

Russian Cultural Code: A Formula of Synergy

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Abstract – The article is devoted to the search for the cultural code of Russian civilization relevant to modern Russia. This article disputes the point of view about the exhaustion of the possibilities of Russian culture for the modernization of the country. The research is based on the civilizational approach representing religion as the basis of culture. The focus of this study is one of the most important aspects of Orthodox spirituality, i.e. the doctrine of synergy that allows to determine the attitude of Orthodoxy to man. The author comes to the conclusion that Orthodoxy assigns an important role to man; that of a co-Creator responsible for his own choice.

Keywords – cultural code, Orthodoxy, synergy, free will, grace, modernization

I. INTRODUCTION

The problem of national and civilizational identity, the search for cultural or civilizational code as the sense-setting reference points that determine the life of the people is very relevant in modern Russia painfully seeking its place in the global world. The long-standing dispute between the Slavophiles and Westerners has acquired a second, if not a third wind. So, the questions are raised again: who are we, what is our identity, what is our purpose? Despite the fact that this topic was actively and fruitfully developed by Russian philosophical thought at the turn of the 19-20th centuries (N. Berdyaev, S. Frank, G. Fedotov, N. Lossky and others) and later: in the second half of the 20th century (D.S. Likhachev, V.N. Toporov, K. Kasyanova and others), contemporary authors continue to address these issues of particular importance in the context of globalization which creates new challenges for cultures and peoples. The ambiguous processes of globalization often create the danger of identity erosion which is fraught with the rupture of the socio-cultural fabric that can lead to unpredictable consequences.

It is the basic cultural values that hold society together and make it viable by uniting autonomous individuals into a single people. Herewith, the question ‘What are the substantive characteristics of these values?’ yields different answers. But at the same time there is a growing awareness of the importance of determining the Russian cultural code as well as the attempts to understand how it “works”: what mechanisms are involved? [1, 2]. B. V. Mezhyuev, asking such questions, expresses an interesting proposition that comprehension of the Russian civilizational code requires identification of other civilizations cultural borrowings that are blocked by Russian culture [2].

Another discussion point is whether the cultural or civilizational code is something immutable, or it is subject to change and destruction over time and new historical

circumstances? Here the views of the researchers vary: some of them, e.g. A.V. Shchipkov, believe that the cultural and axiological content of the code is constant, only its historical form is changing; other scientists challenge this statement [3-6]. For instance, L.G. Byzov drawing on his long-term sociological research makes an assumption about the current process of the Russian socio-cultural code changing. This is due, in his opinion, to the results of socio-economic and political transformation of Russia in recent decades. [4].

A similar view is taken by the famous philosopher and culture expert I.G. Yakovenko, who believes that a radical transformation of traditional Russian culture and mentality is necessary to complete the modernization that started in Russia at the beginning of the 18th century. Otherwise, the country is threatened by historical oblivion. According to him, the transition to a dynamic society is hampered by the Russian culture basic characteristics, which hinder further development. As one of these characteristics, in particular, he cites “renouncing the worldly life or gnostic attitude”: the belief that the world has sunk in evil, the tendency to reject the world, and therefore the rejection of any attempts to correct or improve it as well as the rejection of any social activity. At the same time, I.G. Yakovenko believes that such gnostic attitude is set largely by Orthodoxy, while Protestantism is completely free from such impulses, and Catholicism is only partially affected by them [6].

I do not share the pessimistic view of I.G. Yakovenko on the fate of Russian culture and do not consider its possibilities to be exhausted, believing that there is a certain core of culture that is not subject to change over time. I also do not set myself the task of deciphering the Russian cultural or civilizational code, “proclaiming” my list of its key characteristics. Instead, I would like to concentrate on one of the important aspects of Orthodox spirituality, namely, the doctrine of synergy, which, in turn, allows revealing one of the features of the Russian mentality, determining the attitude of Orthodoxy to man, as well as shedding light on the Orthodox attitude to the world.

II. METHODOLOGY

As a methodological basis, I use the civilizational approach, according to which independent civilizations are the main actors in world history, with each civilization developing according to its own laws (N. Danilevsky, A. Toynbee, O. Spengler, S. Huntington, etc.). The identity of a civilization is determined by culture, which, according to A. Toynbee, represents the very essence of civilization [7]. It is important to emphasize the following: the authors of the civilizational approach draw on the fact that it is religion that sets the axiological basis for culture. Russia has the status of a special

civilization in such reference system and occupies its place among the local civilizations of the past and present. S. Huntington, in particular, assigns the role of “the core state of a separate Orthodox civilization” to Russia [8].

