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The Problematics of Violence in Post-Soviet Russian Orthodox Discourse

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This article analyzes a number of issues in contemporary Russian Orthodoxy from the perspective of the link between religion and violence. After a brief survey of the theoretical apparatus, it turns to the imagery of “cosmic war” in the discourse of official representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate and of Orthodox nationalists; to the ways that imagery affects questions of ethics and morality; to the events of 2012 associated with the performance of Pussy Riot and the reactions to it; and to examples of symbolic and actual violence. The analysis will conclude with eschatological images of “cosmic conquest” and with what might be called the “sacrificial crisis” of Orthodox parish subculture. This article then attempts to draw links of religion and violence on the theoretical level.

Keywords: symbolic violence, religious violence, religious symbolism, Russian Orthodox Church, Orthodox nationalists, parish subculture.

RUSSIAN scholarship lacks interdisciplinary academic studies of “religion and violence,” whereas Western scholars have been working on that problematic since the late 1960s and early 1970s. Even before then, anthropologists (for example Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, Marc Bloch, Nancy Jay and Elaine Scarry), sociologists (Emile Durkheim) and philosophers (Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, and Georges Bataille) addressed the two phenomena (Juergensmeyer and Kitts 2011: 93–216). The American sociologists Charles Glock and Rodney Stark pioneered the new academic endeavor with studies of Christian anti-Semitism, as did Rene Girard independently with his well-known *Violence and the Sacred*, inspired by the events of May 1968 in France, and Walter Burkert in *Homo Necans* (Glock and Stark, 1966; R. Girard [Girard] 2010; Burkert 1983). Scholars such as Regina Schwartz, Hector Avalos, Jessica Stern, R. Scott Appleby, Mark Juer-

gensmeyer, Margo Kitts, Charles Selengut, Michael K. Jerryson and many others continued this work (Avalos 2005: 75–102).

The final quarter of the twentieth century was noteworthy for the escalation of violence throughout the world that was evidently linked in one way or another with religion. This includes the Islamic Revolution in Iran of 1978–79, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the so-called “troubles” of Northern Ireland, the Sarin attack in the Tokyo subway system carried out by activists of Aum Shinrikyo on March 20, 1995, and the like. How is all of this to be understood? The events of September 11, 2001 (9/11), were a turning point, evoking not only a broad public response worldwide, but also a fresh wave of journalistic, theological, philosophical and, finally, academic reflection.

This article is an effort to analyze a range of phenomena in Russian Orthodoxy in the post-Soviet period (beginning in 1991) by connecting them with the concept of violence. I will proceed as follows. I will examine the image of cosmic warfare in the discourse of official representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate and of Orthodox nationalists (Verkhovsky 2007: 6–32; Verkhovsky 2003; Pain and Verkhovsky 2010: 171–210) and the ways that imagery affects questions of ethics and morality and the family and childrearing. Then I will turn to the events of 2012 associated with the performance of Pussy Riot in the Cathedral of Christ the Savior and the reactions to it and, after that, to examples of symbolic and personal violence. I will conclude with an analysis of eschatological images of cosmic conquest and what might be called the “sacrificial crisis” of the so-called “parish milieu” (to which I will devote a separate section) (Tarabukina 2000; Tarabukina 1998; Levkieskaya 2011: 409–24; Akhmetova 2010).

R. Scott Appleby observes that one of the modes of religious existence is “militancy,” which can be manifested in violent or non-violent forms, in martyrdom, for example, in enduring persecution or in peacemaking (Appleby 2000: 28). Every religious tradition is internally pluralistic and to a certain degree contradictory, and in itself offers resources for both strategies. Appleby calls this duality “the ambivalence of the sacred.” Therefore, recognizing that official documents of the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate, henceforward, ROC MP), the discourse of Patriarchs Alexy II and Kirill and Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeev), and sermons in parish churches frequently articulate a stance of non-violence, I propose that they derive from the very same sources of religious tradition (for example, the Gospels and the works of the Holy Fathers) as the theory and practice of violence. In this article, I will focus exclusively on the second, on the phenom-

enon of violence, bearing in mind the above-mentioned ambivalence of the sacred as I proceed.

My source base is extensive and includes official documents of the ROC MP, sermons and interviews, news items, readers' comments on them, and even blogs and internet forums — in a word, materials from the public sphere and evidence from “lived religion.” Their representativeness rests on a qualitative method — I draw on them to demonstrate actual patterns of religious consciousness in which religious violence is rooted. I exclude from this survey the Christian “new religious movements” (NRM), alternative Orthodoxy (the communities of the True Orthodox Church and the Autonomous Russian Orthodox Church), and Old Belief, focusing on the ROC MP and the two interconnected subcultures that interact with it: Orthodox nationalists and communities representing the parish milieu. To conceptualize this empirical material I draw on the work of Alexander Verkhovsky (including his proposed division of nationalism into ethno-cultural and civilizational), of Nikolai Mitrokhin, Alexander Agadjanian, Konstantin Kostiuk, Arina Tarabukina, Maria Akhmetova, Sergey Shtyrkova, Zhanna Kormina and others (Kostiuk 2006; Kormina and Shtyrkov 2011: 389–413).

