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VLADIMIR MALAKHOV, DENIS LETNYAKOV

The Perception of Islam in Russia: The Comparative Dimension

Translated by Marcus Levitt

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Whereas a political market has developed in Western Europe in which negative clichés about Islam and Muslims are in demand, in Russia this market has not appeared. There are two reasons for this: the “autochthonous” nature of Islam in Russia and the specific features of the current political system. Due to these two factors, public articulation of negative attitudes toward Islam and Muslims is hampered and parties with an openly Islamophobic agenda are unlikely to emerge. At the same time, Russia is experiencing tensions similar to those in Western European societies. They include conflicts concerning the presence of Islamic symbols in the public sphere, such as wearing the hijab in public schools and building mosques in regions where Muslims are a minority. In spite of the officially promoted rhetoric of “interfaith harmony,” Russian society is deeply polarized. In regions where Muslims predominate the patterns of Islamic presence are different. As for migration into Russia from outside, this has not been an issue of public debate until very recently; Central Asian immigrants have been per-

ceived in terms of their ethnicity rather than religion. A shift in perception has begun to occur due to three reasons: (a) a reflection of the Western agenda in Russian media; (b) the increasing visibility of Muslim immigrants in public space; and (c) the involvement of Central Asian newcomers in several publicized terrorist attacks.

Keywords: Islam, Islamophobia, religion, migration, secularism, public discourse, Russia, Western Europe.

IT would be difficult to imagine a movement in Russia whose ideological focus was the struggle against “Islamization,” which is in rather striking contrast to many Western European countries where such movements have acquired a fairly wide scope. It would be equally difficult to imagine a Russian politician who would make passing laws in Parliament such as a ban on the public distribution of the Qur’an the center of his or her program.

Obviously, this contrast is due to the fact that Islam in Russia, unlike in Western Europe, is not “imported” by immigrants, but is a religion to which a significant part of the indigenous population belongs. Evidently, this circumstance also accounts for the difference in reactions to the tragedy of January 2015 in Paris in the editorial office of the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*: there were mass demonstrations in support of freedom of speech in European capitals, but a mass rally in defense of the religious sensibilities of Muslims in the capital of one Russia’s regions, Grozny. Is it worth concluding from this that Russian socio-political discussions about Islam are a complete antipode to those of Western Europe? Is it correct to assume that due to the autochthonous nature of Russian Islam its perception in Russia is fundamentally different from that of Western European countries?

The “Islamic Threat” as a Trope: The Perception of Islam and Muslims in Western Europe

The “Islamic threat” is a catchphrase that originated in anti-immigration rhetoric. One of the most important elements of this rhetoric has always been “the threat to national identity.” But if during the last third of the twentieth century this threat was associated with an increase in the proportion of the non-European (read: non-white) population (Hargreaves 2007), then at the turn of the twenty-first century it has been increasingly associated with a very particular category

of migrants — those from Islamic countries. The discursive shift that we are witnessing is that the “problem of Islam” is separating from the “immigration problem” and is acquiring a significant degree of autonomy. This autonomy is expressed, in particular, in the number of right-wing public figures who position themselves not as opponents of immigration but as opponents of Muslim immigration. A vivid illustration of this was the assassination of Pim Fortuyn. Since then Fortuyn’s anti-Muslim arguments have been introduced into the arsenal of almost all right-wing populist politicians and public activists. Betting on the anti-Islamic card allowed the once insignificant “Freedom Party” to become a powerful political force in the Netherlands. The “Alternative for Germany” (AfD), which arose only a few years ago, managed to overcome the five-percent barrier and enter parliament, not least thanks to the exploitation of the issue of Islamic immigration.¹ Confronting the threat to European identity that those arriving from Muslim countries supposedly brought with them formed the basis of the ideology of the “Pegida” movement — “European Patriots against the Islamization of the West.”

Of course, it would be quite wrong to conclude from the above that this tendency dominates the political field in today’s Europe. We are speaking here rather about a chain of exceptional instances. The European party system and electoral mainstream are still based on a liberal-conservative consensus, one that presumes the rejection of populist radicalism, and European civil society actively opposes attempts to discriminate against immigrants on the basis of religious affiliation. Suffice it to say, in particular, that in the eyes of the German political class AfD remains “untouchable” (all of the leading parties of the country have refused to collaborate with it), and more people come out for demonstrations against Pegida than for those carried out under the banner of the “European patriots.”²

Nevertheless, it should be noted that in Western Europe (and in recent years also in the United States) a political market has developed in which such figures of speech as “the Islamic threat,” “the Muslim issue,” and “the Islamic problem,” and so on, are in demand. What is the pattern of assumptions behind these phrases? First, we should realize that

1. The attempts by AfD leaders to exclude Muslims from legislation protecting religious minorities are worthy of note: “Alternative” suggests declaring Islam an ideology, not a religion.
2. After Pegida held a demonstration in Dresden in January 2015 with the participation of 25,000 people, counter-demonstrations were held throughout Germany, bringing together a total of 200,000 people. See “Deutschlandsweit Proteste” 2015.

we are dealing with the essentialization of the concept of “Islam”; Islam is presented as an unchanging essence, not as a religion that exists in a variety of versions; rather, this is “Islam as such.” This ahistorical entity is assumed to embody immanent conflict (the “bloody borders of Islam” in Samuel Huntington’s mythopoetic description) and an essentially anti-democratic objective (ultra-right politicians,³ journalists, and writers⁴ all repeat the mantra about the “totalitarian nature” of Islam).

Belief in the fundamental “civilizational incompatibility” of the Islamic and Western worlds suggests that Muslims living in the West are agents hostile to Western culture. Immigrants from Islamic countries and their descendants are suspected of deep disloyalty to the constitutional foundations of Western nation-states. “Muslims” in the framework of this ideological construct are not real people with different worldviews and different attitudes toward Islam, but are seen as a single united community whose members dream of creating a new Caliphate in place of today’s Europe.

Despite the caricature-like nature of this image, some very serious authors participate in its dissemination. Among them is the publicist David Pryce-Jones, who writes for such conservative publications as *Commentary* and *The National Review* (Pryce-Jones 2004, 2008). In the online version of the latter, Pryce-Jones maintains a blog that regularly addresses “the Islamic problem.” This, in his opinion, consists in the cultural incompatibility of immigrant Muslims and indigenous French. Pryce-Jones sees the manifestation of this incompatibility, among other things, in the cases of setting cars on fire that have become routine in the Parisian suburbs and that are committed mainly by teenagers of Maghreb origin.⁵

However, behind the trope of “the Islamic threat” lie not only phobias but also concerns that do have some validity. We are referring first of all to radical Islamism whose adherents preach violence. Since

3. “Islam and freedom are incompatible.” Gerd Wilders made this the slogan of his 2017 election campaign. Among the bills he proposed to the national parliament was a ban on the public dissemination of the Qur’an (which Wilders equated to *Mein Kampf*).
4. Some like Paul Berman or the now-deceased Oriana Fallaci achieved high status in the informal ranking of doomsayers; see Berman 2003; Fallaci 2004. Other anti-Islamic publicists compensate for their modest popularity with copious activity in the press and on the Internet. To this last group belongs the German author Michel Ley; see Ley 2015.
5. Pryce-Jones 2015. Readers, however, may be aware that young people of Arab origin living in France are largely non-religious, and they may doubt that the participation of adolescents from this environment in criminal activity can be explained by their confessional affiliation. To dispel such doubts, Pryce-Jones asserts that when setting fire to cars the young men cry “Allahu Akbar!”

some Muslim migrants (albeit miniscule in terms of percentage) do fall under radical influence, Western European societies face a very serious challenge. Journalists who focus on this issue are not usually inclined to distinguish between religious doctrine (Islam) and ideology (Islamism). As a result, when discussing the problem of Islamic radicalism a slight semantic substitution turns the problem into not one of a specific group of people but about Muslims as such.

Secondly, we are talking about the crisis of secularism. The point is not only that in the population of European countries, which in the majority is religiously indifferent, the share of those for whom religion is significant (and these are Muslims) is growing. The point is to rethink the role of religion in society — a process denoted in modern social science as “post-secularism” (Uzlaner 2013).

In this context, once again, many publications substitute the notion of a mythical clash of civilizations for an analysis of a complex set of real problems (normative, social, political, legal). One of the most prolific authors of this sort of work is the American Catholic writer Bruce Bawer, who lives in Norway (Bawer 2006, 2009). Although it would be wrong to suggest that such works do not meet with opposition from social scientists, the publications of the latter are rarely wrapped in popular packaging and therefore do not reach a wide audience (Klausen 2005; Haddad 2002; Roy 2007; Roy 2017; Norton 2016).

Islam and Muslims in Russian Public Discourse

As we have already noted, the principal feature of Russia in the context of the current discussion is that here Islam is not a religion introduced by immigrants, but represents a faith with which a significant segment of Russian society identify themselves.⁶ And in the official state position and in the perception of ordinary citizens, Islam is one of the “traditional religions” of Russia (as opposed, in fact, to the various forms of non-Orthodox Christianity, which are not considered traditional). Hence there are significant restrictions of a protective nature on the public articulation of negative opinions about this religion and its adherents. In the Russian political field, there is no place yet for figures similar to, say, Gert Wilders, who is continuing the work of the abovementioned Pim Fortuyn. In Russia, even those political activists who in fact share the beliefs of the Dutch populist prefer not to

6. Various estimates put the number of Muslim Russian citizens at from 12 to 18 million. See Malashenko 2007, 10.

publicize them and usually exercise caution when speaking on issues related to Islam.⁷

In this situation, the only “socially acceptable” channel for expressing a negative attitude toward Islam and Muslims is to reference the problem of Islamic radicalism, primarily in the terms in which it has been discussed in the West. Hence, there is a rather artificial distinction made between “traditional” (Russian) and “non-traditional” (non-Russian) Islam. For the former, loyalty to the Russian state and a peaceful attitude are assumed, while the latter is by definition unlawful, fraught with extremist sentiments and threatening terrorist activity. Although this distinction does not stand up to criticism for a number of reasons,⁸ it continues to be repeated in public discourse on a regular basis. There are, however, certain distinctions to be made, depending on the agents of the discourse in question.

In the rhetoric of the top bureaucracy and of politicians within the system, the thesis of Russian multinationalism and multiconfessionalism, as well as of Russia’s “unique experience” of peaceful coexistence among representatives of different cultures, is fundamental. Russia is represented as a country that is “intertwined with the Islamic world by traditional, natural ties” (Putin 2003) and even is an “organic part” of the Muslim world (Medvedev 2009).

Nevertheless, some system politicians do deviate from this “general line” from time to time. However, each time their deviations spark criticism from the authorities and/or representatives of civil society (as well as from representatives of Islamic regions) and often lead to “self-criticism” by those who have dared to manifest self-will. Thus on the eve of Duma elections in 2016, the press received a recording of a conversation between Iabloko party leader Sergei Mitrokhin and journalist Yulia Salnikova in which Mitrokhin called Islam “the horror of the modern world,” a “brake on modernization,” and so on. Soon after,

7. In this regard, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, who periodically allows himself very extravagant judgments, comes to mind. Thus after the terrorist attacks in Volgograd in 2013, speaking on a television talk show, he broke out into a rant in which among other things he called for official control over the birth rate in the North Caucasus and for banning all study of Islam. However, first, this kind of statement is usually followed by explanations that Zhirinovskiy’s words were “misunderstood” and “taken out of context,” and second, unlike his Dutch colleague, he never attempts to turn his ideas into legislation.
8. Ironically, during the Soviet era “traditional Islam” was associated with backwardness and hostility to progress. For a brilliant analysis of this issue, see Dannreuter 2010, 12–13. On the position of the authorities at that time and the “official” Islamic organizations they supported in opposition to traditional Islam, see Babadzhanov 2001, 170–84.

he apologized to all Muslims, stressing that this was a private conversation, made public without his permission (“Sergei Mitrokhin” 2016).

As for politicians outside the system, those who do not feel bound by the conventions of the mainstream, they may allow themselves sharp attacks on Islam and Muslims. This applies not only to marginal ultranationalists, who periodically frighten the public with “Islamic expansion” into “Russian lands,” but also to Alexei Navalny, who tries to appeal to the broadest possible social base. A suspicious attitude toward Muslims is an integral part of Navalny’s anti-immigration agenda, which, as we know, is in favor of introducing a Russian visa regime for the countries of Central Asia. He has repeatedly stated that “young Muslim men” from these regions are a breeding ground for terrorism (Naval’nyi 2015b). Navalny also permits himself to make ambiguous statements concerning Russian Muslims, who regularly accuse him of inciting inter-religious strife and Islamophobia. Thus in one of the materials on his site Navalny, quite loosely interpreting data from opinion polls, concludes that “the growth of religiosity” among Muslims in Russia inevitably leads to their radicalization, even up to a readiness to fight for Islamic causes with weapons in hand (the very title of this material itself is provocative) (Naval’nyi 2015a).

Opinion makers are the next group of participants in public discourse. This includes experts, journalists, writers and famous academics who have access to the mass media and thereby have the ability to influence the attitudes of their fellow citizens. The spectrum of opinions here is extremely broad, from conventionally “Islamophobic” to conventionally “Islamophilic.”

To start with the first group, in the Russian media (and especially in RuNet), you can find a lot of publications on Islamic topics accompanied by headlines like “The Green Plague,” “Beat Islam — Save the Planet,” and so on (Malashenko 2007, 62–64). Their authors, as well as leading radio and television talk show hosts and TV experts who frighten the average listener with the “Islamic threat,” can hold a wide variety of political convictions. However, all of them are united by thinking in terms of the “clash of civilizations,” that is, they essentialize the differences between the European (“Christian”) and the Islamic worlds, with the indispensable demonization of the latter (Abashin 2005). Thus, the journalist Alexander Kots warned the inhabitants of the capital in *Komsomolskaya Pravda* that entire districts of Moscow will soon turn into Muslim ghettos, where “a generation [of children] will grow up under Sharia law” (Kots 2007); the nationalist activist Konstantin Dushenov publishes materials on creeping Muslim expansion in Russia (“Vsled za

‘Moskvabadom’ 2016); Deacon Andrey Kuraev in one of his books with another very provocative title asserts that “in today’s Russia, the slightest attempt to enter into discussion with Muslims immediately triggers a warning that those who attend Mosques have swords and hexogen [aka RDX or T-4, an explosive] at hand” (Kuraev 2004); publicist Yulia Latynina in her program on the radio station Ekho Moskv (which is liberal) criticizes the European elites “who after every act of terrorism begin to explain that it is criminal to accuse peaceful Islam of terrorist attacks,” and expresses bewilderment regarding why Europeans rose up in arms at Trump for his statements about the need to close entry to the United States for immigrants from Islamic countries, and suggests that “Europe, perhaps, will perish because of political correctness.”⁹

At the opposite end of the spectrum are those participants in public debate who seek to protect Muslims from stigmatization. Hence the journalist Maxim Shevchenko regularly raises the topic of discrimination and persecution of Muslims in Russia, sometimes making shocking statements, for example, that “the situation of Muslims [in today’s Russia] resembles the position of Jews in Nazi Germany in 1934, before concentration camps but already with a ban on certain professions, with special [negative] attention paid to them.”¹⁰ His partner in journalism, Nikolai Silaev, also seeks to show that Russian public consciousness is filled with unreasonable suspicion and phobias toward Muslims and that “‘the Islamic threat’ is not so much a reality as a way of perceiving reality” (Silaev 2006).

Of course, both “Islamophilic” and “Islamophobic” positions are conventions that we have intentionally identified as two poles of public discourse. As a rule, the majority of participants in the public discussion of Islam and Muslims is ambivalent. Thus among those who can be provisionally called “Orthodox fundamentalists,” positions on this issue vary greatly. Typical titles of their articles on the relevant Internet resources announce: “Islam Actively Displaces Christianity in Britain” (“Islam aktivno” 2014); “Most Danes Believe That Islam Has a Negative Impact on the Development of Their Society” (“Bolshinstvo datchan” 2010; “Vafa Sultan” 2008). At the same time, more mod-

9. Here are references to several of Latynina’s program *Kod dostupa* [Access code] on which these issues were discussed: <http://echo.msk.ru/programs/code/1897628-echo/>, <http://echo.msk.ru/programs/code/714906-echo/>, <http://echo.msk.ru/programs/code/1675290-echo/>.

10. Interview with M. Shevchenko on the program *Osoboe mnenie* [Particular opinion] on the radio station Ekho Moskv, January 26, 2017, <http://echo.msk.ru/programs/personalno/1916290-echo/>.

erate views are also represented in the same resources. In the eyes of some Orthodox fundamentalists, the expansion of Islam should only cause concern insofar as it replaces Christianity (as, in their opinion, happens in the West). In Russia, alarmism is inappropriate, to the extent that an acceptable balance is maintained in symbolic space. If Islam is considered a traditional religion in certain parts of Russia¹¹ and does not make inroads on the traditional domination of Orthodoxy, Muslims are treated with benevolence. In the first place, they are in any case dearer to the heart of Orthodox fundamentalists than atheists and agnostics; secondly, Muslims are perceived as allies in Russia's confrontation with the "noxious West." As a well-known filmmaker has put it, "Islam, especially Russian Islam, is much closer to Orthodoxy than Catholicism" ("Islam blizhe Pravoslaviu" 2006).

The idea of an alliance between Orthodoxy and Islam on the basis of protecting "traditional values" against "globalization" is quite popular in this sector of the ideological field. Vsevolod Chaplin, who for a long time headed the Synodal Department for Relations between Church and Society, in his speech at the 10th International Muslim Forum in Moscow (December 2014) called on Muslims to unite with the Orthodox in the face of the global "civilization of sin."¹² This idea is popular with the adherents of "neo-Eurasianism" headed by Alexander Dugin, for whom the very fact of the centuries-old coexistence of Orthodoxy and Islam on Russian territory confirms the notion of a special "Russian civilization" that unites East and West.

The next group of participants in Russian public discussions about Islam can be designated by the term "spokespeople for Islam." These are individuals and organizations acting on behalf of Islam. This group, in turn, breaks up into two subgroups. The first is official Muslim organizations and their leaders. First of all, this is the Central Spiritual Directorate of Russian Muslims (TsDUM) under the leadership of Talgat Tadzhuddin, which by their own count unites more than 2,500 Muslim

11. In this regard, the expression "ethnic Muslims" is often used; it is obvious that they are drawing a parallel to the "ethnic Orthodox."

12. "RPTs prizvala musul'man" 2014. Within the Orthodox Church, of course, there are differing attitudes toward Islam. Thus, the Muslim community often accuses the religious scholar Roman Silantiev, who is a member of the leadership of the World Russian People's Council (an organization closely affiliated with the Russian Orthodox Church), of Islamophobia. The Council of Muftis of Russia even issued a special appeal in connection with the publication of R. Silantiev's book *Noveishaia istoriia islamskogo soobshchestva v Rossii* (The most recent history of the Islamic community in Russia). It called the book "libelous in nature" and incompatible "with the ethics of interfaith communication" (see "Obrashchenie muftiev Rossii" 2005).

communities throughout the country, with the exception of the North Caucasus. In 1996, because of disagreements with the Directorate over a series of issues, an alternative “umbrella” organization emerged, the Council of Russian Muftis (SMR), headed by Ravil’ Gainutdin. Even earlier, in 1992, an independent Spiritual Board of the Muslims of Tatarstan (DUM RT) was created, which was primarily concerned with making this federal republic of Russia more independent (so-called *suverenizatsiia*) (Mukhametshin 2005, 131–32). There is also the Coordinating Center for Muslims of the North Caucasus (established in 1998), headed by Ismail Berdiev. These four organizations oversee the majority of Muslim communities in Russia; the remaining ones exist autonomously or are included in smaller associations (Silant’ev 2016, 16–17).

The heads of these organizations are members of various state consultative institutions (the Council for Cooperation with Religious Associations under the president, the Public Chamber, etc.). They receive government funding and are invited to important public events such as the president’s annual message to the Federal Assembly. In addition, they closely cooperate with a number of ministries and departments, as well as with regional authorities, especially in the Islamic regions of the federation. Researchers note that “in most of the [federal] republics of the North Caucasus, the spiritual administrations make up almost a single entity with the republics’ leadership” (Tul’skii 2005, 234).

The Russian authorities actively support this system of “nationalizing” Islam that they inherited from the Soviet era. The reason for this is obvious and consists in convenient management: it is easier to deal with several large organizations than with a multitude of disparate religious communities. In turn, representatives of “official” Islam, due to their privileged position, have the opportunity periodically to broadcast their views to society on various topical issues. For example, after the terrorist attack in the Dubrovka Theater Center in 2003, the Muslim Spiritual Board of the Republic of Karelia issued a public statement demanding that the media “stop using Islamic religious terms with respect to people accused of terrorism and murder” (it was referring to expressions such as “shahid,” “warrior of Allah,” etc.) that they said were insulting to true Muslims and spread religious enmity (Kuznetsova-Moreno and Salakhatdinova 2004, 11).

Needless to say, representatives of official Islam share the idea that there is a basic separation between the “traditional” Russian and foreign (by default “non-traditional”) Islam, which is also key for the Russian authorities. As Ravil’ Gainutdin formulated this thesis, “the mentality of [Russian Muslims] *differs radically from the mentality of fellow*

believers from foreign countries [italics added]. Muslims are quite well integrated into Russian society and the idea of an Islamic state is alien to the absolute majority of them" (Gainutdin 2004, 169–70).

At the same time, it should be noted that relations among official Islamic structures are very difficult,¹³ and might be more appropriately described in terms of competition and a struggle for resources rather than of consent and cooperation. In addition, these institutions are distinguished by the different degrees of willingness with which they are ready to broadcast a "Muslim" position on various issues in the Russian public space. For example, Gainutdin and one of his deputies Damir Mukhetdinov openly opposed the compulsory introduction into schools of classes on "Foundations of Orthodox Culture" and against other measures favoring Orthodoxy (Mukhametshin 2007, 52). Representatives of the Council of Russian Muftis supported Kosovo's independence from Serbia in 2008, which radically diverged from the official Russian position, and they continued their active cooperation with Turkey even after the cessation of official Russian-Turkish relations in November 2015 ("Sovet muftiev," 2008). In contrast, Talgat Tadzhuddin of the Central Spiritual Directorate of Russian Muslims and the mufti of the Spiritual Assembly of Russian Muslims, Al'bir Kruganov, have usually taken a much more conformist position regarding the Russian state and the Russian Orthodox Church.

