

NININS 2020**International Scientific Forum «National Interest, National Identity and National Security»****PECULIARITIES OF RELIGIOUS COMMUNICATION
IN RUSSIA IN SECULAR ERA**

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Abstract

The article discusses the peculiarities of religious communication in the process of secularization and the formation of a post-secular world. The purpose of the article is to show the peculiarities of secular trends in Russia with the example of the evolution of Old Believers' communities and the formation of the folk saints' cults. Special attention is paid to the communication between the society/state, Russian Orthodox Church, and "folk beliefs". The subject of the research is the peculiarities of the Old Believers' communities evolution within the secularization; their relations with the state/society/ROC and communication processes in the secularizing space; the phenomenon of the transformation of folk religiosity: archaization and archetypization of Old Believers' communities; local and corporate nature of folk saints' veneration; influence of the Church as an institution and individual Church officers on the formation and evolution of folk saints' cults. Semiotics serves as the primary research method that explores different forms of communication within the secular processes. Lotman's structural-semiotic concept is chosen with the aim to study the communicative processes in the framework of the culture and their interpretations. A cross-cultural and comparative approach is taken to study the phenomenon of communication between society/state, ROC and folk beliefs. It is concluded that the veneration of folk saints is a reaction to secularization. Secular processes have had more impact on Church structures than on religious groups without a clear organizational structure, which also affected the communication among them.

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1. Introduction

Secularization is the process of liberation of public and private life from the influence of religion. Modern Russian society is secular; that is, the religious norms are no longer dominant in the cultural, political, legal, and economic spheres. The peculiarities of Russia's historical development have primarily contributed to the formation of a secular society. The dominance of atheistic ideology during the Soviet times made it possible for several generations of people to be raised in secular traditions. However, religion managed to survive despite all the efforts to combat it made by the Soviet state. After the collapse of the USSR, there was a religious revival that lasted until the beginning of the 21st century when religious institutions took their place in the social life of the Russian society; acquiring new characteristics (Kormina & Shtyrkov, 2015).

While the main aim of the state's policy in the USSR was to oppress the Church as an institution, religion as a system of beliefs continued to develop. In order to carry out the ritual practices, many believers had to conceal their faith and hold religious services secretly. The authorities had practised violent actions towards religious groups in Imperial Russia (Boobbyer, 2017); however, in Soviet and post-Soviet times, the reaction to them took a slightly different character.

In the process of building modern Russia's statehood, traditional religious movements and mainly the Orthodox Christianity began to restore their influence in society. What is more, we can note new characteristics that arise in the era of secularization possible due to the use of methods and tools of secular practices while preserving and deepening archaic and traditional religious features. These trends can be most vividly observed in the evolution of Old Believers' communities and the transformation of folk saints' Veneration.

In this article, we understand secularisation/the secular epoch as the process of transition of spiritual experience into everyday life within the framework of a specific culture, which leads to the devaluation of the sacred, its re-evaluation and adaptation for practical needs.

2. Problem Statement

Old Believers have always tended to represent themselves as a kind of opposition to "classical" Orthodox Christianity. Thus, they are ideologically opposed to the state and public institutions, which some of the Old Believers consider as the elements of the "Kingdom of the Antichrist". Old Believers perceive persecutions carried out by authorities in the Imperial and Soviet Russia as a Martyr's feat that strengthens their connection with God (Dutchak, 2019). In the times of religious persecution, the communities of Old Believers managed to preserve their inner asceticism and fanaticism. They led a secular life that did not differ from the life of a typical citizen while keeping their religious life a secret (Raskov & Kufenko, 2017). Many Old Believers' denominations allowed their followers being baptized and getting married within the framework of official Orthodoxy while pursuing their common ritual practices at home. This trend has lived up to the present day and can be considered as an archetype of Old Believers' religious behaviour that allows them surviving in unstable religious situations (Vorontsova & Sundukova, 2018). This process makes it difficult to get accurate data on the number of Old Believers

because some of them conceal their true identity, which leads to an inaccurate total number in the General register.

