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Articles

Xenia Luchenko

The Digitalization of Worship Practices during the Coronavirus Pandemic in the Context of the Mediatization of Orthodoxy

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Translated by Patrick Brown

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The article describes how the closure of churches during the Easter period due to the COVID-19 pandemic and quarantine measures led to the shift of everyday liturgical and communication practices online. The experience of "distance church life" in April-June 2020 has shown that both the mediatization of Orthodoxy and the development of the Orthodox section of the Internet reached a fundamentally new stage. The author examines this stage using the concept of participatory culture introduced by Henry Jenkins and cultural studies approaches based on the categories, interactivity and immersion. The shared experience of online worship over a span of several months and the degree of participants' co-presence and level of emotional involvement point to a new level of mediatization that entailed the production and consumption of textual, audio, and video content in the course of vertical and horizontal communication. This experience also showed the active development of participatory practices, including the strengthening of the interactivity of worship, the unprecedented intensity of immersion, and the prospects of substantial changes in liturgical life driven by digitalization.

Keywords: liturgy, online worship, immersion, interactivity, coronavirus pandemic, mediatization of Russian Orthodoxy, participatory culture.

THE coronavirus pandemic and related quarantine restrictions were not themselves the cause of changes in various social and cultural areas; rather, they catalyzed existing processes and trends. Religious life is no exception. Unforeseen circumstances — the inability of believers to attend services and habitually live according to the Church calendar, necessary changes to the rite due to sanitary measures, the transformation of churches and monasteries into hotbeds of infection, death among the clergy, including high-ranking prelates, conflicts with local authorities over restrictions, and declining income due to the lack of parishioners — all exacerbated previously existing contradictions and revealed tendencies that will gradually change various aspects of church life and Church-societal relations. Perhaps the most radical experience for millions of believers was the closure of temples to the laity and the migration of everyday liturgical and communication practices to the online environment.

In this text, my goal is not to describe an established, representative, and average picture (it does not yet exist), but rather, to identify situations, examples, practical experiences, and points of view that demonstrate the potential and direction of transformations. This text is based on theoretical and practical works and concepts in cultural and media research (immersiveness, participation, and the like), and in theological, sociological, and anthropological research (liturgical practices and the mediatization of religion).

The Internet and the mediatization of Orthodoxy

Researchers of the mediatization of religion have mainly examined the presence of religious organizations, communities, and their individual representatives in the media space, in information exchange, and in communication. One of the main mediatization of religion theorists, Danish sociologist Stig Hjarvard, believes that mediatization leads to the “banalization” and “mercantilization” of religion, that is media institutions take away from religion its functions (i.e. they become moral and spiritual guides, give a sense of community, and so on) and equate religion with various forms of entertainment (Hjarvard 2008; Hjarvard 2016). German author Oliver Krüger, in his critical review of different approaches to describing the mediatization of religion, concludes that “most research simply defines mediatization as a process of using new media” (Krüger 2018). Krüger shows that researchers have not developed a single concept of the mediatization of religion, and thus all existing interpretations are vulnerable to criticism, but provide much room for interpretation and development.

Sociologist Elena Ostrovskaya, for example, wrote about the application of the concepts of mediatization to Russian Orthodoxy and its digitalization (Ostrovskaya 2019). Ostrovskaya believes that "for twenty years there has been a steady tendency for Russian Orthodoxy to enter public social arenas, mediated by its mediatization and the digital reconfiguration of its basic institutions" (Ostrovskaya 2019, 310). This trend has had two directions: "the semantic, organizational, and ideological formation of the media and the digital dimensions Russian Orthodoxy" and "the restructuring by the forces of Orthodox media communications of a wide media environment and digital space" (Ostrovskaya 2019, 310). That is, the focus is first and foremost on the use of new media as tools for internal and external communication.

Since 1996 and the first appearance of Orthodox sites in the *ru* domain zone, the Internet has performed almost the same functions as traditional media, information dissemination and communication. Despite the presence of properties that distinguish the Internet from the "old media" — hypertextuality, multimediality, and interactivity (Lukina and Fomicheva 2005) — and even though the authors of church sites, both informal and official, enjoyed all the advantages that these properties provided in comparison with traditional broadcast media, the usual model of media content consumption persisted: producers published information and readers/viewers received it. I have described this stage in detail in previous works (Luchenko 2008; Luchenko 2015). Gradually, Internet communities emerged that could be called extraterritorial religious communities, indicating interaction greater than the simple exchange of information. These include, the community of the first large independent forum of Deacon Andrei Kuraev (http://kuraev.ru) and the Orthodox segment of LiveJournal (www.livejournal.ru) in the 2000s, and later, numerous thematic Orthodox groups on VKontakte and Facebook. These, however, cannot be considered parish communities in the full sense due to their limitations in regards to both vertical and horizontal communication.

The experience of a distanced church life in Russia during April-June 2020 showed that a fundamentally new stage has begun both in the mediatization of Orthodoxy and in the development of the Orthodox Internet. No longer just characterized by the "process of using new media," about which Krüger writes, nor the traditional creation and consumption of content, nor the presence of religious topics and representatives of the Church in the media, etc. . ., this stage features the massive transfer of church practices, including the liturgical, into the digital space, the emergence of various hybrid forms, and a new level of involvement — immersion.

In part, this was a projective situation, an experiment, a demonstration of opportunities that will not yet be in demand on a daily basis following the return of a normalized offline church life, but which will determine the trajectory of changes and the directions of discussions. It should be noted that the practices discussed further did not arise due to the coronavirus and quarantine; rather, the crisis showcased and strengthened them. For example, two years ago Elena Ostrovskaya published a study on the Internet mediatization of confession, in which she studied confession as a topic of communication in parish groups on social media (Ostrovskaya 2018). Distancing in 2020, however, raised a topic scholars have yet to discuss, that of confession or other sacraments as online practices.

Henry Jenkins, the American media and cultural studies scholar, formulated and developed the concept of participatory culture in relation to the digital practices of an information society (Jenkins et al. 2009). Participatory culture presupposes a high degree of self-regulation and informal relationships within online communities, but most importantly, extensive user involvement in content production. While Jenkins wrote more about traditional content, engagement and participation are key categories that describe the qualitative change in digital religious practices. Orthodox Internet users, including the clergy, exist in a participatory cultural space, in which the church component cannot be separated from their everyday life and habits, a phenomenon that was especially pronounced during the period when access to tangible worship was limited. In Jenkins' conception, users involved in the production of cultural meanings unite in communities, elevate their status, and get the opportunity to influence institutionalized culture. If this pattern is extrapolated to religion, then one can assume that the experience of being in the "participatory space" will allow laymen and priests from the generation of "digital natives" to influence the transformation of practices and the system of hierarchal relationships within the Church, at least in its mediatized, virtual projection. It is useful to consider some of the trends in this direction that emerged during the pandemic.

Online worship during self-isolation

On April 13, 2020, the website of the RBC news agency published the results of a Qrator Labs survey that claimed that "in the last week of March the volume of traffic consumption on religious sites increased by 30-500 percent" (Skrynnikova 2020). Company representatives attributed the rise to increased interest in the religious topics and the

fact that “many are participating in church services via video link” (Skrynnikova 2020). There may be pretense in this report: the company does not disclose which religious sites the study assessed, and furthermore, traffic on Orthodox sites always increases during Great Lent and major holidays. Even with these faults, it is clear that at the very beginning of self-isolation online services became a pronounced phenomenon in the Russian segment of the Internet.

The period of self-isolation fell on those weeks of the church calendar when services are most intense and attendance increases significantly — the end of the Great Lent, Holy Week, Easter, and Bright Week. On April 11, a circular letter issued in Moscow and signed by the first vicar of the Moscow diocese, Metropolitan of the Resurrection, Dionysius (Porubai), stated that services would be performed only in the presence of clergy, church staff, and volunteers. (Metropolitan of the Resurrection, Dionysius 2020). In other cities Church authorities issued similar orders with reference to the decisions of the regional sanitary authorities. And the next day, Patriarch Kirill called on believers “to spend time in front of the television during service broadcasts” (Patriarch Kirill 2020).

The “working group under Patriarch Kirill for coordinating actions in the context of the spread of the coronavirus infection” made Telegram its official messenger for informing the media, the flock, and the interested public. On April 7, the group reported that “in conditions of forced self-isolation, the Russian Orthodox Church offers its parishioners online broadcasts of services. This allows home prayer to be filled with the joy of contemplation of the Divine Liturgy and other services” (Telegram 2020). It also contended that 100,000 users on the Odnoklassniki social network watched the broadcast from the Yelokhovo Cathedral of Patriarch Kirill’s morning prayers for the Feast of Praise of the Most Holy Theotokos (Telegram 2020).

On April 15, Natal’ia Rodomanova, the press secretary of the St. Petersburg diocese, reported that from April 1 to April 12 there were 800,000 views of broadcasts of divine services. According to Rodomanova, “in the fifth week of Great Lent about 65,000 users watched the broadcast of the service in which the Metropolitan participated,” and “in those churches where amicable parishes formed or in those where the format of online broadcasting has been used for a long time, the average views are up to 26,000” (Galeeva 2020). According to *Fontanka*, 15 churches of the diocese broadcasted regularly, most on VKontakte, but some via Facebook and Instagram. By April 2, similar news appeared from Orenburg: 2,500 people watched the first broadcasts of services on the official account of the Orenburg diocese (ProOren 2020).

There is no aggregate data on nation-wide viewership of online broadcasts of the Easter night service, but scholars can derive approximate numbers from regional news (on Easter churches in 42 of Russia's 85 regions were officially closed to parishioners). In St. Petersburg, about 500,000 users watched online broadcasts on the night of April 19 (Kolash 2020). The Yekaterinburg diocese also provided statistics on views of Easter services; on the night of April 18-19, 107,000 users watched the broadcast from the Holy Trinity Cathedral on the YouTube account of the regional Orthodox TV channel (*Soiuz*), 5,000 tuned in for the broadcast from the Novo-Tikhvin monastery on VKontakte, and several thousand viewed parish broadcasts in groups on social networks (Ekaterinburgskaia eparkhiia 2020).

It was not only dioceses and individual parishes that conducted online broadcasts on their websites and social media accounts. With assistance from "Match TV," which specializes in broadcasting sporting events, Gazprom-Media organized broadcasts of the pre-Easter and Easter services from churches in Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Orel. It created a special section on the Premier service, where on the main holidays and during Holy Week one could watch several services a day from different cities ("Priamye transliatsii bogosluzhenii" 2020). In this service, the live broadcasts themselves were free, but their recordings were only available to subscribers.

In contrast to the Internet, television broadcasts of services is familiar, and thus there exists complete statistics of viewership. Three channels, "*Pervyi*," NTV, and the Orthodox channel, "*Spas*," annually broadcast the patriarchal service from the empty Cathedral of Christ the Savior. According to Mediascope, in 2020 the television audience for the Easter Night Service on April 19 reached 2.9 million viewers, 81 percent higher than in 2019, when 1.6 million watched the service (Dobrunov 2020).

It is clear from this review that online broadcasts became a very popular format on various sites. The hierarchy itself called on believers to pray in front of the screens, and the broadcasts became more technologically diverse, conforming to the standards used in the broadcasting of other major events like sports.

Broadcasting services: from television to Instagram

Professional official online broadcasts from diocesan cathedrals and large churches do not differ from television, except for the channel of distribution. The traditional passive, unengaged consumption of con-

tent persists. The genre of commentated television broadcasts of patriarchal services, which appeared on television channels in the early 1990s and has since undergone minor changes, underscores the substantial distance between the viewer and the employees and those present in the temple: those present are participants while the viewers are spectators, a type of "teletourist." The result is a "double intermediary" effect, whereby not only the media channel and the screen separate the viewer from the events, but also the commentator, who shapes the perception of what is happening on the screen, who dictates what and how the viewer sees.

A different situation arises when watching live broadcasts on the social networks of parish churches. Amateurs use mobile phones to broadcast the service, which often includes background noise, their breathing, and the shaking of the tripod or their hands. This is a completely different level of involvement — immersion — which shrinks the distance between the viewer and what is happening on the screen. As noted by media researchers Anna Novikova and Il'ia Kiriia, "the distinct 'low quality' of the image and sound, the informality of speech, and so on, along with the promptness of information transmission, do not interfere but contribute to create the effect of presence, the involvement in the reality of the spectacle" (Novikova and Kiriia 2018, 281). Moreover, in this way it is not just possible to broadcast the main services — liturgies, all-night vigils, and so on — but also *molebens*, *akathists*, vespers, and other events of church life.

For example, those wishing to watch the ceremony of the descent of the Holy Fire from the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem in 2020 could choose between a traditional television broadcast with commentary and a live amateur broadcast on Facebook, which creates the effect of presence. There were also broadcasts of funeral services for clergymen who died from the coronavirus. On April 23 about one hundred Facebook users watched the funeral service for the rector of the Yelokhovo Cathedral in Moscow, Archpriest Alexander Ageikin. And on May 1 about the same number of parishioners attended the online broadcast of the funeral service for the Rector of the Church of the Nativity of the Most Holy Theotokos in Krylatskoe, Archpriest Georgii Breev. Both were broadcast simultaneously on YouTube.

At the same time, on social networks it is possible to see which accounts view events. Thus, parishioners who know each other may have the feeling that they "saw each other"; that is, they did not watch separately but were all together at the same time in one place. Viewers wrote about this in the comments accompanying the broadcasts. In

addition, they can respond to what is happening in the broadcast window — put a "like" or sympathetic "emoji," leave a public comment expressing gratitude, support, sympathy, or send a personal message to the filmer. In this way, an exchange of emotions occurs that increases engagement.

Also popular among church users were "stories" — fragments of the broadcast posted on the church Instagram accounts. This was often the format for sermons and the reading of names for commemoration at the liturgy. In comments or via personal messages on the same Instagram accounts or VKontakte pages, individuals posted requests to remember the names. This is a new contactless way of submitting memorials: parishioners sent them in the comments, listened to them being read in the "stories," and sent offerings through an online payment system. In the case of "stories," the effect of presence and involvement is asynchronous: a person can see what happened today at the liturgy in their parish, hear their name being read, or listen to a sermon over a twenty-four-hour period (this is how long the stories are available in the account that published them).

Thus, interactivity implies ample opportunities for active interaction of the users with what is happening on the screen and with each other. Furthermore, the variability of virtual presence strategies has the potential to transform the practices of believers' participation in worship and the role of online events in church life.

Interactivity and immersion

To describe and analyze the transition of liturgical practices online and the ever-increasing degree of involvement, the approaches adopted in cultural studies and art history are useful. Rituals in Christian worship harken back to the most ancient religious rituals, which have always had performative properties. The symbolic structure of the liturgical action and the nature of the relationship between those who perform the service and those present still have much in common with the theater. Therefore, it is appropriate to apply the categories that researchers use to describe the transformations of theaters, museums, and other cultural institutions to the participatory culture of the digital sphere — interactivity and immersion. Interactivity is interaction provided by a media carrier, between a user or a recipient and something. Immersion is the next step: "in immersive projects, the environment becomes both the place where a user's needs can be met and one that generates emotion through a unique combination of con-

vention and reality" (Novikova and Kiriia 2018, 282). Both liturgical practices and theatrical performances emerged from the ancient mysteries, but an important difference is that divine services always presupposed greater involvement of the "spectators," some form of co-existence with the "protagonists" performing the rituals and sacraments, sometimes emotional or even active presence within the performance. That is, worship services were initially more immersive than theatrical performances and shows, which, while gaining online involvement, use digital techniques to create immersive spaces in real offline halls. It is important that the participants of interactive and immersive actions always have a choice of the degree of interaction and immersion — they are given the opportunity to enter into a dialogue and immerse themselves, but regardless of whether the action takes place online or offline, the choice of distance remains with the user: the creation of conditions for interactivity and immersion does not guarantee it. One of the main features of modern multimedia shows is that the recipient has the right not to accept the proposed rules of the "game" and may determine the degree of interactivity and immersion, according to their own individuality or mood" (Evallyo 2019, 269).

A Television broadcast of a liturgy or any other worship service, especially if it features commentary, is a type of passive content consumption. This is the "old" form of interaction that places the spectacle at maximum distance from the viewer. Live broadcasting on the Internet assumes interactivity — the ability to react and to follow events without intermediaries. In addition, it provides new opportunities, for example, the ability to "move" between different churches during one service, to connect to different broadcasts or even turn on two different screens (desktop and smartphone) simultaneously, and to send comments to some of the employees (for example, to tell the operator of the broadcast to adjust the tripod) or to others watching the broadcast. At the same time, the participant is completely invisible and protected from possible reactions from those present, which creates a more comfortable situation. For example, there is no need to observe church etiquette (wear a skirt and a scarf or, for men, a long-sleeved shirt).

This is how Anna Lyudkovskaya, a parishioner of the Orthodox Church in America living in Chicago, described this experience on her Facebook account:

> Isolation does amazingly progressive things to church services. Last night I went to YouTube (to listen to Byzantine singing at a Moscow

> church), and on the right are recommended videos, all live broadcasts from Orthodox churches in Chicago, Minnesota, and Washington — they read the twelve Gospels everywhere (Lyudkovskaya 2020).

Among the comments from Orthodox users that I collected from social networks were the following:

> Broadcasts are simply considered as television or theatre. I watch them from this perspective. This is the case in some huge cathedrals, where the service goes somewhere distant and incomprehensible... I watch broadcasts from different churches [...] Of course, it is sad without icons, well I have them at home, and without incense and Holy water of course. But this is a chance to feel grace where it is without the incense. And I am very grateful for this opportunity!... There is a feeling that you are gaining more than you are losing: there is a composure and harmony of prayer at the service, listening to every word, it is a very personal experience for those who serve. The vision of what is happening in the altar is very close and there is an amazing unity between all who pray together at a great distance. All this is akin to the sacrament. All that is missing is the ray of light from the high window to the altar and the beauty in people's faces after communion. Well, that, and I really want to hug (Leonova 2020; Luchenko 2020).

On the one hand, the variety of reflective responses collected in real time, when the experience is still transpiring or when it is just beginning, confirms the thesis that the degree of involvement and immersion depends more on the individual characteristics of the user and their mood than on their technical skill. On the other hand, they suggest that participation in these online practices brings an unexpected novelty to believers' church life and becomes a valuable joint experience. As a result, this experience, which thousands of Orthodox Christians endured at the same time, may, in the long term, change their daily behavior and affect their attitude towards worship in general, especially considering that the sanitary measures churches took demonstrated the very possibility of these changes and innovations.

During the time of isolation new practices arose that allow scholars to discuss a gradual transition from interactivity to one with some elements of immersion and even the emergence of hybrid forms of worship. The next stage of interactivity/immersion after broadcasts on social networks is worship on Zoom or any other conferencing platforms, which permits many participants to be equally connected to events at

the same time. In some parishes, especially Orthodox communities in America and Western Europe, it was common to hold services together, when all the employees, including the priest, were at home. Deacons and choir members, lay worshipers, altar men, and priests all participated in the worship services via Zoom. Often, these were not liturgies centered around the celebration of the sacrament but services consisting of joint prayers, reading and singing — canonical hours, morning prayers, Holy Week services, prayer services, and so on. For example, parishioners from Paris, Moscow, and cities across the US, who only attend the Cathedral of Christ the Savior during visits to New York, joined the divine services conducted by Archpriest Mikhail Meerson. They saw each other, sang together, said prayers, and appreciated this as a unique opportunity and experience. One of the believers described this experience on Facebook: “The constant joint Zoom services in which I participate are no less church to me than the usual liturgical cycle. In some ways, they are even more acute. One feels the globality of the Christian community more strongly, without the limits of distance and space” (Leonova 2020). Parishioners wrote less openly about liturgical services over Zoom because the remote administration of the sacrament is very sensitive and not approved by the hierarchy. Nevertheless, there is evidence that informal ecumenical congregations gathered on Zoom to consecrate the sacraments, and here, the degree of immersion is even higher. One of the participants, O. G., briefly described her experience:

> If I do not go to the temple and do not take communion in the temple, I am deprived of the society of the parishioners, of my temple, communion, and worship. But I am not deprived of the community of believers, the sacrament, and worship as such, because I participate in ecumenical worship services via Zoom, where I take the home sacrament and pray with friends or with participants in online services. (G 2020).

The Archpriest Andrei Dudarev from the Moscow region shared his experience of delivering a Zoom liturgy on Akhilla.ru. This service included “the liturgy of the Word,” one without the Eucharist and which laymen can serve. Fourteen parishioners who received assigned roles in advance attended. Dudarev wrote: “I had a complete sense of participation in fellowship and service with everyone. At first, it seemed that technological innovations would get in the way, but this did not happen. In general, everything worked well. The transition of worship to the online format was psychologically perceived as a transition from reading a text from a book to reading a text from a smartphone” (Dudarev 2020).

Experiments with online liturgies

In the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) a large discussion took place around the practice of online liturgies. Two clerics — priests Dmitry Vaysburd and Igor Savva — were added to the ranks of supernumeraries after announcing that they digitally delivered the liturgy to parishioners, consecrating bread and wine digitally. On his Facebook account Father Igor Savva wrote:

> Last Saturday Fr. Dmitry Vaisburd and I had the amazing experience of serving a full-fledged liturgy with Communion using the Hangouts video conferencing program. Each of the worshipers prepared bread, wine, and water in front of the monitor. I performed the liturgy of John Chrysostom, as we took turns reading and singing parts of the succession. The consecration of the Gifts took place in the same way as during the divine service in the church. All participants received the Holy Communion, each in his own home. It was an amazing and inspiring service. (Savva 2020).

