

# Christian Calendar and Symbolism of Numbers in the Late Literary Prose of Leo Tolstoy

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**Abstract** – The article touches upon the issue of the role of the Christian calendar and the symbolism of numbers in Tolstoy late literary prose. The authors prove that Leo Tolstoy relates the life of his characters with the dates of the Christian calendar and the Biblical numerical symbolism that perform a prospective function. The appeal of Tolstoy to the Christian calendar is aimed at the proof of the New Testament's salvation. The absence of the dates of the Christian calendar is not an indicator of the unjust life of his characters, but usually it reflects their moral and physical death. In Tolstoy's short stories the Christian calendar "helps" his characters to start living according to the Gospel. The oblivion of religious holidays by Tolstoy's characters is an additional charge of people immorality. The pointing at the dates of the Christian calendar does not change the fate of Tolstoy's characters for which the material comfort or the voice of the flesh is the most important. The beginning of Tolstoy's characters enlightenment is predetermined by several of the Twelve Great Feasts. The analysis allowed the authors claiming that the life stories of Tolstoy's characters are perceived in the context of the Parable of the Prodigal son.

**Keywords** – *Leo Tolstoy, Christian calendar, Biblical numerical symbolism, prospective function, enlightenment, literary prose*

## I. INTRODUCTION

It is high time to include the "late" Leo Tolstoy, who was excommunicated from the Orthodox Church, into the broad context of Christian literature. Tolstoy is still perceived by many scientists as an odious writer and they treat his later prose as supposedly contrary to the spirit of the Gospel. V.N. Zakharov is absolutely right when he confirms that Tolstoy became a non-church man, but he was still a Christian [1, p. 120].

When scientists try to consider Tolstoy's creative works in the paradigm of the Christian mentality, they adhere to the opinion that Tolstoy has his own religious views, which differ from the Christianity professed in Russia. The perception of the literary text is ambiguous. When a literary text is analyzed, a "subjective factor" plays a big role. The personal opinion of an interpreter partly predetermined by his epoch and the prevailing scientific context is equally important, therefore, literary assessments do not always reflect writer's intentions; all this leads to radically contradictory interpretations of the works of one and the same author. The analysis of composition, coloratives, presence of evangelical text, mithopoetic discourse, choice of anthroponyms, oineropoetics, chronotope and etc.

makes it possible to avoid the biased assessments and judgments.

In 1881 N.N. Strakhov admired the evangelical spirit in Tolstoy's story "What Men Live by" [2, p. 407]. In Soviet literary studies, in contrast to the pre-revolutionary literary criticism, it was not customary to talk about the Christian beginning of Tolstoy short stories.

Recently, in Tolstoy short stories, N. D. Sat distinguished the parable beginning, the plot scheme based on the model of "the Christian behavior – the spiritual enlightenment – the harmonious reality" [3].

M.Yu. Barabanova reveals the gospel motifs, the reminiscences, the re-creation of evangelical characters and the plot situations in Tolstoy short stories. She also speaks about the inclusion of evangelical parables into Tolstoy short stories and the correlation with the Gospel at the level of word order inversion [4].

The authors did not find the works in which researchers had analyzed the Christian ideas in Tolstoy stories of the 1880s.

Many literary scholars continue to perceive Tolstoy novel "Resurrection" as allegedly contrary to the spirit of the Gospel. The authors do not agree with A.B. Tarasov, who claims that describing the Easter Vigil Tolstoy wanted to create the new Christian morality [5].

S. Vasilyev's point of view seems convincing to the authors. S. Vasiliev considers that the drawing of the Easter Vigil in "Resurrection" has no irony and accusatory pathos. According to S. Vasiliev the Easter Vigil becomes the semantic center of the novel and the key to Nekhlyudov's and Katyusha's enlightenment [6, pp. 18-23].

Scientists are still arguing about what should be understood by the resurrection in the last Tolstoy novel. Some researchers interpret the resurrection as a return to universal moral standards, others literary scholars treat the resurrection as the religious concept. Several researchers talk about Katyusha's and Nekhlyudov's resurrection [7, 8]. The others scientists write about of Katyusha's, Nekhlyudov's and the whole country resurrection [9, 10]. Some researchers affirm that only Nekhlyudov went through the resurrection in this novel [11].

