

**THE PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION IN RUSSIAN
RELIGIOUS THOUGHT:
ON THE PROBLEM STATEMENT****

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Original research paper

Summary

The paper analyzes milestones in the development of psychological reflexion of religion, that took place in Russian religious thought. The author means that psychological approach to analysis of religion appeared in Russian thought under the influence of German idealism with its attention to the problem of consciousness as well as Romanticism, which implemented a rehabilitation of religion and at the same moment put it to the sphere of emotions. The author analyzes three steps in this process. First, the prehistory as represented by Chaadayev and Slavophiles. Such concepts as “work of consciousness,” “faith,” “personal revelation” are introduced here. Second, Solovyov, his disciples and other thinkers from various philosophical movements, who worked mainly in the last quarter of the 19th century. One can see here detailed descriptions of historical-religious process, made in psychological terms. Third period encompasses early 20th century, with widening influence of such schools in foreign thought as neo-Kantianism, Lebensphilosophie, phenomenology etc., as well as “psychological prose” in Russian literature. The psychological interpretation of religious life of individual in the form of literary or art criticism grows up here. The paper describes methodological innovation and major results in psychological understanding of religious questions. The author views the following as the crucial trends: growing empiricity and historicism, moving from abstract philosophical schemes to more complicated interpretation techniques while researching concise historical matter.

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Introduction

In this article I would like to examine the Russian religious thinkers not as an object of the psychology of religion (and in this respect they are of undoubted interest, and psychological studies of them as original religious personalities could be very productive), but as subjects of its development, perhaps as a direction in the development of the psychology of religion in Russia. Is it possible? It seems to me that to some extent, yes. Even a brief acquaintance shows that Russian religious thought spoke about the problem of religion mainly in psychological terms, among which the concept of consciousness was central.

The origins of this question should be seen: 1) in the German classic philosophy with its thematization of the problem of consciousness; 2) in romanticism, which carried out the rehabilitation of religion and, at the same time, localized it in the sphere of feeling, experience, impression, which complicated, in comparison with the Enlightenment, the inner world of a person; 3) later – in Russian literature with its “psychological prose.”

Consider the main points of the formation of this psychological reflection on religion in Russian thought.

First steps: Chaadayev and Slavophiles

At the stage of the formation of Russian religious thought, we note: P.Ya. Chaadayev, I.V. Kireevsky, A.S. Khomyakov, Yu.F. Samarin.

Pyotr Yakovlevich Chaadayev (1794–1856) is most interested in the cycle of the so-called “Philosophical Letters to a Lady,” among which the First and Fifth letters stand out. In the first of them Chaadayev offers his addressee, who has just passed through a religious conversion, something like a set of exercises for adjustment of religious consciousness, first of all, his emotional side. It is from complaints about the lack of a set of cultural tools in Russia for implementing this kind of adjustment arises his famous criticism of the national culture. The fifth letter proposes a detailed analysis of consciousness in the correlation of his personal and intersubjective aspects, leading to the concept of tradition, to the idea of revelation, etc. It formulates the doctrine of tradition as a world consciousness, an element of which is the personal consciousness of man and, at the same time, as an aggregate of religious ideas. The assimilation of these ideas is, at the same time, an entry into the tradition and, most importantly, the opening of the individual consciousness, its introduction to the world, religious conversion. This process is described by Chaadayev with the help of the specific concept of “work of consciousness” [Chaadayev 1991, 321, 338, 381, 403, 440]. In 6–8 letters, this complex of ideas is put in the basis of religious understanding of history.

Slavophiles are often represented as Orthodox opponents of “philo-Catholic” Chaadayev, but in terms of their philosophical understanding of religion they generally move within the framework of the same problematic. The personalistic aspect of it is developed in the later “Fragments” by I.V. Kireevsky. Here we find, first of all, the doctrine of faith as “consciousness about the relationship of the Divine personality to the human person”, while faith acts as an integrating force acting in the consciousness, as something that ensures the unity and integrity

of the psychological structure of the personality [Kireevsky 2002, 281–282].

Kireevsky's communication with the Optina elders and his participation in publishing the works of the Eastern Fathers of the Church devoted to asceticism and analyzing the inner world of man, largely predetermined by his interest in the culture of romanticism and the German classics, played a significant role in the development of his ideas about religious life as, above all, the reality of the "psychological" order. He undoubtedly influenced the psychologism of the approach of the Russian writers who turned to the religious theme: Gogol, Zhukovsky, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and others [Kontsevich 1970, Kotelnikov 2002, Ereemeev 1996].