Here, the parishioners were actively involved in what was happening, they were no longer passive viewers of the broadcasts, but rather immersed participants in an online worship service. Deacon Andrei Kuraev commented on this experience in his blog:

> The isolated layman puts a piece of bread and a cup of wine in front of a video camera. At the same time, the priest in the church (or where he spreads his antimins) begins the Liturgy of Preparation, holding in his mind and his prayer not only the bread that is presented to him, but also the one that is "at a distance." The layman simply listens to the prayers of the priest. Maybe sometimes he burns incense (if he has such an opportunity). And in the end, he hears from the priest — "with the fear of God and by faith, approach." I am convinced that his experiences will be much deeper than in a regular service. (Deacon Kuraev 2020).

He writes of the depth of experience (immersion implies the emotionality of engrossment through the senses) and the possibility of being included in the liturgy, of participating in it, not only preparing bread and wine, but also, for example, burning incense.

Bishop Savva (Tutunov) on his telegram channel called this practice "marginal," "unacceptable[,] and impossible in Christ's Church" (Bishop Savva 2020). Finally, the official speaker of the Russian Orthodox

Church, the Chairman of the Synodal Department for Church Relations with Society and the Media, Vladimir Legoyda, also noted on his Telegram channel “the theological absurdity of this venture” (Legoida 2020).

Another OCU cleric, Archpriest Georgy Kovalenko, in his blog described in detail the experience of delivering the liturgy online on Easter (Kovalenko 2020). He blessed the gifts during the liturgy on Thursday and individually packed them, for which he “developed technology of ‘pious’ packaging, taking into account the ease and ecological dimensions of recycling”; held personal conversations with the parishioners in messengers in which he explained what would happen; and distributed these carefully packed gifts to all those who wished to receive the Holy Communion on Easter. On the night of the Easter Liturgy, parishioners watched an online broadcast of the service and received communion with the gifts prepared in advance. Thus, the digital online liturgy and real physical participation in the sacrament are linked. Another OCU cleric, Archpriest Andrei Dudchenko, spoke out sharply against the practice of online liturgies with a full Eucharist. He questioned: “is this an event in which they are participants rather than observers” (Dudchenko 2020)? Dudchenko compares the liturgy to dance because of the role of non-verbal, tactile contacts. In his words, the “liturgy can be compared to dance. How does one conduct a circle dance (*khorovod*) or a pairs dance via videoconference” (Dudchenko 2020)? Furthermore, He believes that “a communal meal is not the same as a collection of several individual meals” (Dudchenko 2020). That is, for Dudchenko, who by education is a specialist in the theological liturgy and not simply a clergyman-practitioner, the degree of involvement in the process as well as the level of emotional, sensory, participatory immersion are extremely subjective, but as has been observed, the parameters and the technical capacity for overcoming these already exist.

Prospects of the digitization of worship

The concerns that clergy and Church officials voice about online sacraments sends scholars back to cultural theory. In works on immersion (Novikova 2020; Evallyo 2019), researchers often draw on Walter Benjamin’s essay “A Work of Art in the Era of Its Technical Reproducibility,” where he reflects on the category of authenticity and argues that by gaining reproducibility, a work of art loses its unique aura. Benjamin wrote that “These changed circumstances leave the artwork’s other properties untouched, but they certainly devalue the here and now of the artwork” (Ben’iamin 1996, 21). The Catholic theologi-

an, Antonio Spadaro, also references Benjamin in his study *Cybertheology*: *Thinking about Christianity in the Internet Age*, in which a separate chapter is devoted to the possibility of an online liturgy. Spadaro believes that "In reality, the liturgical event is never technologically reproducible, because it incorporates in its *hic et nunc* [here and now] — in which is celebrated in an unreproducible way the cation of the Holy Spirit — which makes the mystery of Christ present and actualizes it[.]" (Spadaro 2014, 79). Further he writes that "the liturgy always 'works' on the body, organizing the spheres of emotions, of sensibility, of actions, in such a way that these spheres will be the presence of the sacred, of the mystery of Christ" (Spadaro 2014, 79).

Spadaro wrote his book in 2012 (published in 2014), when technology did not yet permit the level of interactivity or the near immersive practices demonstrated during the coronavirus crisis and associated with self-isolation and the inability to visit temples. The key question that has been raised thanks to the collective experience of more or less interactive participation in online services is whether to consider presence at the liturgy via technical means as a reproduction, or a genuine representation of "here and now." Is the degree of co-presence and emotional involvement sufficient for all participants to accept the service and the sacrament as valid and repeatable in this format?

Thus, the extreme experience of limited access to temple services during April, May, and June 2020, which included the traditionally intense Easter period, demonstrated potential directions for further mediatization of Russian Orthodoxy, the new level of which includes not only the production and consumption of information content in text, audio, and video formats, vertical and horizontal communication, presence in the media and social networks, but also the active development of participatory practices, in particular, strengthening the interactivity of divine services, the appearance of elements of immersion in them, and the prospects for significant changes in liturgical life due to its digitalization.

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Archimandrite Cyril Hovorun

“Covid Theology,” or the “Significant Storm” of the Coronavirus Pandemic

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The article examines various theological aspects of the perception of the coronavirus pandemic in global Orthodoxy and the Russian Orthodox Church. Among other aspects, it touches upon issues pertaining to the celebration and distribution of the Eucharist under hygienic restrictions. It also explores Christological arguments in support of each practice. The article proposes some specific interpretations of the phenomenology and aetiology of the so-called Covid dissidence. It argues that artificial ideological polarization between so-called “liberals” and “conservatives” is why many bishops, priests, and laypeople in the Russian Orthodox Church mistrust the quarantine measures.

Keywords: Eucharistic ecclesiology, Christology, agape, COVID-19, culture wars.

In 1971 Archpriest Alexander Schmemann published the programmatic article “A Significant Storm: A Few Thoughts on Autocephaly, Church Tradition and Ecclesiology” in the *Herald of the Russian Patriarchal Exarchate* (Schmemann 1971). When the Russian Orthodox Church granted the Orthodox Church in America autocephaly in 1970, Father Alexander considered this a new opportunity for Orthodox churches to rethink Orthodox tradition in the realities of our time. For him, this event marked “one of the most significant crises in the Orthodox Church history of recent centuries” (Schmemann 1971, 550). Exactly fifty years later, the global coronavirus pandemic provoked an even larger debate that has forced theologians to reflect on tradition and ecclesiology.

The coronavirus pandemic, which will also be referred to as Covid, has caused confusion in local Orthodox churches. Many hierarchs and

clerics either do not know what to tell their flock about the risks associated with the disease, or do not dare to do so. Quite a few have already contracted the virus and some have died. Nonetheless, the pandemic has provoked productive discussions about the development of Orthodox theology. New theological and ethical ideas are emerging, and the Church is rethinking established ideas.

Ecclesiology is the most promising discipline to crystalize new theological concepts, as it is young and flexible. Formed in the nineteenth century, it has inspired debate on the relationship between Church and State as well as ecclesiological and theological primacy.[1] Ecclesiology responds quickly to the challenges of the time and is therefore a suitable platform for discussions about the coronavirus pandemic. Nevertheless, there are still few ecclesiological reflections on the pandemic.

Most theological reactions to the crisis focus on the transmissibility of Covid through the Eucharistic Gifts. For some, this is impossible *a priori*; ardent advocates of this position include certain hierarchs and theologians who have a reputation for guarding the tradition. Among the official Church institutions, the Synod of the Orthodox Church of Greece is perhaps the most consistent and verbose in upholding this point of view. For example, on March 9, 2020 it published an official communiqué stating the following:

> For Church members, the Eucharist and Communion from the Common Chalice of Life, of course, cannot be the cause of contagion. The faithful know that taking Holy Communion, even in the midst of a pandemic, is a practical confirmation of self-giving to the Living God, and a manifestation of love that overcomes all human fear: "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18). Members of the Church know that the sacrament, which is a form of interpersonal relationship, is the fruit of love and freedom precisely because it has no suspicion, doubt, or fear (I Kathimerini 2020).

Positions like this are fideistic, that is, they appeal exclusively to the postulates of faith (Penelhum 2010). In some cases, fideists try to appeal to scientific data. For example, John (Tassias), the Metropolitan of Langada of the Orthodox Church of Greece, made the following statement:

1. I analyze the emergence of modern ecclesiology in more detail in Hovorun 2015, 79-94.

> There are no germs in the sacred chalice and on the sacred diskos because, even if we look at it from a worldly point of view and in accordance with the laws of physics, viruses are nonresistant to alcohol, and the ions contained in the gold and silver sacred utensils deactivate any microbes (Flas.gr 2020).

Indeed, science recognizes the effectiveness of gold, and especially silver, against some bacteria, but not against viruses.[2] Relying on the metaphysical cleanliness of sacred vessels in the fight against the coronavirus is essentially the same as using antibiotics to kill a virus — ineffectual. While Metropolitan John did not differentiate between these germs, and ultimately succumbed to the virus on November 15, 2020, this distinction is fundamental for understanding Covid and attitudes towards Eucharistic hygiene.

Currently, fideists do not have significant theological or scientific reflections on the Eucharist's immunity to the coronavirus. The debate is even more perplexing when it comes to Orthodox fundamentalists — they accuse all who doubt the invulnerability of the Eucharist of unbelief and apostasy.

Fundamentalists often advocate "Covid dissidence," which is consonant with widespread conspiracy theories in secular society, according to which the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus was artificially created to inspire fear, restrict freedom, and strengthen the power of an imaginary "world government behind the scenes." Covid dissidents consider the danger of the virus to be greatly exaggerated, do not take hygienic measures against its spread, and ridicule those who do. The public statement of Metropolitan Onufrii Berezovskii, the Primate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP), is one example of such a dismissive attitude:

> Everyone falls ill at some point. Someone gets sick and recovers, then somebody else gets sick, but this is life. People often catch a cold when the season changes, but now everyone immediately suspects the coronavirus. Your leg hurts, your ear hurts — it must be the coronavirus (Rebrina 2020).

2. I am grateful to Gayle Woloschak, professor of microbiology at Northwestern University in Chicago, for confirming my findings on this matter. In this regard, the Associated Press denied the claim that silver could somehow influence the spread of the coronavirus. See Dupuy 2010.

Many Orthodox Covid dissidents and fideists have a rudimentary "covid theology"; they are so confident in their beliefs that they care little about theological arguments in support of their theses. Those who assert the risks of Covid with theological arguments do much better. This group of theologians could be called Eucharistic realists, since they believe that the reality of the Eucharistic Body and Blood of Christ presupposes that the Eucharistic Gifts are subject to physical laws and therefore capable of transmitting infection.

The realists' theological publications are quite extensive. They include the collection "Church in a Pandemic," published under the editorship of Petros Vasiliadis, professor at the University of Thessaloniki (Panos 2020), and a number of important publications on the Public Orthodoxy blog, edited by George Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou of the Center for Orthodox Christian Studies at Fordham University (publicorthodoxy.org).[3] In this blog, I published the article "Covid-19 and Christian (?) Dualism" (Hovorun 2020), which contends that the virus is part of God's creation and is included in his universal plan of salvation through *recapitulatio* in Christ.[4] From this perspective, the virus is not evil, and such a view would, in fact, be dualistic and contrary to the Orthodox worldview. As part of God's creation, the coronavirus can freely reside in the Eucharistic Gifts and be transmitted to humans.

According to Eucharistic realists, fideism borders on magic. In various publications and on social networks, realists criticize fideism for its empirical and theological shortcomings. The main empirical argument is that the Eucharistic Gifts are not magical substances that destroy infection but are subject to the same laws of the physical world. To think otherwise is to accept a docetic position, which views the human nature of Christ as separate from the framework and laws of the material world. Throughout history, the Eucharist has been a vehicle for viral transmission, and the Church has taken sanitary measures against the spread of infection through the chalice. It also requires

3. Among the thematic publications in this blog, the following can be noted: "The value of the concept of "nothing." Lessons from Covid-19 on Silence and Peace "by Deacon John Chrysavgis," God, Evil, and Covid-19 "by Prof. Pavel Gavrilyuk, "Ready for the Covid Vaccine? An Orthodox Perspective "prof. Gail Voloschak, "Reflection on Faith and Science in Light of Covid-19" and "The Eucharist, Its Physical Elements, and Molecular Biology" by Hermine Nedelescu. All of these authors, some of whom are biological scientists, can be attributed to the group of Eucharistic realists.

4. *Recapitulatio* — the reunification of the world with God through the Incarnation. The apostle Paul used the term *recapitulatio*, or ἀνακεφαλαίωσις, in Ephesians 1:10. On this basis, see St. Irenaeus of Lyons 1969.

clergymen to protect sacred vessels from mold, and thus implicitly recognizes the possibility of infection through Communion.

The theological problems associated with the Eucharist are also related to the Incarnation. Starting in the fifth century, Christological disputes about Christ's human nature provoked the first discussions about the Eucharist, which include the writings of the main Christological authority of the Orthodox Church, St. Cyril of Alexandria. Now during the pandemic, disputes about the Eucharist develop into disputes about the Incarnation. For example, Eucharistic fideists consider the Eucharistic Body equivalent to Christ's Body after the resurrection; it is, therefore, not subject to decay and cannot transmit illness.

The fideists object that the Eucharist is a continuation of the Last Supper with the disciples, before Christ's Body was resurrected. One may ask them, however, if Christ's Body did not obey any physical laws after the resurrection, then how did the wounds from the crucifixion remain on it (see Moss 2019)? Furthermore, how could Christ eat fish and honey (Luke 24:42), if there were no microorganisms in his Body to help digest food? If the resurrection did not destroy the Bifidobacteria in Christ's Body, then what prevents bacteria and viruses from being in the Eucharist?

If one accepts the fideists' claim that the Eucharist is incorruptible because it is identical with the Body of Christ after the resurrection, then the salvation of the human race is in question, since Christ's humanity was flawed before his resurrection. According to classical Eastern Christology, such claims come dangerously close to heresy. For Eucharistic realists, the possibility of infectious transmission through the Eucharist is evidence of the identity of this Body with the Body of Christ, both before and after the resurrection. For St. Cyril of Alexandria, the wounds in Christ's resurrected Body were connected with his pre-resurrection body: "By showing his wounded side and the nail marks, he convinced us, beyond any doubt, that he had erected a temple to his body — the very body that hung on the cross" (Elowsky 2007, 357).

For Eucharistic realists, the fideistic position has a Christological parallel not with the Orthodox teaching, but with the Aphthartodocetes, a doctrine formulated by Julian of Halicarnassus that arose within the anti-Chalcedonian party at the end of the fifth and beginning of the sixth centuries (Hovorun 2008, 28-9). According to this teaching, Christ's humanity was not subject to corruption. Hence the name of the heresy " aphthartodocetism," that is, that the human nature of Christ is not subject to any corruption. Julian proceeded from the

premise, common to all anti-Chalcedonians, that the divinity and humanity of Christ are one nature. He concluded that divinity and humanity have common properties, including incorruptibility. The anti-Chalcedonian theologians and supporters, such as Severus of Antioch, disagreed with Julian on this issue. John Damascene, who represented the Chalcedonian position, defined aphthartodocetism as follows:

> Aphthartodocetes, from Julian of Halicarnassus and Gaianus of Alexandria, are also called Gaianites. In almost all respects, they agree with the followers of Severus, but they recognize the difference in the unity of Christ and teach that his body was incorruptible from its very formation. On the one hand, they confess that the Lord suffered — with hunger, thirst, and fatigue — and on the other, they say that He did not suffer in the same way as we do. For we endure suffering by natural necessity, while Christ endured it voluntarily and was not a slave to the laws of nature (Damascenus 1981, 22).

The latter phrase accurately characterizes Eucharistic fideism in that the laws of nature do not apply to the Eucharistic Body of Christ. Modern Eucharistic fideists, therefore, proceed from an Aphthartodocetic rather than an Orthodox premise. For them, the position that the Eucharistic Gifts are subject to decay contradicts the empirical experience of the Church.

Nevertheless, contemporary theoretical discussions of the Eucharist have not yet addressed fundamental Christological issues. At the same time, it is obvious that an acceptable synthesis between realistic and fideistic positions is impossible without including Christological issues in the discussion. The solution to these theoretical problems could resolve practical issues, which are given special attention in the Orthodox environment.

One of these issues was the possibility of performing the sacraments, above all the Eucharist, online. The Russian Orthodox Church hierarchy permits the use of modern communication to perform the sacrament of confession. For example, in his response to the question "How will confession be received now — via Skype with the priest?," Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeyev) of Volokolamsk answered:

> If you want to confess, make an appointment with the priest — he will receive you on an individual basis. You will be able to talk to him, ask him questions, and give confession. I think that in exceptional situations it is possible to confess via phone or Skype. But, again, negotiate with

> the priest. Confession is brought to God, but it is accepted by a specific priest (Portal "Jesus" 2020).

In another interview, Metropolitan Hilarion compared the online Liturgy to "magic healing": Representatives of the older generation probably remember the so-called "magic healers": "Kashpirovskii and Chumak charged water, and people put it in front of their TV screens and then somehow used it. The Church condemns all such magical practices" (Official site of the Moscow Patriarchate 2020b).

For Metropolitan Hilarion, this practice became another excuse for condemning the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, some of whose clergy actually tried to celebrate the Liturgy online. On the Ukrainian Internet, such attempts have provoked a lively and constructive discussion. It began when priest Igor Savva, who had transferred from the UOC-MP to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU), posted on his Facebook page that he performed the Liturgy online:

> Since the beginning of the quarantine, we have been performing the liturgy online. To compensate for the lack of Communion, we discuss spiritual communion (after all, it is actually non-material), and try to deliver the Gifts to parishioners, but this is not always possible nor available to everyone. All this time, I've been thinking, why can't we conduct the entire liturgy online? We pray that this bread and wine will become the Body and Blood of Christ and provide us communion with Him so that we will become His Body. Doesn't this prayer "work" at a distance? Are radio waves (WiFi) or the use of gadgets an obstacle to our unification with Christ, His life-giving Body and Blood?
>
> Last Saturday Fr. Dmitry Vaisburd and I had the amazing experience of serving a full-fledged liturgy with Communion using the Hangouts video conferencing program. Each of the worshipers prepared bread, wine, and water in front of the monitor. I performed the liturgy of John Chrysostom, as we took turns reading and singing parts of the succession. The consecration of the Gifts took place in the same way as during the divine service in the church. All participants received the Holy Communion, each in his own home. It was an amazing and inspiring service (Savva 2020).

Predictably, the OCU leadership did not approve, and other clerics raised theological arguments against an "online Eucharist." In his article "What's Wrong with Online Communion?," well-known liturgist

Archpriest Andriy Dudchenko acknowledges that Father Igor's initiative actualizes the need for believers' conscious participation in the sacraments. He also notes, however, that parishioners' physical presence and interaction is just as important to the liturgy:

> The Liturgy is not a "technical means" for the consecration of bread and wine, so to speak, to obtain a material shrine through which one can then be consecrated. There is fellowship, community, and unity when all participants partake of the one Body and Blood of Christ. It is not only the taking of Communion that is important, but everything that the community experiences together during the service. There is a lack of physical presence in online ministry. We know that during the service, less than half of the information is transmitted orally, most is nonverbal. Movements, gestures, facial expressions, intonation, clothing, incense, and distance matter. The liturgy can be compared to a dance. How does one orchestrate a dance via videoconference (Dudchenko 2020)?

As an alternative to the "online Eucharist," there is talk of reviving the ancient practice of "agape," or "love feasts," which were often practiced in the ancient Church alongside the Eucharist (Al-Suadi and Smit, eds. 2019, 189; McGowan 1997; McGowan 2004). Priests began to perform agapes online during the pandemic. For instance, myself and the nun Vassa (Larina) performed agapes on Zoom (Cyril Hovorun [YouTube Channel] 2020).[5] As a liturgical specialist, Vassa adapted the agape structure for performance online. Below is the liturgy in full:

> Friday, April 24, 2020, 10:00 am New York time (EDT); 7:00 am California time (PDT); and 3:00 pm Vienna time (CET).
> Host:
> - Greetings. "Welcome. Christ is Risen!"
>
> Guests:
> - Responsive greetings.
>
> The host:
> - "We gather for this agape on the eve of St. Thomas's week in memory of our Lord Jesus Christ, His coming to His disciples "despite the closed doors," and confirmation of Thomas's faith. We are also gathered to confirm our love for one another in Him."

5. "Online Agape hosted by Sr Vassa", *Cyril Hovorun Youtube Channel*, 25.04.2020 https://tinyurl.com/y20jq269, accessed on 23.11.2020.