Grassroots public activists who claim to articulate an "Islamic" point of view on key political issues make up a second subgroup of "spokespeople for Islam." They sometimes manage, if not to influence public opinion, then to achieve public visibility, thus challenging "official" Islam's claim to speak for the entire Russian Muslim community. One notable figure of this kind was Nadir Khachilayev, a member of the State Duma, who in the 1990s headed an organization called the Union of Russian Muslims. Khachilayev was an ardent critic of the corruption that prevailed in his native Dagestan, and was a preacher of so-called "New Islam," which attempted to combine the customs of mountain folk with interpretations of certain aspects of Islam that he himself proposed (Ignatenko 2004, 26; Allenova and Gerasimov 2003). Khachilayev vehemently denounced the official Muslim clergy as "state muftis and other 'legal'¹⁴ spiritual pastors ...

13. For more detail about schisms and re-groupings within the Muslim Spiritual Administrations in the post-Soviet period, see Laruel' 2005, 163–75; Iunusova 2007, 142–54.

14. Literally, "in the law," an ironic reference to "thieves in the law" (*vory v zakone*) or members of old-style Russian organized crime. — Trans.

concerned only with strengthening their positions,” and he also insisted on the need for Muslims to live “according to the laws of Allah,” and not by the rules of secular power (Khachilaev 1997, 6). Khachilayev’s career was cut short when he was assassinated in 2003.

A prominent “Muslim voice” for a quarter of a century was Heydar Dzhemal’ (1947–2016), chairman of the Islamic Committee of Russia, an organization that in the opinion of many observers represented the personality of its leader and creator rather than serving as a broad-based public platform. Dzhemal’ published an Islamic magazine and newspaper, conducted programs on several Russian television channels, and also actively participated in political life — he ran for the State Duma and spoke at opposition rallies. For him, Islam was not only a religion, but also a political project, an alternative to modern “soulless” globalism.

Obviously, from this perspective, dividing Islam into domestic and imported is out of the question. According to Dzhemal’, Islam functions as a global emancipatory idea aimed at uniting all oppressed people who are dissatisfied with the status quo, just as communism once did (Dzhemal’ 2001). Heydar’s son, the journalist Orkhan Dzhemal’, has become a notable media figure, and many of his public statements sound like a development of his father’s ideas.¹⁵

Here we can also mention the journalist and political commentator Ruslan Kurbanov, a regular participant in political talk shows on Russian TV and author of many publications in which he calls on Russian Muslims to abandon their “inferiority complex in the face of [the non-Islamic] majority” and enter “into competition with non-Muslim projects” relating to social arrangements, including active resistance to the influence of Western liberalism on Russian society (Alishaev 2008).

To the two subgroups described we should add another player who has appeared on the Russian political scene during the last decade. This is the head of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov, who claims almost a monopoly in expressing the point of view of “Russian Muslims.” Suffice it to recall his public criticism of the minister of education O. Vasilieva, who supported a ban on wearing the Muslim hijab in school, or his sponsorship of the million-strong protest in Grozny in September 2017, after reports of violence in Myanmar against the Rohingya Muslims; at the rally Kadyrov himself demanded that the top Russian leadership inter-

15. For an articulation of his ideas, see *State, Religion and Church* 5, no. 1 (2018): 154–66. Orkhan Dzhemal’ was killed on assignment in the Central African Republic on July 30, 2018. — Ed.

cede on their behalf. The rally mentioned at the beginning of this article that was held in the Chechen capital soon after the terrorist act in the *Charlie Hebdo* editorial office was also an initiative of Kadyrov, who declared that he considered his personal enemies “all those who support the ‘right’ of *Charlie Hebdo* and other publications to insult the religious sentiments of one and a half billion Muslims” (“Ramzan Kadyrov” 2015).

Islam and the Russian State

Provisionally, one could describe this relationship as a triangle, at the top of which is the state power (the Kremlin); in the lower lefthand corner, Muslim organizations that the state classifies as “traditional Islam” and therefore recognizes and supports; and in the lower right, unofficial movements and organizations that arise from the unsatisfied social and moral demands of Russian citizens of the Muslim faith (in official terminology, “representatives of non-traditional Islam”). The Kremlin’s position is to encourage the former and ignore the latter. Obviously, the construct labeled “traditional Islam” is nothing more than a projection of the authorities’ expectations onto Russia’s Muslim population. The state would like to deal exclusively with these structures that are easy to manage; everything beyond them is seen as a potential threat. Hence there is a policy of prohibition and repression against any form of grassroots activity by Russian Muslims, as well as the labeling of all unofficial Muslim religious currents as “Wahhabism,” which drives the adherents of “untraditional Islam” underground (Verkhovsky 2010, 35–36; Kisriev 2007, 29).¹⁶

However, since at this time no national state is an isolated entity, the triangle described above should be better thought of as a pentagon: the upper corner (the Kremlin) is influenced by political developments and legal decisions in other secular states,¹⁷ and the lower right corner (unofficial Islamic movements and organizations) experiences the direct and indirect influence of general global trends in the religious sphere and in the world of Islam in particular.

16. The unproductive nature of dividing Islam into “traditional” and “non-traditional” is also due to the fact that such a dichotomy simplifies the rather motley, mosaic structure of Russian Islam, which (especially in the North Caucasus) includes various trends, groups and directions (see Iarlykapov 2013, 133–52).

17. I have in mind, first of all, Russian legislation with regard to freedom of conscience that is based on the same principles as that of other secular states. Secondly, official Russia constantly “looks over its shoulder” at the current religious and political situation in Western countries (from the debates about the hijab and the scandal over caricatures to discussions around the “burkini”).

Conflicts around Islamic Symbols: Russian Specifics

In 2003, there was a court case in which a group of women from Tatarstan attempted to defend their right not to remove their headscarves when being photographed for a passport. After losing in all the courts and listening to a public rebuke from President Putin, who urged them not to insist on their demand, which contradicted the rules of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, their case reached the Supreme Court, which — to everyone's surprise — took their side, allowing women believers not to remove the hijab when being photographed for official documents. The signal to society was transparent enough: Russia is a multiconfessional country in which adherents of different religions have the right to publicly express their identity.

Still, despite the official rhetoric of interfaith harmony, Russian public space is permeated with contradictions and conflicts very similar to those that unfold in the public space of its Western neighbors. In Russia — of course, excluding regions with a heavy Muslim population — one can observe the same negative reaction to mosque construction projects as is often observed in Western Europe.¹⁸ Thus in Moscow, residents of different regions (in Tekstil'shchiki in 2010 and in Mitino in 2012) actively protested against plans to build mosques, and each time the city authorities were forced to abandon their original plans. As a result, whether due to the protests or to the authorities' using them to justify their own passivity, in Moscow with its significant Muslim population (both native and immigrant), today there are only four large mosques, while there are five large synagogues and 1,100 Orthodox churches and chapels.

Muslims Immigrants: From Ignoring to Problematicizing Them

Until very recently the Muslim affiliation of a portion of Russian immigrants (primarily those from Central Asia) was not a significant topic of public discussion except on the part of ultranationalist organizations. Thus the now banned Movement against Illegal Immigration called the mass migration of laborers from the Muslim countries of Central Asia “a breeding ground for recruiting terrorists” and one of the organizers of the “Russian March” (a yearly event organized by

18. On conflicts over the construction of mosques in European cities, see Saint-Blancat and Schmidt di Friedberg 2005, 1083–1104; Allievi 2010.

nationalist groups), Alexander Sevastyanov, stated that if the current migration policy did not change, Russian cities would soon be “taken over by ethnic Muslims” (“Zaiavlenie DPNI” 2010). In the “Russian Marches” themselves anti-Islamic slogans do periodically surface, although they are not the main ones for their participants.

Migrant laborers from post-Soviet states belonging to the Islamic cultural sphere (in particular, from Central Asia) have usually been perceived by the authorities and by the general public in ethnic rather than religious terms. In the first two post-Soviet decades the average Russian perceived people from these regions as “Kirghiz,” “Tadzhik,” “Uzbek,” and so on, and not as “Muslims.”¹⁹ Ethnic identification also dominates over the confessional in the minds of migrants themselves. It is not accidental that immigrant organizations that have arisen in Russia have been formed on the basis of ethnic and national, rather than confessional identity.

However, since the 2010s the situation has been changing. The Islamic affiliation of Central Asian immigrants has become a topic of public debate. Why did this happen? In our opinion, three interconnected factors have played a role. The first is the growing visibility of Muslim immigrants. Since the number of mosques in Russian metropolitan areas is disproportionately small in relation to the number of potential parishioners, during the great Muslim holidays there is real pandemonium around mosques. Hundreds pray right on the street, a sight that causes average citizens a feeling of discomfort. The second factor is the activity of TV talking heads who continually reinforce this discomfort with talk shows about “the Islamization of Europe.” The third factor is the series of terrorist acts that have been prepared and carried out by citizens from Central Asian states. It is unnecessary to state what kind of reaction these factors create in people’s minds.

The further development of the situation will largely depend on the attitude of Russian Muslims. Specifically, will they see the Central Asian immigrants as co-religionists and feel solidarity with them, protecting them from stigmatization, or, on the contrary, will they prefer to join the socio-cultural mainstream, which has had a cautious and even negative attitude towards *gostarbeitery* (literally, “guest workers” [German]; in Russian, “migrant laborers”) or “illegal aliens” from Central Asia?

19. It is extremely noteworthy that the violent actions of the Russian ultra-right are also addressed mainly to “hetero-ethnic” and not to “heterodox” groups. The objects of their attacks are usually people of “non-Slavic appearance,” whereas mosques almost never become targets.

Conclusion

When comparing Russian and Western European perceptions of Islam, significant differences emerge. In many European countries, parties with an anti-Islamic agenda operate legally. These parties often achieve impressive success precisely because of their emphasis on “the Islamic threat.” But there are no such parties in Russia. In Western Europe there have also been movements in recent years fueled by the fear of Islam; in Russia, no such movements exist. Thus if in the Western European public space there is a political market in which negative clichés about Islam and Muslims are in increasing demand, in Russia this market has not appeared, and if the existing political system is preserved, it does not seem likely that it will appear.

In most countries of Western Europe, anti-Islamic (not to say Islamophobic) views are widely represented in public debates. And although they meet fairly vigorous opposition both at the level of the journalistic community and at the level of civic activism, one cannot deny that such views are present in the mainstream media. Between those whom we may provisionally call Islamophobes and their opponents there is *open discussion*. In Russia, there is more of a *latent confrontation* between these two positions. On the one hand, it is very doubtful that organizations would arise whose central agenda is the fight against the “Islamization” of Russia, if only for the reason that several Russian regions are already historically “Islamized.” On the other hand, there are many people in Russia who sympathize with the ideas of Oriana Fallaci and Pim Fortuyn; they simply prefer not to advertise it. Propaganda of such ideas would immediately cause the most energetic response from Russian Muslim activists, not to mention from figures like Ramzan Kadyrov.

Russian cultural and symbolic space is essentially divided into “Orthodox” and “Muslim” zones of influence, and between those who control discourse there is an unspoken pact about non-interference in each other’s affairs. As for the mainstream media, it is dominated by the official narrative of “interfaith harmony” and “interconfessional dialogue.” The central media diligently avoid the articulation of existing tensions.

For obvious reasons the problem of Islam in Europe has been discussed in connection with the new emigration from Islamic countries. In Russia, until recently this linkage was almost completely absent; Islamic issues and the problem of immigration were discussed separately. Until the beginning of the 2010s, the ethnic categorization of immigrants over their confessional identity predominated. The per-

ception of people from Central Asia as Muslims rather than as Uzbeks, Tadzhiks, Kirghiz, and so on, is a relatively recent phenomenon.

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Peter and Fevronia and the Day of Family, Love, and Fidelity: Pronatalism and Unstable Gender Order in Contemporary Russia

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This paper investigates the role of the Day of Family, Love, and Fidelity in the deployment of Russian state family policy since 2006. It argues that the holiday is emblematic of a cooperative, rather than synchronous, relationship between church and state in the promotion of pronatalism and so-called “traditional family values,” and highlights the ways in which public discourse around the holiday intentionally obscures internal contradictions within the dominant family ideologies of both institutions. Investigating these contradictions, the paper analyzes the manner in which the state deploys a selective segment of the church’s teachings on marriage, gender, and the family to bolster the official pronatalist agenda while rejecting the church’s most conservative solutions to demographic decline, such as an abortion ban. Most importantly, the paper examines the problematic nature of the deployment of the hagiography of Peter and Fevronia — the basis for the Day of Family — to pronatalist ends, arguing that the clash between the ideal of family life portrayed in the hagiography and the goals of the holiday now celebrated in the saints’ honor points to a larger incompatibility between Orthodox matrimonial theology and the politicized promotion of reproduction.

Keywords: pronatalism, Russian Orthodox Church, gender, sexuality, hagiography, family policy, demographic decline, Vladimir Putin.

Introduction

ON July 8, 2008 — the “Year of the Family” — Russia celebrated the nationwide Day of Family, Love, and Fidelity for the first time. The fanfare surrounding the holiday, including public events in all major urban areas with ceremonies and awards honoring

Russian families, has grown and increased in visibility every year since its inception. However, the ideological goals of the celebration — the strengthening of the family through lower divorce rates, increased birth-rates, and the restoration of gender-based hierarchy — remain unmet.

This paper investigates the role of the Day of Family, Love, and Fidelity in the deployment of Russian state family policy since 2006, arguing that the holiday is emblematic of a cooperative, but not synchronous, relationship between church and state in the promotion of pronatalism and so-called Russian family values, and highlights the ways in which the public discourse of the holiday intentionally obscures internal contradictions within the dominant familial ideologies of both institutions. Further, the paper analyzes the manner in which the state attempts to deploy a selective segment of the church's teachings on marriage, gender, and the family to bolster the official pronatalist agenda while rejecting the church's most conservative solutions to demographic decline, such as an abortion ban. Most importantly, the paper examines the problematic nature of the deployment of the hagiography of Peter and Fevronia — the basis for the Day of Family — to pronatalist ends, arguing that the clash between the ideal of family life portrayed in the hagiography and the goals of the holiday now celebrated in the saints' honor points to a larger incompatibility between Orthodox matrimonial theology and the politicized promotion of reproduction. The ideal that the holiday promotes — the heteronormative, monogamous Russian Orthodox family with many children — relies on the promotion of a putatively traditional gender order that is not reflected either in concrete state family policy focused largely on mother and child, or in the ascetic Orthodox theology of marriage. This theology, taught to the core faithful, is currently obscured by church leadership, which has seized upon the Day of Family in an effort to disseminate socially conservative ideals and has demonstrated a willingness to obscure substantive church teachings to serve pronatalist ends.

Peter and Fevronia of Murom

The Day of Family, Love, and Fidelity is a somewhat secularized version of the Russian Orthodox saints' day of Peter and Fevronia of Murom, celebrated on July 8. There is a major discrepancy between the 16th-century hagiographic¹ portrayal of the holiday's honored saints and the

1. The original hagiography of the saints and the narrative referred to here, *The Tale of Peter and Fevronia of Murom* (*Povest' o Petre i Fevronii Muromskikh*), was composed

matrimonial and gender-based ideals that they are called upon to represent in the context of the Day of Family. The tale of the married saints — thought to be based on a 13th-century Murom prince and a peasant girl he married according to legend — certainly represents love and fidelity, but does not offer an image of the ideal Orthodox family as it is conceptualized in the rhetoric and visual discourse of the holiday.

While Peter and Fevronia have been chosen as the figureheads of the Russian family as it is conceptualized in the contemporary rhetoric of “traditional values,” the key feature of the traditional family insofar as the ideology of the holiday is concerned — children — is missing from their story, highlighting the inherent problem in conceptualizing the church as an uncritical pronatalist voice. While the church certainly amplifies teachings that extol the virtues of reproduction — teachings that often emphasize directly the same demographic concerns around the decline of the Russian population that occupy the architects of state family policy — the substance of the theology of matrimony de-emphasizes reproduction as its central goal. The Day of Family encapsulates a long-standing historical tension surrounding matrimonial theology vis-à-vis childbearing within the Russian Orthodox Church, and represents an effort to de-emphasize the ascetic underpinnings of that theology in favor of winning a perceived battle against both demographic decline and Western cultural imperialism.

Let us pause here to take a closer look at the hagiography at the center of the holiday. Lyobomira Parpulova Gribble (1995) argues that *The Tale of Peter and Fevronia* is an “apologia” for the Orthodox ecclesiastical model of marriage. Indeed, it is the clearest statement of matrimonial theology available in the corpus of Russian Orthodox literature to this day, which accounts for the deployment of Peter and Fevronia to bolster a familial ideal divergent from their narrative. The tale emphasizes not fecundity or familial hierarchy but monogamous, sacrificial spousal love as the goal of the Orthodox marriage, and Peter and Fevronia are largely portrayed as equals. Indeed, it is Fevronia who might be said to take the lead; as a peasant maiden, she secures the promise of marriage from the prince in return for healing him from leprosy. Later, when Peter’s boyars balk at a peasant princess and demand their divorce, he re-

by Hermolaus-Erasmus (Ermolai Pregreshnii), an archpriest (later monk) and writer in the 16th century (Demkova 1997). Some scholars, most prominently Dmitrii Likhachev, argue that the written story of Peter and Fevronia precedes Hermolaus-Erasmus. The assertion is based on a recorded church service from the 15th century that mentions the 13th-century Murom prince Pyotr and his wife named Fevronia, buried in the same place as per the hagiography.

jects the throne and exiles himself with Fevronia until the boyars beg for their return in the face of widespread turmoil.

Although the tale concerns an aristocratic couple who should rightly be preoccupied with the production of an heir, such a goal is never mentioned, while “the desire of the spouses to stay together is placed at the very center of the plot” (Gribble 1995, 97). When Peter and Fevronia become monk and nun in old age and still find their way back to each other in the grave, they achieve the rare status of married monastics with a love that transcends the patriarchal gender order.

Peter and Fevronia’s hagiography therefore serves the pronatalist ends of the Day of Family, Love, and Fidelity only when it is not carefully examined. The incongruity between the aims of the holiday and the narrative and message of the *Tale of Peter and Fevronia* is exacerbated by a contradictory approach to the implementation of pronatalist policy in terms of the state’s putative support of “Orthodox family values.”

Establishing the Day of Family, Love, and Fidelity

Murom municipal officials, who established a local Day of Family in 2001 amid a resurgence of the veneration of the saints, promoted the holiday as a “native” Russian alternative to the celebration of St. Valentine’s Day, which has gained immense popularity in post-Soviet Russia and has come to be perceived as a tool of Western cultural imperialism resulting in the destruction of the family. In August of 2002, Murom held a conference of fifteen ancient Russian cities, including Vladimir, Staraya Lagoda, and Suzdal’, all of which had banned the celebration of Valentine’s Day, to discuss the promotion of the alternative holiday.

Indeed, fears of Valentine’s Day as a tool of Western cultural imperialism have motivated many church and state officials in their promotion of the Day of Family since its inception, positioning the two holidays as symbolic of a struggle between Russia’s traditional family values and the debauchery of the West. In 2011, for example, chairman of the Patriarchal Committee on Questions of Family, the Protection of Motherhood, and Childhood,² Archpriest Dmitry Smirnov, declared on

2. This department was founded in 2011 in cooperation with former Children’s Rights Commissioner P.A. Astakhov, and in 2012, Astakhov and Bishop Panteleimon, chairman of the Synodal Department of Charity and Social Service, signed an agreement of cooperation — another event marking the new era of church-state cooperation around the pronatalist agenda. As a result of this agreement, clergy participate in the Public Council (Obschestvennyi soviet) on the rights of the child and in regional forums and conferences on the same (Shirokov 124).

the televised program *Besedy s batiushkoi* on TK-Spas that Valentine's Day, a Western "business project," attracts youths who have no feeling for their own (Russian) culture. Valentine's Day celebrates *voliublenost'* (amorousness), he told his audience, which is not the same thing as *liubov'*, true Christian love. From the state side, in 2017, Duma deputy Vitaly Milonov stated in an interview with the radio program *Govorit Moskva* (Moscow speaking) that the government had a duty to promote the Day of Family, Love, and Fidelity as an antidote to Valentine's Day, which promotes completely immoral standards.

In 2006, Murom officials successfully petitioned the federal government to enshrine the holiday under the auspices of Svetlana Medvedeva's Fund for Sociocultural Initiatives. The celebration of the first Day of Family, Love, and Fidelity during the Year of the Family — a presidential initiative focused on providing a greater degree of financial support and resources for families and encouraging the growth of families — signified the intensification of Russian pronatalist policy. However, significant disagreements exist both within the government and within the church regarding the necessity, deployment, and makeup of pronatalist policy.

Russian Orthodox Theology and State Family Policy: Deployment and Contradiction

During the celebration of the Day of Family in 2011, Russian Orthodox patriarch Kirill gave a sermon at the Marfo-Mariinsky Convent in Moscow in support of the holiday as a transformative force in contemporary Russian society. However, Kirill also articulated the church's unease about the state's lack of a full commitment to the success of the family as evidenced by the legality, accessibility, and widespread practice of abortion. Calling upon the state to fully commit to the demographic battle, the patriarch used his sermon to (unsuccessfully) call on the Duma to sign into law a bill that would remove mandatory state insurance (OMS) coverage for the procedure and push forward its prohibition. Appealing to the fears of pronatalist politicians, Patriarch Kirill warned of imminent human extinction. Calling widespread abortion and non-traditional families regrettable outcomes of the sexual revolution in the West, Kirill invoked the Russian government's responsibility to preserve "traditional family values," defined by compulsory heterosexuality and fecundity. Using the biggest platform accessible to the church for the dissemination of its message beyond the small minority of churchgoers, Kirill continues to pressure the state to follow its moral guidance in this area.

