

PhR 2019 Philological Readings

CHRISTIAN VALUES PRESERVATION WITHIN MODERN INFORMATION CHALLENGES

Irina A. Dymova (a)*, Julia V. Kudashova(b)

*Corresponding author

(a) Department of Journalism, 13, Pobedy Avenue, Orenburg state University, Orenburg, Russia,
dymova_i@mail.ru

(b) Institute of Socio-humanitarian Innovations and Massmedia, 13, Pobedy Avenue, Orenburg state University,
Orenburg, Russia, j_kudashova@mail.ru

Abstract

All over the world the access of religious organizations to the media and the use of mass information resources to promote their religious outlook in society are considered to represent one of the best manifestations of democracy. Since the adoption of the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations in 1990, Orthodoxy, like other state religions, has become legitimate and that fact has forced the expansion of pluralistic opinions in a democratic society. The Soviet atheistic past and the general decline of the Church authority adversely affected the preservation of Christian values in the modern world. The problem-thematic analysis of scientific literature has shown that, despite the public response to the speeches of the modern Russian Orthodox religious representatives, their publicistic activity has not been studied enough. The paper is devoted to the issue of Christian values preservation within information challenges as one of the urgent problems of present time. The clergy's public speeches on ambiguous issues concerning Christian values preservation in various national and foreign venues have proved to be opportune and effective. It is concluded that new laws are often revised and public opinion on the possible informational challenges is adjusted as a result of a constructive dialogue.

2357-1330 © 2020 Published by European Publisher.

Keywords: Christianity, dialogue, information challenges, Orthodoxy, publicism.



1. Introduction

In Russian journalistic science Orthodox publicism has so far been little studied for the reason that during the Soviet period the Russian Orthodox Church had been in public isolation for a long time. Modern civilization challenges, associated with the preservation of Christian values, cannot but worry the global community. Perhaps this fact, along with the main goal of the Church - the preaching of Orthodox dogma in the world - pushed the journalistic and religious community to create the Orthodox Christianity.ru website, the largest "Orthodox web resources catalogue" with the materials published in 33 languages including English language (as cited in A Directory of Orthodox Internet Resources/Categories, 2017). The current civilizational challenges, mainly connected with the transformation and secularization of Christian consciousness and behaviour, have a tremendous public response and arouse scientific interest among theologians, philosophers, and journalists. On the one hand, provocative events and actions clearly marked the threats to preserve traditional Christian values, and on the other hand, they demonstrated the unprecedented unity of the Russian people around the Church, religious, spiritual and moral values. This article is devoted to the analysis of these and other events.

The study of journalistic texts of modern Russian Orthodox religious leaders (2013-2016), who highlight the topic of preserving Christian values in the context of informational challenges, is caused by the ambiguous assessment of the modern events related to the information attack on the Russian Orthodox Church. The materials for analysis were classified according to the research of predecessor scholars and practicing journalists on Orthodox journalism and were distinguished by the following categories: the characteristics of confessional (Kostikova, 2005) and Orthodox journalism (Kostikova, 2006); types and principles of institutionalization of religious (Shevchenko, 2009), including Orthodox, journalism (Antipov & Rachkova, 2008); communicative space in the religious-philosophical journalism of Russian modernism (Shahbazyan, 2012); the principles of expert religious journalism (Shchipkov, 2002) and its religious dimension (Shchipkov, 2014). Previously, we studied the demographic (Dymova, 2015), spiritual, moral (Dymova, 2016) and religious doctrine issues of the modern Russian religious figures' publicism (Dymova, 2017) using the original proprietary methodology, which included both the problematic and thematic typology. The basis for analysis of the Christian values preservation in the context of modern informational challenges consists of the popular Orthodox and Christian sites Pravoslavie.ru, Patriarchia.ru, Pravmir.ru, Religiopolis.org, Sova-center.ru, Bogoslov.ru, Verav.ru, Religare.ru. In total, 20 of the most relevant publications are analyzed.

2. Problem Statement

- To identify the thematic originality of nonfiction materials posted on the major sites.
- To analyze the publications of Internet media on Orthodox subjects from the standpoint of preserving Christian values in the context of information challenges.
- To interpret the events presented in the information materials from the point of view of the Christian worldview.

