A Fashionable View of Modesty." The group brought together Orthodox Jewish women professionally engaged in the creation and distribution of the obligatory trappings of female modesty. The group's communications centered around advertisements of the sale of kosher head coverings (wigs, turbans, men's kippahs), matchmaking (*shidukh* or *shidekh*) for unmarried men, kosher confectionery products made to order, and so on. The group's photo album presented a portfolio of Russian-speaking kosher fashion designers, owners of kosher clothing salons, and kosher cafes and showrooms in cities of various post-Soviet countries.

In 2019, most of the participants known to me personally or by correspondence left the groups "Shop Shok" and "A Fashionable View of Modesty." In interviews, they noted that the topic of combining tzniut and contemporary fashion still interested them, but they stopped discussing it in these groups. A Hasidic respondent commented on her departure from the group as follows: "Earlier, I was interested in almost all the posts, but now shoes combined with dresses, outfits of various peoples, works of art without comments. [You] can also see this spam in the feed even without this group." Wanting to participate in discussions about observance, they joined the newly established closed group "Stylish Spirituality." Unlike its predecessors, the group was formed by an Orthodox Jewish woman from the Lithuanian branch. Observant Russian-speaking Jewish women from different countries and branches joined the group. At first, the group's main media practice was the discussion of topics of women's tzniut with insights from religious experts. Posts on matters of women's modesty were accompanied by hyperlinks to religious sites and online broadcasts of talks by well-known Lithuanian female mentors (*rabanits*). Subsequently, however, the range of topics expanded with discussion of the weekly chapter of the Torah for women, kosher food and clothing, Jewish holidays, and so forth.

Hyperlinks in the groups held special interest, with the prospect of establishing a media ensemble of the figuration of Russophone Orthodox Jews. Links appeared only after the thematic profile of each group

12. "The main St. Petersburg it-girl" is the designation I took from interviews with observant-fashionistas in St. Petersburg. By this title, they mean a young woman from the core of the Chabad community at the Choral Synagogue whose style is accepted as a reference point in matters of kosher fashion.

was clearly drawn. The most frequent links included links to the specialized sites toldot.ru and ru.chabad.org and to rabbis' personal blogs. For example, in the group "The World of the Jewish Mother" in the years 2018–2019, hyperlinks appeared to closed chatrooms in WhatsApp. Participants from the Lithuanian movement regularly posted hyperlinks to online talks, articles, and video lessons by Chava Kuperman, a well-known ultra-Orthodox rabanit.[13] The topics of these links ranged from online Torah lessons for women conducted in secret WhatsApp chatrooms, to articles on various aspects of women's observance on the site toldot.ru, to explanations of cooking recipes on Jewish YouTube channels. According to my observations, the links to the audio recordings of Chava Kuperman and her webinars received by the group in a secret chatroom were broadcast further using WhatsApp to many in the Chabad, Lithuanian, and Hasidic communities.

An analysis of the posts in women's closed groups has shown that heated discussions were usually accompanied by hyperlinks to texts and statements in men's rabbinical blogs on Facebook. These links appeared in connection with discussion of the compatibility of new products of modern fashion and cosmetology with the requirements of female modesty, intimate relations between spouses, and life before and after returning to tradition. I will give an example from a discussion in the group "A Fashionable View of Modesty" on the question of the permissibility of eyelash extensions from a halakhic perspective:

> Uri Superfin also wrote that it is possible. Our magnetic lashes really aroused the rabbinic minds))) But I have long been tormented by a question about Rav Volokhov. Why is he perceived by many almost as a *posek* [halakhic decisor]? I am sometimes shocked by what issues people resolve with him on the Internet without reference to the tradition of their community. I never even heard of him except on FB [Facebook]. Enlighten me, [someone] who knows.

This quotation includes the names of two frequently cited Lithuanian rabbis, Uri Superfin and Mikhael Volokhov, hyperlinks to whose blogs

13. In the Russian-speaking observant environment, Chava Kuperman is the most well-known rabanit of the ultra-Orthodox Lithuanian movement. She is the daughter of Rav Yitzchak Zilber, the founder of the Russian-speaking ultra-Orthodox community and the Toldos Yeshurun organization. Chava Kuperman's brother, Rav Ben Tzion Zilber, is the spiritual director of the site toldot.ru. Her lectures, talks, and articles are posted on most Russian-language Lithuanian sites for the observant and on Jewish channels of the YouTube platform. For more information concerning her, see https://toldot.ru/HavaKuperman.html.

appeared regularly in the media practices of women's groups. A detailed analysis of the content of blog texts to which the groups' participants refer allows one to draw conclusions about the thematic and semantic connection between the communications of women's groups and men's rabbinical blogs.

Rabbinical blogs: digital practices of Judaism

In all the interviews without exception respondents named Uri Superfin, Yisrael Paripsky, Aba Dovid Abbo, Avigdor Nosikov, and Mikhael Volokhov's group as the authors of the most popular blogs on observance. Each of them has experience working in post-Soviet Orthodox communities and has their own vision of the aspects of rabbinic daily practice that should be strengthened and developed through online communication. In speaking of the media environment of Russophone Jews, they assessed it as extremely meager in comparison with Hebrew-language digital resources. Specialized Russian-language media are limited to a small number of sites of Israeli and American Russian-speaking Orthodox communities and several rabbinic sites. Common to all the interviews was the characterization of the sites as "an educational resource for beginners on their way to Jewish life." Rabbi bloggers stressed that they themselves do not use any of them, preferring online resources in Hebrew. They invite their students in Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian communities to subscribe to their blogs on social networks and provide links to their online Torah lessons. When asked about the purpose of creating a personal blog, the rabbis spoke of their desire to contribute to the Jewish education of Russian-speaking observant individuals. Each interviewee emphasized that Facebook and Instagram are the most popular media for digital interactive discussions of Judaism. They considered the advantage of both platforms to be the ability to reach a wide audience, heterogeneous in its age, gender, geographic location, citizenship, and other characteristics. In addition, both allowed hyperlinks to other Jewish blogs about observance and to other useful resources.

As mentioned above, I discovered personal rabbinic blogs, popular among Orthodox Jews, through targeted interviews about the media repertoires of the observant. Because of this, one of my first steps was a content analysis of the thematic distribution of posts in each of the blogs for the period 2016–2019. The posts were distributed quantitatively according to the following topics: Torah lessons and Talmud

study, everyday life-cycle practices (Shabbat, minyan [quorum for communal worship], prayer, bris, bat/bar mitzvah, chuppah, mikvah, tzniut, and so forth), Jewish holidays, offline community and synagogue, and personal examples of daily observance. The analysis indicated that the communications developed in the blogs mainly concerned halakhic commentaries and reflections on the "minimum of religious practices." The main differences between the blogs under consideration lay in the following areas: the leading topic, the target audience, the choice of one of the platforms as the main platform, and the media image and style of communication with the blog's digital public.

The closed group "A Question for the Rabbi" was created in 2016 by Mikhael Volokhov, the rabbi of the Moscow yeshiva "Torat Chaim" of the Lithuanian movement.[14] Over a period of three years, communications in the group followed the same "questions-and-answers" model on observance topics. Participants posted questions about the conformity with the laws of halakha of a particular act, decision, choice of clothing, preparation of a dish, kosher status of a product, and so on. Rabbi Volokhov's answer was published in the comments to all question posts, accompanied by a discussion or additional comments from those also interested in the topic. A selective sampling of the accounts of active participants indicated that men and women from Russian-speaking communities of various strands of Orthodox Judaism addressed their questions to the group. Hyperlinks to the Lithuanian website toldot.ru and the Russian-language branch of the Chabad site, ru.chabad.org, regularly appeared in the group. Rabbi Volokhov recommended turning to the website of an ultra-Orthodox Lithuanian yeshiva in Israel in all cases when confirmation of his opinion was required or when questions were received concerning kashrut. Hyperlinks to the Chabad site ru.chabad.org were few and appeared in connection with questions about the presence or absence of the digital practice of selling leaven (*hametz* or *chametz*) before Passover.[15]

14. The ultra-Orthodox Russian-language yeshiva "Torat Chaim" in the Moscow suburbs was founded in 1989 with the support of the Israeli ultra-Orthodox organization Toldos Yeshurun. For more information, see Zhurnal Mir Tory, 2010.

15. On the site ru.chabad.org in the section "The practice of Judaism. Jewish holidays-Passover-Chametz," there is an online form that, when completed in advance, makes it possible through the Internet to accomplish the religious practice of removing all leavened products from the home before the celebration of Passover. See https://ru.chabad.org/holidays/passover/sell_chometz_cdo/fbclid/.

Rabbi Uri Superfin was also mentioned in many interviews as a blogging pioneer.[16] For a long time, from 2013 to 2018, he sought a key theme for his digital narrative. Superfin tried various topics — Jewish holidays, the weekly Torah chapter, sketches of daily life in an ultra-Orthodox Israeli town, and so forth. In an interview, Uri Superfin described his motives for creating the blog as follows:

> In 2006, I stopped going to Kyiv to teach, and then I came to LiveJournal. That's where I started, but now it's empty and quiet there. Everyone went to Facebook because there is a reaction and everything is mobile. Facebook gives me everything I need — both immediate feedback and an audience. [. . .] How do I choose topics? There's always a bit of reflection. Naturally, when certain holidays are approaching, I try to reflect on this as a rabbi. This suggests some filler. As a rule, these are little-known things; I do not see the value of writing banalities. I write what is unknown and get a reaction to this from the outside. This is my know-how in the Russian-speaking environment — to give the kinds of things that a person would never know without teaching the Torah professionally.

Monitoring the blog over time showed that Rabbi Uri gradually filled the blog's communications with various media. For example, in the period 2013–2016, he posted audio recordings of lessons on various halakhic topics and Jewish holidays. During the years 2017–2018, he introduced hyperlinks to his articles on weekly Torah chapters published on the site jeps.ru of the St. Petersburg Chabad community at the Grand Choral Synagogue. In 2019, he gave discussions and commentaries on the daily page of the Talmud and consideration of the weekly chapter of the Torah the thematic framing of interaction. The script for these communications developed gradually through the blogger's interaction with his digital collective. In the media practice of the blog, it looked like this: Rabbi Uri would offer a little-known quotation or excerpt from the texts of the Talmud and his detailed commentary, and the blog's digital collective would discuss Rabbi Uri's opinion in the comments. Rabbis of the Chabad and Lithuanian movements, working in Russian, Ukrainian, and Israeli communities, appeared regularly as active participants in these discussions. Most of my former male and female respondents from

16. Rabbi Uri Superfin belongs to the ultra-Orthodox Lithuanian branch of Judaism, lives in Israel, and has experience teaching the tradition in Russian and Ukrainian communities of observant Jews. He also contributes regularly to the Russian-language digital media (journals and websites) of Lithuanian post-Soviet communities.

Chabad, Lithuanian, and Hasidic communities of Russophone Judaism in post-Soviet countries subscribed to the blog and were its active participants.

Among his own media innovations is "Moishfilm" — a visual commentary on the halakhic laws, consisting of a frame selected from popular Soviet comedy films, with a short humorous, but also instructive, caption on the image itself. Here is how he himself explained the pragmatics of this media:

> Moishe — a standard, recognized Jewish name — plus Mosfilm. Soviet films with Jewish seasoning. I wanted to use ready-made images that are well known to the adult viewer, that have *a priori* positive emotions connected with them. And to use these images to popularize the Jewish law, halakha. The rest was a matter of technique: since the Jewish law covers all areas of life without exception, all I had to do was take another image, a frame from an old Soviet film, and think a little about what law is applicable to it. Well, and to make it amusing, is a must.

"Moishfilm" is particularly popular with the female portion of the digital collective of Superfin's blog. In addition, the ladies were actively involved in discussions of posts on the interpretation of aspects of women's observance.

Rabbi Yisrael Paripsky was one of the first to introduce online Torah lessons in the media environment of observant Russian-speaking Jews on Facebook.[17] He initiated discussions of "uncomfortable topics" that were taboo in offline communications of Russophone post-Soviet Jewish communities. These included the following: the competition between Chabad and Lithuanian communities, the intimate side of married life, and the attitude to homosexuality and drugs from the perspective of the Torah. In his expert interview, he stressed that he created two different blogs in order to reach audiences that varied in age, status, and preparedness:

> I have been teaching for fifteen years and to keep in touch with my students, I registered on VK and on FB [Facebook]. From [the years] 2012–2013, I started to have a blog. Usually, in the first lesson, I [would] ask everyone to take out their smartphones and subscribe to all my social

17. Rabbi Yisrael Paripsky belongs to the Lithuanian branch of Judaism. For fifteen years, he worked as a rabbi in the Lithuanian Jewish communities of Moscow, Odessa, and Mogilev.

> networks, and only then [would] I start the lesson. We are in the flow, I need to be in touch with them. So, they [would] listen to the lesson, leave, and that was it. This way I'm there on their Instagram. On Instagram, I have two pages — "Channel 613," a title based on the number of Torah commandments, and a personal [page]. There are things I post on Instagram, there are things [I post] on Facebook. When I worked in Moscow, I taught in various places where they recorded my Torah lessons, and I began to post them with a hashtag on Facebook. I track audience preferences. On Facebook, there are more controversial things, managers and older people are on there, angry after work, they want to criticize someone. The audience on Instagram is younger, likes someone positive. On Channel 613, I did an analysis — there [the audience] is mostly men from twenty-five to thirty-five years old.

The media practices of Paripsky's blogs differed from each other in their thematic frame. The blog on Facebook was aimed at digitizing the religious communications of Russian-speaking Orthodox Jews — Torah lessons, online broadcasts of events in community life, and online explanations of the practices of Jewish holidays. Paripsky directed the second blog, "Channel 613" on Instagram, toward the formation of a unified media environment for Russian-language rabbinical blogs on observance. Along with posts on topics of daily observance, it contained regular extensive quotations (repostings) from the blogs of current rabbis of the Lithuanian and Chabad branches of Russophone Judaism. In addition, Paripsky actively used the hashtags popular with bloggers of various strands of Judaism (*tefillin* [phylacteries], Torah, Judaism, Shabbat, Jews, and others). The hashtag "online synagogue," which he introduced, formed a lively international public page, on which posts in Spanish, Hebrew, and English appeared.

Chabad respondents named Aba Dovid Abbo's blog — "rabbiaba" — in all their interviews without exception.[18] In interviews, bloggers of the Lithuanian movement also described him as enjoying great popularity with Jewish youth of various branches of Orthodox Judaism. Unlike other bloggers, Aba Dovid arranged his narrative in the form of an autobiographical photo diary. Over the course of nine years of

18. Aba Dovid created his blog @rabbiaba in 2011, when he came from Israel to Moscow to study at the Chabad yeshiva "Machon Ran" at the synagogue on Bolshaya Bronnaya Street. [Strictly transliterated according to the modified Library of Congress system (without diacritics), the name of this street reads "Bolshaia Bronnaia." The "-aya" spelling is often encountered in English references to this street, however, and therefore appears here — Translator.]

blogging, he created a digital version of the biographeme of a traditional Chabad rabbi. The photo narrative reflected the religious transformation of a young man, a student of the Moscow Chabad yeshiva, into a mature teacher, the manager of a large project for Jewish teenagers, and the father of a family. The media image chosen by Aba Dovid is that of a charismatic young leader of Russian-speaking Jewish youth embarking on the path of observance. In an interview, he commented on the choice of this particular genre of digital storytelling as follows:

> For me, Instagram is the main platform because on it [people view] mainly visual content, not texts. I believe that it is possible to convey more of value there with a single photo than with a long article . . . I see an incredible resource in social media, everything that I spend time on in my work, what I invest in is the educational process with teenagers. And where else can I build an educational process with them, if not on the Internet? And in fact: who blogs on Instagram? Teenagers!

The specific feature of this blog's communications was the combination of photo narratives with hashtags popular in the media environment of Chabad accounts on observance. On Instagram, these hashtags were used to refer to public pages with digital Torah lessons, talks by Chabad rabbis, and accounts of observant Jews professionally engaged in the production of various kinds of kosher products (jewelry, food, and items of men's and women's kosher fashion).

Avigdor Nosikov's blog is a digital narrative about the daily life of a Russian Orthodox rabbi.[19] In an interview, he stressed that by his personal example, he would like to "demonstrate to young people that [the] observance of Jewish tradition [need] not be a burden, but an exciting way of life." Rabbi Avigdor considered it important to clarify the frame and target audience of his digital narrative:

> I myself created a blog, because it is an opportunity to communicate and give knowledge, information to a large audience, which, well, you cannot bring together in any class [or] synagogue. The main blog is Instagram because it is the most streaming and widely used. My task is

19. Avigdor Nosikov registered an account on Instagram in 2016 under the name @ voronezhrabbi. In that year he moved from Israel to Voronezh, where he received the position of chief rabbi and was entrusted with the Hasidic community there. In connection with this, Rabbi Avigdor considered it necessary "to create the only Russian-language blog by a rabbi on Instagram."

> to arouse interest, sympathy with Jewish values in both Jews and non-Jews who are simply interested. I intentionally hired a person who did not do content but dealt with attracting an audience. The content is always mine. I myself run the blog, the publication takes half an hour [. . .] I set myself the challenge of running this blog primarily not as a rabbi, but as a Jew observing the commandments of the Torah from a Russian non-metropolitan city, who in doing so does not feel disadvantaged and persecuted.