The format of this article does not permit me to consider still other questions, such as the role of the anti-cult movement in Russia from the 1990s through the early years of the twenty-first century in shaping the structures of violence or the problem of divine violence as reflected in the polemics of the “modernist” (relatively speaking) and (unquestionably) anti-modernist groups within the Church (Agadjanian 2011: 255–76).¹ In addition, I have consciously distanced myself from the normative/legal approach, although that approach makes it possible to connect empirical material with an analysis of legislation currently in force, for example, with reference to the legal definition of religious radicalism and extremism (for example, Verkhovsky 2013: 134–58).

Religion and Violence: A Theoretical Outline

Johan Galtung, the Norwegian sociologist and mathematician and the founder of peace and conflict studies, suggests the division of vio-

1. Although its opponents, the “anti-modernists,” created the term “Orthodox modernists,” it is open to conceptualization from a scholarly perspective. For a sense of Russian Orthodox Modernity from an “anti-modernist” perspective, see Vershillo.

lence into *cultural*, *structural* (indirect) and *personal* (direct or actual) (Galtung 1969: 170). Each of these forms can call forth the others: cultural violence creates the conditions for manifestations of structural violence, as structural violence does for manifestations of personal violence. This division is linked with the particular definition of violence that Galtung provides: “Violence is here defined as the cause of the difference between the potential and the actual, between what could have been and what is.” Only that which can be avoided can be called violence. For example, death from tuberculosis in the eighteenth century is not violence. However, now, when tuberculosis can easily be cured, to let a person to die of tuberculosis is violence. The frame of cultural violence encompasses those forms of culture — such as the “symbolic sphere of existence” — that can be used to legitimate violence, be they religious, ideological, linguistic, artistic, or the like (Galtung 1990: 291).

Insofar as the primary concern here is religion, below I will focus on distinguishing structural from personal (or immediate) violence. The absence of complete “composition,” that is, of a subject, an object, and a relationship or interaction between the two, distinguishes the first from the second. In addition, the first is a precondition for the second, as in cause and effect. Here is an example. On April 23, 2005, having badly beaten parishioners of the Pentecostal church “Reconciliation,” young people who identified themselves as Orthodox shouted: “We have only Orthodox Easter here in Russia,” and called the parishioners “sectarians” and “devils” (“V Kemerovskoi oblasti”). It is clear that, for them, hatred toward abstract “sectarians” preceded hatred for actual Pentecostals, and that hatred in turn preceded the act of personal violence. Alexey Perov, the pastor of the Protestant church “The Community of Christ,” whose son was badly beaten by classmates on the Day of Knowledge (September 1, the first day of school in Russia — the editors), confirmed that exaggerated references to “sectarians” and “traitors” had long circulated in their village (“Pervoklassnika”). The organizers of the pogrom that took place in the gay club *7 Free Days* and Abbot Sergii (Rybko), who approved of the pogrom afterward, also “recognized the face of the enemy”: they were “sodomites,” that is, members of the LGBT community (“Pogrom v gei-klube”).

Is it possible to say something about an act of personal violence — murder, for example — if the act “stands alone,” that is, if we do not know who is murdered and who is the murderer? I propose that actual violence in itself is meaningless and empty of substance;

it gains substance and meaning when regarded from the perspective of the structural violence that provides its context. Above, I presented three cases. Stable structures (for example, religious images of the enemy) evident in all of them make it possible to designate the aggressors as religious actors and their actions as religious violence. Violence always begins long before the “deed,” in “word and thought,” that is, in something “general” and frequently indistinct, which can and must be the subject of investigation.

According to Hector Avalos, religious violence arises from the ability of religious consciousness to generate imaginary scarce resources, including access to the divine will (for example, through Scripture), sacred space, group privileging, and salvation (Avalos 2005: 30). Scarce resources therefore should be recognized as structures of violence, in the same way as dualistic models that counterpose light and darkness, or the way religious images of the enemy (“sodomites,” “sectarians,” and the like) function in the discourse of religious communities. However, to one degree or another, structural violence is inherent in all “comprehensive doctrines,” including all religious traditions (Agadjanian 2012: 92).

At the border between structural and actual violence lies symbolic violence (Burdé [Bourdieu] and Passeron [Passeron] 2006). Its action is neither objective nor subjective: it cannot be proven, but it is taken on faith by its subject or its object, or by both simultaneously. For example, the performance that Pussy Riot carried out in the Cathedral of Christ the Savior (CCS) on February 21, 2012, was an act of violence (blasphemy) to the group’s opponents, but not to its supporters. Symbolic violence represents a mediated, symbolic act; in it, the symbol (in the given instance the sacred space of the CCS), as the structural element in the system of signs, becomes the mediating link between the subject and object of violence.

There exists an opinion, set forth, for example, in Regina Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain*, that identity, *any* identity, is a fundamental structure of violence. The American scholar writes that “identity, as an act of distinguishing and separating from others, of boundary making and line drawing, is the most frequent and fundamental act of violence we commit. Violence is not only what we do to the Other. (...) Violence is the very construction of the Other (Schwartz 1994: 5). Georges Corm agrees. He emphasizes that identity functions as a “reference to the negative pole” (Korm [Corm] 2012: 60). Both have in mind mainly collective, not individual, identity. According to this model, the formation of identity, that is, *identification*, occurs when the subject establishes

boundaries by setting itself off against everything external that is other and alien. James Wellman and Kyoku Tokuno take this thesis to its logical limit, presenting identification as “conflict and tension” with “external” reality. “Conflict and tension” here become the “engine” of collective identity as a whole, and collective religious identity in particular (Wellman and Kyoko 2004: 292).