3. Research Questions

- Formation of problem-thematic blocks, which reflect the content of the analyzed publicistic materials orientation.
- Interpretation of the publicistic online media materials that reveal Christian issue.
- Determination of a causal relationship between the appearance of a newsworthy event and a public debate on the controversial issues in terms of the preservation of Christian values in the world.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to determine and examine the thematic content of publicistic materials published on Orthodox sites concerning Christian values preservation within informational challenges.

5. Research Methods

The method of sources critical examination for theoretical understanding of the issue elaboration degree; comparative, structural, descriptive, structural, typological and statistical methods; theoretical analysis of scientific literature.

6. Findings

The study is based on the work of Archpriest Tkachev (2014), a writer, journalist, missionary, who is constantly promoting traditional Christian and moral values with the help of the media. The article "Religious Genius" is devoted to the Russian people as "the bearers of a cultural and civilizational code," the core of which is Orthodoxy. In his opinion, people get "religious genius" through neighbourhood with many religious and civilization worlds, which is provided by mutual enrichment and "secret internal rivalry": neighbourhood with the world of Islam can help to redefine the relationship between generations and "stop swearing by mother". Tkachev (2014) believes that Russian specific inner sense of pride is universal religious literacy, which is a guarantee of fruitful neighbourhood, a resource for meaningful enrichment, a way to get rid of "boorish disregard for someone else's cultural tradition". A healthy desire to respect the foreign culture and faith, a call to explore the unknown religious worlds of its neighbours are illustrated in the publicistic article. The Bishop Panteleimon has also expressed a hope of good neighbourly relations between the Orthodox and Catholic representatives in his report, presented in Rome at the conference "Outskirts of Life in the Light of the Gospel. Orthodox and Catholics on the path of mercy" (Panteleimon, Bishop of Orekhovo-Zuevo, 2014).

The interview of Philip (Ryabykh) (2014), the representative of the Russian Orthodox Church at the Council of Europe, abbot of the All Saints Church in Strasbourg, given to RIA Novosti correspondent in March 2013 and aimed at introducing Orthodox testimony at the venues of European international organizations for the readers of Patriarchate.ru, has been of particular public interest. Questions of the journalist O. Lipich were targeted at the most compelling issues: the cleric's attitude to the PACE resolution, which refers to an overly harsh sentence for the notorious punk band (PACE, 2013). In this

regard, the material, which contains the idea that a videotape recording of their performances in the Moscow church could claim the Oscar for best documentary (as cited in Oscars get political with Pussy Riot film setting the pace for best documentary, 2014), was published on one of the foreign websites. According to the representative of the Russian Orthodox Church, the opinion had changed dramatically after the similar performances in Cologne Cathedral, Notre-Dame de Paris, and it had become obvious for the overwhelming majority of officials and diplomats that such protests were an insult for the national spiritual tradition. This fact approves that the opinion of the western society, which is also confronted with the inappropriate behaviour of a certain group of people in their homeland, is gradually being adjusted.

However, the anticlerical theme is not exhausted by these scandals, and Russian cultural figures become the troublemakers of the moral order. The young director of the Novosibirsk Opera and Ballet Theater, Timofey Kulyabin, staged the play “Tannhäuser”, and the experts and judges did not consider the most blasphemous posters and scenes with the Crucifixion and the image of Christ amusing with the women of low social status to be offensive for religious consciousness of believers. This theatre performance was subjected to public discussion and condemnation in the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation on March 13, 2015, where Archimandrite Tikhon (Shevkunov), Secretary of the Patriarchal Council for Culture, the author of the famous book “Unholy Saints”, which claimed the Big Literary Award, took an active part.

The film “Leviathan” directed by Andrei Zvyagintsev, which won in the category “Best film in a foreign language” and received the Golden Globe prize, appeared to be provocative and even more scandalous as many discussions and responses were presented in the Russian media. The film, which took place in Russia, although based on events in the United States, was welcomed by the Western press, while most of the Russian public strongly condemned the film and the rest ignored it. Writer Sergei Lukyanchenko called “Leviathan” an “export anti-Russian film,” which describes deep drunkenness, corruption, hypocrisy, hopelessness, which denigrates the image of modern Russia and is completely untrue. This film was actively discussed in the articles published on the Internet by Archpriest Andrei Tkachev (“Leviathan”) and Archimandrite Savva (Mauzhko) (“Bishops and Leviathans”), on Facebook by Archpriest Vyacheslav Perevesentsev (“Goat Song from Andrey Zvyagintsev”). During a speech in front of the Moscow Pedagogical State University (MPGU) student audience, Archimandrite Tikhon (Shevkunov) expressed abhorrence towards this film: “I want to shoot myself after Leviathan”.