The blog posts included short texts and personal photos. Thematically, Rabbi Avigdor focused his narrative on discussing various aspects of the "minimum of religious practices." Analysis of the blog posts indicated that the main topics were events in community life (chuppah, bar mitzvah, creation of a mikvah, visits of famous rabbis, shabbatons, minyan), Jewish holidays, the weekly chapter of the Torah, the lighting of Shabbat candles, kosher food production, trips to rabbinic conferences and travel, and Russian media interviews with the rabbi. Along with this, he used media practices popular in the youth media environment of Instagram — online video chats with subscribers on issues of everyday observance and flash mobs with prizes in the form of the items and trappings of male and female observance. A distinctive feature of this blog was the expansion of the thematic repertoire through communications about repatriation to Israel and treatment in Israeli clinics. In addition, unlike most rabbi bloggers, Avigdor Nosikov linked his narrative through hyperlinks to women's blogs about the Jewish way of life, repatriation to Israel, kosher fashion, and kosher products on Instagram.

Textual analysis of these blogs and groups over time from 2016 to 2019 has revealed that their authors were pioneers of a sort in introducing practices of digital Judaism, such as "questions and answers," online Torah lessons, online discussions of the daily Talmud page, and rabbinic digital narratives on the commandments and the day-to-day practices of the observant. These practices are widespread in the Hebrew-speaking milieu of Orthodox Judaism, but take place, as a rule, through a wide variety of new media — rabbinic websites, specialized Jewish sites for observance, webcasts, and so on.[20] The blogs considered in this study have made the practices of digital Judaism accessible to Russian-speaking Orthodox Jews in the media environment of

20. For an overview and analysis of the practices of digital Orthodox Judaism, see Katz 2012.

Facebook and Instagram. It is fundamentally important to note that the blogs contain reciprocal hyperlinks. Regular cross-citations and links ensure the circulation of digital stories in blogs on similar topics of male observance and rabbinic commentaries on halakhic matters.

Conclusion

Andreas Hepp's concept of communicative figurations has proven to be a very productive methodological framework permitting the identification of the communicative interweaving among actors involved in the life of Russian-speaking Orthodox Jewish communities in post-Soviet countries, as well as in Israel, the United States, and Western Europe. A communicative network of the figuration of Russian-speaking Orthodox Jews is emerging in the media practices of closed women's groups and rabbinic blogs on Facebook and Instagram. The thematic frame of the communications of the groups and blogs is the "minimum of religious practices." The media practices of the figuration of Russian-speaking Orthodox Judaism also replicate the gender segregation characteristic of offline community practices. The communications of women's closed groups on Facebook are aimed at constructing a frame for the everyday reproduction of the prescriptions for tzniut, family purity, the Jewish home, and so forth. The participants in these groups are observant Jewish women from communities in various countries and branches of Orthodox Judaism. The observation of women's groups in action has shown that over time they transformed either into digital collectives to discuss the topics of women's "minimum of religious practices," or into communities that bring together those who are professionally engaged in producing kosher products for women's observance and interested observant individuals.

Personal rabbinic blogs on Facebook and Instagram concerning observance have introduced into the communication repertoire the practices of digital Judaism, such as Torah lessons, the daily Talmud page, and digital narratives about the doctrinal foundations of Jewish holidays and life-cycle rituals. Each of the bloggers sought to create his own unique media niche in order to attract the target audience to his specific digital narrative. At the same time, one should also note the consolidation of the communicative practices of Russian-speaking rabbi-bloggers working in local communities of various movements in Orthodox Judaism. Hyperlinks, which circulate digital stories about observance in the media environment of Rus-

sian-speaking Orthodox Jews, serve as a necessary component of their communications.

Textual analysis of the media practices of the groups and blogs has revealed the communication links between them: thematic intersections, the circulation of digital stories, and reciprocal hyperlinks. Women's and men's communications about observance link actors of the various branches of Orthodox Judaism into a transnational constellation. The media ensemble of the figuration includes the social networks Facebook and Instagram. Hyperlinks in groups and blogs interweave the media practices of rabbis and rabanits from Israeli and American yeshivas on the YouTube platform and the specialized sites toldot.ru and ru.chabad.org into the communicative networks of the figuration of Russian-speaking Orthodox Jews.

References

Abrams, N. 2015. "Appropriation and Innovation: Facebook, Grassroots Jews and Offline Post-Denominational Judaism." In *Digital Judaism: Jewish Negotiations with Digital Media and Culture*, edited by H. A. Campbell, 40–56. New York: Routledge.

Arkin, N. O. 2009. Problemy integratsii khasidov KhABADa Moskvy v sovremennyi rossiiskii sotsium. Avtoreferat dissertatsii na soiskanie uchenoi stepeni kandidata istoricheskikh nauk [Problems of the integration of hasidim of Chabad of Moscow into modern Russian society. Abstract of dissertation for the degree of candidate of historical sciences]. Moscow: Moskovskii Gosudarstvennyi Universitet im. M. V. Lomonosova.

Barzilai-Nahon, K., and G. Barzilai. 2005. "Cultured Technology: The Internet and Religious Fundamentalism." *The Information Society* 21 (1): 25–40.

Campbell, H. A. 2010. "Considering the Religious-Social Shaping of Technology." In *When Religion Meets New Media*, 41–63. London: Routledge.

Campbell, H. A. 2010a. *When Religion Meets New Media*. London: Routledge.

Campbell, H. A., ed. 2013. *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*. London: Routledge.

Campbell, H. A., ed. 2015. *Digital Judaism: Jewish Negotiations with Digital Media and Culture*. New York: Routledge.

Campbell, H. A., and W. Bellar. 2015. "Sanctifying the Internet: Aish HaTorah's Use of the Internet for Digital Outreach." In *Digital Judaism: Jewish Negotiations with Digital Media and Culture*, edited by H. A. Campbell, 74–90. New York: Routledge.

Campbell, H. A., and G. Evolvi. 2020. "Contextualizing current digital religion research on emerging technologies." *Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies* 2 (1): 5–17.

Golan, O. 2013. "Charting frontiers of online religious communities: The case of Chabad Jews." In *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*, edited by H. A. Campbell, 155–63. London: Routledge.

Hasebrink, U., and A. Hepp. 2016. "How to research cross-media practices? Investigating media repertoires and media ensembles." Working Paper No. 15, Forschungsver-

bund "Kommunikative Figurationen" [Research Network "Communicative Figurations"], Centre for Media, Communication and Information Research (ZeMKI), University of Bremen and the Hans-Bredow-Institute for Media Research (HBI), University of Hamburg. http://www.kommunikative-figurationen.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Arbeitspapiere/CoFi_EWP_No-15_Hasebrink_Hepp.pdf.

Heckathorn, D. D. 2007. "Extensions of Respondent-Driven Sampling: Analyzing Continuous Variables and Controlling for Differential Recruitment." In *Sociological Methodology*, vol. 37, edited by Yu Xie, 151–207. Boston, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Hepp, A. 2014. "Communicative Figurations: Researching Cultures of Mediatization." In *Media Practice and Everyday Agency in Europe*, edited by L. Kramp et al., 83–99. Bremen: edition lumiere.

Hepp, A., and U. Hasebrink. 2014. "Human interaction and communicative figurations. The transformation of mediatized cultures and societies." In *Mediatization of Communication*. Handbooks of Communication Science, vol. 21, edited by K. Lundby, 249–72. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.

Hepp, A., and U. Hasebrink. 2018. "Researching Transforming Communications in Times of Deep Mediatization: A Figurational Approach." In *Communicative Figurations: Transforming Communications in Times of Deep Mediatization*, edited by A. Hepp, A. Breiter, and U. Hasebrink, 15–48. Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing AG, Palgrave Macmillan.

Hepp, A. 2020. *Deep Mediatization*. London: Routledge.

Hjarvard, S. 2008. "The mediatization of religion: A theory of the media as agents of religious change." *Northern Lights: Film and Media Studies Yearbook* 6 (1): 9–26.

Hjarvard, S. 2014. "Mediatization and cultural and social change: an institutional perspective." In *Mediatization of Communication*. Handbooks of Communication Science, vol. 21, edited by K. Lundby, 199–226. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.

Katz, Y. 2012. "Technology Use in the Religious Communities in Israel: Combining Traditional Society and Advanced Communications." *Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture* 1 (2): 1–30. https://brill.com/view/journals/rmdc/1/2/article-p1_2.xml.

Khanin, V. 2008. "Paradoksy identichnosti: sotsiokul'turnye perspektivy razvitiia sistemy evreiskogo obrazovaniia v stranakh byvshego SSSR" ["Paradoxes of identity: sociocultural perspectives in the development of a system of Jewish education in former countries of the USSR"]. In *Evrei v postsovetskikh stranakh: samosoznanie i obrazovanie* [*Post-Soviet Jewry: identity and education*], edited by A. D. Epshtein [Epstein], 57–82. Jerusalem: The Jewish Agency for Israel — Open University of Israel.

Lied, L. I. 2012. "Religious Change and Popular Culture. With a Nod to the Mediatization of Religion Debate." In *Mediatization and Religion: Nordic Perspectives*, edited by S. Hjarvard and M. Lövheim, 183–201. Göteburg: Nordicom.

Lövheim, M. 2014. "Mediatization and religion." In *Mediatization of Communication*. Handbooks of Communication Science, vol. 21, edited by K. Lundby, 547–70. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.

Ostrovskaya, E. 2016. "Religious Identity of Modern Orthodox and Hasidic Jewry in St. Petersburg." *Transcultural Studies*, 12 (1): 159–78.

Ostrovskaya, E. 2016a. "Religioznoe 'evreistvo': opyt biograficheskogo narrativa v zakrytoi gruppe" ["Religious 'Jewishness': the experience of biographical narrative in a closed group"]. *Sotsiologicheskie Issledovaniia* 2: 110–18.

Ostrovskaya, E. 2017. "Mnozhestvennye sovremennosti ortodoksal'nogo evreistva Sankt-Peterburga" ["Multiple Modernities of the Orthodox Saint-Petersburg Jewry"]. *Sotsiologicheskie Issledovaniia* 5: 93–102.

Ostrovskaya, E. 2018. "Transnatsional'naia religioznaia set' sobliudaiushchikh evreev" ["The transnational religious network of observant Jews"]. In *Sotsiologiia religii. Vvedenie* [*The sociology of religion. An introduction*], 231–58. St. Petersburg: Peterburgskoe Vostokovedenie.

Rashi, Ts. 2013. "The kosher cell phone in ultra-Orthodox society: A technological ghetto within the global village?" In *Digital Religion. Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*, edited by H. A. Campbell, 173–81. London: Routledge.

Rosenthal, M., and R. Ribak. 2015. "On Pomegranates and Etrogs: Internet Filters as Practices of Media Ambivalence among National Religious Jews in Israel." In *Digital Judaism: Jewish Negotiations with Digital Media and Culture*, edited by H. A. Campbell, 145–60. New York: Routledge.

Sapritsky, M. 2015. "Ot evreev k iudeiam: povorot k vere ili vozvrat k nei" ["From *Evrei* to *Iudei*: Turning or Returning to Faith?"]. *Gosudarstvo, religiia, tserkov' v Rossii i za rubezhom* 33 (3): 224–54.

Tsuria, R., A. Yadlin-Segal, A. Vitullo, and H. Campbell. 2017. "Approaches to digital methods in studies of digital religion." *The Communication Review* 20 (2): 73–97.

Volz, E., and D. D. Heckathorn. 2008. "Probability Based Estimation Theory for Respondent Driven Sampling." *Journal of Official Statistics* 24 (1): 79–97.

Zelenina, G. 2015. "Portret na stene i shproty na khlebe: moskovskie evrei mezhdu dvumia 'sektami'" ["A Portrait on the Wall and Sprat on the Bread: Moscow Jews between the Two 'Sects'"]. *Gosudarstvo, religiia, tserkov' v Rossii i za rubezhom* 33 (3): 121–69.

Zhurnal *Mir Tory* [Journal *the World of the Torah*]. 2010. "Eshiva 'Torat Khaim' — moskovskii brend v mire eshiv." *Iudaizm i evrei* ["Yeshiva 'Torat Chaim' — a Moscow brand in the world of yeshivas." *Judaism and the Jews*]. https://toldot.ru/articles/articles_11839.html.

Vladislav Razdyakonov

The Revolution of Spirits for the Spiritual Brotherhood: The Social Ideals of Russian Spiritualism

Translated by Isaac Stackhouse Wheeler

DOI: https://doi.org/10.22394/2311-3448-2021-8-1-70-89

Vladislav Razdyakonov — Russian State University for the Humanities; Russian Academy of National Economy and Public Administration (RANEPA) (Moscow, Russia). razdyakonov.vladislav@gmail.com

This article offers a reconstruction of the social ideals of the Russian spiritualists. The main sources include texts revealing spiritualists' ideas about the structure of the spiritual world, the structure and characteristics of spiritual circles, and literary works by spiritualists that reflected their social ideals. Although the social and political views of Russian spiritualists were mostly conservative, their ontological views contained elements of social radicalism. The author divides Russian spiritualists into two types — the rationalists and the traditionalists — depending on their attitude towards the Orthodox Church, Christian theology and their specific views of the spiritual world. All spiritualists viewed society critically, as gripped with a disease. Rationalist spiritualism was critical towards Christian dogma and practice, and although its supporters advocated the preservation of the social and political status quo, they hoped for both gradual social and political transformation and the acquisition of social ideals in the spiritual world. The traditionalists, despite their commitment to monarchy and the institution of the Church, expected a millenarian upheaval and thus challenged the social and political order. Overall, the spiritualists' social ideals are close to communitarian social projects based upon the idea of Christian brotherhood.

Keywords: spiritualism, history of religion, Russian Orthodoxy, millenarianism, brotherhood.

SPIRITUALISM, which asserted the existence of a spiritual authority that was simultaneously anthropological in nature, became one of the most significant currents for social change in the mid-nineteenth century United States. The voice of the "spirits" became the voice of a "nation," which expressed its demands through mediums, demands that often coincided with those of the era's reform movements (Braude 2001). At the same time, it must be acknowledged that B. Caroll, who demonstrated the ambivalence of spiritualism as a means of social legitimization, was right to conclude that the "spiritual world" could serve as a justification for conservative social views as well as reformist ones: "if they were 'radical spirits' articulating a 'middle-class radicalism' that challenged the conventions of the status quo in the name of liberty and envisioned an alternative social structure, they also displayed a profoundly conservative middle-class concern for order" (Caroll 1997, 5). The focus of this article is precisely that conservative trend in Russian spiritualism.

The social views of Russian spiritualists were conservative, if one determines a movement's level of conservativism by measuring their attitude towards social revolution and governmental change. Rejecting social revolution, the spiritualists proposed changing society through small deeds; in this sense, their views were close to those of Nikolai Nepliuev and Alexander Engelhardt (Gordeeva 2020, 89, 101). In the words of spiritualist Maria Petrovna Saburova:

> these days, hotheads see everyone as equal, and have lately (March 1st of this very year) made an attempt on the life of the Tsar, supposing that the death of a 'tyrant,' which is how they view every monarch, could instantly change everything for the common good; they do not understand that there is only one single correct way of being at peace — for everyone to honorably contribute his share of labor to the common structure (IRLI RO, f. 2, op. 1, d. 262, l. 289).

As this article will demonstrate, the social ideal of the spiritualists was one of a spiritual brotherhood, since a participant, under the guidance of the spirits, would, in the words of Nikolai Wagner, "engage more fervently in socially useful activities, since this serves to strengthen his will and his attachment to all members of society, which is where the 'humane' truly manifests itself" ("Rebus iz rebusov" 1881, 60).

The Russian spiritualists seem even more conservative if one considers their political beliefs. In all likelihood, there were proponents of myriad political views among their numbers, but, judging by the avail-

able evidence, it seems that all of them at least refrained from criticizing the monarchy. Some (S.V. Semyonov, F.B. Vinberg) (NIOR RGB, f. 368, k. 8, ed. 13, ll. 9 ob, 12) participated in the Black Hundreds movement, and the work of famous spiritualist Vera Ivanovna Kryzhanovskaia expressed concerns about internal and external threats to Orthodoxy and autocracy that were characteristic of the group: "while in the past one ruled over all, now all rule over everyone — nay, not even all, but only those who have managed by whatever means to grab power for themselves and, in their own interest, support this delusion in the consciousness of the people" (Kryzhanovskaia 1906, 20). Right-wing representatives of spiritualism, such as Elena Ivanovna Molokhovets, spoke of the need for conservative reforms in the government and the church in accordance with their spiritualist ideals, but all of their proposed innovations, such as removing references to living people from the liturgy or removing texts that people could not understand from the Orthodox catechism (while retaining Church Slavonic as the language of church services), were ultimately designed to strengthen the institution of the monarchy through administrative restructuring. As Molokhovets asserted "in our Orthodox world, monarchism, nationalism, and Orthodoxy constitute a single indivisible whole" (Molokhovets 1910, 1). Even spiritualists who publicly defended the principle of freedom of religion and largely supported the missionary work of Father Joann Wostorgow criticized his activities in the Union of the Russian People for mixing national and religious questions (Smelye mysli 1910, 465) and always publicly maintained their loyalty to the institution of the monarchy. They displayed commendations from Nicholas II in the pages of their journals and criticized the social upheavals of 1905-1907, "When a current of western culture, with its materialistic worldviews that reject and reproach everything, were directed into Russian patriarchal society by an artificial hand" (V. P. B. 1907, 138).

While the sociopolitical conservatism of the well-known Russian spiritualists is indubitable, Ilya Vinitsky's famous claim that "the Russian spirits were restrained, even conservative" (Vinitskii 2005), requires more nuanced discussion. My goal here is to offer a more sharply focused analysis of the religious positions held by the Russian spiritualists, some of which went against their declared sociopolitical loyalty, while others supported it. In my view, this social tension was created by two ideas, divine intervention and spiritual evolution (Aksakov 1887, 87-8; "Dukhovnyi darvinizm," 1890, 302), both of which held that the current social order was transitory. Social consolidation

was supported by the idea of a spiritual hierarchy, which, in my view, played a decisive role in the formation of the social ideals of the Russian spiritualists.