If the attitude of Kireevsky to the analysis of the personal aspect of consciousness can really be seen as opposing the Chadayev idea of tradition, then the main ideas of A.S. Khomyakov is more likely to continue and develop the Chaadayev tradition. The social aspect is fixed by him in the concept of "unity" (*sobornost*), the historical one is in the description of two basic types of natural religiosity, which he conditionally refers to as "Iranianism" and "Kushitism." These types are determined by the thinker again in the categories of consciousness, more specifically, in the "categories of will": "Iranianism" grows out of a sense of freedom, "Kushitism" grows from the experience of necessity [Khomyakov 1994, 188], and whole complexes emotional-volitional attitudes towards the Divine, religious practices and cultural phenomena in which they find expression. Tracing their development and relationships, Khomyakov, in his "history of faiths," provides virtually nothing more than a general psychological interpretation of the history of religion.

An important place in the development of a primarily psychological interest in religion should be given to Yu. Samarin, the student and follower of Kireevsky and Khomyakov. He systematizes the general Slavophilic criticism of scholasticism in theology and thereby

contributes to the establishment of interrelations between dogmatic positions and the inner world of man [Samarin 1887, 327–370, Kireevsky 2002, 283, Khomyakov 1994, 25–71]. In his later work on the controversy with M. Muller about the basic principles of the historical study of religion and the dispute with K.D. Kavelin about “problems of psychology” in the center of his attention is religious and psychological issues. They introduce here the concept of “personal revelation” as a fact of consciousness underlying all religious experiences and ideas, the natural foundation of any positive historical Revelation [Samarin 1887, 513].

Summarizing, we can say that by the 1870s the laic religious thinkers have formed a steady interest in the psychological aspects of religious issues, which they opposed on the one hand to study of dogma at ecclesiastical academies, and, on the other, to the increasingly determined sociological approach to religion of secular and atheistic trends of thought.

Second step: V. Solovyov and others

A qualitatively new stage can be dated to the mid-1870s: on the one hand, at this time, the three-volume work of bishop Chrysanthus (Retivtsev) *Religions of the ancient world and their relationship to Christianity* (1872–1878) which is the first detailed and systematic history of religion in Russian, appeared, and on the other hand, a number of authors develop philosophical works, allowing to view this time as a “period of systems” in Russian thought [Zenkovsky 2001, 449]. Among them, V. Solovyov’s figure is prominent.

Without discussing the concept of Solovyov as a whole and his contribution to the philosophy and history of religion, I will point out a few issues that are essential from the point of view of movement toward the psychology of religion.

Thus, in the first published article “The mythological process in ancient paganism,” we see how the development of religious ideas under the influence of Schelling, Muller and Khomyakov is

considered as “mythological or theogonic process” [Solovyov 1911, 4], which is immanent to consciousness and defines its development. The history of religion thus receives a psychological shade.

This approach is developed when considering the history of religion in *Lectures on Divine Humanity*, where this is clearly done with reference to psychological categories. So, for example, the Greeks are building their relationship to the deity in the categories of contemplation or artistic creativity [Solovyov 1989, 65], while the Jews – in the categories of the will [Solovyov 1989, 69]. The common paradigm, in whose logic Solovyov considers himself, is the phenomenon of conversion/deconversion [Antonov 2004, 160–190]. The structural analysis of religious relations in *The Spiritual Foundations of Life*, is “psychological” too as it is carried out in the categories of “desire,” “conscience,” “grace,” “thought,” and “will” [Solovyov 1912, 274–283]. I do not set as my goal a complete analysis of all the works of Solovyov in one way or another devoted to the problem of religion: what has been said is enough to clarify in which direction he guided the thinking of his many followers.

Among his followers – who not only developed his philosophical ideas but also translated them from the sphere of metaphysics into the field of more concrete historical and theoretical research – the figure of Prince S.N. Trubetskoy is clearly distinguished (1).

I will focus on his concept a bit more and try to connect the two issues: the concept of religion, outlined in his famous article “Religion” in the Brockhaus and Efron Encyclopedic Dictionary, and analysis of the collective imagination, as presented in the article “On the nature of consciousness.”