- Seeking forgiveness and teaching peace: “Forgive me, my friends, for my sins that could disturb our peace and love in Christ. Peace to you!”
Guests (all together):
- “Peace to you, Father N!”
One of the guests:
- “Today we are reading a passage from the Gospel of John 20: 19-31.”
- Reading Scripture.
Guests and host:
- Share thoughts on what they have read.
The host:
- “Let’s pray together, as the Lord taught us to pray.”
Guests (all together):
- Read the Lord’s Prayer.
The host:
- “Father N, could you bless our food?”
- Everyone is holding bread and red wine in front of a computer camera.
Father N:
- “Christ God, bless this food and drink for Your servants, for You are holy now and forever and ever.”
Everyone:
- “Amen!”
Everyone eats and talks (Cyril Hovorun [YouTube Channel] 2020).

In March 2020, quarantine laws forced churches to close, contributing to the dilemma of how to give the Eucharistic Gifts to believers. In some congregations, priests allowed trusted members of the community to take particles of the Eucharistic Gifts home with them and receive Communion there. This practice, however, did not become widespread.

More common was the practice of delivering the Gifts in the church, but without using the liturgical spoon (*lzhitsa*). In such cases, priests carry the particles of the Eucharistic Body, saturated with the Eucharistic Blood, to the pulpit and then distribute them to parishioners. This innovation has spread throughout local Orthodox churches. Essentially, it marks a return to the ancient practice of Communion “by hand.” The 1996 study on Byzantine liturgical spoons by Father Robert Taft played an important role in justifying such practices for the laity (Taft 1996).

Vassa, a student of Robert Taft, gave a talk at the 24th Orientale Lumen conference held online in June 2020, and made an important observation about the practice of giving lay people the Eucharistic Gifts

with the help of a liturgical spoon. This practice can be viewed as a kind of "glue" that solidifies the Church hierarchy, as it symbolizes the power of the clergy over the laity. Indeed, the difference in the way the Eucharistic Gifts are presented to clergy and laity perpetuates stratification within the Church. When the cleric delivers the Gifts with the help of a liturgical spoon, he moves his hand from top to bottom, emphasizing the vertical relationship between the cleric and the laity. Accordingly, many in the Church perceived the democratic, horizontal change of taking Communion "by hand" as a threat to the existing structures of Church authority.

As a result of the pandemic, people questioned traditional symbols and practices of the Church hierarchy. Hierarchs needed to perform divine services in a minimalist style — without subdeacons or deacons. Many celebrated liturgy according to the priestly order. Even the Moscow Patriarch, judging by the photo reports about his liturgical activity during the quarantine period, often served the liturgy alone.

The virus itself can be seen as the principal factor in the democratization of church life. Neither hierarchical positions nor the traditional privileges associated with them protect against the illness. Indeed, everyone faces the risk of getting sick and dying — patriarchs, bishops, priests, elders, monks, laity, righteous, and sinful. The virus thus created a powerful impetus for emancipation within the Church.

Among other things, the desire to maintain the hierarchical structures of the Church drives Covid dissidence. Another motivation for Covid dissidence is the perception of the virus as evil, which is inherently dualistic and Manichean. For many modern dualists, Covid has become a way to test and demonstrate their faith. Such ecclesiastical and spiritual authorities convince their flock that it is impossible to become infected with Covid if they have sufficient faith. This attitude is reminiscent of ancient "trials by ordeal," or tests to determine right and wrong that included putting one's hand into a boiling cauldron and fetching a ring or carrying red-hot iron in your hands, etc. . . Such forms of "godly violence" are discussed in a book by UCLA professor Alan Page Fiske and Northwestern University researcher Teija Shakti Rai (Fiske and Rai 2014). These tests could be invented by people or established in nature. In any case, the victim was considered guilty, and God himself confirmed their guilt.

For many modern Orthodox Christians, the coronavirus has become a sort of "trial by ordeal." As the Archbishop of Novogrudok and Slonim Gurii put it, "God permits us to be exposed to diseases and other calamities of earthly life for our sins. Sin is the cause of all man's sor-

rows both in time and in Eternity" (Archbishop Gurii of Novogrudok and Slonim 2020). The former Metropolitan of Kiev Philaret (Denisenko) was even more specific about the causes of Covid. In an interview with one Ukrainian TV channel, he said: "An epidemic is God's punishment for people's sins. The coronavirus is caused by sinfulness. People do not openly defend what is good, but spread what is evil — I'm referring to same-sex marriage" (4 kanal 2020). From this point of view, if someone gets sick with Covid, the disease becomes a stigma which implies the guilt of the sick person. The fault lies not in the fact that someone did not follow hygiene standards, but in the fact that they did not believe or pray enough. In other words, for many Orthodox Christians, Covid has become a marker of spiritual inferiority, almost a curse. For this reason, many sick hierarchs, clergy, and monastics hide their infection. They are afraid to appear spiritually flawed in the eyes of believers and lose the authority and spiritual power they have cultivated for years. According to Robert Bartlett's findings in his study *The Trial by Fire and Water*, hierarchs and priests established medieval "torture trials" as a way of exercising spiritual authority (Bartlett 1999, 36). The clerics themselves, as a rule, did not take such tests. Now, those who would judge others for contracting Covid but who could not pass the "torture test" themselves, carefully hide this fact.

In conclusion, ideological polarization between conventional "liberals" and "conservatives" also informs Church perspectives on Covid. The so-called culture wars, which have escalated within the Russian Orthodox Church in the last decade, are projected onto this topic. The Russian Church borrowed this polarization from American politics, where the split between liberal and conservative ideologies is primarily due to the bipartisan system (Prothero 2016). During Donald Trump's presidency, this polarization reached unprecedented levels and contributed to the United States' leading number of Covid cases and deaths; for many supporters of President Trump, hygienic measures against the spread of coronavirus were an attempt by the Democratic Party to impose liberal politics. This contributed to many Americans' disregard for sanitary standards.

Something similar can be observed in the Russian Orthodox Church. For many of its members, including some among the episcopate and clergy, the ideological markers of "liberal" or "conservative" have become fundamental, even more important than the traditional identities of Christian or Orthodox. For many church members who view each other through the ideological bipolar lenses of liberalism and conservatism, the measures against Covid, and even the virus it-

self, seem to be nothing more than a liberal invention and an attempt to impose their values on everyone. Father Andrei Tkachev, one of the most popular preachers of ideological polarization within the Russian Orthodox Church and a passionate denouncer of "liberalism," serves as an example of this. In March 2020, he went to the pulpit of a Moscow church wearing a respirator to ridicule those who wear the mask (Telekanal 360 2020). Later, he explained his decision:

> I wanted to wear it, so what — it's my decision. I think [wearing masks] is psychotic. I didn't care though. You can all go mad, but I'm going to laugh at you.... Whoever wants to accuse me — let him blame me for my health, I won't be offended. We have a lot of people dying from a variety of diseases every day. Why should I apologize? Did I come up with this coronavirus? It leaked from some military laboratory, let those who created it apologize (Gazeta.ru 2020).

The hierarchy of the Russian Orthodox Church in recent years has supported and sometimes even initiated both ideological polarization and fundamentalist sentiments among believers. In the era of Covid, both contributed to the faster and wider spread of coronavirus infections among members of the Church. And although the hierarchy itself is aware of the danger of Covid for the most part, it now cannot cope with skepticism, or even aggression among Church "conservatives" and fundamentalists over restrictive hygienic measures.

Despite the Covid crisis within the Russian Orthodox Church, the pandemic also contributes to the much-needed processes of catharsis and emancipation within the Church. Quarantine conditions and other health measures stimulate fruitful theological discussions that could ultimately accelerate the development of ecclesiology, Christology, and liturgical and pastoral theology.

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Torah against the Virus, Rabbis against the Government: The Ultra-Orthodox and the Pandemic

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The paper discusses several of the most remarkable responses to the Covid-19 pandemic and its social distancing measures coming from several, mostly ultra-Orthodox, Jewish communities in Israel, the United States, and Russia. It examines major elements of the crisis discourse, i.e., the hermeneutics of the causes and meanings of the pandemic; the affirmation of group borders and hierarchies as a result of the search for culprits; the relations between the religious community and the state; as well as the possible transformations of social behavior and ritual practices resulting from the crisis.

Keywords: Judaism, Ultra-Orthodox Judaism, Hasidism, Modern Orthodox Judaism, apotropaic practices, messianism, COVID-19 pandemic.

IF one imagines Judaism as a physical body threatened by COVID-19 and forced to comply with its related measures, this body would display an impressive array of reactions representing various types and trends. Some rabbis blame and condemn outsiders (e.g., China, Italy, and the LGBT community), while others disparage their own groups. In some communities, cantors record holiday liturgies for parishioners to watch at home, while in others parishioners gather in prayer at parking lots. Some Orthodox leaders criticized the state (Jewish or otherwise) and its social distancing requirements and restrictions on large gatherings for discriminating against them as ethnic or practicing Jews, while others shut down

their synagogues before the state mandated it. Some figures of authority on the Halakhic religious law permitted practitioners to join in prayer from a balcony, while others discussed whether it was acceptable to adjust the nose wire on a mask on the Sabbath or whether a food blessing should be read if one has lost the sense of taste and smell.

This paper considers the responses of several, mostly ultra-Orthodox, Jewish communities and rabbis in Israel, the United States, and Russia to the COVID-19 pandemic, and on a second level, the reactions to those responses from other rabbis, who either rebuke or justify the immediate reactions of their fellow believers. I do not, however, claim to create a comprehensive picture of Judaism's response to the coronavirus. Furthermore, this study is bound by two unavoidable limitations: methodologically, quarantine made fieldwork impossible, and thus this research is based solely on open online sources, and chronologically, it only considers the first wave of the pandemic in the spring of 2020. The available sources prescribe a broad focus, preventing the paper from exploring the undercurrents of the private everyday life of communities during these months but enabling it to collect the most significant public opinions, behavioral strategies, and ritual practices that attracted media attention. Open sources also provide an opportunity to look for patterns, to discern both what is new and what corroborates existing observations in regard to ultra-Orthodox behaviors "in the face of death" (itself long considered an important anthropological test case that can "shed new light on worldview systems and values accepted by society" (Gurevich 1992, 1), which in this case is further enriched by state regulations and the interpretation of them.

Responses of religious groups to the pandemic can be grouped into three categories: the hermeneutics of the causes and meanings of the pandemic, the search for deliverance (alternatives to the secular scientific approaches of lockdowns and vaccines), and, lastly, the regulation of change, or the assertion that religious practices remain unaltered. The crisis presents an opportunity to reaffirm existing hierarchies, boundaries, authority, and phobias. Pronouncements and actions of Jewish religious figures shed light on "semiotic technologies" (see Keane 2003, 419-20; Panchenko and Khonineva 2019) typical of their communities — perspectives on which signs are natural and which are not, and on the intentions of the agents behind unnatural signs; on hermeneutic strategies — ways of interpreting those signs; on the reactions of the authorities, which since the Enlightenment, the

Jewish community has described as a "state within a state"[1] ; and on the structure of a religiosity that resists the replacement of social/communal practices with individual ones.

The "Coronavirus pandemic" equals "lack of modesty": the hermeneutics of causes and meanings

Rabbis of several denominations provided a list of causes for the pandemic that have nothing to do with the conventional viewpoint. The semiotic ideology common to a variety of religious mindsets implies that all significant events explained as coincidental or as links in cause-and-effect chains are, indeed, not random and do not conform to the laws of nature, but are initiated by a supernal, or nonhuman, agent in response to humans' actions in order to communicate to them, i.e., they function as rewards, retributions, or lessons.

The statements of various religious leaders on the causes of the coronavirus answer one question: Why did God send the coronavirus? Matityahu Glazerson, the Israeli Rabbi and prolific scholar of Torah codes — textual patterns that make the scripture the source of numerous predictions for modernity — declared that breaches of the Kashrut laws were the cause of the pandemic, first and foremost in China, where all manner of unclean animals are consumed (*The Jerusalem Post* 2020).

The influential Sephardic Rabbi Meir Mazuz, the dean of the Kisse Rahamim yeshiva in Bnei Brak, an Israeli city with a predominantly ultra-Orthodox population, saw pride parades as the cause of the virus, calling the pandemic revenge from the One who created nature for acts in violation of it. In support of this insight he erroneously argued that the disease was not spreading in Arab countries where all open displays of gay life are prohibited (*The Times of Israel* 2020a; Joffre 2020).

Wall posters and pamphlets with mostly critical, protest content, the so-called pasquils, or *pashkavilim*[2] in Hebrew, were displayed abundantly in the streets of ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods in Jerusalem and other cities, acting as an important information channel in communities that shun modern public and social media. The pasquils

1. The expression used to describe the Huguenots after the Edict of Nantes was widely used in the eighteenth century in debates on the assimilation of Jews in order to not grant them civil rights. See Kats 2007.

2. On this subcultural phenomenon, see the documentary by L. and S. Chaplin *Yoel, Israel, and Pashkavils* (2006).

condemned lack of modesty among Orthodox women, who purchased wigs made with non-Jewish hair and/or excessively attractive ones, proclaiming it the cause of the pandemic. For example, in the Mea Shearim neighborhood of Jerusalem the equality of numerical values (*gematrias*) of the expressions "coronavirus pandemic" and "lack of modesty" were used as evidence of this theory. Another cause vividly demonstrated on the same walls was revilement, a grave offence in Orthodox Judaism that is strongly reprehended in the Talmud (Babylonian Talmud, Pesachim 113b, 118a; Sotah 42a; Shabbat 33a-b,): "*Lo medabrim [lashon hara] lo nidbakim*" ("no revilement, no sickness") (Sokol 2020a; Sokol 2020b). This conclusion was based on Biblical precedent, drawing on the occasion when God's wrath at Mariam, who rebuked Moses, took the form of striking her with leprosy (Bemidbar, or Numbers, 12). The doyen of the Litvaks and an influential figure in the Israeli ultra-Orthodox community, Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky, shares this position (Greenberg 2020).

Other Israeli and North American ultra-Orthodox rabbis offered several more interpretations of the pandemic as divine retribution. They linked it to Internet usage and the instigation of conflict in the online space (understood as the baseless hatred that destroyed the Second Temple); moral relativism and postmodernism; and noted that it targeted certain nations, China for atheism, Iran for antisemitism, Italy, the embodiment of Catholicism, for its centuries-long hostility toward Jews, and Western civilization in general (Rav Wachtfogel 2020; Slifkin 2020a; Lamber Adler 2020; Muchnik 2020). Naturally, the suggested causes reflect the traditional agenda; they establish boundaries between the inner circle and outsiders, demonize the ostracized, and point the finger at things that ultra-Orthodox groups have long seen as threats — female beauty, fashion, sexual liberty, the West, technological innovations, and secular media. The crisis inspired no new thinking; it only revealed existing ethical imperatives and phobias.

Such interpretations gave rise to criticism from liberals. Speaking from the position of Jewish religious rationalism and citing its creator, the highly influential medieval scholar Moses Maimonides, representatives of Modern Orthodox Judaism tried to blend the concept of divine retribution, quintessential to religious hermeneutics of tragic events, and an analytical cause. In their opinion, the explanation lies in punishable sin but not in unrelated ones, such as immodesty or revilement. Rather, sins directly related to the disaster cause it. Maimonides blamed the destruction of the Second Temple on Judea's military

unpreparedness; in this sense, high COVID-19 mortality rates should be attributed to society's medical unpreparedness, which is considered a sin rather than a consequence of economic conditions. This can be framed in the same way as building a fence on a balcony — in this case, the fence around people's health was not constructed properly (Slifkin 2020b).

Another hermeneutic line of thought was a search for meaning in the pandemic, i.e. what was God's goal for inflicting it on humanity in general and Jews specifically, and what lessons were people expected to learn from it? As paradoxical as it may sound, this approach searches for a positive meaning of the tragedy.

The abstracted meanings correspond to the ethos and the agenda of the denomination, to which the rabbis who declare them belong, and range in content and scale from moderate practical innovation to messianism. On the one hand, the modern liberal American Orthodox community revels in the transition to the online space where parishioners' activity is much higher (Salkin 2020). On the other hand, conservative rabbis welcome the deliverance from the inner Egypt — the dissolution of familiar life with its secular temptations and routines, which is essentially everything outside of family and religious practices (EveryJew 2020). Rabbi Shlomo Aviner, the dean of the Ateret Yerushalayim yeshiva, expressed satisfaction with the paralysis of the entire goy (i.e., secular) culture: the academe, the Ministry of Education, the entertainment industry, and international travel. The popular neo-Kabbalist, Michael Laitman, also called the virus a "good deed," more than that, "a greater good, mercy," which allows people to slow down and stop "running, running, running," and enables the entire world to stand still, preventing it from sliding into a world war and environmental disaster. In his words: "I am absolutely sure [...] if it were not for the virus [...] we would start a war in the near future" (Laitman 2020).

Many ultra-Orthodox rabbis resort to the traditional hermeneutic strategy of perceiving signs of an upcoming messianic deliverance in any substantial crisis (the so-called birthing pains of the Messiah) and claim that "the pandemic, like wars and even the Holocaust, 'was getting us closer to the redemption'" (Halbfinger 2020; Winner 2020). They perceive the mechanism that brings about the messianic age differently. Some envision it as depriving people of pastimes and vacations (the Bratislava Rabbi Lazer Brody) or bringing the collapse of world economies (the Tzfat Rabbi Alon Anava), both of which rid society of its material dependences; others, the purging of two states

which are responsible for theft and the violation of human rights and which contribute to global instability (rabbi Mendel Kessin); others, the awakening of diaspora Jews who previously had no intention of returning to the promised land until they discovered that Israel's gates were closed to them due to the lockdown (Nahman Kahana, Rabbi in Jerusalem's Old City); and still others, the actualization of the categories of purity and impurity during two-week quarantines of the infected and the contagious (rabbi Yaakov Mizrahi). These categories of purity and impurity are vital during temple services, and through their actualization, the pandemic prepares Jews for the construction of the Third Temple, an indispensable attribute of the messianic era (Mizrahi 2020). Some rabbis and kabbalists interpret the pandemic in the messianic sense, defining it as an all-pervading crisis when the Almighty alters the world order, and humans are to demonstrate repentance and faith (*tshuva* and *emuna*) and thus embark on the path to salvation and messianic deliverance (Lambert Adler 2020).

Another hermeneutic mechanism of reconciling with the pandemic, or taming it in a way, corresponds to the tradition of seeing reflections of past events in contemporary ones. Mostly, this consists of searching for precedents or parallels in events of sanctified biblical history (see Yerushalmi 2004, 35-58). Matityahu Glazerson claims that his coding method reveals that the pandemic was predicted in the Torah (*The Jerusalem Post* 2020). Predictions of the pandemic were also found in medieval commentaries to *Sefer Yetzirah* (Book of Creation) and other sources (Schnytzer 2020). Precedents were uncovered — primarily, in Miriam's and Job's leprosy — from which a moral lesson is derived: people should pray for healing, as Moses did for Miriam (Numbers 12:13) (Kipnes 2020) and should not ask why it happened, but rather what can be done. Lessons were also derived from historical precedents, such as the 1830s cholera epidemic that struck Eastern European Jews, whose rabbis prescribed obeying the authorities, praying, and burning incense. In such situations, strength is required in place of fear. Of upmost importance is confidence in the Almighty and the coming of the messiah, and faith that society is in the messianic age (Winner 2020). The same semiotic ideology allows for other ways of rooting the new event in Jewish history, ones that are not pragmatic and free of moral lessons and messianic signs. Thus, the transfer of religious practices to the online space is compared to the radical changes of the Yavneh period (70-132 CE). When the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the Second Temple, the surviving institutions moved from Jerusalem to Yavneh, and Temple Judaism turned into a synagogal

faith, in which the Torah scroll assumed the role of the sacred object, and the synagogue became the place of worship (Salkin 2020).

Helicopters, amulets, and other apotropaic practices

Rabbis of various denominations agree, understandably, that during the pandemic religion should not give way to medicine in saving lives. On the contrary, many pronouncements and actions stem from the conviction that lockdowns alone cannot defeat the virus. The most conventional religious strategy in this case is praying for the health of all the diseased, of all Jews who contracted the virus, and of specific individuals, especially sick rabbis.[3] As expected, online forums of communities and synagogues are replete with prayer requests, video recordings of prayers, and schedules of online prayer groups that produce considerable effect. Thus, the Chief Chabad-Lubavitch Hasidic Rabbi of Russia, Berel Lazar, who the Federation of Jewish Communities elected, and for whom the concept of miracle is paramount (i.e. God's presence in people's lives reveals itself through a variety of positive events that are not necessarily extraordinary but are conceptualized as miracles),[4] notes that joint prayer brought "great miracles" and that many people recovered (Moskovskii evreiskii obshchinnyi tsentr 2020).

Some circles and communities resorted to rather extraordinary but hardly novel rescue strategies fraught with accusations of doing magic. These included circling Israeli territory in a helicopter while citing kabbalistic apotropaic formulations and performing wedding ceremonies for socially disadvantaged couples, usually orphans, at a cemetery (*shvartse khasene*, or "black wedding"), a tradition that dates back to the cholera years of the nineteenth century, in which those beyond the grave are called upon to intercede with the Almighty on behalf of the congregation (Gorskie.ru 2020; Kafrissen 2020). Customary apotropaic objects, such as amulets with images of revered religious leaders, also circulated. Promising protection from the virus, representatives of the ultra-Orthodox Shas (*Shomrei Torah Sepharadim*, "Sephardi Torah guardians") party distributed amulets with a portrait of Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, the creator and long-time leader of the party

3. See the newsfeed at Matzav.com where prayer requests for rabbis' health previously appeared once every two months but beginning in March 2020 have been posted every few days.