Spiritualism between tradition and rationalism

It is possible to discern two threads in spiritualist theology: the rationalist and the traditionalist (Razdyakonov 2019, 11). The primary difference between them lays in the question of reforming religious institutions; the rationalists were inclined to reject the Church as a social institution, while the traditionalists held that it would have to undergo a transformation, either a liberal one that permitted a diversity of views among the faithful or a fundamentalist one that asserted the principle of strict compliance with religious norms. The theological debate between those two threads reflected both the then-ongoing public discussion of reforming the Orthodox Church and its attitude toward the modernist movements of the period.

The "rationalists" took a critical stance towards Orthodox dogmas and religious practices and favored a universalist understanding of Christianity. One example of this attitude towards Christianity can be found in the spiritualist journal of Maria Petrovna Saburova, in which she cited the opinion of, among others, representatives of Biblical criticism and cast doubt on the dogma regarding the Trinity and the divinity of Christ. In her words: "I venture to suggest that there would be fewer nonbelievers if the Church had not established dogmas that run counter to science… I am convinced that many of Christ's words have been distorted… if we are meant to perfect ourselves, that means there can be no such thing as eternal damnation" (IRLI RO, f. 2, op. 1, d. 262, no. 1, ll. 427-8). A. N. Aksakov expressed equally critical views of Christian theology in his comments on the Russian spiritualists:

> Believing themselves faithful followers of Spiritualism… do not follow its teachings, which conflict with the dogmas of contemporary theology, that is, they do not take logical conclusions from accepted truths to their legitimate end; they stand on neutral ground between the orthodox teaching of their national church and the rationalism of Spiritualism (Aksakoff 1869, 457).

The persistence of this critical position is demonstrated by the fact that M. P. Saburova held to such views despite her communication (through the medium Sophia Bestuzheva) with spirits who told her

that Orthodox observances were indispensable: "despite the fact that you do not particularly hold with Orthodox observances, and despite the fact that much in your world has been perverted, the majority of people are still in need of form and cannot do without those rituals… we do not have them in our world, but when we praise the Creator, it is utterly incomparable" (IRLI RO, f. 2, op. 1, d. 262, no. 1, l. 62)! M. P. Saburova's letters to A. N. Aksakov were written in the same critical spirit: "do you approve of my decision to publish these tidings as well? I vacillated for a not inconsiderable time before coming to a decision on the matter. How unfortunate that we shall scarcely be able to publish what they have said regarding religion, that 'we do not have different denominations'" (IRLI RO, f. 2, op. 1, l. 2 ob.).

As the diary of M. P. Saburova indicates, other spiritualists, whom I referred to as "traditionalists" above, such as Barbara Ivanovna Pribytkova, defended Orthodox dogma and practices. The regular arguments between M. P. Saburova and B. I. Pribytkova make clear that such disagreements did not interfere with the close relationships between the rationalists and the traditionalists. The latter group held that Orthodox tradition should be preserved, since its observances were the means through which an occult connection between the human world and the world of spirits was established:

> … No one would ever dare to deride the Mystery of the Eucharist if he knew that every person who undertakes to take in the body and blood of Christ with sincere, deep belief facilitates the centralization, the condensation of the atomic rudiments of the astral body of the Son of God, and is actually tasting, in a crumb of what appears to be bread, of His actual body, and in the drops of transubstantiated wine, is taking in his divine blood (Kniaz' Inok 1906, 572).

Sacred texts retained their significance thanks to a form of spiritualist hermeneutics designed to substantiate spiritualist metaphysics, while spiritualist seances, were, at least in some cases, perceived by the traditionalists as analogous to Orthodox liturgy (NIOR RGB, f. 368, k. 9, ed. 1, l. 154 ob.). Some spiritualist scholars, such as N. P. Wagner, argued, in accordance with their Orthodox convictions, for the religious significance of prayer and faith, making a distinction between the "miraculous" and the "mediumistic" and not reducing the former to unknown natural forces. In his words, "the power of prayer produces a miracle. The power of mediumism produces only mediumistic phenomena. These phenomena may be strengthened by prayer and the

harmony of the circle, but a miracle will never be counted among the mediumistic phenomena, although some bear features of a miracle" (PNP Wagner, ll. 4 ob.-5). The traditionalists viewed Christianity as the highest religious form (Razdyakonov 2020), and conceptualized themselves as reformers, destined to "renew" it:

> "My children! Today the time has come again for repairing the Old and outmoded forms, the time for the further development of the Word! And here we are, the workers of this mission, calling upon you to join us in undertaking this work, which is great, lofty, and joyful! We have not come to break the Law, but to add to it, and, by God's Will, to correct it" (NIOR RGB, f. 368, k. 8, ed. 26, l. 48)!

Different traditionalists had diametrically opposed visions for that religious reform. For example, Vladimir Pavlovich Bykov, who had a high opinion of the missionary efforts of the Baptists and evangelicals, could not "agree with the claims of the dominant church that it is sinful for laymen to say prayers on their own, to read and interpret the Gospels and preach the word of God without a special blessing to do so" (Bykov 1910, 272).[1] Others, such as E. I. Molokhovets, took the opposite stance, calling for a struggle against "cosmopolitanism," which they viewed as the greatest threat to the "spiritual-religious-moral" state of Russian society: "freedom of conscience (*Gewissensfreiheit*) is a contrivance of the West, the best means of distinguishing and defining the West and the East, those two countries of the world, obliged at all times to be representative of spiritual darkness and light" (Molokhovets 1880, 63). While E. I. Molokhovets framed a fundamentalist plan for a Russian Orthodox state, V. P. Bykov, judging by the writings of his closest colleague E. F. Speranskaia, was inclined towards Christian ecumenicism during the period when he embraced spiritualism; the circle of "dogmatist spiritualists" he founded boasted 800 members in 1910, "just in Moscow alone," "where Lutherans, Catholics, Orthodox Christians, Calvinists, Baptists, Gregorian-Armenians, and representatives of the Anglican creed all live closely together" ("Doklad, chitannyi E. F. Speranskoiu 18 maia po novomu stiliu na vsemirnom s"ezde spiritualistov v g. Briussele" 1910, 549).

1. After his break with Spiritualism, V. P. Bykov took a diametrically opposed position: "for the achievement of his great designs, the Lord chooses ONLY OUR MOTHERLAND, our holy Orthodox Church , and His great chosen and anointed one, our God-loving Tsar for carrying out those designs in this life" (see Bykov, 1914, 25).

The difference between the rationalists and the traditionalists was not limited by the question of how to view theology, observances, and the institution of the Church. The rationalists and traditionists had different definitions of the significance of national and religious factors in the structure of the spiritual world. Analyzing these factors makes it possible to draw conclusions regarding the social goals of the spiritualists, including their level of sociopolitical conservativism.

The spiritual world as a social project

Despite the spiritualists' adherence to the principle of spiritual progress, their spiritual world, as a whole, was static, existing as a hierarchy of spheres on the soul's path to perfection. As P. Chistiakov averred, "Jacob's Great Ladder, with angels constantly going up and down, is no longer a myth for us, but a reality — more than that — the Highest Reality of the Universe" (Chistiakov 1907, 89). At the head of the cosmological and social hierarchy, standing as an unreachable template for the pursuit of perfection, was God. More perfected souls ruled over less perfected ones: "after Andrei's transition to a better sphere, OD became able to use him as an intermediary" (IRLI RO, f. 2, op. 1, d. 262, no. 1, l. 157). The relationships of dominance and subservience, however, were not based on coercion as in the real world, but rather on mutual love and free choice (Karyshev 1897, 8). The principal business of the spirits consisted of perfecting themselves and mentoring those at lower levels of development. In addition to spirits participating in a hierarchy, the spiritualists spoke of spirits who were unwilling or unable to do so. Those souls either eked out a lonely existence or joined together in small groups (Geintse 1899, 623; O'Rurk 1886, 4), or else joined the anti-hierarchy headed by the Devil (Karyshev 1897, 218). They could not develop and required help from the spiritualists, though they would often hinder spiritualists' own path towards perfection.

There was a difference in how rationalists and traditionalists understood the structure of the spiritual world. The rationalists emphasized the unending development of the soul as it climbed the ladder of progress (Boltin 1907, 9). They viewed the present as a transitional period, regarding it as the dawn of a new era that had to be reached through human effort. Though the traditionalists agreed with spiritual evolution in general, they ascribed greater significance to eschatological concepts, according to which the world would soon undergo a radical transformation as a result of divine intervention.

Rationalists, such as M. P. Saburova, used the allegorical method to interpret certain utterances from mediums, as is exemplified by the story of a spirit's "tail" "falling off," which apparently provoked indignation among Russian spiritualists (IRLI RO, f. 2, op. 1, d. 262, no. 3, l. 205). The rationalists, who confined themselves to general speculation about the structure of the spiritual world, were, in principle, critical of detailed descriptions. As Saburova remarked "my acquaintance Barbara Ivanovna Pribytkova is a follower of Swedenborg. Unquestioningly believing everything he says about the world of spirits, she has tried for some time to convince me of his teachings, but metaphysics and his ideas about life there, which are, in my view, very crude, cannot make their way into my soul, into my mind" (IRLI RO, f. 2, op. 1, d. 262, no. 1, l. 46). They were no less skeptical of the possibility of communicating with the souls of "great people," considering it unlikely given their level of development. Furthermore, the rationalists took a critical view of the idea of distinctions between souls based on any feature other than their level of perfection. Their spiritual world could be characterized as a rationalist utopia in which religious content was ultimately designated as secondary in relation to the general structural makeup of the spiritual world.

Certain traditionalists, however, presented abundantly detailed descriptions of the structure of the spiritual world. For example, the social utopia located on Mars was, according to the mediums of I. A. Karyshev, nothing more or less than a system of gardens (Karyshev 1897, 221-2), which spirits who had reached a level of perfection beyond earthly society tended and inhabited. Furthermore, a significant element of the traditionalist concept of the spiritual world was its characteristic cosmological dualism, which presupposed the existence of a constantly active evil as a necessary component of development and a precondition for spiritual progress. On the one hand, it was brought to life by close contacts between spiritualists and folk mediums, as, for example, in the well-known cases of M. P. Saburova, E. F. Tyminskaya, and I. A. Karyshev, and, on the other hand, it was influenced by, for example, in the case of V. I. Kryzhanovskaia, French occultism based on the works of Eliphas Levi (Luijk 2016, 136). Cosmological dualism meshed well with the militaristic rhetoric that was characteristic of traditionalists like E. I. Molokhovets and V. I. Kryzhanovskaia, which emphasized the general elitism of spiritualism and held that competition and struggle between opposing forces existed in the spirit world as well:

> "The Morning Star is dressed in a black shirt and wrapped in a mantle, with head uncovered and bare feet. All of the fallen heavenly forces and angels are also dressed in black shirts, but they are not wearing robes. The Lord God took all of their wings away; only the servants of the Divine may bear them, not the adepts of the black king" (Karyshev 1897, 133).

The spirit-guide of the Blagoveshchensk Society of Spiritualists discussed the spirits in a similarly "dualistic" manner: "Satan is a god, but a god of evil, for borders for the development of his endeavors…evil spirits are the victims of Satan" (Blagovest 1916, 105).

Some traditionalists stated that nations played a role in the spiritual world. For example, P. A. Chistiakov cited a document which held that spirits were able to join together in the spiritual world along national lines, forming "national" conglomerates of spirits that acted as the collective patrons of earthly peoples: "all such disembodied intellects constitute a kind of Olympus, a complex hierarchy of folk gods, the protectors of nations, saints and prophets that differ from one another in knowledge, abilities, and power" (Chistiakov 1907, 97). The study of the souls of races and peoples that the popular Gustave Le Bon developed in his works included a vision of the Indo-European peoples as the race that appeared most recently, an idea that found itself reflected in the popular occult raciology of the period, harkening back to the works of Antoine Fabre d'Olivet. It is not surprising that P. A. Chistiakov defined the future Apocalypse as a conflict between Christianity and Buddhism, the "white" and "yellow" races (Chistiakov 1905, 3-5).

The spiritual world of the Russian traditionalists was a place home to both Orthodox saints and warriors who, according to the artistic writings of V. I. Kryzhanovskaia, appeared to aid the Russian people in their struggle with European occupation (Kryzhanovskaia 1906, 5, 13) and intervened as an avenging force headed by Christ during the Last Judgement (Kryzhanovskaia 1911, 284-5). Russian national spiritualism was a fully distinct movement that contraposed itself against both the individualistic and materialistic "West" and an "East" associated with Buddhism and the destruction of the self. Its national character manifested itself not only in criticism of foreign spiritualists, Kardec first and foremost, but even in the policing of language: "the Russian name has been agreed upon here since the beginning of this endeavor; in various ways the word 'medium' of spirits, patron, and leader, has given way to the word *provodnik* [conductor], the saucer is called an *orudie* [tool], the pencil a *stil'* [stylus], and a séance a *beseda* [dis-

cussion]" (Vestnik obshchestva spiritualistov v g. Blagoveshchenske 1910, 32). The traditionalists thought of themselves as surrounded by threats and enemies (Maklakova 2019), and thus sacralized national memory, indicating that recollection was a means of developing the souls of nations (Chistiakov 1907, 96), which, in their turn, thereby gained the ability to act as patrons of spiritualist organizations.[2] This system of mutual spiritual aid made Orthodox practices (primarily prayer and pilgrimage) necessary methods of national spiritual consolidation from the traditionalist point of view. Ultimately, it was precisely the perfect spiritual world that defined events in the earthly world: "a change to a given governing principle in the state, or a change to a given piece of legislation" demands decisions from the "higher heavenly forces of the leaders, the patron spirits; they all debate 'yea' and 'nay,' the entire quantity of good and evil that will be introduced into the world by every involved party, and they decide whether or not to permit it" (Karyshev 1897, 116).

The spiritualists' vision of a hierarchically structured spiritual world stood in contrast to the real world, which they characterized as a space of competition between individuals and groups. They often compared the earthly world to a school, or even a prison (Chistiakov 1907, 333-4), in which souls experienced pedagogic preparation. In this world, society was ill, and the spiritualists envisioned themselves as its doctors and saviors. There was also a spiritual empire to which they were fated to return, and they saw themselves as its colony in the earthly world, a colony in need of "ambassadors" and "prophets" from the spiritual world. These "ambassadors" manifested themselves in the spiritualist circle, which, thanks to transcendental approbation, became a source of social change. By turning to an analysis of the social relationships between its participants, it is possible to discuss the question of how closely the religious ideas of the Russian spiritualists about how society should be ordered corresponded to the actual state of affairs.

The spiritualist circle as a religious proto-commune

Traditionalists viewed spiritualist circles as a means of religious renewal for the Orthodox Church. E. F. Tyminskaya and E. I. Molok-

2. The patron of the "Moscow Circle of Dogmatic Spiritualists" was Saint Seraphim of Sarov and the patron of the Blagoveshchensk Society of Spiritualists was apparently Saint Nicholas of Myra.

hovets, for example, received messages from the apostles in their capacity as "higher spirits"; participants in circles of this type, which, according to V. P. Bykov, were the most widespread in Russia, were active in the Church (Bykov 1911, 1-16). The dawn of circles as the organizational model of spiritualism can be compared to the eucharistic revival of the early twentieth century (Zernov 1991, 69), first and foremost by viewing it in the context of the activities of the "Christian brotherhoods" (Balakshina, et. al. 2017). For example, the spiritualists of Blagoveshchensk made the first and only attempt to create a spiritualist labor brotherhood (Vestnik obshchestva spiritualistov v g. Blagoveshchenske 1911, 17-8; Blagovest 1916, 192-8).

A religious spiritualist circle was a group of people who met regularly to receive instructions and guidance from spirits. This narrow description excludes amateur circles that assembled simply to entertain participants from consideration, and those in which participants dedicated themselves to studying the physical and psychical sides of mediumship. Spiritualist circles of this kind were a means of affirming "transcendental" authority which sanctioned and directed the circle's activities. The fact that the idea of "brotherhood" held these groups together signals both their closed nature and the elitist nature of spiritualism:

> "A spiritualist circle is a school of interrelationships with the aim of achieving a unification of Spirits, which is able to exert a beneficial influence in the future on the thinking beings of such a relational community, and likewise of the process of self-improvement. Spiritualist circles have deep meaning and a great mission! The more of them are founded, the more brotherly love will develop between people" (PNP Wagner, l. 17).

The spirit-guide of the Blagoveshchensk Society of Spiritualists made a distinction between the "brotherhood," which was under his leadership, and the formal "society," which was necessary for recruiting new members: "to begin with, bring them into an ordinary society of people broadly interested in this particular branch of knowledge, and then it is only from a *member of the society* that a *member of the brotherhood* can be molded" (Blagovest 1916a, 188).

In contrast to the professed ideology of "brotherhood," relationships within the spiritualist circle were structured along authoritarian lines. This circumstance is shown most distinctly by the example of the Moscow spiritualist circle, in which the spirit-guides had the

deciding vote in discussions of contentious questions, and the primary circle, which controlled the "branch" circles, had the right to expel any who were disobedient for violating the strictures of their charter (Proekt "ezotericheskogo" ustava Russkogo spiritualisticheskogo obshchestva 2018, 125-6). The denial of access to communication with spirits became a punishment, since spiritualists considered this communication a means for improving a person's spiritual/moral and physical condition. This situation facilitated the formation of socio-psychological attachment to the group among its members, as the example of the A. I. Chertov's split with A. I. Bobrova's circle demonstrates:

> I shall not hide from you that the incident which occurred left me so shaken that my sorrow was expressed as tangibly as it often is among nervous women… I will tell you one thing that you and A. I. [Borbova] know very well, that, for almost three years, I had not missed a single séance, even last summer, when my daughter was at death's door, but this circumstance still did not stop me and my inner sense… You knew very well what I expected when I became involved in spiritualism…and all of that was destroyed by the dictatorial power of A. I. I am finished with her (NIOR RGB, f. 368, k. 7, ed. 65, ll. 3-3 ob.)!

