

Article

The Problem of Church's Defensiveness and Reductionism in Fr. Alexander Schmemmann's Ecclesiology (Based on His Journals)

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Abstract: This article analyzes Schmemmann's ecclesiology in the context of his attempt to give an assessment of the Church's attitude to life; as well as the problem of defensiveness in Orthodoxy; reductionism of ecclesial culture; "rejection" of the world and traditionalistic isolation. The author focuses upon the socio-cultural interpretation given by Schmemmann to such important categories of the ecclesial language as "piety," "humility," "churchliness," "spirituality," etc.; showing that in real life these categories express the isolation and stereotypification of Orthodoxy. In the context of "lived" religion, these categories deliver a protective and reductionist message, justifying a kind of anthropological pessimism, "religion of guilt" and psychological self-closure of a person. The theologian juxtaposes two religious traditions: one based on the defensiveness and the other based on a sense of joy; the feeling of God's presence and affinity to the Kingdom of Heaven. According to the author, the accents put by Schmemmann in his ecclesiology can promote the formation of ethics of laity and a more adequate attitude towards the world in the 21st century Orthodoxy.

Keywords: Orthodoxy; Russian Church tradition; ecclesiastic culture; defensiveness; Orthodox piety; cultural attitudes; behavioral preferences

Theologians as well as ecclesiastical journalists have said much about protopresbyter Alexander Schmemmann's ecclesiological legacy and its relevance for the present times, so there is no need to reiterate their arguments here. Notably, Fr. Alexander is a rarity among Orthodoxy due to his deep-seated sensitivity to developments in the modern world. In his works he pays specific attention to the Church's vision of the world (Agadjanian 2016, pp. 255, 262, 271–72). Within this framework, he insistently asks how Church mentality affects behavioral stereotypes in this particular milieu and analyzes how loyalty to Orthodoxy shapes believer's lives. In fact, he raises the question how to bear witness to one's faith and thus how to attest to the truth of Orthodox Christianity and the Church.

Schmemmann articulates these issues most naturally and explicitly in his *Journals* (composed from a number of diary notebooks that document the last ten years of his life, from 1973 until 1983). The genre of diary allows the writer to talk freely and to express various and contradictory ideas that would be difficult to present in their natural variety in an analytical essay. A key feature of the genre is that the writer feels entitled to question an idea even while trying to explicate it. In the case of Schmemmann, his *Journals* present the greatest range of his thoughts by affording him the freedom of speech rarely permitted in an essay, which normally is constructed around and substantiating just one specific idea.

We shall here consider Schmemmann's ecclesiology from the perspective of social theology, and partly also that of social psychology. Anthropological issues with which Schmemmann engages in his *Journals* are vital for our evaluation of contemporary issues, as well as for understanding whether specific ecclesiastical conflicts and socio-cultural paradoxes are systemic or accidental.

Let us look at some particular paradoxes in the culture of the churchly social environment that Fr. Alexander elaborates on. Quotations are taken from the English translations by the theologian's

widow Juliana Schmemann (who died in January 2017) whenever such a translation exists and adequately renders Schmemann's Russian text. It should be noted, however, that in translation many concepts have been modified, particularly the term *tserkovnost'* which is often translated as "life of the Church", while in cases where Schmemann appealed to negative connotations of key concepts of the churchly culture, Mrs. Schmemann rendered them as "pseudo"-concepts. That is to say, she did not always dare to convey the highly critical attitude toward the Church's social environment and culture that had been present in the original version of Fr. Schmemann's diaries.

1. Subculturization and Reductionism in the Church

Let us note, that the key question Schmemann asks himself along his spiritual way, is a problem of "institutional conservatism", which often realizes itself as "defensiveness" of the Church, that is expressed in the priority of limitative attitudes upon motivating ones. This priority often presupposes not approval of the lay-activity forms, not encouraging certain innovations which are usually welcome in the so called "secular world." Schmemann keeps remarking the fact that the preoccupation with "guarding" the Church, like a "recurrence of the Old Ritual", leads to negativity essentially prevailing in churchly life over positive affirmation, which should have informed life within the Church. He characterizes defensive attitude as "the position of the Russian Church in Exile and of the Old Believers. To keep, to guard, to protect the Church not only from evil, but from the world as such, from the contemporary world. No checking, no verification—everything, every stikhera is equally important" (Schmemann 2000, p. 144).¹

Here Schmemann actually echoes Maria Skobtsova, who wrote that the Old Believers were "the extreme expression of this stagnant, splendid, immovable, protective spirit," and that "it kept in place, away from life's surges, a kind of a fixed form in the development of piety." (Skobtsova 1998).

Notably, Schmemann uses the term "Old Belief" here in its socio-cultural, rather than historical meaning—as a synonym of defensiveness. He is forever puzzled as to why the Church's attempts to defend itself all too often lead to a primitive denial of culture, isolationism and escapism. Why for Orthodoxy "to escape or to deny is stronger than to affirm"? (Schmemann 2000, p. 29).

In expressing these and similar criticisms, Fr. Schmemann does not adopt any kind of modernist standpoint. On the contrary, he censures those willing to "surrender to the world" (Schmemann 2005, p. 108). His critique of secularism and the rationalizing western lifestyle is a special theme in his legacy (Shishkov 2015). Thus Fr. Schmemann's negative assessment of the defensive socio-cultural attitude of the Church does not presuppose the Church's adaptation to modern culture:

Christianity's intimate, indispensable bond with culture does not necessitate that Christianity ought to be made "cultural" and thus attractive and acceptable for a "cultured" person. (Schmemann 2005, p. 110)

Rather he maintains the opposite: it is the Church's calling to affect culture by changing and elevating it.

It is Christianity's call to keep blowing culture up from within and to make it face the Last one: One who is above it, but who, simultaneously, also "performs" it, for at its ultimate depth culture is, in fact, a question man addresses to "the Last one". (Schmemann 2005, p. 111)

That is, although condemning various forms of defensiveness in churchly life, Fr. Alexander does not deny the Church the right to employ defensive mechanisms against worldly influences or to be selective about "worldly novelties." For Schmemann, however, the ability to withstand "the spirit

¹ Normally we cite the English edition—the translation of Schmemann's *Journals* made by Juliana Schmemann, a widow of the theologian. In case the passages by Schmemann's *Journals* are missed in English edition we give our own translation of the Russian edition which is much more complete than the English one.

of the world" (I Cor. 2.12) did not mean a primitive overall rejection of the world as something one ought to step away from in disgust. He stated that the popular mode of guarding the Church, which prescribes that the religious distance themselves from the world and from modernity, was a dead-end track (he even suggested that this method be called "*estranged Orthodoxy*").

As an example of Orthodoxy's rejection of culture Schmemmann cited ecclesiastics' proclamations against theatre and literature, "impossible in how primitive they are". Schmemmann believed the Christians' vocation is to transform culture rather than reject it. "It is culture (not biology, physiology or 'nature') that constitutes the world judged, condemned and, in the end, transformed by Christianity. Christianity is above nature, but it cannot be under or outside of it" (Schmemmann 2005, p. 110).

As the theologian wrote,

Historical forms of Christianity, including "Orthodoxy", are attested to in the cultures they created or inspired. Every given period's culture is a mirror, in which Christians should have seen themselves and the degree of their faithfulness to the "one thing needful" for "the victory that overcometh the world . . ." But usually, they do not even look into that mirror, believing it to be "lewd" and "irreligious". (Schmemmann 2005, p. 109)

According to Schmemmann, when the aspiration to limit the impact of the "world" turns into "unconditional rejection", the Church acts like a barbarian. "For it becomes more and more negative and throws away everything it simply does not comprehend and 'could not care less about'" (Schmemmann 2005, p. 111).