As a rule, researchers interpret "Resurrection" exclusively in the aspect of universal human values and they treat the title in the same way. According to I.B. Mardov, in this novel the

resurrection is embodied in the feeling of love for all people and in the awakening of the character to life and in his favor towards all people, which is inherent in children [12, p. 233]. N.G. Nabiyeu states that the title of this novel presupposes the return of a man to primary harmony [13, p. 51]. I.Yu. Matveyeva interprets Nekhlyudov's resurrection as a restoration in the memory of the forgotten, as the return of the deceased to death [14, p. 93]. R. F. Gustafson considers Nekhlyudov's resurrection as an awakening, a constant process of man's self-improvement, his enlightenment from a Stranger into an Inhabitant [15].

E.G. Novikova claims that the finale of "Resurrection" is focused on the Apocalypse, and its title restricts character's resurrection to earthly life and deprives Tolstoy novel of the Christian meaning [16, p. 171].

For a long time scientists, ignoring the saturation of "Resurrection" with gospel quotations, interpreted the writer's appeal to the Gospel as a kind of "supplement" in solving social problems of rebuilding the world. Recently in a number of works it is stated that in "Resurrection" Tolstoy solves moral and religious issues.

Until now scientists have not answered the question about the reasons for such a frequent appeal of Tolstoy's character to the Gospel of Matthew. V. G. Andreeva argues that Nekhlyudov's reading the Sermon on the Mount does not give alleged reasons to talk about Tolstoy addiction to the Gospel [17, p. 102].

V.G. Odinkov was right when he says that Tolstoy perfectly felt the aesthetic potential contained in the Gospel and realized this potential in his literary works [18, pp. 202-206]. V.G. Odinkov considered that the Gospel epigraphs clarified the moral essence of Tolstoy's novel and set the algorithm for the character's moral and spiritual enlightenment. According to V.G. Odinkov, the statements stated in the epigraphs for "Resurrection" were confirmed at the end of Tolstoy novel [19, p. 148].

D.M. Shevtsova revealed that in "Resurrection" the ideas, which were in the evangelical epigraphs, reflected in the plot and sounded in the finale as a logical result of the character's thoughts on the surrounding reality. These ideas were repeated in the form of direct quotations and reminiscences from the Scripture. The Gospel finale of the novel concentrated Tolstoy point of view that was expressed in the plot and character system [20].

According to A.S. Kondratyev, Tolstoy built the plot of "Resurrection" in such a way that Nekhlyudov began to realize the fundamental principles of the Divine being and the composition of this novel reproduced the purification and renewal of Nekhlyudov's soul and consciousness [21, p. 15].

V.V. Savelyeva comes to the conclusion that the motive of Nekhlyudov's awakening received religious and moral content [22].

In a number of works, considering the Christian discourse of Tolstoy literary prose, the authors said that the late Tolstoy leads his character to the rejection of a godless existence. The authors proved that Tolstoy also uses the Evangelical motifs-

symbols and allusions and besides refers to the color scheme, anthroponym and mythopoetic images, which are caused by the traditions of the ancient Russian literature based on the Gospel. Tolstoy resorts to the stylization of the narrative-rhetorical tone of the Biblical tale [23, pp. 131-180; 24].

The analysis of the embodiment of the Christian picture of the world in the late Tolstoy literary prose must be continued.

Since the Baptism of Russia, people relate their lives to the milestones of the Christian calendar and biblical numerical symbolism. In the literary prose Christian chronometric coordinates and the symbolism of numbers often express the idea of "restoring" a character who refuses a godless existence and joins the Word of God, therefore, according to V.N. Zakharov, the chronotope of many works in Russian literature is the Orthodox Christian, even if it was not consciously set by the author [25, p. 9].

The appeal to calendar dates and numerical symbolism in Tolstoy literary prose allows getting closer to the understanding of the religious and philosophical views of this writer and revises the outdated clichés in the interpretation of his literary creativity. Until now, scientists have not considered Tolstoy appeal to the symbolism of numbers and dates of the Christian calendar.