One excellent example for demonstrating the significance of the medium in a spiritualist group is the Blagoveshchensk Society of Spiritualists. They held regular meetings for members of the "brotherhood," at which "the guide offered their thoughts via hypnotized speech through *their first intermediary*, after which their *co-teachers* in the development of that thought, which was the foundational one for the meeting, gave their thoughts through two other mediums who belonged to the society" (Blagovest 1916a, IV).

Although mediums, as intermediaries between the human and spirit worlds, also played the role of social arbiters in religious circles, in some instances, especially among rationalistically inclined spiritualists, their social status not only failed to rise, but actually fell. The medium was reduced to a "thing" that others had to take care of to make sure he or she was working dependably:

> My parlor-maid answered me in such an abashed voice (she is still ashamed that she permits herself to be Ivan) when she was passing me the glasses: "Varya! Now I am alone again! Good lord, how horrible!"
> "There is nothing horrible about it! You are just a little machine through

> which a dead person can speak — that's it!" I said, comforting my speaking-medium who stood before me, head lowered (IRLI RO, f. 2, op. 1, d. 262, l. 254).

In my view, these two ways in which spiritualists assessed the significance of a medium — either as a cult figure or as an automaton — corresponded to two opposing concepts of social leadership: a monarchical one that insisted that the leader should play a political role and a religious role simultaneously, and a republican one that transformed the leader into an instrument for fulfilling the "will of the people." The social ideals of the spiritualists expressed their aspiration to synthesize those two concepts; for example, the traditionalists sacralized the figure of the tsar, while, for the rationalists, the tsar was not only a "conduit for divine will," but also a conduit for the will of the spirits, and thus, in accordance with spiritualist logic, the will of the people.

As my analysis of the social structure of spiritualist circles demonstrates, they should be viewed as typologically related to communitarian projects (Gordeeva 2017, 10). Obviously not all religious spiritualist circles were this sort of "spiritual commune," but, judging by the available materials on the Moscow Spiritualist Circle, the Blagoveshchensk Society of Spiritualists, and N. P. Wagner's circle, they were inclined towards precisely that form:

> "When it comes to us, the four members of the circle, we are, in truth, also still weak students and often get answers wrong at our lessons, but that should not trouble us; we must work doggedly, study, and continue the great task we have undertaken, with warm, tacit prayer, not restricting ourselves to any form. We, my dear Nikolai, will struggle with all our negative traits and together we will, at the same time, learn to love each other and everything around us more and more, and that love will give us blessings in proportion to its strength" (PNP Wagner, ll. 17 ob.-18).

Russian spiritualists referred to the first Christian communities as their historical antecedents (V. P. B. 1907, 460), while, for those who were more inclined towards occultism, such as V. I. Kryzhanovskaia, the Pythagorean communities might have been an analogous historical reference point (Nazarov 1911, 5).

The example of the labor brotherhood of the Blagoveshchensk Society of Spiritualists, which founded a settlement near the village of Astrakhanovka, shows that the aspiration of returning to the "land" was familiar among spiritualists, just as it was for representatives of the

other reform movements of the period. For example, the theosophist D. V. Stranden, who valued the spirit of the common people highly, noted that "the representatives of the common people are not reacting to new ideas in the same way. Their psyches have not been distorted by abnormal city life, and their will has not been weakened, but rather tempered by the constant struggle with the natural environment" (Nazarov 1911, III). Social isolationism was not, however, characteristic of the spiritualist movement as a whole; although the spiritualists usually viewed cities negatively, they considered such a "hostile environment" an essential prerequisite for self-perfection.

The way in which spiritualist circles were structured as small, closed religious groups, whose teachings varied depending on the personalities of the mediums (in every instance I am familiar with), made it difficult for the Russian spiritualists to create a large and open informal organization. Two well-known Russian spiritualist organizations in the early twentieth century, the Moscow Circle of Dogmatist Spiritualists and the Russian Spiritualist Society, openly opposed each other ("O prostitutsii mediumicheskogo dara 'Spiritualista'" 1907, 5-6). The spiritualists' dreams of social unity ran into internal obstacles. To determine how spiritualists imagined their ideal organization it is useful to analyze the spiritualist fantasy literature they produced.

The brotherhood of Christian Magi

To the spiritualists, a secret brotherhood seemed to be the most suitable social form for realizing their ideal. Their social ideal was aristocratic in so far as "nature is itself aristocratic, and it follows that any democratic culture is, to a certain extent, artificial, in that it contradicts nature itself" (Diu Prel'. 1893-1894, 33). The "aristocracy of the spirit" demanded political and social dominance over the wild masses: "it is strange to think that there will come a time when knowledge will penetrate down to the lowest strata of the people, but despite all that it will not match their moral development. This mismatch inevitably must give rise to the existence of social evil…" (Diu Prel'. 1893-1894, 295). The task of the aristocracy was to mold and develop the "lowest strata of the power" with the goal of overcoming their ignorance, as "it is precisely there that the cause of our social evils lies, in that gaping abyss that lies between the enlightened minority and the ignorant masses" (Diu Prel'. 1893-1894, 54).

This concept of a "secret brotherhood" was represented in the Russian literary tradition of spiritualism by the occult novels of V.

I. Kryzhanovskaia (Kryzhanovskaia 1910, 5). She used a Himalayan theosophic myth to create an artistic image of a secret brotherhood (Andreev 2008), as well as ideas about the mystical brotherhood of the Grail: "if I call our brotherhood the 'Brotherhood of the Grail,' it is only to use a name that is already known to you, one which comes from a word that was pronounced Sainreal, which means 'royal blood.' That allegorical name is relatively accurate, since the essence of life truly is the royal blood of nature" (Kryzhanovskaia 1901, 64). The ideas behind this brotherhood that possesses the secret of immortality change over the course of V. I. Kryzhanovskaia's "Magi" pentalogy, but the primary goal of the brotherhood remains unchanged — that of caring for humanity and, first and foremost, Christians, the most morally advanced subset of humanity.

V. I. Kryzhanovskaia contrasted the moral ideals of the brotherhood with the materialism and egotism of humanity, and she described the birth of a magus as the process of transforming an "old" person: "you were a *person* in the fullest sense of the word, never dreaming of being a *magus*" (Kryzhanovskaia 1917, 308). V. I. Kryzhanovskaia's work expressed the social skepticism typical of Russian spiritualism, asserting that society was not capable of being transformed. Despite the brotherhood's efforts to correct society, it ultimately had to experience the wrath of God, and only a small portion of people could escape on spaceships. It was precisely this negative interpretation of society that made the idea of a secret brotherhood legitimate; spiritualists often saw the public world as a space like a theater, in which illusions and deceptions reigned, describing it as an "aggressive environment" in which egotism and competition flourished.

In V. I. Kryzhanovskaia's text, the secret brotherhood fulfills a function traditionally assigned to angels. Diminishing the significance of angels, which was characteristic of spiritualism as a whole, was accompanied by a reaffirmation of the significance of Russian Orthodox saints, who were subject to increased attention in the early twentieth century due to a campaign to discover new relics and canonize new saints, most notably Seraphim of Sarov, who was popular among Russian spiritualists (Nol'de 1909, 139-41; Anatolii 1908, 513-7). The euhemerism characteristic of V. I. Kryzhanovskaia which led to most "miracles" being interpreted as the results of the actions of great people, imagined the secret brotherhood as the key historical agent resisting the degradation of society. The primary mission was to become the lawgivers of a new society following a global eschatological event. Once they had arrived on another planet, they had to "establish order

there, create laws, teach people how to meet their needs, both material and spiritual, in a reasonable way, and to endow them with the beginnings of the process of understanding the divine" (Kryzhanovskaia 1917, 18).

The brotherhood was organized hierarchically; a magus climbed the hierarchy by passing through a system of initiations. Directing the brotherhood was a tribunal of magi who selected a leader to mentor student magi. V. I. Kryzhanovskaia held that anyone pursuing perfection must have a teacher who would always propose decisions that facilitated development but never negated freedom of choice. Members of the brotherhood even obeyed their leaders when it came to their personal lives. In spiritualism, the search for a spiritual teacher paralleled the search for an anthropological and simultaneously spiritual authority figure. For many Russian spiritualists, those figures were not so much mahatmas and yogis, but rather Orthodox zealots and elders.

V. I. Kryzhanovskaia's views of the structure of the secret brotherhood reflected the way many spiritualists who were inclined towards occultism viewed knowledge, as a means of social segregation. The "Brotherhood," itself a type of social relationship opposed to "society," became an alternate source of knowledge and power, but one that did not compete with the state, which gradually fell under the influence of the forces of evil. P. A. Chistyakov's criticism of political Freemasonry was not just a gift to censorship, but also an expression of the spiritualist certainty that changing the social status quo was only possible through a personal or cosmological eschatological event that would separate the invited from the elect. In his words: "no forms of social relations which are themselves elevated can dignify and make holy a person who has not been born again and who does not carry within him the light of brotherly love and a living sense of love for God and the Truth" (Ch-v" 1909, 9).

Social reform and religious reformation

The religious views of Russian spiritualists are indicative of the conservative nature of their social ideals. In general, the Russian spiritualists unlike many American ones, hoped not so much for social change as for a spiritual transformation of man and the cosmos; they were no longer talking about "external" social reform, but rather about an "internal" religious reformation. This reformation required spiritualists to reimagine their place in the world and think of themselves as a

part of a single unified spiritual hierarchy that encompassed both the earthly sphere of being and the "other" world.

The spiritualists' belief in the existence of a divine plan preordained the totalizing character of their spiritual project; asserting that the individual soul was preserved forever and insisting on the necessity of it constantly changing its position and significance in the spiritual world, the spiritualists placed it in a spiritual hierarchy, fully defining its development on the path to becoming perfect and godlike. In contrast to the idea of social unity as the equality of all people associated with socialist thinking, the spiritualists proposed a complex unity based on the principle of social hierarchy. From their point of view, the efforts of individual people could lead to positive social change, but an individual could not change the social order as a whole. The colony-brotherhoods scattered across the materialist continent served as gateways to the empire of souls to which the spiritualists dreamed of returning.

The political and social conservativism of the Russian spiritualists was based on their theological interpretation of the evolutionary process. The renewal of Christianity, which can be considered one of the key questions on the spiritualists' social agenda, was regarded as a natural process that was simultaneously controlled by God. The spiritualists viewed the future "crisis" as an external one, not one of the essential nucleus of the Christian teaching. The two groups within Russian spiritualism — the rationalists and the traditionalists — understood that "essence" in different ways, but they shared an equal belief that the "new form" would be the realization of a divine plan for humanity. It was this handover of power from humanity to divine Providence that contained the essence of the religious (and, therefore, social and political) conservativism of Russian spiritualism.

References

Archival Sources

Institut russkoi literatury (Pushkinskii Dom) RAN, Rukopisnyi otdel (hereafter IRLI RO), f. 2, op. 1, d. 262, no. 1-3, Diary of Maria Petrovna Saburova: Years of my life in communication with the spirit world.

IRLI RO, f. 2, op. 1, l. 2 ob., Letter from M. P. Saburova to A. N. Aksakovu from February 27, 1896.

Nauchno-issledovatel'skii otdel rukopisei Rossiiskoi gosudarstvennoi biblioteki (hereafter NIOR RGB), f. 368, k. 8, ed. 13, ll. 9 ob., 12, Petersburg circle for the research in the field of psychism. Roster 1901-1904.

NIOR RGB, f. 368, k. 9, ed. 1, l. 154 ob., Book of general seances-essay by a participant in seances, signed by Alexei Ivanovich.

NIOR RGB, f. 368, k. 8, ed. 26, l. 48, Bobrov, S. D. Reflections on the topic given by Arthur, April 3, 1897.

NIOR RGB, f. 368, k. 7, ed. 65, ll. 3–3 ob., Letter from A. Chertov to P. A. Chistiakov, March 15, 1899.

Pamatnik Narodniho Pisemnictvi Wagner, Nikolai Petrovich (hereafter PNP Wagner), ll. 4-4 ob., Draft letter from N. P. Wagner to I. Ia. Bibinov, undated.

PNP Wagner, Letter from I. Ia. Bibinov to N. P. Wagner, June 3, 1890.

Sources

Aksakoff, A. 1869. "Spiritualism in Russia." *Human Nature*, no. 30.

Aksakov, A. 1887. "Spiritizm i evoliutsionizm. Otvet 'nedoumevaiushchemu'" ["Spiritualism and evolutionism. Answer to the 'bewildered'"]. *Rebus*, no. 8.

Alba. 1911. "Teosofiia i ee veianiia v Rossii" ["Theosophy and its trends in Russia"]. *Vestnik teosofii*, no. 1.

Blagovest. 1916. *Mysli iz mira nevidimogo* [*Thoughts from the invisible world*], vol. 4. Moscow: Tipografiia t-va Riabushinskikh.

Blagovest. 1916a. *Mysli iz mira nevidimogo* [*Thoughts from the invisible world*], vol. 6. Moscow: Tipografiia t-va Riabushinskikh.

Boltin, A. P. 1907. "Dogmaty Khristovoi tserkvi, izlozhennye soglasno spiriticheskomu ucheniiu" ["The dogmas of Christ's church, according to spiritist teaching"]. *Rebus*, no. 22-23.

Bykov, V. P. 1910. "Smelye mysli" ["Brave thoughts"]. *Smelye mysli*, no. 9.

Bykov, V. P. 1914. *O chem govoriat nam sobytiia zhizni* [*What life events tell us*]. Moscow: Na strazhe pravoslaviia.

Bykov, V. P. 1991. "K chemu my prishli" ["What have we come to"]. *Spiritualist*, no. 1: 1–16.

Chistiakov, P. A. 1905. "Iaponiia i buddizm (ocherk)" ["Japan and Buddhism (essay)"]. *Rebus*, no. 25.

Chistiakov, P. 1907. "Bessmertie po traditsiiam Aziatskikh Rozenkreitserov" ["Immortality according to the tradition of Asian Rosicrucians"]. *Trudy Pervogo Vserossiiskogo s"ezda spiritualistov* [*Proceedings of the First All-Russian congress of spiritualists*].

Ch-v" [Chistiakov], P. A. 1909. "Tainye obshchestva i Frank-Masonstvo" ["Secret societies and Freemasonry"]. *Rebus*, no. 6–7.

Diu Prel' K [Karl von Prel]. 1893-1894. *Krest nad gletcherom* [*Cross over the glacier*]. Saint Petersburg: tipografiia V. Demakova, vol. 2.

"Doklad, chitannyi E. F. Speranskoiu 18 maia po novomu stiliu na vsemirnom s"ezde spiritualistov v g. Briussele" ["The report read by E. F. Speranskaia on 18 May on a new style at the world congress of spiritualists in Brussels"]. 1910. *Smelye mysli*, no. 19.

"Dukhovnyi darvinizm." ["Spiritual Darwinism"]. 1890. *Rebus*, no. 36.

Geintse, N. E. 1899. "Iz mira tainstvennogo. Zapiski spirita" ["From the mysterious world. Notes of the spiritualist"]. *Sochineniia N.E. Geintse* [*Essays of N. E. Geintse*], vol. 8. Saint Petersburg: Tipo-litografiia V. V. Komarova.

Karyshev, I. A. 1897. *Sushchnost' zhizni*. [*The essence of life*]. Saint Petersburg: Nadezhda.

Kniaz' Inok. 1906. "Religioznye obriady so spiritualisticheskoi tochki zreniia" ["Religious rituals from a spiritualist viewpoint"]. *Spiritualist*, no. 12.

Kryzhanovskaia, V. I. 1901. *Zhiznennyi eliksir* [*Life elixir*]. Saint Petersburg: tipo-litografiia V. V. Komarova.

Kryzhanovskaia, V. I. 1903. *S neba na zemliu: (Mif)* [*From heaven to earth: Myth)*]. Saint Petersburg: tipo-litografiia V. V. Komarova.

Kryzhanovskaia, V. I. 1906. *(Rochester): Na Moskve (son v osen. noch')* [(*Rochester): In Moscow (autumn night dream)*]. Moscow: Vernost'.

Kryzhanovskaia, V. I. 1910. "Pro Domo Suo. Beseda s moimi chitateliami" ["Pro Domo Suo. Conversation with my readers"]. *Izida*, no. 5.

Kryzhanovskaia, V. I. 1911. *Smert' planety* [*Death of the planet*]. Saint Petersburg: parovaia tipografiia L. V. Gutmana.

Kryzhanovskaia, V. I. 1917. *Gnev Bozhii* [*The wrath of God*]. Petrograd: B. i.

Molokhovets, E. I. 1880. *Sud'by Zapada i Vostoka* [*The fate of West and East*]. Saint Petersburg: Tipografiia A. S. Suvorina.

Molokhovets, E. I. 1910. *Monarkhizm, natsionalizm i pravoslavie* [*Monarchism, nationalism, and orthodoxy*]. Saint Petersburg: tip. P.F. Voshchinskoi.

Nazarov, A. P. 1911. *Vozzvanie k zhivym silam chelovecheskim dlia sozidaniia dukhovnoi i material'noi kul'tury: mysli krest'ianina o neobkhodimosti sozdaniia trudovoi religiozno-filosofsko-nauchnoi obshchiny* [*Appeal to living human forces for the creation of spiritual and material culture: thoughts of a peasant about the need to create a working religious-philosophical scientific community*]. Saint Petersburg: tipografiia V. F. Kirshbauma otd-nie.

Nol'de, L. A. 1909. "O moei poezdke k Serafimu Sarovskomu" ["About my trip to Serafim of Sarov"]. *Spiritualist*, no. 2.

"O prostitutsii mediumicheskogo dara 'Spiritualista'" ["On the prostitution of the mediumist gift of the 'Spiritualist'"]. 1907. *Rebus*, no. 18–19.