One more episode that occurred on the stage of the theater, which was previously headed by Oleg Tabakov, attracted the attention of the experienced publicist Archpriest Ilyashenko (2015,): “a naked woman was hung from the ceiling and portrayed the crucified Jesus Christ, and an actor, playing a homosexual priest, prayed for her” (p. 17). The activists, who could not stand such a shame, went on stage with appeals to the audience: “Don't you understand?”, “This is blasphemy”, “Stop” – and then the guards took them out. Thanks to such articles as “Why does Tabakov dare to sneer at the Russian people so much?” (Ilyashenko, 2015) readers can learn about the challenges, initiated by public figures of art and culture, and can involuntarily engage in public discussions. It is of a great concern that exclusively extraordinary actions and events but not examples that cause a feeling of pride and optimism cause such

discussions. Ilyashenko (2015) proposes to talk about this in sermons and media and to appeal to the conscience of the participants of such public demonstrations.

The most blasphemous antics against the desecration of Christian and Islamic shrines caused a flurry of indignation from both the Russian and Western public (unfortunately, the liberal part of society often has approval). Of course, the Russian clergy acted as a united front in defence of Christian values, and not only them: the antics of French caricaturists were also subject to a strict public trial (article "I am not Charlie Hebdo. I am a Christian!" A. Ilyashenko). In the publication "Shepherds on the fight against blasphemy," several priests argue that every day the godless world tests Christians for loyalty to the gospel ideals and fortitude: the films *The Da Vinci Code*, *The Last Tomb of Jesus*, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, the notorious punk antic in the main temple of the country, the visit of the satanic band "Begemot", concerts of the Cabbalist Madonna (Shishkin, Shevchenko, & Dukhanin, 2014). And they are wondering how to react to this: not to notice and not make a fuss, while such reaction may be regarded as a betrayal of their faith, or, conversely, to raise a wave of indignation in all media, which does not exclude creating additional popularity for scoffers, as happened with a punk band.

Phillip (Ryabykh) (2013a, 2013b, 2014) discusses the danger of attempts to commit a civilizational coup and informs the readers of the ban on wearing religious symbols and clothes in educational institutions of the West in an interview for RIA Novosti. He introduces other challenges related to the legitimacy of surrogate motherhood and euthanasia in individual European countries, although euthanasia in Christianity and in traditional Islam is considered a grave, mortal sin, rebellion against God. In the program document "Fundamentals of the social concept of the Russian Orthodox Church", in the section on bioethics, it is written about the inadmissibility of surrogate motherhood and the permissibility to resort to IVF services in exceptional cases when the integrity of the marital union is not destroyed, that is, without third parties being involved in the process of conceiving a child: "This technique involves the destruction of deep emotional and spiritual intimacy, which is already established between the mother and baby during pregnancy. Surrogacy traumatizes both a pregnant woman, whose motherly feelings are violated, and a child, who can later experience a crisis of self-consciousness" (as cited in *Fundamentals of the social concept of the Russian Orthodox Church*, 2008). Surrogacy is almost completely prohibited by law in Europe, but legalized in the UK, Greece and Russia. The author is concerned about the difficult situation when Russian and Belarusian women raise the birth rate abroad for money, signing agreements on the sale of newborns and then requiring them back.

Philip (Ryabykh) (2013a, 2013b), considers it as a moral and professional duty to inform the Western and Russian public about the inadmissibility of adopting non-traditional family and sexual relations, which is reflected in his series of articles: "Legalization of non-traditional families - fashionable utopia" (Philip (Ryabykh), 2013a), "Civilization is in mortal danger" (Philip (Ryabykh), 2013b) and others. The priests are guided by the Gospel, where this vice is severely and unequivocally condemned by Jesus Christ. The answers to almost all questions and an assessment of behaviour and actions can be found in this eternal book. Not coincidentally, Patriarch Kirill called the Gospel "a bottomless, endless source of news" (Patriarch Kirill, 2016). The resolution of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe contains criticism of Russia both for the prohibitions of gay parades and gay propaganda, and for refusing to legalize single-gendered marriage. PACE adopted a resolution on the report "Overcoming

Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity”, which calls upon politicians and other public figures to “establish relations of dialogue and trust with LGBT communities, including through participation in gay parades”, “refrain from homophobic and transphobic speeches and publicly condemn them”. In addition, strong concern about the introduction of laws prohibiting the promotion of homosexuality in a number of Council of Europe member states is expressed in the document.