Contemporary family policy is more in line with Russian Orthodox teachings surrounding reproduction than it has been at any other period in post-Soviet history. Although the decline of the family has been a concern since 1991, it was in the early 2000s, amid a widespread “alarmist mood” around falling birth rates, that demographic problems became a government priority (Chernova 2012, 79). Gradually, the church became a key agent in the promotion of state pronatalist policy, which centers on pronatalism within a far-reaching familial ideal that prioritizes young marriage, fecundity, monogamy, and the avoidance of divorce. As Michele Rivkin-Fish has observed, Russian pronatalism “aims to discipline women and men through a system of economic incentives and disincentives to fulfill the state’s desires for increased fertility” by perceiving social behavior and attitudes as “ultimately malleable products of the right policy formula” (2010, 722). The state’s “gender regime” relies heavily on economic and social incentives to promote and reinforce the ideal of the heteronormative fruitful family as the norm. However, as we will see, pronatalist policy is not internally coherent in terms of its dependence on conservative church principles and does not reflect the entirety or complexity of those theological principles or the Orthodox social norms upon which it draws.

The President’s Address to the Federal Assembly on May 10, 2006, is commonly referred to in the relevant scholarship as “the pronatalist turn” in contemporary Russian history (Kim 2017, 66). It is in this speech that the president introduced the “maternity capital” program — referring to the provision of economic support to childbearing women to make up for their losses on the market — which constitutes the central component of Russian state family policy (Borozdina et al. 2016, 61). In January 2007, the new “maternity capital”³ entitlement for mothers giving birth to a second or third child went into effect. In his speech, Putin stated that increasing the number of mothers of many is achievable only if the financial impact of multiple pregnancies and maternity leaves is taken into account in pronatalist strategies, providing financial incentives to offset the economic hardship that a second child presents to the typical Russian family.

In keeping with the “pronatalist turn,” after Putin’s 2006 speech the Ministry of Health and Social Development significantly limited access to second-trimester abortions, requiring clinics to discourage

3. The entitlement provides a sum of 250,000 rubles (indexed to inflation) upon the child’s third birthday and usable toward child care and education.

the procedure and impose a forty-eight-hour waiting period. Additionally, in 2013, Putin signed into law a ban on the advertisement of abortion. Some movements toward a more conservative abortion policy have, thus, been made. However, bills aimed at further limiting access by removing the procedure from state-funded medical insurance have met with little success,⁴ and family policy has done little to mitigate Russia's high abortion rate. The continuous defeat of anti-abortion bills points to a current preference in the Duma for a more moderate execution of family policy than either the church leadership or conservative politicians support. The moderate abortion laws currently in place reveal the limitations of church influence on state pronatalist policy, which is almost entirely based in financial incentives for women to increase birthrates while lacking substantive barriers to alternate reproductive choices.

Further complicating the issue is the fact that the maternity capital program presupposes, but provides limited support for, the heteronormative familial arrangement that the church upholds as a matter of social policy (see *Osnovy sotsial'noi kontseptsii* 2000). As Borozdina et al. observe, despite commonalities with Soviet pronatalist policy, the state no longer actively promotes working motherhood — though, it should be noted, the reluctance to legislate against abortion and birth control does reflect some attention to its realities (2016, 62). Contemporary Russian authorities “appear to acknowledge that child care inevitably weakens women’s position in the labor market,” and offer a monetary compensation for this loss rather than working toward a reconciliation of the two roles (ibid.). Putin’s 2006 statement that maternity capital was meant to help the “degraded housewife” is a prominent example of this discursive reliance on a theoretical two-parent family with a male breadwinner. However, the family as a unit is not at the forefront of federal pronatalist discourse or substantive policy.

While maternity capital has been “interpreted as part of a strengthened paternalist attitude in family and gender policies and a statist welfare model” (Chernova 2010, 2011; Kashina and Iukina 2009), the monetary benefit “coexists with state neglect in the development of social services for families with children” (Borozina et al. 2016, 61). Contemporary Russian policies “pay little attention to the reconciliation of work and family,” as shown, for example, in the shortage of pre-school

4. Most recently, Senator Elena Mizulina spearheaded a group of deputies who introduced a bill to both exclude abortion from insurance and to fine private abortion providers (“Mizulinoi pomeshali” 2017).

and daycare institutions, and are not concerned with facilitating family life (Chernova 2012, 82; Borozdina et al. 2016, 61).⁵ Most tellingly, “maternity capital,” as a policy, is aimed at mothers rather than families, with fathers receiving access to management of the grant only in outstanding cases (Borozdina et al. 2016, 63).

Pronatalist policy, rather than a manifestation of substantive Orthodox influence, is primarily a “numbers game” aimed at increasing the birthrate by deploying church teachings where convenient. Though the focus on the woman as the natural care provider is certainly a reflection of gender traditionalism, substantive support for a paternal policy that would make workable a “traditional” domestic model is notably absent. Ultimately, the celebration of the Day of Family is one of the few components of state pronatalism that centers the family and the spousal relationship.

Theorizing Contemporary Russian Pronatalism: Gender and Traditionalism

If the reality of pronatalist policy decenters the heteronormative family and particularly marginalizes the husband and father, pronatalist ideology — expressed as it is most frequently in the context of “traditional family values” — instead prioritizes the family unit. Particularly in the context of the Day of Family, Love, and Fidelity, but also in the administration of ceremonial and optical aspects of family policy such as the Order of Parental Glory, pronatalist discourse draws superficially on Orthodox matrimonial theology in its construction of the “traditionalist” post-Soviet “gender order” (Connell 1987).⁶ While the existing gender order does not fully reflect the ideals of pronatalist ideology, it is based on the same “traditional” gender hierarchy; indeed, the existing cultural standard supporting a strict gender-based division of labor⁷ serves as the foundation of traditionalist pronatalist rhetoric (Shadrina 2017, 164). Pronatalist ideology is aimed at re-

5. It might be argued, of course, that the slow expansion of such facilities is a strategy to keep mothers at home, but this is merely conjecture.

6. A “gender order” is made up of “gender regimes,” or “gender-based institutionalized power relations which allocate men and women to different social tasks and characterize specific institutions”; particularly, in this case, the gender regime of the heteronormative family (Charlebois 2011, 24).

7. According to the aforementioned study from Tomilin et al., 40 percent of respondents indicated that a man must be the head of the family, while less than 1.5 percent agreed that a woman could play that role (Tomilin et al. 2014).

fining and strengthening current patriarchal gender regimes and the prevention of liberalization in gender relations.

Examining pronatalist ideology through the lens of gender constructivism, which examines gender as a “society-wide institution that regulates people’s lives” and a “powerful ideological device which produces, reproduces, and legitimates choices and limits,” we observe that the traditionalist reshaping and ideological deployment of “femininity” and “masculinity” is central to pronatalism as both a state policy and a religious movement of social transformation (West and Zimmerman 1987, 147). A facet of gender constructivist theory particularly crucial for this analysis is the theoretical framework of “doing gender” (West and Zimmerman 1987), which centers the notion of “accountability”; that is, the self-regulation of gender behavior based on how it is socially perceived, a concept rooted in Judith Butler’s understanding of gender performativity.

Gender, in this framework, is an active repeated accomplishment achieved by participating in “a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micro political activities that cast particular pursuits as expression of masculine and feminine ‘natures’” (ibid., 126). As an accomplishment and something to be consistently maintained, gender is constantly subject to “slippage,” particularly as a surplus of variant gender expressions arise in the post-Soviet space. In creating the Day of Family, Love, and Fidelity, the state is working to shape a neotraditionalist, heteronormative model of gender as the hegemonic norm, which must be continuously cited at the risk of deviation and marginalization. The long-term goal of the institutionalization of the holiday is that its gender ideology will become a genuine reflection, rather than an ideal, of the Russian gender order due to the increasing unavoidability of enacting those ideals as an integral aspect of one’s gender conformity. The optics and ideology of the holiday act to continually model and reinforce appropriate gender performance.

The hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church have been “deeply involved in the debates on the role and place of traditional values in national identity of Russia’s past and present” since the collapse of the Soviet Union, attributing to the church an “exclusive role in the sphere of culture and morality” (Stepanova 2015, 120). This role is bolstered by widespread trust⁸ in the church and support of, if not obedience to,

8. According to a 2016 poll conducted by the Levada Center, 43 percent rate the church as worthy of complete trust. <http://www.levada.ru/2016/10/13/institutsionalnoe-doverie-2/>.

its social principles⁹ — posited as synonymous with traditional values — among the populace (ibid.). Moreover, the ascension of Putin correlates with a spike in Orthodox identity, particularly after the second election (2007–2008) (Zorkaia 2009, 65). It is for these reasons that pronatalist ideology and its optics depend heavily on the church. Although its moral guidance appears to have little influence on those who identify as Orthodox, the “institutionalization of traditionalist discourse” in contemporary Russian family policy has become a “fait accompli”: the “ideology of state policy creates patriarchal gender relations, idealizes the traditional family model, and ascribes it the highest value” (Chernova 2012, 91).

Reinforcing the ideological rhetoric underpinning the 2006 “pronatalist turn” was Putin’s 2012 address to the Federal Assembly explicitly calling for the government’s support for “traditional values,” which presupposes the reinforcement of the patriarchal gender hierarchy as a primary requisite for the growth of the Russian family (Shadrina 2017). Indeed, “traditional values” discourse, particularly since the early 2000s, has been focused almost exclusively on “restoring” the Russian family to its ostensibly “traditional” (pre-Soviet) form distinguished in part by a strict division of labor along gender lines. This discourse also delegitimizes liberal opposition to the dominant ideological, political, and legal regime, including advocacy for gender equality and female agency, as inherently “anti-Russian” and anti-Christian (Laruelle 2014, 1).

Traditional values discourse serves the wider goal of the “re-feminization” and “re-masculinization” of the populace. A key motivation here is the prevention of single motherhood and absent fatherhood through the promotion of male economic responsibility and female dependence. Where Western sociologists of fertility focus on transforming women’s “double burden” of domestic labor and employment, Russian critiques of the status quo “envision empowering men with renewed familial authority” (Rivkin-Fish 2010, 721). With the erosion of

9. According to a 2014 study of the correlation between Orthodox identity and support for traditional family values based on the residents of the city of Tambov, while a majority (52.5 percent) of respondents expressed support of the *mnogodetnaia sem'ia*, only 40.8 percent expressed a theoretical desire for a third child and only if they had access to the best financial and social resources. The idea of sacrifice in favor of openness to the birth of many children has certainly not penetrated the belief system of any but the most devout Orthodox. Nevertheless, the majority of respondents agreed that Orthodox values had the potential to strengthen the family, even as their answers demonstrate their personal divergence from those very Orthodox familial ideals. Respondents described the positive influence of the church on their family in terms of mutual love and domestic tranquility rather than the inspiration to change their reproductive habits (Tomilin et al. 2014, 192).

social benefits and the redefinition of motherhood as a “private institution and responsibility,” men are “expected to reassume the traditional ‘male’ responsibilities which have now been abandoned by the state” (Ashwin 2000, 2).

Church and state gender ideologies posit as necessary not only the reinforcement of the already strong social association between femininity and motherhood, but also the strengthening of the significantly weaker association between masculinity and fatherhood. *Mnogodetnost*’ (having multiple children) is necessarily contingent upon a familial and subordinate femininity that is reliant upon both maternity capital and spousal support, and its institution as a norm requires the acceptance of neotraditional subordination to both the husband and the patriarchal state as a necessary facet of femininity. However, the ideal of the husband and father remains somewhat ill-defined, and becomes subsumed in what Messerschmidt calls “non-hegemonic dominant masculinity,” which presents a significant barrier to the aforementioned project of “masculinization”/“feminization” (2010).

Hegemonic masculinity (and femininity) refers to “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (Connell 1995, 77). According to Messerschmidt, alongside hegemonic masculinity, there exist in every society “non-hegemonic dominant masculinities” (38) that demonstrate the “discrepancy between hegemonic masculinities and men’s actual embodied gendered actions” (Charlebois 2011, 27). Dominant masculinities are the most powerful and widespread in a society, even if they do not correspond with the hegemonic masculinity deployed as a social norm. Here the masculine ideal is almost uniformly defined by ethnic “Russianness” and Russian Orthodox identity, oriented toward work and provision for familial needs, centered in the home, and avoidant of alcohol and promiscuity. This is an ideal that clashes with “nonhegemonic dominant masculinity,” which is hard-drinking, aggressive, and promiscuous, and places little value on fatherhood (see Utrata 2015).¹⁰

Within a culture of masculinity that does not associate manhood with marriage and fidelity, the modest, chaste, devout St. Peter represents a “hard sell” as an aspirational model (as well as an insufficient model of

10. The men interviewed in Jennifer Utrata’s 2015 study “Women Without Men: Single Mothers and Family Change in the New Russia” reinforce perceptions of Russian men as irresponsible, immature, and unsuited to monogamy and family life as normative.

a fecund and dominant father and husband), just as the childless Fevronia¹¹ makes little sense as a model for the “mother of many” (*mnogodetnaia mat'*). The “traditional family” faces the challenge of the unruliness of non-hegemonic masculinity that the provision of saintly models appears powerless to contain, given that hegemonic femininity and masculinity constitute unstable categories in the hagiography. While the church has increasingly focused on filling the gap in the guidance and support of fathers as heads of the Christian household in the last twenty years through specialized lectures and seminars, the extremely limited audience of “active” faithful results in the low effectiveness of such programs, leaving only Peter and Fevronia Day as the church’s opportunity to reach a greater portion of the populace (Pablina 2010, 131).

Following the 2006 pronatalist turn, “traditionalism” became the foundation for the formation of a new national identity based on the distinguishing of the Russian subject from the “Western” based in part on heteronormative sexuality (Muraveva 2014, 68–86). In keeping with the nationalist underpinnings of Russian Orthodox identity, state pronatalist ideology relies on the appeal to popular perceptions of Russia as the global guardian of traditional family values, which are assumed to encompass *mnogodetnost'*. Most useful to the alarmist nature of pronatalist ideology is the church’s claim that the rejection of traditional values “leads to the destruction of human beings and society”; for example, the shrinking family that has resulted from the decline of familial gender hierarchy (121). Thus traditional values discourse serves a wider goal of instilling, especially among the youth, particular gender norms stressing “traditional” heteronormative patriarchy.

Pronatalism in the Ideologies of Church and State: Divergent Ideals

The key role that Russian Orthodox hierarchs play in the Day of Family — as well as the symbolism of the holiday and its reliance on Orthodox iconography — is demonstrative of the way in which the pronatalist agenda targets ethnic Russians who identify as Orthodox rather

11. Fevronia, in particular, slips from the pronatalist feminine norm by fulfilling instead the Christlike norm of rejecting the female body that is inherent to her embrace of monasticism. Particularly in Orthodox hagiography, as Ashley Purpura explores in her article on “Hymnographic Constructions of Eastern Orthodox Gender Identities,” female saints are “depicted as holy through the acquisition of masculine traits” (2017, 528). Femininity, therefore, is something mutable, which can be “put on and taken off,” while masculinity is “less fluid and transfigured through realizing masculinity in Christological imitation (ibid., 528).

than Russians (*Rossianë*) as a whole, constituting a populist¹² strategy rather than the policy of an Orthodox state. It is clear that the church does not ultimately set the agenda of the holiday, any more than it determines Russian family policy, nor does the church determine the method whereby the holiday is celebrated. The Day of Family thus represents one (albeit major) aspect of Russian state family policy rather than its encapsulation.

In promoting the heteronormative family, pronatalist rhetoric encourages an active, purposeful, patriotically minded repopulation of Russia that does not fully coalesce with the Orthodox theology of matrimony, even as many leaders of the church have sought to minimize this tension. While in its public activism the church represents “conservative” social policy in its condemnation of all forms of abortion and birth control and the encouragement of the prioritization of early marriage and motherhood in women’s lives — Archpriest Dmitri Smirnov is perhaps the most vocal advocate of “patriotically minded reproduction” — the idealized familial “gender regime” dominant in the church and propagated in sermons and literature aimed at the devout often emphasizes that parenthood makes up only one facet of pious family life and only one possible path of holiness for both men and women even in marriage. The ascetic, self-sacrificial model of Orthodox marriage deviates from the a pronatalist social agenda, which conceptualizes the heterosexual family almost exclusively as a reproductive unit, while at the same time affirming an approach to reproduction considered too extreme by the majority of legislators.

The public celebration of the Day of Family is intended to showcase the ideal Russian family. This is evident in the holiday’s promotional materials as well as in the public ceremonies honoring lifelong monogamous parents of many in televised ceremonies. Although, as we have seen, family policy focuses heavily on aiding “deviant families” — no proof of marriage is needed, certainly, to access maternity capi-

12. Natalia Zorkaia notes in her 2009 article that the growth in ethno-confessional (Russian Orthodox) identity following the collapse of the Soviet Union was, and continues to be, a reaction to the disappearance of Soviet identity, which had de-emphasized issues of national and ethnic identity. The growth of identification with Orthodoxy is the growth of identification with, and trust of, the *institution* of the church, a phenomenon that elucidates the reliance of pronatalist ideology on the dissemination of Orthodox matrimonial theology, as the state had begun to utilize the church as an instrument of legitimization in the Yeltsin era (68). Complicating this situation, however, is the fact that Orthodox identity is quite weakly correlated with religious faith; moreover, the majority of those whose Orthodox identity is a statement of faith (43–47 percent) are elderly — that is, beyond the concern of pronatalist politics (72).

tal — single or cohabitating parents are not visible on this holiday. The spotlight here is on the idealized minority: the *mnogodetnaia sem'ia* (family with many children), defined as five to seven or more children, currently making up 7 percent of all Russian families — many of them clerical (Novikova 2012). What is even more notable than the invisibility of the “deviant,” however, is that of long-term married couples without children. The saints are called upon to serve as models for the *mnogodetnaia sem'ia* to the general public while serving as models of ascetic piety in the context of Orthodox matrimonial theology.

In the most recent, and most transparent, effort of a segment of church clergy — most prominently, again, Archpriest Smirnov, as well as other church leaders including clergy from Murom — to support the transformation of Peter and Fevronia as patron saints of the *mnogodetnaia sem'ia*, the Patriarchate announced in late May 2018 that the church would work with the organization In the Family Circle to erect the first monument to the saints including three children. These children — Princes Yuri and Sviatoslav and Princess Evdokiia — are not mentioned in any redaction of Peter and Fevronia's hagiography, and their connection to the saints is a product of historical extrapolation in favor of serving the pronatalist ends of the Day of Family, the tenth anniversary of which the erection of the monument will celebrate.¹³

On the one hand, then, church spokesmen such as Patriarch Kirill, Metropolitan Hilarion, and Archpriest Smirnov consistently push the state to commit more fully to a pronatalist agenda, and as we have seen, anti-abortion activism¹⁴ is a major component of its social activity. Indeed, the church has been advocating for a more prominent place for itself in the national pro-family project since the early 2000s,¹⁵ with publicly active clergy advocating for its role in the promotion of rising birthrates through the provision of “spiritual resources for reviving the family,” as Metropolitan Kliment of Kaluga and Borov stated at

13. “V Moskve” 2018.

14. In recent years, the church has focused on building shelters for pregnant women, mothers, and children in crisis, with plans to install such shelters in every parish in Russia. These centers are aimed at preventing women from obtaining abortions because of financial need or difficult circumstances, as well as to provide material support.

15. A prominent example of this campaign is the *Osnovy sotsial'noi kontseptsii Russkoi Pravoslavnoï Tserkvi*, the result of a six-year effort from a Synodal working group formed in 1994 confirmed by the Bishops' Council in 2000. The document posits the church as the key to solving the crisis of the family, including high divorce rates as well as demographic decline. *Osnovy* warns of the dangers of de-emphasizing motherhood and fatherhood in favor of careerism and of the weakening bonds of parents and children — ills to which the church holds the solution (108).

a church-sponsored forum on demographics in 2004 (San'kova 2015, 103). On the other hand, many clergymen resist the ideology of reproduction as the central function of marriage, focusing instead on the *ascetic* path of matrimony — the key principle, as we have seen, of the *Tale of Peter and Fevronia*.¹⁶ While clergy nearly always refer to the family as a unit of parents and children when speaking generally — for example, Kirill's September 2014 address to the forum "Mnogodetnaia sem'ia v budushchee chelovechestva," in which he described the family as "a man and woman living together, preserving fidelity, and raising children" — the church's practical teachings de-emphasize this last point as well as the patriarchal family structure that is so important to the state pronatalist ideology that the church upholds (San'kova 2015, 101). Likewise, while pronatalist ideology reinforces the association between womanhood and motherhood, clergy consistently argue against the idea that a woman must bear many children to be a good wife or a Christian.

This more complex attitude about marriage is at the center of an eight-part series of discussions (*besedy*) on marriage and family life held in November and December of 2017 and disseminated to the public through pravoslavie.ru. In these *besedy*, clergy (as well as a lay psychologist) confirm that children are not the aim of marriage, preach against romantic attachment, and offer sober assessments of family life. In one *beseda*, Archbishop Andrei Ovchinnikov takes a brutally honest tone in his discussion of raising a many children, warning his audience against absorbing the strain of church propaganda that tells couples to aim for maximum reproduction. Of course, each speaker emphasizes the imperative that each Christian remain open to many children and eschew contraception. Openness, however, is not quite the same as ideologically driven reproduction.

Optics and Influence

The midsummer celebrations of the Day of Family, Love and Fidelity draw large crowds, to which ample television and news media coverage during the week of July 8 attests. Covering the cities in chamomile flow-

16. I base this assessment on my review of official church statements and documents about marriage (e.g., "On the Canonical Aspects of Church Marriage" and publicly-available Synodal proceedings on the website of the Moscow Patriarchate), as well as articles published in major Orthodox publications (pravoslavie.ru, pravlife.org, and pravmir.ru, as well as mospat.ru, the website for the Department of External Church Relations, and patriarchia.ru), between 2008 and 2018. The video and transcripts of the December 2017 *Besedy* on the family, discussed herein, represent the most recent and most comprehensive example of the dominant contemporary teachings around marriage and family in the contemporary Russian Orthodox Church.

ers — a symbol of the holiday and its native Russian roots — local governments hold concerts, art exhibitions, traditional balls and folk dances, family-friendly film screenings, and other events oriented toward social transformation, even if most treat them strictly as entertainment. The centerpiece of the holiday, both in “real time” and in terms of the dissemination of its ideals to the public through the media, is the massive concert held in Murom in honor of the holiday and televised nationally on July 8. The broadcast of the concert nationwide, and the widespread coverage of the event in state, church, and independent media for weeks leading up to and following the event, gives the impression that the Day of Family holds much greater importance in Russian society than it does in reality, including the usurpation of Valentine’s Day. The broadcast, too, is likely part of a larger strategy to portray a more positive image of the family than the dramatized portrayals of familial strife dominating Russian television, following the observations of academic experts who have deemed contemporary mass media¹⁷ damaging to the goal of raising the birthrate (Novikova 2012, 266; Smirnova and Frolova 2011,¹⁸ 203). Still, despite the state’s heavy sponsorship of, and participation in, the holiday — Dmitri and Svetlana Medvedev (a prominent anti-abortion advocate), for example, usually present medals to families — its putative ideals and carefully managed optics cannot be said to reflect substantive policy.