Many denominations attribute themselves to Old Believers. The long-term persecution of Old Believers has contributed to the formation of peculiar communication patterns among them. We can observe a mutual attraction and understanding among believers that make part of the same denomination and a complete denial of religious communication with representatives of other denominations. This circumstance influenced the emergence of so-called island groups of Old Believers who have existed independently from the surrounding world and created their cultural environment (Makartsev, 2017). Unlike Orthodox Christianity, which has been developing mainly within the framework of the Orthodox Church, Old Believers' institutional development, that is, the formation of official communities began only in the post-secular era, which matched the time of post-modern trends in the cultural consciousness of leading European countries and the process of Perestroika in the USSR. The largest institutions of Old Believers include the Russian Old Orthodox Church and the Russian Orthodox Old-Rite Church. There also exist some other Old Believers' legally registered associations, such as The Pomorian Old Orthodox Church, Fedoseevtsy. In total there are 387 religious organizations of Old Believers registered in the Russian Federation. They compose part of one of 9 centralized religious organizations, including 367 local religious organizations, one spiritual and educational institution, seven monasteries and three other religious institutions according to the data available on 22.04.2019. To compare, the Russian Orthodox Church includes 18,550 religious organizations, Islam – 5,954 religious organizations, and Pentecostals – 1,034 religious organizations.

At the beginning of the XXI century, we observe a change in communication among Old Believers. There we see a tendency of "conversion" of some representatives of Bespopovtsy (Old Believers that deny priesthood) to the Russian Old Orthodox Church and the Russian Orthodox Old-Rite Church. The representatives of Spasovo Soglasie were the most numerous to join the official churches as they used baptizing children in the churches of the Russian Orthodox Church and then decided to continue the tradition of baptizing their children in more closely related Old Believers' churches and eventually entirely became part of their communities.

Folk Orthodoxy by its nature, attempts to represent archaic beliefs as the official ones. Folk beliefs represent the aspirations of society to satisfy their religious needs. Since ideology tried to replace religion in Soviet times, both official and folk Orthodoxy were unable to spread and develop independently actively. An integral element of folk religion is the folk saints' Veneration, which is either not approved by the Russian Orthodox Church or even goes against its dogmas.

The issue of the development of folk saints' cults and the peculiarities of their Veneration also fits the problem of communication both horizontally and vertically. On the one hand, folk saints' worshippers consider themselves Orthodox Christians by faith. On the other hand, the very fact of folk saints' Veneration helps to strengthen and spread folk beliefs, which are not always in sync with the official position of the Church.

After the collapse of the USSR, religious communication on the issue of folk saints' Veneration occurs mainly between the worshippers and the Church representatives in order to convince the latter to contribute to the process of canonization and legitimize the sanctity of a particular person in the Russian

Orthodox Church. During the period of religious revival and the formation of the so-called "pro-Orthodox consensus" (Furman & Kaariainen, 2000), some Church representatives start to support the Veneration of some of the folk saints and launch the procedure for their canonization. Currently, the official Church authorities are pursuing a policy to counteract the Veneration of folk saints, in the process of which they face the problem of uncontrolled dissemination of information on the Internet. This leads to the formation of various groups within the Church authorities, contradictions and conflicts within the Church, and merging of folk and official Orthodoxy (Kormina et al., 2006).

3. Research Questions

3.1. Peculiarities of the process of Old Believers' communities' evolution within the secularization process

Old Believers originated as a religious archetype under the influence of the Church reforms of Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich Romanov and Patriarch Nikon. They have never been part of a single religious movement. We can perceive Old Believers as a set of Christian religious beliefs that are common in the territory of various ethnic groups. The differences in cult practices made the Old Believers unite in various communities. With the influence of folk beliefs that were not always close to the Christian ones, different communities conceived various Old Believers' denominations.

3.2. Old Believers – state/society/Russian Orthodox Church relations and peculiarities of communication processes in the secularizing space

The Soviet epoch has become a foundation for the secularization processes in Russia. The Old Believers were prepared much better to the change in ideological policy than representatives of official Orthodoxy. The reason for that is that they were used for the repressive policy of the state for two and a half centuries, which was slightly reversed during the reign of Nicholas II with the publication of the decree "On strengthening the principles of religious tolerance", according to which the Old Believers were liberated from state supervision for 13 years (White, 2017). The methods used by Old Believers to continue their service and religious practices in Soviet times were generally identical to those used in Imperial Russia. For instance, elders could baptize children and take people's communion as there was no possibility to visit a church.