4. On faith in miracles, see Biale, et al. 2020, 280, 69-70; Idel 1995; Miller 2014, 1011-3; Dein 2011, 41-4.

and a highly influential figure for Sephardic and Eastern (*Mizrahi*) Israeli Jews (*The Times of Israel* 2020b).

Another traditionally approved method of protection from disaster is charity, which rabbinical texts claim deters God's wrath: "Three things cancel the decree, and they are prayer, charity, and repentance" (Bereshit Rabbah, 44:12). Calls for donations and requests to extend generosity went out in many communities. The most resonant was the story of a promise made by Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky, "the prince of Torah" (Sar ha-Torah) a *posek,* an influential Halakha scholar with the authority to issue Halakhic decrees, and the leader of the Lithuanian, or Litvak, non-Hasidic ultra-Orthodox community in Israel. According to Kanievsky, a sizable donation (three thousand shekels, i.e., approximately nine hundred dollars) to the town fund (*kupat ha'ir*) would guarantee immunity (Magid, J. 2020; Slifkin 2020c; *The Yeshiva World* 2020a). Non-Orthodox forum audiences met Kanievsky's suggestion with disbelief. Moreover, they ridiculed and rebuked the call, interpreting it as profit hoarding and comparing it to the Catholic Church selling indulgences. The Kanievsky family promptly responded to the critique. Rabbi Chaim's son, Rabbi Yitzhak Shaul Kanievsky, called his father's doubters heretics and maskils ("enlighteners," apostates to ultra-Orthodox Judaism) and offered an elaborate providential explanation for COVID-19 cases in Bnei Brak. If God wills someone to contract the disease, the same providence would stop him or her from donating. The person would either never learn of it or would forget to contribute. Despite Rabbi Chaim's guaranty, a donor could also fall ill because of sins punishable by the disease. The bonus from donating consists in administering two punishments — the disease itself and the loss of blessing for the donation — at the same time, thus paying for multiple sins that deserve two separate penances (*Kikar HaShabbat* 2020). Obviously, these convoluted accountancy calculations provoked another wave of sarcasm in response (Slifkin 2020c).

Learning cannot cease: Haredi defiance and its motivations

Differences between the generic, or secular, and religious narratives of the pandemic, which include interpretations of its causes and strategies for protection, culminated in controversies when ultra-Orthodox communities defied lockdowns and social distancing regulations by refusing to close schools and synagogues or cancel large gatherings for weddings and funerals.

This disobedience is a logical extension of the above-mentioned strategies of conceptualizing the situation. If the causes and meanings of the pandemic and deliverance from it lie outside those approved by modern medicine and secular society, then widely accepted methods of curbing it are irrelevant for ultra-Orthodox groups. Moreover, an ongoing conflict of authority exists between "the laws of the kingdom," (the law of the extraneous anti-Jewish state, which Israel is to ultra-Orthodox Jews), whose prescriptions are nonetheless mandatory, and the laws of the Torah pronounced by religious leaders. This conflict reveals beliefs about the adaptive capability of religious practices. The currently relevant question is whether the epidemiological situation qualifies as "saving a life" (*pikuach nefesh*), which would render any negative Torah rule inapplicable, arises against a backdrop of reticence among religious denominations to modify norms for following rules in response to the non-catastrophic needs of the time. Some groups adapt in the hope of maintaining a following for Judaism, while others toughen the rules to preserve Judaism for the congregation.

In this case not only very adaptive Reformist and Conservative Jews but a variety of Orthodox and even ultra-Orthodox groups — American "Modern Orthodox," Israeli Sephardi, Chabad-Lubavitch Hasidim — closed synagogues (Goldman 2020), transferred religious festivities online (for example, they conducted *Megillat Esther* readings over the phone and Passover Seder on Zoom) (Sharon 2020), and cancelled optional rituals not required by Halakha, for example, kissing the *mezuzah*, the Torah scroll, and prayer books (Boroda 2020). In public addresses about the pandemic, the leaders of the Russian Chabad-Lubavitch Hasidism added to practical Halakhic recommendation representative details on the country or the community. For example, they mentioned that the Moscow Jewish Community Center is the largest in Europe and that the epidemiological status of Russia was better than in other countries (Boroda 2020; Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia 2020). They also underscored that contrary to some rebellious Israeli and American ultra-Orthodox groups, the Russian rabbinate shut down the synagogues early (Masis 2020). Thus, the Russian Chabad obeyed the state authorities (following the established Talmudic principle "the law of the land is the law") (Babylonian Talmud, Nedarim 28a; Gittin 10b; Bava Kamma 113a; Bava Batra 54b and 55a,) and expressly supported the state by sharing its narrative of superiority over other countries and Jewish communities. The same cannot be said of Litvak Jews. The Israeli Lithuanian ultra-Orthodox community represented by Rabbi Kanievsky defied a decree is-

sued by the Ministry of Health. In mid-March of 2020, in response to his grandson's question Kanievsky said: "God forbid [the shutdown of cheders and yeshivas]." In his opinion, stopping Torah studies would bring more danger to Jews than the virus as the Torah protects them (Katz 2020a; Katz 2020b; Sokol 2020a).[5] Interestingly, while male educational and liturgical practices continued without change, females could follow Ministry of Health recommendations. This decision demonstrates the secondary role assigned to women in ultra-Orthodox communities — they do not participate in the economy of salvation through studying the Torah and prayer. They are not expected to perform either of these crucial religious practices; they are to attend to men's practicing rather than to be plenipotential followers of Judaism. Other influential statements during the pandemic also reflect this view of men as practitioners of Halakhic law and religion and of women as a subsidiary element and a potential threat to the virtue of practitioners and even the entire community (demonstrated by women's lack of modesty being named as a cause of the pandemic).

Only after two weeks of ill-advised delay when cheders and yeshivas continued to function and caseloads in Bnei Brak rose to second place in the country behind Jerusalem (Rabinowitz 2020a), a much larger city with a considerable ultra-Orthodox population,[6] did Kanievsky shut down schools and synagogues, issuing a preventive reprimand to violators (Rabinowitz 2020b). However, the story of ultra-Orthodox defiance did not end there. Large gatherings continued in Bnei Brak, for example, at funerals (Peleg, et al. 2020). Similar occurrences were registered in other Haredi neighborhoods, including in the US. In April 2020, in ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods in Brooklyn police broke up numerous crowded funerals, prompting a stern appeal from the mayor to the Jewish community that was immediately criticized as antisemitic (Berger and Chapman 2020; *The Yeshiva World* 2020b; Hanau 2020). In his words "the time for warnings has passed" (de Blasio 2020).

5. Kanievsky's civil disobedience and Haredi defiance gave rise to numerous discussions in the press. See: Zaken 2020; Sokol 2020c; Halbfinger 2020.

6. Jerusalem and Bnei Brak are at the top of the list of Israeli cities with high percentages of ultra-Orthodox population. This analysis is based on the numbers of voters for the Yahadut Ha Torah (United Torah Judaism) party. According to the statistical report on the ultra-Orthodox community in Israel (Israel Democracy Institute, 2019), votes for Yahadut Ha Torah are an indicator of the numbers of Haredi in the country and their distribution among cities. Jerusalem and Bnei Brak respectively bring 24% and 19% of votes to the party, leading by far (four ultra-Orthodox cities of Beit Shemesh, Modiin Illit, Beitar Illit, and Elad combined yield 20%). See Malach and Cahaner 2019.

Reactions from the secular and non-Orthodox public ranged from sarcasm to rage. Some assumed mockingly that Rabbi Kanievsky failed to understand his grandson's question because he, like most members of the ultra-Orthodox community, did not own a smartphone or television, was not exposed to news media, and had access only to community newspapers and had thus not heard anything about the pandemic. Concerns over the irresponsible behavior of Haredi communities endangering the rest of the population (for example, having depleted the resources of Bnei Brak hospitals, Haredi occupied hospital beds in neighboring towns) led to passionate disapproval of ultra-Orthodox Jews' persistence (e.g. "insane fanaticism," "utter irresponsibility,") and calls for police or military intervention to enforce lockdowns in Haredi neighborhoods (Pfeffer 2020).

Non-ultra-Orthodox Jewish groups and authors also responded apologetically. They refused to lay blame exclusively on the Haredi, calling it biased and pointing out that most Orthodox Jews were innocent or, at least, that responsibility should be shared between them and secular Israeli citizens, many of whom — beachgoers and promenade joggers — also violated lockdown regulations (Iton TV 2020). To explain high rates of infection among the Haredi, other advocates looked to their unchangeable way of life, which includes large families and small residences, attributed violations of lockdown rules exclusively to a small number of marginals, radicals, and zealots, and claimed that mainstream ultra-Orthodox groups promptly discouraged large gatherings (citing, for example, Rabbi Gershon Edelstein, the dean of the Ponevezh yeshiva and the second-in-command in the Litvak community after Rabbi Kanievsky) (Shafran 2020).

Academic authors have called for an end to the social stigmatization of ultra-Orthodox groups and have shifted the conversation from criticizing ultra-Orthodox rigorism to exposing the inconsistency of liberal observant Jews and secular traditionist groups (Myers 2020). The scholar of Hasidism and commentator, Shaul Magid, deflects accusations of ignorance. In his words: "They are certainly aware of avoiding danger. The question is more about authority — who gets to determine danger and who gets to dictate what activities need to cease in light of it" (Magid, Sh. 2020). Moreover, Magid perceives the behavior of the ultra-Orthodox as an expression of an authentic Jewish approach, according to which the yeshiva and the study of the Torah protect from disaster. The Haredi truly believe in this and in divine presence in general while Modern Orthodox Jews cite the prayers but place their faith not in what they cite but in science. In addition, they

are inconsistent because they rely on the scientific worldview in important matters while resorting to apotropaic practices and amulets in "just in case" and "it cannot hurt" situations (for example, checking the *mezuzah*, placing notes in the Wailing Wall, treasuring dollar bills from the Lubavitch Rebbe and water bottles from Rabbi Kaduri, etc..) Magid uses Bruce Lincoln's opposition between religious maximalism and minimalism as discourses present in all religions (Lincoln 2009). He condones Haredi religious maximalism as being consistent, redirects the discussion toward secularization and liberal denominations, and exposes religious maximalism among secular and Modern Orthodox Jewry as hypocritical (Magid, Sh. 2020).

This same discussion of the justification and consistency of ultra-Orthodox versus Modern Orthodox positions on the pandemic takes place among liberal rabbis. The Modern Orthodox rabbi, Yitz Greenberg, criticizes the behavior of the Haredi from the point of view of the Jewish tradition rather than medicine or common sense. In his words "tradition includes the idea of a growing minimization of the miraculous and divine intervention over the course of history"; thus, it would be a mistake to expect this intervention and refuse to take precaution. Greenberg considers the position of the Modern Orthodox, who have as much faith as the Haredi but are forced to solve new dilemmas and adapt to new ages instead of ignoring them as ultra-Orthodox communities do, to be more appropriate, challenging, and dignified in this situation (Blau 2020).

Several publications criticize ultra-Orthodox behavior from the viewpoint of religious rationalism with references to its Jewish founder, Maimonides. The message "Torah protects," to which the Haredi appealed, is interpreted realistically rather than literally. The Torah grants wisdom to scholars who exert a positive influence on society, thus giving them protection (Slifkin 2020b). Maimonides taught to follow the commandments because the Torah prescribes it, not to initiate divine intervention (Slifkin 2020d), for the latter becomes an attempt to manipulate God's will and perform divine magic. Consequently, ultra-Orthodox leaders are accused of "false theology" — using magical thinking rebuked in the Bible — and of making erroneous decisions comparable to the fatal choice made by those who resented Zionism in the wake of the Holocaust and thus decided not to relocate to Palestine, which led to the obliteration of entire communities (Greenberg 2020).

Interestingly, opposition toward ultra-Orthodox authorities, most of all Kanievsky, ranging from marginal nonconformity to full-fledged

opposition, came from the ultra-Orthodox medium itself, demonstrating the diversity of opinions (if not open controversy) in its midst. Members of the Bnei Brak Lithuanian Jewish community announced in the media that they were sensible people, not the "idiots" depicted in the Israeli press. They asserted that not everyone blindly follows leaders, who are currently behaving like murderers, and that many parents refuse to send their children to cheders. Less influential rabbis in the community also spoke against unquestioning obedience to the gedolim ("the great," or "leaders of the generation"). One in particular, "published an article in Kikar-Shabbat on a false prophet, whom he did not name, but everyone knows who was implied [Kanievsky]" (Heil'brun 2020) Thus, leaders' declarations of power in opposition to the state often undermine their authority within the community, or their zealous position exposes underlying controversies, dissatisfaction with the leadership's policies, or, most likely, the leaders' authoritarianism, the autocratic system of power in the community.

Ultra-Orthodox groups' quarantine violations take on several contexts other than faith in being saved by the Torah and a perception of the current events, their causes, meanings, and ways of negotiating them that differ from the mainstream. One of these contexts is power: the competition between community and religion as sources of authority and knowledge and the state and medicine as secular sources. When Kanievsky sanctioned the continued functioning of educational institutions, his grandson was actually saying to him that the state wanted to close them. Of course, Kanievsky reacted with "halila," "God forbid." The state is seen as an enemy, and it is no coincidence that the Haredi speakers use the word "gezerah" ("evil decree," "persecution decree," or simply "persecution"). In some cases, historical associations evoked in connection to this are explicitly articulated. A representative of the radical Lithuanian ultra-Orthodox organization "Hapeleg HaYerushalmi" (The Jerusalem Faction) stated: "They will not close our synagogues — this is how Jewish persecution in Russia began!" (Rabinowitz 2020c)

Kanievsky literally claims the priority of the Torah over state law and, respectively, his own authority over state rulings: "Toran told us to protect ourselves long before they [the government] made up their laws" (Sharon 2020). Opposing the government manifested itself through actions as well. Stones were thrown at representatives of the state who came to inform residents about the virus and quarantine measures. Haredi behavior that was unacceptable during a lock-

down was an act of defiance against state power, a recent move in a long history of opposing or ignoring it.

Another context is social. Kanievsky exclusively issued statements about ignoring lockdown measures, yet a wide range of Haredi communities — Lithuanian and Hasidic Jews in Israel and in the US — refused to self-isolate and social distance, including those who do not follow Rabbi Kanievsky's decisions. Why? The explanation rests in the ultra-Orthodox way of life, which at its core is socialization within the community. The Haredi are above all a social category even if they are often perceived as a religious one, and it is difficult to determine the common dogmatic and ritual specifics among all Haredi Jews. Practices of socialization — minyans, Shabbat and feast meals at a rabbi's house, and other practices — distinguish them.

Established religion plays a crucial role for ultra-Orthodox Jews. The pinnacle of Haredi identity is belonging to the community, loyalty to leaders, and resentment toward the outside world. The main framework of their life comprises collective religious practices and uniformity in everything from attire to voting. The cornerstones of the ultra-Orthodox society are such institutions as the synagogue, the yeshiva, and the *kollel*, and in Hasidism these include the *shtibl* (informal prayer space and gathering separate from the synagogue) and the *tisch* (Pfeffer 2020). This explains why the Haredi were unprepared to discontinue group ceremonies. Their cancellation posed a threat to the very existence of the ultra-Orthodox community. For other denominations, including the Modern Orthodox, faith centers around individual rather than collective observance and shutting down spaces for prayer and learning did not pose as large of a threat. As far as I can see, several weeks of a lockdown that was loosely followed (in addition to large gatherings, the Haredi, for example, the Kanievsky family, continued to pray together in home minyans) failed to introduce any noticeable adjustment toward individual observance. Nor was there a transition to online practices by the end of spring 2020, contrary to what was unfolding in other communities. Furthermore, the relaxation of lockdown rules facilitated the reinstatement of the basic components of social religious routine.

* * *

It can be concluded that the pandemic and related patterns of social behavior became challenging for Jewish religious communities, spurring intellectual and political responses but failing to foster (by the

beginning of summer 2020) any notable and stable new routines or to transform religious practice in general. Temporary closure of synagogues and schools and the compulsory transfer of prayer and feast liturgies online do not count. Different reactions to the pandemic demonstrated semiotic ideologies and hermeneutic mechanisms customary in Judaism; gender and intra- and interfaith (Orthodox and non-Orthodox, Jewish and non-Jewish) hierarchies and boundaries intrinsic to a *high-group high-grid*[7] community; and power relations within the community and between the community and the state.

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Post-Christian or Post-Atheistic Society? Some Characteristics of the Russian Regime of Secularity

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The authors argue that the specificity of the Russian case of secularity is generally underestimated. This leads to two negative consequences. First, it leads researchers to consider the regimes of secularity in Eastern Europe as variations of the "Soviet model," which is false. Second, it entails inaccuracies in the analysis of the regime of secularity that has developed in post-Soviet Russia, which the authors propose to describe as "post-atheistic." The special Russian case involved the destruction of the very mechanism of religious and cultural transmission during the period of Communist rule. This destruction resulted in other features of a post-atheistic society: the relatively low relevance of religious symbols and narratives to the social fabric; the involvement of religious agency in projects of nation-building and, therefore, the predominantly ideological, rather than religious, motivation of the subjects of such agency; the top-down, rather than bottom-up, dynamic of the post-Soviet return of religion to the public sphere; the lack of broad public support for state activities in this field; and the widespread polarization of views on the role of public religion in modern society — either linking religion to cultural backwardness, or the total rejection of modernity and secular culture.

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Keywords: secularization, secularism, secularity, state-church relations, post-Christian society, post-atheistic society.

WHEN Peter Berger put forward his idea of desecularization, it made a huge impression on the academic community (Berger 1999; Berger 2008). To be sure, doubts about the validity of the secularization hypothesis had been expressed even before Berger and his colleagues' publication. One of the first skeptics was Thomas Luckman.[1] In the mid-1980s, sociologist Roland Robertson issued a refutation of the thesis about the decline of religion's public role in the modern world (Robertson and Chirico 1985).[2] And indeed, among religious scholars there have always been people convinced that the rumors about the death of God are greatly exaggerated (Hadden 1987; Stark 1997). It was Berger's work, however, that provoked an academic discussion leading to epochal shifts in the sociology of religion. Among these shifts was the decoupling of modernity and secularity. Today, a consensus has emerged in which secularization does not always and everywhere accompany modernization.[3] In addition, during discussions at that time, scholars proposed treating "secularization" as an analytical variable. It should not act as both *explanandum* and *explanans*. The case is the same with the concept of "secularism."[4] As a British researcher noted, one cannot study the phenomenon of secularism from the standpoint of secularism (Navaro-Yashin 2002). This refers not so much to the variability of this term's meanings as to its emotional and psychological connotations. Although academic literature usually associates secularism with the state's neutrality with respect to religion, authors on this topic fall into two camps: the "secular" and the "anti-secular." While to representatives of the former, secularization and secularism are a fact requiring study and description, to representatives of the latter, both these phenomena are equated with moral relativism and value disorientation.

1. Ironically, Luckmann was Berger's coauthor for several notable early works (see Luckmann 1980).
2. For responses to the arguments made by opponents of secularization theory, see Chaves 1994 and Yamane 1997.
3. Shmuel Eisenstadt's concept of multiple modernities was a response to those (Eurocentric) theories that equated modernization with westernization. In line with this logic, the concept of multiple secularities appeared later. See Wolhrab-Sahr and Burchardt 2012.
4. While secularization describes a social process, secularism signifies an ideology and a policy.

Furthermore, debates on (de)secularization relativized the idea that secularism means the distancing (neutrality) of the state with respect to religion. In particular, the work of Talal Asad, which has become paradigmatic in recent years, has demonstrated based on abundant empirical material that secularism is highly historical and contextual (Asad 2003). Behind this seemingly abstract attitude there are always specific social actors associated with certain interests and lifestyles. In some cases, this entails the preferences authorities show toward one confession over others, up to outright discrimination. In other cases, secularism results in the sacralization of the state and the fathers of the nation.[5] Lastly, the formula of Jurgen Habermas concerning "postsecularity" was a veritable conceptual discovery in the context of the debate over the role and place of religion in modern societies (Habermas 2002; Habermas 2006). This formula makes it possible to eliminate the opposition of secular and anti-secular tendencies in public life, because it asserts the *coexistence* of religious and non-religious worldviews in the same public space (for a detailed analysis of the concept of postsecularity see Uzlaner 2013a). Strictly speaking, Peter Berger himself expressed this idea while opposing the equivalence of modernity and secularization:

> Modernity is not necessarily secularizing; it is necessarily *pluralizing*. Modernity is characterized by an increasing plurality, within the same society, of different beliefs, values, and worldviews. Plurality does indeed pose a challenge to all religious traditions — each one must cope with the fact that there are "all these others," not just in a faraway country but right next door (Berger 2008, 23).