This article considers Tolstoy appeal to the Christian calendar and numerical symbolism in "What Men Live by", "Where Love is, There God is Also", "How Much Land does a Man Need?", "The Death of Ivan Ilyich", "The Kreutzer Sonata", "The Devil", "Hadji Murad" and "Resurrection".

## II. METHODS

In this article the main method of Tolstoy late literary prose analysis is the method of mythopoetic restoration. Mythological images, situations and the mythopoetic meanings hidden behind them exist in the works of art implicitly and explicitly. The mythologism of any literature is a special method and reflects the writer's attitude to the world. In the literary text specifying the certain dates of the calendar and the symbolic meaning of numbers does not differ from the symbolic meaning of individual words or episodes. The certain calendar dates and numbers perform the function of signs-substitutes for the whole situations and plots. When the authors consider some of these signs it is possible to reconstruct the poetic space of the author. Analyzing the literary text the authors identify the elements of mythological consciousness, establish this text degree to the mythology and give a subsequent interpretation of the events associated with the mythological plot.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Tolstoy claimed in "Confession" about his rejection of all the Twelve Great Feasts except Christmas, but in his literary prose he uses the dates of the Christian calendar and the Biblical symbolism of numbers when he draws the characters' enlightenment.

As a rule, in Tolstoy's literary prose, the absence of the dates of the Christian calendar shows how far people have moved away from God. In the short story "How Much Land does a Man need?" Pakhom did not read the Gospel; he did not love

people and died in pursuit of profit. In “The Kreutzer Sonata” Pozdnyshev was tormented by jealousy and was not thinking about God and did not repent of killing his wife. In “Hadji Murad” officers were not depicted at prayer; the highlanders prayed 4 times a day, and they killed their enemies on their religious holidays too, because they thought it pleased to their God.

The Christian calendar helps people to find the meaning of life. In the short story “Where Love is, There God is Also” Martin started drinking and talking bad things about people after the death of his wife and son. At the Trinity countryman-old man told him that it was a sin to despair and added that we should live not for our joy, but for God. The saving mission of the church to convert people to God is associated with the Trinity. In Tolstoy’s story the enlightenment of the character started with the Trinity, and the man began to live according to the laws of God, bringing love to the world.

In the short story “The Candle” events take place on the eve of the Holy Week, which influenced on the master’s wise decision and also on the lesson learned by the characters. After the death of the cruel estate manager the master did not punish the peasants, but let them go to the court, and they understood that the power of God is not in sin but in good.

In the short story “Girls are Smarter than Old Men” parents of children who quarreled because of a trifle began to curse and fight. The girls who had forgotten about the tiff and the words of the old woman that it is sin to quarrel, especially in the Holy Week, shamed the adults.

In the short story “Two Old Men” the men Efim and Elisha went to worship the Holy Sepulcher. Efim did not forgive the wanderer the debt and he was only concerned about the salvation of his soul. Elisha, whose name means *salvation* saw a family dying from starvation and did not go to the Holy Land, but he fed the people, adjusted their life and returned home after the Assumption. According to the Gospel, the Apostles miraculously gathered in Jerusalem at the Dormition to complete the burial of the Virgin Mary. Elisha “came” before Efim to Jerusalem. Near the Holy Sepulcher Efim checked his wallet. Suddenly it seemed to him that Elisha was praying near the Holy Fire. When Efim returned home, he saw Elisha at work. Efim realized that God ordered people to live in love and care for people. Elisha is Tolstoy’s righteous; the story of his deeds is related to one of the Twelve Great Feasts.

In the short story “The Dream of the Young Tsar” the character had a dream about main trouble in his country: about fights, murders, drunkenness, police bribes, debauchery in orphanages and theft in churches. An unseen companion told the king that a man must serve God and save his soul. The author promises to tell the king fulfilled this order or not in 50 years. The dream sent on the Christmas Eve transformed this story into a religious-philosophical plane and turned into parable about choosing a life path.

The references to the dates of the Christian calendar in some Tolstoy’s works are an empty device when he shows the unrighteous life of his characters. In “The Death of Ivan Ilyich” no one perceived his demise as a tragedy. Golovin devoted his life to the hoarding and he had no spiritual closeness with

people; Ivan Ilyich’s widow of grieved only about the loss of salary; his colleague did not go to the requiem, but he went to gamblers. Golovin died on February 4, 1882. That year this date coincided with the Broad Thursday of the Pancake Week which was intended to eliminate interpersonal conflicts. In Tolstoy’s story nobody mentioned the Pancake Week because the family of the deceased could not think about the holiday. The removal of the body took place the next day, which contradicts the Orthodox funeral rite.

