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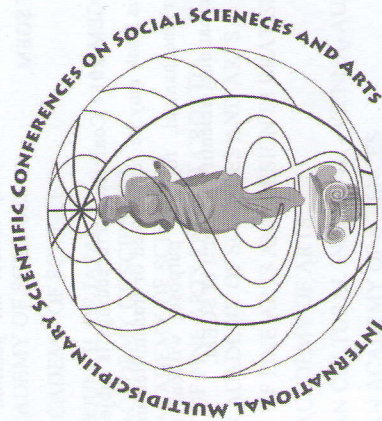
ANTHROPOLOGY  
ARCHAEOLOGY  
HISTORY, PHILOSOPHY  
MEDIEVAL & RENAISSANCE STUDIES



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## RELIGIOUS VALUES OF RUSSIAN YOUTH

Ph. D., Associate Professor, Fedorova Marina<sup>1</sup>Ph. D., Associate Professor, Rotanova Mira<sup>2</sup>Ph. D., Associate Professor, Boryshneva Nelly<sup>3</sup><sup>1</sup>Linguistic University of Nizhny Novgorod<sup>2</sup>Linguistic University of Nizhny Novgorod<sup>3</sup>National Research University "Higher School of Economics" - Nizhny Novgorod

## ABSTRACT

The article is focused on the analysis of views of Russian youth on religion, religious values, and The Russian Orthodox Church. The survey of value orientations of the youth in one of the largest regions of Russia (Nizhny Novgorod Region) became the source of the empirical material of the research. This region is considered to be a federal indicator of many socio-economic indexes including religious and confessional ones. The data and information about religious views of the younger generation were collected within several years by means of questionnaire survey and depth interview method. The specific goal of the article is to define peculiar features of religious identity of youth in Russia, and to show the change in the attitude of youth towards the basic religious ideas and values, that demonstrates transformation of value paradigms of modern youth. According to the authors of the article, "ethnization" of religious identity, syncretism of religious consciousness, and aiming at vital values become features of religiousness of the younger generation in Russia. It all leads to distorted perception of some Christian ideas and concepts. As a result the authors draw a conclusion that religious representations of Russian youth are defined in terms of universal factors (individualization and privatization of religion, influence of media and mass culture on religious consciousness and religious behavior), as well as national specificity (significance of the Russian Orthodox Church in national culture, initial tendency to syncretism of thinking, etc.). The authors also try to predict changes of religious behavior of youth due to the process of growing up.

**Keywords:** Russian youth, religious identity, religious values, religious activity, syncretism.

## INTRODUCTION

The issue of religiousness of modern youth acquires special relevance in the context of new civilization conditions. Formation of information society and distribution of mass culture values become new factors of religious identification. Religious consciousness, formed in global society, can be specified by syncretism, amorphism, an antidogmatism, that was distinctly revealed, for example, in the movement "New Age".

Plural religious picture, developed in modern multicultural global society, is analysed in conceptual field of numerous theological concepts and theories: theory of autonomous social institutes, privatizations of religion (T. Luckmann), theory of post-secular society



(J. Habermas), religion of technology (D. F. Noble), theory of religion as goods and consumption (P. L. Berger). One of the important directions of analysis is the research of variety of religious subcultures and pluralism of religious identity (S.H. Oppong, M. Shterin, A. N. Krylov).

The problem of religious identity of the population (including the youth) is becoming one of the most important issues for Russia. This situation is caused by the search of the unified national idea, which could act as the basis for national self-identification. Such ideas as vision of Russia's messianic role, promoting the concept of "Sacred Russia", proving "the Russian idea" through a religious factor appeared in works of the Russian philosophers: A. S. Homiyakov, K. S. Aksakov, N. A. Berdyaev, I. A. Ilyin and many others in the 19th century. And they still continue to remain actual.

Nowadays two contradictory processes can be observed in Russia: on the one hand, the national consciousness and the influence of Russian Orthodox Church on public life are growing, but on the other hand, the processes caused by formation of information society, leading to washing out the borders of national, ethnic and religious identities, forming a set of various subcultural configurations. In Russia this problem is aggravated by the variety of ethno-confessional structure of the population, vigorous missionary activity of foreign religious organizations, and domination of mass culture values.

Formation of religious conceptions of the Russian youth is carried out in the field of mass culture with its aiming at vital values and neo-mythology. Creating new myths in the field of culture is generating new religious (quasireligious) formations which are becoming extremely popular among young people. Lack of continuity in the process of religious identification, the prevailing influence of information technologies on formation of religious views of young people are causing concern of hierarches of Russian Orthodox Church.