O'Rurk, P. I. 1886. *Kratkoe izlozhenie zakona spiritskikh iavlenii* [*A summary of the law of spiritual phenomena*]. Moscow: Tipografiia V. Gattsuk.

"Rebus iz rebusov" 1881. *Rebus*, no. 7.

"Smelye mysli" ["Brave thoughts"]. 1910. *Smelye mysli*, no. 16.

Vestnik obshchestva spiritualistov v g. Blagoveshchenske [Journal of the society of spiritualists in Blagoveshchensk]. 1910-1911. *Trekhnedel'nyi zhurnal po issledovaniiu spiritualizma*. [*A three-week journal for the study of spiritualism*].

V. P. B. 1907. "Mozhno li v nashe vremia zhit' v dukhe khristianskogo ucheniia" ["In our time is it possible to live in the spirit of Christian teaching"]. *Golos vseobshchei liubvi*, no. 18.

Literature

Balakshina, Iu. V. et. al. 2017. "Pravoslavnye bratstva v dorevoliutsionnoi Rossii: Prioritety deiatel'nosti" ["Orthodox brotherhood in prerevolutionary Russia: Prioritized actions"]. *Vestnik Sviato-Filaretovskogo instituta* (21): 167–97.

Braude, A. 2001. *Radical Spirits. Spiritualism and women's rights in Nineteenth-Century America*. 2nd edition. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Caroll, B. 1997. *Spiritualism in Antebellum America*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Gordeeva, I. A. 2017. *Zabytye liudi. Istoriia rossiiskogo kommunitarnogo dvizheniia* [*The forgotten people: A history of the Russian communitarian movement*]. Moscow: Common Place.

Gordeeva, I. A. 2020. “Malye dela v rossiiskom kommunitarnom dvizhenii” [“Small deeds in the Russian communitarian movement”]. *Krest'ianovedenie* 5(2): 88–105.

Maklakova, A. A. 2019. “Obraz vraga v diskurse russkikh spiritualistov (na primere materialov Moskovskogo spiriticheskogo kruzhka)” [“Enemy images in the discourse of Russian spiritualists (the case of the Moscow spiritualist circle)”]. *Religiovedcheskie issledovaniia* 20(2): 44–66.

Proekt “ezotericheskogo” ustava Russkogo spiritualisticheskogo obshchestva [Project of an “esoteric” charter of the Russian spiritualist society]. 2018. *Studia Religiosa Rossica: nauchnyi zhurnal o religii* 1(1): 115–128.

Razdyakonov, V. S. 2015. “Dukhovnye avtoritety sekuliarnogo veka: spiriticheskii dnevnik M.P. Saburovoi” [“Spiritualist authorities of the secular Age: M.P. Saburova's spirtiualistic diary”]. *Vestnik PSTGU: I. Bogoslovie. Filosofiia* 62(6): 55–69.

Razdyakonov, V. S. 2019. “Ot redaktora” [“From the editor”]. *Religiovedcheskie issledovaniia* 20(2): 5–18.

Razdyakonov, V. S. 2020. “Poniatie o ‘religii’ v otechectvennom ezoterizme kontsa XIX — nachala XX veka (po materialam Moskovskogo spiriticheskogo kruzhka)” [“The concept of ‘religion’ in the late nineteenth — early twentieth century Russian esotericism: The case of the Moscow Spiritualistic Circle”]. *Vestnik PSTGU. Seriia I: Bogoslovie. Filosofiia. Religiovedenie* (89): 129–148.

Sharova, V. L. 2008. “Pravoradikal′naia ideologiia v Rossii: istoki i preemstvennost′” [“Right-radical ideology in Russia: roots and continuity”]. In *Politiko-filosofskii ezhegodnik* [*Political-philosophical yearbook*], 120–135. Moscow: Institut filosofii RAN.

Van Luijk, R. 2016. *Children of Lucifer. The Origins of Modern religious Satanism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Vinitskii, I. U. 2005. “Obshchestvo mertvykh poetov. Spiriticheskaia poeziia kak kul′turnyi fenomen vtoroi poloviny XIX veka” [“Dead poets society. Spiritualistic poetry as a cultural phenomenon of the second half of the nineteenth century”]. *Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie* 71(1): 133-65.

Zernov, N. M. 1991. *Russkoe religioznoe vozrozhdenie XX veka* [The Russian religious renaissance of the twentieth century]. Paris: YMCA-Press.

Maksim I. Bogachev and Kirill V. Sorvin

Politics in the Church: Who Do Orthodox Priests Support?

Translated by Olivia Bowins

DOI: https://doi.org/10.22394/2311-3448-2021-8-1-90-112

Maksim I. Bogachev — National Research University Higher School of Economics (Moscow, Russia). mbogachev@hse.ru

Kirill V. Sorvin — National Research University Higher School of Economics (Moscow, Russia). ksorvin@hse.ru

The article provides a study of the relationship between politics and religion in contemporary Russia. The authors analyze the survey "Sociopolitical Preferences of Russian Society" (number of people identifying themselves as Orthodox believers N=2,735), which shows that at least 21.1 percent of the sample make decisions concerning their electoral choices under the direct influence of priests and fellow parishioners. The authors reveal that, although the ruling party, "United Russia," is the main political beneficiary of the Orthodox vote, political support largely depends on believers' church attendance. The authors show that priests' public and private advice on political preference is not effective in garnering support for the ruling party. Support for "United Russia" is most likely when believers discuss their electoral choices within their church community.

Keywords: sociology of religion, political science of religion, politics and religion in Russia, election, Orthodoxy, campaigning, "United Russia" party.

TODAY, the problematic relationship between religion and politics in Russia continues to be a poorly studied area, despite the large number of publications devoted to the topic. On the one hand, a significant proportion of this thematic industry is made up of works that are more journalistic than academic; on the other hand, theoretical research maintains a leading role in strictly scientific publications. Despite numerous publications about desecularization, state-confessional relations, the politicization of the Church, the struggle of patriarchates for spheres of influence, and so on, there is still an obvious shortage of works that address

the relationship between religion and politics: 1.) not on the scale of abstract social constructs and processes, distinguishable only at the level of concepts, but in the context of specific, directly observed and perceived phenomena; 2.) not at the macro- (the level of the patriarchy, state-confessional and international relations), but at the meso- (the level of metropolises and dioceses) and micro-levels (the level of deaneries and parishes); and 3.) not in historical, but in contemporary empirical material.

In recent years authors who have strove to eliminate the theoretical-empirical imbalance include: Iu. Sinelina and V. V. Lokosov, who studied believers' trust in various public and state institutions; A. V. Sitnikov and I. A. Papkova, who measured believers' attitudes to the most preferred form of government, democracy, etc. . .; M. I. Bogachev and M. V. Uhvatova, who studied Orthodox believers' party preferences; and A.Iu. Kulkova and D. V. Zhuravlev, who focused on political participation and social conservatism among various religious groups (Lokosov and Sinelina 2008; Lokosov 2007, Lokosov and Sinelina 2004; Sitnikov 2012; Papkova 2011; Shcherbak and Ukhvatova 2018; Ukhvatova 2017; Kulkova 2017; Kulkova 2015; Zhuravlev 2017).

These publications, however, only reveal the tip of the iceberg. Following previous researchers, the authors examine the interrelationships between religion and politics to consider the role of religion in contemporary Russia's electoral process through Orthodox priests' and parishioners' propaganda activities. From December 2014 to January 2015, the authors conducted a sociological survey, "Sociopolitical Preferences of Russian Society," among an unrepresentative, non-probabilistic sample of VKontakte users in various (mainly religiously oriented) communities. The sample consisted of 6,259 people, of which 2,735 identified themselves as Orthodox believers (Bogachev and Sorvin 2019). An increase in the sample size (compared to standard surveys) and attention to practicing Orthodox believers through disproportionate stratification made it possible to demarcate groups of Orthodox believers equally represented and comparable at different stages of churching.[1] The statistical error in the group indicators did not exceed 1.6 percent.[2]

1. Orthodox priests' campaigning activities are characterized by an uneven distribution among various groups of believers, but they are most common among the Orthodox group that frequently attends services. However, this group makes up a relatively small share in Russian society (according to various estimates, from 2 percent to 4 percent), and the standard sample used in all Russian polls is not large enough to make correct conclusions about the prevalence of certain political practices among practicing believers. Therefore, the authors focused on the most religious group of Russians when conducting the survey.
2. The statistical error is calculated using the standard formula provided by the FDF group MA Marketing Agency.

The authors operationalized churching, i.e. the process of assimilating one's way of life and thinking in the Church, by measuring believers' attendance of religious services (the minimalist concept of being churched). Depending on the degree of churching, the authors divided Orthodox respondents into five groups: I consider myself Orthodox but do not attend services (2.4 percent); I attend services once a year or less often (16.7 percent); I attend services several times a year (24.7 percent); I attend services from one to three times a month (25.4 percent); and I attend services once a week or more often (30.8 percent).[3] In the course of the study, the authors questioned believers about their religious practices and political preferences, how often they witnessed clerical political campaigning,[4] if they followed priests' political advice or community members' recommendations, and so forth.

The study identified three main channels of religious influence on Orthodox believers' electoral preferences, all of which are associated with attending services. The first channel is priestly political campaigning. Priests can agitate believers both in groups (preaching during services, preaching outside the church, public speaking, and so on), individually as part of counseling work (mainly confession), through out-of-service conversations with people, or during interactions with parishioners in the course of any joint parish activity) (Kollner 2013; Kormina 2019; Emel'ianov 2019; Krikhtova 2019). The study reveals that 18.4 percent of the Orthodox believers in the sample listened to priests' political sermons, and 7.4 percent of all respondents followed priestly political recommendations. The second channel is individual believers' appeals to the priest for advice "on whom to vote for." In the study, 7.1 percent of believers listened to priestly advice after independently requesting it. Lastly, the third channel is parishioners' interactions with other members of the community, generally without priests. In the sample, 6.6 percent made

3. For comparison, we present data from a Levada Center survey, representative for the entire population of Russia, conducted in April 2019 (N = 1600). In the sample, the groups of believers with similar indicators of church attendance responded: I consider myself Orthodox, but do not attend services (38 percent); I attend services once a year and less often (29 percent); I attend services several times a year (17 percent); I attend services from one to three times a month (7 percent); I attend services once a week or more often (5 percent). See: Obshchestvennoe mnenie 2020, 121.

4. In accordance with Article 48 of N67-FZ "On Basic Guarantees of Electoral Rights and the Right to Participate in a Referendum of Citizens of the Russian Federation" political campaigning refers to any action taken to induce voters to vote, or, conversely, not to vote for any candidate or list of candidates.

their choice not under the influence of a priest, but solely based on community members' opinions. Based on the results, religion has a tangible impact on believers' electoral preferences in modern Russia. At least 21.1 percent of Orthodox believers are under the direct influence of priests and community members when making their electoral choice.[5]

These results, however, do not exhaust the list of issues related to the influence of religion on believers' electoral preferences. In particular, the frequency of priests' and community members' political campaigning remains relatively unknown. This study searches for an answer to the question: which political forces benefit from clerical political activism and which of the above-mentioned channels of influence are most effective in mobilizing believers?

This article consists of four parts. The first section defines the political beneficiaries of clerical agitation. The second part examines the political and ideological contradictions between the Russian Orthodox Church and secular authorities. The third section analyzes modern opinions on Orthodox priests and their attitudes to secular power, and the final part establishes the most effective way to mobilize believers.

The dangers of hasty conclusions, or the paradox of clerical political sermons

During the survey, the authors asked respondents about their party preference in the Federal Parliamentary Elections to the State Duma of the VI Convocation (2011–2016). The December 2011 elections were part of a proportional representation system, with all 450 seats in the lower house of parliament distributed on the basis of party lists. Therefore, the study considered only political parties that claimed to profit from political campaigning of the clergy. To identify which parties benefit most from this activity, we compared the party preferences of believers who were exposed to political sermons and those who were not. (Table 1).

5. This survey is significant not so much by the total indicators of religious influence on electoral choice, as by the tendency for various typological groups to encounter priestly political agitation. The authors found a positive correlation between the number of believers attending services and the proportion of Orthodox Christians who witnessed clerical political campaigning (from 8.8 percent in the group attending services once a year or less often to 26.8 percent in the group attending services once a week or more).

Table 1. Witness of priests' political sermons and believers' electoral choices (sample as a whole)

	United Russia	Communist Party	Liberal Democratic Party	A Just Russia	Patriots of Russia	Yabloko	Just Cause (now Party of Growth	I made a mistake	I don't remember	I did not vote
Witnessed a political sermon	25.9	8.9	4.8	6.2	1.6	5.9	0.5	7.1	7.3	31.8
Did not witness a political sermon	32.8	8.9	6.1	6	0.6	3	0.8	3	9.6	29.2
Difficult to answer	32.2	4.8	7.2	4.3	1	2.9	0	2.4	11.1	34.1
Total	31.5	8.6	6	5.9	0.9	3.5	0.7	3.7	9.3	30.1

The voting results differ significantly for only one political party, United Russia. Since clerical political sermons significantly affect only United Russia, this study focuses on Orthodox believers' voting patterns for this party only. The data indicate that political sermons led to a decrease in the vote for United Russia: 25.9 percent of believers who attended them voted for the party, while 32.8 percent did not.

In light of this distribution, it is logical to assume that the clergy campaigned against United Russia. This hypothesis is not unfounded, although it contradicts the widespread view on the relationship between the Russian Orthodox Church and secular authorities. Clearly, there is tension between the Church and the Russian secular govern-

ment, but is it serious enough to induce clergymen to negatively impact electoral support for United Russia?

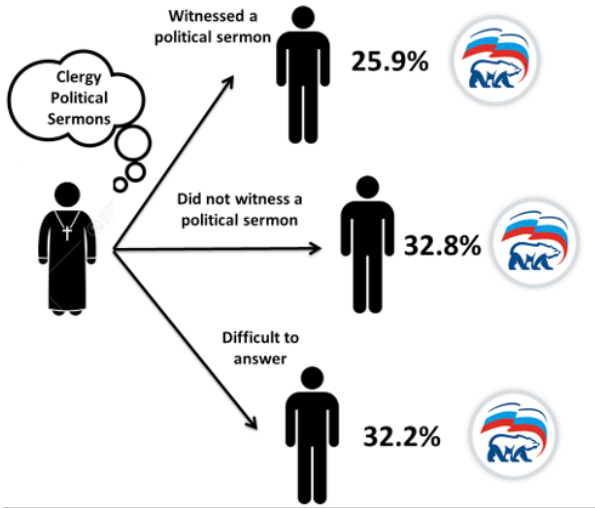


Figure 1. Voting for "United Russia" among those who witnessed political sermons

Unpublicized conflict: motivations behind the silence on church-state relations in modern Russia

There are several significant contradictions between secular and religious authorities in modern Russia. First, are conflicting ideas about the ideal political system. The secular government's ideal, established in the law, is a secular democratic state with a republican form of government. However, from the religious perspective, "... there is simply no political theology capable of justifying the existence of a secular democratic (albeit only nominally democratic) state, which arose in the very place where there was once (allegedly) "Holy Russia" <...> in the Russian Orthodox tradition" (Kaspe 2018). According to the "Bases of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church," the Church's political ideal is a theocracy. This social system is described in the Book of Judges, under which the state is ruled by the Invisible King, or God. Church hierarchs approve of a monarchy (under a monarchy, power remains God-given), but as a form of government resulting from the people's weak faith. In turn, "modern democracies, including those monarchical in form, do not seek the divine sanction of power. They are a form of power in secular society that presuppos-

es the right of every capable citizen to express will through elections" (Patriarch Alexy II 2000), and therefore democracy (used here in the ancient sense as a form of government) and the republic do not earn Church approval.

Three factors contribute to the clergy's dislike of modern (liberal) democracy: 1.) its refusal to seek divine sanction of power (that is, secularism), 2). its recognition of a person's inalienable rights and freedoms (including universal suffrage) (Arkhiereiskii Sobor Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi 2008), and 3.) its sanction of competition (according to the patriarch, "all competition carries the energy of division") (Patriarch Kirill 2017). However, the Russian Orthodox Church takes no issue with the election process itself, as the clergy regularly demonstrates when it calls on the flock to participate in civil elections (Patriarch Kirill 2016), or when it speaks of the elective monarchy as the most preferable government for modern society (*Pravmir* 2012).

This discrepancy in perspectives influences secular and religious authorities' ideological views. The secular authorities act as conservatives, while the clergy act as traditionalists (close, but not identical to conservatism). Indeed, "the conservative position of the authorities is to strive to maintain the existing order and balance of forces in society as long as possible, to protect the interests of the groups entrenched in power, and to apply innovations only in extreme cases, when the absence of reforms can lead to the imminent death of the existing system" (Bogachev 2016, 260). The secular government is unconcerned with issues of morality and religious permissibility. It will resort to any means necessary in order to maintain the status quo and preserve itself, be it universal suffrage, cultural liberalization, juvenile justice, legalization of abortion, or assistance from nontraditional religious associations in Russia.

The bishops' most important concern is to please God, and thus it conforms to whichever methods further the influence of the Church's views. The clergy considers many of the secular authorities' actions as pernicious and sinful, leading society to apostasy. Therefore, traditionally oriented bishops perceive the equilibrium that has developed in the political sphere as a temporary and transient state. The clergy want to change the current situation and shift the balance of power towards the Church. For the Church, however, taking harsh action against the current rulers (e.g. harsh criticism of the President or government decisions) is tantamount to abandoning its symbiotic relationship with secular authorities and relinquishing access to the pow-

er and economic resources the state provides. Therefore, the Church strives not to publicize the fissure between religious and secular authorities and continues its collaboration with what it views as a morally corrupt political system.