It is striking, however, that participants in these discussions sidestepped the Soviet case with its ideology of state atheism. They could not, of course, fail to mention the USSR, but it clearly lies on the periphery of their attention, and appears as the subject of separate empirical, rather than theoretical, studies (Anderson 1994; Smolkin 2018; Keller 2001; Dragadze 1993; Freeze 2015; Pospielovsky 1987–88).[6]

5. An argument the president of France, Nicholas Sarkozy, once made concerning the necessity of removing a Muslim head scarf upon entering a school is indicative of this form of secularism: one removes one's shoes when entering a mosque; why not show respect when entering a temple of the Republic?

6. In Berger's above-mentioned article, the Soviet case appears as one of three types of secularism, along with the provisionally termed "American" and "French" cases. David Martin's *A General Theory of Secularization* (1978) does not analyze the case of the USSR. In the revised version of this work (2005), the post-Soviet states are mentioned only in passing; they are not included in the theoretical discussion.

Moreover, it is tacitly assumed that the Soviet space fits into the general context in epistemological terms (that is, that it can be described in the same categories as the West): in effect, the same process occurred in Soviet territory as in Western Europe (secularization)[7] — with only this difference, that in this territory secularization was "forced." Post-Soviet Russia also appears through a similar — "normalizing" — lens: it is believed that it, like its European neighbors, is experiencing "desecularization" in certain respects and, viewed over the long term, has joined the trend of transformation toward "post-secularity" (Uzlaner 2013; Knorre 2014; Shishkov 2012; Kormina and Shtyrkov 2015; Bogatyrev and Shishova 2015).

It seems to us, however, that with this approach, some important features of the state-confessional relationship in Russia during the Soviet period escape the researcher's scrutiny. In addition, we believe that this approach hinders the understanding of the regime of secularity that has formed in post-Soviet Russia. Thus, it is implied that one can regard the countries of Eastern Europe, which were part of the Soviet bloc after the Second World War (or, like Yugoslavia, were included only in the "socialist camp"), as variations within the same secularity regime that developed in Soviet Russia. It is telling, for example, that the authors of a comprehensive collection devoted to the interaction of religion and politics draw no distinctions between the USSR and its Eastern European satellites with respect to the structure of state-confessional relations (Haynes 2009). Thus, in the section on Protestantism, Paul Freston prefers to speak generally about "Marxist-inspired regimes" in general, without making distinctions between the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and Soviet Latvia and Estonia (Freston 2009, 37); and in a survey chapter on religion and the state, John Madeley uses the concept of "the former Soviet bloc." In his view, all twenty-two states that were behind the "Iron Curtain" can be described as "atheistic *de jure*," since the separation of Church and state there meant the "exclusion [of religion] from public life" and the "cutting-off" of religious institutions from most resources, both symbolic and material (Madeley 2009, 183, 187–88). Similarly, José Casanova writes of states that are simultaneously strictly secular and non-democratic, "Soviet-type Communist regimes" as the most obvious ones" (Casanova 2008, 112). Likewise, Pippa Norris and Ronald

7. Berger and his supporters insist that this trend does not apply to North America (see Berger, Davie, and Fokas 2008). So as not to become entangled in this controversy, we shall conduct the discussion below with respect to Western Europe, not to the West in general.

Inglehart, investigating the phenomenon of "religious revival," chose all "post-Communist countries" as the object of their research (Norris and Inglehart 2004, 111–32).

We hold, however, that the regime of secularity in the USSR, on the one hand, and in the countries in the "socialist camp" in Eastern Europe, on the other, had numerous fundamental differences.

Following Monika Wohlrab-Sahr and Marian Burchardt, by secularity we understand a set of cultural meanings, based on the differentiation between religion and non-religious spheres, and by the regime of secularity we understand the customs and practices that arise around this set in a particular country or macro-region (Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt, 2012).

The specifics of the Soviet case in the context of secularization and secularism

In our view, the assertion that the Soviet case represents one of the variants of the secularization process requires significant qualification. The processes that took place in the USSR in the sphere of state-confessional relations contrast quite sharply with what transpired in Western countries.

(1) In the West, secular idioms gradually "sprouted up" into public life. In the USSR, secularism was literally implanted from above. The order the Communists established excluded both religious agency and religious symbols. Indisputably, Soviet religious policy underwent marked changes over the years, from attempts to purge completely all traces of religion's presence from public life in the 1920s and 1930s to a compromise with the Church and its exploitation for foreign-policy purposes in the Brezhnev era.[8] Nevertheless, through-

8. Throughout the two post-revolutionary decades Bolshevik authorities engaged in direct state terror against the very institution of the Church. By the mid-1930s organized religious life in the USSR was practically completely paralyzed. Public expression of piety had been made impossible. With the beginning of the war, however, the state's attitude toward religion became more pragmatic and the pressure on religion abated. The party leadership's religious policy over the next four decades was not distinguished by its consistency — one recalls a new round of anti-Church persecution under Nikita Khrushchev. Nevertheless, one can generally speak of an evolution of the state's attitude toward the ROC, from outright hostility toward a more accommodating position (with the proviso of the absolute political loyalty of religious institutions). The apotheosis of this process can be considered the censorship ban introduced in 1982 against public criticism in the Soviet press of the senior hierarchs of the Moscow Patriarchate (see Shkarovskii 2010, 397). The state constructed similar relations with the official clergy of other confessions.

out the seven decades of Communist rule, piety was considered socially censured behavior.

(2) In Western countries, the *continuity* of religious institutions is evident. In the twentieth century, these institutions lost their former significance, but they never disappeared from public space. In the USSR, religious institutions were *dismantled*. They have in fact been absent from the public space for four generations (except in Western Ukraine, Western Belarus, a large part of present-day Moldova and the three Baltic countries, where these institutions survived until the outbreak of World War II).

(3) Atheism's position as the *state ideology* for many generations has deeply marked both the institutional structure of society and the consciousness of citizens. In this case, the state did not simply distance itself from religion, forcing it out of the public sphere, as happened in the early twentieth century in France with its *laïcité* principle, which represented an extreme form of the privatization of religion. In France, despite the cautious, unfavorable (and even hostile — in the strict version of laicism) attitude of the state toward religion, its "privatization" was and is occurring: it is being dislodged from the public sphere into the private one, but the right to follow one's religion in the private space is *guaranteed by law*. In the Soviet case, the government sought to oust religion from citizens' lives altogether.[9] This was not the "hyper-privatization" of religion, as is sometimes argued (see Shishkov 2012, 167–68), but an approach toward it in which the state considered religious faith and practices undesirable at best. For religion, this situation signified its *individualization*, that is, the departure of believers into a voluntary ghetto, and, consequently, their (self)isolation from the socio-cultural mainstream. It should be noted that under other radically secular regimes, such as the Turkish government during Kemalist rule, no such isolation occurred: from the late 1920s to the late 1970s, the state pointedly distanced itself from religion, but it did not expect citizens to adopt atheistic views. Moreover, in Kemalist Turkey, unlike Soviet Russia, the goal was not the de-

9. One should note, by the way, that in Soviet conditions the dichotomy between private and public is problematic. Here the public does not exist as a certain special sphere outside the bounds of the family, which could not be seized by the state, over which the controlling ambitions of the state could not extend. Not without reason was "public property" something that in essence belonged to the state, and not to this or that community (cooperative). And not for nothing does the Russian language lack the concept *privacy*, while the expression *private property* is translated as "individual property (*chastnaia sobstvennost'*)." In Soviet Russia something belonging to an individual was referred to as "personal property (*lichnaia sobstvennost'*)."

struction of Islam as such, but rather its reform. The authorities expected that a modernized Islam would support Turkish nationalism.[10]

We believe that the above-mentioned circumstances necessarily exerted significant influence on the formation of the regime of secularity in Russia after the collapse of the Soviet system. In our view, it is appropriate to characterize the society that developed in Russia during this period as *post-atheistic*.

But before proceeding to demonstrate this thesis, let us compare features of the Soviet regime of secularity with corresponding regimes in the Communist countries of Eastern Europe.

The countries of Eastern Europe and the "Soviet" regime of secularity

It seems to us that the countries of Eastern Europe, situated in the orbit of the USSR for four decades, do not conform to the Soviet regime of secularity. One can adduce the following arguments in support of this claim.

First, in most of these countries, a certain — at times quite high — degree of *autonomy of religious institutions* persisted.[11] There were only two exceptions: Bulgaria and Albania. The Bulgarian Orthodox Church existed under the strict control of the authorities for all the years of the regime's existence, state security organs recruited most of the senior Church hierarchs, and the state conducted aggressive anti-religious campaigns right up to the mid-1980s (Nikolov 2013). In Albania, Enver Hoxha set out to build an atheist state. There were several reasons for this. Firstly, the confessional heterogeneity of the population (70% were Muslims, 20% Orthodox, and 10% Catholics). Secondly, the attitude of the ruling elites toward Islam as a "backward" religion precluded its reform (see Buchenau 2015, 271).

The autonomy of the Catholic Church was especially great, not least for organizational reasons. As is well-known, Polish Cardinal Wojtyła was elected pope in 1978. All the Catholic episcopates located in the

10. It is significant that under Ataturk the State Directorate of Religious Affairs, while banning the recitation of prayers in Arabic, simultaneously initiated the translation of the Koran into Turkish (see Sergeev and Sarukhanian 2012, 138).

11. To be sure, one should clarify that at first after the establishment of pro-Soviet regimes in these countries most of the leftist governments waged an active attack against religious institutions, which included the repression of clergy, the confiscation of church property and lands, attempts to construct a network of agents within the church, and the like. From the second half of the 1950s, however, religious policy in most of these countries softened considerably.

territory of the GDR were part of the episcopates of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). But other religious organizations also enjoyed a certain degree of independence from the state in the countries of this macro-region. For example, in East Germany from at least the 1970s the state adopted a position of non-interference in relation to the Evangelical Church (Tyndale 2010, 216). The leaders of Romania considered it unnecessary to distance themselves from the Orthodox Church.[12] Researchers note that the pro-Soviet regime in this country instead sought the support of the Church (especially at the initial stage — when undertaking unpopular reforms such as the collectivization of agriculture or the nationalization of the economy), rather than striving to suppress it (Vasile 2013, 53; Shkarovskii 2011, 217). This stance of the authorities contrasts with the position of their Soviet counterparts in the first decades of Communist rule (as well as in the Khrushchev period).

Second, most Eastern European countries differed from their Soviet patron in terms of the *"visibility" of religion in the public space*. The Church in Eastern Europe, especially from the 1960s, was actively present in education systems and in other social institutions (healthcare, homes for the elderly, penal institutions, and the like). For example, in the GDR, one could easily buy a Bible in bookstores (something inconceivable in the USSR). From the late 1970s, Sunday services were broadcast on the radio, religious programs appeared on television, and Church publishing houses and theological schools operated (Burgess 1990, 18–19). Over the same period, the Protestant Church in East Germany patronized dozens of hospitals, homes for the disabled, orphanages, and hundreds of homes for the elderly (Ward 1978, 89). In Poland in 1956 religion lessons (albeit optional) returned to secondary schools. Although five years later schools were again declared strictly secular, the teaching of religion remained possible at catechization sites in Catholic churches until the fall of the Communist regime (Gryz 2016, 19). In addition, there were clubs of Catholic intellectuals in the country, which organized pilgrimages, concerts of sacred music, and so forth. Throughout these years, the Catholic University of Lublin functioned, and from the late 1970s the free construction of places of worship was allowed. As a result, in the 1980s Poland set a European record for the number of new churches and chapels (Gryz 2016, 28).

In other words, in Eastern Europe the *limits of secularism* were defined quite early and quite clearly. The state in the countries of this mac-

12. Soviet embassy personnel in Bucharest in 1960 informed Moscow with annoyance that the authorities did virtually nothing to oppose "the noxious influence of the clerics" (see Shkarovskii 2011, 217).

ro-region — with the sole exception of Albania, and except for a short postwar period (when the authorities, following Moscow's example, pursued a policy of militant atheism) — did not seek the full displacement of religion from citizens' lives.[13] The reasoning of the ruling elites was twofold: a) they feared turning society against themselves and (b) they considered religion an integrative component of national identity.

Therefore, Eastern European leaders behaved differently toward the Church (at least, when the Church was considered nation-forming) in comparison with their "elder brother" in Moscow. When the father of Romanian dictator Ceausescu died in 1972, the head of state pointedly buried him according to the Orthodox rite. We have already discussed the role of the Catholic Church in Polish society. Here, however, is another remarkable fact: since membership in the ruling party in Poland did not preclude religious affiliation, more than half of Polish Communists were Catholics. In 1986, almost 66 percent of the members of the Polish United Workers Party called themselves believers, a situation unthinkable for members of the CPSU (Gryz 2016, 37).

Religious organizations in Yugoslavia also enjoyed a high degree of freedom (Belyakova 2014, 65). This was primarily due to the heterogeneity of the federation's population in terms of confessional affiliation — under these conditions, a cautious religious policy was part of the quest for balance in ethno-national policy. After Tito's official visit to the Vatican in 1971, the Catholic Church in Bosnia, Croatia, and Slovenia gained permission to conduct social work among the country's youth, and the active publication of religious periodicals and books began. The Serbian Orthodox Church, which had no governing center outside the country, was more dependent on the Yugoslav authorities, but it also gradually became more free. From the late 1950s, spiritual literature (including children's literature) was published under its auspices, and seminaries and theological schools opened. And Orthodox priests known for their criticism of the authorities often became bishops (Buchenau 2005, 547).

In general, the Communist governments in Eastern European countries were quite tolerant of such manifestations of religion as religious education (at least as elective courses or Sunday schools), pilgrimages, religious processions, and so forth. One of the documents of the Czechoslovak Communist Party from 1966, which stated the need

13. Even in Bulgaria, which in its religious policy came closest to the Soviet model, the repressive course with respect to believers, beginning in the 1960s, affected mainly the Muslim population (see Buchenau 2015, 271).

"to provide citizens who have not yet cast off [their] religious prejudices the opportunity to perform religious rites," serves as an excellent expression of this accommodating attitude (Murashko 2014, 327).

A third important point is that the Church in Eastern Europe had *its own social agenda*. And it was socially active. While in the Soviet case the state harshly suppressed any religious activity that could be regarded as an encroachment on its absolute authority, in the Eastern European case the state stood in ideological *competition* with the Church.

And, finally, thanks to the preservation of relative autonomy and the existence of the Church's own agenda, the Church was able to play *a prominent role in the mass movement for democratization*. In the 1980s, the Church in several Eastern European countries (Poland, the GDR, Czechoslovakia) was an active participant in the civil resistance to the Communist government. In this respect the situation in Eastern Europe was strikingly different from that in Soviet Russia and other republics of the USSR during the perestroika period. In the Soviet Union, religious institutions, having been eradicated from the system of socio-cultural communication throughout the entire period of Communist rule, stood aside from the processes of democratization that swept society in the second half of the 1980s.

During the perestroika period, the "official" religious structures took a rather cautious, wait-and-see attitude toward what was unfolding. It is symbolic, for example, that during the August coup, Patriarch Alexii II decided to issue a very restrained appeal concerning the unacceptability of bloodshed only on the night of August 21, when the failure of the GKChP's [State Committee on the State of Emergency] plans was already more or less obvious. Of course, there were individual dissident priests in the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) who exhibited considerable civic engagement — for example, in 1988 the pressure group "The Church and Perestroika" appeared, headed by Fr. Gleb Yakunin, and some of its members later joined the Russian Christian Democratic Movement and "Democratic Russia." Nevertheless, the "liberal" wing of the ROC did not exert significant influence on the perestroika movement. The same can be said of Islam. Attempts at self-organization by Muslims, the most significant manifestation of which was the creation of the All-Union Islamic Renaissance Party in 1990, took place, firstly, without the active participation and support of the muftiates, and secondly, did not lead to the emergence of a politically significant force. In other words, the movement for democratization in the USSR remained purely secular in both its membership and ideology. This situation contrasts starkly with that in Poland (where committees in support of the main opposition force —

the Solidarity movement — were often drawn directly from church parishes and clubs of Catholic intellectuals, and Solidarity itself actively employed Christian symbolism [Kunicki 2012, 183; Meshcheriakov 2014, 250]) and in the GDR (where thousands of protest rallies in 1989 originated at the Cathedral of St. Nicholas in Leipzig).

Post-Christian vs. post-atheist society

When observers describe European societies as post-Christian, they mean the following: institutionalized Christianity (the Catholic and Protestant Churches) in our day has ceased to play the role it played two centuries ago. Christianity as a symbolic system retains its significance for public life, however. Symbols and narratives associated with Christianity are part of the daily routine. The structure of weekends, the radio broadcasts of Sunday sermons, the virtually obligatory *communion* ritual in schools, the names of political parties, religious allusions, plots, themes, and imagery in show business, and much more all indicate that society, no matter how religiously indifferent it may be today, remembers what it was yesterday.[14]

In our view, it is impossible to place contemporary Russia in the same category as post-Christian Europe. It is more appropriate to describe present-day Russian society in other terms, namely, as a post-atheist society.

There are several reasons for this.

(1) Reconstructed institutions differ from institutions that have existed continuously, in much the same way as a "modern replica [*novodel*]" in architecture differs from surviving authentic structures. "Restored" buildings can, of course, make a certain impression on viewers, but they lack the unmistakably discernible aura that historical buildings have. With this metaphor we would like to emphasize the thesis advanced above concerning the reconstruction of institutionalized religion in post-Soviet Russia.[15] A situation in which religious sym-

14. Of course, the degree of this indifference varies greatly. While in some Western countries the proportion of people who consider themselves agnostics constitutes approximately half the population (as in Great Britain or France), in others non-believers form a relatively small proportion. For example, 72 percent of Italians declared the importance of religion in their everyday lives (see European Commission 2009, 11).

15. It is important to emphasize here, that "institutions" in the understanding we espouse are not only establishments (or, in other terminology, "formal institutions"), but also practices that had become habitual (so-called "informal institutions"). And while the former in the Soviet period were reproduced, albeit in extremely truncated form, the reproduction of the latter was disrupted.

bols and narratives are routinely present in the life of a society (even if they have lost their former significance) is not the same as one in which these symbols have "returned" to public life (and this is precisely what unfolded in Russia in the early 1990s). At first glance, the presence of religion in the public sphere in contemporary Russia is a sign of its normalization, when viewed from the perspective of the version of "normality" that emerged in the second half of the twentieth century in Western Europe. In both Western Europe and Russia, one sees the officially sanctioned celebration of Christmas and Easter; religion classes in schools; theology faculties at universities; priests on radio and television; chaplains in the army; and churches' charitable work in orphanages, homes for the elderly, and the like. Religion's removal from public life for seven decades, however, could not but affect how its return appears in the social communication space.

This return has given and still gives the impression of artificiality. It seems to us that the discrepancy between the actions of the state and the level of public demand for the presence of religion in public space produces this impression. To be sure, it cannot be said that this demand was entirely absent.[16] The further the 1990s receded into the past, however, with their characteristic striving to fill the spiritual vacuum that arose after the collapse of the Communist project, the clearer it became that the initiative in the process of "religious revival" came more from the authorities than from society. Both the introduction of religious education in schools and the opening of theological departments and colleges in universities did not happen thanks to demand from below — they were dictated from above.[17] Society was either indifferent to this bureaucratic dictate or responded to it with protests.[18]

16. The early 1990s were quite rich in grassroots initiatives for the revival of Orthodoxy as the national religion. In this regard one may recall the society "Radonezh," known for its eponymous Orthodox radio station, which has subsisted since its creation on donations from its listeners, as well as the appearance of organizations such as the "Orthodox Political Caucus," the Union of Orthodox Brotherhoods, and so on. Later, in 2000, the movement "For the Right to Live without a TIN (Taxpayer Identification Number)" arose, which opposed not only the state, which had introduced the TIN, but also the patriarchate, which held an excessively liberal position on this issue according to the participants in this movement. For more details on the history of these kinds of organizations and public initiatives, see Verkhovskii 2003.

17. Researchers have even proposed characterizing this process as "desecularization from above" (see Karpov 2013).

18. While the introduction of lessons on the "Foundations of Orthodox Culture" in the schools or the establishment of theology in the higher education system met only minimal protest activity, in numerous cases linked to the erection of churches in recreational zones or the transfer of museums to the property of the church, protests were massive.