The concert is an optical smorgasbord of Russian Orthodox and nationalist discourse and imagery strategically arranged to amplify “traditional values.” Couples who have been married for many years, and families with many children — recipients of the “Medal of Love and Fidelity” — are often invited on stage to provide viewers with a living image of the ideal. These awards were introduced in addition to the Order

17. In response to this concern, in 2009 the church founded the Synodal Informational Department (now called, after a number of internal changes, the Synodal Department for the Relationship of the Church with Society and Mass Media), through which organ it promotes — among many other things — traditional family values, for example through the production of documentaries about Peter and Fevronia or the celebration of the Day of Family, which are often shown on public television. The church also owns a number of radio and television stations, and print and web-based publications (Shirokov 124).
18. Smirnova and Frolova (2011) argue in their article “Crisis of the Family in the Media,” an analysis of the role of media in the promotion of pronatalism, that material support for the family does not solve its most pressing problems. Government support for the family, they write, must include the strategic utilization of contemporary mass media, rather than the current reliance on traditional government propaganda — a category to which, I would argue, the Day of Family belongs (220). However, Smirnova and Frolova, like many academic scholars of the family, also advise a modernized approach and embrace of the changing nature of the family in place of the regressive ideology of traditional family values currently dominant in both state and non-state media (222).

of Parental Glory, also established in 2008 for families with exceptionally high numbers of children, carrying on the tradition of Soviet “hero-mothers” and members of the “Order of Maternal Glory.” To a large extent, as we have seen, the Peter and Fevronia awards constitute the Christianization of a patriotic pronatalism with a long tradition in Russia.

The *pièce de résistance* of the concert — a performance of Ilya Reznik’s “Hymn to the Family” — makes plain the conflation of “traditional family values,” “Russianness,” and Orthodoxy. As pop stars, youth choirs, and dancers in folk dress jointly take the stage to close the concert with the hymn, they are surrounded by Russian flags and banners reading “The Day of the Family is OUR holiday.” The words of Reznik’s hymn are full of intertwined religious/nationalist language, such as the following verse: The family is a kingdom of great love / In it is faith, righteousness and strength / The family is the pillar of the government / Of my country, of my Russia.” There is no mistaking the message: to be Russian is to live in a large, pious Orthodox family.

Nowhere is the largely symbolic role of the Orthodox Church in the practice of the veneration of Peter and Fevronia by singles and engaged couples more apparent than the increasingly popular trend of marrying on July 8, particularly in Murom, in order to insure good fortune and lifelong togetherness with the saints’ blessing. Those who wish to marry on the Day of Family, however, have only the option of the civil ceremony, as the veneration of the Murom saints falls in the middle of a fast, and marriages are forbidden by canon law. In response to the popularity of marrying on Peter and Fevronia Day, the church has instituted an additional annual holiday venerating the saints — September 19, the day of the return of Peter’s relics to Murom — as a day on which the faithful may marry in church. The popularity of weddings on July 8 highlights the widespread treatment of Peter and Fevronia Day as a Russian “Day of Lovers,” with most celebrants understanding little of its religious underpinnings. The phenomenon of July 8th weddings is evidence of the fact that the holiday has thus far had little transformative effect on Russian society simply because few have paid any more than the most cursory degree of attention to it, and even then only in terms of their own perception of what a holiday in celebration of love might entail.

Conclusion

In creating the federal holiday of Family, Love and Fidelity, the Russian government has not instituted a nationwide, state-sponsored celebration of an Orthodox saints’ day, even as the symbolism and “national” origins

of the holiday are key to its role in disseminating an ideology of a “return” to traditional Russian family values explicitly shaped by the church. Rather, the state has created a holiday that draws on the theological underpinnings and ecclesiastical understanding of marriage and family to promote a gender order that does not quite cohere with the order to be found in the narrative of Peter and Fevronia due to a clash of ideals vis-à-vis the reproductive goals of married couples, as well as representing an ideal that is not reflected in actual state family policy. As I discuss throughout this paper, the heteronormative gender order that the government deploys in its project of social transformation via the celebration of the Day of Family marginalizes and marks as deviant all those who do not live in nuclear family units with married parents and several children.

While the *Tale of Peter and Fevronia* reinforces the importance of monogamy and lifelong devotion crucial to the state’s battle against high divorce rates, it falls short of serving as the pronatalist fable that state propaganda seeks to make of it when, for example, it creates medals for parents of seven or more children emblazoned with images of the childless saints to be publicly awarded on the Day of Family. At the same time, while projections of pronatalist ideology onto the *Tale of Peter and Fevronia* prove problematic when read in the context of church family theology and hagiographic exegesis, which emphasizes marriage as an ascetic school of love to which children are not central but even to an extent tangential, the hierarchy of the church has been vocal in its evaluation of the insufficiency of the holiday as a symbolic commitment to the resurrection of the traditional Russian family given the state’s simultaneous support of abortion.

Key to this conflict, of course, is the way in which the similar but divergent “gender regimes” of church and state shape the ideal of the post-Soviet Russian woman. Where she is not, in the eyes of the church, seen exclusively or even most importantly as a mother — it is her path of salvation, either in marriage or in monasticism, that is prioritized, as indeed the *Tale of Peter and Fevronia* shows, de-emphasizing even her gender in favor of her Christianity — she is, crucially, always open to childbirth when married, and if she is indeed a mother, the raising of many children is conceptualized as a key element of her salvific matrimonial journey.

State pronatalist ideology, however, deploys an ideal of the Russian woman, mother, and worker based on the support of maternity capital and the acknowledgment of the economic sacrifices involved in motherhood, even if it cannot be said to promote equality in the workplace or careerism among women and if it encourages men to take on the

chief role in supporting the family. By the same token, in affirming the social role of the contemporary Russian woman as a worker even if she is — ideally — a mother before all else, the state also tempers the extreme pronatalism exhibited in the spectacles honoring parents of many by providing a second, more practical ideal (the three-child family) existing beneath the veneer of a campaign for compulsory family growth.

It is perhaps the existence of this second, less ambitious ideal supported by state policies such as maternity capital — an ideal that does not demand the radical lifestyle shift of the church's ascetic marriage path or complete openness to unlimited reproduction — that helps explain why nearly a decade of the celebration of the Day of Family, Love, and Fidelity has yielded neither a significant increase in birth-rate nor an abandonment of the celebration of Valentine's Day and its "foreign" romantic ideals among the Russian populace. While the state deploys aspects of Russian Orthodox matrimonial teachings to promote traditional family values, the church largely serves as the emblem of the specifically "native" Russian roots of the family values movement. Meanwhile, its teachings are subtly manipulated in order to support patently statist goals based on a contemporary gender order that simultaneously locates the woman in the workplace and the home, granting her a level of reproductive and matrimonial autonomy that clashes with the church's model for the family.

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LEILA ALMAZOVA

Teaching Religion to Children in Contemporary Tatarstan: The Case of Islam

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This article is devoted to the problem of children's instruction on Islam in the Republic of Tatarstan. Research is based on fieldwork in several rural districts and six cities carried out in June and July 2017, as well as on the analysis of curricula, textbooks, and publications on religious educational reforms. The study shows that the main factor in how religion is taught in public schools is the multiethnic and multireligious composition of the population (54 and 44 percent of Tatar and Russian populations respectively). Of the six available modules for the study of religion and ethics, only two are taught in Tatarstan — Foundations of World Religious Cultures and Foundations of Secular Ethics. The remaining four — Orthodox, Islamic, Judaic and Buddhist Cultures — although widely taught in other Russian regions — are not utilized in the state schools of Tatarstan. This lack of religious instruction in public schools determines the intensity of children's intrareligious education. The case of Islam shows the diversity of forms of children's religious education: religion is taught in Muslim kindergartens, in special courses that operate near mosques, in summer camps, discussions and meetings with imams and Islamic clergy at schools, regular courses of Islamic ethics taught by imams at schools, and at Uthmaniya, the private general-education school founded in Kazan by the Tatarstan Muslim Religious Board. The case of Tatarstan, in which state and religious institutions have divided children's religious education into spheres of influence, is an interesting example of building relations between religion and the state in post-Soviet, post-secular societies.

Keywords: religious education, religion in secular school, Foundations of Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics, Islam, Muslim education for kids.

Introduction

THE system of education in the Russian Federation is now in a state of transition and reform. New programs and standards are being introduced, documentation is being upgraded. All of this causes teachers, parents and children great concern. They complain about lack of stability, the drastic nature of the reforms, complicated programs and difficulties in passing the Standardized State Examination (Edinyi gosudarstvennyi ekzamen or EGE). Emile Durkheim wrote that public education has a social nature, and it cannot but react to social changes (Durkheim 1996, 49). In post-Soviet realities this applies to the multiple changes that have occurred during the last two to three decades.

For seventy years, the Soviet state clearly defined the goals of the educational system: “The main goal [is] . . . to make the school a true tool of communist upbringing and enlightenment, a conductor of the ideological, organizational, educational influence of the proletariat on the semi-proletarian and non-proletarian strata of the working masses” (Prokof’ev 1967).

The current Education Law of the Russian Federation, in turn, prioritizes certain aspects, proposing as its main principles: “the humanistic nature of education, the priority of human life and health, the rights and freedoms of the individual, the free development of the individual, the education of mutual respect, diligence, patriotism, responsibility, legal culture, careful attitude to nature and the environment, management of natural resources,” as well as “an individual learning principle Now the main task of the teacher is to identify and develop the specific abilities of each student” (“Zakon” 2017).

As the above citations show, in the Soviet era children were convinced that the USSR was building a bright future through communism, the main distinguishing feature of which would be the lack of money and satisfaction of people’s needs. The modern concept of education does not provide as clearly articulated a picture, offering instead only rather abstract concepts. Apparently, it is precisely this absence of clarity that generates an intensified search for a certain system of values and goals shared by the majority that could be reflected in the educational system.

Religion offers modern society clearly articulated and historically tested positions. Survey data for 2012, with a sample of 3,000 respondents, indicated that 78 percent of Russians consider themselves believers, 13 percent vacillate, and only 6 percent are non-believers (Sineline 2013). According to the latest sociological polls (June

2017) of the Levada Center, the number of religious people (those who ranked themselves as “very religious” [9 percent] and “somewhat religious” [44 percent]) had increased and now made up 53 percent¹ of the population (Kochergina 2017). At the same time, up to 93 percent of the population are friendly toward religion.

The return of religion to the public space in post-Soviet Russia is quite an interesting phenomenon, which confirms the advent of the post-secular era, about which G. Gutman writes: “If secularization desacralizes the sacred and demonstrates its real profane status, then the advent of the post-secular era must be associated with at least partial restoration of the sacred, the discovery of its reality” (Habermas and Ratzinger 2006, 17). Apparently this trend determines the reemergence and active development of religious institutions in the modern Russian social space, and, subsequently, the reflection of this process in the educational system. This happens at various levels — in private, family upbringing; at the general educational and university levels; and in the actual intra-religious institutions of the church, mosque, datsan, or synagogue.

As Jurgen Habermas writes:

The neutrality of the state authority on questions of world views guarantees the same ethical freedom to every citizen. This is incompatible with the political universalization of a secularist world view. When secularized citizens act in their role as citizens of the state, they must not deny in principle that religious images of the world have the potential to express truth. Nor must they refuse their believing fellow citizens the right to make contributions in a religious language to public debates. Indeed, a liberal political culture can expect that the secularized citizens play their part in the endeavors to translate relevant contributions from the religious language to the public as a whole. (Habermas and Ratzinger 2006, 51–52)

Thus, the formation of a new social reality is taking place, where the past, with its almost total atheism, meets with the present, where religion again seeks to take its place, and shapes a future that is not yet clear. The field research carried out by the author of this article can pro-

1. Citation from the article “Religiosity” at URL <https://www.levada.ru/2017/07/18/religioznost/>: “There is an increase of those who counts themselves as predominantly religious people: for the last three years this number increased from 35% to 53%, mostly at the expense of the indistinct mass of those who consider themselves as “to some extent religious” — 44%. Only a small percentage considers themselves “very religious” (9%). One third consider themselves as “not too religious” (33%). For the last three years there has been a sharp decline in the number of atheists and non-believers — from 26 to 13%.

vide some insights into the trends in the teaching of religion to children in modern Russia, based on materials from the Republic of Tatarstan.

Teaching the Course “The Basics of Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics” (BRCSE) in the Republic of Tatarstan

As mentioned above, modern Russian society is now searching for a national idea. One answer to this question could be the revitalization of religion:

In practice, the development of national concepts has often been combined with religious and ethnic identity. In the context of the worldwide trend of religious revival, the appeal to the church as the guardian of national and cultural identity becomes a necessary component of the process of self-identification of the people. (Orlov 2012)

As a concrete step in realizing this idea, the Basics of Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics (BRCSE) course was introduced from September 1, 2012, in all the schools of the Russian Federation. The course consists of six modules, and students (or their parents) have the right to choose one for study. The thirty-four-hour course is taught in the 4th grade, usually in the first half of the year. According to the results of 2013–2014 academic year, almost half of the students (46 percent) chose the module “Basics of Secular Ethics,” 20 percent chose the “Basics of Orthodox Culture” (BOC), 19 percent chose “The Basics of World Religious Cultures,” 4 percent chose “The Basics of Islamic Culture,” and less than 1 percent chose “Fundamentals of Jewish Culture” and “Fundamentals of Buddhist Culture.” Against this background, the Republic of Tatarstan looks somewhat different:

Table of choices by year²

	2013	2014	2015
Basics of World Religious Cultures	61.3%	37.8%	46.4%
The Basics of Secular Ethics	38.7%	62.2%	53.6%

2. The Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Tatarstan annually monitors research on implementation of this course in public schools. The results are published on the following site: http://orkce.apkpro.ru/doc/m_seminar_2/brshr_28_03_15.pdf.

Parents in Tatarstan preferred their children to study the two modules “Basics of World Religious Cultures” (four religions are studied within the framework of this module—Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism), and “Basics of Secular Ethics” (this module is devoted to the study of ethical issues — the problem of moral choice between good and evil, historical examples of ethical systems, universal virtues). According to the data from other national republics, parents in Kabardino-Balkaria choose similarly. In Bashkortostan, which neighbors Tatarstan and is similarly divided by ethnic and confessional factors (54 percent of the population in Tatarstan and 55 percent in Bashkortostan are ethnic Muslims³), the choice of modules is as follows: “Basics of Secular Ethics” — 73.5 percent, “Basics of World Religious Cultures” — 21.7 percent, “Basics of Islamic Culture” — 4.2 percent, and “Basics of Orthodox Culture” — 0.79 percent.

Table of BRCSE module choices by region with a Muslim majority

National Republic / % of Muslims	Basics of Secular Ethics	Basics of World Rel Cult	Basics of Orthodox Culture	Basics of Islamic Culture	Basics of Buddhist Culture	Basics of Judaic Culture
Bashkortostan / 55 ⁴	73.5	23.7	0.79	4.2	0	0
Dagestan / 95	21.4	39	0.008 (or 3 kids)	39.5	0	0
Ingushetia / 98.7	0	0	0	100	0	0
Kabardino-Balkaria / 67	38.6	61.4	0	0	0	0
Karachaevo-Cherkessia / 66	28	38.3	4.3	29.4	0	0
Tatarstan / 54	62.2	37.8	0	0	0	0
Chechnya / 99	0	0	0.36	99.64	0	0

Comparison of the preferences in choices of BRCSE modules in Muslim regions of the Russian Federation indicates that in polyconfessional regions the choice of confessional modules is not high. This

3. The term “Ethnic Muslims” refers to Tatars, Bashkorts, Azeris, Uzbeks, or any other ethnic group who have historically (no less that 2–3 centuries back) belonged to the Islamic Civilization.
4. The number after the slash represents the percentage of Muslims, which is counted according to the data of Russian Federation census carried out in 2010.

is due to the fact that most parents tend to compromise when choosing modules, which leads to an increase in the percentage of the secular modules, that is, of “Basics of Secular Ethics” and “Basics of World Religious Cultures.”

Several things also should be said about the attitude of representatives of the religious establishment to the issue of teaching BRCSE as it is reflected in Tatarstan’s media. The debate in the public space was initiated by the Orthodox clergy, including Patriarch Kirill and Feofan, metropolitan of Tatarstan, who was recently appointed in place of of Metropolitan Anastasii. They have repeatedly protested the failure to teach the religious module “Basics of Orthodox Culture” in the Republic of Tatarstan. Thus, Patriarch Kirill, in an interview on the official website of the Moscow Patriarchate, comments:

There are only a few regions where problems with the choice of the BRCSE still persist. There are literally a few such regions where the choice of the Basics of Orthodox Culture clearly does not correspond with the structure of the population. There is also a “unique” region, Tatarstan, where the regional authorities consider it possible for people to decide *what* they should study within the framework of BRCSE, and *what not*. The Basics of Orthodox Culture is not allowed. (“Religioznoe obrazovanie” 2015)

Before his move from Ulyanovsk to Kazan, Metropolitan Feofan also said: “As for my new see [in Kazan], there are two main religions. Knowledge by Muslims of their religion is an opportunity to preserve society from the challenges that we have now.” The same is true of the Orthodox. “I believe that, in my new diocese the ‘Basics of Orthodox Culture’ should be taught. Just like the ‘Basics of Islam.’ And other traditional religions. ” (Feofan 2015)

But the Islamic religious establishment has a different view on the issue. Rafik Mukhametshin, the deputy mufti responsible for education, and at the same time, rector of the Russian Islamic Institute, says:

There were no complaints from Muslims that they were not allowed to study the module “Basics of Islamic Culture” delivered to the Muslim Religious Board of the Republic of Tatarstan. We, being religious organizations, are interested in an additional platform, but the teachers fear that the classes will be divided along denominational lines.” (“Tatarstanu ukazali” 2015)

Thus, among the representatives of the two main religions in Tatarstan — Orthodoxy and Islam — there is a difference in the vision of the situation with the teaching of confessional modules within the framework of the BRCSE course. Russian Orthodox Church authorities are more inclined to introduce courses on religion into the public school system in the Republic of Tatarstan, whereas Muslim leaders, being a minority in the Russian Federation, are more cautious in this respect.

Gulzada Rafailevna Akhmerova, the deputy head of the General Education and Final Certification Department (Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Tatarstan), who is responsible for the teaching of BRCSE, noted that Tatarstan's schools offer the choices they do because

There are so many mixed marriages,⁵ so everything is intertwined here, that when they gather a parent meeting, parents themselves come to such a decision consciously. No one forces anyone to choose, parents make their own decision about choosing a module.⁶

The choice of religion in cases of mixed marriages is often quite difficult. Researchers note that the mother often determines the religion and nationality of a child. At the same time, given that Russian culture is dominant in the Russian Federation, religion and ethnicity tend toward Russian identity. It should be noted as well that there are sometimes cases where ethnic Russians adopt Islam as a result of interethnic marriages, both in those cases when the husband is a Tatar and a practicing Muslim, and those when the wife is a Tatar. The bitter experience of the 1990s in the Republic of Tatarstan, when ethnic conflicts were widely discussed (Ageeva 2015), showed that only a balanced and thoughtful policy in the sphere of interethnic and interfaith relations can lead to peace and harmony in society. From this point of view, caution in choosing secular modules for children seems quite justified.

However, what should parents do who want their children to study one or another religion when it is impossible in public schools? In these cases, there is confessional religious education, which in three decades has come a long way from its almost complete absence to a

5. According to statistics, 6,650 marriages (or 21 percent) were mixed in 2010. http://zags.tatarstan.ru/rus/file/pub/pub_67556.pdf.

6. Authors interview with G. R. Ahmerova on July 24, 2017.

fully-fledged institution of teaching religion for Tatarstan's two main confessions — Islam and Orthodoxy.

It should be noted that this research is focused only on studying Islamic education and teaching Islamic culture to children in Tatarstan due to the general thrust of the author's research. The study of the teaching of Orthodoxy, as well as of other religions, remains beyond the scope of consideration here.

The Revival of Islam and Religious Education in the Republic of Tatarstan in the Late 20th to Early 21st Centuries

The history of Islam for Tatars has lasted for more than a millennium (since 922) and has become a part of the self-awareness of the people, in which ethnicity and religion have blended into one indissoluble whole. Seventy years of atheistic propaganda did not destroy religious identity, despite the fact that one of the main tasks of the Soviet government was “the replacement of religious identity by secular ethnic cultures, which were supposed to harmoniously interact within the concept of ‘friendship of the peoples’” (Luehrmann 2011, 4). Even in the late Soviet years, during the 60s and 70s, certain religious rituals were performed: the naming ceremony (*isem kushu*), male circumcision (*sunnat*), weddings (*nikah*), and funerals (*jenaza*). Rituals associated with funerals, even in urban areas, were practiced by 67 to 73 percent of Tatars. Part of the funeral ceremony was the rites of remembrance of the deceased, which were usually held on days three, seven, and forty, as well as on every anniversary of the death of the deceased. This ritual is called *Koran Ashy* or *Olylar Ashy* in the Tatar language; it included abundant treats for relatives and the invitation of a mullah or *abystay*,⁷ who read the Qur'an and said special prayers dedicated to the dead (*Bagyshlau*). During these rites — at which children and numerous relatives were present (a feast was arranged for them after the departure of elderly guests) — the Qur'an was read in Arabic, words from the prerevolutionary religious vocabulary of the Tatar language (which the Soviet authorities tried to erase from the memory of the people) were delivered and then preserved in the mentality of the Tatars. Mostly due to that ritual they perceived Islam as a part of their culture and life. Therefore, when in the early 90s the bans were lifted, people again turned to religion, and they accepted it

7. *Abystay* — usually an older woman, who can read the Qur'an in Arabic.

not only as a form of pure spirituality, but also as a form of national culture and identity.