Is it possible to agree with the contention that *every* identity is formed in this way? I think that the answer is no. Sociologists distinguish between positive and negative identity, and the model outlined above describes only the latter. The Russian sociologist Lev Gudkov observes that negative identity actually functions as “self-construction from the opposite,” expressed “as the rejection of its qualities or values” (Gudkov 2004). Identity, in the form of negative identity, can be construed as a structure of violence, and with that caveat, I think it is possible to work with the concept.

The American religious studies scholar and sociologist Mark Juergensmeyer maintains that one of the key forms of the religious imaginary, together with sacrifice, is “cosmic war,” the war of the sacred order and modes of perception with profane chaos and senselessness (Juergensmeyer 2003: 149; Juergensmeyer 1994: 159). In the context of this “definition of the situation” (borrowing this term from Goffman 2000), religious identity consists of identifying “us” with the sacred, and “the Other” with the profane, thus, marking them as “the enemy.” The profane, that is the “negative pole” of religious thinking, is violence as such, which spreads like a contagious illness, a “disease” that strives to “devour” the sacred, so to speak, and is personified in the image of the cosmic enemy: the devil, dees, genies, demons and the rest of the “spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12, NRSV). Thus, religious violence promotes the victory over violence as such and the felicitous separation of the sacred and the profane, as opposed to their infelicitous blending. Rene Girard also uses the metaphor of a vaccine: the lesser, sacred violence is necessary to avert the far greater, profane violence. He also hypothesizes the existence of “sacrificial crises” — particular space-time and social continuums in which such prevention becomes impossible due to the extraordinary intensity of the “infection,” the erosion of all forms of traditional and rational authority and also of certain social institutions (the institution of ritual sacrifice first among them) (Zhirar [Girard], 2010).

For religious consciousness, the essence of the “enemy” is that it is almost always a projection of the cosmic enemy onto mundane so-

cial and political realities. The “enemy” is amorphous because it represents the consequence of two divergent processes: on the one hand, it is the personification of the cosmic enemy and its association with particular communities; on the other, it results from the de-individualization and dehumanization of particular people and groups.² These processes explain why members of the LGBT community are conceived of as “demonic warriors of the Antichrist (“Novaia Ataka Sodomitov”), why there are references to representatives of the “global cabal” “who, resembling people only in appearance, in fact represent the demonic spawn of people with dead souls” (Gracheva 2010: 3–4), and even why, when L. D. Simonovich-Nikshich, the head of the Union of Orthodox Banner-Bearers (hereafter, UOB), burned a poster of the pop singer Madonna, he concluded with the words “the devil has been driven out” (Simonovich-Nikshich 2012). They demonstrate all the futility of attempts to understand how the various categories of enemy differ from one another, for example, “yids” from “masons,” because they are essentially all shades of one and the same formless enemy. Moreover, my use of the term “representative of the global cabal” is clearly only the consequence of my inadequate linguistic resources: the “enemy,” as the personification of the chaotic profane, always appears simultaneously as singular and multiple, faceless and many-faced, so that to designate “a part of the whole” is unthinkable in relation to the sphere of total violence, in which there is neither a whole nor its parts.

The Diversity of Images of “Cosmic War”

Turning now to empirical material, it is useful to bear in mind that cosmic war as a structure of violence, paradoxically, can lead to the theoretical and practical affirmation of either violence or non-violence and reconciliation. The discourse of justification or legitimation of violence is usually built on the foundation of the discourse of victimization, the perception of oneself as an object of violence. The religious community defines a situation as one of conflict, in which the community itself is subjected to violence from the “enemy” (or “enemies”) and therefore must respond with defensive or defensive-aggressive (preventative) violence.

2. That is, the deprivation of individuality and human status respectively. For an exploration of the connection between these two processes with the dynamic of violence see Zimbardo 2013.

The official position of the Moscow Patriarchate under Patriarchs Alexy II and Kirill is civilizational nationalism — an inclusive version of ethno-cultural nationalism, in which Orthodox civilization is opposed to internal and external secularism (embodied in the image of “the West”), with its heavy artillery of liberal values (Verkhovskii 2012).³ Opposition takes place on the global level as well as on the canonical territory of the ROC — in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus’. Patriarch Alexy described the state of affairs thus:

We must recognize that a well-planned, bloodless war is being conducted against our people, with the aim of destroying them. A powerful industry of corruption is at work in western nations. (...) It has led to an unprecedented demographic crisis in our land, which is resulting in the rapid degeneration and extinction of our people. (...) We must rouse the Russian people to fight for the life of their children. We are calling neither for war nor for pogroms, but summon our people to the heroic deed [*podvig*] of confessing their Christian faith in the face of militant evil (“Vystuplenie patriarkha Alekseia” 2000).