Comprehension of the obsessive homosexuality lobbying prompted Russian lawyers to develop reports on “Violations of the rights of children adopted by homosexual unions (single-gendered partnerships)” and on “The right to critically assess homosexuality and the legal restrictions on imposing homosexuality”, which were presented by the Church Representation in Strasbourg for the Western public and politicians (Ponkine, 2013). The sexual-oriented educational programs, where homosexuality is given as the norm, have already caused parents’ resentment. According to the results of the National Referendum, Croatia, for example, refused to publicly recognize single-gendered marriages. We admit the significance of a dialogue between the countries concerning very complex issues, since the Council of Europe is an important platform for discussions, where our country's opinion and the arguments of our partners and allies abroad are taken into account. Various useful initiatives are suggested through the Council of Europe: to create anonymous programs for spiritual and psychological help for people of non-traditional sexual orientation, to use long-term funds (thoughtful presentation of materials in the media about the activities of religious communities, religious education, the fight against extremism).

The events mentioned can be assessed differently: from the point of view of a secular person who does not have a religious worldview and considers any compromises to be possible or from the position of a real Christian who lives according to the Gospel commandments. Contradictions in the perception and evaluation of the ambiguous events of our time, which we call informational threats and challenges, arise because of the unequal attitude to spiritual, moral and Christian values. These resonant events are regarded by some people as blasphemous and provocative, while the others use them for informational wars and as an attempt to undermine the authority of the Russian Orthodox Church and age-old Christian principles, and some people define them as an expression of plural opinions.

7. Conclusion

To conclude, the analysed publicistic materials clearly demonstrate a wide thematic originality, caused mainly by real events both in our country and abroad. In the research topic of preserving Christian values, several problems are found. Only one topic described by the publicist Andrei Tkachev does not cause heated debates and sharply opposing judgments, since the text of the article was written without a vivid informational event. The issue of “semantic enrichment” of the Russian people and those from different religious and civilization worlds is raised in this article. It arouses interest in studying the traditions of the cultural neighbours, respect for someone else’s culture and the need to preserve the own religious and moral code. The said approach to a foreign culture might be the right one.

The next series of the anti-clerk orientation events, which are actively discussed in the Orthodox online publicism, concerning: the scandalous antics of the famous Russian punk group; the performances in the Novosibirsk and Moscow theatres containing vulgar, blasphemous actions against the believers,

demonstrating outrageous mockery of the image and the death throes of Jesus Christ; the offensive to Russia and others film “Leviathan”, which was shown in the West and in our country.

Another group of problematic topics raised by Orthodox publicists was provoked by actual events — the legalization of surrogacy and euthanasia in some Western countries and the issuance of documents in support of these phenomena. The open support for gay propaganda and gay parades, the legalization of non-traditional family relationships and the possibility of homosexuals to adopt children, as well as the adoption of resolutions containing critics towards Russia for banning gay parades and single-gendered marriages, forced Russia to develop documents defending its traditional moral and family values. The successful dialogue and interaction between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian and foreign society is conducted not only with the help of the publicists, but also due to the fact that the publicists quickly learn to respond to the informational challenges of our time, explaining the complex, highly contradictory phenomena of life.

We are certain that the publicism of modern Russian Orthodox religious leaders is able to consolidate both Russian and Western society around Christian spiritual and moral values, as they possess the enormous educational potential, associated with their integral religious worldview, the continuity of historical tradition and unique literary heritage, the ability to conduct a lively public dialogue with society.