In “The Devil” the author mentions the dates of the Christian calendar three times, but these dates did not affect Irtenev. The main character did not recall his father who died on the Great Lent. Irtenev married on the first Sunday after the Resurrection (that was one of the most successful days for weddings), but two years later, at the Trinity, Eugene decided to go to his lover. Only by chance that day the adultery did not take place. Irtenev could not overcome the temptation and he committed suicide.

In the novel “Resurrection” there are several dates of 188\*year, which correspond to the days of the celebration of the church holy martyrs.

On the 28<sup>th</sup> of April the church commemorates the Apostles Jason, Sosipater and the holy martyr Kerkyra. The Apostles, who carried the Word of God, were slandered and thrown into prison, where they attached 7 thieves to the faith of Christ and were tortured by the authorities. The king’s daughter Kerkyra refused from her wealth, and she began to teach people the Word of God, and believed in Christ. In the first chapter of Tolstoy novel on April 28 three prisoners were tried for murder. The beginning of “Resurrection” with this date foreshadows Nekhlyudov’s appeal to God in the novel’s finale and the coming enlightenment of mankind in future.

On January 17 Christians commemorate Anthony the Great. In Tolstoy novel that day a merchant was poisoned and robbed in a brothel. February 15 is the day of commemoration of the Apostle Onesimus, beheaded in Pozzuoli. In “Resurrection” on February 15 Smelkov’s autopsy examination of was carried out. July 5 the church commemorates Sergius of Radonezh. In Tolstoy novel that day the party of prisoners was sent to hard labor. August 17 the day of commemoration of St. Miron. That day Neverov hanged himself in the madhouse.

Although in the church calendar almost every day is devoted to the commemoration of saints or the memories of events in the life of Christ, on the eve and immediately after the dates indicated by Tolstoy there are no such revered Christian holidays in the Christian calendar. Tolstoy does not resemble the sacred meaning of these dates because the characters have forgotten about them and committed iniquity.

In Tolstoy novel the dates of moveable feasts such as the Ascension, the Pancake Week and the Resurrection, “lead” people to spiritual enlightenment. On the Ascension, in the garden Nekhlyudov kissed Katyusha; the feeling of the young people was chaste and saved them from the fall. Nekhlyudov recalled how he experienced pantheistic unity with the world in a snowy forest on the eve of the Pancake Week. On the Pancake Week, Maslova decided to break out of brothel, but then her desire to avenge everybody for her ruined life was defeated by

continued debauchery. On the hard labor Maslova again believed in people and the good. She became Katyusha again and returned to her primordial pure self.

The biggest role in the Christian chronometric coordinates of Tolstoy late literary prose belongs to the Resurrection which opens the church year. It was Nekhlyudov aunts' estate property where he for the first time felt his dissolution in the world being a student. This event changed his attitude to the Resurrection. When Nekhlyudov became an officer he wanted to be in his aunts' estate only for a day. But he saw Katyusha and agreed to celebrate the Easter there.

During the Easter service he did not think about the atoning sacrifice of Christ, but he thought about Katyusha. Dmitry thought that the iconostasis was shining and candles were burning and the Easter tunes were sounding for Katyusha especially. When Nekhlyudov saw the faces of the peasants who prayed fervently, he remembered his child's promise to try to make everyone happy. All this largely determined Nekhlyudov's enlightenment.

Many of Tolstoy's characters did not have a respectful attitude to the Good Friday and the Resurrection. The Good Friday is the day of prayers and grief for the crucified Christ. But Nekhlyudov thought only about Katyusha. The servants cleaned the floor in Dmitry aunts' house in spite of the fact there should be a perfect order in the houses that day.

The canonical name of the holiday is the Resurrection Sunday of Christ. In Tolstoy novel this title was firstly used in a domestic context. The clergymen were discussing bad weather and complaining about the thaw going to the matins.