The discourse of victimization invariably goes hand in hand with a dualistic vision of the world, which to a greater or lesser degree includes an interpretation of contemporary political realities. In his book *Autocracy of the Spirit: Notes on Russian Self-Consciousness*, Metropolitan Ioann (Snychev) set forth the classic conceptualization of Orthodox ethno-cultural nationalism. The book proposes viewing world history as the opposition of “dark forces” and Holy Russia, as incarnated in an Orthodox tsar and the collective, “communal” [*sobornoi*] personality of the Russian people (Metropolitan Ioann [Snychev] 1994). This approach is characterized by a militaristic aesthetic and an army and warrior ideal (Kostiuk 2002). Mikhail Nazarov, the commentator and author of the so-called “Letter of the 500,” writes about the struggle between the forces of Christ and the Antichrist (Nazarov 1996), while the Orthodox political scientist Tatiana Gracheva refers to two “sacral world centers of opposition (...) these two imperial nuclei — one filled with the spirit of Christ, the other a concentrated incarnation of the spirit of the Antichrist” (Gracheva 2009: 8) Obviously, the idea of cosmic war pervades all these models.

3. A. Verkhovskii observes that “Orthodox civilization” in the interpretation of the ROC MP can include representatives of other religions so long as the Russian and the Orthodox remain hegemonic.

Until 2012, the themes of morality and ethics, of the family and child rearing were practically the only ones prompting Orthodox nationalists to appeals for violence. The theme was invariably set forth in the language of cosmic warfare, to which was added the vested interest of each Orthodox believer in preventing himself and his family from becoming victims of “dark forces,” as presented, for example, by Sodom and Gomorrah or by *iuvenal’shechiki*, that is, advocates of juvenile justice (JJ).

The image of Sodom and Gomorrah (or simply Sodom) becomes the “semantic center” of the profane, juxtaposed to Holy Russia and joining together all the “dark forces” with the tag of “sex”: homosexuals, bisexual people, transgender people, pedophiles, and also sex educators and JJ activists (Nil’sen [Nielsen] 2004). Thus, its characteristics are exactly the same as those of Holy Russia, but with a “minus” sign: it is supra-personal, that is to say, it is not reducible to the sum of its personifications; it is a *chaotic* (anti-*cosmic*) structure with indefinite boundaries that strives to destroy the Christian cosmos (Molodets 2012). Therefore, “Sodom will not pass!” — that is, the attack on LGBT-related endeavors — is the most popular “genre” of actual violence by Orthodox nationalists. Thus, for example, the brutal beating of the journalist Elena Kostiuhenko by a member of UOB (“Chto zashchishchala Elena Kostiuhenko”), the skirmish following the action “Day of Kisses 2,” timed to coincide with the State Duma’s consideration of a law to forbid “propaganda” of non-traditional sexual relations (“Gei-aktivisty”), the pogrom at the gay club *7 Free Days* noted above, and many more incidents.

In the best case, homosexuality is considered a consequence of the Fall. “The Bases of the Social Conception of the ROC” calls it the “depraved disfiguring of God-given human nature” (“Osnovy sotsial’noi kontsepsii ROC”). In the worst, homosexuality is called the “spiritual act of renouncing God in favor of subordination to Satan, with the goal of realizing his (the person’s — A. Z.) voluntary entry into the anti-church of Satan” (“Novyi mir’ izvrashchentsev”). The distinction of the “sodomite” as a form of the enemy is that he conveys the meaning of the profane like a contagious disease — he is literally “infected” with violence and carries it to the city and to the world. This aspect of the “sodomite” can also be depicted as demonic possession: LGBT-related events supposedly create the conditions for demons to move from person to person (“Novaia Ataka Sodomitov”). In the above quote, Patriarch Alexy II emphasized the very same sense of “contagion” as “corruption.” “The Bases of the Social Conception of the ROC” also remark:

The propaganda of vice inflicts particular damage on the tender souls of children and youth. (...) The church summons all believers to work together with all morally healthy forces to struggle against the dissemination of that diabolic temptation, which is capable of destroying the family and undermines the foundations of society (“Osnovy Sotsial’noi Kontseptsii”: 80–81).

K. Mikhailov rightly observes that it is in “The Bases” that the first reference to the vague notion of “homosexual propaganda” appears in an official document (Mikhailov 2013: 87–98). He thinks that this text likely influenced the first legislative project of the State Duma Deputy Alexander Chuev concerning the prohibition of “homosexual propaganda” in 2003, and the analogous initiatives that followed, culminating in the passage of the law “On the prohibition of propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations among minors” on June 11, 2003 (“Gosduma priniala zakon”). It is worth observing that this notion also carries the above-mentioned sense of “contagion,” which thus crosses over from religious to secular discourse.

Images of cosmic warfare manifested with particular clarity in 2012, after the scandal concerning the luxurious life-style of the patriarch, and especially after the performance of Pussy Riot in the CCS on February 21, during the trial of three members of the punk rock group: Natalia Tolokonnikova, Maria Alekhina, and Ekaterina Samutsevich. The Moscow Patriarchate’s important shift to a discourse of victimization had broad public resonance.