In fact, Schmemmann shows that, by adopting a position of denial and estrangement (or detachment), and by refusing "to blast culture from within," Orthodoxy turns into a subculture that shapes the habitual way for the Church to look at itself, rather than the world.

2. In the System of Cultural References: A Phenomenon of Orthodox Piety and Its Interpretation through Synonyms

A general question Schmemmann asks in his deliberations is what the Church offers in place of the cultural values of the secular world. What advantages does the former have over the latter? The theologian points out that, by turning away from culture and *refusing to influence it*, Orthodoxy presents its own system of references and its own, in a sense, alternative cultural values. This refers primarily to a mindset and behavior known as "piety," which serves as a marker of belonging to the Church.

A few words need to be said about the concept of piety. In and of itself, it is a rather broad notion, which, before the New-Testament Christian tradition, existed also in the Old Testament and Judaism, where it was used to mean "the fear of God". The same concept was also known to the Hellenistic tradition (τρεπ. εὐσέβεια), where it denoted "reverence, fear, loyalty" in relation to parents or pagan deities (Igumnov 2002).² Both the Old and the New Testament traditions share their understanding of "piety" as "a form of religious worship focused on strict observation of religious and moral commandments and norms".

In the Christian tradition, the idea of "piety" builds specifically on the Greek term (εὐσέβεια), which in the writings of Church fathers and Christian hermits acquires connotations of a mindset and a lifestyle based on man's filial yearning for God and a desire to correlate one's every deed with God's will³ in the firm belief that God's eyes are on us throughout our life.

Today, the Russian Church tends to interpret "piety" mostly as "an internal arrangement of the spirit founded on fearing God and complying with religious and moral commandments" (Igumnov 2002). Also important for Russian theology is the understanding of "piety" as "a principle

² See also a dictionary article "La piété" in (Vocabulaire de Theologie Biblique 1970) (La Piété 1970).

³ See in more details: (Ershova 2005).

of man's religious attitude to God", "built mainly around experiencing God's holiness and glory—His absolute inapproachability and unfathomable proximity revealed in the blessed natural force of churchly life" (Igumnov 2006).

Such an understanding of "piety" finds a matching dimension in the sphere of practical morals: to the theologian, hegumen Platon (Igumnov), piety is "a path of active and contemplative life" filled with multiple and varied Christian virtues. These are a "constant repentance, . . . reassessment of one's way in life, admission of one's errors, contrition of spirit, immersion into the depths of humility, rejection of haughty ambitions and exclusive privileges, the beginnings of unselfishness and equanimity," and, lastly, "a growing recognition of the importance and value of other people's interests." In the oft quoted in the Russian churchly milieu words of Anthony the Great, "piety" has to do with an aspiration "not to be jealous, but chaste, gentle, as generous as possible, sociable, not too given to arguing, and to do all that pleases God".

"Piety" thus also entails openness to self-imposed limitations of all sorts and forbearance in the face of whatever sufferings one may encounter. A distinctive feature of "piety" in the Russian ecclesiastic tradition is kenoticism, which was peculiar to Russian Church culture from the times of Ancient Rus'. It is expressed in striving to obtain the "likeness" of Christ through self-belittling, underlining the role of suffering and martyrdom. Kenoticism has been described by Georgiy Fedotov (Fedotov 1975, pp. 99–112).

To a certain extent, at least in the Russian tradition, "piety" seems to be a feat of sorts, a combination of virtues, just as a life of a Christian person in itself is an act of courage. Yet, in contrast to, say, martyrdom—the act of valour few people are capable of, "piety" is both accessible and prescribed to all members of the Church. There is even a notion of "*podvizhnik blagochestiya*" [champion of piety]—a person who did nothing special during his lifetime, but proved to be a faithful and obedient member of the Church, a mild, gentle soul living to God's truth in spite of any obstacles and temptations.

In the Russian church, biographic descriptions of such "champions of piety" have become a special, very popular genre of edifying didactic literature. However, there are also scientific analytical works by different scholars, who analyze 'piety' and pious practices of Russian Church tradition in framework of studying history and phenomenology of sainthood. There is a great amount of such a literature now, so we do not list it. A good historical review of this literature through the end of XIX—beginning of XXI is given in (Semenenko-Basin 2011, pp. 70–123). However, for understanding Schmemmann's assessments of piety is important to appeal to the works of Georgiy Fedotov (Fedotov 1975, 2000), a founder of special research tradition. Among the most recent works on hagiography or hagiology one can see also: (Loyevskaya 2005; Lurie 2009; Pliguzov and Yanin 1989; Ziolkowski 2014; Giambelluca 2007).

However, in the context of hagiographic studies, "piety" is seen mainly in a certain 'ideal', imaginary and 'perfect' point. That is, I think, one can find rather the Church's ideals concerning pious behavior, than the real behavioral manifestations of piety in life, rather the examples what piety should be, than what it actually is. These imagological representations of piety were *volens-nolens* elaborated on the basis of hagiographical life stories of saints and spiritually-edifying teachings of ecclesiastical writers.

Formed in this way, the Church's idea of piety, partly adopted by Russian culture, in certain aspects does not coincide with the real picture of behavior of Church members. In this article we consider those semantic connotations of piety, which Alexander Schmemmann noted in his observation of real human behavior, motivated by Church's norms. We are focusing on how people, according to Schmemmann evidence, interpret the norms of piety in the XX—and in the beginning of the XXI century, and how people actually display (or failed to display) them beyond the lofty declarative statements.

3. "Piety" in Contemporary Church Life

In the contemporary ecclesiastical system of values, "piety" has become a sort of moral-behavioral category—a kind of an "overarching virtue" unifying various behavioral puzzles. "Piety" can characterize both individual acts and a person's life as a whole. In fact, this category bespeaks

the peculiar nature of Orthodox religiosity in that it connotes spiritual strength, spiritual growth, and loyalty to the Church. The notion of churchliness (*tserkovnost'*), which has become synonymous with "piety," as well as with "*dukhovnost'*" [spirituality] is a category that functions as a marker of belonging to churchly culture (or, rather, subculture). Actually, "piety" sometimes even means the same as "Orthodoxy" in its theological sense. It is, therefore, no accident that ecclesiastical didactic literature equates "piety" with "churchliness," and Schmemmann, too, often uses these two categories simultaneously and interchangeably.

We must admit that the ethical evaluation of "piety" on the part of Schmemmann is very critical. Despite the significance of this concept for the Church ascetical language, Schmemmann mentions "piety" mainly in the negative sense, as "imposing limitations on human consciousness" (Schmemmann 2005, p. 79), "replacing faith" (Schmemmann 2005, p. 95), and even more so, "weakening the Eucharistic awareness in the Church and supplanting the Eucharist." He speaks of a certain sentimentality typical of piety; of "piety" turning into a kind of outward form whose only purpose is to declare "churchliness." In the ecclesial environment, a lack of tangible piety may give rise to censure: Schmemmann refers to cases when, for example, seminary students scolded others for their "insufficient piety" (Schmemmann 2005, p. 306), or when priests did the same addressing their parishioners (Schmemmann 2005, p. 479).

Basically, in a critical assessment of piety in the ecclesial social environment, Schmemmann is by no means alone. Metropolitan Anthony (Bloom) in his various articles and pastoral conferences and talks also very often uses the concept of "piety" in a negative connotation. For example, one can speak about the need to «remove from prayer "a raid of piety"» (Bloom 2014), that "very pious people" find it difficult to pray with all the depth of their souls, contrasts "the outward pious speeches" with a true appeal to God with the whole being. (Bloom 2014). Speaking out against imitation and stylization in Orthodoxy, he warns: "Do not repeat endlessly certain prayers or insist on some specific praying practices, just speak to God!" (Bloom 2014).