Finally, the Church's tacit cooperation with secular authorities can be explained not only by its private corporate interests, but also by the fact that electoral authoritarianism is more palatable for the higher priesthood than liberal democracy. Russia's political system is only nominally democratic; the state's real mechanism for making political decisions is much closer to Church rather than constitutional ideals. Therefore, the Church's encroachment on the existing political system, expressed through statements of dislike, does not guarantee that a theocracy will be established in Russia. Delegitimizing the existing political system may not only eliminate the de facto privileged position of the Orthodox Church in multiconfessional Russia, but also lead to a new government even more distant from the Church's ideal than the current one. As a result, the Church, which sees itself as an enduring part of society, prefers to silently wait for better times without raising concerns about the proper relationship between the political and the sacred.

Thus, there are differences between the Russian Orthodox Church and the secular authorities regarding the ideal political system, ideological views, and political methods. At the moment, the Church and the secular authorities find themselves in the same predicament, where they "are not so much allies as fellow travelers who, constantly expecting the other party to violate their agreement, try to maximize their usefulness for their own sake" (Bogachev 2016, 258). And, although high-ranking clergy demonstrate an explicitly positive attitude towards the authorities (for example, they publicly proclaim the state's divine nature and irremovability) (Ukhvatova 2018), ordinary clergymen may deliver sermons that differ significantly from official Church rhetoric. Experience shows that there may be a tangible discrepancy between an organization's public position, especially one as large as the Russian Orthodox Church, and the behavior of its rank-and-file members.

Clerical attitudes towards secular power

To date, systematic studies devoted to Orthodox sermons and their reflection of political theology do not exist. However, based on a number of studies that analyze clergy speeches and sermons in the context

of other research, clerical discourse expresses at least three points of view on the existing authorities and the United Russia Party (Verkhovsky 2003; Kollner 2013; Østbø 2015; Briskina-Muller 2015; Suslov 2016; Knorre 2016; Knorre and Kharish 2018; Knorre and Kumankov 2019; Adamsky 2019). These positions are characterized as explicitly positive (the existing power is good and bestowed by God), latently positive (the existing power is bad but it is not and never will be better), and negative (the existing power is bad and commits godless deeds).

Archpriest Dmitry Smirnov, who has repeatedly spoken publicly about the goodness and divine origin of the Russian authorities, provides an example of an explicitly positive attitude towards secular power:

> Smirnov: The very principle of power is a divine institution. It is necessary. Otherwise, people will destroy each other. <…>
> Interviewer: It turns out that sometimes the authorities destroy a country's statehood and terrorize the people. Is this power from God?
> Smirnov: All power is from God! But each individual person may not be from God … (tvsouz 2015)
> Is all authority from God? If so, can you resist and not accept it? — asks the Muscovite, Alexander. Or consider another question: What do you think about the many thousands of rallies against the rigged elections of the United Russia Party on December 4, 2011? <…> — Of course, those people who outwardly protest and advocate fair elections are known to everyone. For example, if we peacefully move those who are in the Kremlin to the opposition, and those who are in opposition to the Kremlin, I think that the general state of affairs in Russia will deteriorate dramatically. That is, all people who are obsessed with protest should understand perfectly well that if we manage to overthrow the existing power, then we will all have a lot of problems. This must be understood. <…> If a person wants to reach the pinnacle of power, he must be ready for anything. Putin has a huge advantage. He received this power without fighting for it and now he has to keep it. He didn't fight for it, and for good reason, because there is a certain process. People often overturn those in power for trivial reasons. The question is why? Change makes sense in some circumstances. For example, if you have the money, buy a car so that people do not think you are poor. But what is the point of a change in power if the power is supported by only half of the people? Is it worth it to do something because of this (Archpriest Dmitrii Smirnov 2011)?

As an illustration of the priesthood's latently positive view on the powers that be, one can cite Bishop Evtikhii's statement: "Although I, like many of you, find many things wrong with our government <...> I ask you to go and vote for Putin in the upcoming elections" (Dmitrii Kraiukhin: svoe i chuzhoe 2012)! Similarly, in the words of Deacon Vladimir Vasilik:

> Power guarantees stability; it is a wall that blocks the path of chaos, civil strife, and mutual extermination. In addition, power keeps enemies from attacking the country. In Soviet times, the Church denounced the state, but, nevertheless, declared that Orthodox Christians were praying for it. The Soviet government was not formally godless because the Constitution did not contain a written statement about the prohibition of religion. Also, the Church and the faith were subjected to persecution and oppression because of communism's atheistic message. But the righteous men of the twentieth century, Vladyka Benjamin (Fedchenkov) and Father John (Krestiankin), fervently prayed for the Soviet regime. <...> Thanks to these prayers, Russia miraculously revived because the government, though perhaps not completely, turned to faith and the Church. <...> This commandment has not lost its relevance even now, when Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin leads our country — a believer and church-going President who regularly confesses and partakes of the Holy Mysteries of Christ (Deacon Vasilik 2015).

An example of a negative attitude towards the authorities is Archpriest Yevgenii Sokolov's speech, which reproaches government leaders for their hypocrisy and lack of faith:

> During a Presidential press conference, someone asked a question about the one million signatures collected against abortion procedures funded through the compulsory medical insurance system. <...> And what did our leader answer? He said: "The question is difficult. In all countries of the world, this operation is performed, so one must think and decide. You can't answer right away." Well then, do not claim to be a believer because from the Orthodox point of view this is murder. <...> We have baptized people sitting in the Duma who thwarted the vote on banning abortion by simply not showing up to the meeting. Such an ostrich policy. Hypocrisy. <...> I repeat, there are no true believers in the Duma, in the Federation Council, or in our government offices, including the Presidency. I repeat, there are no believers. Because if there were, they would not legalize what is happening (News.ru 2018).

Consequently, it is reasonable to assume that the Orthodox clergy is agitating believers to vote against United Russia due to discrepancies between the secular and ecclesiastical authorities on a wide range of issues. However, media documentation of clergy campaigning for United Russia (Vinokurova 2011; Sova-Center.ru 2015; Credo.ru 2011; Kam24.ru 2015; Mel'nikov 2018; Sova-center.ru 2018), official Church documents, speeches showing Church representatives' traditionalist attitudes (Zhuravlev 2017, 4), and the Church's public stance on maintaining the status quo in the political sphere (Ukhvatova 2018) testify to the inconsistency of this (albeit not unfounded) hypothesis. But how then can we explain the fact that the parishioners who witnessed clerical political campaigning demonstrated a lower percentage of support for United Russia than those who did not?

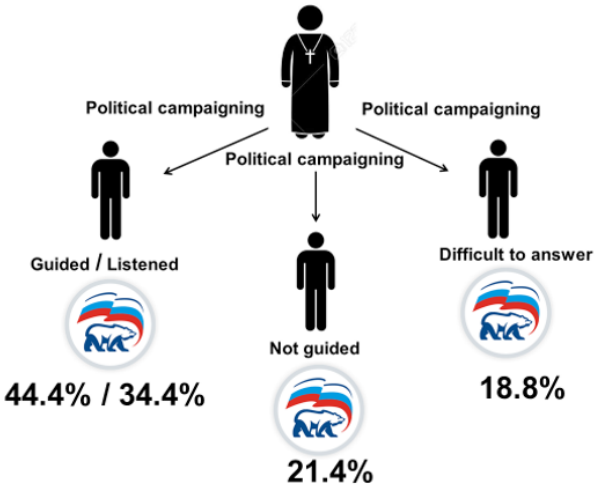


Figure 2. Attitudes towards priests' advice and voting for "United Russia"

The true beneficiary of clerical campaigning and the most effective way of agitating believers

This paradox can be explained by the fact that parishioners themselves perceive clerical political agitation ambiguously. Modern believers are a complex community differentiated according to various characteristics, such as the frequency of attending religious services. As recent studies show, church attendance (being churched) is interconnected with many social, economic, and political behavioral char-

acteristics (Berghammer 2012; Wright 2014; Baro and McCleary 2006; Tienen, Scheepers, Reitsma, and Schilderman 2011). Thus, the authors hypothesized that believers who differed in their degree of churching would have dissimilar reactions to priestly political campaigning. According to the study's results, priests mainly campaign in favor of United Russia, but these actions cause different reactions among believers in different stages of churching.

Believers who listened to or were guided by priests' advice should have shown greater loyalty to United Russia and lower rates of absenteeism in comparison with other categories of respondents. The data supports this assumption: 44.4 percent of those guided by priestly advice voted for United Russia, while 27.8 percent did not, and 34.4 percent of those who listened to clerical advice voted for United Russia, while 23 percent did not. However, participants' refusals to follow this advice and difficulties in answering the question lowered the ruling party indicators (21.4 percent and 18.8 percent), while increasing absentee behavior (34.6 and 50 percent, respectively). (See Table 2.)

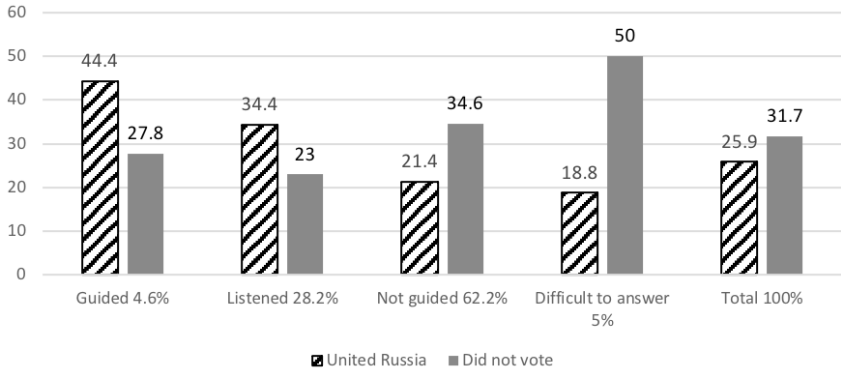


Table 2. Electoral preferences of believers who witnessed political sermons (18.4 percent of those in the sample), and their adherence to the priest's advice

Clearly, United Russia benefits from clerical political campaigning only among believers who rely on priests' opinions.[6] For believers who

6. Respondents were asked: "Were you guided by the priest's advice / hints /opinions when deciding whether to vote for this or that party / candidate?" The scale of answers included the options: "was guided / not guided", "I find it difficult to answer", and "listened to the opinion of the priest, but made the final decision independently." The answer "was guided by the priest's opinion" marks the believer's unquestioning adherence to the priest's will and means that the believer voted for the political party the clergyman indicated. The an-

do not, mass campaigning is ineffective. Given the fact that the share of believers who listen to and rely on priestly opinions (the sum of the answers "guided" and "listened") is only one-third (32.8 percent), and those who do not (answer "not guided") is two-thirds (62.2 percent), believers who witnessed political sermons were less loyal to the United Russia Party than those who did not (25.9 percent and 32.8 percent respectively). This negative effect is not connected with the fact that the priests are campaigning against United Russia, but with the fact that the majority of believers have a negative attitude towards campaigning in general. Thus, clerical campaigning is effective for United Russia in terms of intensity, but not in terms of breadth.

Indeed, a significant part of secularized Russian society negatively perceives clerical political campaigning as an invasion of spheres that are outside the Church's purview. According to a survey by the Levada Center in 2017, 58 percent of Russians agreed that the Church should not influence state policy (Interfax.ru 2017). In a similar survey by the FOM that same year, 35 percent of Russians believed that the Russian Orthodox Church intervenes in social spheres that it should not, while 29 percent answered that this does not happen, and 37 percent found it difficult to answer (Fom.ru 2017).

Faced with priestly political activities that, according to societal ideas, go beyond the tasks assigned to the Church (maintaining public morality, satisfying spiritual needs, giving charity, and so forth), believers in early stages of churching may make decisions that differ from those that priests prescribe. When their ideas clash with the clergy, believers do not rely on the priest's opinion and refuse to participate in elections (Table 2.).[7] Archbishop Panteleimon, who in 2000-2009 headed the Maikop and Adyghe diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church, spoke about this category of believers as follows:

swer "I listen to the opinion, but I make the final decision on my own" demonstrates the believer's high level of trust in the priest while maintaining a certain level of reflection. This option made it possible to capture the effect of the clergy's indirect campaigning and to take into account believers who were uncomfortable admitting that, in some cases, they relied on someone else's opinion. For many believers, the answer "listened" is preferable to "guided", since the suggestion of independence allows believers to convince themselves that they are making their own decisions. In reality, their decisions are based on the priest's judgments and recommendations. As a result, the answers to "guided" and "listening" are considered as the sum of the shares of believers who, to one degree or another, rely on a priest's opinion. They will be collectively referred to as "believers who rely on priests' opinions."

7. When asked "what would you do if the priest delivered a political sermon?" one of the believers replied: "I would send this priest away — because the gospel is supposed to be godly, not worldly. I would not vote for the party he recommended!"

> They take into account the priest's opinion, but only in those matters that they themselves consider to be spiritual. The priest cannot forbid much if they consider something to be "not his business" (Filatov 2014).

At the same time, not all respondents who rely on priests' opinions witnessed political sermons. In other words, religion is not limited to only one (the first on our list) channel of influence. Many believers turned to clergy on their own initiative with questions about which political party they should support. Indeed, 73 percent of Orthodox believers in the sample did not witness priests' political sermons, but 9.7 percent of this group decided to independently contact the clergy with questions about voting. This category makes up a significant proportion of believers who rely on priestly opinions in political matters. If we consider the entire group of believers who relied on the opinion of clergy when voting, only 41.6 percent of them witnessed political sermons. At the same time, 48.4 percent of the believers, who relied on pastoral advice, initiated conversations with priests on political topics and privately asked for their advice.

The authors traced the second channel of religious influence by examining the category of parishioners who did not witness priests' political sermons.

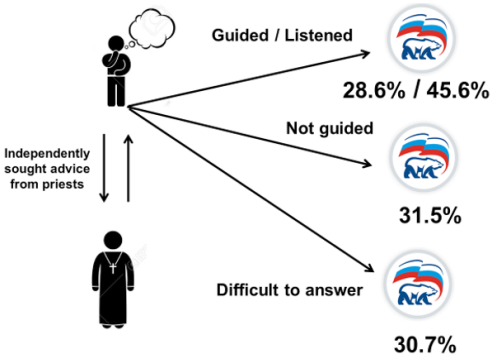
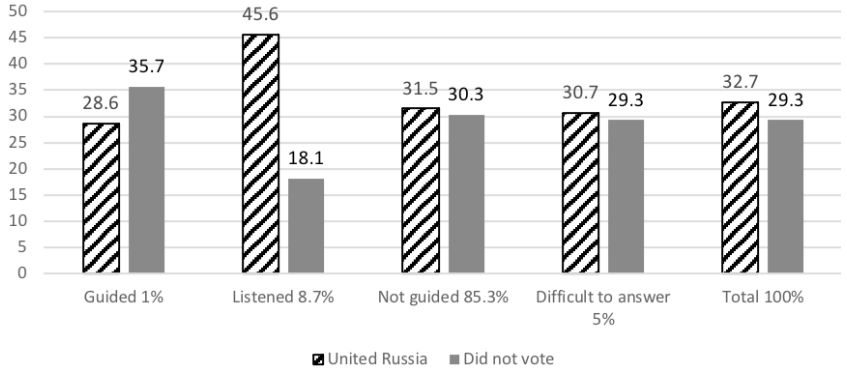


Figure 3. Voting for "United Russia" among believers who received private counseling by a priest (of their own free will)

In Table 3 (below), the highest percentage of support for United Russia is from believers who independently sought advice from priests and listened to them (45.6 percent). They are also the most active in the elections (in this group, only 18.1 percent refused to participate in the elections). If this data is in line with expectations,

those few respondents who did not just listen, but were guided by priestly advice (28.7 percent) gave the least support for the ruling party, which requires a separate explanation. "Guided by" advice and "listening" to it are fairly close categories, but the respondents who answered them demonstrated opposite voting behaviors. Moreover, among the parishioners who witnessed priests' political sermons, the ratio of these categories was reversed: the "guided" provided more support for United Russia than the "listening." How can this be explained?

Table 3. Electoral preferences of believers who did not witness political sermons (73 percent in the sample), and their adherence to the priest's advice

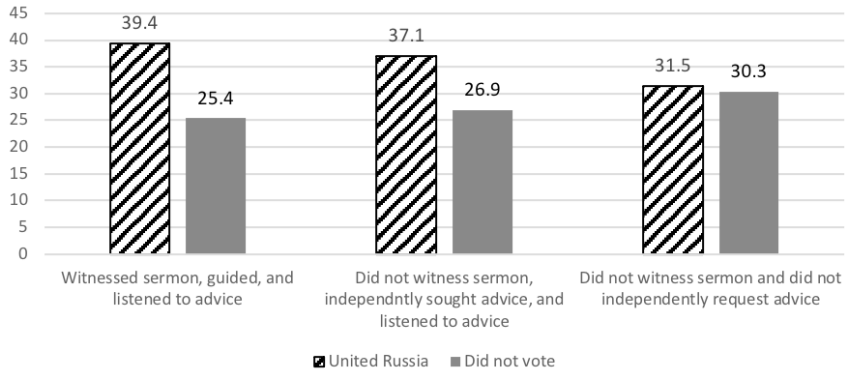


This is presumably due to the fact that priests who agitate the flock during sermons and those who answer believers' political questions on an individual basis broadcast different attitudes towards power.[8] It is highly likely that the former express an explicitly positive point of view on power (the existing power is bestowed by God and the good), giving United Russia a greater result than "listening." The latter more often voice a latently positive position (the existing power is bad, but it is not and never will be better). Therefore, support for United Russia among believers who rely on priests' public opinions is, on average, slightly higher than the level of support among Orthodox Christians who rely on priestly opinions voiced in private (39.4 percent and 37.1 percent) (See Table 4). In general, this

8. Cases where believers seek advice from a priest who previously conducted public campaigning for the flock during the service are not considered in this case.

channel of influence turns out to be more effective than the first one, because it does not cause a negative reaction among the majority of parishioners.