The concept of religion outlined in the article is emphatically psychological, the entire discussion is conducted in psychological terms. Defining religion as “organized worship in a higher powers,” Trubetskoy further reveals the basis of this worship in the intentionality of the “believing consciousness.” In it, the correlative subject is the higher power, perceived *by believer’s consciousness*

as a “undoubted reality” and an act of faith, which is further considered in its intellectual, emotional and volitional components [Trubetskoy 1908, 499]. At the same time, it is the second and third that is given the greatest importance, in connection with which religion is defined “as a cult, not as a mythology” [Trubetskoy 1908, 500]. But the cult is also analyzed primarily from the point of view of the psychology of its participants: in the cult the “subjective attitude of the believer to the subject of his worship” objectifies [Trubetskoy 1908, 500], the cult can be either more or less filled with this attitude, or formal, empty. Here, the question naturally arises about the relationship between personal and collective moment in religion, which is decided not sociologically, but socio-psychologically. Trubetskoy apparently uses here the logic of the relationship between the personal and the collective (more precisely, the “cathedral” (*sobornyi*) as “intersubjective”), described by him in an article on the nature of consciousness.

The role of connecting link here plays the concept of “revelation.” Interpreting its usage by Trubetskoy, it seems appropriate to use the opposition of the emic/ethical approaches. If emically, from the insider’s point of view, the revelation is recognized as direct communication of the individual with the higher forces with which it enters into the attitude of worship; ethically, from the point of view of the researcher, it acts as a universal psychological fact, the “main phenomenon of religious consciousness” development, the point at which an individual can make a unique contribution to this development [Trubetskoy 1908, 501]. At the same time, the researcher as a researcher should observe a strict epoché regarding the ontological status of the source of this contribution. This moment is presented in detail in the methodological section of Trubetskoy’s great work on the history of religion [Trubetskoy 1994a, 406–408].

This is where the “collective imagination” begins to work. Images entering its sphere through personal revelation begin to transform.

Representations “live in a society of minds just as they live in separate individuals; and they develop and summarize in their social life” [Trubetskoy 1994b, 571].

The examples given by Trubetskoy show that his analysis of mental functions, including imagination, was aimed at understanding religious history from the very beginning: “A savage worships the ghosts of gods created by the collective imagination of his tribe” [Trubetskoy 1994b, 570].

The historical process is set not so much by the events themselves as by their processing in the world of social representations, by a system of folk or/and universal images, which are a kind of “revelations” or even “bibles” of peoples, their contributions to the treasury of universal spiritual life, to the common “education of the human race” [Trubetskoy 1994b, 572].

Thus, further psychologization of the history of religion takes place: its main driving forces are motives and images connected with them in the collective imagination of mankind: selfish motives of fear and self-interest and ethical motives of awe, reverence, piety; frightening images of demons and sublime images of gods, passing into each other until the appearance of a pure image of the one God, in which there is nothing demonic [Trubetskoy 1908, 502–507].

In Trubetskoy’s ideas, the influence of the previous tradition of Russian and German thought is evident, but it is also evident that the influence of his concept caused a largely psychological orientation of the cognitive interest of Russian thinkers in the field of religion in the future.

Directly (personally or through his works) he had an impact on such significant authors as P. Florensky, S.N. Bulgakov, N.A. Berdyaev, Vyach. Ivanov, L.P. Karsavin, F.F. Zelinsky, N.S. Arsenyev, B.P. Vysheslavitsev, and other thinkers. His indirect influence, an account of the philosophical and historical work done by him can be found in the works of Rozanov, Merezhkovsky, Frank.

There is no doubt that Solovyov and his followers were not at the end of the 19th century the only group of religious thinkers who emphasized the psychological aspects of religious life. Along with them, it is necessary to note such trends as the Neo-Leibnizian spiritualism of Astafiev, Lopatin, Kozlov, and others, the Hegelianism of Chicherin and P.A. Bakunin, Kantianism of A.I. Vvedensky, that is not to mention the thinkers of the Russian spiritual academies. However, it was this group of thinkers that turned out to be the most influential in the next period – the beginning of the 20th century.

The third step: the beginning of the century

However, to take the next step, we need to take into account two important points: the reception of the ideas of Western thinkers of the late 19th – early 20th centuries: Nietzsche, Dilthey, James, Freud, Jung, Wundt, neo-Kantians, and the reception (in many ways co-directional) of the artistic analysis of religious consciousness, proposed by the great Russian writers, first of all, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky.

