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## RELIGION, THEOLOGY AND SCIENCE IN RUSSIA

Evgeny Arinin\*

*Vladimir State University, Faculty of Humanity,  
Department of Philosophy, Religious Studies and Psychology, Gorkiy str. 87, Vladimir 600000  
Russia*

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### Abstract

The scientific researches of religion in Russia as well as in Europe begin in XIX<sup>th</sup> century. In additions of that time for the name of the new and special sphere of scientific interest, the common European terms ‘the History of religion’ and ‘the Science of religion’ were used. The Russian term ‘religiovedenie’ (German ‘Religionswissenschaft’) was used for the first time in 1908 (Leo Tolstoy) and 1932 (in the preface of the book edited by A.T. Luckachevski). The authors of the edition in 1932 had already opposed their “harmonious successive dialectal – materialism theory of religion by the Marx-Engels-Lenin” to alien “bourgeois religious studies”. Then the given term was practically forgotten till 1960. Dmitry Ugrinovich, the author of the first monograph in Russian, including the term ‘religiovedenie’ (1973), opposed the ‘Bourgeois Religious Studies’ and ‘Marxist religiovedenie’. In the ‘post-communist’ Russia appeared and spread a great number of new approaches in Religious studies: ‘Comparative Studies’, ‘Exclusive-Holistic’ (‘Orthodoxy Religious Studies’, ‘Esoterical Religious Studies’, etc.) and ‘Dialogue’ (‘Meta-Theology’, ‘General Theory of Religion’, etc.).

*Keywords:* Russia, Religious studies, Meta-Theology, atheism, religiovedenie

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### 1. Introduction

The relationships between Science and religion have many aspects, and in this paper we will focus on the research studies of religion, which in Russia received the name of ‘religiovedenie’ or in English – ‘religious studies’. Today in Russia the word ‘religiovedenie’ appears as a term that has become one of the most popular on the Internet; for example, on the Google search engine in Russian language it was possible to find: at September 1, 2010 – 231,000,000 documents on topic of ‘religiovedenie’, at September 1, 2011 - about 445,000,000 documents, and January 1, 2012 – 527,000,000 documents. In Russian language there is also another name: ‘religievedenie – religious studies’ (it differs on one letter in spelling the Russian name, comparing with ‘religiovedenie’) [1], but it is less common, and the term ‘religiovedenie’ started

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\* E-mail: [eiarinin@mail.ru](mailto:eiarinin@mail.ru)

to label everything that is connected with the study of religion and the teaching of knowledge about it.

The popularity of the term reflects the rapidly spread over the last twenty years of the public interest in Orthodoxy, religion and the ‘mysterious at all’, the formation of ‘pro-Orthodoxy consensus’ when people began to consider the Orthodoxy, in particularly Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), the only ‘regulatory’ spiritual community [2], and the mass interest in nondenominational ‘esotericism’, which in the Church community received the name of ‘occult revival’ [Deacon Andrei Kuraev. *Occultism in Orthodoxy*, <http://lib.eparhia-saratov.ru/books/10k/kuraev/okkultizm/6.html>].

The founder of interpretive anthropology, Clifford Geertz believes that Science in general should not be understood as a ‘final diagnosis’ as defined by this or that ‘essence of religion’, but as much less pretentious “hermeneutic step as an attempt to shed light and to give a definition, and not to bring under column and decode” [3].

## 2. History

We can distinguish, with the inevitable degree of conditionality, the seven periods (and forms) in the development of common types of ‘religious studies’ in Russia:

1. traditional pre–Church (mythology, folklore);
2. Church (theological-universal, and apologetic-conservative);
3. philosophical and axiological (‘Philosophy of religion’, ‘religiovedenie’ by Leo Tolstoy);
4. positive-scientific (‘History of religion’, ‘Science of religion’);
5. ‘militant infidelity’ (‘militant atheism’, ‘Marxist religiovedenie’);
6. ‘scientific atheism’;
7. ‘neutral religious studies’ and contemporary ‘postmodern project’.

Historically, the first form of ‘knowledge about religion’ may be considered the pre-Christian oral stories about the ‘ancestral traditions’ preserved as a ‘folklore’ until the present day in some villages of the Russian North. The second stage begins with the period of Christianization of Rus’ (Russia), acquaintance with the richness of the knowledge from the European theology of the East.