Understanding all danger of trends of information society and mass culture, Russian Orthodox Church is strengthening its work with youth. The youth subject is constantly present at the work of the Sacred Synod and speeches of Patriarch Kirill. Thus, speaking at opening of the International Congress of Orthodox Youth in Moscow in November, 2014, the Patriarch spoke about need to distinguish negative consequences of information streams: "We live during that era when information ... in many aspects defines attitude and even world view of people ... That is why, using a tablet or a computer, it isn't necessary to be a starry-eyed person and to consider that we'll learn the truth now. In most cases, unfortunately, we don't see the truth, especially where the truth is vital" [1].

The state is also expressing concern about formation of religious value conceptions of the young population of Russia. Amendments about increase in punishment "for insult of feelings of believers", including establishing criminal liability in the form of imprisonment for the public actions expressing obvious disrespect for society and made for insult of religious feelings of believers were adopted in 2013. The subject "Fundamentals of Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics" has been introduced in many Russian schools since 2010. Besides at the federal and regional level considerable numbers of research of religious identity of Russians are carried out.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS.** Researches of religious conceptions of residents of Russia are conducted regularly. Such organizations as All-Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM), Levada-Center, Research service

"Sreda" and many others collect, analyze and popularize data concerning religious situation in the Russian society. It allows to trace dynamics of religious conceptions; the influence of age, gender, socio-economic factors on religion. At the same time there are also regional peculiar features determining the level and the nature of religious consciousness of residents of the country. It is more evident in the areas, formed by "national territory principle" (republics, regions).

Nizhny Novgorod Region is the model region according to many social indicators. Therefore to a certain extent it acts as a federal indicator of confessional situation; and the result, received during the research, can be extended to some other regions of the Russian Federation. Practically all traditional religions, nonconventional beliefs and cults, and also main modern youth subcultures, including religious orientations (the Rastafarian, youth New Age groups, Neopagans, Jediists and others) are represented in Nizhny Novgorod, with its population of about one million citizens and its close proximity to the capital.

A large-scale research of dynamics of value orientations of the youth was conducted in Nizhny Novgorod Region from 2006 to 2016. Within this survey investigation of religious consciousness and religious identity of studying youth was also conducted.

Mass questionnaire survey of pupils of senior classes of schools, students at colleges and higher educational institutions was conducted during the research of religious identity of youth (2500 people were interviewed in 2014, 2700 people - in 2015, and 2400 people - in 2016). A number of questions were defined during the subsequent focused interviewing of certain representatives of youth (325 people were interviewed within three years). During the conducted research the respondents' idea of the value and the role of Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) in life of society was specified; the youth attitude towards some religious ideas was revealed, moreover features of religious behavior of modern young people were defined.

**RESULTS.** A tendency to a disproportional correlation between internal religiousness (defining yourself as a believer) and external religiousness (reference to a certain religion, religious organization) was found during the analysis of religious views of youth. Thus, in the research of 2014 [2] vast majority of respondents (with different degree of confidence) referred themselves to believers (74%), and 70,1% of respondents specified Orthodoxy as the choice of faith. These data (with rather insignificant fluctuations) were confirmed during the further surveys in 2015 and 2016. However among those, who considered themselves the Orthodox Christian, only about a half (49,5% in 2014 and 52,4% in 2016) respondents surely referred themselves to believers, about 35% of respondents doubted the fact of the belief, and about 4,3% of Orthodox Christians frankly told about disbelief in God, main dogmatical provisions and religious categories. On the other hand, 3,2% of atheists and 58,7% of non-believers referred themselves to the Orthodox faith. This contradiction can be explained by the fact that for many groups of the population of our country, including the youth, Orthodoxy is a part of national culture and tradition.

The tendency of rigid fixing religious identity on ethnic origins has a long history. As O. N. Kazmin marks out, in pre-revolutionary Russia "connection between religion and ethnicity was especially strong", it "was cemented" by the legislation which actually tied everyone to "own" belief though, at the same time, the reference to the Orthodoxy was encouraged [3]. Thus, we observe the process of the so-called "ethnization of



religion" which was expressed in complex dialectics: on the one hand, popularity of religion among certain people, but on the other hand, the possibility of its non-orthodox treatment increased [4].