Public opinion was divided sharply (Uzlaner 2013: 93–133). The “clerical” side repeatedly called the situation a “campaign against the church,” and an “information war,” or simply “warfare,” indicating that this *breaching of the boundary of the sacred* and *war against the sacred* might also manifest itself in the other “traditional religions” of the Russian Federation. Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin affirmed: “in my time, crimes have occurred such as the defilement of synagogues and Jewish cemeteries, and of mosques, the burning of the Koran and other acts of vandalism and offenses to religious feelings. In all these cases, Russia’s traditional religious communities supported one another and showed solidarity” (“Patriarckh ne otpustit grekh Pussy Riot”). Various marginal groups actually did undertake acts of symbolic violence against the ROC. In this category belong the sawing down of a holy cross on the construction site of the Cathedral of the Holy Martyr Tatiana in Moscow; acts carried out by the activists of FEMEN (“Aktivistki FEMEN spilili krest”); and the destruction of four more cross-

es in Arkhangelsk and Cheliabinsk by “The People’s Will” (*Narodnaia volia*) movement (“V Arkhangel’ske i Cheliabinskoi oblasti”; “Otvetstvennost’ za spilivanie”). These and many other acts of violence were characterized as blasphemy, proof of the reality of war against the sacred (Chaplin 2012).

The discourse of Patriarch Kirill and Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeev) had an emphatically peaceful character, while the image of the “enemy” in their remarks was amorphous but completely this-worldly: “anti-clerical forces,” “organizers of provocations,” “ill-wishers” (Patriarkh Kirill 2012). The Archpriest Dimitry Smirnov expressed himself more harshly:

The attacks against the Russian Orthodox Church that we observe at present are the start of a war against the Church. It is the beginning of persecution. (...) The manifestations of that warfare are clear. Among them are the ordinary remarks and reactions of the defenders of the punk group’s blasphemous acts, that whole extremely vile assault on the Most Holy Patriarch, and the various statements in the media made on all sorts of grounds and groundlessly. All this is very clear. And the horns are showing! It is evident that the Antichrist is at work. (...) It is clear that there are two poles. Anti-Christian depravity, the destruction of the person, is at one and at the other, Christian values (...) The people who are now unfurling this Anti-Christian campaign want to replace Christian culture with Sodom and Gomorrah (Smirnov 2012).

The quotation demonstrates both the demonization of concrete social forces, and the dualistic opposition of Sodom and Gomorrah with Holy Russia. Lawyers for the security guard of the CCS, whose religious feelings were offended by Pussy Riot’s performance, elaborated that cluster of associations still more clearly, asserting that there is a “mystic component” in the group’s performance that is connected with the terrorist act of 9/11, “with Satan, who is engaged in destruction” (“Gruppe Tolokonnikovoi luchshe ponesti nakazanie”). The lawyers were also convinced that the young women should be accused of sowing religious discord. The Orthodox journalist Alexander Shchipkov called the performance in the CCS “an act of terrorism,” and wrote that “a systematic effort to discredit Orthodoxy has been unfolding since 2011” and that “a Cold War has been declared against the Russian Orthodox Church” (Shchipkov 2012: 67, 99). He characterizes the letter of June 19, 2012, which a public interest group of Orthodox believers addressed to the patriarch with a request for “interces-

sion” before the authorities on behalf of the members of Pussy Riot, as a schismatic “ultimatum,” and writes that “the letter writers have de facto declared war openly against their Primate and by extension against the entire church, inasmuch as one of the warring sides has presented the other with an ultimatum — the strong side to the weak” (Shchipkov 2012: 100). In the best case, the goal of this cold war is the dethronement of Patriarch Kirill, in the worst, the abolition of the patriarchate as an institution. The nominally Orthodox journalist Maksim Shevchenko has also employed obscure militant imagery. He has contended that Pussy Riot’s performance is “the incursion of the forward detachments of liberal-western civilization into the territory of the inner life of millions of Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Georgians and Armenians” (Shevchenko 2012).

The war against the sacred is also associated with the physical annihilation of the clergy, as the same Archpriest Dimitry has declared. Characteristically, Damir Mukhetdinov, the deputy chair of the Muslim Spiritual Board of European Russia, has also expressed that point of view — and, it is worth noting, on a website associated with the Russian Orthodox Church. He maintains: “there is a single root cause — godlessness and aggressive Satanism” (Mukhetdinov 2013). Later, Andrei Turchak, the governor of Pskov Oblast, said of the murder of the well-known preacher Fr. Pavel Adelheim, that “the murder of a clergyman is a challenge to society and an affront to the very foundations of morality, ethics and faith” (Protodiakon Kuraev 2013). This statement seems to me representative: from the perspective of religious consciousness, the murder of a clergyman actually appears to be a challenge to the sacred (in the given instance, to society), that is, to the existing order itself.

The most recent edition of Article 148 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, which establishes criminal responsibility for “offending religious feelings,” also reflects this sense of violation of the boundaries of the sacred. In it, “offending religious feeling” is equated with the desecration of sacred objects venerated by the faithful (<http://pravo.gov.ru>). Although this idea has repeatedly been criticized, legal experts from the ROC point to its presence in the Federation’s law “On Freedom of Conscience and on Religious Associations,” and contend that the feeling is “a person’s reverential attitude toward what seems to him sacred according to his religious beliefs” (“V ROC dali kommentarii”). I think that this idea has been used to project onto secular legislation a concept of “the sacred” and “the boundaries of the sacred” that do not belong there. I have already noted earlier a

similar adoption by secular discourse of a concept from religious discourse (in connection with the notion of “homosexual propaganda”). The well-known traditionalist Geidar Dzhemal has noted this explicitly, for example.