3.3. Unique phenomenon of the process of transformation of folk religiosity: Archaization and archetypization of Old Believers' communities as a result of the secularization process

The religious archetype of Old Believers can be described as radical conservatism with the external world and the opposition of the religious self to everything secular. Despite the rejection of everything new, the adherents of this trend were able to preserve their original values and accept changes in social life with little loss for their teachings at the same time.

3.4. The issue of identifying the local and corporate nature of folk saints' veneration

The main difference between the folk saints' Veneration and the cult of saints in general lies in the absence of official canonization and, therefore, its condemnation by the official Church. As for the rest, the following characteristics can be found in the Veneration of folk saints, e.g., supernatural characteristics are attributed to the relics of a folk Saint; a folk Saint is prayed for; there are memorial days of a folk Saint, which are associated with important events of the revered person (Toporov, 1998).

Folk saints' Veneration is often limited locally. Local Veneration is widespread because the identity of the "saints" and the miracles they committed are witnessed within a local group. What is more, a limited number of people have access to the relics of saints and their biographies form an integral part of the local history of a village or district where they are venerated. Folk saints themselves often play a social-forming function (Kormina, 2019).

Usually, people who were associated with the activities of the Church during their lifetime or who were seen as possessing higher spiritual knowledge by residents become the objects of Veneration. Local Church officers could either support the formation of a cult or not attach much importance to it, as sometimes aggressive Church policies can lead to an increase in conflict potential in a local community. For example, in the Nizhny Novgorod region the righteous John of Nizhny Novgorod (Shorokhov), the elder Mikhail Khabarsky (Smetanin) are revered (Tretyakov & Urakov, 2019). Famous representatives of the Church in a particular area could also become objects of Veneration, such as hieromonk Vladimir (Shikin) from Diveevo.

3.5. The issue of the influence of the Church as an institution and individual Church officers on the formation and evolution of folk saints' cults

After the collapse of the USSR, the Church as an institution was freed from the state's ideological pressure and began to restore its role as the spiritual core of the Russian nation. Thus, it was again able to gain control over folk saints' cults, putting under control the processes of communication between the society and the Church. In particular, the system of spiritual education from local Sunday schools to higher educational institutions was restored, which contributed to the spread of dogmatic teaching. Nowadays, the spiritual media under the control of the Russian Orthodox Church actively enter the media space and the Internet, which also aims to counter the spread of "heretical" practices.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to show the peculiarities of secular trends with the example of the evolution of Old Believers' communities and the formation of folk saints' cults, paying particular attention to the problems of communication between society/state, the Russian Orthodox Church and so-called folk beliefs.

5. Research Methods

Since the spread of post-modern ideas marked the post-secular era in Russia, the research methodology aims to reconcile the rational-analytical and hermeneutical-phenomenological traditions, which were previously oppositional to each other. The aim is to interconnect elements, actualize the importance of accepting the Other taking into consideration the secular trends and the restoration of religious influence in modern Russian society. This makes it possible to distinguish between the true reality and the ways in which it is represented. The principle of ideography allows pointing out "the individual" in "the universal", to actualize reflection on the complex mechanism of combining analytical and interpretative methods of studying religious phenomena in all their multidimensional specificity. Modern historical anthropology serves as a synthesizing method of knowledge that accumulates philosophical, ontological ideas and cognitive techniques developed in various fields of humanitarian knowledge. Semiotics serves as the primary research method that explores different forms of communication within the secular processes. The structural-semiotic concept of Lotman (Demin, 2017) was chosen to study the communicative processes of the culture and their interpretation. As a result, a cross-cultural and comparative approach to the phenomenon of communication between society/state, the official Church, and folk beliefs becomes possible.