At the end of the Soviet era in 1986, only eighteen Muslim communities were registered in Tatarstan. However, at the beginning of the 90s, the government gradually started to return Kazan's historic mosques to believers. At the same time, the construction of new mosques began. By 1999, there were already 937 mosques in Tatarstan. With the increase in the number of new mosques, the Muslim Religious Board in Ufa (DUMEC — Dukhovnoe upravlenie musul'man Evropeiskoi chasti Rossii i Sibiri) started to have difficulties with the volume of work and could not provide adequate services on numerous issues for the fast-growing Muslim community. Some regions established their own local religious boards, which were independent and not subordinate to the Muslim Religious Board in Ufa. In Kazan, the Muslim Religious Board of the Republic of Tatarstan (MRB of RT) was registered in 1992; at that time it was headed by Gabdulla Galullin. Among the MRB of RT's priorities were opening new mosques, charity, the organization of the Hajj to Mecca, and the development of Muslim education.

Before the 1990s, Islamic education in the Republic of Tatarstan was available only through teachers who conducted education at home. Among the famous teachers of the time, Abdulhabir hazrat Yarullin, Ahmadzaki hazrat Safiullin, Garifulla ishan Zainullin, Rashida Abystay Iskhakova, and a number of other religious figures who maintained their adherence from prerevolutionary times should be mentioned. In the early 90s, mosques began to organize free courses for all who wanted to acquire a basic knowledge of Islam. Over the last three decades this form of teaching children and adults has become structured and standardized. To date, according to the rector of the Russian Islamic Institute, Rafik Mukhametshin, up to thirty thousand people in the Republic of Tatarstan have taken advantage of this education.

The second stage of Muslim education is the secondary professional schools or madrassas. In Tatarstan, the first madrassa was founded in the city of Chistopol by Gabdulkhak Samatov, then the imam-hatib of the Chistopol Mosque. It was in this mosque at the end of 1990 that a group of twenty students (*shakirds*) was recruited. A year later, the madrassa, along with its founder, moved to Kazan and became known as a madrassa at the Zakabany Mosque. In 1993, it was officially registered as the Kazan Higher Muslim Madrassa (KHMM), named after the thousandth anniversary of the adoption of Islam (by Bulgars).



The Gabdulla ibd Masgud Madrassa in the city of Mamadysh.

Author's photo, 2017.

In the 1990s, about twenty madrassas were opened, but not all of them have stood the test of time. Thus, three madrassas in Naberezhnye Chelny — Nuretdin, Ayub and Yoldyz — as well as the Ishmuhammat madrassa in Elabuga were closed. Although legally registered as higher educational institutions, the Ramazan madrassa and Kazan Islamic University's Muhammadiya madrassa never began working. There are nine madrassas operating in Tatarstan at the moment (2017).

Higher professional religious education in the Republic of Tatarstan can be obtained at the Russian Islamic Institute (it issues a state diploma in such areas of preparation as theology, linguistics, journalism, and economics) and the Kazan Islamic University (which issues a non-state diploma in the specialization “bachelor of Islamic knowledge”). In September 2017, the Bulgarian Islamic Academy was opened, which trains masters and doctors in the field of Islamic Knowledge.

Teaching Islam to Children

The very first approach to religion usually happens within the family, where parents introduce the child to a certain tradition — ethical or religious or a mixture of both. The next step in preschool Islamic education is usually the Muslim kindergarten. Even quite recently, the lack of such institutions made finding a place for one's child difficult. Now there are quite a lot of Muslim kindergartens. Their distinctive

features are halal food and the presence of Muslim-educated teachers, usually women who wear the hijab and teach some elements of Islamic culture. Below is the description of subjects taught taken from an advertisement on the Internet:

The program will include: learn the Arabic alphabet with correct pronunciation, memorizing small Suras of the Kuran, lessons about monotheism, in the place of fairy tales true stories of the prophets, in between small classes will be educational games, making simple toys with their own hands, and so on. ("Kindergarten Day" 2018)

Here is another description of what is taught in a Muslim kindergarten:

By law, we do not have the right to teach children Akyde and Fiqh, but we try to tell the children, in a language they understand, that everything is created by the Almighty.

When we read prayers with children, we make two *raka'ats*, without detailed elaboration, i.e., there is a certain standard, and we try to keep to the middle, because parents bring up children on different Madhabs.

We tell stories about the prophets in the form of tales, then we perform a creative task with the main characters. For example, according to the life story of the Prophet Salih (peace be upon him), we know that in his history a camel and mountain participate, and accordingly we make their creative models. ("Muslim Kindergarten" 2016)

Attending such a kindergarten usually costs from 5,000 to 15,000 rubles per month.

The next and most important step in the religious education of children is represented by the system of elementary schools established near mosques. This system started to form in the early 90s. The course participants were both children of five to six years old, and citizens who are far beyond sixty. Often the groups were not divided by age or gender. They were taught the basics of Islam and the recitation of the Qur'an (*Tajwid*). Some of the most capable students were taught Qur'anic recitation individually. Classes usually took place once or twice a week. Very often teachers did not have professional training; mostly they had been educated by individual private teachers during the late Soviet period or took short courses near mosques themselves.

The lessons were held either on weekends or in the evenings on working days. The purpose of these courses was the moral upbringing

of the younger generation, as well as the elementary religious education of adults. The term of study ranged from one year to three or four years. At the same time, control over attendance was not strict: some quit school after a while, some left and then reappeared on the courses, some joined the classes in the middle of the year.

The leading place among the abovementioned educational institutions in the early 2000s was occupied by the Faruk Madrassa, opened near the Bulgar Mosque, located in a densely populated area of Kazan. Its task was not the training of professional clergymen, which is usually associated with the concept of the madrassa, but the education of religiously uneducated Muslims. Each of the teachers (*mugallim*) formed his own group. Several teachers taught at different times, so groups of ten to forty people studied almost every day of the week. The term of study was four years. As a rule, textbooks were not used. A thin booklet called “Fan Tajwid” was used in lessons on the recitation of the Qur’an, as well as the Qur’an itself, and the fundamentals of the dogma were acquired mainly on the basis of lectures and sermons.

In these same years, various foreign religious organizations and foundations sponsored the establishment and operation of many madrassas. Among them, in particular, were the Saudi Foundation Ibrahim Bin Abdulaziz Al Ibrahim, which published numerous translated works on Shariah. Other organizations were represented by Dar Ul-Hadith, Dar Ul-Jhil, Dar Ul-Fikr, and Dar Ul-Mugrif (Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon respectively). These organizations provided assistance under the condition that the curricula, the list of educational literature, and the teaching staff were under their control. By the late 1990s, the work of many international funds in the territory of the Russian Federation was banned due to the increased incidence of illegal activities involving graduates and students of some madrassas, as well as the situation in Chechnya.

Gradually, diverse segments of society, including many Muslims, representatives of the academic community, and state authorities, came to the understanding that in order to counterbalance foreign influence, it was necessary to form a system of Muslim education that would be based on educational practices that were traditional for Russian Islamic societies (which were very diverse in different regions of Russia). So, in 2014, a new program for religious education was approved in Tatarstan that includes a three-year course on such subjects as Islamic ethics (*Ahlyak*), the doctrine of Islam (*Aqida*), recitation of the Qur’an (*Tajwid* — only for the first year), Islamic law (*Fiqh*), the Qur’an, the biography of the Prophet Muhammad (*Sirah*), and the Arabic language (two years — the second and third year).

An analysis of the literature recommended for these courses (a total of sixty-five publications) shows that at this initial level of teaching knowledge of Islam, aimed mostly at children and people of the older generation, there are five main types of educational literature:

1. Textbooks written by modern Tatarstanian authors (Ramil Adygamov, Gabdelhak Samatov, Valiulla Yakupov, Rishat Kalimullin, etc.), 37 books or 57 percent.
2. Textbooks by authors who taught in Jadid madrassas (Rizaetdin Fakhretdin, Ahmad-Hadi Maksudi, Salihjan Barudi, etc.), 9 titles or 14 percent.
3. Modern secular textbooks, mainly in Arabic, on the history of theological thought (Alexander Kovalev and Grigory Sharbatov, Rafik Mukhametshin, Taufik Ibrahim), 7 editions or 10 percent.
4. Medieval books (Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, Abdurrahman Karabash and others), 6 titles or 9 percent.
5. Foreign textbooks written in the 19th to 21st centuries that are now used in some countries of the Muslim East (Muhammad Ashik, Muhammad Kifayatullah, Mustafa Chagirdzhi/Turkey), 8 percent or 5 titles.

The program, constructed so that it uses primarily the works of local authors as teaching aids, is called upon to form Islamic views in a form adapted to modern Tatarstan realities. Here I would also like to note that the overwhelming majority of mosque courses are using Tatar as the language of instruction. According to Muslim officials, this could help to protect the Islamic community from globalist versions of Islam such as those described in *Globalized Islam* by Olivier Roy, whose adherents seek not to preserve national languages and cultures, but instead use the most widespread languages to retransmit its cultural codes. In the context of the Russian Federation that means, first of all, the use of the Russian language as a language of religion and recruitment.

In the last decade the Shamil Madrassa, which operates near the Kazan Nury Mosque, has become the most famous religious school in Kazan. The teaching staff of this institution are the leaders in Islamic education for children. Teachers of this madrassa developed special techniques for teaching children starting from one and a half years. Using the textbook *Qa'ida al-Nooraniya*, written by the Indian scientist Nur Muhammad Haqqani (1856–1925) for teaching the Qur'an, the teachers teach children by the age of six to independently read (not recite) the Qur'an in Arabic. Groups are divided by age from 1.5 years (classes are held for toddlers together with parents) to older adolescence.

Another example of children's Islamic education is the unique Muslim private school of Usmaniya, which offers eleven years of education. The Muslim Religious Board of the Republic of Tatarstan founded this institution. The program includes Arabic language and in the afternoon, children study in the nearby mosque of Nur al-Islam, where courses on the history of Islam, the history of the prophets, and reading and memorizing the Qur'an are taught. There are about a hundred children studying there.



Summer camp at the madrasa in the city of Kukmor (a group of girls).

Author's photo, 2017.

Another way to familiarize children with Islamic culture and religious knowledge is the summer camps or Muslim centers for children's daytime care at mosques. They do not call them summer camps because of the strict requirements for summer camps where children live, study, and sleep. Muslim organizations have moved to Muslim daytime care for children in the form of a day program, although Muslim children's camps are also conducted by those capable of working through the obstacles of normative acts, requirements, and regulations.

Leysan Firdusovna Ganieva, mother of four, is one such advocate of Muslim camps. She is also the organizer of the creative group Bakheta Akkychy (Key of Happiness), which is famous for working with Muslim children. In an interview on the question of why she does so much in the field of Muslim camps, she replied: "I do this in order to live in a society where people and our children are safe, and this is such a society where morality should be in a highest level. Religion is able to provide the most moral up-

bringing.” In 2015, Kazan Federal University began special programs on the issue of Muslim camp organization. Among these are programs on the “Regulatory and Legal Documentation for Organization and Conduct of Summer Camps for Muslim Children,” “Sanitary and Epidemiological Requirements for the Organization and Maintenance of Children’s Summer Camps,” and “Modern Approaches to the Implementation of Program and Methodological Support for Summer Muslim Children’s Camps.” Within the framework of the thematic block on “Preparation of Counselors,” the following topics were considered: the organization of the leader’s work, the pedagogical style of the leader, the pedagogical ethics in the conditions of the children’s summer camp, the method of collective education, the features of creating a temporary children’s collective, self-management and co-management in the camp, the healing process in the summer camp, the provision of first aid, pedagogical approaches to working with children of different ages, methods of organization of children’s group activities, and the development and presentation of creative projects, including scenarios, teaching materials, games, cards, decorations, and so on.

If the camp is organized according to all rules established by the state, then children stay for a whole session (from five days to three weeks) with accommodation and meals. All the camps that were visited during field research in 2017 (in cities and the district central villages of Kukmor, Baltasi, Mamadysh, Pestretzi, and Almetyevsk) were day camps. They began only July 1, due to the end of fasting in the month of Ramadan (June 26). Religious instructions in Kukmor, for example, included three lessons of thirty minutes before lunch (the list of subjects changes from day to day) on such courses as reading the Qur’an, Muslim ethics (*Ahlak*), Arabic language, the history of Islam, and the life of the Prophet Muhammad. After lunch in some camps children listened to short (fifteen-minute) sermons, then had play time with games, and at three o’clock in the afternoon children usually returned home. Sometimes children had bus tours around the city and visited memorable places.

Another current form of children’s Islamic education in Tatarstan is the educational work of imams (Muslim preachers) at public schools. Field research, especially in relatively mono-confessional villages and small towns of Tatarstan where the majority of the population are Tatar, revealed that imams often have certain opportunities to preach Islam to children. Imams are invited to schools at the beginning of the year (September 1) and at the end (the so-called Last Bell, held at the end of May). There they give speeches, make gifts to first-graders and graduates. Sometimes the Muslim community headed by the imam arranges a special celebration at schools during the Feast of Sacrifice (*Kurban*

Bayram) or Ramadan (*Gaid/Id*), with abundant meals as well as different contests for children in various aspects of Islamic culture including reciting the Qur'an or knowledge of the basics of Islam.



Arab language lesson during summer camp at the madrasa in the city of Kukmor. Author's photo, 2017.

Field research also provided information about another form of educational work carried out in public schools by the imam, that is, more or less regular conversations between Islamic preachers and school children. Sometimes such conversations are associated with a tragic event. For example, in one of the villages a schoolboy committed suicide, and the imam was invited to the schools to explain the attitude of religion toward this tragic phenomenon. Or, in another village there is a rehabilitation center for drug addicts, and one of its patients fled and died right in the village. On this occasion, the school administration also decided to arrange a meeting of students with the imam. Imams are also invited to talk without any special reason, and simply for moral instruction.

There is an interesting story told by the imam of the central mosque in Baltasi, who regularly receives invitations to talk to senior class students about relationships between young people in order to prepare them for future family relationships. One day he brought a package of chocolates to a conversation with young ladies in the eleventh grade. He poured them out onto the table and invited them to take one. After each took her treat,

the imam drew the girls' attention to the fact that one candy that did not have a wrapper was left untouched on the table — no one wanted to take it. This is the way the imam tried to convey the idea of chastity to those girls.

There are also frequent cases where the imam is invited for regular weekly conversations with primary school students on matters of morality. So, the imam of Elhovo village of Almetyevsky district, at the request of parents and the invitation of the school administration, conducts regular lessons in ethics for children of the Tatar first grade class every Wednesday for half an hour from 7:30 to 8:00 am.

And finally there are various competitions for children, such as the Qur'an recitation contest, held every year at the madrassa in Kukmor. The same competition is held in Baltasi and many other districts of the republic. For example, a contest called "Brothers and Sisters of Syuyumbika," is held by the Kazan Yardam Mosque. At the Buinskoye Madrassa, a competition for knowledge of Islamic culture is held.

Conclusion

The above analysis of the specifics of subjects related to the teaching of religion in general and Islam in particular for children in the Republic of Tatarstan testifies to a rather interesting situation. In the Russian Federation, with its concept of Russian society as a single community, there are ethnic cultures and confessional communities that have their own ideas about man, and it is very difficult to combine them in such a way that they do not come into conflict with one another. This is not to mention the fact that within the framework of one community, for example, a confessional community, the concept of a perfect person could be different depending on the region: for example, the Muslims of the North-east Caucasus — Chechnya, Ingushetia and Dagestan — have a completely different view of the system of religious education than Muslims of the Volga-Ural region — Tatarstan and Bashkortostan. Even more than that, within the framework of one national republic, for example Tatarstan, there are different concepts of Islam — there are teachers who tend more toward fundamentalistic ideology and those who are more moderate.

In modern postsecular society, according to Jürgen Habermas, "a greater degree of communicative rationality expands — within a communication-community — the scope for unconstrained coordination of actions and consensual resolution of conflicts" (Habermas 1987, 17). Thus, understanding the processes currently taking place in the field of religious education for children by various players on the educational stage can help us to understand the boundaries encountered in the

context of achieving both the general and the private goals of various groups. Every social community has its own idea of the role of religion in the upbringing of children, and the real state of things in this area is determined by the economic and political capabilities of certain groups in modern Tatarstan. At present, the situation with the teaching of religion is in a delicate state of balance. It will be difficult to maintain this state for long. The number and economic strength of Muslim communities grow, while the secular community and representatives of other religious cultures are discontented with the growth of Islam. The issues of religious extremism and terrorism, which dictate certain methods of control over the religious sphere in the republic by the state, also remain relevant. In any case, the consideration of regional, ethnic, and confessional specifics, as well as the idea of social peace and well-being, remain the most reliable way of building and reforming the system of modern education in its gradual shift from the past to the future.

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Teaching “The Foundations of Orthodox Culture” in Schools of the Tambov Region: Achievements and Problems

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This paper analyzes the conceptual bases for introducing and implementing the course “Foundations of World Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics” in public schools of the Tambov region. It draws upon official data presented by the diocesan administration and the regional department of education. The article also presents the results of independent monitoring of the introduction and teaching of “The Foundations of Orthodox Culture” in the Tambov regional schools that was carried out by the staff of the Center for Religious Studies of Tambov State University. This monitoring included questionnaires, attendance at parents’ meetings, and conversations with teachers who were trained in the subject matter and who had experience teaching it. The author analyzes different opinions about teaching “The Foundations of Orthodox Culture” in schools; identifies the most significant problems in this area, which include the preparation of teachers and the low motivation of teachers and students; and gives examples of positive experiences.

Keywords: Foundations of Orthodox Culture, knowledge about religion in school, the problem of teacher training, parental opinion.

THE question of what to teach about religion in school remains acute in Russian society. According to surveys in 2009 (that is, when the subject of religion began to be taught in Russian schools) a significant number of respondents to the question, “Should there be a subject in school dealing with knowledge about religion?” answered in the affirmative (“Vybyli” 2017).

In 2011, Patriarch Kirill voiced his opinion: “The introduction [of the course] ‘The Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture’ is one of the most important issues on the agenda of church-state relations, one that to a significant degree has decisive importance for the fate of our national education and one that directly affects the interests of millions of parents and their children” (Kirill 2011).

Representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) often speak about the spiritual and moral crisis that Russian society is experiencing and view teaching “The Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture” (OPK — *Osnovy pravoslavnoi kul'tury*) in school as a means of overcoming it. Thus, for example, the director of the Orthodox St. Peter Gymnasium in Moscow, Father Andrei Posternak, recently said:

“The Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture” concerns how a young person makes a moral choice and learns to distinguish between good and evil in the modern world, in which, unfortunately, moral criteria have long ceased to define social life. And history shows that only religion can establish moral criteria in society and the state. (Matsan and Posternak 2012)

Critics of Russian education point to the fact that it is constantly being reformed, and that the pedagogical component has been eliminated from the educational process, which has turned it into a system for producing professional competencies.

The objectives outlined in the proposal by representatives of the ROC titled “The Concept of Including the Subject ‘Orthodox Culture’ in the New Generation of State Standards for a Common Middle School Education as Part of the New Planned Educational Curriculum ‘Spiritual and Moral Culture,’” have not themselves elicited objections. These objectives include:

1. the development of children’s [moral] upbringing within the system of state and municipal education; the expansion of opportunities for the development of children’s spiritual culture and morality — which society recognizes as one of the main requirements for overcoming negative social tendencies and processes — in general educational institutions;
2. fulfilling the educational needs of citizens who represent various worldviews, including those of religious and confessional groups in the Russian Federation, and of their children in the state and municipal education system, in general educational institutions;

3. regulating the practice of studying the religious culture of various confessions in general education institutions, as well as [offering] other ideological, ethical, philosophical and religious courses developed on the basis of non-religious worldviews and approaches. (“Konseptsiiia” 2007)

However, the public reaction to the introduction of the subject of religion in schools has been mixed. Some think that any division of children in school based on religion could be explosive in current Russian conditions; others say that this system will provide an opportunity for children to study their culture and religion. There is no unanimity in the ROC itself. But all agree that there are not enough personnel who have the knowledge necessary for the introduction of this subject in school. Only those who favor the so-called “ideological-formal” approach are optimistic: “All members of the Council [the Board of Trustees of the Central Federal District for implementing the project ‘The Revival of the Religious and Moral Heritage’] agreed that religious and moral upbringing is the ideological basis of the state” (“Dukhovno-nravstvennoe vospitanie” 2010, 27). According to adherents of this position, excessive knowledge is even harmful for teaching OPK; it is enough to have taken a course on Holy Scripture.

In the Tambov region, this project is being implemented in accordance with “The Concept of Including the Subject ‘Orthodox Culture’ in the New Generation of State Standards for Secondary Education.” The process of introducing the subject area “The Fundamentals of Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics”(ORKSE) is controlled by the diocesan administration and supervised by the head of its Department of Religious Education and Catechization, someone who has a higher degree, although in military-technical education, and who is a definite supporter of the abovementioned “ideological-formal” approach. The legitimate question arises as to how competent he is in matters of implementing educational programs and in examination of subjects that require knowledge in humanities disciplines, in ethics, pedagogy, and didactics. To this question the responsible person at the regional Department of Education and Science answered: “It is precisely representatives of the diocese who are the most competent in this area.” In order to work more efficiently the diocese and the Department of Education have created a joint working group to evaluate the comprehensive ORKSE educational program (Feodosii 2010, 20). Neither representatives of the public, parents, nor high school teachers are taking part in discussing and implementing this initiative, and the staff of the Department of Education and Science only consult with the diocesan

administration, even on the issue of defining an alternate course for people who choose the subject “Secular Ethics.” It turns out that this violates a clause of the “The Concept”:

Employees of research centers and university professors are engaged in the preparation and examination of indicative educational standards in the relevant academic subjects and model training programs. (“Konseptsiia” 2007)

The “Concept” indicates that teaching this course is controlled by the corresponding religious organization, including control over its content and staff. The law “On Education” states:

Model core educational programs in school subjects, courses, and disciplines (modules) aimed at providing students with knowledge about the basics of the religious and moral culture of the peoples of the Russian Federation, about ethical principles, and about the historical and cultural traditions of world religion (or religions), pass through review by the centralized religious organization corresponding to the [particular] belief system to see that they comply with the doctrine, historical and cultural traditions of the organization, in accordance with its internal statutes. (“Federal’nyi zakon” 2018)

However, the above documents do not state specifically how to select personnel for teaching subjects concerning religion. At one time we heard from the lips of the president of the Russian Federation and the minister of education that secular experts in the field of religious culture and ethics would come to school to teach subjects in the framework of the ORKSE program (“Medvedev predlozhil” 2009). To our question about who will present this subject in the schools of the Tambov region, the head of the diocesan Department of Religious Education, Archpriest Igor Grudanov, gave the direct response that representatives of the diocese will decide who will be allowed to implement the program. As the main selection criterion he named the “churchliness” of the teacher, without specifying what this means. Russian researchers in the sphere of the study of religion argue about the meaning of this term, introduced into scholarly use by V.F. Chesnokova (Chesnokova 2000; 2005). In scholarly studies that use this concept they try to define the criteria for “measuring churchliness,” among which most often appear such things as the frequency of attending services, taking confession, communion, and observing fasts. Most

likely, in the given case this means that the teacher should have experience of church life. But the procedural question remains: how to control the assessment of such experience? This would only be possible if they introduced control over ideological and religious life, which is contrary to the Constitution. Or is it enough to express your loyalty to certain ideals in words?