Alexander Schmemmann points out that the earlier noted "unconditional rejection" of the world and the Orthodoxy's strife for isolation deprecates the Church's own values, such as piety and churchliness, in the real life of the Orthodox believers. "Piety" taken in the external form the theologian watched in no way contributes to meaningfulness, but, on the contrary, promotes primitivism, proving to be a sort of mask that a person puts on, immersing in the ecclesiastical societal environment. This is how Schmemmann writes about it:

Being in church should be liberating. But in the Church's contemporary tonality, church life does not liberate . . . Instead of teaching man to look at the world through the Church's vision, instead of transforming man's view of himself and his life, one feels obliged—in order to be "spiritual"—to clothe oneself in an impersonal, soiled "garment of piety". Instead of at least knowing that there is joy, light, meaning, eternity, man becomes irritated, narrow-minded, intolerant and often simply mean. He does not even repent of it because it all comes from "churchliness" . . . (Schmemmann 2000, p. 33)

Mother Maria Skobtsova also mentions this primitivization and avoidance of meaningfulness in relation to the ritualist type of piety. She notes that the commitment of "pious atmosphere" in the church, which is characteristic of the ritualist type of piety, allows one to adopt indifferent attitude to the worship.

The lengthy recitations by the Psaltis immerses him into a particular atmosphere of piety, bringing on a specific rhythm to his spiritual life. This is what he really wants, he is not so interested in the content. < . . . > If you tell him that you don't understand something, either in essence or because the Psaltis is reading too rapidly, he will answer that it isn't necessary to understand, it is only necessary to achieve a particular atmosphere of piety during which occasional words come through clearly which are understandable and necessary for you.

While in worship, within the ritualist type of piety, reductionism is expressed in blocking off a meaningful understanding of the text, in the non-religious communicative space such reductionism manifests itself in the fact that in communication people get accustomed to using special declarative forms, a special “churchly stylistic”. Moreover, in the contemporary post-Soviet Russia, there is even a notion of churchly decorum, according to which one is judged to be more or less “churchly” or “pious”. Special books on churchly manners and communication rules exist, for instance, “*Chto nado znat’ o tserkovnom etikete*” [What you need to know about Church etiquette] by hieromonk Aristarkh Lokhanov and the *Church protocol* by bishop Mark Golovkov (Lokhanov 1999; Golovkov 2007).

The so-called “humble appearance” has become a standard element of decorum in contemporary churchly social milieu (with the exception of hierarchs and ecclesiastical superiors). In many parishes, though not in all, appearances are often used as a signifier of “piety” and “churchliness”. Hieromonk Aristarkh (Lokhanov) gives the following criterion to identify a churchly person: “Very often one’s gaze—a mild, humble, downcast gaze—bespeaks good upbringing, in our case, a churchly person” (Lokhanov 1999).

As Ivan Zabaev notes (Zabaev 2007, p. 20), “Orthodox actors easily detect humility through its outward representation, through a pose and facial expression, through an absence of objection in response to any critical remark.” That means that in these circles it is perfectly acceptable to determine “piety,” “churchliness,” “spirituality,” and other such qualities through outward appearances.

In the language of sociological theory, what we are dealing with in this case is a habitus, firmly embedded in the churchly milieu; or in other words, a system of acquired behavioral patterns. This system is quite complex. It includes, on the one hand, a shared notion of the Orthodox person as someone who looks humble; on the other, an idea of what this humility must look like across the repertoire of respective attributes: posture, mimics, gait, voice, etc. *Humility* must be declared even in business correspondence, especially when addressing ecclesiastical superiors: “I consider it my filial duty to humbly inform His Eminence about the following . . . ”⁴

Notably, believers themselves may see this behavior as completely natural, authentic, and the only appropriate mode. But this, in Pierre Bourdieu’s view, constitutes the essence of any habitus. After all, Bourdieu states, agents are never free, but the illusion of freedom (lack of coercion) is not so complete as in the case when they are following the schemes of their habitus, i.e., the objective structures, the product of which itself is a habitus: in this case, the agents feel the compulsion no more than the weight of the air (Bourdieu 1977, pp. 79–80; see also Shmatko 1998, pp. 60–70). In other words, declarative forms become second nature to the people of churchly subculture: they get so used to them, that they end up taking them for granted.

Especially early on in the process of religious revival in Russia, believers looked markedly different from anyone else. They had their eyes ostentatiously lowered, their back stooped in an attempt to outwardly reflect their humility and pious mindset. The problem of such “despondency” was even discussed in Orthodox mass media; for example, an article in the Orthodox popular magazine “*Delovoy khristianin*” (Pal’cheva et al. 2007) had the characteristic title: “Why do some Orthodox look like dead fish?”.

Let’s note that under Putin’s rule, the overwhelming popularity of this image began to wane, because a moderate national revival, changes in social-economic climate in Russia as well as changes in social attitudes influence the moods and aesthetical preferences in the Church’s social milieu. On the one hand, the rehabilitation of some historical pre-revolution traditions in certain parishes took place, for example, the centers of “*Slavyano-goritskaya bor’ba*” [Slavic-hill wrestling] (Filatov 2005) as well as the centers of Russian national dances (Filatov 2009). On the other hand, alongside the process of partial rehabilitation of the soviet culture, the elements of soviet ‘monumental style’ have been reproduced in the Church’s official ceremonial (Volkova 2009).

⁴ Such a form of address is typical for Russian Orthodox Church senior officials, see also (Golovkov 2007).

A special phenomenon of Russian Orthodoxy in the 2000-ies, however, happened to be a certain “militant piety” (Rock 2002) as well as cultural-symbolic forms of “Church-military aesthetic” (Briskina-Müller 2015; Knorre 2015, 2016). The changes of religiosity in the framework Post-Soviet Orthodoxy in zeros were quite various, including the emergence of different forms of so-called “user-friendly” Orthodoxy. As long as it is not the main topic of our article, we just draw the reader’s attention to the literature focused on it: (Filatov and Lunkin 2006; Kormina 2010; Köllner 2013).

However, alongside the all aforementioned forms of the Church aesthetics and piety, the “humble style” has remained an integral part of ecclesial subculture, at least in places where people consistently turn to the Church’s legacy of asceticism (Knorre 2011, pp. 317–40) and where the “strict ritualist” type of religiosity was peculiar to the Church parish life (in the wording by Mother Maria Skobtsova (Skobtsova 1998)).

A failure to comply with the humble style may cause rebuke in Church milieu and even bring about some sort of punishment from a priest in case the offender is in some way subordinate to him. For example, a parishioner from one of the Nizhniy Novgorod churches (Hanna, 35 y.o.) shares the following episode from her life during her studies in the Nizhniy Novgorod school of theology: “In the Church college, they used to wake me up at night and send to clean all toilets . . . Or do kitchen duty for a week for I didn’t look humble enough”.⁵

4. Category of “Spirituality” and Specific Character of Spiritual Guidance in the Church

One of the topics that was most frequently raised by Schmemmann is comprehending the concept of “spirituality,” “spiritual” in Orthodoxy, not as ontological dimensions of human life, but as a certain quality, understood in a narrow reduced sense and style conditioned by ecclesial context. Fr Alexander listed this “spirituality” among the modern Orthodox fetishes, such as “Byzantinism,” “Russism,” “historicism” and equated it to pseudo spirituality, so, it was not accidentally that he put it in quotation marks, stressing that he was referring to the concept of “spirituality” in its distorted understanding he always had to deal with. He confesses to himself, how he has been tired of it.