Such monuments of Old Russian literature as the ‘Sermon on Law and Grace’ by Metropolitan Hilarion (1047 - 1050) or ‘The Tale of bygone years’ (1113) are describing the Russians as a ‘Christian nation’ opposing ‘paganism’, ‘Judaism’, ‘Islam’, ‘Latins’, and who believed correctly – ‘true believer’, while familiar to us the term ‘Orthodoxy’ started to spread only at the end of XIV<sup>th</sup> century [V. Kolosov and T. Pavlova, *Etymology of the term ‘Orthodox’ and ‘Orthodoxy’*, <http://pravoslavie.chestisvet.ru/index.php4?id=213>]. The study of other religions was not recommended or was intended to show their danger (‘heretics’ and ‘fatality’), justifying the need for the state enforcement of ‘involvement in religion’, precisely, ‘state religion or confession’. The main

problem of this period (and the approach itself) has been and remains to this day the problem of the Church boundaries, that is a contradiction between the theological-universal and the apologetic-conservative tendencies in Christianity as a particular jurisdiction, and as an exclusive-universal worldview, manifested, for example, in the ability of ‘Christians before Christ’ (“... apologists derive that ... Socrates and Heraclitus were Christians before Christ”) [4; S.A. Mazaev, *The Christian before Christ*, online at: <http://www.bogoslov.ru/text/455620.html>]. It starts with the criticism of the ‘external’ self-identification with a confession: “We know that there may be people, who do not know Christ, but still serve him, and they are those, who do His will; and vice versa – there are those who call themselves Christians, but in fact alien to Jesus...” [5].

Philosophical-evaluative stage of understanding the knowledge about religion in Russia (the ‘philosophy of religion’, *Religiovedenie*’ by Leo Tolstoy) begins in the XIX<sup>th</sup> century, herewith “the object is not conceived almost as something separate from theological apologetics” [6]. Especially after the decree about Toleration in 1905, it was understood much wider such an approach of Leo Tolstoy, for which the theological apologetics should be contrasting with the “religious teaching, common to all people, and doctrine of morality which follows from it, [which] is also the same for all peoples” and which must “be the main subject of all education and training ...” [7]. As suggested by A.P. Kostylev, Leo Tolstoy was the first who used the term ‘*religiovedenie*’ in 1908, when he said that “*religiovedenie* - is a whole science, for which there is no name”, but it is necessary because “core truths in all religions are the same” [<http://pstgu.ru/scientific/events/2011/06/30/30727/>; 8]. Somewhat differently looked at the problem S.N. Bulgakov, who in 1906 pointed out that the passionate theist can be seen in the militant Marxist atheist, and he understood by ‘religion’ as “...those highest and last values, which recognized by a man over and above him, and the practical attitude which man is taking towards these values .... In this sense we can talk about religion of every man, equally religious and who consciously rejects any particular form of religion” [9].

The beginning of positively - scientific (‘History of religion’, ‘The science about religion’) stage in Europe is counted from the lectures on ‘Introduction to the science about religion’ by Frederick Max Muller in London in 1870, although particular scientific researches of religion in Russia, as in Europe, starting earlier in the XVIII-XIX centuries, as part of the History, Ethnology, Philology, and so on [10]. In the XIX-XX centuries, actually were published – ‘Oriental’ studies of Buddhism, Shintoism, ‘medievalist’ works, researches on the history of the Church (by V.V. Bolotov, N.N. Glubokovsky, E.E. Golubinsky and others), by N.F. Kapterev - about Old Believers, excellent articles in the Encyclopaedia of F.A. Brockhaus and I.A. Efron (1890-1907), etc. [P.N. Kostylev, *Russian Religious Studies: Past, Present, Future*, online at: [http://www.sobor.by/rosrelig\\_kostilev.htm](http://www.sobor.by/rosrelig_kostilev.htm)].

It is important to note that at that time, the cooperation between Russian and European scientists was considered normal, which allowed to describe and summarize the materials in the same terminology, to obtain similar and mutually interesting results, there were also published translations of studies written by leading European scholars, while Orthodox priests were actively involved in those researches [11-14]. In the publications of this kind, with purpose to name this new and particular area of scientific interest, were initially used general European terms, such as ‘the history of religion’ and ‘the science of religion’. S.N. Bulgakov believed that scientific research, separated from apologetic theology, “unquestionably extends the knowledge about religion and ... impacts on religious identity”, and “... the fact of science development about religion” was understood by him as “a specific manifestation of religious life” [15].