References

- A Directory of Orthodox Internet Resources/Categories (2017). Retrieved from <http://www.orthodox-christianity.org/>
- Antipov M., & Rachkova L. (2008). Orthodox media - a new player in the information market. Retrieved from <http://archive.bogoslov.ru/>
- Dymova I. A. (2015). Demograficheskaja problematika publicistiki sovremennyh pravoslavnyh religioznyh dejatelej Rossii [Demographic problematics of modern orthodox religious Russian figures' journalism]. *Vestnik Orenburgskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta [Vestnik of Orenburg State University]*, 11(186), 9-18.
- Dymova, I. A. (2016). Duhovno-nravstvennaja problematika publicistiki religioznyh dejatelej na sajte "Pravoslavie i mir" [Spiritual and moral issues of religious figures' journalism on the website "Orthodoxy and the World"]. In *Tatishhevskie chtenija: aktual'nye problemy nauki i praktiki [Tatishchev Readings: actual problems of science and practice]* (pp. 324–327). Tolyatti: Volga University named after V.N. Tatishchev.
- Dymova I. A. (2017). Verouchitel'naja problematika pravoslavnoj internet-publicistiki: jazykovej i stilisticheskij aspekty [Teaching problems of Orthodox online journalism: language and stylistic aspects]. *Vestnik Orenburgskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta [Vestnik of Orenburg State University]*, 2, 122-128.
- Fundamentals of the social concept of the Russian Orthodox Church (2008). Retrieved from <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/419128>
- Ilyashenko A. (2015). Why does Tabakov dare to sneer at the Russian people so much? Retrieved from <http://www.pravmir.ru>
- Kostikova, N. A. (2005). Konfessional'naja zhurnalistika: predmet i osobennosti dejatel'nosti [Confessional journalism: subject and features of activity]. In *Zhurnalistika v 2004 godu. SMI v mnogopoljarnom mire [Journalism in 2004. Mass media in a multipolar world]* (pp. 120–121). Moscow: Faculty of Journalism of Moscow State University named after M.V. Lomonosov.
- Kostikova, N. A. (2006). Orthodox journalism: methodological features of studying the effectiveness of activities. Retrieved from <http://radonezh.ru/analytic>

- Oscars get political with Pussy Riot film setting the pace for best documentary. (2014). Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/jan/04/documentary-oscars-get-political>
- PACE (2013). Retrieved from <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/Home-EN.asp>
- Panteleimon, Bishop of Orekhovo-Zuevo. (2014). The feat of Christ's poverty. Retrieved from <https://patriarchia.ru>
- Patriarch Kirill (2016). The gospel is a bottomless, endless source of news: Patriarch Kirill on life in the information society and the church mission. Retrieved from <http://dysha.info/public/jizn/1109-evangelie>
- Philip (Ryabykh), I. (2013a). Legalization of non-traditional families - a fashionable utopia. Retrieved from www.pravmir.ru/igumen-filipp-ryabyx-legalizaciya-netradicionnyx-semej-modnay
- Philip (Ryabykh), I. (2014). On the Orthodox testimony at the venue of European international organizations. Retrieved from <http://www.pravoslavie.ru/smi/66731.htm>
- Philip (Ryabykh), I. (2013b). Civilization is in mortal danger. Retrieved from <http://www.verav.ru/common/mpublic.php?num=1845&table=mpublic>
- Ponkine, I. V. (2013). Sur les violations des droits des enfants pendant leur «adoption» par des couples homosexuels ou par des individus homosexuels. Retrieved from moral-law.ru/files/Report_eng_adoption_IX-2013.pdf
- Shchipkov, A. V. (2002). Religious journalism - expert journalism. Retrieved from <http://www.religare.ru/21260.html>
- Shchipkov, A. V. (2014). *The religious dimension of journalism*. Moscow: PROBEL-2000.
- Shahbazyan, M. A. (2012). *Transformacija komunikativnogo prostranstva v religiozno-filosofskoj publicistike ruskogo modernizma* [Transformation of the communicative space in the religious and philosophical journalism of Russian modernism] (Doctoral dissertation).
- Shevchenko, M. (2009). Religioznaja zhurnalistika: tipy, principy i problemy institucionalizacii [Religious journalism: types, principles and problems of institutionalization]. Retrieved from <https://www.sova-center.ru/religion/publications/state-confessional/2004/02/d1767/>.
- Shishkin, D., Shevchenko, S., & Dukhanin, V. (2014). Pastors on the fight against blasphemy. Retrieved from <http://www.pravoslavie.ru/>
- Tkachev, A. (2014). Religioznyj genij [Religious genius]. Retrieved from <http://www.pravoslavie.ru>