Analogies, that is, projecting similarities onto the discourse of victimization, permits “getting to the very essence” of a situation, and, giving it a definite scale, going beyond its limits. The central analogy in “clerical” discourse became the persecution of the Church in the Soviet period and, first and foremost, the repressions of the 1920s and 1930s. Archpriest Vladimir Vigiliansky, the former head of the patriarch’s press service, compared the rhetoric of opponents of the clerical position to the rhetoric of the early twentieth century and wrote: “we are actually facing the horrors of those genuine persecutions that occurred under the Bolsheviks” (Vigilianskii 2012: 134). Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin made a comparable allusion during his meeting with students in the Communications Department of Moscow State University, when he contended that during the 1920s, the faithful should have responded to the Bolsheviks with the force of arms (“Chaplin: *nravstvennoe delo khristianina*”).

The Moscow Patriarchate’s discourse of victimization was elaborated in a justification or a legitimization of force, specifically in the idea of the *defense of objects sacred to Orthodoxy* by Cossack fighting squads (*druzhiny*) and Orthodox activists such as the Russian Orthodox movement of Ivan Otrakovsky, Holy Rus’ (Sviataia Rus). In August 2012 Otrakovsky declared: “we reserve the right to take appropriate measures when we discover individuals who carry out blasphemous acts against the sacred objects of the Russian Orthodox Church, offend the Orthodox faith and show aggression toward the clergy” (“Sviataia Rus”). Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin, Archpriest Vladimir Vigiliansky and Patriarch Kirill (Patriarkh Kirill 2013) himself all supported the initiative to create Orthodox fighting squads, although Patriarch Kirill was considerably more restrained in tone than the two archpriests. Even more extravagant schemes followed, such as the creation of an “Episcopal Regiment” of guardsmen of the patriarch, which, however, remains unrealized (“Moskvu budut patrolirovat” 2012). Acts of personal violence by people associated with the fighting squads also occurred; for example, the attack on the Museum of Erotic Art on the Arbat (“Zashchitniki pravoslavnykh sviatyn”). The extraordinarily catalytic effect of the discourse of violence on the internet also bears mentioning. Here I will quote a series of radical statements by people who identify themselves as Orthodox: “We should have dragged those

whores by their hair from the cathedral and impaled the scum so that no one ever dares to mock the Orthodox faith”; “Don’t take offense if next time we break your legs. Christians are tired of being weak”; “Burn those prostitutes in a bonfire!!!!” “I hope that they’ll be convicted after all. Although it would be more merciful simply to suffocate them quietly, so they don’t suffer, because they are biotrash. And the children should be sent to a monastery” (“Koshchunnitsy”).

The idea of defense formed the basis of Orthodox Actionism (or Orthodox Activism), subsequently crystallizing as the Orthodox social movement God’s Will. Arising among Orthodox youth in reaction to the performance of Pussy Riot, Orthodox Actionism became a reflection, a mirror image, of the actions of various art groups of the 1990s and 2000s. Its leaders are Dmitrii “Enteo” Tsorionov, Dmitry Pimenov, and Andrey Kaplin.

The God’s Will movement’s activity takes both violent and non-violent forms, and is noteworthy for its popularization of symbolic violence as a separate “genre,” familiar before then only from the “banner-bearers’ auto-da-fe” of the Union of Orthodox Banner-Bearers. Based on an analysis of the actions of God’s Will and UOB, I conclude that only a few of these actions were performances that to one extent or another were oriented toward an audience and to the media; the rest, on the contrary, occurred in less public settings. The first category includes “A Prayerful Stand against the Anti-Madonna” (referring to the American singer Madonna, “Molitvennoe stoianie”) in the course of which her portrait was impaled, and the “Russian auto-da-fe” in Kuzminki (“Russkoe autodafe”), while to the second belong the burning of an effigy of Elton John (“Khorugvenosnoe autodafe”) and what the website Credo.ru, with restraint, designated a symbolic hunt for gays (“Okhota na geev”), but which the UOB, with its characteristic expressiveness, called “A Spiritual *Oprichnina*” or “Death to Fags!” (“Dukhovnaia Oprichnina”).⁴ Of the various measures undertaken by God’s Will, I focus on the “Fire of Penitence” (“Andrei Kaplin”) and “Enteo sets the Earth Afire” (“Enteo podzheg Zemliu”). The tools of the UOB are fire and cold weaponry (bows and arrows, knives, “aspen stakes”); the actionists restrict themselves to fire. All these things are used to destroy anything associated with “the enemy”: the attack is directed not only at the enemy but also at that which is abstract-

4. During the reign of Ivan the Terrible, a portion of the Muscovite tsardom designated the “oprichnina” was set aside for the personal use of the tsar. For a period of years this area was terrorized by a band of warriors, the “oprichniki,” responsible directly to the tsar. — The editors

ly profane in him, his “enemy-ness.” Before and after the burning of Madonna’s portrait, L. D. Simonovich-Nikshich declared: “we are not acting to oppose people, we are acting to oppose sin” and “she has flown to Hell. The devil has been driven out” (“Khorugvenostsy”). In the course of the action “The Fire of Penitence,” Andrey Kaplin and Dmitry Enteo sketched the masks of Pussy Riot (balaclavas) on the asphalt and then spread incendiary materials on the sketches and set them alight. It is typical that the alternative name for the action is “Andrei Kaplin and Dimitrii Enteo Burn Pussy Riot”: by the operation of sympathetic magic, the portrayal of “the enemy” and the “enemy” itself become identical. The goal of the ritual is to drive out the demon. Kaplin calls upon the members of the punk rock group to “tear off the masks and become the slaves of God Maria, Nadezhda and Ekaterina”: his action is aimed at the disappearance of the “enemy,” with the girls or without them. Enteo’s actions, according to him, invariably take place in the context of the struggle with infernal forces, that is, of cosmic war (“Aktivist Dimitrii Enteo”). Symbolic violence, in contrast to actual violence, makes it possible to act within legal limits, as L. D. Simonovich-Nikshich (“Monitoring SMI”) and Enteo point out (Enteo 2012).