I realize how spiritually tired I am of all this “Orthodoxism” of all the fuss with Byzantium, Russia, way of life, spirituality, church affairs, piety, of all these rattles . . . It all literally obscures Christ, pushes Him into the background. (Schmemmann 2000, p. 146)

Let us note that it corresponds to Mariya Skobtsova’s “*The Synodal type of religious life*”, which, according to her words, “promoted other values along with spiritual ones, namely those of the State, the way of life and of tradition” (Skobtsova 1998). Michael Plekon states, that historical and legal obsession of the Church for Schmemmann served to be one of disappointing reductions of the Church. (Plekon 2016).

“Spiritual life”, “spiritual talk”, “spiritual literature”—all these are concepts that Schmemmann put on a par with “piety”, noting that they serve along with piety as a marker of belonging to a subculture and are associated with the retreat of the socio-ecclesial community inside itself. And in pastoral practice, in the domain of “spiritual eldership” (almost synonymous with the modern Russian “spiritual guidance”) the concept of “spiritual”, among other things, is very closely intertwined with the concepts of “spiritual authority” and the guidance of souls, as the practice of eldership, assuming personal guidance on human life, expresses very often an authoritarian model of personal interactions. As a result, “eldership” (starchestvo) proves to be “pseudo eldership”, i.e., it is not a value but an anti-value.

The system itself pushes to pseudo-eldership, making every priest a “confessor” and a little “starets”. The Orthodox Church has almost no monks who would not have deemed it their

⁵ The comment on LiveJournal post (Personal diary of the author in Li. Ru. 13.12.2009), http://www.liveinternet.ru/users/boris_knorre/post116563556/ (accessed on 3 October 2017).

sacred duty to write already in two years the treatises on Jesus prayer, on spirituality and asceticism, to teach “mental doing”, etc. There are also no priests, who would not have believed themselves capable of solving all problems in five minutes, and direct to the right path . . . (Schmemmann 2005, p. 35)

Metropolitan Anthony (Bloom) expresses similar thoughts on the frequent abuse by priests of their pastoral authority over the flock, saying that

“Unfortunately, this happens all too often, in all different countries: a young priest, by virtue of his priesthood—not because he is spiritually experienced, not because God had led him to it—begins to direct his spiritual children and command them: Don’t do this; do that; read this or that spiritual literature; go to church; make prostrations . . . As a result, his victims become caricatures of spiritual life, doing everything that the ascetics of piety did. However, the ascetics of piety did all this out of their spiritual experience, and not because they were trained animals”. (Bloom 2012)

The use of the wording “trained animals” points to the fact that Metropolitan Anthony (Bloom), similar to Schmemmann, feels there is a problem of imitation, stylization in the ecclesial life, which comes in the place of authenticity.

According to hegumen Peter (Meshcherinov), abuse by priests of their pastoral authority makes possible the situation when “a spiritual father becomes a head of one’s family instead of the husband,” or when a confessor is influencing the process of performing official duties by his “spiritual child.” (Meshcherinov 2005).

The Russian Orthodox Church’s leadership is not unaware of these issues. 28 December 1998 at the session of the Holy Synod a special decision on this problem was accepted (Zasedanie 1999). Patriarch Alexiy II referred several times to the problem of “*mladostarchestvo*,” and publicly stated on the facts of abuse of spiritual power by priests, particularly in matters of family relations (Alexiy 1999, 2004).

Metropolitan Anthony (Bloom) formulated the appropriate approach to spiritual guidance in a way one can use to distinguish healthy spiritual guidance from its distortions:

Cultivating them [spiritual children] means treating them and working with them as a gardener would with flowers or other plants. He has to know the soil, the nature of the plant, the climactic or other conditions they are set in, and only then can he help. And help is all he can do, because one or another plant can only grow into what it should be by nature. We should never break a person in order to make him like ourselves. One religious writer in the West said: A spiritual child can only be brought to his own self, and the road in his life can be very long. If you read the lives of the saints you will see how great elders were able to do this, how they were able to be themselves, but also see in another person his exclusive, inimitable qualities, and to give that person—and another, or a third person—the opportunity to also be himself and not a replica of an elder; or in the worse case, a cookie-cutter repeat. (Bloom 2012)

While pondering what caused the parishioners’ heightened attention to their own “spiritual life,” Schmemmann sees here not only a feature specific for the ecclesial milieu, but a fruit of individualism and narcissism, which are peculiar to modern Western culture as such. The theologian advances the thesis that Christians, as customers of organizations, started seeing the main task of the Church as “attending to their spiritual needs” and sought “therapeutics” from the Church. According to Fr. Schmemmann, personal confession and “spiritual guidance” became the instruments to support this approach, and for that reason he considers them to be useless, while many domestic problems and concerns discussed in confession might be “eliminated” through a genuine sermon:

I might be terribly wrong, but somehow I have seen no slightest benefit around me and in the Church—from this spiritual guidance. On the contrary, I have always seen more harm:

self-centered indulgence, subtle spiritual pride (on both sides), some kind of reduction of faith to oneself and one's own problems ... < ... > Personally, I would abolish private confession, except for the cases where a person has committed an obvious and particular sin and confesses it, and not their sentiments, doubt, discouragement and temptations. (Schmemmann 2005, pp. 34–35)

In one of his articles, the protopresbyter notes that the parishioners, succumbing to the individualistic orientation of Western culture and the desire to seek one's own "self" and "spiritual path", expect therapeutic effect from the Church, and that the priests indulged them in this by offering "spiritual direction" and their own methods of problem solving. That is, Schmemmann discerns the phenomenon of self-centeredness not only in ecclesial community as such, but also in the way ancient church traditions, in his view, are being overlapped by phenomena that belong to Western individualistic culture. All this, according to Schmemmann, is the exact opposite of the true contemplative sense of Christianity. He perceives the savoring of triumph of one's own decency and pious sentimentality as "abolition of the cross of Christ", its replacement by "professional religiosity".

In contrast to this "professional religiosity", the theologian finds examples of true Christianity in the Arab East, writing how impressed he was by three monasteries he saw during a trip to Egypt.

But then today I had an extraordinary day: a visit in the desert to three monasteries with an uninterrupted tradition from Anthony the Great, Makarios, etc. In one of them is the sarcophagus of Ephrem of Syria. And the most amazing, of course, is how very much alive it all is: Real monks! In my whole life, I have seen only imitations, only playing at monastic life, false, stylized; and mostly unrestrained idle talk about monasticism and spirituality. And here are *they*, in a *real* desert. A real, heroic feat. (Schmemmann 2000, p. 189)

5. The Problem of Neurotization. A View through the Lens of Fromm's "Escape from Freedom"

"Piety," Schmemmann notes, "is soaked through with religious egocentrism" (Schmemmann 2005, p. 359). "The narrowing of man's conscience through piety ... leads to a rather dull, gray digging into one's self" (Schmemmann 2005, p. 79, emphasis added). However, an individual's egocentrism does not exist all by itself. To Fr. Alexander's mind, it intertwines with the egocentrism typical of the churchly social environment as a whole, and even with the egocentrism of the Church herself (sic!), with her withdrawal from the world and her rejection of her mission towards all humankind.

In this connection, Schmemmann speaks negatively about various church activities. For instance, churchly periodicals are no more than "a pious conversation of pious people about their piety" (Schmemmann 2005, p. 460). That is to say, ecclesiastical mass media also boost Orthodoxy's tendency to withdraw and to reduce Christianity to piety, to circle it in its own (Schmemmann 2005).