III. RESULTS

The most important position of Orthodoxy, which essentially distinguishes it, both from Catholicism and Protestantism, is the concept of “synergy”, according to which the achievement of salvation is the result of the joint activity of man's free will and divine grace, or their community, so to say. Human efforts in themselves do not matter, but, on the other hand, it is impossible to do without them, because according to Orthodoxy, grace can enter into a man only when “by his desire a man opens his entrance into himself” [9]. That is, the initial impulse must come from the man himself, when he wants to open himself to grace's action. Orthodox bishop Barnabas explains synergy formula in the following way: “But God will not help us if we do not raise our hands first” [10].

For this purpose, in Orthodoxy, the Hesychast monks developed a whole system of spiritual exercises called “inner” or “smart doing”. Its essence is to calm the mind, restore order and purity in one's own soul, assuming the constant control over one's thoughts and emotions and paying vigilant attention to the subtle nuances of one's own soul as an important aspect of such exercises. The meaning of this spiritual practice is in the harmonization and ordering of inner space, in bringing oneself into a state when soul and body, mind and feeling are united, in overcoming one's ego, which leads to a deep transformation of man and ultimately allows creating conditions for the connection of man with his Creator. The meaning of smart doing I reveal in more detail in [11].

I should remark here that I imply a deep spiritual process and the efforts of a purely internal nature associated with it; this process is most directly related to the formation of a man's personality. From the Orthodox point of view, people are not born as personalities; they become the ones in the process of inner work and synergy with divine grace, since the person has a spiritual dimension, being rooted in the source of being. It should also be emphasized that Orthodoxy places emphasis on the need for internal change in man, on the importance of spiritual growth, and not on external virtues and decent behavior, which are only a consequence of such a change. What is especially important is that the moral perfection, which Western Christianity also speaks about, is not the aspirations limit of an ascetic who practices smart doing.

The famous philosopher and Orthodox theologian S.S. Horujy notes that the Orthodox strategy is to go beyond the boundaries of the empirical existence of man, to overcome his nature by its ontological restructuring, thus breaking through to another, transcendent reality, which in Orthodoxy is called theosis or deification. He emphasizes the fact that the practice of smart doing takes place in the form of a ladder: of a gradual dynamic climbing up the steps: from the lowest step – penitence to the highest – theosis [12, 13]. The transfer to the higher steps is possible only with the help of divine grace, which requires initial training in order to be comprehended. Such training is in fact spiritual practice of smart or inner doing.

Importantly, theosis is neither a metaphor, nor mere likening to Christ as the highest moral paragon, but a real communication between Him and a man at present. It is in the process of such a dialogue that the personality is constituted; a man joins his spiritual nature, thereby acquiring his true “Self”. Furthermore, it should also be noted that theosis is about every aspect of human existence: soul and body, that is, the latter becomes deified as well, hence the veneration of the saints' relics so illustrative of Orthodoxy. Man's body also participates in the process of spiritual ascent during the smart doing: its position matters, the breathing rhythm is coordinated with the words of the prayer

Unlike in Catholicism, the body in Orthodoxy is not considered a source of imperfection: the body is not evil and not sinful in itself, its needs are natural, only their abuse is evil. In Orthodox liturgical literature, the body is called the brother. A rational attitude to one's body, the need to reckon with its needs were taught by the holy fathers and monks who believed that the exhaustion of the flesh was harmful. In addition, according to the patristic teaching, sin arises in the soul and only then goes into the body, being revealed in evil deeds. Therefore, to fight with the body means to deal with the effect, not the cause. Consequently, one should not discard the body considering it as a burden, but save it in the same way as the soul.