Table 4. Comparison of electoral preferences of believers who followed a priest's advice after public sermons and individual counseling



The third channel of influence on believers' electoral choice is the direct interaction of parishioners with community members. At this level, the priestly role as formal Church representatives is minimized, and the importance of parishioners who are involved in community life as opinion leaders increases. Data shows that participation in a religious community was associated with an increase in electoral support for United Russia.[9]

The distribution shows that 37.2 percent of Orthodox Christians involved in parish life voted for United Russia while 28.6 percent of uninvolved believers supported the ruling party. Of the respondents who found it difficult to answer, 32.8 percent expressed loyalty to United Russia. In turn, the absentee indicators in all typological groups were approximately equal, in the region of 30 percent (Table 5).

9. It should be noted that Orthodox Christians who do not participate in the activities of religious communities more often than their fellow believers, vote for the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (10.3 percent and 5.2 percent), the Liberal Democratic Party (7 percent and 4.3 percent) and Yabloko (4.4 percent and 2.2 percent).

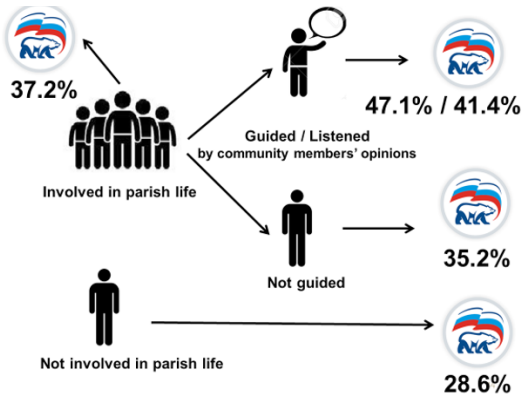
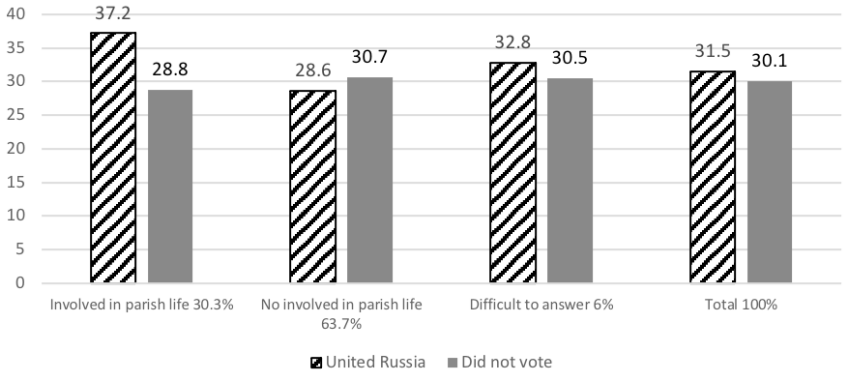


Figure 4. Voting for "United Russia" among believers taking part in parish life

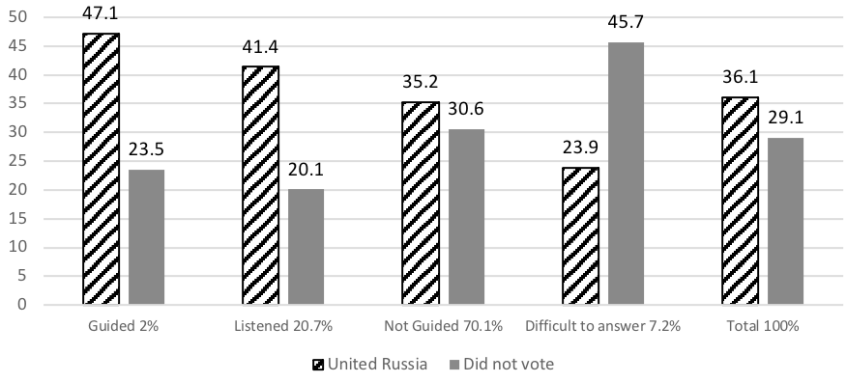
Table 5. Believers' parish participation and their electoral choices



Of course, a believer's increased loyalty to United Russia is not an accurate indicator of the third channel's influence on electoral choice. A more important indicator of party choice is community members' opinions, which is coupled with an increase in support for United Russia. Among the Orthodox believers who were guided by their community members' opinions, 47.1 percent voted for United Russia, while among those who "listened" the same indicator was 41.4 percent. In turn, among those "not guided" and "those who found it difficult to answer," votes for the ruling party were 35.2 percent and 23.9 percent, respectively (Table 6). The indicators of nonparticipation in elections among believers involved in parish life and reliant on the opinions of the community members (23.5 percent and 20.1 percent) were lower

than among their fellow believers who were not guided by community members' opinions when voting (30.6 percent), and those who found it difficult to answer the question (45.7 percent).

Table 6. Electoral choice of believers who are members of the Parish community and reliance on community members' opinions when voting



Accordingly, the United Russia Party is the main beneficiary of priests' political influence on Orthodox believers' electoral preferences. The clergy's effectiveness, however, largely depends on the extent to which believers trust their priest, which is related to their degree of churching (frequency of attending religious services).

At the same time, the most effective mechanism of influencing believers' party choice is through fellow parishioners' opinions. The greatest loyalty to United Russia is among believers who take part in the religious community and, when deciding to vote, seek advice from their parish neighbors. These results are consistent with other researchers' conclusions. The American researchers P. Jupe and K. Gilbert argue that it is not priestly advice that most influences believers, but the social interactions that occur between believers within the church community. In other words, interpersonal and group discussions that take place within the community determine believers' political preferences to a greater extent than priests' words (Djupe and Gilbert 2009).

The results indicate that among Orthodox Christians who discuss political issues with their neighbors in the parish, support for United Russia is higher than support from believers who are "guided" or "listen" to priestly opinions. Considering parishioners' influence on par-

ty choice, it should be remembered that in Russia the share of Orthodox believers who participate with varying intensity in the life of the parish is relatively small (Sreda.org 2011). At the same time, in conditions of low voter turnout, religious communities' electoral potential (among other things, characterized by relatively high mobilization rates) may well provide the necessary percentage for both a single-mandate (which can be confirmed by V. V. Milonov's experience) and a political party on the federal scale (an interesting example is the party "Rodina," which in the 2003 elections brought 29 deputies to the State Duma, 12 of whom were members of the "Union of Orthodox Citizens") (Toshchenko 2007, 341).

Conclusion

This study reveals that there are three significant channels of religious influence on parishioners' electoral preference: priests' public political campaigning, believers' independent appeals to the clergy for advice, and the views and opinions of other members in the community. In all three cases, the main beneficiary of such influence is the United Russia Party.

At the same time, these various channels of influence are characterized by unequal indicators of the effectiveness of political propaganda. Thus, successful clerical political campaigning largely depends on a believer's degree of churching. Political sermons have a strong positive effect for United Russia, but within a rather limited audience of believers. Campaigning during the sermon is effective among the relatively few categories of believers who often attend religious services (those who attend services from one to three times a month or attend services once a week or more often). Among the large group of Orthodox Christians in the early stages of churching (those who do not attend services, attend services once a year or less often, or attend services several times a year), political sermons provoke a backlash and lower support for United Russia. In addition, priests' targeted advice to undecided believers who voluntarily turn to the Church with political questions is a more effective method of campaigning for United Russia than public sermons, since it does not lead to a decrease in support from the Orthodox Christians in early stages of churching. Lastly, the study reveals that those Orthodox believers who take part in the religious community and discuss political issues (seek advice) with their fellow believers demonstrate the greatest loyalty to United Russia. In this group of believers, votes for the party

in power are higher than the support for United Russia among Orthodox Christians, who rely on priests' public political opinion. Thus, parishioners in the religious community have a stronger influence on the electoral choice of Orthodox believers participating in parish life than priests.

References

Adamsky, D. 2019. *Russian Nuclear Orthodoxy*: *Religion, Politics, and Strategy*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.

Archpriest Dmitrii Smirnov. 2011. "Protoierei Dmitrii Smirnov: revoliutsiia ili pokaianie?" ["Archpriest Dimitri Smirnov: revolution or repentance?"]. *Pravovrns.ru*, http://pravovrns.ru/?p=4806.

Arkhiereiskii Sobor Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi. 2008. "Osnovy ucheniia Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi o dostoinstve, svobode i pravakh cheloveka" ["Fundamentals of the teaching of the Russian Orthodox Church on dignity, freedom, and human rights"]. Patriarcha.ru. June 26, http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/428616.html.

Barro, R., and R. McCleary. 2006. "Religion and Political Economy in an International Panel." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 45(2): 149–75.

Berghammer, C. 2012. "Church Attendance and Childbearing: Evidence from a Dutch Panel Study, 1987–2005." *Population Studies* 66(2): 197–212

Bogachev, M. I., and K, V. Sorvin. 2019. "Politika v Tserkvi: vozdeistvuiut li sviashchenniki na elektoral'nye predpochteniia pravoslavnykh veruiushchikh?" ["Politics in the Church: Do priests affect the electoral preferences of Orthodox believers?"]. *Mir Rossii: Sotsiologiia, etnologiia* 28(4): 68–91.

Bogachev, M. 2016. "Curriculum vitae: Religiozno-obshchestvennaia zhizn' rossiiskikh regionov" ["Curriculum vitae: The religio-social life of Russia's regions"]. *Gosudarstvo, religiia, tserkov' v Rossii i za rubezhom* 34(4): 251–265.

Briskina-Muller, A. 2015. "Power and Victory as Central Categories of the Russian Orthodox Public Discourse Today." Paper presented at the Conference of Political Orthodoxy and Totalitarianism in a Post-Communist Era, Helsinki, Finland, 2015, May 28–31.

Credo.ru. 2011. "Vybornyi skandal v Kurske" ["Election scandal in Kursk"]. *Portal-credo.ru*. March 24, http://www.portal-credo.ru/site/?act=news&id=83111.

Deacon Vasilik, V. 2015. "Pochemu tserkov molitsia za vlast?" [Why is the church praying for power?"]. *Pravoslavie.ru*. October 24, http://www.pravoslavie.ru/87082.html.

Djupe, P. A., and C. P. Gilbert. 2009. *The Political Influence of Churches*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Dmitrii Kraiukhin: svoe i chuzhoe [Dmitrii Kraiukhin: him and other's]. 2012. "Episkop Evtikhii (Kurochkin) agitiruet za Putina" ["Bishop Evtikhii (Kurochkin) campaigning for Putin"]. February 26, video, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0772sCgCzOM.

Emel'ianov, N. 2019. *"Zhatvy mnogo, a delatelei malo": Problema vzaimodeistviia sviashchennikov i mirian v sovremennoi Rossii* [*"The Harvest is plentiful but the workers are few": the problem of the interaction of priests and laity in modern Russia*]. Moscow: Izd-vo PSTGU.

Filatov, S., ed. 2014. *Religiozno-obshchestvennaia zhizn' rossiiskih regionov,* vol. 1. [*The religio-social life of Russia's regions*, Vol. 1]. Moscow: Letnii sad.

Fom.ru. 2017. “Otnoshenie k RPTs i ee uchastiiu v raznykh sferakh zhizni strany” [“Attitude towards the ROC and its participation in different spheres of the country’s life”]. *Fom.ru*. November 11, https://fom.ru/posts/13846.

Grishaeva, E. I. 2018. “Tserkovnye diskursy i identichnost’. potentsial primeneniia diskursivnykh podkhodov v sotsiologicheskom izuchenii religioznykh identichnostei v khristianskih obshchinakh” [“Church Discourses and Identity. The potential of applying discursive approaches in the sociological study of religious identities in Christian communities”]. *Vestnik RGGU. Seriia: filosofiia. sotsiologiia. Iskusstvovedenie* 1(11): 50–64.

Interfax.ru. 2017. “V Rossii za tri goda stalo vdvoe men’she ateistov” [“In three years atheists in Russia fell by half”]. *Interfax.ru*. July 24, https://www.interfax.ru/russia/571819.

Kam24.ru. 2015. “Kommunisty: v mil’kove za kandidatov ‘Edinoi Rossii’ agitiroval sviashchennik” [“Communists: in Milkovo a priest campaigned for ‘United Russia’ candidates”]. *KAM 24*. December 21, https://www.kam24.ru/news/main/31921.html.

Kaspe, S. I. 2018. “Zagovor molchaniia: sopriazheniia sakral’nogo i politicheskogo v diskursivnykh praktikakh sovremennoi Rossii” [“A conspiracy of silence: the conjugation of the sacred and the political in the discursive practices of modern Russia”], *Sotsiologicheskoe obozrenie* 17(2): 9–38.

Knorre, B. K. 2016. “The Culture of War and Militarization within Political Orthodoxy in the Post-soviet Region.” *Transcultural Studies* 12(1): 15–38.

Knorre, B. K., and T. Kharish. 2018. “Political Language of the Church in the Post-Soviet Period.” *KnE Social Sciences* 3(7): 365–383

Knorre, B. K., and A. D. Kuman′kov. 2019. “’Bogoslovie voiny’ v postsovetskom rossiiskom pravoslavii” [“The Theology Wars” in Post-Soviet Russian Orthodoxy”]. In *Politicheskoe bogoslovie* [*Political Theology*], edited by A. Bodrov and M. Tolstolzhenko, 52–76. Moscow: Izdatel′stvo Bibleĭsko-bogoslovskogo instituta sv. apostola Andreia. Gl. 4.

Kollner, T. 2013. “Businessmen, Priests and Parishes. Religious Individualization and Privatization in Russia.” *Archives de Sciences de Sociales des Religions* (162): 37–52.

Kormina, Zh. V. 2019. *Palomniki: Etnograficheskie ocherki pravoslavnogo nomadizma* [*Pilgrims: Ethnographic essays on Orthodox nomadism*]. Moscow: Izd. dom Vysshei shkoly ekonomiki.

Krikhtova, T. 2019. “Raspredelenie rabochikh vremiazatrat sovremennykh pravoslavnykh sviashchennikov” [“Distribution of working time and the costs of modern Orthodox priests”]. *Monitoring obshchestvennogo mneniia: Ekonomicheskie i sotsial'nye peremeny* (3): 223–238.

Kul’kova [Kulkova], A. Iu. 2015. “Religioznost’ i politicheskoe uchastie: rol’ politiki v rossiiskikh religioznykh obshchinakh” [“Religiosity and political participation: the role of politics in Russian religious communities”]. *Preprinty. Vysshaia shkola ekonomiki. Seriia WP14. “Politicheskaia teoriia i politicheskii analiz”* [*Preprint. High school of economics. Working Paper series. “Political theory and political analysis”*] 2.

Kulkova, A. 2017. “Religiosity and Political Participation across Europe.” In *Values and Identities in Europe: Evidence from the European Social Survey*, edited by Michael J. Breen, 36–57. New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

Lokosov, V. V. 2006. “Vliiaet li religioznost’ na politicheskuiu konsolidatsiiu obshchestva?” [“Does religiosity influence the political consolidation of society?”] *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia* (11): 83–89.

Lokosov, V. V., and Iu. Iu. Sinelina. 2004 *Religioznaia situatsiia v Iaroslavskoi oblasti* [*The Religious situation in the Yaroslavl region*]. Moscow: ISPI RAN.

Lokosov, V. V., and Iu. Iu. Sinelina. 2008 "Vzaimosviaz' religioznykh i politicheskikh orientatsii pravoslavnykh rossiian" ["The relationship of religious and political orientations of Orthodox Russians"]. In *Religiia v samosoznanii naroda (Religioznyi faktor v identifikatsionnykh protsessakh* [*Religion in the consciousness of the nation (religious factors and the identification processes*], edited by M. P. Mchedlov, 135–158. Moscow: Institut sotsiologii RAN.

Mel'nikov, A. 2018. "Dukhovnik patriarkha Kirilla agitiruet za lidera prezidentskoi gonki" [Confessor of Patriarch Kirill campaigns for the leader of the presidential race"]. *Nezavisimaya gazeta*. March 15, http://www.ng.ru/faith/2018-03-15/100_elections150318.html.

News.ru. 2018. "Arkhangel'skii sviashchennik zhestko raskritikoval Putina za 'zapredel'noe litsemerie', pripomniv provalennoe obrazovanie, aborty i pensionnuiu reform" ["An Arkhangelsk priest harshly criticized Putin for "outrageous hypocrisy", recalling the failed education, abortion, and pension reforms"]. *News.ru*. June 27, https://www.newsru.com/religy/27jun2018/kritika.html.

Obshchestvennoe mnenie — 2019 [Public Opinion — 2019]. 2020. Moscow: Levada-Tsentr.

Østbø, J. 2015. *The New Third Rome: Readings of a Russian Nationalist Myth*. Stuttgart: Ibedem Press.

Papkova, I. A. 2011. *The Orthodox Church and Russian Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Patriarch Alexy II. 2000. "Osnovy sotsial'noi kontseptsii RPTs" ["Bases of the social concept of the Russian Orthodox Church"]. Mospat.ru, https://mospat.ru/ru/documents/social-concepts/.

Patriarch Kirill. 2016. "Sviateishii Patriarkh Kirill prinial uchastiie v golosovanii na vyborakh v Gosudarstvennuiu Dumu FS RF" ["His Holiness Patriarch Kirill took part in voting in the elections to the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation"]. *Patriarchia.ru*. September 18, http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/4616882.html.

Patriarch Kirill. 2017. "Sviateishii Patriarkh Kirill prizval pastvu k uchastiiu v vyborakh Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii" ["His Holiness Patriarch Kirill called on the flock to participate in the presidential elections of the Russian Federation"]. *Patriarchia.ru*. December 26, http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5089386.html.