Among other things, Schmemmann interprets the phenomenon of encapsulation he observes in churchly life as a sign of neurotic fear and lack of confidence in the face of the world and freedom. The churchly subculture offers a welcome refuge to anyone wishing to escape freedom. The word "escape" is key in this context:

"People escaped—to the Fathers, to the Typikon, to Catholicism, to Hellenism, to spirituality, to a strictly defined way of life, anywhere. Fundamentally, one escaped. To escape or to deny is stronger than to affirm. It is easier to cling to the old calendar to the letter of the law, to fear and angry defense". (Schmemmann 2000, p. 29)

"Religion was born from fear, they say, and this is basically true," notes the theologian (Schmemmann 2005, p. 243). That is, the empiric evidence of churchly life leads him to believe that "religion ... is almost always born from a lack rather than surplus, from a fear of life rather than gratitude for it" (Schmemmann 2000, p. 35) (emphasis added). In his words, "there is a lot more fear in the world than before, there is even religious fear, only it is not at all the fear of God" (Schmemmann 2005, p. 152). And this fear is often accompanied by triumphalism and narcissism.

The Orthodoxy is filled through and through with idolatry . . . , < . . . > but also with fear, triumphalism, narcissism . . . < . . . > It speaks a kind of artificial language, completely unrelated to reality; it has neither love, nor freedom, and in some sense, the Karlovchane [adherents of “Karlovcian Church”⁶] express it most adequately. Whatever the “Orthodox” talk about, they always speak in a falsely high-spirited tone, and at the same time irresponsibly in terms of “semantics”. (Schmemmann 2005, p. 376)

Upon reading such statements, one might feel that the defensive settings of churchly cultural space observed by Schmemmann reflect a deep psychological conflict—a heavy load of various defense mechanisms, a lack of balance between conventional norms of human identification and a genuine internal self-identification, between the declared norms and a real ability to live up to them.

Schmemmann does not ever mention Erich Fromm, but Fromm’s descriptions (Fromm 1969, pp. 21–36, 54) are very similar to the problems individuals are facing in a society devoid of a rigid social structure (“primary ties”) which with one hand grants him freedom of personal self-expression, and with the other dooms him to insecurity, anxiety and, at times, to a sense of powerlessness.

“Although society was thus structuralized and gave man security, yet it kept him in bondage”. To the degree to which the individual, figuratively speaking, has not yet completely severed the umbilical cord which fastens him to the outside world, he lacks freedom; but these ties give him security and a feeling of belonging and of being rooted somewhere (Fromm 1969, p. 21). Freedom from the bondage of structured society, of “primary ties” is bound to create a deep feeling of insecurity, powerlessness, doubt, aloneness, and anxiety. These feelings must be alleviated if the individual is to function successfully. (Fromm 1969, p. 54)

Fromm’s thoughts on “Escape from Freedom” apply even more to the aforementioned abuse of spiritual authority, the specifics of the type of spiritual guidance called “*mladostarchestvo*”. Fromm’s view can also be applied to the sometimes blind consent for parishioners in following the arbitrary directions of “*mladostartsy*”. Without such a free consent, without free subordination (submissiveness) the practices of spiritual guidance of “*mladostarchestvo*” would be impossible, so not only the clergy is responsible for it.

“Escaping from freedom”, according to Fromm, “is the tendency to give up the independence of one’s own individual self and to fuse one’s self with somebody or something outside of oneself in order to acquire the strength which the individual self is lacking” (Fromm 1969, p. 140). Fromm argued that this striving to submit to authority happens when individuals feel that they are not aware of their own needs, goals, and desires. They also have difficulties in articulating their personal identities. As a result of these conditions, such people are inclined not only to submit themselves to the forces of powerful authorities but also to experience “feelings of inferiority, powerlessness, individual insignificance. . . . these persons show a tendency to belittle themselves, to make themselves weak, and not to master things” (p. 141). Escape from Freedom can be carried out by means of submission to authority, any proven tradition that a priest may represent, in other words, the confessor can act as a person called “magic helper” in psychoanalytic literature (Schmemmann 2005, p. 150).

We can see here a realization of such a model when people strive to be included in practices of spiritual guidance in accordance with the type of *mladostarchestvo* as one of the forms of managing their psychological freedom and their lives. This phenomenon evidences that many people accept the church as an institution because it affords them opportunities to get rid of the burden of self-determination and personal choice in the socially and ideologically unstructured world. By subordinating his or her

⁶ “Karlovcian Church”—non-official title of Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR). It has been adopted to ROCOR, because its Synod of bishops was established in Serbian town of Sremski Karlovci, where Russian Orthodox hierarchs met on 13 September 1922.

will to a confessor, a “starets”, whom parishioners usually tend to absolutize, such a person gets an opportunity to throw off the said burden of freedom, to “escape” from it.

This issue is particularly relevant to the ecclesial life in Russia, where, in the words of hegumen Peter (Meshcherinov)⁷, the attitude to mystify phenomena is thriving, where the confessor’s importance in the guidance of his flock’s life is strongly exaggerated. Hegumen Peter points out a phenomenon, where a churched person seeks to shift personal responsibility onto the confessor, and thus be free of the need to make decisions him- or herself.

Accordingly, this scenario of joining the Church is not so much a coming to Christ, or not a “coming to” at all, as it is a “flight from”, with subsequent fear of experiencing anything new. To use Schmemmann’s words, this is a “recurrence of the Old Ritual” (Schmemmann 2000, p. 144), where the term “the Old Ritual” is used as a socio-cultural term, synonymous with “defensiveness”.

Schmemmann admits, however, that he is not yet ready to offer a clear, concisely formulated way out of this situation. The Orthodoxy’s neurasthenia comes through also in the fact that, even upon having realized the need to replace a defensive paradigm, one finds it hard to offer a specific remedy as clearly defined as that of the “defenders”.

A relative success of any “old ritual”—among the “converts,” for example,—lies in the fact that they offer a ready formula: accept and obey. I know, with my whole being, that this formula is wrong . . . What do we offer when we say; here is the wonderful design of God for the world, for man, for life. Go and live by it! But how? Little by little, Orthodoxy becomes neurotic, people are rushing around searching for answers, and there are no answers, or rather, the answer is so general that people do not know how to apply it to their lives. (Schmemmann 2000, p. 144)

6. “Religion of Joy” vs. “Religion of Guilt”: Reference to Heavenly Kingdom

While reading this article, a reader may have a legitimate question as to whether the author of the *Journals* sees the true spiritual life, a true communion with God, and not declarative and simulative ones? Studying the (Schmemmann 2000), one can easily see that Fr. Alexander’s criterion of genuine communion with God and genuine religious experience is the ability to rejoice. It is the joy as a state, accompanying the true communion with God that is an indicator of genuine ideas, opposing the connotations that Schmemmann criticized so much in his *Journals*. Any religious virtues and states acquire their true meaning, if joy accompanies them.

Joy is absolutely essential because it is without any doubt the fruit of God’s presence. One cannot know that God exists and not rejoice. Only in relation to joy are the fear of God and humility correct, genuine, fruitful. Outside of joy, they become demonic, the deepest distortion of any religious experience. (Schmemmann 2000, p. 129)

The ability to take pleasure in being as the divine gift that, according to Schmemmann, allows acquiring the religious experience, which is not opposed to life, but on the contrary, reveals it. It is absolutely logical to Schmemmann that it is impossible to feel the living God and all His perfection without rejoicing, as in his view, joy is a kind of key dominant of Christianity.