This means that Orthodox body and soul are not opposed to each other and there is no conflict between them, since from the point of view of a holistic approach a man is considered a unity of soul and body, spirit and matter. According to N. S. Zhirtueva, this conflict, illustrative of the Western European civilization, is «dismissed» by the concept of theosis [14]. Such a view of a man, in our opinion, involves not only recognizing the value of earthly life and the importance of worldly activities, but inevitably encourages a man to develop and fulfill his talents and abilities here and now. St. Theophan the Recluse, in one of the letters to his spiritual daughter, wrote that it was a great delusion to think “heaven” seemingly required some kind of ambitious activity for the benefit of all mankind. A real deed for a person who turns out to be pious at the same time is his usual everyday affairs: help to his relatives and activities that are close to him in spirit. [15]. It is also worth emphasizing that one of the peculiarities of Russian Orthodoxy is the eldership - the institute of spiritual leadership of ordinary laity. One of the main centers of eldership was the famous Optina monastery, where simple people from all over Russia flocked for advice and spiritual help. This fact clearly shows that the Orthodox monks did not shun the world, but actively interacted with it. As such, there is no reason to ascribe renouncing and rejection of reality to Orthodoxy as it is done by I.G. Yakovenko.

Thus, in order to unite with God, reestablish communication with Him and, consequently, achieve salvation, one must accomplish natural interaction and cooperation between Divine and human wills, or synergy. In other words, according to the principles of Orthodoxy, everyone may achieve salvation, but as the Holy fathers said, “God constrains nobody” – that is, He gives man the opportunity to pursue salvation if man wishes to do so. Consequently, salvation is a conscious and free choice made by man himself, for which he bears full responsibility.

Western Christianity developed a radically different view of salvation and the role of man in it. This view goes back to the famous debate on freedom and divine grace between Pelagius and St. Augustine, which took place in the 5th century. Pelagius believed that Adam's sin was his own personal deed that had nothing to do with his descendants and never exerted any harmful influence on human nature. Since human nature is undistorted, man sins because of his own evil inclinations, which he can get rid of by himself by contributing to his moral improvement, thereby achieving salvation. It is divine grace that man receives as a reward for his own virtue. In other words, Pelagius emphasized the freedom of man, in fact denying the importance of divine grace in their salvation.

St. Augustine was prone to the other extreme. Polemicizing with Pelagius, he gave absolute priority to divine grace, denying the role of man in his salvation. According to Augustine, Adam's sin affects the entire human race, and therefore all of them, including newborns, deserve damnation. However, God is merciful, and that is why he ordained some men to eternal bliss, while dooming the others to eternal torment. Such division of all men into chosen and damned is a manifestation of God's free will. It would be pointless to try and explain those decisions, because they are beyond human consciousness. One must accept his fate and not grumble at it, since a man does not have the power to change anything.

Thus, Augustine's idea of human ordainment made man completely subordinate to divine grace. Augustine's doctrine of ordainment was interpreted in the era of Protestant Reformation by Calvin and Zwingli who aggravated his extremes even further. Thus, the Westminster confession of 1647 emphasized that upon God's decision to divide all men into chosen and damned he not only deprived the latter of his mercy, but "oftentimes took their own virtues" as well. This document also says that God did this "to exalt unlimited power over his own creations" [16]. Each man's fate is forever ordained by God and not subject to change, so no merits or good deeds can ever affect his destiny. Christ came into the world to save only the chosen ones.

But why the idea of ordainment neither gave birth to fatalism nor led to passivity and instead contributed to the development of unrestrained energy? In his famous work "*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*", M. Weber comes to the conclusion that it has to do with the concept of professional vocation [16]. According to this concept, it is practical activity that makes it possible to identify the presence of divine grace in a person most effectively, and the degree of success in the professional activity is the criterion for that. But if you fail, it causes many doubts about your chosenness, and at the same time a new surge of energy evoked by the desire to make sure that the misfortune you went through is temporary and is not an indication of your damnation.

Such a concept surely stimulated human activity and self-sufficiency, but this activity was directed outwardly: towards external practical enterprise. Therefore, Protestantism encouraged entrepreneurial spirit and do-it-yourself approach of man in society, though denying his freedom in spiritual matters, believing that salvation of man depends entirely on God and not on him.

Deterministic trend had great influence in both Catholicism and Protestantism: divine grace acts here somewhat automatically, in spite of the will and desire of man: in Catholicism, there is a doctrine of the so-called divine grace pouring; in Calvinism, divine grace is considered irreversible, and its influence cannot be avoided. That is why those who were chosen for salvation cannot but accept it, and those who were called to salvation cannot be left behind. Such a perception of divine grace impact may lead to one and only conclusion: there is no room for human freedom and creativity.