Nekhlyudov defiled the Resurrection. On the night of fall the ice on the river began to break, everything was in the ominous fog, a flawed crescent Moon threw light on the world, and Dmitry could not realize that he had committed the meanness.

The title of Tolstoy novel "dictates" the need for spiritual enlightenment to all people. After 10 years, Nekhlyudov recognized Katyusha in the prisoner, he recalled the defiled Resurrection in shame and Dmitry decided to atone for his sin and marry Maslova. The marriage of the character who "condescended" to Maslova would not be enough to return to righteous life. In the final of the novel, Nekhlyudov is going to live by the Word of God and carry it to people.

The correlation of the first and the last chapters with the seasons performs a prospective function. Tolstoy novel begins with a picture of all-conquering spring. The novel ends in a picture of spotless snowy whiteness, which predicts the Christmas and the Resurrection.

In Tolstoy late literary prose the semantics of numbers 4, 6, 8, 12 coincide with the biblical meaning. These numbers perform a prospective function, they are the sacred signs that "direct" people to comprehend the Word of God and "enlarge" the religious and philosophical plan of the writer's works. The number 4 is connected with 4 rivers in Paradise, 4 evangelists, 4 ends of the cross [26, p. 78-86]. In the short story "Where Love is, There God is Also" there are 4 characters. They are Avdeich, Stepan and an old woman with a boy. And there are

4 off-stage evangelical characters. They are the centurion, the widow, the sinner and the host who forgave the debt. They listen to God; the quantitative "equality" of these two groups of characters enhances their typological commonness. The number 4 acts as a "guarantor" of the spiritual enlightenment of people.

In the Bible number 6 is the number of creation, the symbol of strength, wisdom, love, mercy and justice [26, pp. 89-94]. In the short story "What Men Live by" the Angel spent 6 years in Semyon's house before he learned the command of God. The Angel learned that people must love each other.

Number 8 symbolizes a new time in the kingdom of God and the communion with the resurrected life [26, pp. 110-114]. In the short story "Where Love Is, There God is Also" the old man who had been wandering for eight years told Martyn that people must obey the commandments of God.

In the Holy Scriptures, the number 12 is related to the Heavenly Jerusalem and the Apostles [26, p. 14]. The title "What Men Live by" and Angel's words in the final XII chapter that people must love each other are the paraphrase of 8 epigraphs of this story. In chapter XII Semyon, his wife and children saw a huge pillar of fire and Angel's ascension. They fell on their knees. It looks like the creating of a new person and relates to the enlightenment.

In "Resurrection" Maslova was in the prison cell with 12 convicted persons. While transferring to prison 12 prisoners died from the heat. These prisoners cause the reader's allusions to prisoners who were languishing in one cell with the Apostles Jason and Sosipater. But in Tolstoy's novel the prisoners did not have a teacher who could lead them to God. In the prison cells the bitterness reigned and icon with a dusty bouquet of immortelles hung near the bucket.

In "Resurrection" in the last part there are 28 chapters, as in the Gospel of Matthew (but earlier were 27 chapters). The chapter XXVIII is the most "important" in the ideological sense in each of the three parts in this novel. In chapter 28 Nekhlyudov reads the Gospel of Matthew. The New Testament begins with the Gospel of Matthew. In fact Nekhlyudov joins the Word of God for the first time. Dmitry will comprehend the Holy Scriptures in future outside of the novel.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

In his late literary prose Tolstoy recreates the social and historical life of Russia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Under the influence of external factors Tolstoy characters began to realize the presence of God everywhere and they start building their lives according to the laws of God turning from the profane characters to the sacred ones. In the late literary Tolstoy prose the Christian chronotope is represented. The author's implicit or explicit components correlate the events in the life of his characters with the Christian calendar and the biblical numerical symbolism. Such parallels perform the prospective function. These correlations are included in the discourse composition of presentation strategy and they are aimed at the asserting of the salvation of the God's Word in a person's life whose mission is to bring goodness into the world. The Resurrection, the Christmas Eve, the Pancake Week, the Holy Week, the Ascension, the Trinity and the Dormition of the

Mother of God influenced the enlightenment of Tolstoy characters. The life stories of Tolstoy characters are shown as falling away from God and finding Him. These stories are perceived in the context of the Parable of the Prodigal son.

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