In short, it is impossible to exercise this kind of control, just as it is impossible to find the required number of “churched” teachers. Teachers reveal all the features of a generalized portrait of a modern Russian, in particular — a discrepancy between their declared religiosity and the extent of their religious practice. Thus, according to a survey conducted in the city of Tambov and the region by the Center for Religious Studies of Tambov State University, 87.9% percent of respondents called themselves Orthodox; at the same time, 81.5 percent called themselves believers but only 42 percent called themselves believers *with confidence*, whereas 39.5 percent preferred to choose the option “I am somewhat believing.” Only 8 percent of respondents said that they regularly participate in the life of the church or community and attend services; the majority, more than 60 percent, attend services on major holidays (Christmas, Easter) or in connection with events such as baptism, marriage, funeral services, the arrival of icons, relics, or other sacred objects.¹ At the present time, lessons on “The Foundations of Orthodox Culture” (OPK) in schools of the region are taught by primary school teachers or teachers of specific subjects (most often by teachers of world culture and literature). My conversations with teachers have shown that for the most part they have neither the necessary knowledge nor the motivation to teach such a course. Some openly stated that they are atheists, but that this course was assigned to them, and that they find it difficult to imagine how they will teach it. All of our interlocutors without exception noted that the ten-day advanced training courses that are offered cannot fully prepare a person to teach OPK. The instructor needs to have knowledge of the history of Christianity and Orthodoxy, the content of Orthodox dogma and moral doctrine, of church rites and traditions, Christian art, and so on, that is impossible to master in ten

1. The main goal of this research is to study the influence of religion on the belief system, behavioral motivation, and social practices of modern Russians, based on analysis of the residents of the city of Tambov and the Tambov region. Its method is using questionnaires based on established practices. Its duration: February 2013–March 2014. Those surveyed consisted of the general population of Tambov and the Tambov region. The sample set was determined by 3200 respondents living in the Tambov region. The data was processed using the software package Portable IBM SPSS Statistics v19.

days. Furthermore, some of the teachers who had passed the retraining course reported that they were not supplied with the educational materials necessary for teaching but, on the contrary, they were required to bring their own materials, works-ups and presentations for lessons, to be gathered into a common resource bank. In turn, one of the course's instructors admitted in conversation that they only give lectures on Orthodox culture, since the Institute for Advanced Training did not engage, and did not plan to attract, instructors with a broader background, scholars of religion or philosophy (to teach lessons on ethics). At the same time, in 2014, that is, four years after the start of the experiment, Feodosii, bishop of the Tambov and Rasskazovsky regions, in one of his speeches, spoke of OPK teachers' lack of systematic knowledge of the faith and of Christian traditions due to the fact that they had not received an Orthodox upbringing in their families, and he noted that some of the teachers of OPK were spiritually and psychologically unprepared to teach the course (Feodosii 2014).

The position of church representatives is somewhat contradictory: on the one hand, they confidently assert that its adherents, first of all, the clergy, can adequately discuss the Orthodox faith and tradition: "Who can tell about the spiritual and moral traditions of our people better than clergymen?" (quoted from a speech by the head of socio-cultural center "Transformation" at a meeting of an association of OPK teachers ["Zasedanie metodicheskogo ob"edineniia" 2011, 18]). On the other hand, priests are not being invited to school to teach about religion on a voluntary basis. Possibly this is due to the laboriousness of such teaching. Another reason may be that church leaders are beginning to see Orthodoxy as a factor in creating state ideology and forming civic identity, and for this reason they are not against the large-scale, formalized teaching about Orthodoxy as a cultural tradition. Therefore, random people with little knowledge about the subject and even far from the faith may teach it.

A proposal that the regional university invite trained religious scholars to teach was rejected. This rejection reflected the negative view of religious studies itself on the part of the head of the diocesan Department of Religious Education: "Religious studies tries to put itself above religions; this is a harmful discipline and it should not have a place in the Russian educational system." It appears that this opinion has acquired the status of a "party" position and has been imposed on the bureaucrats of the regional Department of Education, which was not slow to be revealed. Thus, in response to the proposal to involve religious scholars both as teachers and as specialists, a rep-

representative of the Office of Education suggested that the real specialists in religion are the priests of the diocesan administration, and that therefore one should be guided in one's work primarily by the words of the patriarch. For the record, yet another point stated in the "Concept of Including the Subject 'Orthodox Culture'" is not being followed: that

the implementation of all actions and undertakings based on the provisions of this Concept should be open and public on all levels, with the broad participation of the pedagogical and parental community and under the control of institutions of civil society. ("Kontsepsiia" 2007)

Another important circumstance is the church's active use of administrative resources in this area. In an interview with the TV channel Soiuz a ruling bishop noted:

We work together [with secular authorities] not only in terms of the revival of shrines. I would say that in the Tambov region a lot is being done in the way of educating young people. We have very good relations here with our regional Department of Education, with school administration, with teachers, and the community of parents. (Feodosii 2016)

The results of this interaction are very significant: in the Tambov region today, 96 percent of parents have chosen to have their children taught "The Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture." To a journalist who expressed misgivings about this overly high percentage, the bishop replied without a shadow of hesitation that there was a lot of work behind it. Besides, he confidently expressed the opinion that this is the way it should be, since parents truly realize the importance of inculcating their children with the values that Christianity preaches. "These are really good results that have only been achieved due to the fact that we have good and mutually beneficial cooperation [with parents]; . . . in this area there is an understanding that today we must think about and care for young people and, of course, to bring them up on high evangelical moral values" (Feodosii 2016).

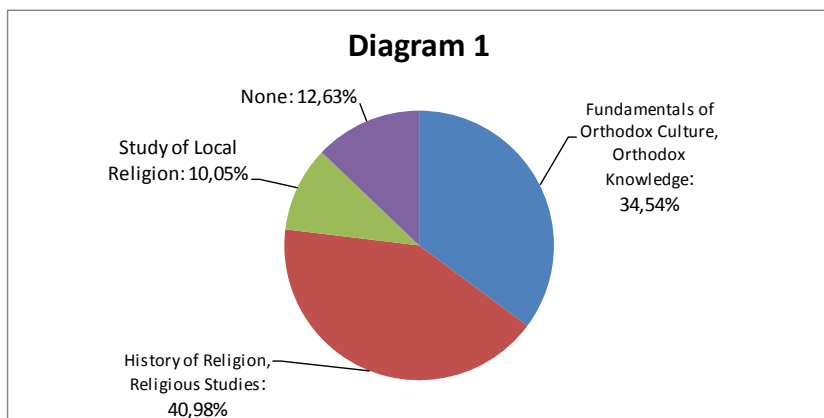
However, in 2010, at the beginning of the initiative, which included the Tambov region along with nineteen other areas of the Russian Federation, a commission consisting of representatives of the diocese, an institute for advanced training, and teachers noted that there had been difficulties in implementing it. Among the main problems they named low motivation among teachers and the difficulty of the subject matter for primary teachers, because teaching the course demands

significant erudition on their part. Initial monitoring of parents' attitudes toward the chosen modules that was carried out in 2009 showed that 55 percent of parents chose OPK, 37 percent — secular ethics, and 7 percent — “Fundamentals of World Religious Cultures” (Feodosii 2010, 19). The Commission considered this result unacceptable and decided to do another survey after having worked with parents, head teachers, and teachers. The necessity now arose of carrying out the second survey *under the control of [the diocesan] Office of Education*. According to the results of the second survey, 92 percent of parents now chose OPK, from which one can conclude that the measures taken were successful.

In parallel, independent researchers at the Center for Religious Studies monitored the implementation and experience of teaching the OPK course in city and regional schools from 2012 to 2017. This included a whole range of activities: questionnaires; presence at parents' meetings at which the course was discussed, conversations with teachers who were to teach this subject, and with those who already had experience teaching similar material.

In 2013, to the question, “Which subject should be taught in school?,” of the proposed options 34.54 percent of the polled residents of the Tambov region chose “The Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture” and “The Fundamentals of Orthodox Knowledge”; 40.98 percent chose “The History of Religions” and “Religious Studies”; 10 percent selected “The Study of Local Religion”; and 12.63 percent answered none of the above (diagram 1).

Diagram 1. The answers given by residents of the Tambov region to the question, “Which subject should be taught in school?,” in percentages.



Considering the results of the pilot survey that was conducted a year before the main stage of polling, one can say that the responses did not change significantly, but that the number of those who replied that such a subject should not be taught in school rose from 8 percent to 12 percent. True, the 2017 survey was only carried out in one school, although it was precisely among those parents who had to choose a module, and not among all inhabitants of the region, as in the previous polls. It showed that 16 percent thought that religious education was unnecessary, and that 32 percent were in favor of religious education, but only in the family.² This is evidence of the increasing tension in discussion of the issue; some saw an opportunity to escape from its complexities and conflicts by rejecting the introduction of this kind of subject into schools altogether.

Introducing the subject into school presupposed that parents would choose one of the proposed modules at a parent's meeting. Meetings attended by researchers who were parents of students, about whom word had been spread by other parents, usually proceeded as follows. The fourth grade homeroom teacher reports that in the last quarter of this class and in the first quarter of the fifth grade students will be taught about religion. When parents ask, "Why is this needed?," as a rule, they get the answer: "Our children need to know about their traditions, including religious ones." The question, "Is it possible to skip this subject?" receives a negative response because this subject is required for everyone. This testifies to the fact that gradually during the implementation of this initiative they dropped the previously announced principle that taking this course would be voluntary. Next, the teacher informs parents about the fact that there are several modules to choose from, but then concludes that everyone must choose "The Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture." To the questions, "Why?" and, "Is it possible to take a different module?" the answers are given that "OPK is the study of our traditional culture," and "in any case there is no one to teach the other modules since the advanced training courses are only about OPK." Insofar as parents repeatedly received the very same arguments in favor of OPK, one may conclude that at the advanced training courses teachers were given instructions on how to respond if parents asked for other modules. A number of other facts confirms this. Thus, we learned from an instructor of the advanced training course who would be teaching this subject that she only taught a short course about the basics of Orthodox culture, and that, as she frankly admitted, she was incompetent to speak about

2. Survey of parents of a school in Tambov, February 2017. Sample: forty-four parents.

other religious cultures. In turn, the head of the Department of Religious Education and Catechization of Tambov diocese, Archpriest Igor Grudanov, speaking to teachers at a regional conference, recommended that parents be told that the course on “Secular Ethics” is atheistic, and that no one wanted to write a textbook for it because of the incongruous subject matter and because Russian culture is so inextricably linked with Orthodoxy. Such arguments, of course, influenced parents’ choice.

At the same time, it should be noted that representatives of the church often represent the situation in the exact opposite way. This happens when a parent’s choice leans toward the subject of “Secular Ethics”:

Parents are poorly informed about their right to choose a desired module from the integrated program “The Fundamentals of Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics” (ORKSE). Most parents do not know about the purpose and objectives of the course “The Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture” (OPK). “The Fundamentals of Secular Ethics” is strongly recommended to them, [or] if worse comes to worst, the so-called “Foundations of World Religions.” So more often than not there is a situation that one can characterize as “choice without a choice.” (Pivovarov 2012)

What are the specific results of the introduction of “The Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture” into Tambov schools, that is, what do we see in practice? The results have been quite predictable: in class, teachers went over material from textbooks with the students, but lacking serious knowledge of Orthodoxy, they presented their own, sometimes quite peculiar, ideas about Orthodox culture. Sometimes the children came away with quite a distorted understanding of this subject. Here are some examples of the curiosities that were revealed when speaking with students after taking this course. One student “learned” that the Trinity is three gods; another said that the Holy Spirit is when a priest waves an censer. It is not very clear why teachers need to touch upon some of the most complex questions of Christian dogma in a class for children ten to eleven years old, but in any case, it is obvious that their knowledge about the fundamentals of Orthodox teaching is insufficient.

Most often, we had to record the students’ lack of knowledge of the subject. For example, in answer to my question, the children could not name the major Orthodox holidays, nor could they say which biblical event is associated with the Easter holiday. Only after a clue about painted eggs were most of the children able to name the holiday asso-

ciated with this custom. (We should note that at the time of the conversation no more than a month had passed since Easter Sunday, and that the course was taking place in the same half-year.) Conversations with ninth-grade children showed that most often they remember almost nothing about this course. Some recalled lessons that covered topics that touched them personally, for example, about heroes, about friendship. Almost no one mentioned a properly religious topic.

It is also interesting to cite parents' opinions recorded after their children had taken OPK, which are reflected in the following table:

Table 1. Evaluation of the OPK course by parents. Answers to the question: "What is the value of the OPK course for children?"

Acquisition of new knowledge about traditions and culture	40%
Moral education of the child	24%
Gives religious education	8%
Other opinions, no answer	24%
A total of 44 parents were questioned.	

Thus, most parents perceived the course as culturological, acquainting students with Orthodoxy as a cultural tradition; parents also noted topics relating to moral concepts: friendship, honesty, kindness, mercy, and so on, but only a few of them (8%) perceived elements of religious education in it.

As an example of the ambiguous interaction of the church leadership with the authorities in the field of education on the regional level, we may cite the case of the renovation of a building for the Tambov Theological Seminary from which a public school was evicted via administrative measures. In the already cited interview of 2016 on the TV channel Soiuz, Bishop Feodosii of the Tambov and Rasskazovsky regions said:

Today the Seminary, as I said, is growing; it is located in a large, spacious building of the Diocesan House [*arkhireiskii dom*], but very recently we received another building for the seminary on the territory of the monastery, where one of the city of Tambov's secondary schools was located. Now the school has been removed from the territory of the monastery and we are making this structure into the seminary's second building, reconstructing it in accordance with the requirements of Rosobrnadzor [the federal agency for supervision of education and science] and according to the wishes and requirements of our Education Committee. As a

result there will be everything necessary for the proper housing and education of our seminarians: an excellent refectory, an assembly hall that I hope will seat 200, and lecture halls. (Feodosii 2016)

Obviously, the bishop is confident about the correctness of his position and that evicting school children and teachers from the building did not bother him at all. In personal conversation, former students of this school expressed indignation about this action, which for many of them generated a negative attitude toward the church as a whole.

Patriarch Kirill believes that everyone recognizes that the experiment of introducing ORKSE into schools has been successful. It is possible that he bases his conclusion on the official reports of regional educational authorities. We happened to attend a meeting at the Tambov regional administration of its working group on the harmonization of interethnic relations at which a report [was presented] on the results of the region's participation in the project to introduce the ORKSE (more accurately, the ORK) curriculum into all schools. Formally, everything looked positive and effective. But substantive analysis of the report's data raised a mass of questions. The first concerned the performance indicators it used. For example, after two years of the experiment (i.e., teaching this course in the fourth grade), how can one draw the conclusion that the level of drug addiction dropped by 24 percent? It also seems untenable to conclude that family relations improved by 70 percent over this period; this and other similar indicators simply cannot be confirmed empirically.

Another important area to consider is [the program's effect on] higher education. At the initiative of the diocese, the regional university opened a program in theology. The nature of such organizational activities testifies to the fact that they are undertaken for political purposes. "Today, of course, we are trying very hard to accomplish the tasks that His Holiness the Patriarch sets us," said Bishop Feodosii in his interview. But this is an ideological task, since in this paradigm religion is seen as a new form of civil and national ideology. So most often the discourse concerns such goals as strengthening the nation and the state, traditional values, the revival of spirituality, and about creating a system to protect religion.

Our observations and analysis do not support the conclusion that religious education in the form in which it is currently being introduced into the Russian educational system will promote the goals of moral upbringing or harmonizing ethnic and interfaith relations. Teaching ORK at school does not give students even a minimal knowledge of the religious traditions being studied.

As for the implementation of the program on theology at the regional university, one cannot expect positive results by virtue of the “formal-party” approach to this initiative. First of all, the region does not have the personnel necessary for teaching the disciplines appropriate in a theological curriculum. Among its teaching staff the local seminary has two BA’s in history who have basic knowledge of history but not a single teacher with a theological degree, so it cannot be of help in this case. The level of training of seminarians is quite low, and learning is reduced to mastering the liturgical calendar, which is necessary first of all for future or already serving clergy. True, the bishop has collected an excellent theological library in the seminary, but without teachers with the necessary professional qualifications, this cannot solve the problem.

The situation is even more complicated concerning the teaching of disciplines connected with the study of religion in the theology program. The appointment of relevant teachers was carried out by the head of the Diocesan Department of Education in coordination with the bishop; the university was completely sidelined from the process. Therefore, it is not surprising, for example, that teaching the discipline “New Religions” was assigned to a clergyman with no academic degree or pedagogical experience. At the same time, the university does have a specialist in this field, active in the religious studies program, with a PhD in the philosophy of religion and religious studies. Why did they exclude this expert? As it was explained to us, it was because of his “unreliable” worldview, the fact that this expert allowed himself to criticize church activities in his writing. Something similar happened in connection with a course on law regarding religion. The university has an appropriate specialist who is a member of various commissions on relations with religious organizations and who is chairman of the regional council for conducting religious studies examinations, but the course was taken over by the head of the diocese’s General Department of Religious Education, who only has a basic technical education. Here we see the completely unjustified selection of teachers for the program based on ideological considerations, provoking conflict among university professors and teaching staff, and not making use of existing scholarly and pedagogical resources. No one is concerned here about the subject matter to be taught or the pedagogical and methodological approaches to be taken. A natural result of the fact that incompetent people are developing the program in theology at the university was that they appointed someone far from religion as its head, although the program was created primarily to prepare teachers to teach ORK in the region’s schools.

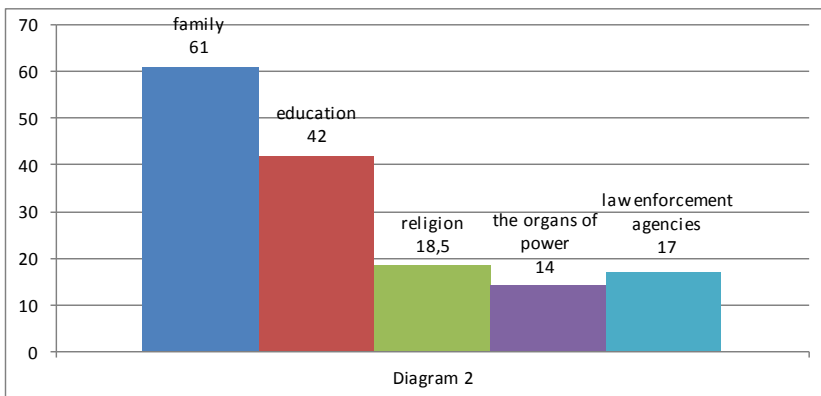
At the same time, it is already possible to say that in the student milieu a negative attitude toward the Russian Orthodox Church has acquired features of a lasting trend. In the 1990s, several researchers determined that a “pro-Orthodox consensus” was forming in Russian society: Orthodox and believers of other religions as well as unbelievers expressed a positive attitude toward the ROC. At that time negative responses were only expressed by individuals; today in lecture halls we are observing a change. The number of young people identifying themselves as atheists has increased. Ten or even five years ago very few called themselves this; such a choice of worldview was extremely unpopular and aroused indignation or bewilderment in most people. But the situation has changed, and more and more young people consciously call themselves not indifferent to religion, but precisely atheists. It is interesting that during conversations with such young people we most often find out that they do allow for the existence of some kind of transcendental force, but they categorically reject religion and religious institutions. Moreover, one can find a similar outlook among many of those who identify themselves as Orthodox. To questions about the reasons for this attitude, young people give roughly the same answers: scandals associated with expensive items and cars belonging to clergy; immoral actions committed by them; the church’s property claims, seizure of buildings and land; the church’s lack of meaningful participation in solving social issues. According to the results of research trips in the region, our team members noted that conversations about religion began to cause people irritation and disgust. It appears that the church is rapidly losing the credit with people that it had in the 1990s and 2000s.

At the same time, the region has had positive experiences teaching subjects related to the study of religious traditions in its schools. For example, in the school in the village of Kuzmina Gat, where the teachers themselves developed a training kit for ORKSE, they constantly participate together with students in various competitions and projects, carry out research on the history of the local cathedral, and write biographies of churchmen.

The gymnasium named for St. Pitirim of Tambov exhibits its success with pride. True, in this case it is only possible to objectively judge the part of the primary school that has taught ORK once a week for over five years, and where they developed a system of supplementary education including such subjects as religious singing and folk art; extracurricular activities are focused on religious holidays and other events. One should also note that in this case the children and parents are aware of this institution’s program and are therefore motivated to study religious traditions from the start.

Gymnasium teachers have many years of experience teaching subjects that correspond to OPK using interesting contemporary methods. For example, there is S. I. Belan's project of creating an interactive map with school children titled "Tambov's Holy Treasures Yesterday and Today," and O.M. Eroshkina's project, "A Virtual Museum as a Means of Forming a Unified Informational Environment in the Sphere of Religious and Moral Education." There is also the example of A.V. Seregina, an experienced scholar of methodology in the field of teaching about religion in school. We have attended her classes and workshops more than once. She is the author of numerous educational materials that have received recognition at the federal level. The main principle of her method is to avoid moralizing and to tell children about Christianity through its connections with art, literature, and ethics. Seregina takes into account the actual state of contemporary Russians' religiosity, and therefore, in our opinion, is able to achieve positive results. The special nature of the process of restoring religious tradition in modern society does not require the introduction of culture through religion, but, on the contrary, the introduction of religion via culture — through customs and traditions existing at the family or community level, through art, philosophy, and ethics. To confirm this, we can cite the results of a survey of residents of the Tambov region asking them which forces can best strengthen moral values in our society today (diagram 2).