Such a radical cut-off within the framework of one Christian tradition has a well-founded explanation in one of the works by S. Horuzhy, who mentions the crucial Orthodox notion of energy and doctrine of distinguishing between God's essence and energy, inseparable from its own essence, similar to the Sun and its rays (doctrine of G. Palama). Western Christianity, in its turn, rejects such a distinction, considering divine grace to be, according to V. N. Losskiy, a consequence and "the effects of the Divine cause" [17]. It is unthinkable to believe that man somehow takes part in the connection with God in such a system of coordinates, where God remains absolutely transcendent ("The finite is unable to comprehend the infinite"). According to S. Horuzhy, such an "essential" connection might be a matter of mere necessity, provided God himself wants to establish the link with a man [18].

From the point of view of Orthodoxy, the connection between man and God takes place at the energy level. The process of theosis is carried out through the connection of human energies with divine grace, which represents divine energy. Since God himself exists in those energies, a person "is deified" by letting divine energy flow through his body, which results in his radical transfiguration or ontological transformation. This circumstance makes manifestation of human freedom in the matter of acquiring divine grace possible.

Besides, the creative potential inherent in human nature is fully revealed in the process of spiritual ascent. After all, man is created in the image and likeness of God, and God is the Creator of all things. According to the concept of theosis, man is a potentially divine being. By combining the energies of man with divine grace, he actualizes this potential state acquiring unlimited creative possibilities from this cooperation. St. Gregory Palamas paid particular attention to the ability of man to be creative. The prominent theologian considered this peculiarity to be decisive for man, distinguishing him from the whole universe and being a man's advantage over angels who are not familiar with such a gift [19].

It should be noted that the Orthodox opinion on that matter is still not very much appreciated. The Western Church interprets this Orthodox approach as semi-Pelagianism. But the Orthodox point of view is not something that lies in the middle. Orthodoxy resolves the issue with correlation of human will and divine grace on the completely different, deeper level: divine grace is a gift of Divine love, and it is not given for anything, nor it is a reward. It is the manifestation of God's love, it is Love itself, and therefore extends to all and equally from the righteous to the notorious villains. And it depends on a man whether he can accept this gift, use it and to what extent to learn it or reject it at all. This idea is illustrated perfectly by St.

Theophan the Recluse through the parable about ancient coins called mnases. All slaves were given one mnas. One of them acquired ten more, the other acquired five, and the third one did nothing [15]. In other words, the ability to perceive grace depends on the level of spiritual development of the person.

The process of salvation itself is carried out as a coordination and cooperation of human will and divine grace. A prerequisite or initial impulse is moral catharsis, inner renewal which manifests itself in the conscious desire to progress on the path of Good and which then is reinforced by the influence of divine grace. It is important to note that the quality of work done by an ascetic in the form of spiritual practice is entirely within their personal responsibility, while still being performed with utmost freedom and consciousness. In addition, the system of spiritual exercises is nothing but a way of self-knowledge and self-realization through overcoming one's self, i.e. creative process.

Western theology also mentions renewal of man, though according to the archbishop Starogorodsky, in this case renewal is accomplished "as a supernatural, coerced alteration", since according to the western doctrine, divine grace "settles" and acts inside the man in its own volition and thus turns into a kind of magical influence. At the same time, according to the Orthodox point of view, alteration of man "is carried out through man's will and only finalized by divine grace" [20]. In addition, it should be emphasized that, once received, grace does not turn into one of man's possessions, but remains a temporary occurrence that can be lost at any time. Therefore, continuous spiritual work is crucial for its maintenance, which in its turn indicates the importance of one's own efforts.

It is important to note that recently there is a convergence of science and religion and the former idea of their hostility is beginning to recede. An eloquent confirmation of this is the study of the English scientist A. Deikman, which attempts to explain and confirm the reality of religious experience from the standpoint of cognitive science. The author concludes that ordinary people, not religious ascetics, are able to feel the unity of the universe, the spiritual connection between people when they do their work, any activity as a ministry: they do what is required, not waiting for approval and gratitude from others. In other words, such motivation helps them overcome their ego, which is an important point in all mystical traditions. It is noteworthy that the author suggests the word "energy" as a metaphor for denoting an invisible, intangible spiritual connection between people, although in his study he appeals to Eastern mystical tradition in general, Zen Buddhism, in particular, in no way mentioning hesychasm. As a result of the research, A. Deikman comes to the important conclusion that the further development and survival of mankind will depend on the change in human consciousness, as taught by ancient mystical traditions [21].