6. Findings

6.1. Flexible forms of adaptation of Old Believers' communities

The acceptance or rejection of permanent priests is the fundamental difference between various denominations within ancient Orthodoxy, which is respectively called Popovstvo and Bespopovstvo. The former relies on medieval Russian Church institutions in their hierarchy and many ways imitate the system of the Orthodox Church of our time. This trend became palpable in the middle of the XIX century in connection with the strengthening of the Belokrinitsa hierarchy. Church pastors acted as a unifying element of community life, and they mainly contributed to the introduction of the Old Believers to secular life, which was in some opposition to religious life.

Bespopovtsy, in their turn, strengthened in Hesychasm, and their disunity contributed to the preservation of the original religious culture within closed communities, primarily large families. Some denominations could participate in Church life and allowed their children being baptized in the new Orthodox Church while continuing to conduct secret services, e.g., Spassovo Concord. The rest, on the contrary, tried to hide and separate themselves from civilizational processes, thus preserving pre-secular traditions within their community.

At the same time, we need to note that Popovtsy had the most challenging situation as they had lost any possibility of existence in Soviet times due to the openness of their ideology. They were able to start their open services during the period of Perestroika and especially after the 1000th anniversary of the Christianization of Rus'. In a relatively short time, they restored the congregation, including the supporters of Bespopovtsy, who joined the Russian Old Orthodox Church and the Russian Orthodox Old-Rite Church.

In the period of globalization and the search for unified forms of existence within a mutually enriching social space, ancient Orthodoxy has become an example of leading a traditional way of life and dynamic adjustment to current social processes at the same time (Rygovsky, 2019).

The evolution of the folk saints' Veneration is one more example of the transformation of religious reality in modern Russia. The Veneration of some of the folk saints goes beyond local societies. Their Veneration has a so-called corporate character, that is, in the popular consciousness, a Saint may act as a defender of certain groups in society. A distinctive feature of Veneration is a kind of combination of different discourses within the framework of Veneration of individual cults. The most striking example is Evgenii Rodionov – the Warrior (Fomina, 2017). He is perceived simultaneously as a warrior-Martyr (religious discourse), a victim of political circumstances (political discourse) and a hero of Russia (Patriotic discourse). Thus, the combination of secular and religious parameters of Veneration of saints is a distinctive feature of the evolution of the folk saints' cult in the secular era.

The main method of counteracting the spread of folk saints' Veneration is the official condemnation of the worshippers by the Church, a ban on the distribution of materials about folk saints. However, some Church officers support the idea of Veneration of individual saints and lobby for their canonization. Thus, the folk saints' cults become an apple of discord among Church officials, the issue of canonization becomes a political one, which may create a schism in the church elites.

7. Conclusion

The post-secular society has opened up a different picture of the world not only due to the emergence of qualitatively new religious movements but also due to the gradual comeback of folk beliefs, which have survived the triumph of state atheism, to the information field.

Old Believers' denominations became the most prepared for the era of secularization, as they have already faced similar processes in the era of Imperial Russia. Old Believers, especially Bespopovtsy, managed to preserve religious institutions in their original form, unaffected since the Middle ages, due to a flexible approach to relations with the state and their autonomous existence. Mysticism and conservatism among Old Believers let them keep the rules established for centuries and avoid the influence of global trends.

The post-secular era has presented new opportunities for the development of Old Believers' thought and allows various denominations interacting more actively. However, they are still reluctant to new thinking, and the tension among different Old Believers' denominations persists. The Old Believers' perception of being has remained intact since medieval times have not been affected by secularization. The Old Believers' institutional reinforcement is carried out with the example of the Russian Orthodox Church with clear trends towards secularisation: in contrast to the denominations of Bespopovtsy. Thus, secular processes have had more impact on Church structures than on religious groups without a clear organizational structure, which also affected the communication among them.

Local folk saints' cults continue to emerge and evolve in the secular era. Also, there is a vast potential for the spread of folk saints' cults, both local and corporate, due to the distribution of mass media. The Internet allows saints' worshippers disseminating information online.

In the secular era, the Church's influence on the evolution of folk saints' cults is constantly growing, while some Church officials try to oppose the Church's decisions and activities. On the one hand, this leads to conflicts within the Church; on the other hand, it shows the blurring of the boundaries between official and folk Orthodoxy.

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