Pravmir [Orthodox World]. 2012. "Protoierei Dmitrii Smirnov v efire Vladimira Poznera" ["Archpriest Dmitrii Smirnov on air with Vladimir Pozner"]. *Pravmir.ru*. March 20, https://www.pravmir.ru/protoierej-dmitrij-smirnov-v-efire-u-vladimira-poznera/.

Shcherbak, A. N., and M. V. Uhvatova. 2018. "Ot 'krasnogo poiasa' — k 'bibleiskomu': istoricheskie predposylki sdvigov v politicheskoi geografii Rossii" ["From the 'red belt' to the 'biblical': the historical background of shifts in the political geography of Russia]. *Obshchestvennye nauki i sovremennost'* 6(6): 98–113.

Sitnikov, A. V. 2012. *Pravoslavie, instituty vlasti i grazhdanskogo obshchestva v Rossii* [*Orthodoxy, institutions of power, and civil society in Russia*]. Saint Petersburg: Aleteiia.

Sova-center.ru. 2015. "V Voronezhe 'Edinaia Rossiia' dlia predvybornoi agitatsii ispol'zovala khram" ["In Voronezh, 'United Russia' used a church for election campaigning"]. *Sova Information and Analytical Center*. September 14, https://www.sova-center.ru/religion/news/authorities/elections/2015/09/d32794/.

Sova-center.ru. 2018. "Vpreddverii vyborov v nekotorykh eparkhiiakh poiavilis' broshiury s 'molitvoi za prezidenta'" ["On the eve of the elections, brochures with a 'prayer for the president' appeared in some dioceses"]. *Sova Information and Analytical Center*. February 20, https://www.sova-center.ru/religion/news/authorities/elections/2018/02/d38893/.

Sreda.org. 2011. "prikhodskaia zhizn'" ["Parish Life"]. *Sreda Research Service*. December 30, https://sreda.org/opros/31-prihodskaya-zhizn.

Suslov, M., ed. 2016. *Digital Orthodoxy in the Post-Soviet World: The Russian Orthodox Church and Web 2.0*. Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag.

Tienen, M., P. Scheepers, J. Reitsma, and H. Schilderman. 2011. "The Role of Religiosity for Formal and Informal Volunteering in the Netherlands." *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 22(3): 365–389.

Toshchenko, Zh. T. 2007. *Teokratiia: fantom ili real'nost'?* [*Theocracy: phantom or peality?*]. Moscow: Academia.

tvsoyuz. 2015. "Vsia li vlast' ot Boga?" ["Is all power from God?"]. June 2, video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zz_9jCZ9IcQ.

Ukhvatova, M. V. 2017. "Religiia i elektoral'noe povedenie v Rossii: regional'nyi aspect" ["Religion and electoral behavior in Russia: a regional perspective"]. *Vestnik Permskogo universiteta. Seriia: Politologiia* (4): 26–48.

Ukhvatova, M. V. 2018. "Naputstviia okhraniteleii (Religioznaia ritorika na inauguratsiiakh rossiiskih gubernatorov)" ["Parting instructions of the guardians (Religious rhetoric at the inaugurations of Russian governors)"], *Politiia: Analiz. Khronika. Prognoz* (2): 84–101.

Verkhovskii, A. M. 2003. *Politicheskoe pravoslavie: Russkie pravoslavnye natsionalisty i fundamentalisty, 1995–2001 gg*. [*Political Orthodoxy: Russian Orthodox nationalists and fundametalists, 1995–2001*]. Moscow: Tsentr "Sova".

Vinokurova, E. 2011. "I Bog s nimi. Regional'nye vlasti ubezhdali sviashchennikov agitirovat' prikhozhan za 'Edinuiu Rossiiu'" ["And God is with them. Regional authorities urged priests to agitate parishioners for 'United Russia'"]. *Gazeta.ru*. November 17, https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/elections2011/2011/11/17_a_3838690.shtml.

Wright, N. 2014. "Attendance Matters: Religion and Ethical Affirmation of Gay and Lesbian Sexuality." *Review of Religious Research* 56(2): 245–273.

Zhuravlev, D. V. 2017. "Pravoslavnaia identichnost' kak traditsionalizm: konstruirovanie politicheskikh smyslov v aktual'nom publichnom diskurse RPTs" ["Orthodox identity as traditionalism: the construction of political meanings in the current public discourse of the Russian Orthodox Church"]. *Politiia: Analiz. Khronika. Prognoz* (4): 82–100.

Dmitry Uzlaner. 2020. *Postsekuliarnyi povorot. Kak myslit' o religii v XXI veke* [The Postsecular Turn. How to Think about Religion in the Twenty-First Century]. M.: Izdatel'stvo Instituta Gaiidara (in Russian). — 416 p.

Translated by Jan Surer

DOI: https://doi.org/10.22394/2311-3448-2021-8-1-113-119

Researchers who work in the humanities or the social sciences regularly present concepts to describe the current state of society with varying degrees of generalization and attention to a specific sphere of life (the economy, culture, religion). For example, until the beginning of the twenty-first century, postmodernism seemed to be the most relevant language for describing "modernity," but recently numerous alternative concepts for describing the present have appeared and can be listed ad infinitum—hypermodernism, metamodernism, digimodernism, and so forth.

Many observers follow the influence of individual phenomena on modernity—the media, robotization, or, for example, religion. While scholars have long argued that we live in a secularized world, having realized the inadequacy of this approach and noting both the transformation of the religious and religion's return to society, researchers have begun to consider the need to invent a new language to describe new phenomena and trends. Accordingly, the concept of the postsecular was proposed and in recent decades has become increasingly popular.

The book by the sociologist of religion and philosopher Dmitry Uzlaner, *The Postsecular Turn. How to Think about Religion in the Twenty-first Century*, serves as a large-scale attempt to describe the ongoing changes in the transformation of the religious. The work offers an analysis of postsecularity, first, as an actual social reality, and second, as a relevant conceptual framework for describing this reality. In fact, this work is a continuation of the

monograph *The End of Religion? A History of the Theory of Secularization* (2019). The author's first book provided a comprehensive analysis of the sociological theory of secularization and its history within the Western context and in Soviet reality. The work ends by leading readers to the topic presented in the book reviewed here: the author now explores the reasons that the theory of secularization at the beginning of the twenty-first century began to lose its value as a system of representation and as a language for describing modernity, since the "postsecular turn" had taken place.

This turn occurred in the 1990s, when the concept of postsecularity emerged. As new religious phenomena arising in the second half of the twentieth century spread everywhere, the sense developed that the old model of describing reality no longer worked. In academic and sociopolitical literature devoted to the critique of secularism the concept of the "postsecular" began to see active use. Prior to this, new forms of religiosity were considered deviations from the norm and were viewed through the customary secular lens. Dmitry Uzlaner focuses his research on analyzing these trends.

What does the author mean by the postsecular turn and postsecularity? The postsecular turn is "the erosion of habitual religious and secular forms, on the one hand, and of the model of their representation in academic discourse, on the other hand" (12). This disintegration necessitates the search for a new language to describe the nascent reality, simultaneously postsecular and post-religious, if one is to consider it with the help of "the usual ideas about religion and the secular" (12). Accordingly, postsecularity is a new unstable state of society, in which religion returns to the social space and new forms of interaction between religion and secular reality arise. Furthermore, postsecularity implies the need for a new model to represent the emerging reality. The postsecular does not seek to return to pre-secular ways of thinking; on the contrary, it becomes the basis for the formation of a fundamentally new state of modernity (97). Following the sociologist Gregor McLennan, Uzlaner indicates that one should understand the prefix "post-" in postsecularity as something that is beyond the secular, not after and not anti-secular (186). When speaking of postsecularity, Uzlaner also mentions alternative approaches to the description of modernity. For example, he refers to the concept of desecularization and immediately points to its inadequacy: desecularization, in contrast to postsecularization, focuses attention on the "reversal of secularization," the return to premodernity, which inaccurately describes current trends (185).

The Postsecular Turn itself is a collection of ten articles and one

appendix (a review of the book *The Science of Religion and Its Postmodern Critics* by the historian of philosophy Alexei Appolonov, 2018). The works have been published in various academic journals since 2008: some of them were included in the book in an expanded version; others appear in Russian for the first time. In other words, readers have the results of sustained, meticulous scholarly work, finally collected under one cover. The texts are arranged in chronological order of their publication, so readers should not expect a sequential narrative. Nevertheless, each article deals with a separate aspect of postsecularity and stands as a self-contained study, the conclusions of which represent an important contribution to social theory (the theory of postsecularity) which scholars can develop in further research and which contribute to other spheres of the humanities and social sciences. Due to the great empirical and theoretical richness of each chapter, any part of the book could be the subject of a thorough analysis; however, I shall focus on only those aspects I found most interesting.

Chapters One and Two were published in 2008 and 2011 in the journal *Logos* and provide a retrospective analysis of the concepts of the "religious" and the "secular" and their formation within the academy. Specifically, in these parts of the book the author draws attention to the role of modernism in the construction of these categories and its gradual weakening in recent years: "religions today are trying to break free from the shackles of 'religion'" (41), to return to their original status. Uzlaner does not believe that modernism has completely exhausted itself: ideological modernism is indeed "very much in question," while institutional modernism is consolidating its position (41–2).

In the context of the new reality, philosophy itself is changing as a branch of thought: philosophy and theology are interpenetrating each other, which is becoming a growing trend and a distinctive characteristic of postsecular philosophy. This phenomenon even has a name—the theological turn (54). Many scholars have begun to oppose the intermixing of the two disciplines, but Uzlaner readily supports a second camp, whose representatives (for example, left-wing philosophers Alain Badiou, Terry Eagleton, Slavoj Žižek, and Giorgio Agamben) began to employ theological ideas and concepts actively in their own works (48–61).

Uzlaner focuses on more than the transformation of philosophy and theology, however: Chapter Three analyzes the relationship between religion and modernity in the social sciences. This chapter, like its predecessors, demonstrates how the theory of secularization has become an inadequate tool for describing

the changes underway. Here, the author identifies the following factors that prompted the consideration of secularization theory's loss of relevance: debates about European and American exceptionalism; a series of important world events, in particular the Iranian Revolution of 1979; and, finally, criticism of modernization theory, with which secularization has always been associated. According to Uzlaner, the sociologist Shmuel Eisenstadt's concept of "multiple modernities" has become a possible lens for addressing the challenges faced by religious researchers (117–27).

Three chapters (Four, Eight, and Nine) speak directly to the Russian context of postsecularity. In Chapter Four, Uzlaner briefly leaves theory and directs his attention to a specific "case," the Pussy Riot case, and focuses on the characteristics of postsecularity in Russia. The value of the chapter lies in its examination of the boundary between the religious and the secular through the example of a punk prayer, which provoked a conflict of interpretations, confirming the instability of the postsecular situation. The author considers several aspects linked directly to the interpretive conflict: the very act of a punk prayer service, the Cathedral of Christ the Savior as an example of a profane "sacred" space, and the social group of "Orthodox believers" whose feelings the performance offended. For example, the study views the punk prayer from the perspectives of several parties: members of the group Pussy Riot, official representatives of the Church, the general public, and "schismatics" (Christians opposed to both the Russian Orthodox Church and the current political regime) (132–45). Each party had its own understanding of the boundaries of the religious and the secular, which enabled the author to distinguish two normative visions of postsecularism in Russia: the "oppositional" and the "pro-authority" (177). The same case describes how, in the postsecular reality, the secular state and its agents are drawn into "(quasi-)theological disputes" (133). In addition, as shown in Chapter Nine, in which the author analyzes the nationwide pro-Orthodox consensus, the Pussy Riot case became a turning point in this consensus and hastened its gradual disintegration, which today is reflected in a more acute form, namely, the emergence of national conflicts based on religious grounds (299–346).

Chapter Four is also important because it introduces the author's concept of a "postsecular hybrid." By postsecular hybrids, Uzlaner means "the interpenetration of religion and societal subsystems from which it had once been isolated" (161). The Pussy Riot case made it possible to discern several striking Russian "postsecular hybrids": religion as part of the public order, the

intersection of the religious and political spheres, and confessionally sympathetic expert witnesses (162).

Chapter Eight examines how Russian theologians try to conceptualize postsecularity in Russia. As the authors indicate (the text is co-authored with sociologist Kristina Stoeckl), this conceptual framework was introduced into the Russian context to describe the post-Soviet experience. Proponents of this concept aim to find "a middle ground between the modern and the anti-modern" (271). The authors pay special attention to an analysis of the works of Alexander Kyrlezhev, who authored the first Russian-language systematic analysis of the postsecular.

Chapter Five begins a different conceptual block: the mapping of the postsecular, or cognitive mapping, to use the terminology of Fredric Jameson, one of the main theorists of postmodernism. The chapter describes the "key conceptual points" of the postsecular: postsecularity is considered as a new empirical reality, a new normative paradigm, and a new scholarly lens. This text in a sense represents the quintessence of the ideas expressed earlier, but the resulting cognitive map enables the reader to better understand the postsecular situation and to better navigate the issue.

Chapter Seven, which Kristina Stoeckl also co-authored, serves as an attempt to clarify and in a certain sense to map postsecularity. The chapter examines four genealogies that give rise to a unique view of the postsecular: the sociological, the normative, the postmodern, and the theological. The researchers note that the large number of interpretations of the postsecular does not signify the concept's inadequacy, but once again proves the fluidity of the modernity it seeks to capture and describe (249–67).

Chapter Six addresses the interaction of science and religion in the public sphere in the sense in which Habermas understood this "dialogue"— "the set of institutions and practices located between the sphere of state authority and the sphere of privacy" (212). The text defends religion as an important and inevitable participant in public discourse and shows that it cannot be an exclusively private phenomenon.

Finally, the last chapter, published in 2019, offers an overview of the main trends in the relations between religion and politics in the modern world. Here one learns that today not only can politics influence religion, but religion can also influence politics. A number of world events affected this, including the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and the emergence of the "Christian right" movement in the United States. In another trend, many intellectuals refuse to take religious processes and religion itself seriously. Moreover, we are currently witnessing a crisis in secular political ideologies. The coupling of re-

ligion and politics in Western Europe and Russia constitutes a trend emblematic of this (347–67).

The idea that it is necessary, first, to conceive of modernity as postsecular, and, second, to accept postsecularity as a relevant lens for the analysis of modernity, runs as a common thread throughout the text. Uzlaner bases his reflections on a powerful empirical foundation: in the chapters devoted to the theoretical aspects of the analysis of postsecularity, the number of concepts and theories and their application to the phenomenon under study is pleasantly surprising (for example, John Rawls's concept of "overlapping consensus," John Caputo's approach to postsecular philosophy, and the analysis of the concept of secularity by Charles Taylor, Talal Asad, John Milbank, and others). In the chapters analyzing specific cases, the author performs a high-level analysis of media resources: for example, in his references to the Pussy Riot case, in addition to an accurate exposition of the materials of the case itself, one finds an examination of representative posts in amateur blogs (the "live journals" of the politician Alexei Navalny, Pussy Riot, and the journalist and politician Maxim Shevchenko) and in the national media (Gazeta.ru, Radio Liberty), as well as in thematic resources ("Orthodoxy and the World"). The author also turns to social media (the public pages "MDK" and "Lepra" on VKontakte), for example, when analyzing contemporary, shared cultural values to prove the thesis about the collapse of the pro-Orthodox consensus. Although Uzlaner does not offer a detailed analysis of the content of social network pages, he outlines the general environment.

The work covers a wide range of topics, so the chronological arrangement of the materials is sometimes confusing: some of the ideas in the book recur but are presented from a new angle; yet one also finds repetitions that, admittedly, sometimes lack justification. In addition, there is a lack of narrative in the book that could make the rich material more coherent. This absence of narrative by no means negates the theoretical and empirical value of the work, however: in fact, it makes it possible for the book to delve more deeply into the context of the postsecular, and the ideas it offers can be used to develop the line of research already underway in sociology, religious studies, the philosophy of culture, and so on.

V. Shpot'

References

Kyrlezhev, A. 2004. "Postsekuliarnaia epokha." ["The postsecular epoch"]. *Kontinent*, no. 120. https://magazines.gorky.media/continent/2004/120/postsekulyarnaya-epoha.html.

Pavlov, A. V. 2019. *Postpostmodernizm: kak sotsial'naia i kul'turnaia teorii ob"iasniaiut nashe vremia* [*Post-postmodernism: how social and cultural theories explain our time*]. Moscow: Izdatel'skii dom "Delo" Rossiiskaia akademiia narodnogo khozaistva i gosudarstvennoi sluzhby (RANKhiGS).

Uzlaner, D. 2019. *Konets religii? Istoriia teorii sekuliarizatsii* [*The end of religion? A history of the theory of secularization*]. Moscow: Izdatel'skii dom Vyschei Shkoly Ekonomiki.

Reference Information

Maksim I. Bogachev — Lecturer at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (Moscow, Russia). mbogachev@hse.ru

Olga Bogdanova — Editor at the Department of Foreign Journalism and Literature, Lomonosov Moscow State University (Russia). otheodorova@gmail.com

Natalia Dushakova — Senior Research Fellow at the Laboratory for Theoretical Folklore Studies, School of Advanced Studies in the Humanities, Russian Academy of National Economy and Public Administration (RANEPA) (Moscow, Russia). nataliadusacova@gmail.com

Vladislav Razdyakonov — Associate Professor at the Centre for the Study of Religion, Russian State University for the Humanities; Research Fellow at the Russian Academy of National Economy and Public Administration (RANEPA) (Moscow, Russia). razdyakonov.vladislav@gmail.com

Vasilisa Shpot' — Research Assistant at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (Moscow, Russia). vvshpot@edu.hse.ru

Kirill V. Sorvin — Associate Professor, Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences, National Research University Higher School of Economics (Moscow, Russia). ksorvin@hse.ru

Elena A. Ostrovskaya — Professor at the St. Petersburg State University (St. Petersburg, Russia). e.ostrovskaya@spbu.ru