The totally new stage of development begins in the early twentieth century, with the spread of Soviet ideology ‘of militant infidelity’. During this period, in scientific publications, the term ‘religiovedenie’, as suggested by E.V. Menshikova, was firstly used in 1932 in the preface of the book, edited by A.T. Lukachevsky ‘Proishozhdenie religii v ponimanii burzuasnih uchonih’ (The origin of religion in the understanding of bourgeois scientists) and has been translated as the term common before ‘science of religion’ from the German ‘Religionswissenschaft’ (this German term referred to the emerged in the XIX<sup>th</sup> century Europe of empirical and positive areas of the ‘The Science of Religion’, ‘Religious Studies’, ‘Comparative Religion’, etc.), and the authors contrasted their ‘theory of religion of Marx-Engels-Lenin’ as alien to ‘bourgeois religious studies’ [16]. Later, in 1937, the term ‘religiovedenie’ was used by V.K. Nikolsky in the same confrontational value [17]. From his student years V.K. Nikolsky was a sincere supporter of Marxism, and in 1922 considered it as the most fruitful method for the application to ‘the religious phenomena’. He believed that “only here the materialist historians could stand on their own feet and not to seek a foundation for their works in the writings of linguists and anthropologists”, because only in this context could be understood that “religion in general is a social phenomenon, which groups people associated with the set of economic, social and political relations in this society and in this era” [18].

‘The Marxist religiovedenie’ has been inextricably linked with the well-known concept of ‘withering away of religion’, which was justified by the fact that religion by its very nature is a “perverted, fantastic reflection in men’s minds prevailing over them of natural and social forces”, which “played an active role in strengthening... the system based on the enslavement and exploitation of man by man, ... is an instrument of the imperialist bourgeoisie in the struggle against the camp of democracy and socialism, ... appears as an implacable enemy of the progress and science” [19, 20]. In this social context, the term ‘religiovedenie’ have proved to be almost forgotten until the 60’s of the twentieth century. The reason for this, apparently, can be assumed that in the 40s and 50s Stalin, in the context of the events from the World War II dramatically changed the overall policy in respect to religion, trying to make it as an instrument, practically ‘manage and own’ it (organized the election of a

new Patriarch in 1943, by this seeking to create an ‘Orthodox Vatican’ in Moscow, etc.) [21, 22]. However, it is important to note that in those years a literary genre of mystical fiction appeared, and was written the famous novel by Mikhail Bulgakov ‘Master and Margarita’, which presents a completely different attitude to religion. Semiotics appeared - the only humanitarian research area in the former Soviet Union, which has obtained worldwide recognition, and allowed to describe religion in terms of symbolic systems [23].

After Stalin’s death in 1954 the CPSU Central Committee issued a decree ‘On the errors in the conduct of scientific-atheistic propaganda among the population’, which criticized the “insulting remarks against the clergy and the believers”, intervention of authorities in the activities of religious associations contrary to the Constitution of the USSR, and here after it was recommended to continue “deep, patient, skilfully promoted scientific-atheistic propaganda” on the basis of scientific and materialistic knowledge [24]. This meant a change in religious policy - from the aggressive anti-religious activities of 1920-1930s to the comparative academic-balanced ‘scientific atheism’, although N.S. Khrushchev, who had promised to build communism by 1980 and ‘to show the last Orthodox priest on television’, began a new wave of repressions against believers.

During those years, in the journal ‘Problems of Philosophy’ in a series of articles ‘Marxist atheism’ has continued to be opposed to the “vicious bourgeois religious studies methodology” [25-27]. Y.V. Kryanev thought it’s necessary to clarify that the “accusation in borrowing the term ‘religiovedenie’ from the lexicon of bourgeois science is untenable: there is also the term ‘philosophy’, which exists since the slave-owning society. Bourgeois religious studies are exploring religion from objective or apologetic positions. In contrast, Marxist, scientific religiovedenie, exploring religion in order to overcome it, and this kind of religious studies promote the consistent militant atheism.” [28] D.M. Ugrinovich, author of the first monograph in Russian, which includes the term ‘religiovedenie’ (‘Vvedenie v teoreticheskoe religiovedenie’ – ‘Introduction to the Theoretical Religious Studies’, 1973), also contradicted the bourgeois and the Marxist religiovedenie, stating in response to the observation noted above by Y.V. Kryanev - that the last is not opposed, but is “an important and integral section of scientific atheism” [29]. In this study, was given a very detailed and comprehensive analysis of the achievements of the ‘bourgeois religious studies’. The term ‘religiovedenie’, however, was not included in the popular ‘Pocket Dictionary of the Atheist’ (1973) and the Great Soviet Encyclopaedia (1975, Vol. 21), appearing only in the ‘Atheist Dictionary’ (1983) [30]. The attitude towards religion changing among recital intelligentsia of 60s - the publications of ‘village prose-writers coming out, travel routes not only ‘in places of revolutionary and military glory’, but to the ancient cities (‘Golden Ring’, etc.) are being opened, it comes out a film by A. Tarkovsky - ‘Andrei Rublev’, studies of M.M. Bakhtin, S.A. Tokarev, S.S. Averintsev, D.S. Likhachev are being published [31; S. Averintsev, *Calling to God of Soviet intelligentsia in the 60-70s*, online at: <http://www.evangelie.ru/forum/t41879.html>].