Actual religious violence can be *organized* or *unorganized*: there is a difference between regular endeavors in the spirit of “Sodom Will Not Pass!” in the course of which Orthodox nationalists oppose LGBT activists, and the spontaneous assault on a draftee, a parishioner of the Orthodox Church of Mary, the Sovereign Mother of God (“Marian Center”)⁵ by Alexey Malykhin, an employee of the Military Commissariat, who shouted: “We have a different God and a different church, while there’s something wrong with what you have, so we’re going to save you” (“V moskovskom voenkomate”). It is significant that the very same structures, in particular images of “the enemy” — in this instance, “sodomite” and “sectarian” — preceded both incidents; the attack on them becomes not simply an act of defense against them, but also a *sacred duty* (Appleby 81). These two “enemies,” more than any others, are the targets of personal violence on the part of believers.

The sacred is capable not only of restraining the onslaught of the profane that threatens to “devour” it; the sacred can also carry out the forcible conversion of the profane and “devour” it in its turn. That

5. “The Orthodox Church of Mary the Sovereign Mother of God” represents a new religious movement and is not affiliated with the ROC MP. — The editors.

sense of conversion is reflected in the abovementioned incident involving Malykhin and the member of the “Marian Center.” It should be said that non-violent conversion is also possible, a response to the preaching and personal virtue of a believer. However, often “sodomites,” unlike “sectarians,” are so dehumanized that such an approach becomes inapplicable.⁶

“The Sacrificial Crisis” of the Parish Milieu

Having surveyed Orthodox nationalists’ images of cosmic war and its influence on symbolic and actual violence, I now turn to the reflection of these images in the rhetoric and practice of the parish subculture. It is very hard to conceptualize the notion of “parish milieu” (*prikhramovaia sreda*) because of the complexity of its texture. Provisionally, it is possible to define it as an ethno-confessional external subculture (that is a peripheral cultural code, in contrast to the central cultural code), which consists of a multiplicity of small communities existing on a temporary or permanent basis and united by a shared worldview, mythology (a set of “objects of faith”), a dualistic philosophy of history and a prominent eschatology, which exploits particular situations like the “sacrificial crisis” and predicts the end of the world during the life of the current generation (Tarabukina 2000; Akhmetova 2010). If the situation of Orthodox nationalists represents the normal dynamic of cosmic war, then the situation of the parish subculture differs in a number of ways. Its members share a perception of the present moment as a spatial and temporal “gap” that opened up after the assassination of the imperial family, which signified the end of old Russia and the advent of Bolshevik power (Kormina and Shtyrkov 2011: 389–413). Time does not exist in this “gap,” but instead there is an inexorable profane, which hour after hour devours the sacred, blending with it and replacing its content with its own lack of content. From the end of the 1990s, a belief in the tsar-redeemer has spread in the monarchist “wing” of the parish milieu, that is, the doctrine of the divine status of the Russian tsar, and the idea that the present moment is liminal is linked to the actual absence in Russia of a monarch as the personification of Holy Russia (Zygmunt 2012: 138–45). The renewal of the sacred cosmos is

6. “We have preached in paddy wagons, been beaten by revolutionaries in buses filled with homosexuals. (...) Now it is more important for us to work with the liberal public. Beneath the walls of the court we spoke of God to the adherents of Pussy Riot, and one activist practically fell to her knees in repentance on the spot” (“Persony”).

associated with the restoration of the monarchy by the eschatological return of the tsar-redeemer — the Tsar to Come, who will purge Russia of its enemies and drive out or kill the Antichrist (Chistov 2011; Arkhipova 2010: 1–30).

The progressive blending of the sacred and profane as “cosmic conquest” is reflected in eschatological catastrophes (elemental and ecological disasters, famine, war, the desecration of formerly sacred places, the falseness of the hierarchs of the ROC) and in the near future will be crowned with the granting of the mark of the Antichrist (Akhmetova 2010: 89). The mark of the Antichrist has become the image of absolute “infection,” the conversion to the totality of violence, which condemns a person to eternal damnation (that is, eternal violence). The acceptance of the mark is a process, facilitated by the acceptance of its analogues, not a single act. According to the words of an anonymous author from the conservative portal “Moscow — The Third Rome,” a person does not renounce Christ all at once, but instead gradually, step by step, accepting a voucher, a Russian passport, a tax identification number, an insurance policy, a bank card, a biometric passport (“Myshelovka”). Once he accepts the mark of the Antichrist, a person becomes his own enemy, de-individualized and dehumanized, dissolving himself in the gray mass of non-human beings. He “will lose his ‘ego,’” in the words of the monk Rafail (Berestov) (Rafail 2010).