I think God will forgive everything except lack of joy, when we forget that God created the world and saved it. Joy is not one of the “components” of Christianity, it’s tonality of Christianity that penetrates everything—faith and vision. (Schmemmann 2000, p. 137)

⁷ Hegumen Peter (Meshcherinov) is one of the famous pastors in today’s Russia. A writer and journalist, raised in the middle of the two thousands the issue of substitutions in the life of the Church, in particular, the distortions in spiritual and pastoral guidance.

According to Schmemmann, the feeling of joy is connected with yet another very important capability—directedness not towards oneself, but towards the others, attention to others. That is, the joy of which Schmemmann writes, helps to overcome the very narcissism and self-centeredness that the theologian sees in the socio-cultural precepts of the ecclesial subculture. It is in the tonality of joy that a person sees another person, but in the absence of joy, on the contrary, he is self-absorbed, “enslaved to his own self.” In this relation, Fr. Alexander notes: “. . . the directedness towards other people, other things—God, man, world—and not religiosity,” meaning by religiosity one of those code subcultural constructs of the socio-ecclesial milieu, which we mentioned earlier.

It should be noted, however, that the nature of happiness, of which Schmemmann speaks, is not confined to the glamour optimism, expressed in such concept as “fun.” Christian joy of communion with God is quite compatible with the sorrow over one’s imperfection.

“The knowledge of the fallen world does not kill joy, which emanates in this world, always constantly, as a bright sorrow” (Schmemmann 2000, p. 137). In one of the texts of his *Journals* father Alexander speaks about “joyful, humble, sad melody of the Lenten, ‘Lord, have mercy!’”, designating that bright-sorrow feeling, which Orthodox people have while listening to the chanting of the canon by Saint Andrew of Crete (Schmemmann 2000, p. 9). And there is nothing contradictory in this feeling for Schmemmann, because it is associated with the transition to another “dimension,” a different reality, to which the worship should lead. Contradictions, in contrast, begin where there is no joy.

Without joy, piety and prayer are without grace, since their power is in joy. Religion has become the synonym of a seriousness not compatible with joy. So it is weak. People want answers, peace, meaning from religion, and the meaning is joy. That is the answer, including in it all answers. (Schmemmann 2000, p. 140)

That is, according to Schmemmann, in modern Orthodoxy, the religion of joy is often replaced by its opposite pole—a phenomenon that can be qualified as a “religion of guilt”. “Religion of fear. Religion of pseudo-humility. Religion of guilt: They are all temptations, traps—very strong indeed, not only in the world, but inside the Church. Somehow ‘religious’ people often look on joy with suspicion,”—the theologian writes (Schmemmann 2005, p. 297). Let’s note that Georgiy Fedotov in his work “The Russian Religious Mind” argued, that a fear was an integral part of the atmosphere amidst monks in Ancient Rus’, however, he drew his attention to the fact that in Byzantine tradition fear in the face of God often transformed into the fear in the face of earthly people hierarchy. And it seemed to be an obvious distortion of Gospel ethical principles. (Fedotov 1975).

One can see an explanation of the notion “religion of guilt” in (Hankiss 2001). Let’s say that in the Western science the issue of religiously stipulated emotions of guilt was discussed quite widely, as well as considering different functions of “guilt” as a regulator in religious groups and as an element in ethical religious codexes (Sheldon 2006; Albertsen et al. 2006). There are different works analyzing emotions of guilt within Catholicism and Protestantism (Luyten et al. 1998; Walinga et al. 2005; Martinez-Pilkington 2007; Stotts 2016). However, this issue was still not so much analyzed with regard to Orthodoxy (see, Knorre 2011, 2017; Lorgus and Krasnikova 2010).

And the “religion of guilt” cannot give man freedom, cannot release him from slavery to sin, worldly things, temptations, and therefore cannot reunite with God. “The fear of sin does not save from sin. Joy in the Lord saves. A feeling of guilt or moralism does not liberate from the world and its temptations. Joy is the foundation of freedom, where we are called to stand” (Schmemmann 2000, p. 126).

It should be noted that Schmemmann indicates that, depending on the presence or absence of joy, such an ethical ecclesial category as “humility” produces a genuine or, on the contrary, a distorted sense. Genuine “humility,” according to Schmemmann, is not based on focusing on one’s own sinfulness and imperfection, but on the tonality of joy, since joy is associated with turning to God as the source, taking interest in one’s neighbor, which means overcoming egocentrism and obsession with one’s self.

All of creation rejoices in you, o full of grace,” here the point is in rejoicing about the other, in admiration of the other, and it means—in “ontological” humility, which alone

makes possible this rejoicing, this admiration, while such religiosity lacks this directedness towards the other—to God, man and the world. (Schmemmann 2005, p. 360)

Schmemmann believes that freedom to which Christianity calls man is “first and foremost the freedom from enslavement primarily to one’s own self,” expressed in the feelings, “in the directedness of heart and mind”. “For only in freedom illuminates “the joy of . . . ,” the admiration, only within it all becomes clear and the integrity lost in the original sin is being restored (Schmemmann 2005, p. 360).

That is, the directedness towards the neighbor, as well as joy, are the qualities that define the actual content of such most important ethical quality for Christianity as humility, which, as it turns out, can be of two types—the one associated with the egocentric focus on one’s self, the other—with directedness to the neighbor:

. . . humility is deemed a fruit of person’s knowledge of his own shortcomings and unworthiness, while it is the most divine of all the properties of God. We are made humble not because we contemplate ourselves (this always leads to pride in one form or another, for the false humility is simply a kind of pride, perhaps—the most irreparable of all), but only if we contemplate God and His humility. (Schmemmann 2005, p. 13)

Here, perhaps, Fr. Alexander comes to the key point—the directedness towards God, contemplation of God, the capability that he also names “correlation” (Schmemmann uses the words “correlation” and “reference”), to emphasize that we are talking about the correlation of “terrestrial” reality with the “heavenly” one. This is why Schmemmann pays so much attention to the criticism of self-centeredness in his deliberations in (Schmemmann 2000) entries—self-centeredness, retreat inside oneself—the most serious obstacle to conversion to God, to correlation. Accordingly, it is understandable why the theologian is so critical of the principles and precepts of the ecclesial culture that indulge this egocentrism.

I would suggest that it is the reference of all in this world to the Kingdom of God—the main idea for Schmemmann, if one can ever speak about the main idea in relation to his work. This idea dominates the entire array of the *Journals*, and, of course, to Schmemmann is it the very truth that he is ready to juxtapose to narrow-minded religiosity and church reductionism.

This correlation is a tie, not an “idea”; an experience. It is the experience of the world and life literally in the light of the Kingdom of God, revealed through everything that makes up the world: colors, sounds, movements, time, space—concrete, not abstract. When this light, which is only in the heart, only inside us, falls on the world and on life, then all is illuminated, and the world becomes a joyful sign, symbol, expectancy. (Schmemmann 2000, pp. 20, 52)

In other words, the worldview of a man who comprehended this correlation is the feeling of a different depth in the ordinary things, the divine reflection in all creation, a touch of authenticity to the “substratum of life,” joy and gratitude. The experience of correlation reveals a different reality to the person, and the service, according to Schmemmann, is intended to bring people into this reality, creating a special “dimension” to perform the sacraments. The Church itself exists only “to make this dimension really manifest,” and without this feature, Fr. Alexander argues, all of the Church’s teaching does not mean anything.