IV. CONCLUSION

Thus, Orthodoxy considers man to be an active basis in the task of his salvation, giving him a role of co-Creator, who not only counts on God's support, but also contributes to cooperative creative effort in a free and conscious manner. Unlike in Protestantism, such activity is not directed outwardly,

but inwardly. After all, it is the depths of human soul that moral choice between Good and Evil takes place in; it is this place that bears witness to the "unseen battle" between the man and his desires or malice and the important work of self-actualization and self-assembly for man in order to become a unified harmonious whole. It is this place that cultivates seeds of Good and Love, capable of curbing man's selfness or ego. It is there that the act of creation of one's true self through connection of God and man takes place in, thus giving birth to the miracle of transformation.

It should be reminded, that according to Christianity, the essence of the Fall from grace is in the severance between man and God. It was this connection between man and God that ensured the harmony in the world. This event disrupted the original harmony. Chaos emerged shortly after, and the world sank in evil. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the world is the reason why evil exists. Evil lies in the man himself, more specifically, in his state of disharmony and imbalance resulting from the Fall. Therefore, the meaning of salvation is to restore the connection between man and God.

Hence such a strong emphasis on the inner world of a man rather than the outer one, which is far from manifesting rejection or denial of the real world as well as the rejection of its development and improvement. The pathos of Orthodoxy is somewhat different: man changes the world around him by changing himself. In other words, transformation of the world is possible, but it has to be preceded by transformation of man, because only the internal change is able to generate sustainable external changes. Such statement is best illustrated by the famous phrase of Seraphim of Sarov: "save yourself, and around you thousands will be saved", which is in fact the credo of Orthodoxy.

The tradition of Hesychasm, within which the doctrine of synergy as well as the spiritual practice of inner or smart doing were developed, is the core of Orthodox spirituality which strongly and fruitfully influenced Russian culture. This tradition came to Rus from Byzantine Empire almost immediately after its adoption of Orthodoxy. Since then it developed with only minor interruptions experiencing periods of upturn and downturn at different historical times: it would both gain strength, as it was in 14-15th centuries, and weaken during the split of the Russian Church and the reforms of Peter I that followed. A new, the most intense and fruitful rise occurred between the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century.

All this time the ancient tradition nourished Russian culture from its fertile source. It was enough to mention only a few individuals, which were known not only to educated Russian people, but to the majority of school students as well, such as Sergius of Radonezh, Andrei Rublev, Theophanes the Greek, Nil Sorski or Seraphim of Sarov. In order to assess the value of such influence, one should recall the vigorous conversations between the prominent representatives of Russian culture such as F.M. Dostoevsky, L.N. Tolstoy, Slavophiles and others with Optina elders who were the living embodiment of the tradition.

The ill-fated 20th century associated with the Bolshevik revolution and the subsequent era of terror prevented the Hesychast tradition from its creative development on the Russian grounds.

Today, after a long break, the tradition is being revived again. Modern Russia takes great interest in its own roots, Russian spiritual culture and Orthodoxy. However, many of the current adherents of Orthodoxy perceive it purely in an outwardly directed manner: they see it as a formal rite without linking it to the spiritual practice that actually reveals the creative potential of man.

Such situation shows that the tradition of Russian ritualism has stronger grounds than that of Hesychasm now. It poses a serious problem because this tradition is archaic and does not stand up for the challenges of modernity. Therefore, it makes no contribution to the dynamic development of society causing the situation to stagnate.

Apparently, it is this tradition that draws fair criticism from I.G. Yakovenko, although he identifies it with Orthodoxy as a whole, in no way mentioning the existence of the opposite Hesychastic tradition. This tradition, according to the fair remark of S.S. Horuzhy, is a movement “towards the Church Fathers” and not back to the past, because the strategy of this tradition is associated with the attitude of personal responsibility and creativity [22].

Therefore, it is not a matter of exhausting the possibilities of Russian traditional culture, but of the fact that the current generation will have to re-discover and familiarize themselves with spiritual heritage of Hesychasm's ancient tradition and its great potential for our development. Thus, the Orthodox perception of man as a personality characterized by creativity, internal freedom and responsibility for their moral choice is fully consistent with the objectives of modernization, which require human independent activity, openness to innovation and responsibility.

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