Diagram 2. Answers of inhabitants of the Tambov region to the question: "What forces today can best strengthen moral values in our society?"³



3. Survey of inhabitants of the Tambov region. Sample size: 1200.

We see that, with a large margin, residents name the family and have high hopes for education, while religion (by a factor of 2 to 3 times less) occupies third place rather than first (as, perhaps, supporters of the “formal-ideological” approach to introducing ORK into schools might expect).

We may draw some conclusions based on our observations. First of all, children form deep conceptions about religious culture only as a result of a systematic approach, when interdisciplinary connections are established, when knowledge, learned in the classroom, is buttressed by additional activities and receives creative application (as in the process of preparing for such things as performances, concerts, and school projects). In our opinion, a positive outcome from teaching about religion in schools is possible, but only within the framework of specialized Orthodox schools to which children come ready for such study and where it is possible to gather a team of enthusiastic teachers. If we try to talk about traditions, cultural norms and values through religion (whose influence was interrupted during the Soviet period) we find that society is not receptive. As a result, we do not obtain an understanding of religious culture, but rather flawed knowledge about tradition and the debasing of religious feeling.

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To Be Continued: The Religious and Social Life of Russia's Regions

Review of: *The Religious and Social Life of Russia's Regions (Religiozno-obshchestvennaia zhizn' rossiiskikh regionov)*. Vol. 3 / Ed. S. Filatov. Moscow: Letnii sad, 2018 (in Russian). — 468 pages.

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In May 2018, the third volume of the encyclopedia *The Religious and Social Life of the Russian Regions* was published. This is the twelfth volume published jointly by representatives of the Russian academic community and the Keston Institute (Great Britain) in the framework of the research project “An Encyclopedia of Contemporary Religious Life in Russia.” The purpose of this ambitious project is to de-

scribe the main trends taking place in the religious and social life of the Russian regions. The editors of the encyclopedia and of the current volume are Sergey Filatov (senior researcher at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences), Roman Lunkin (head of the Center for the Study of Religion and Society of the Institute of Europe, Russian Academy of Sciences), and Ksenia Dennen (president of the Keston Institute).

The material in this review is based on the results of a government project sponsored by the Russian Academy of National Economy and Public Administration No AAAA-A18-118013190105-2 titled: “The System of Expert and Analytical Support for Religious and Political Processes at the Regional and Municipal Levels of the Legislative and Executive Authorities of the Russian Federation,” within the scholarly framework of “socio-historical, political and legal, culturological and philosophical studies.”

Structure

The order of material presented in the third volume follows the strategy previously chosen by the editors — it is given by region, in alphabetical order. The first volume dealt with the religious and political situation of nineteen regions (A to I — from Adygea to

Ingushetia); the second volume included fourteen regions (I to K — from the Irkutsk region to the Krasnoyarsk Territory); and the third covers eleven regions from K to N (the Kurgan, Kursk, Lipetsk, Magadan regions, the Chukotka autonomous region, the republics of Mari El and Mor-dovia, and the Murmansk, Nizhny Novgorod, Novgorod and No-vosibirsk regions).

The disadvantages of present-ing the material in alphabetical or-der in each volume have already been discussed in detail (Bogachev 2017). Among the main problems it is worth noting: (1) the logistic difficulties of collecting the infor-mation; the authors, following this order, are forced to move back and forth from one end of the country to the other; (2) the readers' cog-nitive difficulties in absorbing the material, because alphabetical se-quencing removes regions from their geographical, sociocultur-al and political-economic context, readers have to constantly jump from the religious and social spe-cifics of one region of the Federa-tion to those of another in order to appreciate the contents of the book.

In a number of cases, the au-thor's team itself deviates from the chosen strategy of present-ing the material. Thus in the first volume the Nenets Autonomous District (NAO), in violation of al-phabetical sequence, is presented

after the Arkhangelsk region (in fairness it should be noted that the NAO is formally part of the Arkhangelsk region, both a sub-ject of the Russian Federation and an integral part of the re-gion). At the same time, the Jew-ish Autonomous Region was not described at all, either in the first or in second volume.¹ However, the third volume holds the record for deviations from the rule orig-inally adopted by the authors. In violation of alphabetic sequence, it does not include: the Repub-lic of Crimea; the Leningrad Re-gion; or Moscow (which will be the subject of the last volume of the encyclopedia); the Moscow Region; or the Nenets Autono-mous Area (since the latter was presented in the first volume). But the new edition includes the Chukotka Autonomous Region (ChAO), which is presented af-ter the Magadan region. Howev-er, the ChAO has not been part of the Magadan region for more than a quarter of a century (it left in 1992 and is currently only one of four autonomous regions in Russia that does not belong to another entity in the federation); in this regard, its location in the third volume of the encyclopedia is puzzling.

1. In Russian, the "Evreiskaia avtonomnaia oblast'," starts with "e," the sixth letter in the Cyrillic Russian alphabet (—Trans.).

A separate chapter is devoted to each region of the federation. The chapters feature informational-analytical descriptions of the religious and social life of each region in 30–40 pages. Within chapters, the material being presented is structurally divided into several blocks: the narrative begins with an introductory section on “Characteristics of the Historical Development of Religion,” which lists key historical events in the region and gives a brief retelling of mythologized traditions concerning the local saints who founded important churches and monasteries there. After that comes information about the organizational structure and special nature of religious life in the region; covered are: the Russian Orthodox Church, the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, Old Belief, Catholicism, Protestantism, Judaism, Islam, Paganism.

A large part of each chapter is devoted to the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), and this section includes several components: Organizational Structure, Features of Diocesan Life, State Religious Policy and the ROC; Number [of Adherents]; Educational Institutions; Monasticism. The section with the promising title “Organizational Structure” includes information on the number of dioceses (*eparkhii*) that make up the archdiocese (*mitropoliia*) and

condensed biographies of current metropolitans and bishops. This section does not offer analytical information but may be useful for getting a sense of the main channels of social mobility in church circles. For the general reader, the sections of greatest interest concern the features of diocesan life and the authorities’ religious policy, sections that paint a not necessarily bleak but generally severe picture of the religious and social life of the Russian regions.

Features of Diocesan Life

The world of the ROC can be provisionally divided into three levels whose daily existence and consciousness differ significantly: the level of the Patriarchate; the level of dioceses and archdioceses; and the district and parish level. The Patriarchate focuses mainly on solving geopolitical problems: building relations with international parties, interacting with the federal authorities, and finding a balance among opposing forces within the church.

At the level of dioceses and archdioceses the church lives a different life. On the one hand, dioceses and archdioceses are compelled to observe the centralizing course set by the patriarchate and to formally comply with its initiatives, but on the other hand they have significant

independence in deciding their own internal issues. Often the façade of church officialdom conceals a myriad of financial, economic, ideological, personnel and personal conflicts that determine the specifics of religious and social life in the regions. According to the data presented in the publication, the diocesan and archdiocesan departments of the Russian Orthodox Church are mostly occupied by people of authoritarian character and a conservative, paternalistic worldview; many of them sympathize with monarchical and anti-ecumenical ideas. They are suspicious of all forms of community self-organization; they demand unquestioning obedience and are ruthless toward active clergymen who show initiative. In many regions described in the third volume of the encyclopedia there are cases recorded of clergymen who gained recognition among laymen but who were unacceptable to the church leadership due to their popularity or “liberal” views and who were banned from ministry (in the Kurgan, Kursk, Murmansk, Nizhny Novgorod, Novosibirsk, and Chukotka regions).

In turn, at the district and parish level the church is in a most unenviable position. It is here that the burden of “feudal” financial support for higher-ranking churches falls and this is the place where the actual problems

of serving society are encountered, difficulties that are compounded by the shortage of qualified personnel and the small number of parishioners. The many economic problems faced by members of the lower church have various consequences. On the one hand, the existing difficulties contribute to the apolitical nature and ecumenical neutrality of its clergy and parishioners, which increases their subordination, but on the other hand, it is precisely economic disorder that creates the demand for democratization and liberalization of church life, for dialogue and interaction with the non-Orthodox and people of other faiths. These demands come into conflict with the authoritarianism of the diocesan and archdiocesan leadership and frequently lay the foundation for conflicts between the flock, headed by ordinary clergymen, and regional church hierarchs.

Government Religious Policy and the ROC

The relationship between church and state in the Russian Federation has not changed significantly in recent years. To this day, there is no normative document on the federal level in Russia that would go beyond articles 13 and 14 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation and establish principles for relations between the state and

religious organizations, regulating their interaction. In the absence of an official, centralized state policy in the sphere of church-state relations, secular authorities and the ROC continue to remain the main players in the religious and social sphere. Moreover, the actions of the federal government in relation to religious organizations are in many ways utilitarian and ostentatiously loyal to the church. On the one hand, religion (in particular, Orthodoxy) is used by the authorities as a “spiritual unifier,” a collective mark of identity that unites the atomized population into a single whole, a means for the cultural homogenization of Russian society, legitimizing the political regime and an instrument for influencing international politics. On the other hand, the secular authorities have been trying to distance themselves from religious and church-related scandals, and in these difficult times for the church they maintain an emphatically neutral, secular attitude, adhering to the letter of the law.

In the absence of a centralized religious policy, regional officials are forced to seek “signals” from the federal authorities, even if they do not exist, and to carry out the ruler’s will as they interpret it. As one of the Protestant pastors who gave an interview to the authors of the project notes: “The authorities hold the principled position that the ROC is ‘the

most important church, and bureaucrats look to the president who is standing in the temple with a candle” (p. 102). As a result, in most of the constituent units of the federation the state’s religious policy has a moderately pro-Orthodox coloration. This moderate pro-Orthodox policy is manifested in the following ways. Within reasonable limits, the authorities finance and facilitate the realization of most of the ROC’s requests; in particular, they help the ROC with the construction of cathedrals, allocate land and money for building churches, and they pay the church and clergy’s expenses for housing and communal services or give them special rates. However, they prevent attempts by the clergy to influence regional cultural and educational policies and they block Orthodox hierarchs from attacking religious minorities (in the Kurgan and Novosibirsk regions).

At the same time, there are also regions where the official religious policy can be characterized as extremely pro-Orthodox (the Lipetsk region under Oleg Korolev, Moravia under Nikolai Merkushkin and Vladimir Volkov). The essence of this policy boils down to the full support of all of the ROC’s initiatives; facilitating the Orthodox clergy’s penetration into all spheres of social and political life, including the regional ministries; very active construction of reli-

religious facilities, and forcing officials and businessmen to finance the construction of churches (pp. 116, 213, 243), as well as putting pressure on religious minorities and persecuting their representatives. In such areas bishops become full-fledged political figures who, thanks to their “close business and friendly relations” (p. 93) with the main regional authorities, are able “to solve all issues directly” (p. 213) and to influence not only the religious, but also the economic and political life of the region. For example, in the Nizhny Novgorod region under the governorship of Valery Shantsev, in the Volga Federal District, or, to be more precise, during Alexander Kononov’s rule as his plenipotentiary (2005–2008), “With the tacit consent of this presiding officer the new and energetic Nizhny Novgorod Bishop George demanded [tribute] from local businessmen for the construction and restoration of churches” (p. 294).

As a main indicator of the state religious policy pursued in a region, one can use the attitude of the authorities toward religious minorities (primarily Protestants). If the life of the Protestant communities is regularly made difficult (houses of worship taken away, mass events prohibited, barriers are created to renting premises, defamation of “sectarians” occurring with impunity in the regional and municipal me-

dia, etc.), then the region is instituting overly pro-Orthodox policies. If on the other hand the authorities try “not to notice” religious minorities, accept their assistance with social services, and in some cases even intercede for them when their constitutional rights are violated, then we may call this a moderately pro-Orthodox policy. Additional indicators for determining the political course taken by regional authorities in the sphere of church-state relations include: the composition and frequency of meetings of the council for interaction with religious organizations of the regional parliament or administration (if the council only includes representatives of the authorities and the ROC it suggests that the region carries out extremely pro-Orthodox policies; if representatives of “traditional” religions are present in the council, then it more likely takes a moderately pro-Orthodox position; and if Catholics and Protestants are allowed, then a moderately pro-Orthodox policy has clearly been established); the frequency of applying the “Yarovaya law”² in the region; as well as the proportion

2. This refers to a pair of Russian federal laws drafted by deputy Irina Yarovaya and Senator Viktor Ozerov passed in 2016 concerning counterterrorism and public safety measures; they also placed new restrictions on “evangelism” and missionary activities (–Trans.).

of schoolchildren who chose to take the course “Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture” in the ORKSE³ program (the high “popularity” of the course in a region is often a sign of coercion on the part of the secular and religious authorities).

The nature of the state religious policy pursued in a given region depends entirely on the ideology of the people responsible for making decisions on the relevant issues, the degree of their objectivity and their resistance to pressure on the part of bishops. First of all, this concerns the governor and the specialist on religious matters who serves in his administration. In the 1990s and early 2000s a sharp change in church-state relations was frequent after a change of the governor; as a rule, politicians who were politically neutral and/or negatively inclined toward the ROC immediately halted or reduced official financing for the restoration and construction of churches (pp. 53, 286), while those who were loyal to the ROC, on the contrary, increased church subsidies and put pressure on businessmen, who were forced to make “charitable” contributions to them (pp. 116, 243–44, 294). However, in the 2010s radical changes in regional religious pol-

icies no longer occur due to the fact that all of the political players have mastered the established rules of the game concerning the pro-Orthodox consensus.

It is noteworthy that during their stay in power, even prominent Communist figures, members of the CPSU⁴ and the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (Alexander Mikhailov in the Kursk region, Gennady Khodyrev in Nizhny Novgorod), changed their attitude to the ROC and became its members. It is also interesting that the governors’ time spent on finding a path to God and changing their attitude toward the church by a strange coincidence coincided with their political conversion and transition from the Communist Party to United Russia (Khodyrev changed his political stripes in 2002, and Mikhailov exchanged his red party card for a blue one in 2004–2005).

At the same time, it should be noted that in the context of the prolonged economic crisis, accompanied by foreign sanctions, it has become increasingly difficult for regional authorities to find means to finance the long-term results of the actively pro-Orthodox policies of their predecessors. As Alexander Evstifeev, elected in 2017 as head of the Republic of Mari El,

3. ORKSE — “The Foundations of Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics” (–Trans.).

4. Communist Party of the Soviet Union (–Trans.).

noted in an interview with TASS: “Over the past ten years, many Orthodox churches have been built in Yoshkar-Ola. [. . .] and the burden of caring for churches falls on the city budget, since the parishes are not able to cope with the expenditure. In a word, this is a big headache for us” (Vandenko 2017).

The Position of Regional Authorities

The logic that guides the regional authorities in conducting a moderately pro-Orthodox policy can be explained not only by their attempts to anticipate the officially undeclared wishes of the federal government, but also by the peculiarities of the bureaucratic worldview. Regional authorities often view religious institutions as an aid in solving social problems (p. 152, 292). Thus, “The position of Governor Oleg Korolev is that the Church is a stronghold and support of the authorities, without which it is impossible to raise the younger generation or to struggle against various social vices. Independently the state cannot provide this kind of social activity. Therefore, the Church and the state maintain a mutual symbiosis. From the point of view of power, this way is easier to prevent any kind of conflict, therefore it is precisely the Orthodox who conduct the education of the younger generation, every-

thing from childhood on, as early as in Sunday school” (p. 95). In this respect, the case of the Lipetsk region is curious. There the secular authority was the most active lobbyist for the separation of the Voronezh diocese from the independent Lipetsk diocese, and later for the formation of a Lipetsk archdiocese, since as part of the Voronezh diocese Lipetsk churches and church social services were largely deprived of the support of their main sponsor — the Lipetsk Metallurgical Plant (NLMK).

At the same time, bureaucrats adhere to the principle of “little blood,” which consists in minimizing costs and maximizing their own usefulness, and the principle “as long as we don’t get in trouble,”⁵ which amounts to preventing civil initiatives in their domain. Minimizing costs incurred by the authorities is often manifested in the desire to interact only with large bureaucratized organizations that have an impact on a broad public. It is easier for officials to work with similar rigidly hierarchical structures than with religious minorities that are numerous in organizational terms but relatively small in terms of followers. “According to an employee of the adminis-

5. A rough translation of the colloquial phrase spoken by the pusillanimous title character in Chekhov’s well-known story “The Man in a Case” (–Trans.).

tration, the number of Orthodox parishes in the region is stable, and the other faiths can't play the same role as the ROC ('The question arises: is there a need for any other organizations? In comparison with Orthodoxy, they are a drop in the bucket')" (p. 94).

In turn, fear of the possible consequences of processes that are not under official control has prevented civil initiatives on the part of religious minorities, as has the "stink" that the ROC has raised concerning this issue. "Indulgence" toward minorities causes dissatisfaction among Orthodox hierarchs who claim a priority, if not a monopoly, of rights over religious and public space. "They sought to establish [church-state] relations strictly within the framework of the law and of equal treatment for all faiths. This position of the regional authorities aroused strong criticism from Archbishop Simon who accused officials 'of indifference to the needs of Orthodoxy and connivance with the religious aggression of Western missionaries. [. . .] The absence of zeal in aiding the diocese and permitting the existence of many religious minorities in the city also prompted Archbishop Simon to criticize city officials'" (p. 244). The ROC's dissatisfaction often results in complaints and slander that escalate the problem and attract the attention of the federal authorities and

public opinion (in the Murmansk, Nizhny Novgorod, Novgorod and Novosibirsk regions), which is also an undesirable consequence for regional authorities.

Nevertheless, in a number of cases the pragmatism of the authorities has benefited both religious minorities and society. The authorities are ready to interact with organizations that provide free assistance to people and that "do not pursue proselyting goals" (p. 54). "As officials note, the Orthodox have long criticized Protestants' initiatives, but they themselves have not previously engaged in this kind of social service," according to Lymar', head of the Department for Relations with Religious Organizations of the Novosibirsk Region's Committee on Relations with Religious, National and Charitable Organizations. "The parents of a drug addict do not care what kind of a church he belongs to — the main thing is that he stays alive" (p. 408).

The Position of the Church Hierarchs

One can also trace a certain logic in the actions of the ROC leadership. For the last quarter century the ROC has adhered to a strategy of large-scale development whose main goal is to "stake out" its place, to signal its presence, in all spheres; hence the clergy's active presence in the media and in

the country's socio-political and cultural-symbolic space. Priests energetically work to create images of the faith and of the majority church and to buttress support for Orthodoxy and the ROC; they sponsor the construction of cathedrals all over the country, the restoration of destroyed and abandoned churches (even if there is no one to conduct services and no one to conduct them for), the erection of crosses, and they try to have a presence at all secular events. It is understood that in the future, after secularized Russian society gets used to the proximity of religious institutions, and when the church, weakened by Soviet Union's atheistic policy, will become strong and increase its financial, economic and theological power, an active stage of preaching the Gospel and God's Word will begin. However, at the moment the church is still in the stage of "the initial accumulation of capital," whose main support comes from the state. "His Grace Arkady, who became the first Magadan bishop, was not distinguished by piety or a special gift for preaching, but he was able to establish good relations with local authorities in order to obtain the means necessary to build churches and a monastery" (p. 110).

At the same time, however paradoxically, the ROC seeks to minimize its dependence on the state and to create an autono-

mous system of church life support independent of the secular authorities. For the clergy the memory of the fact that government support (like that of the state itself) is not constant is still fresh and they realize that this support is not disinterested and may have unsure consequences for the church. With this in mind, the calculated interaction of the ROC with the authorities focuses not so much on power structures in general, but on the specific individuals who make decisions and it builds relations with them that are "not simply warm, but very intimate" (p. 280). With the help of targeted pressure on regional leaders, church hierarchs manage to obtain all kinds of resources and privileges; thus regional and local administrations exempt the ROC from tax on property used for non-religious purposes; provide space for offices and hierarchs of the ROC for free; allocate land to them for construction; subsidize various activities; and put pressure on the ROC's competitors in the religious market. The church reallocates administrative resources obtained through lobbying to various purposes, the most important of which, apart from symbolic construction projects, are economic, cultural and educational, social and "anti-sectarian."

The church structures are vigorously working to create a fi-

nancial and economic base; they acquire agricultural land and organize private farms (p. 44, 408) because “preaching and piety in the church are secondary, the main thing is to create an economic base. Only after that is the stable development of the church possible” (p. 111). The ROC also actively promotes religious socialization in the educational system, especially in primary and secondary schools and children’s camps; it publishes Orthodox literature; supplies libraries with textbooks; retrains teachers; creates theological departments and faculties; and does all it can to increase the number of parents who choose the course “Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture” for their children. This course includes “the presentation of Orthodox doctrine, church history and the Orthodox understanding of Russian history, Russian literature and culture” (p. 41). The authors of the encyclopedia note that there has been a tendency in the ROC in recent years for a qualitative change in regard to social services: the Orthodox leadership (not without the influence of the secular authorities) has begun to gradually move away from symbolic activities and to become involved in real social work such as rehab centers, medical institutions, orphanages, prisons, shelters, etc.

Another area of interaction between the ROC and regional secu-

lar authorities is the fight against religious minorities. By obtaining administrative resources the ROC is trying to oust its competitors from the religious market, primarily Protestant churches, which Orthodox media activists often depict as “totalitarian and destructive sects.” “Under Goria, the relationship between the government and the diocese became even stronger and discrimination against minorities became the norm” (pp. 116–17). Representatives of religious minorities are removed from councils on interaction with religious organizations; deprived of houses of worship; their requests to have old church buildings returned and to be provided with land for new ones are refused; they are prevented from renting premises for worship; they are fined for preaching; they are terrorized by constant prosecutorial inspections, etc. Representatives of the ROC perceive with hostility any activity on the part of alternative religious organizations, whether it is an attempt to build a mosque (p. 117), create a Catholic monastery (p. 273), or organize Protestant processions (p. 349). The result of such actions is not only the escalation of tension in the region, but also the suppression of the Protestants’ social services, which are dramatically more vigorous and successful than the Orthodox. Protestants are not al-

lowed to work with prisoners; the alcohol and drug addiction rehabilitation centers they supervise are closed; they are not permitted to help the homeless publicly; and state and municipal organizations are prohibited from receiving help from them. "For example, in 2010, during massive fires in the region, the Adventists decided to bring supplies to an orphanage, but an announcement was posted on the building that orphanages may only accept help from the CPRF,⁶ LDPR,⁷ United Russia and the ROC" (p. 319).