The thesis about "ethnization of religion" and close connection of such forms of identity in youth consciousness as religious and ethnic, was developed during depth interviewing of certain representatives of the youth (leaders of opinion). In representation of the majority of respondents (80,5%) Orthodoxy not only acts as a part of national tradition, but also exists only for Russians/Slavs. The thesis about possibility of conversion into Orthodoxy representatives of other religions (first of all non-Christian – Jews, Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus), and also representatives of other ethnic groups and races (Asian people, ethnic groups of the Negroid race) was perceived quite skeptically. This tendency to a nationalist interpretation of Orthodoxy is quite an alarming sign and needs not only reflection, but also development of preventive measures from both the authorities, and Russian Orthodox Church.

The disproportion tendency between social and individual poles of religious identity also testifies to the absence of direct connection between processes of confessional identification and personal religious experiences. Proceeding from the psychological features of teenage and adolescence, differing in tendencies to self-isolation, concentration on own experiences, in extreme cases even frustration, it is possible to speak about a priority of individual religious thoughts and feelings during this age period; that quite expectedly leads to popularity of non-confessional forms of religiousness among young people.

The research of religious identity, conducted in Nizhny Novgorod Region, has confirmed this situation: in 2014 14,4% of the interviewed youth referred themselves to non-confessional believers, in 2016 – 15%. Besides during the interviewing 90,2% of respondents noted that their own spiritual experiences are more significant for them, than any socially approved religious position.

It should be marked that the growth of non-confessional believers were also defined by a number of objective reasons, for example tendencies of individualization and privatization of religion. Luckman believed that privatization of religion is a logical consequence of high extent of differentiation of social structure [5].

Thus, objective tendencies of development of religion in modern society are complemented by subjective factors of religious consciousness, caused by age characteristics. And the fact that religious conceptions of the studying youth differ from religious conceptions of more senior age groups has been noted in a number of Russian and foreign researches [6], [7], [8], [9].

Following the results of the research in 2014-2016 in Nizhny Novgorod Region, we have come to the conclusion that the main part of the interviewed youth is at the so-called synthetic-conventional stage of faith (J. W. Fowler) which is characterized by syncretism, amorphism of religious conceptions, dependence on opinion of the others [10]. It is reflected in prevalence among the youth of various superstitions, in eclectic combination of various religious and world outlook ideas. In our opinion, syncretism of religious conceptions of modern youth is reflected in attitude of youth to a number of religious ideas and categories. For example, the research of 2014 showed that the concept of "life after death" becomes the most "popular" religious idea, and it is supported not only by adherents of different religions, but also by 15,8% of non-

believers, by 36,1% of non-confessional believers and by 17,3% of atheists. In the subsequent researches it was specified that many assumed reincarnation under the idea of "life after death": 26,11% of Orthodox Christians, 31,4% of non-confessional believers and 20% of atheists trust in the thesis about "resettlement of souls". Moreover, according to the latest data (2016), more than 50% of Orthodox youth believe in magic, amulets, signs, and other supernatural force.

Actually, it is possible to agree with those researchers [3], [11] who believed that such syncretism is a feature of Russian national culture (the so-called "ditheism") and always existed in consciousness of the Russians. But it also should be noted that recent eclecticism and syncretism of religious consciousness have been revealed in a disordered, chaotic and unstable connection of lots of elements, many of which aren't even religious in traditional understanding. So, in the interviewing of 2015-2016 young people expressed the ideas about Christ – Jedi, Messiah-Neo, etc. Similar inclusion of mythologemes of mass culture in a context of modern religious consciousness is one of the tendencies of development of religion in modern society.

Specificity of religious consciousness of modern youth is also defined by a priority of vital values in value consciousness. It has led to radical changes in the attitude to aspects of the body: a deformed idea of death has distorted the concept of a sin. The idea of sin didn't get mass support among the interviewed youth in the survey of 2014-2016 (only 34,6% of respondents supported it). Only two decades earlier [6] belief in paradise, hell and sin acted as the main indicator of religious and moral consciousness of youth and was peculiar to nearly 50% of respondents. The concept of a sin is deformed now. Owing to the main values of mass culture the sin is perceived not as something forbidden, but desirable. Thus, the important educational mission is on religious organizations. As A. Cloete notes, analyzing influence of the media on youth culture and sexual views of modern youth, the religious organizations need to reconsider their position on this question. "It would be helpful if churches are aware of their own theological history on sexuality and sex and how it influences their message on sexuality and sex today" [12].

In Russia the problem is aggravated by the fact that individualization of religious processes which is mostly revealed among young people has resulted in low religious activity.