(2) It is important to emphasize that the reconstruction of institutionalized religion, the matter at issue, is an inherent component of *nation-building* projects (Agadjanian 2015). Hence a specific feature of the activity of the Orthodox revival's agents (whether operating from "above" or "below"): this activity is often motivated and rationalized by *ideological* rather than religious considerations. As for the "higher-ups" of reconstructed Orthodoxy, one must mention the skepticism that the current primate of the Russian Orthodox Church evokes among many observers. According to Sergei Filatov, "Kirill and his associates preach not faith in God, but a neo-Slavophile ideology of national rebirth, secular in its essence" (Filatov 2012, 34). With respect to the "grassroots," by them we mean neophytes, as a rule, who categorically reject the values of secular society and are convinced that secularization was imposed on Russia from outside. We shall call them Orthodox radicals (to avoid the term "Orthodox fundamentalism"). There are quite a few groups in these circles united by an aggressive rejection of the "West" and of "liberalism," allegedly a Western product, latent or overt anti-Semitism, and hostility to secular culture. Members of these groups periodically participate in demonstrations, such as the disruption of civil initiatives opposing the construction of churches not approved by residents, or riots against art exhibitions. Nationalist rather than Christian ideas have inspired these actions. It is no coincidence that various kinds of ultraconservatives — of both the "statist" and ethnonationalist strands — appear as allies of Orthodox radicals. In the ideological cocktails they produce, the symbols of Orthodoxy mingle with blatantly profane images (so that icons depicting Stalin do not seem an oxymoron to those who use them).[19]

(3) Moreover, a characteristic feature of post-atheistic society is widespread dissemination of inadequate conceptions of religion's public role in the modern era. Seven decades of state atheism necessarily affected the thinking of both the majority who adopted the dominant ideology and the believing minority. After the delegitimization of religious institutions and symbols during the Soviet period, very peculiar ideas about the relationship between the secular and the sacred (as well as about the meaning of both) emerged in society. These ideas were extremely schematic, abstract, and, as an attentive researcher noticed, fantastical (Agadjanian 2006). Thus, in Russia, within the framework

19. The erotic militarism of Alexander Prokhanov is in the same vein. Religious images perform a supporting role in this writer's ideological fantasies — the primary significance here belongs to sacred Russian weaponry and the Russian victory achieved with it.

of the narrative of "religious revival" both modernity and secularity appear to be synonymous with falling into "unspirituality" and "detachment from [one's] roots." Correspondingly, returning to the roots and finding spirituality is regarded as aggressively anti-modern. Curiously, however, the opponents of religious enthusiasts in Russia — "anticlericalism" activists — also operate with fantastical images: in their eyes, religious adherence symbolizes backwardness, rejection of modernity, and unwillingness to keep pace with the progressive secular West. Alexander Agadjanian attributes both these phantasms to "specifically post-Communist naïveté." Since the mechanisms of transmitting cultural experience were destroyed during the years of Soviet rule, there were virtually no agents of "religious transmission" in society. But secularism also essentially did not exist, because "the thing that gave it meaning, religion, had been artificially suppressed" (Agadjanian 2006, 172).

(4) *Last but not least*, it is impossible not to mention the social climate formed during the years of the Soviet regime, with its "militant" atheism, glorification of people in black leather jackets, and a frankly unchristian way of solving problems ("one has to meet violence with violence"). This, of course, does not mean that Gospel principles prevail west of Russia in solving social problems (not to mention that social climate does not lend itself to any reliable measurements). Nevertheless, we believe that the heightened degree of aggression inherent in the public rhetoric of the Russian political and cultural *beau monde* bears a direct relation to the atheistic period in Russian history, giving reason to characterize post-Soviet society as post-atheistic as opposed to post-Christian.

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Orthodox Anti-Ecumenism as an Element of the Mobilization Model of Society: Political Aspects of Religious Fundamentalism

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This article explores the anti-ecumenical movement in Russian Orthodoxy, its facets of religious separation and isolationism. The article analyzes the sociocultural and political premises on which the isolationist ideology of Orthodox fundamentalists relies, in particular defensiveness and security, both of which intertwine with revanchism, geopolitical resentment, and an idealization of the Soviet past. It also explores the cultural phenomenon of "mobilization consciousness" — a psychological conviction that positive transformation processes in Russia can only occur in circumstances of extreme stress and danger. The article also compares of key features of modern Orthodox fundamentalists and radical right movements.

Keywords: Orthodox anti-ecumenism, ecumenical movement, Orthodoxy, fundamentalism, mobilization model, militarization, securitization, Soviet values.

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Introduction

AGAINST the backdrop of globalization and increasing intra-church relationships, the ideology of religious isolation seems illogical. The Theory that social progress leads to the mutual understanding of different religions and cultures is based on the UN Universal Declaration and serves as the primary factor in determining interfaith relations, sometimes in regard to issues as serious as dogmatic theological doctrines. Nevertheless, anti-ecumenical groups and the ideology of religious isolationism in Orthodoxy are significant and actively struggle against the development of interfaith contacts.

Several socio-political, economic, and cultural factors influence the phenomenon of religious isolation. For example, George Demacopoulos envisions political reasons for anti-ecumenism. He believes that anti-ecumenists in many countries operate within the framework of postcolonial logic, constructing their attitude towards the West and predominantly Western Protestant denominations and Catholicism in a manner similar to how colonized countries construct their attitude towards the metropole. Anti-ecumenism, according to Demacopoulos, demarcates the identity of Eastern Christianity, that is, it manifests itself as a component of identity politics (Demacopoulos 2017, 477). The theological scholar Will Cohen generally agrees with Demacopoulos' opinion, and religious studies scholar Vasilios Makrides characterizes the anti-ecumenist consciousness as Orthodox rigorism (Koen 2018; Makrides 2016).

Theologian Paul Ladouceur, who calls this phenomenon "ecumenoclasm," referencing the "iconoclasts" who struggled against the veneration of icons, sees in it a manifestation of neo-traditionalism in modern theology (Ladouceur 2017). He also suggests that scholars must analyze this phenomenon not simply from the perspective of theology but from those of religious studies, psychology, and politics (paying attention to the relationship between geopolitics and Russian foreign policy) (Ladouceur 2017; 2019).

This article will also analyze the ideology of the opponents of ecumenism from a socio-cultural standpoint. That is, it will explore the sociocultural and political preconditions that underlie this movement, the extent to which its principles can change as the socio-political context changes, and the degree to which, at one time or another, it constitutes the socio-cultural background of anti-ecumenical protests, which will be analyzed through the concept of mobilization. The essence of this concept rests in a particular type of societal development, the mobilization model, reflected in the work of Peter Nettl. (Nettl

1967). In such a model, social-political attitudes are tied to societal development achieved through “extreme stress,” in which extraordinary measures become the norm. In this case, this study relies on the definition of R.A. Lubskii, introduced in the section “Applying the mobilization model of social organization” (Lubskii 2006). This work also takes into account O. Gaman-Golutvina’s theoretical developments of the mobilization model, discussed later (Gaman-Golutvina 2006).

An overview of the anti-ecumenical movement and its typical arguments

The Orthodox anti-ecumenical movement arose at the beginning of the twentieth century in response to ecumenical initiatives of Christian churches. Paul Ladouceur distinguishes three groups among anti-ecumenists: the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR), Greek Old Calendarists (protesting the transition from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar), and the Athonite monks. All other anti-ecumenists who do not fit in these groups are not specifically classified (Ladouceur 2017, 324).

In response to the formation of the World Council of Churches, the ROCOR presented an expanded anti-ecumenical position. Archbishop Seraphim (Sobolev) of Bogucharsk, who managed Russian Orthodox communities in Bulgaria from 1921 to 1950 and was canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church in 2016, was one of the most influential anti-ecumenical voices. In his report “Should the Russian Orthodox Church participate in the ecumenical movement?,” read at the 1948 Pan-Orthodox Conference in Moscow, the Orthodox hierarch denounced the ecumenical movement as a Protestant-Masonic project aimed at building an ecumenical Church of the Antichrist with the intent to destroy the true Church of Christ on Earth (Sobolev 1949, 364-8). His claim against ecumenism (itself the first argument of anti-ecumenical criticism) boils down to the fact that ecumenism contributes not to Orthodox missionizing among Protestants, but, on the contrary, to the expansion of Protestant missionary activity among the Orthodox population (Sobolev 1949, 364-8).

In the 1960s “branch theory,”[1] which supports the relativistic idea that truth or holiness is not concentrated in a single Orthodox faith but

1. According to “branch theory,” Although the Church may split into several archdioceses or groups of archdioceses that are not in communion with each other, each of them can still be a branch of the one Church of Christ, provided that it continues to adhere to the faith of the undivided Church in order to preserve the apostolic succession of her bishops. See Cross and Livingston 1997.

is distributed among different confessions, gained popularity in global Orthodoxy and became the bane of anti-ecumenists. Metropolitan Filaret (Voznesenskii), one of the leaders of anti-ecumenical ideology and the ROCOR's first hierarch from 1964 to 1985, strongly opposed this theory (Filaret n.d; Filaret 1970, 348-59). According to Filaret, ecumenism is a unity based on secular foundations on the path of mixing good and evil, truth and error, which destroys the church, forcing people to become indifferent to faith and God. Archimandrite Justin (Popovich) (canonized in the Serbian Church in 2010 and revered as a saint in other local churches) supported this viewpoint in his work *The Orthodox Church and Ecumenism* (Popovich 2006). In his view ecumenism was unacceptable because it served as a rationale for a humanistic worldview — a specific understanding that suggested the possibility of existence without God, one in which progress, culture, enlightenment, and inspiration could be achieved by human forces (Popovich 2006). Thus, as the second programmatic argument in the anti-ecumenical polemic, this work singles out the idea that ecumenism is inextricably linked with a humanistic worldview, which replaces faith in God with faith in man.

One component of anti-ecumenical criticism of "branch theory" centers on the participation of the Russian Orthodox Church Moscow Patriarchate (ROC MP) in theological dialogues with Ancient Eastern Churches during 1964-1985 and from 2005 to the present day that considered lifting all mutual anathemas and condemnations (Shaio 2013). It is noteworthy that the parties of this dialogue are called the "families of Orthodox churches" (*sem'i pravoslavnykh tserkvei*). This turns out to be an even bolder claim for rapprochement than "branch theory," as it recognizes the Roman Catholic Church as a "sister church," within the framework of the Balamand declaration.[2]

Rapprochement with other churches is envisioned not only as a phenomenon associated with dogmatic disputes and negotiations, but also a reconciliation with other cultures that threaten the traditional way of life. Thus, the third programmatic argument in anti-ecumenical discourse is directed against the erosion of cultural traditions and traditional foundations. In this regard, for example, there are those who on behalf of ROCOR members correlate ecumenism not only with the ideas of progress and humanism, but also with revolution-

2. In June 1993 the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches adopted the Balamand Agreement, in which the parties rejected union as a method of seeking unity, banned missionary activity and the conversion of believers from one church to another, and strengthened the mutual recognition of the sacraments of the Orthodox and Catholic churches as "sister churches." See Speranskaia 2012.

ary transformations aimed at destroying traditional ways of life. Thus, one ROCOR scholar, the Orthodox historian Vladimir Moss, pointed out that ecumenism in the late twentieth century was continuing the work that the October Revolution began on the church front. Among other things, he attempts to correlate the ideas of ecumenism with the ideas of communism, noting that these two phenomena are aspects of one global heresy, which can be designated by the single term "ecucommunism" or "ecucommunist heresy" (Moss 2001). The basis of Moss' theory is that ecumenical and communist aspects act as revolutionary forces that destroy traditional foundations. In his words, ecumenism "is intensifying to destroy the significance of the church as a pillar and statement of Truth (I Timothy 3:15) by preaching that there is no single church" (Moss 2001), and "the communist aspect of the ecucommunist heresy is intensifying to destroy the moral, social, and eschatological teaching of the church by preaching a new 'revolutionary morality,' the goal of which is not the Kingdom of Heaven, but a communist paradise on earth. Instead of the church, we see the Party, instead of God — history" (Moss 2001). To draw connections between ecumenism and communism, Moss also points to the phonetic consonance of the terms.

Common among almost all anti-ecumenists is an eschatological position and an attraction to conspiracy theories, that is, what Bakrun calls "a culture of conspiracy" (Bakrun 2003). Ecumenical rapprochement is understood as a process that is the fruit of a conspiracy of secret forces aimed at creating a "single world state" of the Antichrist, in which a single "All Church" exists. In accordance with this position is the notion that any unification of churches is part of an external super task intended to build the world state of the Antichrist. Here, anti-ecumenists, especially those inspired by the ROCOR, rely on the book of Hieromonk Seraphim (Rose), *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future*.

The Post-Soviet era: the "non-commemoration movement" versus the "loyalists"

During the Soviet period, the clergy of the Russian Orthodox Church ignored the issue of ecumenism. On the one hand, this can be explained because under conditions of state persecution, religious life and the purity of faith receded into the background. Moreover, both Western heterodoxy and Orthodoxy were persecuted, and therefore they perceived each other similarly, as "friends in misfortune." On the other hand, given the degree of control on the part of the commission-

ers for religious affairs, the church lacked the opportunity to put issues of an external ecclesiastical nature on the agenda (Serafim 1975).

The situation changed dramatically, however, with the arrival of religious freedom. According to Fr. Alexandr Borisov "for the orthodox (*ortodoksal'nii*) part" of the clergy, the problem of ecumenism has often been "issue number one" (Borisov 1994, 155). The most striking expression of the struggle for the purity of faith in the 1990s was the "non-commemoration movement," which revived in reaction to the exceptionally complimentary speech Patriarch Alexy II delivered on November 13, 1991 in New York at a meeting with rabbis. Few believers knew that the patriarch had reproduced the text of Archbishop Nikanor's (Brovkovich) "The Mystery of Israel" speech (Smakov 1993; Solov'ev 1993, 34), which preached unity between Christians and Jews. As a result of the speech, many Orthodox priests stopped considering Alexy II to be the patriarch and ceased commemorating his name and the names of other ecumenically-minded bishops during services (Poliakov, n.d.; Hegemon Arsenii Mednikov, interview by B. Knorre; Soldatov, Alexander, interview by B. Knorre).

The "non-commemorators" of the 1990s relied partly on the experience of the Catacomb Church, which in 1927 rejected the declaration of Sergius (Stragorodskii) and ceased to commemorate bishops during divine services who were subordinate to Soviet power (Regel'son 2017). Despite their institutional disobedience to the hierarchy of the ROC MP, those who did not commemorate drew a canonical legal basis from the Church Abroad, itself an authoritative part of Russian Orthodoxy but one that was not in canonical communion with the ROC MP. Alongside "Sergianism" and the nonrecognition of the new martyrs who suffered under the Soviet regime, ecumenism represented one of three claims that the Karlovtsy[3] had against the Moscow Patriarchate. In particular, the Orthodox abroad considered "Sergianism," or loyalty to the godless authorities and a tendency to grovel before and serve them, and ecumenism itself — a phenomenon caused by "Sergianism" — as the basis of two other lies of the ROC MP. (Filatov 2004, 62).

Of course, the episcopate could not ignore the threat of the expanding "non-commemoration movement." In order to reconcile with the "non-commemorators," it selected from zealots, "loyalists," that is, those who despite their anti-ecumenism demonstrated loyalty to the hierarchy

3. The name "Karlovtsy" was assigned to the members of the ROCOR because on December 3, 1921, in Sremski Karlovtsy in Serbia, an all-foreign Russian Church meeting convened, which adopted the main provisions and documents of the ROCOR and formed its administrative structure.

of the ROC MP and opposed withdrawing from subordination. For example, the Metropolitan of St. Petersburg and Ladoga, Ioann (Snychev) (Shnirel'man 2017, 280), and the famous Russian priest from the Pskov-Pechersk Lavra, Archimandrite Ioann (Krest'iankin) (Archimandrite Ioann (Krest'iankin), interview by B. Knorre), were authoritative among fundamentalists and played a mediating role, reconciling many non-commemorating groups with the high clergy. At the same time, they held a critical view of the policy Patriarch Alexy II pursued but were loyal to the institution of the Church (Poliakov 2015). From the side of the ROC MP establishment, Bishop Nikon (Vasiukov) of Ufa and Sterlitamak, Bishop Anthony (Masendich) of Barnaul and Altai, and Bishop Veniamin (Pushkov) of Vladivostok and Primorii, made anti-ecumenical statements and voted against the document "On the Basic Principles of the Russian Orthodox Church's Attitude to Non-Orthodoxy" at the 2000 Jubilee Council (Vsiakii arkhierei 2000, 9).

Since anti-ecumenical criticism in the nineties erupted from the "lower classes" in the form of Orthodox brotherhoods, the Church leadership formed the Union of Orthodox Brotherhood (UOB) in order to have at least partial control over them. At first, the UOB acted quite independently, but over time, it took firmly loyalist positions. Other loyalist organizations loudly declared sharply anti-ecumenical positions. These include the Orthodox Citizens Union, which set itself the goal of churching and attracting the political elite to church interests.[4]

It is important to note that these organizations and others that emerged at the turn of the millennium display a fundamentally different position from the "non-commemoration movement." A characteristic feature of them is that, on the one hand, they criticize the Church leadership for ecumenism, and on the other, they try not to cross the line in their criticism and to ensure the Church that they remained loyal to the leadership, the Synod, and the structure of the ROC MP. That is, they in fact voice loyalist positions. At the turn of the millennium, criticism of ecumenism developed in fundamentalist circles along with massive protests against TINs (tax identification numbers), barcodes, and other various electronic means of accounting. As a result, Orthodox zeal is increasingly presented as anti-globalism. Speakers who criticize ecumenism point to the danger of destroying national ties and favor state institutions over international corporations and supranational institu-

4. In the post-Soviet days, the agenda of the Union of Orthodox Brotherhood (UOB) spelled out the struggle "against the influence of the West, Zionism, ecumenism, Freemasonry, and Judaism within the Russian Orthodox Church." See Verkhovskii 2003, 16-8.

tions. The underlying reason for these types of protests against ecumenism is, to a fairly strong degree, national-imperial ambitions.

For example, the aforementioned critic of ecumenism, Bishop Ioann (Snychev), headed a visible political trend, whose ideas concerned not only ecumenism, but also, to no less extent, ethno-nationalism, Russian imperialism, and the Orthodox monarchy (Verkhovskii 2005). Here, anti-ecumenism is an auxiliary element added to national-imperial sympathies. In his article "Look, do not fear. . ." Bishop Ioann noted "the anti-state, anti-national essence of ecumenism" (Bishop Ioann 2005). He points out that the ultimate goal of all ecumenical efforts is "the ideological foundation of mondialism, the ideological foundation of a new world order." Ecumenism, in his opinion, "spiritually substantiates the need for the destruction of sovereign nation states for the sake of a Western planetary dictatorship, led by the United States." Thus, for Bishop Ioann, events such as "the defeat of Iraq, the suffocation of Yugoslavia, and the barbaric bombing of Orthodox Serbs" fall in the same vein as ecumenism (Bishop Ioann 2005). Konstantin Dushenov, an active participant in the campaign against TINs and a former assistant of Snychev, notes not the religious but the political background of ecumenism, proposing that ecumenism is a veiled form of liberalism that erodes national foundations and state sovereignty.

In 2000 Valerii Filimonov, an anti-globalist leader who organized the movement "For the right to live without TIN, personal Codes, and microchips," associated the perniciousness of ecumenism with the destruction of states, nations, and religions, in an effort to create a world government based on ecumenism. He puts ecumenism on par with an attack on patriotism and national identity which in his opinion strives to remove the "nationality" (*national'nost'*) column from passports of citizens of the Russian Federation. The fact that many anti-globalists who oppose digital codes and TINs are also anti-ecumenists is unsurprising. Ecumenism, the introduction of digital personal codes, and globalization in general threaten to erode national identity and state sovereignty.

Alongside growing interest among fundamentalists in the archaic, in attempts to return "to the roots" in one understanding or the other, the anti-ecumenists of the early 2000s often emphasize strength and violence as a value (Maler 2010). Anti-globalists and imperial-oriented opponents of ecumenism are usually monarchists who support an autocratic monarchy or a deeper understanding of a strong central power. In this regard, protests against any kind of ecumenical interaction between churches sometimes correlate with ideas of *tsarebozhie* (Tsar-as God), related to the sacralization and veneration of Ivan the

Terrible and Rasputin. The figure of Ivan the Terrible, in particular, is attractive to some anti-ecumenists because within the framework of his mythological ideas, he personifies a force of national power that should help Russia isolate itself from the outside world, or at least prevent the harmful Western influences that threaten to erode national identity. This, in particular, is the opinion of Konstantin Dushenov (Dukh dyshit, gde khochet 2003). Ivan the Terrible somehow legitimizes a distinct isolationist, partly revanchist, position aimed at protecting Russia and rejecting Western social institutions that penetrated Russian society in the 1990s (Knorre 2005). It is no coincidence that in the *tsarebozhie* prayer to Tsar Ivan the Terrible a special place is given to the role of a tyrant in the struggle for the purity of the faith and in opposing heresies, heterodoxies, and gentile threats of all sorts:

> You, preserver and strengthener of the House of the Virgin Mary and the Orthodox Faith; uniter of Holy Russia; smiter of the Jewish heresy; expeller of the demons in flesh — the Yids (*sic*); eradicator of treason; conqueror and converter to Christ of the Hagars, Latins, and pagans; enlightener and savior of the Russian people.

In 2007 the only bishop who decided to openly accuse the ROC MP hierarchy of ecumenism, Bishop Diomid (Dziuban) of Anadyr and Chukotka, was a *tsarebozhie* devotee, as evidenced by the icons of Ivan the Terrible. After the discovery, the Church defrocked Diomid. It is important to recall that in 2007 he made an appeal against all bishops and clergy, and Patriarch Alexy II personally, which contained accusations of ecumenism (Ruskaia ideia 2007). For this, the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church expelled him from the priesthood in 2008. It is worth noting, however, that Diomid is the only example of a bishop of the Russian Orthodox Church who went over to the camp of the "non-commemorators."