Michael Plekon writes in his cognominal article that a pivotal idea of Schmemmann’s outlook was “Liturgy of Life.” Plekon draws the reader’s attention to the theological affinity in such a mystical understanding between Schmemmann and Mariya Skobtsova. He notes that “Schmemmann never loses sight of liturgy continuing in life, what Mother Maria Skobtsova called ‘liturgy outside the church walls’” (Plekon 2016). Like Mother Maria, Father Alexander “envisioned a transforming, a reintegration of liturgy and life, of faith and everyday activity that is subversive of the strategies of the church growth movement and of every other market-driven tactic for expansion of membership and revenue” (Plekon 2016).

Plekon also justly states that for Schmemmann “sacrament is hardly just a religious ritual but the transformation of each person, of humankind and of all creation by Christ, through the Spirit, to the glory of the Father. The rule of prayer *is* the rule of faith.” (Plekon 2016) while citing F. Alexander: “In the world of the incarnation, nothing ‘neutral’ remains, nothing can be taken away from the Son of Man” (Schmemmann 1979, p. 216).

The Church is a point of view of reference, so that we know, to what everything is related, what reveals the truth about everything, what is the content of our life. As soon as the Church becomes one of the components of the world (Church, government, culture, ethics, *et tutti quanti*) as soon as the Church ceases to be a point of reference, which means to reveal and to judge by this revelation, to convert and transform, it becomes itself an idol”. (Schmemmann 2000, p. 167)

The Church for Schmemmann is not only a community of coreligionists, but a “fragment of eternity” in the non-eternal world, which has its “unique vocation—to be love, truth, faith and mission—all of these fulfilled in the Eucharist; even simpler, *to be* the Body of Christ (Schmemmann 2000, p. 25). The theologian compares Church with “a home”.

It is “the home each of us leaves to go to work and to which one returns with joy in order to find life, to which everyone brings back the fruits of his labor and where everything is transformed into a feast, into freedom and fulfillment, the presence. Only this presence can give meaning and value to everything in life, can refer everything to that experience and make it full”. (Schmemmann 2000, p. 25)

7. Ascetics Based on Anthropological Pessimistic Views

Taking a look at the modern Russian ecclesial community milieu, one can see that all of the above questions relating to defensiveness of tradition, reductionism, replacement of spiritual freedom by stylization of the primitively understood piety, neuroticism and narcissism, and the impact of the culture of guilt on the Church ethics are still relevant for it, and even to the greater extent. Of course, it is necessary to bear in mind that as the Orthodox factor is gaining strength in Russian politics and the ROC is being involved as an influential actor in the ideological and political space of Russia, sub-cultural attitudes are often discarded or at least minimized. At a time when Orthodoxy becomes the majority religion, certain roughening and decay of the rules formed by tradition is inevitable. However, the elements of tradition, albeit in a diffuse form, can be perceived as an element of Russian culture, as a basis of certain stereotypes, i.e., can be translated into the culture of the society, mainly related to this religion. After all, in those communities who want to follow all the rules of the Church, to live “according to ecclesial rules,” the substitutions, which Fr. Alexander Schmemmann pointed out, are being revealed.

What Schmemmann writes of “piety,” “churched life,” and “spirituality” manifests itself sometimes even more prominently in the Russian socio-ecclesial community. Schmemmann’s words on the rejection of Orthodox culture, cited in the beginning, are being confirmed today. Today we can find very similar “recitations [by clergymen] against the theater and literature that are impossible in their primitivism” (Schmemmann 2005, p. 67), of which the theologian wrote. For example, in Orthodox monasteries in Russia today sometimes it is forbidden to read fiction, as is vividly described in “*Ispoved’ byvshey poslushnitsy*”, the newly published personal description of the monastic experience by Maria Kikot in the genre of confession (Kikot 2017, p. 17). There are also church officials of the ROC who speak against some of the classic Russian literary works. At a time when the Orthodox factor is gaining strength in Russian politics, the obscurant of ROC representatives can be spread out far beyond the Orthodox milieu itself. In particular, in 2015 a member of the Patriarchal Commission on family matters, protection of motherhood and childhood, archpriest Artemy Vladimirov proposed to withdraw from the school program some works by Russian classic writers—Anton Chekhov, Alexander Kuprin and

Ivan Bunin based solely on the fact that there is “glorified free love”. “These literature images are a time bomb for our children,”—states Vladimirov (Roshchenya and Vladimirov 2016)⁸.

Modern literature is also attacked and exposed by the clergy or church laymen, for example a lot of protests are spoken against fantasy novels written by British author J. K. Rowling which chronicle the life of a young wizard, Harry Potter, as it is written in (Moslenta 2016). The groups of church Orthodox believers also often protest against theatrical performances and rock musicians’ touring.⁹ In particular, the rock Opera “Jesus Christ superstar” performed in November 2016 in Omsk was even thwarted by. See (Majorova 2016).

A no less striking expression of the simulated piety is the requirement to comply with formalities, declamatory forms of humility and piety, and what is more striking—to comply with declamatory forms of guilt. A very eloquent testimony to this is again *Ispoved’ byoshey poslushnitsy* by Maria Kikot’ where the ex-novice tells about the practices in the monastery when every nun or sister should declare their guilt, wrongness irrespective of the real situation (Kikot 2017, pp. 5, 6, 65–67). What she describes absolutely corresponds with the notion of a “religion of guilt” used by Schmemmann. According to Maria Kikot’s testimony in the Orthodox monasteries where she has lived, *nun-sisters or novices* “constantly live in tension, feeling deeply guilty for not meeting the standards in some kinds of their doings” (Kikot 2017, p. 67).

And indeed, a certain peculiar sense of guilt as a priori given a permanent state of consciousness was inherent in many monastic, but partly also parish communities, who were trying to revive Typicon piety by books in the post-Soviet period. Some theologians offer the awareness of guilt, a sense of being guilty as an integral element of asceticism, which allows us to introduce such a concept as “asceticism of guilt”. In modern Russian Orthodoxy one can really distinguish a certain focus on the “presumption of guilt”, and a certain “culture of guilt” is deeply ingrained in Russian spiritual tradition, both at the ecclesial, institutional, and cultural level, for example, at the level of classical literature. This “culture of guilt” is present as a kind of set of being a priori “guilty” which is imposed on any person, regardless of whether they did something wrong in their lives or not. So, one of the modern Russian theologians, Archpriest Vladislav Sveshnikov, the author of the book “*Essays on Christian ethics*”, by which students of theological schools currently study moral theology, emphasizes that, as part of ecclesial tradition, the moment of being wrong is rightly incriminated to a person who even just enters a conscious age. Archpriest Vladislav Sveshnikov notes that it is not by chance that a person just entering the “age of reason” is told: “Repent! Even if a person is only seven or eight years old. Repent!—it means, admit your guilt. Guilty means wrong. And so, gradually, half-consciously, a person entering the ways of the rightful life receives an experience of his or her own wrongness” (Sveshnikov 2000, pp. 179–80).

This permanent socio-cultural set is paired with a different imperative—constant soul-searching, focus on one’s imperfections, wrongness, i.e., with the retreat inside oneself. For example, Archpriest Vladislav Sveshnikov stresses:

It is necessary to recollect more often your meanness and baseness, and the imperfection of the human nature, in general. The more clearly and constantly you see your own sinfulness, the more obviously you acknowledge its inevitability, the more serious is the work of repentance, the natural and the first fruit of which happens to be humiliation. (Sveshnikov 2000, p. 179)

⁸ See: in details also the News published in Gazeta.Ru: “V Russkoy Pravoslavnoy Tserkvi predlagajut iskljuchit’ iz shkol’noj programmy rasskazy Chehova i Kuprina” [ROC offers to exclude from the school curriculum the stories by Chekhov and Kuprin]. Available online: https://www.gazeta.ru/culture/news/2016/03/14/n_8367569.shtml (accessed on 14 March 2016); See also: <http://www.pravmir.ru/protoierey-artemiy-vladimirov-shkola-ne-mozhet-byit-domom-tolerantnosti-i-terpimosti/> (accessed on 4 April 2016).