All of this, the temporal-spatial “gap,” the eschatological catastrophes, the threat of the “mark” and the ever-increasing thickening of “dark forces” to their maximal personification (the Antichrist), can be designated a “sacrificial crisis” that makes normal cosmic war impossible, due to the extraordinary intensity of the violent “infection.” If supernatural forces are the motive force of eschatological progress, human beings are powerless — they can only flee or remain. And both are linked with the practice of de-socialization that is popular in the Orthodox subculture: from time to time, “church people” move to a village or sacred place, in order to “cultivate their garden” there, and/or renounce money, documents and the achievements of technical progress. For them, this ascetic self-deprivation becomes “self-purification,” preparation for the renewal of the cosmos and, at the same time, the final means of affirming their identity.

The eschatological context of human powerlessness in the face of total violence creates a structure for the *alienation* of sacred violence — that is, its renunciation in favor of superhuman, divine forces. Only Christ or the Tsar to Come is capable of defeating “the enemy” and purifying the world from “contagion”: a person can only pray, fast and wait. The op-

posite of the *alienation* of violence is its *appropriation*, according to the principle: “who, if not us?” The differences become clear if we compare the speech by Ivan Otrakovskii at the 2013 Russian March that begins “What should we do?” (Otrakovskii 2013) with the texts of Vadim Kuznetsov or Roman Sergiev (the pseudonym of Sergey Romanov), which reject violence in favor of the Tsar to Come.⁷ However, a third possibility exists — *the deferral of appropriation*. For example, “*oprichnik*”⁸ authors such as Alexander Makeev, Anatoliy Eliseev and Nikolai Kozlov postpone violence until the “sacrificial crisis” has been overcome and present the “*oprichnik*” brotherhood as an angelic host, comrades-in-arms of the Tsar to Come, who will “drown the Antichrist in his own blood” (Makeev 2002; Eliseev 2008). However, given the variations in that Orthodox subculture, dividing attitudes toward violence into “appropriation,” “alienation” and “deferred appropriation” is relative, the application of these categories of analysis providing a plausible frame to work with rather than a perfectly objective reflection of reality.

Conclusion

Here is what I conclude. Violence far exceeds the realm of physical action and can be structural, actual and symbolic. Moreover, the structures that lie behind them determine the likelihood that actual and symbolic violence will manifest themselves. I suggested that actual violence, in itself, is “naked” and empty and acquires meaning only against the background of a structure of violence, which in this case can be defined as specifically *religious*.

Judging by my material, violence in religious consciousness is a “less-er evil,” a “vaccine,” violence that is aimed at ensuring the end of violence. For that reason, it is often described as defensive or defensive-aggressive (preventative), while the “channel” of violence in the discourse

7. “God has predestined the Tsar to Come. (...) First he will bring order to the Orthodox Church [as Its head], and remove all the false, heretical and cold-blooded bishops. And they will be many, very many, with few exceptions — almost all will be removed and new, true and steadfast bishops will take their place. It should be said that along with the false and heretical bishops, all the lukewarm priests and also deceitfully ‘theologizing’ deacons will be removed (the reference is to Andrei Kuraev — A. Z.). (...) Considering all this, it can be maintained that the Antichrist will be killed and Satan bound until the Almighty decrees the Glorious Second Coming of Jesus Christ. That is precisely why ‘even the Antichrist will fear the Russian Orthodox Tsar,’ knowing what awaits him” (Sergiev).

8. An “*oprichnik*” was one of the warriors associated with the “*oprichnina*” of Ivan the Terrible and responsible directly to him. See footnote 4 above. — The editors.

of every religious community runs from the discourse of victimization (positioning itself as an object of violence) to the discourse of justification or legitimation of violence (the affirmation of the possibility or necessity of answering violence with violence). Negative religious identity as the fundamental structure of violence is transformed into images of cosmic war or cosmic conquest (on the threshold of “sacrificial crisis”), which establish a link between the mundane and the other-worldly, between social and political realities and the world of the supernatural.

I have shown that for the leadership of the Moscow Patriarchate, Orthodox nationalists and some parish communities, “cosmic war” actually defines the present situation. However, these three elements of the Church differ on other matters. Among church leaders, the appeals of Patriarch Kirill and Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeev) for peace and concord, according to the principle of the ambivalence of the sacred, co-exist, for example, with the aggressive rhetoric of archpriests Vsevolod Chaplin and Dimitry Smirnov. Separate groups of Orthodox nationalists regularly “appropriate” violence both in theory and in practice, taking the “directive for struggle” as a guiding principle for action. The same is true of instances of spontaneous violence against “enemies” — “sodomites,” “sectarians” and the like. The situation of “cosmic conquest” and the “sacrificial crisis” of the parish subculture forces its representatives to “alienate” violence in favor of divine forces or “postpone” it until the conquest and crisis have been overcome, as does the ideology of the *oprichnik* brotherhoods.

Research on the subject of violence and religion can clarify the essence of phenomena associated with violence that derive from the logic of *homo religiosus*, that is, from the position of the subject rather than the object of violence. This is its distinction from legal or human rights discourse, which is formed in precisely the opposite way, originating in the fact that someone’s rights have been violated (that is, from the object and not the subject of violence). In this article, I have only contemplated approaches to the problem of violence in contemporary Russian Orthodoxy, a topic that demands further investigation.

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