New Challenges in Church-State Relations

The security forces have been another beneficiary of the oppression of various minorities. The coming into force of the Yarovaya-Ozerov amendment package,⁸ whose religiously oriented section was lobbied for by the ROC, has led to the fact that Russian religious life has become an arena in which law enforcement agencies can earn "sticks" (indicators of fulfilled quotas for detecting crimes).

However, the use of security forces as a tool to fight competi-

tors can be a double-edged sword and have uncertain consequences, not only for religious minorities, but also for the ROC itself. Involving organizations in the religious sphere that adhere to a hawkish strategy of behavior and that possess their own institutional logic of development (there is a law — there must be arrests) is like opening a Pandora's box. At this point in time, the ROC manages to direct the repressive machine in the required direction and to act as an apologist for "national and state security" (p. 10) and as defender of "the spiritual and political unity of the people" (p. 114). In this regard, an incident recorded by the authors of the encyclopedia that took place in the Kursk region is remarkable. A member of the Protestant community refused to "cooperate" with the FSB: "The FSB officers did not expect such a thing from a church representative and they began to argue that, after all, Russian Orthodox Church clergy cooperate with the FSB, and that Baptists 'should also cooperate and be patriotic'" (p. 72). However, at any moment the gears of the security machine may begin to turn on their own, become uncontrollable, and, having questioned the patriotism of church structures, turn against the ROC itself. Moreover, there are grounds for such a fear.

At the presentation of the third volume of the encyclopedia, Ser-

6. Communist Party of the Russian Federation. (—Trans.).

7. Liberal Democratic Party of Russia. (—Trans.).

8. See note 2.

gey Filatov, speaking of new challenges that he had recorded in the sphere of church-state relations, stated that the ROC “has taken the first step toward an independent voice.” “On the most important political issue, the ROC spoke with its own voice [. . . and] did not take a position on the [war in] Donbass” (which from Roman Lunkin’s point of view is also a position), and it began to “criticize the government’s economic policy.” The state system as a whole and the federal secular authorities in particular regard the ROC as a tool in achieving their own domestic and foreign policy goals. Frequently, actions that the authorities force on the church leadership sharply conflict with ROC positions and undermine its interests. Thus the secular authorities, taking advantage of the more or less ecclesiastical idea of the “Russian world,” not only devalued a doctrine that is important to the Moscow Patriarchate but also repelled the Ukrainian Orthodox, who make up almost a third of the parishes of the ROC Moscow patriarchate, weakening the international position of the Moscow Patriarch, who had always positioned himself as the pastor of the entire post-Soviet space, not just Russia. Attempts by the secular authorities to use religious means to break out of international isolation by sending the patriarch as a negotiator and as goodwill envoy to Havana, Sofia, and Istanbul also created a

whole series of problems for the Moscow patriarchate, from accusations of ecumenism within the country to accusations of hypocrisy, desire for material gain and collaboration with the KGB abroad. The Kremlin is ready to sacrifice the interests of the church for its own geopolitical goals, stifling any attempts by church leaders to resist and preventing this with the help of the mass media it controls (e.g., the cycle of investigations on “Lenta.ru” [the Moscow-based online newspaper controlled by the Kremlin]) and with the help of law enforcement agencies, increasing their control over the church’s revenue (e.g., replacing the leadership of *Sofrino*). But how long the church is ready to tolerate coercion and how it will emerge from the crisis of church-state relations, so far from the “symphonic” ideal, remains a question.

Speaking about new challenges in the sphere of church-state relations, it is necessary to highlight one more issue. During his presentation of the encyclopedia Sergey Filatov noted that in modern Russia “religion has turned out to be perhaps the strongest custodian and voice of regional differences in worldview and of regional consciousness.” This remark is especially relevant due to changes in the federal policy concerning the teaching of national languages. In August 2018, the president of the Russian Federation signed a law

on the study of native languages in schools that gave parents of pupils in national republics the right to choose which language their children will learn as their mother tongue. This law simplifies the life of ethnic Russians who were previously obliged to learn the language of the region's main ethnic group. At the same time, the law strikes a blow against the practice of using the national language in the process of nation-building that exists in a number of Russian republics. In this regard it is highly probable that the significance of religion as a factor ensuring the preservation and continuity of ethnic, cultural, ideological and national differences, as well as the degree of its politicization in the national regions of the Russian Federation (Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Mari El, Udmurtia, the North Caucasian Republics), will increase in the near future.

Conclusion

In concluding this review of the third volume of the continuing large-scale encyclopedia *Religious and Social Life of the Russian Regions*, it should be recognized that the authors' collective has completed a work tremendous in volume and unique in content. One may, of course, criticize various aspects of the volume. For example: when describing religious associations that are alternative to the ROC, there is a clear bias toward

Protestant churches; there is a lack of information (or lack of interest on the authors' part?) about the role of Islam in the Russian regions; and the questions raised above remain about the method of selecting specialists and religious leaders to interview for the encyclopedia and about the need to disclose the methods that were used in conducting research for it. However, in general the new volume deserves a positive assessment: the material it contains is characterized by high quality analysis and is presented in accessible language. This work deserves the attention of specialists of various profiles and will take a worthy place on the shelf of specialists in church-state relations, scholars of religion, sociologists and political scientists interested in religion, and it will also be useful to citizens who are curious about the religious and social-political situation in the Russian regions.

M. Bogachev (Translated by Marcus Levitt)

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The Role of Text and Context in the Emergence of Religious Studies

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In recent years, the global religious studies community has shown an interest in the history of the discipline. An example of such interest is Arie Molendijk's *Friedrich Max Müller and the Sacred Books of the East*, published in 2016 by Oxford University Press. This volume is of interest for several reasons. First, even though a considerable body of scholarship is dedicated to Max Müller's legacy, only two works touch upon his largest publishing project — the multivolume edition of *The Sacred Books of the East* (Sun 2013; Girardot 2002). Molendijk chose to fill this gap with a detailed analysis of the background, the content, and the theoretical foundations of the published series. The publishing of *The Sacred Books of the East* was one of the boldest publishing projects of the Victorian intellectual sphere and was comparable in scale only to the famed publication of J.P. Migne's *Patrologia Graeca*, reprints of the Oxford English Dictionary, and the Encyclopaedia Britannica. For the study of religion in the nine-

teenth and early twentieth centuries, this work is unparalleled. Its value lies not only in the fact that Western readers were given access to Eastern religious texts in a familiar language for the first time, but more importantly, this project signals the beginning of the scientific study of religion (as F. Max Müller understood it). Second, the author of the volume, Arie Molendijk, is renowned as one of the most prominent and meticulous historians of the study of religion. His earlier work on the establishment of the scientific study of religion in the Netherlands shed light on previously unknown aspects of the development of religious studies and stimulated a reexamination of the process of its institutionalization, and a reevaluation of specifics and conditions for the genesis of the phenomenology of religion (Molendijk 2005). A distinctive feature of Molendijk's work is that he grounds it in previously unknown or less studied archival materials, and the volume in question is not an exception. Third, despite the fact that

the main theme of the book is the history and the content of the *Sacred Books of the East* series, Molendijk's work discusses a whole range of relevant questions for the history of religious studies.

Molendijk's book consists of six chapters. The first chapter, "The Right Honorable Max Müller" is dedicated to the biography of the scholar. Müller's biography in the book is not supplementary to the main content.⁹ Molendijk explains that to understand the specifics of the series it is necessary to understand the personality of its chief editor, what qualities he possessed and what position he held in society. Molendijk reconstructs Müller's career, his studies in Germany with Schelling, Burnouf, and Bopp, his move to Britain in 1850, and his work in Oxford. His family life is also described along with his romantic encounter and marriage to Georgina and individual stories from his personal life.

Two aspects are of particular interest in the first chapter. The first connects to the general characteristics of Müller's personality. Molendijk purposely quotes nu-

merous assessments of him as a scholar and a person by his contemporaries. These assessments vary from "the greatest scholar of his generation" (p. 27) to "one of the greatest humbugs of the century" (p. 27). Molendijk deliberately refuses to identify with either. He shows that Müller was a complex personality and every opinion, even the harshest critique, could be justified. Müller was a public intellectual on the scale of Richard Dawkins, Noam Chomsky, or Jürgen Habermas; his work by definition could not go unnoticed, thus was bound to elicit critique. A significant part of the chapter is given to a description of Müller's self-understanding. He valued his own work and achievements highly and in the last decades of his lifetime engaged in active self-mythologization. Müller intentionally strove to create for himself the aura of a great man. This is supported by constant comparison of him to Indian philosophers in the biography compiled by Müller's wife and a telling text that Müller himself dictated on his deathbed to his son.¹⁰ Despite his detach-

9. Let us follow the author's lead and call Max Müller simply Müller for brevity. As Molendijk comments, Müller was given two names at birth, Friedrich in honor of his mother's brother and Max for the main character of the opera *Der Freischütz*. When Müller moved to Britain, he made his middle name into part of his last name.

10. This text opens with a piece that is worth quoting here: "People wish to know how a boy, born and educated in a small and almost unknown town in the center of Germany, should have come to England, should have been chosen to edit the oldest book of the world, *The Veda* of the *Brahmans*, never published before, whether in

ment from the sources, Molendijk draws for the reader a portrait of a confident, fame-hungry, and determined scholar.

A second noteworthy aspect is connected to Müller's status in Oxford. Even though his standing at the university increased rapidly and steadily and after eighteen years of work a new chair of comparative philology was created for him, Müller met with apprehension and even hostility in Oxford. The reason for this was not only his wide popularity. Müller was a German Lutheran and alien to the Oxford establishment by nationality and faith. An important episode showing the attitude toward Müller in Oxford are the elections for the post of professor of Sanskrit that seemingly should have favored Müller as an expert of international renown. Müller competed for this position with his rival, Monier-Williams. Müller lost the election (only 610 professors voted for him versus 833 votes to his competitor), and the reason for this was that the Oxford establishment considered him an outsider.

The second chapter, "The Making of a Series," offers a de-

India or in Europe, should have passed the best part of his life as a professor in the most famous and, as it was thought, the most exclusive University in England, and should actually have ended his days as a Member of Her Majesty's most honourable Privy Council" (p. 10).

tailed description of the history of the creation of the series. It is interesting that originally, mainly because of the loss of the election, Müller was planning to leave Oxford and return to Germany.¹¹ In preparation for his departure, he proposed the *Sacred Books of the East* project to the University of Berlin, while stipulating to the Oxford leadership the conditions under which he would stay on in England. As a result, after a series of complicated negotiations, funding for the project was split between Oxford University Press and the India Office. Müller kept his salary at the university, but a new professor, who received only half-pay, was appointed to his teaching position; Müller was to discontinue teaching. All these conditions made it possible for Müller to work on the project. The publication project continued from 1879 to 1910; during this time, fifty volumes of translations were produced. Müller personally supervised the entire conceptual basis of the project. The project was substantially his own, and all other scholars took part merely as translators or, in some cases, as commentators. An international team worked on the project; among the contributors were a Frenchman, a Dane, a Dutch-

11. Molendijk even quotes Müller's letter to a friend: "Here I am a nobody in the University" (p. 45).

man, a Japanese, an Indian, six Sanskrit scholars from Germany and six translators from Britain. They translated texts from Chinese, Pali, Persian, and Arabic. Interestingly, there were virtually no theologians among the translators, and some did not hide their deep sympathies for Eastern religions. According to Müller's concept, the series was to include books from the eight world religions, which he believed to be Brahmanism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, the faith of Moses, Christianity, the religion of Muhammad, the teachings of Confucius and Lao Tzu. Despite such a wide range, eventually the Old and the New Testaments were excluded from the series, because their equalization with texts from other religions caused strong protests among scholars and Anglican clergy. In the general composition of the texts Molendijk and other experts see a strong bias in favor of Hinduism, Müller's main passion. The chapter describes in detail all the difficulties that Müller encountered when working on his ambitious project.

The third chapter, "Concepts and Ideas," covers the key principles of the series design. Molendijk emphasizes that it was based on the unmistakable Protestant idea of authority of scripture. For Müller, the essence of religion was reduced to sacred texts, and the prerogative

of comprehending this text belonged exclusively to authoritative specialists, meaning Western scholars. Molendijk quotes a curious phrase of Müller's in this respect: "We cannot accept that the interpretation of Indian commentators, for instance, is always the right one. On the contrary, these native interpretations, by the very authority which naturally might seem to belong to them, are often misleading, and we must try to keep ourselves, as much as possible, independent of them" (p. 92). At the same time, Müller thought it necessary for Western scholars to put themselves in the position of believers from other religions. It can be said that the idea of empathic understanding was his main condition for an adequate translation of a sacred text.

From the conceptual point of view, the central concept for the entire project was the idea of a sacred book. Müller had a curious interpretation of the term "sacred" as applied to texts — a sacred text is one that received "general recognition or sanction" (p. 56). "Sacred" and "canonical" are synonyms for Müller. Thus, neither Homer's texts, nor the Egyptian Book of the Dead, nor Babylonian religious texts qualified as sacred. Müller was only interested in texts that played the largest historical role, so the defining factor for a sacred text was

not the conditions of its emergence but its reception by later generations. In addition, Müller believed that a sacred text should be organized as a book, to be divided into chapters or verses, to have a beginning and an ending. Collections of parables or less structured narratives did not qualify for the status of a sacred book. This led to the fact that many texts that are considered essential for understanding Eastern religions by modern scholars were not included in Müller's project.

Müller's attitude to principles of translation is also worth mentioning. He believed that a translation from one language to another even within the common Western culture is an extremely complex endeavor and complete adequacy of translation is unattainable. It is all the more difficult when the translation is made not only from a distant language but from a culture removed from us in time and space. Müller thought that translation was to build a bridge connecting different times and cultures, that it could bring a strange concept closer to us, make it more comprehensible, but it could not be communicated entirely accurately. Nonetheless, Müller made every effort to popularize Eastern texts in the West. This is reflected in one of his most widely known metaphors — Müller of-

ten called the *Sacred Books of the East* the Bibles of humanity. On the one hand, this expression clearly indicates a projection of Western culture onto the Eastern world; on the other hand, it reveals a desire to bring this culture closer and increase its status to equal the Western culture, in a sense. In doing so, he did not consider the term "Bible" as the only normative term and believed that it could be substituted with "the Vedas or the Korans of the World" (p. 96). From the technical point of view, Müller advocated for the most accurate translation of the text even when accuracy went against the literary norms of the English language. The only important exception to the rule of accuracy of translation were scenes of a sexual nature. Müller deliberately decided to exclude them from ancient sacred texts, on the one hand, to avoid scandalizing the demure Victorian public, and on the other, following his conviction that ancient religions contained too many useless strata that sometimes prevented pearls of wisdom from being discovered. Obviously, this approach played an important role in understanding ancient religions in the culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Writers, poets, and artists inspired by Müller's series often "portrayed childlike, often passionless inno-

cent deities, who were close to the natural order" (p. 103).

Chapter 4, "Methods," focuses on the key principle of compiling the series, which is comparative religious studies. It has become a common understanding among researchers into Müller's work that Müller's theory of religion was derived from the linguistic theory he had developed in his early work in philology. In this book Molendijk follows this general idea and shows how consistently Müller applied and promoted the comparative method in the study of religion. Müller believed that by joining comparative linguistics and the historical method of the study of religion he was laying the foundations for a new empirical science of religion that would be equally removed from theological infatuation with religious ideas and from anthropological fixation on living religious communities and their practices. For him the study of religion was primarily a study of religious texts. The comparative method was expected to shed light on the unity of human history and common principles of its functioning and to show how individual religions evolved and enriched each other.

The fifth chapter, "Religion of Humanity," covers the ideological subtext behind the project of publishing of *The Sacred Books of the East*. As was mentioned

earlier, Müller was a Lutheran, and Protestant principles of interpreting scripture that he absorbed from childhood played a key part in the design of the series. In this chapter, Molendijk specifically discusses the question of Müller's personal faith. As the reader might remember, the opinion formed among scholars that while studying Hinduism Müller himself embraced the idea of the faith in the impersonal Unity, and proceeding from this, he studied other religions in the belief that all roads would lead to one source.¹² Molendijk contests this point of view. He demonstrates that Müller was a Lutheran his entire life, and quite conservative in his convictions. Müller did not accept all the achievements of biblical criticism and looked down on the High Church movement that strove to reinstate the role of religious rites in Protestantism. Moreover, Müller saw his project to publish books of the East as an act of evangelism. At the same time, he rejected the aggressive forms of contemporary mission that perceived all followers of Eastern religions as servants of demons. In his opinion, this tone of "offended orthodoxy . . . entirely disregards the fact that is

12. See, for example, Strenski (2015), who notes that "Müller's own religion . . . tended toward pantheism" (Ibid., p. 41).

has pleased God to let these men and millions of human beings be born on earth without a chance of ever hearing of the existence of the gospel" (p. 154). Müller thought that mission should take a more delicate path of interfaith dialogue, and for that missionaries should know and understand the cultures in which they preach. This was the purpose of the *Sacred Books* project. Müller saw the same work of God in all religions, but he considered Christianity a superior religion, repeatedly emphasizing that in other religions grains of truth were buried under mountains of misconceptions. On the personal level, Müller made many attempts to persuade his Hindu friends to become Christians. At the same time, in the Lutheran spirit, he claimed that "Christian teaching [finds its entrance] into every human heart, which is freed from the ensnaring powers of priests and from the obscuring influence of philosophers" (p. 152).

The last chapter of the book, "Intellectual Impact," comments on the place that Müller's project occupied in the subsequent scholarly tradition. Molendijk emphasizes that the publication of the sacred books was part of the larger movement in creating high science. Müller's project, which united so many scholars from different countries, defined

the view on Eastern religions for half a century in many respects. The authority of *The Sacred Books* went almost uncontested until the end of World War II and no similar projects emerged in this interval. At that, the project carried an imprint of the Victorian worldview and Victorian scholarship, and its essence was defined by Müller's foundational Lutheran missionary concepts as well as philologically oriented principles of taxonomy and comparativism. These approaches became outdated by the second half of the twentieth century and could no longer generate interest.

Molendijk's work is very rich and gives abundant food for thought. Further, we will turn to three important themes that it discusses. Molendijk positions himself as an expert on intellectual history, thus Müller's work should be integrated into a broad cultural context. In this case the imperial discourse of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century cannot not be ignored. Müller's work was funded by an imperial institution and played a certain part in strengthening the policies of the colonizers. It can be said that the translation of central Indian sacred texts into English was an attempt to colonize the Eastern world intellectually. Contemporary postcolonial studies clearly inscribe

Müller's project within this context.¹³ Molendijk does not fully agree with this idea, he argues against simplistic interpretations, showing that in fact Müller aimed to create an image of humankind as one family, in which the East acted as the cradle of civilization. Thus, an understanding of ancient texts is an understanding of a common history rather than a simple tool for intellectual subjugation of another culture. The concept of the "Aryan" that Müller devised played an important role in this context. Scholars have frequently reproached Müller for laying the foundation for racial theory. Molendijk shows that Müller never sought to promote racial views, for him "Aryan" was a synonym of "Indo-European" and only had meaning as a linguistic category. However, Müller's work reveals the idea of an opposition between Semitic and Aryan types of religion. He saw the Aryan type as more rationalized, the Semitic as more ritualized, and Christianity as derived from a convergence of both these types. Unlike many contemporary historians, Molendijk avoids making harsh judgments, and instead he tries to analyze all the details and show the complexity of historical realities, even if they

are not similar to contemporary society.

The concept of constructing religious studies categories is connected to the idea of imperial discourse in many ways. Contemporary historians often accused Müller of being one of the first authors to suggest the construct "world religions," thus imparting an imaginary unity to unrelated religious traditions. Molendijk goes against the mainstream tendency here too. He openly criticizes the works of J. Z. Smith and T. Masuzawa, exposing their tendentious and sometimes superficial textual analysis. Molendijk believes that the trend of criticism focused on looking for hidden ideological patterns that has become popular in the recent decades often negates the value of the classic works of religious studies, taking them out of the context of the era in which they were written. Molendijk notes that Müller's work should not be seen as a work that created certain concepts but as a "crucial marker" (p. 184) that denotes certain processes in the history of religious studies. Thus, it was not Müller or his series that shaped the imperial discourse and the concept of world religions, on the contrary, they were only imprints of a common cultural process of the era and understanding them outside of this process is counterproductive.

13. See, for example, an integrated characteristic in Strenski (2015), pp. 38–40.

Molendijk's book poses another very valuable question. What place does Müller's project occupy in the history of religious studies? The author does not provide a direct answer to it; the book is only explicit about Müller's role in developing the comparative method of religious studies, however, the material offered in the text provides a basis for broader generalizations. Müller's approach to religion and its structure, his conception of the unity of the religions of humankind, the idea of translating religious concepts of one culture into the language of another, and empathy as a necessary condition for accomplishing a translation suggest that Müller's works played a significant part in the development of the classical phenomenology of religion. Chronological and textual connections as well as conceptual common ground can be traced between Müller's works and the works of phenomenologists. All the basic principles of the study of religion advanced by Müller are reiterated almost verbatim in the foundational works of F. Heiler (Samarina 2013). The concept of the unity of the world of religions, the idea of a single force acting within it, and, as a result, a possibility of interfaith dialogue are reflected in the projects of R. Otto and the activities of the Eranos circle (Nosachev

2015, 25–35). Müller's key understanding of religion as an "ineradicable feeling of dependence on God" deeply rooted within a human being refers directly to the philosophy of Friedrich Schleiermacher, whose works also provided the foundation for the classical phenomenology of religion. Thus, Molendijk's work opens a new perspective for an examination of Müller's legacy within the context of the history of phenomenology of religion, but this work requires a separate study.

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