According to the research of 2014, only 6% of the interviewed young people, who consider themselves to be believers, participate in religious practices every week in Nizhny Novgorod Region. In 2016 this indicator decreased to 4,4%. At the same time Orthodox Christians show lower level of religious activity in comparison with Muslims and representatives of Protestant denominations.

The famous Russian researcher of religion Yu. Yu. Sinelina has predicted growth of religious activity of the population of the Russian Federation [11].

We partly agree with this forecast: religious identity is a dynamic and stadial phenomenon. At different stages of its formation religious identity will endure pendulum fluctuations between social and personal poles, placing priorities either on individual religious experiences, or on the aspiration to define the social status in a group of coreligionists. The large-scale research of religious consciousness of residents of twenty one European countries (including Russia) conducted by Bertelsmann's Fund in 2008 and 2013 showed that belonging to religious organization [8, 9] rather than the



fact of belief is significant for the senior age categories. And that is, probably, the main question – if modern youth with syncretic religious consciousness can arrive at traditional religious organizations in the future? The answer is unambiguous so far. The survey of university graduates (202 persons), and interviewing of young people (35 people) attending various "esoteric and psychological schools", "the centers of spiritual development", "clubs of spiritual improvement", etc. has shown that after the age of 20 comes the desire to find religious orientation, independent of other people's opinion (it is a characteristic of an individual and reflexive stage according to J. Fowler [10]), and at the same time the desire to share the religious beliefs with adherents. Unfortunately, lack of knowledge and ideas of traditional, organic religions, syncretism of religious consciousness operating with superficial pseudo-religious and pseudo-esoteric categories and concepts often push modern youth into the mentioned above "esoteric schools" applying in their activity doubtful practices. As an example of such practices, it is possible to name practices of "karma baptizing", "yoga-tours across the holy sites", various "female practices", etc.

The system work with youth, which is carried out by Russian Orthodox Church, promoted improvement of attitude of young people to the role and value of church in life of modern Russia. According to poll of 2014 (survey was conducted at the beginning of the year) 63,3% of respondents positively assessed the activity of Russian Orthodox Church. At the same time the role of church, first of all, is important for the believing people: the more the person is confident in his religiousness – the higher he evaluates Russian Orthodox Church. It is interesting that not only representatives of Orthodox youth, but also members of other faiths (21,9%), and even non-confessional believers (30,7%) assess activity of Orthodox Church positively.

Tracing dynamics of youth attitude to church activity shows the sharp growth of interest to Russian Orthodox Church in 2014 (according to the beginning of 2015); the growth of positive evaluations is observed: 41,6% of representatives of other faiths and 51,6% of non-confessional believers support the policy of the church. It is caused by the growth of national consciousness, recorded in 2014. Then, in the conditions of crisis of 2015-2016, some recession of national patriotic soundings among youth was fixed, that also changed the attitude to Russian Orthodox Church (owing to already mentioned connection of ethnic and religious identity). Though the percentage of the youth, positively assessing the role and value of Russian Orthodox Church in activity of the state, is still high: according to the research of 2016, it is about 69% of total number of the interviewed youth (77% - Orthodox youth, nearly 35% - representatives of other faiths, 40% - non-confessional believers).

## CONCLUSION

Thus, we see that religious conceptions of modern Russian youth are defined by a group of both internal and external factors. It is possible to refer to external factors such universal processes as globalization, formation of information and communicative space and wide circulation of mass culture. Owing to these factors we observe individualization of religious processes, emergence of lots of religious subcultures, which are chosen by an individual freely, on the basis of a personal decision. The vivid religious picture is formed under the influence of the processes of neo-mythologization and ritualization of ordinary things, characteristic of mass culture. Speaking about

individualization of religion and noticing a priority of personal religious experiences over social manifestations of religious identity among young people, we believe that this phenomenon is defined not only by objective processes, but also by subjective factors (age manifestations). We refer ethnization of religion, which is revealed through close interconnection of religious and ethnic identity, to the internal factors, defining religious views of youth of Russia. This process has resulted in the growth of popularity of Orthodoxy among Russians (including youth), but, at the same time, in the opinion of young people that Orthodoxy in Russia is not perceived as a part of world Christian religion any more, and gains features of national religion. It is possible to refer initial tendency to syncretism of the religious ideas that was caused by complex dialectics of the Russian Orthodoxy and pagan tradition, to the peculiar features of perception of religion determined by the Russian culture.

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