In time, Diomid's address coincided with an event that greatly narrowed the ideological base of the anti-ecumenists. At a 2007 Council, the ROCOR signed an Act of Canonical Communion with the ROC MP, renouncing its claims against it. The signing of the act deprived ROC MP anti-ecumenists of the essential institutional support of the foreign church. Of course, the second and third groups of anti-ecumenists, about whom Ladouceur speaks (the Greek old calendarists and a special community of Athos monks), remained true to their anti-ecumenism, but the relationship of Russian Orthodox ultra-conservatives with these two groups has never been as close as with the Kar-

lovtsy. Ecumenical protests of the Russian Orthodox Church became less pronounced in the second half of the 2000s. Diomid did not recognize the decision of the Council and formed his own small group of alternative Orthodoxy separate from the ROC MP — the “Russian Orthodox Church. The Most Holy Governing Synod” (Ierarkhiia liturgicheskikh tserkvei 2018).

New defenders of a “Soviet caliber” faith

A surge of anti-ecumenical protests occurred in connection to the signing of the Havana Declaration by Patriarch Kirill and Pope Francis and in connection to preparations for a Pan-Orthodox Council, which took place in Crete on February 20, 2016 without the participation of four national churches. The most prominent and largest social actor, which initiated anti-ecumenical protests and united several anti-ecumenical groups, was the political nationalist association, the “People’s Council” (PC), headed by the imperialist-minded publicist Vladimir Khomiakov.[5] At the conferences he prepared, organizers dressed in military uniforms and demonstrated their militant passions. Moreover, the PC organized anti-ecumenical events with volunteers who visited hot spots during the hostilities in the Donbass during the 2014-2015 Russian-Ukrainian conflict, in particular, the Union of Donbas Volunteers and the ideologically linked militarized political organization ENOT Corp (Sergeev 2019). The PC itself formed in close cooperation with the military and has close ties with retired paratroopers. In particular, there are several generals among the leaders of the PC. Oleg Kassin, the cochairman of the PC, for example, is a former activist of the paramilitary organization “Russian National Unity,” which was one of the most famous ultra-right political groups in the nineties.

Political engagement is also a characteristic feature among these anti-ecumenists. For the members of the PC political motives are not only significant, they are decisive. The goals of the PC are overtly political: the protection of the traditional family, refutation of LGBT propaganda and sexual freedom, and the protection of public morality (Ofitsial′nyi sait dvizheniia “Narodnyi Sobor 2020). A shift of emphasis towards political tasks is visible. Compared to these tasks, concern for the purity of the church acts as an appendage to the general course of isolationism (since it is necessary to resist Western institu-

5. The People’s Council is an all-Russian movement founded in 2005, composed of several nationalists, imperialist, and Orthodox organizations.

tions and values, then any form of ecumenism is unacceptable). The religious component of PC activities is exclusively in the vein of "political Orthodoxy"; for example, the PC supports expanding the functions of Orthodoxy in the public sphere, in particular, introducing Orthodox Christian lessons in the education system and protecting believers from blasphemous actions (Ofitsial'nyi sait dvizheniia "Narodnyi Sobor 2020).

Groups, such as the news agency "Amin.su," headed by the well-known ultra-conservative Vladimir Semenko (discussed below), the "Messenger of the Faithful" information portal, and the Basil the Great Analytical Center, led by Deacon Il'ia Maslov, the center's senior analyst, expressed solidarity with the PC. In relation to the leadership of the ROC MP, representatives of these groups took a loyalist position. They spoke out against both the cessation of the commemoration of the patriarch and separation from Church authorities. While criticizing the Havana Declaration and any steps towards integration with Western Christians, PC activists supported continuing liturgical communions for Patriarch Kirill and remaining administratively subordinate to him. The PC began to insist that constant loyalty should be maintained towards the patriarch in order to increase the pressure on him, so as not to let him fall further into the "heresy of ecumenism" and to eventually compel him to reject the Havana Declaration.

The prevalence of representatives loyal to Church leadership among critics of ecumenism in the 2010s testifies to the growing prevalence of the fundamentalist wing within the ROC MP rather than outside of it. Nevertheless, the Havana Declaration gave some impetus to the "non-commemoration movement," although it had a smaller role in church life than in the nineties. Alexei Moroz, an ultra-right and ultra-conservative priest of the ROC MP, organized one such group. Moroz's attention to the spiritual leadership in Russia is reflected in the group's name, the "Cathedral of Orthodox Intelligentsia" or the "Cathedral of Orthodox Priests of the Russian Orthodox Church who remain in the patristic tradition." In a September 2017 resolution from fifteen priests, this organization announced a break in the canonical communion with "heretics who seized power in the ROC MP" (Rezoliutsiia sobraniia Sobora pravoslavnykh sviashchennikov RPTs, v sviatootecheskom predanii stoiashchikh 2017.) At first, Moroz swore and swore that he would never leave the "mother church"; he would simply refuse to commemorate the "heretics," but in the summer of 2019 he joined one of the fragments of the ROCOR — the Synod of the Metropolitan of Filaret (Semovskikh) — and completely broke with the Moscow Patriarchate.

Increased militarist sympathies, however, were a common feature among both loyalist zealots and representatives of the "non-commemoration movement" of the late post-Soviet period. Among the leaders of the "non-commemorators" in 2016 and 2017, Hieromonk Dimitrii Prokhin-Hristov, a former employee of the Main Intelligence Directorate of the Russian Federation, was especially authoritative and organized a number of major anti-ecumenical events in 2017 with a group of Athos monks, led by the prominent anti-ecumenists monk Raphael (Berestov) and Hieroschemonk Onufrii (Stebelev-Velaskes). With their spiritual approval an event took place at the Sinaksis (Cathedral) in Krasnodar on October 5, 2017 in which about 70 clergy participated. Also standing out among the ranks of the "non-commemorators" was Fr. Dimitri Nenarokov (the confessor of paramilitary groups of Moscow Cossacks, the centurion [junior officer] of the "Southeast" District Cossack Society in Moscow," and the organizer of several "Orthodox military-patriotic clubs" and a number of intimidation campaigns against actionist artists) (Gerasimenko 2012).

Thus, it is clear that professional military men or priests with special militant sympathies prevailed in the anti-ecumenical movement of the 2010s. They formed these militaristic attitudes within the framework of a dualistic worldview that features a battle between good and evil. If in the political plane fundamentalists formulate the idea of a fundamental confrontation, a "sacred battle" in the context of Samuel Huntington's conflict between the values of "Russian civilization" and the Western world, then in the religious sphere this confrontation is perceived in the tradition of the bloc-system. Post-Soviet anti-ecumenists inherit the value picture of the world of the "Yalta-Potsdam system," which divided Europe into "spheres of interest" (blocs) between the USSR and the Western powers. Despite the fact that the role of the ROC in this system was to implement the foreign policy of the USSR through building influence abroad, contemporary post-Soviet anti-ecumenists transform the role of the Church in this ideologeme from an exclusively official and state-dependent one to one beneficial for the development of the Church and the state as a whole. The position of the Church in the international arena transformed from a conciliatory one, when the threat of a global nuclear war was high, to one of ultra-right nationalist and imperial sentiments, accompanied by the consecration of weapons, banners of military units, and formations (Krasikov 2009).

Plainly, this is a fairly pronounced group that is not indicated in the Ladouceur classification, which includes only foreigners, Greek old calendarists, and a group of Athos monks. Russian anti-ecumen-

ists of the late post-Soviet period differ from these three groups, although they occasionally collaborate and some of their views overlap.

It is clear that anti-ecumenism is becoming increasingly political. Protests against communication with the non-Orthodox more often reflect the rejection of the Western mentality than concern for Orthodox doctrinal purity. Furthermore, the nationalist component is beginning to manifest itself more strongly in the Russian anti-ecumenical movement. The protests of many Orthodox conservatives reflect fears about the loss of national identity, the erosion of Orthodoxy as a faith inherent in the Russian people. This reveals a significant divergence between post-Soviet anti-ecumenism and the anti-ecumenical criticism of ultraconservative fundamentalists in the Moscow Patriarchate and the Karlovtsy, both of which focus on dogmatic arguments. In contrast to the ROCOR and the Soviet catacombists, the fundamental feature of modern Orthodox anti-ecumenists in post-Soviet Russia is their obvious sympathy for the Soviet heritage and ideology, i.e. they assimilate certain views on Russian foreign policy that are characteristic of the Soviets, which when translated into religious language take on the form of anti-ecumenical protests and militarism. Among "loyalists," a special reverence to the state accompanies a desire to rely on it as a protector of the purity of faith (in the zealous understanding described above). Many Karlovtsy characterized this as "Sergianism," a concept that fundamentally distinguished post-Soviet "loyalists" from the Karlovtsy.

Special service rhetoric in defense of the faith

As a result, another distinctive feature of post-Soviet anti-ecumenists is the prevalence of special service rhetoric. In protests against interreligious dialogue, anti-ecumenists demonstrate a tendency to view contacts with Western religious organizations not in a religious, but in a purely political plane, as a threat to Russia's national and state security. According to Nenarokov, interreligious dialogue is "an attempt to bring the ROC into the orbit of the Vatican's influence"; it is nothing more than "subversive activities against Russia, part of an information war that has become an aggressive conflict with Russia, with the foundations of its state and spiritual security and the spiritual sovereignty of the nation" (Sotnik 2016). That is, he puts the concepts of "state security," spiritual security, "national sovereignty," "purity of faith," and the "struggle for Orthodoxy" in the same category. For Nanarokov, state security and confessional authenticity are of the same order (Sotnik 2016). The co-chairman of the PC, Vladimir Khomiakov, expressed

a similar position at a protest when he urged Vladimir Putin to force the patriarch to abandon the Havana Declaration (Vladimir Khomiakov o vstreche Patriarkha s Papoi-iezuitom 2016). Khomiakov's appeal to the President of the Russian Federation reflected Putin's assumed authority over the patriarch not only in secular, but in church affairs.

According to professor Olga Chetverikova, another leader of modern anti-ecumenical protests, the Vatican should be viewed not as a religious organization but as a "theocratic state with considerable financial and administrative resources and the finest intelligence agencies, which work closely with Western intelligence communities" (Chetverikova 2016a). She believes that the West uses Catholicism to instill the European Union and globalization with a religious dimension (Chetverikova 2016a), one in which an ecumenical interreligious dialogue is required to "bring everyone toward a global standard of thinking and organize a system of world governance" (Chetverikova 2016b).

The aforementioned anti-ecumenists look at ecumenical contacts through the prism of securitization. This approach fundamentally distinguishes modern anti-ecumenists from those of the twentieth century, who not only did not operate with the concept of state security, but, on the contrary, criticized ecumenical contacts with the non-Orthodox for furthering state interests and censured ecumenists for their ties with the KGB. In particular, the researcher of the relationship between the ROC MP and the ROCOR, Deacon Andrei Psarev, concludes that "the ecumenical activity of the ROC during the Cold War primarily depended on the goals of Soviet foreign policy" (Psarev and Kitsenko 2020). Vladimir Moss, in his book *The Orthodox Church at a Crossroads*, elaborates on the WCC as a platform enabling the KGB to spread its influence behind the Iron Curtain (Moss 2001). Similarly, Archpriest Lev Lebedev, a prominent spokesman for the ROCOR ideology in the post-Soviet space, criticized the leader of the late Soviet ecumenical movement, Metropolitan Nikodim (Rotov), because he and his church associates "in all their activities had the powerful support of the KGB, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Council for Religious Affairs" (Lebedev 1999). That is, the viciousness of ecumenism on the part of the ROCOR was explained, among other things, by the fact that political considerations of the Russian special services guided its church leaders, thereby proving their "Sergian" subordination to the state.

Today, it is the opposite — pro-Soviet zealots of the faith accuse ecumenists of neglecting the interests of state security. Anti-ecumenists urge church leaders to weigh their actions against the instructions of

the FSB for military and strategic reasons. The language of the special services and the discourse of state security have become vernacular among many contemporary church fundamentalists. The penchant for special service rhetoric further demonstrates the adherence among late-Soviet anti-ecumenists to the Soviet past as a more "correct" ideological and political tradition. Despite the persecution of the church, adherents of the "Soviet caliber" faith consider the Soviet era preferable to the post-Soviet one in the spiritual sphere because in their opinion globalization processes had less of an imprint on it.

The penchant for special service rhetoric reflects more than just sympathy for the Soviet past, it is a manifestation of the secularization of spiritual and moral values in Russia. As Jardar Østbø posits, "spiritual and moral values" began to be securitized or defined as a matter of national security in Russia at the highest levels of state politics and political discourse (Østbø 2017). According to Østbø, in the mid-1990s the narrow concept of "spiritual security" emerged as a weapon in the hands of the "anti-cult movement," which in Russia was mainly composed of Orthodox, and was initially directed against new religious movements, sects, and non-traditional cults. Later it was expanded to include the recognition of spiritual and moral values as a matter of national security, and such recognition has already given rise to a negative attitude towards the West and Western values in general, including not simply sects, but also established Western religions (Østbø 2017). Fundamentalists do not only adopt this tendency, they try to strengthen it and sharpen it in every possible way, since their very militaristic attitude and their inclination to view the world as a battle between good and evil strengthens this security rhetoric.

Applying the mobilization model of social organization

The views of post-Soviet anti-ecumenists, described in the previous two sections, allow this study to correlate their socio-cultural preferences with the mobilization model of societal development. According to Lubskii's definition "mobilizational development is one of the ways to adapt the socio-economic system to the realities of the changing world which consists of systematically addressing conditions of stagnation or crisis through emergency measures" (Lubskii 2006). The mobilization model also presupposes implementation over the short-term. Contrary to this assumption, however, some analysts have identified long-term implementation of the mobilization model. For example, in Openkin's definition, the essential feature of the mobilization

of social organization "is the regular, widespread use of emergency means to solve the problems that constantly arise in the life of our people" (Openkin 2012). That is, the implementation of the mobilization model need not be short-term. Openkin believes that the long-term historical development of Russia is linked with the mobilization model (Openkin 2012).

Gaman-Golutvina adds to this, noting that

> A society developing in a mobilization mode is in a militarized type of development, the main imperative of which is defense; modernization impulses are formed not as a result of cumulative effect (as an organic need for economic, technological, and military-financial modernization), but come from an external source and are carried out discretely, catastrophically, revolutionarily, and often as a result of military defeats (Crimean [War], Russo-Japanese [war], and World War I) or in connection with a potential threat (Gaman-Golutvina 2006).

The extent to which the mobilization model is characteristic of the history of Russia in general is beyond the scope of this article, since the format does not allow such a large excursion into political science theory. Yet, it is clear that the socio-economic development of the USSR was carried out within the framework of the mobilization model. Currently, the model and the Soviet past influence the construction of the political system in Russia. Its appeal and influence is also expressed in the fact that within the framework of contemporary mainstream Russian political ideology, the pre–revolutionary past is interpreted through an ideological focus that fully corresponds to the mobilization model — regardless of how much it really was shaped by it.

Among the fundamentalists that this study assessed there exists a theory that any accomplishments in Russia (the correct organization of life, for example), are only possible under conditions of extreme stress, a state of emergency, or martial law — in other words, only under extreme mobilizational forces. That is a key sign of the mobilization model. Also common among the fundamentalists is the presence of a strong centralized government that has sufficient political will to force society to mobilize, including through the means of war. In such a situation, prospects for a national upsurge are associated mainly with political and military conflicts. For example, ideologues from the Center of Basil the Great note the positive shock effect of the "Russian Spring" in 2014, which actualized the importance of strong state power and the imperial past. In their words:

> "Maidan" awakened the consciousness of a large number of Russian people, not only those in Ukraine, but also in Russia. The "Russian Spring" — the return of Crimea, the heroic resistance to the ukrofascist regime on the part of the DPR and LPR[6]--made many of our compatriots, many of whom previously thought exclusively in terms of "bread and circuses," ask the question — who are we? What is the basis and core of our "Russianness"? What is the historical meaning of the existence of Russia? The correct answers to these questions are the key to our survival and we need to look for them in our imperial past. Autocracy, strong state power, and Orthodoxy are the civilizational code of Russia. Only in this sense does the "Russian Spring" have the potential to restore the uniform civilizational space of Rus (Tsentr sviatelia Vasiliia 2017).

In the aforementioned appeal to President Putin, Ilya Maslov adds: "Our economy can be national only during a war, in peacetime an American hamburger is somehow sweeter. . . (Maslov 2018). Thus, militarization is viewed not only as a factor useful for countering external threats, but also improving the national economy.

The most prominent proponent of this ideology among the clergy was Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin, who passed in January 2020. Chaplin repeatedly expressed hope for the early onset of a global world war, in which Russia would be an obligatory participant, yearning: "Peace does not last long, currently we have long been at peace, thank God it will not be much longer. Why do I say 'thank God' — a society which is too well-fed, too calm, too comfortable, and problem-free, is a society abandoned by God, this society does not last long" (Archpriest Vsevolod and L. Gozman, interviewed by T. Fel'gengauer 2015). Thus, political threats to national security are an important component of the mobilization rhetoric of new zealots.

The questions of "sacrality" and "passionarity"

In the lexicon of anti-ecumenists there are peculiar concepts and terms that reflect their mobilizational attitude and outlook on the world, in particular, "sacrality," which Vladimir Semenko, one of the leaders of the anti-ecumenical movement, frequently uses. Semenko understands "sacrality" as the intensity of people's perception of the sacred aspects of being, the depth or degree of involvement of human consciousness in religious thoughts. A high degree of "sacrality," or "in-

6. The Democratic Party of Russia and the Libertarian Party of Russia

candescent sacrality" in Semenko's formulation means a willingness to place one's faith as the highest value, raising it to a level at which one would defend it even at the cost of their life. That is, in "incandescent sacrality" religious thoughts determine a person's motivation.

> Take the Old Believers. Who was correct in the dispute with Nikon is a separate question. I suppose I think that Nikon was correct to a greater extent. But now something else is important to us: a fairly large mass of Russian Orthodox people so confidently place their faith above their earthly life that they were prepared to self-immolate in the name of this faith. This is called incandescent sacrality (Archpriest Vsevolod and L. Gozman, interviewed by T. Fel'gengauzer 2015)!

According to Semenko, "if sacrality is sufficiently incandescent, then it is impossible to remain indifferent to its action, even if you belong to a different faith" (Semenko 2007). That is, "incandescent sacrality" is capable of producing a serious missionary effect, and therefore is important in spreading the faith. Thus, the talk of "sacrality" is also associated with expansionist perspectives.

At the same time, "incandescent sacrality" can also be made to serve the protection of national interests. Semenko believes that a high intensity of "sacrality" in a nation provides it with a strong vitality, originality, and independence from outside influences (Semenko 2007). That is, where there is "sacrality," there is also state sovereignty. Semenko shows the political significance of "sacrality," for example, he speaks of "sacrality" as the sacred core of the people. Thanks to a strong "sacrality," the people become able to reject alien, foreign traditions and influences, that is, to ensure their sovereignty:

> Take the history of Rus, during those times when Orthodox sacrality was still inflamed. At first, the false Dmitry enjoyed considerable popularity among the people, but everyone knows what a sad fate befell him when it became clear to our Russian ancestors that his comrade did not respect the ancient customs of the people and, most importantly, was making advances toward the papists. "The accursed Russian question": where is that gun from which ash from the burnt body of Mr. Shvydkoi should be fired??! (said in jest) (Semenko 2007).

It is obvious that Semenko's ironic question reflects his negative attitude toward the former Minister of Culture, Mikhail Shvydkoi (2000-2004), who oriented Russian cultural policy towards Western values

"alien" to Russian consciousness. It should be noted that Semenko's concept of "sacrality" is similar in meaning to Lev Gumilyov's concept of "passionarity"/"passionaries" in the church sphere.[7] In post-Soviet Orthodoxy, fundamentalists called "passionaries'" widely used this concept to press the state to consolidate Orthodox norms at the legislative level in order to protect church interests in society.

The Church leadership also began to use the concept of "passionarity." For example, even patriarch Kirill cited the presence of "passionarity" among representatives of societal and youth organizations in a positive manner in 2014, when he thanked them for "their capacity to defend church interests" (Sokolov 2020). For Patriarch Kirill, "passionarity" is an "inner strength," "undertaken for centuries in the soul of man, including among the Orthodox; it is the capacity to resist unfavorable external circumstances" (Patriarch Kirill 2016). The need to be prepared to undertake an act of bravery, to sacrifice, to do something that requires extraordinary efforts from a person is no less "passionarity." That is, it is a manifestation of the above-mentioned mobilizationist attitude or a mobilizationist worldview.

> In fact, the idea of the act of bravery is central because the true development of the individual, of society, and of the state is linked to it. Otherwise, the brain becomes overgrown with fat, the individual and the nation lose their "passionarity." This is a wonderful concept that determines the capacity of a nation to accomplish a feat; and if "passionarity" is lost, then the civilization's potential is reduced. . . (Patriarch Kirill 2016).

Here, the patriarch cites as an example heroism in warfare, but examples also include the activities of the apostles, sports, science, and fasting. All of these, in his opinion, are inseparable from "passionarity" and heroism. The concept of "passionarity" also appeals to other hierarchs, for example, Metropolitan Tikhon (Shevkunov) (Arkhimandrit Tikhon 2013). Thus, it is not only anti-ecumenical fundamentalists who use "passionarity" but also high-ranking official Church leaders, such as Patriarch Kirill and Metropolitan Tikhon. This also allows one to attribute their view of human life to the mobilization model of societal development. Within the framework of this model, war, monastic asceticism,

7. Gumilev defines "passionarity" as "an excess of biochemical energy of living matter, opposite to the instinct vector and determining the ability to overstrain" or "the effect of excess biochemical energy of living matter, which generates sacrifice for an illusory goal." See Gumilyov 2018, 726.

and the ideology of suffering and deprivation are in the same category, since all require an act of bravery or the utmost exertion of forces.