⁹ See «Karyakina protiv Enteo—Bez nazvaniya» [Karjakina protiv Enteo—without title] (Audiorecord, December 2015), <https://vk.com/search?c%5Bperformer%5D=1&c%5Bq%5D=Карякина%20против%20Энтео&c%5Bsection%5D=audio>.

Note that the desire to “often remember one’s meanness and baseness”, focusing on wrongdoings is termed “getting stuck” in the language of psychology. In the book “Essays on Christian ethics” it is proposed as a means to maintain a constant feeling of guilt, and through the prism of this mindset the ethical and behavioral categories of “humility” and “repentance” shall be read. And that means that the other of the above categories—“piety”, “churched life”, “spirituality” cannot be seen in isolation from this kind of “asceticism of guilt” (Knorre 2011).

That is, we see the definition of the concept of religious ethical qualities that is opposite to the vision that Schmemmann offered as authentic. We see the worst-case scenario imminent in the absence of joy and self-centeredness. This phenomenon is very systematic and engrained in Russian Orthodoxy. Hegumen Peter (Meshcherinov), a resident of St. Daniel Monastery, notes that the ascetic tradition of crying over one’s sins and self-flagellation (for the record, it is typical of the monastics, and not of laymen) gained extensive application in the post-Soviet Orthodoxy.

It boils down to this: I am a nonentity, a miserable sinner, everything in me is evil and sin, I am worthy of eternal torment, the last judgment, hell, death; however, there is a chance to avoid all this. This chance is just to always feel a worthless, wicked, ugly, and unworthy creature capable of nothing but sin (this is called “humility”) and repent, repent, repent, all of my life. The goal of the spiritual life then becomes solely the persuasion of oneself in one’s sinfulness and total self-reproach, because we are absolutely unworthy of other things. (Meshcherinov 2006)

As you can see, Fr Alexander Schmemmann was right, discerning the phenomenon of the “religion of guilt” in relation to Orthodoxy. One can see that the “religion of guilt” permeates Russian Orthodoxy probably stronger than in American Orthodoxy, as Fr. Schmemmann saw it. It should be noted that the ascetic tradition of crying over sins and self-flagellation is typical for monastics rather than laymen, but in Russian Orthodoxy no separate “ethics for the laity” have been developed, and therefore it is the monastic ethic that work in the lay social context too. There is real evidence to this on the part of the ecclesial milieu. For example, one of the active parishioners of the Church of the Holy Martyr Tatiana, Natalia Kholmogorova frankly admits: “I have learned to look at myself as guilty, but have learned to look at others as even more guilty and take pleasure in it” (Kholmogorova 2007). In fact, what we have in practice, may be called indoctrination of guilt (Knorre 2011, p. 37).

The sense of guilt is inherent not solely in the Russian ecclesial tradition but also in the secular one, which is reflected in particular in the Russian literature. For example, in Gogol’s reflections on the “Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends” it is stated that there are no innocent or guilty, only God is righteous. Gogol stresses that this idea is innate to the Russian people. Gogol cites as evidence to this idea a passage from “The Captain’s Daughter” by Pushkin, where the commander’s wife, who sent a Lieutenant to settle a dispute between a policeman and a woman who had fought in the bath over a wooden tub, punished them both (Gogol 2009, pp. 164–65). The imperative to consider all the people guilty in their own way and who deserve to be punished, is not just a kind of ideological phenomenon, but is also a prerequisite for implementing the corresponding model in the real social life. In “Resurrection,” Leo Tolstoy shows that by virtue of a prevailing social consensus the repressive formalist state system is being maintained, which already implements the culture of blame in state paperwork through the judicial machine, whereby each man, even without having committed any particular crimes, can be convicted. That is, the “presumption of guilt” is realized far beyond the socio-ecclesial milieu as such. But this is a topic for a separate study, for a separate article and not even one.

8. Conclusions

Delving into Schmemmann’s reasoning, one can see the arguments proving the existence of two ecclesial and ascetic paradigms within Orthodoxy having unconditional socio-cultural significance. One of them approves the “religion of guilt” making the tradition of defensiveness, reductionism,

suppression of feelings an end in itself, it can be called the “oppressive” or “deprivation” paradigm (Knorre 2011). The second paradigm, laying the emphasis on the joy of communion with God, a living sense of beauty of the world as God’s creation, respectively inspires a person to comprehend this world, direct efforts and apply capabilities to its beautification—it can be called the “empowerment paradigm” in the language of socio-cultural studies.

On the part of church analysts, Hegumen Peter (Meshcherinov) speaks nowadays about distinguishing these two paradigms. He also draws attention to the paradigm in the Church which focuses on human unworthiness and failure in this life to accept the grace of God because of sin and the passionate state of “fallen nature” of man, that is, a complex of guilt, fear for noncompliance with God’s requirements is imposed on mankind (Meshcherinov 2006). It can be correlated with what we call the “deprivation” paradigm (Knorre 2011). However, hegumen Peter (Meshcherinov) singles out also the paradigm which sets as priority of spiritual life the contact with God, the vibrant, unceasing, and joyful sense of faith, a willingness to fulfill the will of God with reverence and awareness of “son-like dependence from God”. (Meshcherinov 2006).

It turns out that for today Schmemmann is not the only one to point to the “religion of guilt” as an integral large-scale phenomenon, using for its designation such synonyms as “religion of fear,” “religion of pseudo guilt,” “religion of pseudo humility.” Wondering about this “religion of guilt,” Fr. Alexander, however, cannot find the answer to the question about its origin: “Where, how, when has this tonality of Christianity become distorted, dull—or rather, where, how, why have Christians become deaf to joy? How, when and why, instead of freeing suffering people, did Church begin to sadistically intimidate and frighten them?” (Schmemmann 2000, p. 129).

In other words, we see that Schmemmann has exposed a whole layer, a large-scale phenomenon—a sort of “religion within a religion”, “Orthodoxy inside Orthodoxy”, which can also be called “counter-Orthodoxy”—a parallel Orthodoxy, or a parallel pattern of religiosity, using the term offered by professor Per-Arne Bodin (Bodin 2009). Using the concept of Sergei Fudel, the Soviet era religious writer, “professional religiosity” referred to by Schmemmann correlates with such a term as “dark lookalike of the Church” (Fudel 2012). We can say that Schmemmann and Fudel wrote about the same order phenomena, and what Fudel designates as the “Church’s lookalike”, Schmemmann calls “fake”, “surrogate”.

Given the current context that urges the Orthodox tradition to establish its modus of interaction with the world, Schmemmann’s Journals are priceless reflections for social theology, for generating the church’s position regarding the secular reality. The questions raised by the theologian can help modern Orthodox believers (and perhaps not only Orthodox) become cognizant of their position and strategy in relation to the changing realities of our time and life.

Given that the Orthodox Church has only recently started focusing on social theology, understanding of social problems and political theology, Schmemmann’s deliberations on church culture, reductionism, guardianship and defensiveness of tradition, and on the other hand, the “correlation”, “reference” as the cultural mission of the Church, seem to be more than relevant.

In Orthodoxy, especially in Russia, the monastic ethics currently prevails, while laymen’s ethics is yet to be developed. In that regard, it seems that the above ecclesiological ideas of Schmemmann are more relevant than ever, and can substantially facilitate the search for forms of existence of Orthodoxy in the III millennium world.

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