The characteristic features of this era, which are directly relevant to our topic, can be described approximately as follows. There is deepening, detailing attention to the individual, rather than to the general, the explanation is replaced by interpretation, suspicion grows, “reading between the lines” is practiced, specific hermeneutic techniques are directed at revealing subconscious impulses, finding that the author or actor being analyzed wanted to cover (and this is by default recognized as the most important), a complex and refined culture of the symbolist hermeneutics of religious life develops [Etkind 1994]. At the same time, “religious” becomes, as it were, a privileged object of interpretation, it is specifically looked for even where it seemed not to exist and cannot be, while it is closely intertwined with the “psychological,” they seem to mutually explain each other. A typical example here is Bulgakov’s article on Herzen, where the author directly compares and actually identifies “religious”

and “spiritual”: asserting that he is primarily interested in “*Herzen as a person*,” he further points out that “truly, authentically and solely human element is his *religion*, understood, of course, in the broadest sense of the word: *what* he lives for, what he considers most sacred and dear for himself and *how* he lives, how he serves his sanctuary. To know a person means to know his religious life, enter this temple” [Bulgakov 1903, 162].

A whole literature of psychological interpretation of individual religious life gradually develops, usually in the form of literary and/or artistic criticism. Unconditional leaders in this area can be considered such outstanding authors as D.S. Merezhkovsky, V.V. Rozanov, L.I. Shestov, however, along with them, we can cite a number of names of authors of the second order, who created in their own way no less interesting and qualitative analyzes: B.A. Griftsov, G.I. Chulkov, A. Zakrzhevsky, S.N. Glinka-Volzhsky and many others.

I will say very briefly only about a few main authors and their results.

N.N. Pavlyuchenkov wrote prolifically on the elements of the psychology of religion in Florensky’s thinking, [Pavlyuchenkov 2011, 92-112]. The parallel of Vyach. Ivanov – K.G. Jung deserves an unconditional attention (2).

I myself already had to write about the elements of the psychological-religious approach among representatives of religious thought at the beginning of the 20th century. Thus, in V.V. Rozanov, we find a very rich material in the form of an analysis of the psychology of Russian sectarianism and schism, a subtle, though theologically profoundly mistaken, analysis of the religious motivation of Christianity, the study of the connection between religion and sexuality, historical and religious digressions in the history of the religion of Egypt, Israel, etc. B.P. Vysheslavtsev, N.A. Berdyaev, S.L. Frank creates their own philosophical theories of religion, implementing a productive reception of the ideas of James,

Freud and Jung, rethinking the concepts of “religious experience,” “sublimation,” and so on. In the works of V.V. Zenkovsky we find the developed concept of the psychology of religion as a study of the subjective side of religious experience, its main tasks, subject and method in connection with the problems of the psychology of childhood and religious education.

Conclusion

First of all, it is necessary to be cautious: it does not mean that in Russian religious thought the psychology of religion has developed as a scientific discipline. It is about the emergence of psychologism as a cognitive interest and atmosphere directed toward the religion, the key concepts of this approach are “experience,” “sentiment,” “feeling,” “necessity,” “motivation,” etc.

Moreover, for the objectivizing, “scientific” psychology of religion, such an atmosphere – with its criticism regarding scientific rationality, with the emphasis on irrational or supra-rational elements of religious life, with the pathos of the “inexplicable” and at the same time focusing on “ontology” – may become not a facilitation but, on the contrary, a hindrance.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that inside this interest, original and significant research projects and productive ideas (not only factual, but also methodological properties) were born. It makes sense that the modern psychology of religion should address such ideas from time to time, translate them into our language, trying to get their empirical confirmation or refutation.

However, this tradition can get a more general meaning. By virtue of its radical otherness, that can become a starting point for overcoming the legacy of Marxist sociology that has come to us from the previous era, or at least for a conscious attitude toward this legacy. It can teach us to look at religious reality not only through the prism of numbers and general categories (I am not saying that it is not necessary), but in its unique concreteness. It can help to realize

the simple fact that the researched people, no matter how bizarre their beliefs may be, and the researcher – whether he is a believer, an atheist or an agnostic – ultimately belong to one life-world, in the structure of which both the importance of religion and the meaning of its study are rooted.

NOTES

(1) On its significance for the development of the Russian science of religion, see: [Miroshnikov 2010, 434–441; Antonov 2011, 17–26].

(2) Until now, this problem has been posed either in the context of the history of psychoanalysis [Etkind 1994] or in the light of a philological analysis of mythopoetics [Titarenko 2012].

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