The privatization of religion — limiting it to the field of religious life and to the framework of one's own community and rejecting its claim to influence society as a whole — is completely unacceptable for both the concepts of "sacrality" and "passionarity." Adapting one's own cultural and religious traditions to interact with other traditions and cultures is unacceptable. That is, the demands of religious and cultural tolerance, more generally, adopted in the context of globalization and demonstrating an orientation towards the values of the contemporary Western world, are unacceptable. "Sacrality" and "passionarity" directly oppose the principle of tolerance. In this regard, it is not surprising that the inclinations of those pro-Soviet anti-ecumenists have developed more successfully under the conservative political turn of the 2010s than during the Russian nineties.

Furthermore, the concepts of "sacrality" and "passionarity" can explain why, for many Orthodox fundamentalists, Muslims turn out to be spiritually closer than Western Christians, for example, Catholics, and why some Orthodox priests cite Muslims as ideal examples of the faithful. In the opinions of fundamentalists, Muslims have a stronger "sacrality" and "pasionarity" than the "lukewarm" and politically correct Western Christians because Muslims unabashedly and with no fear violate the rules of the secular world for the sake of their faith.

Right or left?

Many features of contemporary Orthodox anti-ecumenism make one wonder whether it is an analogue of ultra-right radical associations. In an attempt to identify the exceptional right-wing traits among anti-ecumenists, one faces a problem — the lack of a clear and unified definition of the Russian political right. "Left" and "right" as concepts arose in political discourse during the French Revolution and originally denoted the Jacobins — supporters of revolutionary changes, who were to the left of the king in the Legislative Assembly — and the Feuillants — supporters of a constitutional monarchy who were on the right. Thus, the Left has a progressive and modernist reputation, and the Right a monarchial and conservative one, convinced that not only are individuals unequal in nature, but nations and states as well (Lebedev 1996, 72). This position in relation to equality is fundamental for determining all the ensuing features of right-wing movements. There are further differences between the Right and the Left amongst their

economic programs: the Left are supporters of a planned economy and collective economic structures, while those on the right favor the market and private property. In contemporary Russia, however, right-wing parties gravitate towards a planned economy and strong state power, complicating the criteria for determining whether contemporary political movements are on the right (Berlin and Lukes 1988, 124).

It will be useful to draw attention to similarities among the discourse of both modern Orthodox anti-ecumenical fundamentalists and the ultra-right radical movements. Here, radicalism means the desire to carry out fundamental socio-political changes, focused not on preservation and development, but on the disintegration of existing systems (Tsentr monitoringa i komparativnogo analiza mezhkul'turnykh kommunikatsii Moskovskogo instituta psikhoanaliza. 2018).

A. V. Shekhovtsov, who analyzes the ideologies of contemporary European right-wing radical parties, deduces the following definition: "New right-wing radicalism is an ideology based on the idea of preserving, realizing, and reproducing an ethnically and culturally homogeneous type of society within the framework of the liberal-democratic system" (Shekhovtsov 2208, 143). It is worth emphasizing that the desire to reproduce a single and homogeneous society among right-wing radical movements is accompanied by intolerance and calls for segregation from all other groups that do not help to ensure ethnic and cultural homogeneity. It also follows from Shekhovtsov's definition that modern right-wing radicalism exists in conditions dominated by the liberal-democratic system and emerges in opposition to it. The contemporary revival of radical right-wing forces and their growing popularity in the world is directly linked to disillusionment with liberal ideas and backlash toward the processes of globalization. As demonstrated, Orthodox fundamentalism also draws its resources and support from disappointment and criticism of liberal-humanistic ideas and constructs its identity in opposition to globalization and modernization processes. If radical right-wing parties build their identity in opposition to the dominant liberal-democratic system, then Orthodox fundamentalism opposes Christian values that followed the processes of globalization, Westernization, modernization, and ecumenism that have dragged the world toward humanism.

The desire to absolutize what is "special" — what is socially exceptional in national self-identity — is yet another important feature of the right-wing radical discourse. S. V. Pogorelskaia notes "special" categories, such as "national character," "national culture," "nation," and "race," which due to their mystification become tools for dissociating from other groups and justifying exclusivity (Pogorel'skaia 2004). In

such a situation, Orthodox anti-ecumenists feel like an elect group, and the Orthodox Church the last bulwark of world salvation. A.V. Radetskaia identifies that anti-ecumenism is supported by the following formula: “Only one’s own faith is true, only one’s own Church is united, Holy, synodic, and Apostolic” (Radetskaia 2010, 40). Thus, the pathos of contemporary anti-ecumenism lies in claims of singularity and exclusivity, the special rights of the Orthodox Church to save people all over the world (i.e. subject them to conversion to Orthodoxy). Its task of preserving the purity of faith is posed as the task of saving the entire world, not the traditions and cultures of a different group of people.

Support for the hierarchal structure of society flows from this supremacism, i.e. convictions regarding the superiority of some groups over others. G.M. Tamash notes that new right-wing radicalism “gets along well with liberal democracy of the Anti-Enlightenment, which, without meeting any serious resistance, rehabilitated the understanding of citizenship as a privilege granted by the sovereign, in place of the previous understanding of citizenship as a universal human right” (Tamash 2000). Thus, another distinctive feature of the ideology of right-wing radicals is statism, or “the cult of a strong state that controls all aspects of society as the primary instrument of revolutionary changes” (Tsentr monitoringa i komparativnogo analiza mezhkul’turnykh kommunikatsii Moskovskogo instituta psikhoanaliza. 2018, 3). Among Orthodox fundamentalists, the embodiment of the strong state is undoubtedly the Orthodox monarchical empire.

In this context, it is worth mentioning the congratulatory letter from Deacon Il’ia Maslov, the senior analyst of the Center of St. Basil the Great, in connection to the election of Putin as President of the Russian Federation in 2018:

> Your constituency (including myself) went to the polling stations on March 18 in order to vote against the elections as a political show, but in favor of the election of the Ruler of the Russian land. [To vote] for the election of the traditional model of Russian power — a personified, autocratic power responsible before God and the people as the historical aggregate of all generations — past, present and future; a power that guards both state sovereignty and national identity. In today’s historical time frame, you embody these hopes (Maslov 2018).

It is worth noting that the Russian Empire in the contemporary anti-ecumenical project bears a clear imprint of the Soviet period and even inherits some of its ideologemes. For example, the previously mentioned block-

system, with its division of the spheres of influence between Russia and the West or its manifestations of reverence for the personality of Stalin, is one that fits into the mobilization model of societal development.

Another important feature of right-wing ideologies is the formation of specific mythologemes associated with the revival of the nation and its election. In the Western tradition, R. Griffin studied these mythologemes among fascist ideological attitudes and the "palingenetic myth" (Griffin 1993). Among the anti-ecumenists this study examines, this myth manifests itself in the rhetoric about the revival of a nation, a people, and a state, especially in the form of the "Third Rome," or the revival of a lost empire, the restoration of the natural path of Russian development which was interrupted by the revolution.

However, according to Griffin, the "palingenetic myth" only becomes the mythological core of fascist ideologies when the mythologeme rejects liberal institutions and the humanistic tradition of the Enlightenment (Potseluev 2014, 80). For anti-ecumenists, this is expressed in protest against globalization processes and modernization; in this sense, anti-liberalism represents a rejection of the Western way of thinking. Griffin notes that "at the heart palingenetic political myth lies the belief that contemporaries are living through a 'sea-change,' a water-shed," or 'turning-point' in the historical process." (Griffin 1993, 35). For modern anti-ecumenists, this is expressed in an eschatological belief that the era of the Antichrist is coming, an era which will entail various catastrophic events, such as a world war, a global crisis, a redivision of the world, as well as the appearance of a new autocratic Russian tsar. Thus, the palingenetic myth is especially important for the mobilization type of societal development because it simultaneously actualizes the past and predicts a clear picture of the future and because it reinforces the belief in the exclusivity of the group and its election to ensure the success, survival, and safety of its members. A. A. Galkin expressed a similar concept in relation to the main idea of right-wing ideologies. In his opinion, the mythologeme underlying the right-wing radical movements boils down to the following ideas: "The revival and rehabilitation in their country of the 'titular' nation, considered to be one which is ethno-biologically united and rooted in its original, primordial values, which provide the only effective form of social organization" (Galkin 1995, 12).

For example, the political program of the Russian Imperial Movement (RIM) spelled out "the establishment of a Russian national dictatorship" as one of the ways to restore the autocratic monarchy, one which would offer a "declaration of Orthodoxy as the state religion of

Russia," "protection of the interests of the Russian people," and "spiritual and cultural expansion" (Politicheskaia programma Russkogo Imperskogo Dvizheniia, n.d.). This definition characterizes the paradoxical combination of conservative ideas with revolutionary sentiments. Galkin also notes the expansion of the meaning of the phrase "Russian nation" in its use among Russian right-wing radicals, where it is often used in a cultural and civilizational sense, which allows one to combine imperial ambitions with the national idea to include the non-Slavic peoples of Russia in the concept of the "Russian nation" or to deny the territorial independence of fraternal Slavic peoples (Potseluev 2014, 86).

In the same RIM program, the declaration of Russia as a mono-national state of the Russian people is spelled out, which means it has three branches: Great Russians, Ukrainians (Little Russians [sic]) and Belarusians. They are also convinced that

> By dividing the Russian people into parts, the Bolsheviks, created phantom nations: the "Ukrainians and Litvin" (the so-called Belarusians) and the "Ukrainians" are a communist product (about which there are documents. In particular, the leadership of the Communist Party made a decision about the creation and imposition of what is called the Ukrainian language)" (Deus vult!' ili na poroge Novoi rekonkisty, n.d.).

Thus, we see the involvement of contemporary Orthodox fundamentalists in right-wing political discourse, which allows us to correlate the features inherent in them with the features of the right-wing radical movements. At the same time, they show the imprint of the left Soviet past, manifested in the inheritance of some Soviet ideologies and sympathy for both the bloc-system and the figure of Stalin.

Conclusion

An analysis of the history of the anti-ecumenical movement shows that this movement can fade from time to time and occasionally seem irrelevant and devoid of a real basis. However, it does not completely disappear. It reemerges in the context of interfaith contacts in a new form and, in the twenty-first century, demands an even stricter separation of Orthodoxy from the religious world than was the case in the twentieth century. But the transformation of the anti-ecumenical movement lies not so much in intensity as in the quality of the idea itself and the understanding of what "purity of faith" is. Whereas at the end of the Soviet period and the beginning of the 1990s, the ideology of the ROCOR guided zeal-

ots of the "purity of faith" and denounced the use of Orthodoxy as a political instrument, as an independent post-Soviet Orthodoxy took shape, anti-ecumenism became increasingly correlated with a political background, itself becoming more and more political. In addition, in the post-Soviet Russian context, it employed the Soviet foreign policy bloc-system to insulate the Orthodox cultural tradition from Western influence.

Political rather than religious motives increasingly drive anti-ecumenism as evidenced by anti-ecumenist orientation toward the foreign policy of the late USSR. The ideas of anti-ecumenists are increasingly reminiscent of the ideology of late Soviet politicians who think in the Cold War bloc-system of confrontation. Among other things that post-Soviet anti-ecumenists have in common with Soviet approaches is an aspiration for a mobilization type of social structure and development. Mobilizationism as a feature of Orthodox fundamentalist culture can explain why fundamentalists are drawn toward asceticism, austerity, and minimalism in everyday life, as well as a Soviet-style worldview. The inclination to resort to the feats of Christian martyrs correlates well with the inclination to extol the realities of the Soviet era, not only the exploits during the Great Patriotic War, but in general Soviet asceticism, coupled with the willingness to make do with less and accept hardships. Both are consonant with mobilization mentality. In this regard, it is not surprising that inherent in anti-ecumenist culture are components inherent in mobilizationism — militarism, a martial protective consciousness, the construction of groups on the model of a "military camp," and the tendency to use the language of special services or special operations in religious argumentation. It is clear that the religious struggle for the purity of faith serves political agendas.

Finally, anti-ecumenists develop right-wing discourse in a religious environment by situating Christian values in opposition to humanism, which has overtaken the world, following the processes of globalization, Westernization, modernization, and ecumenism. A fundamentally important feature of the anti-ecumenical movement that arises from politicization is that today it is not simply protesting against communion with the heterodox or reconciliation with them in religious activities, but also against alliances with the heterodox as such, be it in the sphere of social services or political issues. Due to the above features, if today one speaks of "ecumenism 2.0" (in the words of A. Shishkov) (Shishkov 2017), then one may also speak of "anti-ecumenism 2.0," the essence of which is no longer engaged in church dogmatic arguments against the establishment of mutual understanding between confessions, but rather in political arguments.

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Despite an abundance of prerevolutionary publications — both religious studies and journalistic accounts — about the Christovers, works of Soviet religious scholars (e.g. F.M. Putintsev, A.I. Klibanov), and those of modern researchers (e.g. A.A. Panchenko, A.G. Berman, and others) (Panchenko 2002; Berman 2020), the history, everyday life, and ritual practices of the Christovers / Khlysty (who proclaimed themselves the “people of God”) (Reutskii 1872, 4) are insufficiently studied and remain mysterious phenomena. In her monograph on the beliefs and ritual practices of the Christovers in the first half of the eighteenth century, Ksenia Sergazina relies on the corpus of investigative cases from 1717-1757, including those in which authorities accused Christovers of organizing orgies at night meetings, ritual sacrifices of children, and deifying teachers and “prophets.”

Similar to many scholars from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Christovers attributed the beginning of the movement to the first half of the seventeenth century. There are even Khlyst songs about the legendary disseminators of the teachings of Aver’ianov and Ivan Emel’ianov, one of whom lived during the reign of Dmitrii Donskoi, and the other, Ivan the Terrible (Butkevich 1910, 18-9; Berman 2020, 112-13). Sergazina shifts the emergence of the Christovers to the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries (while making the reservation that “the question remains open” [22]). By this time, the young movement had attracted the attention of the authorities. The materials

of these investigations became a key source base for studying Christover communities. In this early period, eunuchs had not appeared in the ranks of the Christovers (the first official investigation about eunuchs dates back to 1772) (Rozhdestvenskii 1882, 77); rather, without rejecting the previous foundations of the faith, its devotees placed a special emphasis on emasculation as a radical means of mortification of the flesh.

Before beginning, it is necessary to address terminology. The author deliberately rarely uses the designations "sectarians", "Khlysty" ("whips"), and Khlystovstvo ("whips movement"), preferring instead the terms Christovery (literally "Christ-faith") and "Chrisova vera" (literally "Faith-of-Christ") (christovshchina). Whereas the desire to avoid the biased "sectarians" is understandable, the rejection of the term "Khlysty" does not seem justified. The author should perhaps address in more detail the origin of the concept of "Christovery" and its place in scholarly terminology.

The work consists of four chapters and an appendix (newly published archival documents), but in terms of content can be divided into three parts: the history of investigations, analysis of beliefs and ritual practices, and documents. It focuses on two interrelated issues: the actual teaching and the practices of the Christovers and the "external view" of them, from which common myths manifested.

When considering Uglich (1717) and other investigative cases, the author reconstructs the course of events in detail, examining when and under what circumstances the authorities became aware of the Christovers, the focus of these investigations, and what information about the beliefs, ritual practices, and personalities of Christovers is contained in them. For example, the participants in the Uglich case not only held secret meetings, but also received Prokofii Lupkin from Moscow (28-29), indicating contacts with believers in other locales. As the investigators became familiar with the new movement, the range of questions they asked the arrested Christovers also expanded.

Of particular interest is chapter four, which examines myths about Christovers in some trials, (for example, they are accused of organizing orgies at night meetings, performing ritual sacrifices of children, and deifying teachers and "prophets"). Subsequently, such myths not only became widespread in oral folklore, but also appeared in religious studies, periodicals, and fiction. The "Khlysty" appear in famous novels: *On the Mountains* by Pavel

Melnikov-Pecherskii, *Old House* by Vsevolod Solov’ev, *Peter and Alexey* by Dmitrii Merezhkovskii, and others. In the novel *Mirovich* by Grigorii Danilevskii, one of the characters, Kondratii Selivanov, is the founder of a eunuch sect. In Soviet times, Christovers appear in *Shadows Disappear at Noon,* Anatolii Ivanov’s popular novel and in Vladimir Kashin’s police detective novel, *Another’s Weapon*. These works and others in one way or another support the odious myths about the “Khlysty”: *Peter and Alexei* and *Shadows Disappear at Noon* include zealous sexual orgies for joy, and *Peter and Alexei* and *Mirovich* feature ritual sacrifices of children. P.I. Melnikov-Pecherskii is more cautious in his accusations: in his novel, *On the Mountains*, the “enlightened” Christovers, apart from Egor Denisov, are chaste, know the scripture and theological books, and interpret them intelligently. However, the people of “lesser authority” blindly believe in legends about the human incarnations of Christ and the Lord Sabaoth, and some engage in zealous self-torture and sexual orgies.

In Soviet times, despite the prevailing anti-religious ideology, scholars of Russian sectarianism rejected the most controversial accusations against Christovers. For example, F.M. Putintsev, in his report at the Second Congress of the Union of Militant Atheists (1929) indignantly criticized the myths:

> There were many trials before the revolution, and there was never a case when the priests managed to prove that there was a cult of debauchery and orgies during divine services. <...> There have never been any orgies during the divine service, and this can be proven. We have the opposite experience; doctors reported that when examining two Khlysty (one 40 years old and the other 60), they discovered both were virgins, despite the fact that both had been married for decades (Nikolskaya 2009, 83).

The outstanding Soviet religious scholar, A.I. Klibanov held a similar position.

K.T. Sergazina rightly points out that in the twentieth century, the myths transferred from the Christovers to Russian Protestants, in particular Evangelical Christian-Baptists and Pentecostals (120), a phenomenon that requires further study. Stories of sexual orgies survived mainly in folklore, but accusations of ritual murder or its attempt were officially declared in trials during Khrushchev’s anti-religious campaign. Specifically, in one high-profile criminal case against

Moscow Pentecostals (1961), the preacher Ivan Fedotov was accused of inciting child sacrifice, for which he was sentenced to 10 years in prison (Kruglov 1961, 3; Fedotov 2006, 299-300, 305) (rehabilitated by the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation of 05/22/1996) (Fedotov 2006, 140).

When considering investigative cases of the eighteenth century, Sergazina wonders if there was any real basis for the emergence of these myths, or if they were constructed during investigations. The author finds no confirmation of these accusations (except for the practice of self-flagellation) and identifies their similarity with the "blood libel" and other pre-existing myths. In addition, the chapter analyzes sources that could have influenced the formation of myths — for example, the writings of Minucius Felix (119). Such an important topic could, however, be considered in more detail. K. Sergazina writes: "The illiterate peasants [...] were even more defenseless in front of the inquiry, which presumed in advance the teaching and praxis of the new religious group" (54). Is it possible to conclude from this selection that the author considers the investigative cases to be largely fabricated? Furthermore, if numerous facts and testimonies contradict accusations of "mass sexual orgies" (the ascetic teaching of the Christovers, the decline or cessation of birthrates in the "Khlyst" villages, and the emergence of Skoptsy, a movement against violations of chastity, etc. . .), other myths still remain poorly understood.

Sergazina also concludes that the Christovers did not have alternative sacraments, and that they — at least in the period described — neither broke from Orthodoxy (131-132) nor rejected the significance of Holy Scripture and Church tradition (77). Christopher teaching preached the importance of adhering to both the Christian commandments and a strict set of ascetic rules. Already at an early stage, a network of interconnected communities and groups began to form among Christovers: in the absence of a systemic hierarchy, teachers, "prophets," and "prophetesses" stood out. They enjoyed special respect, but there is no evidence of their deification, and even less regarding their self-identification with Christ or the Mother of God.

The scholarly novelty of the work should be noted; using a wide range of sources, the author creates a multifaceted picture of the life of Christopher communities in the first half of the eighteenth century. The author questions common myths about Christovers and makes an

interesting conclusion that in the eighteenth century the mysterious movement was not as different from Orthodoxy as is commonly believed. The study is also significant for its interdisciplinary approach to the topic: the analysis of material is carried out from historical, religious, and source criticism perspectives. The final of these is especially noteworthy because the methodology for studying judicial and investigative documents (both from the pre-revolutionary and Soviet era) still remains poorly developed.

A notable phenomenon in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Christovers moved to the sidelines of the Russian religious life in the twentieth, and today even the question of their existence is controversial. As noted by A.S. Lavrov, the author of the foreword to this book, "the Christovers have no living heirs, unless, of course, we count the outspoken imposters" (5). This statement can neither be considered fully proven nor completely erroneous because the process of "extinction" of the Christovers remains a "blank spot" in historical religious studies. Therefore, I would like Ksenia Sergazina's research on the development of the spiritual culture of the Christovers not to be limited to the 18th century, but to be continued.

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