‘Perestroika’ in late 1980s-early 1990s led to an entirely new situation, when courses in religious studies emerged in universities. Besides that, departments of the faculties and academic specialties related to this areas of studies were opened, also new thesis research councils were established (09.00.13 – ‘Religious studies, philosophical anthropology, philosophy of culture’, at present 09.00.14 – ‘The Philosophy of religion, religious studies’; the numbers refer to the code classifications of the specialties (based on the standards of the Ministry of Education of Russian Federation) on which various research councils are open). The journal ‘Religiovedenie’ began to publish, and a new research paradigm, according to A.N. Krasnikov has become a way of “permanent disengagement from Theology and atheism”, with the desire to become a truly neutral “impartial and objective study of the world religions” [32]. At the same time from the pages of the media information about Orthodoxy started to flood news, in general about the ‘mysterious’ TV sessions ‘healers’ like A. Kashpirovsky and A. Chumak. The return of religion in the public space occurred in the spirit of P. Berger and T. Lukman concept, according to which the religion can connect the ‘social constructions’ with the highest order ‘of the sacred being’ [33]. Indeed, Orthodoxy and on-the-spot the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), represents today for many Russian citizens (75% in 2010 [<http://www.pravmir.ru/soglasno-dannym-vciom-pravoslavnyimi-sebya-schitayut-tri-chetverti-rossiyan>] and to 82% in 2011 [M. Vagina, *Russia - a country of formal religiosity?*, <http://mnenia.ru/rubric/society/rossiya--%E2%80%94strana-formalnoy-religioznosti/>]) not just abstract and discrete ‘religion as it is’, but what in the European culture since Plato symbolized the involvement of individuals and communities to a higher order of being. In those years ‘Orthodox religious studies’ appeared, as well as the new ideological projects of ‘Holy Russia’, ‘Russian World’, ‘Orthodox civilization’, etc [34; 35; P.G. Schedrovitsky, *Russian world. Possible objectives of self-determination*, [http://www.archipelag.ru/authors/shedrovicky\\_petr/?library=2015](http://www.archipelag.ru/authors/shedrovicky_petr/?library=2015)]. Attempts were made to create a kind of ‘security religiovedenie’ (court religiovedenie), the answer to that was “religiovedenie of human rights” [I. Davidov, *How can a ‘judicial religiovedenie’ be possible?*, online at: <http://www.religiopolis.org/religiovedenie/3428-kak-vozmozhno-sudebnoe-religiovedenie.html>].

The methodological problematic nature of ‘scientific religious studies’ was noted by S.S. Averintsev, who believed that only in the sorting of specific ‘flesh of faith, as it is’, it can make the research phenomenon closed to us if “we do not have sufficient understanding of their faith inspiring them” [36]. He believes that the works of Alexander Myen is an example of ‘intellectual position’ that can overcome the irreciprocity of ‘school-theology’, ‘religious studies’ and ‘historical-cultural’ approaches, excluding as ‘persuasion - recruitment to the proselytes’ as ‘gross exposure’, which is doing pointless ‘the main point’, which in fact needs understanding, since “not stupid people, as we are, spent their lives” the sake of it [36]. The situation could be changed by the

phenomenological field, but here with the exception of several works of M. Eliade, it remains obscure [37].

### **3. Post-Soviet perspective**

Recent years of post-Soviet development have shown the importance of the idea of subsystems differentiation and specialization of modern society - politics, art, Science and religion (theology) as 'autopoietical' (N. Luhmann), when "in the middle of XVI<sup>th</sup> century, Science ... distanced from religion", therefore the "law to be actively engaged ... to go to religious tolerance" [38]. B. Malinowski took as a standard the internal differentiation of world orientation (magic-religion-Science) of each person [39]. P. Berger pointed that he "was a believer, even when he became a sociologist", that means the same person has as 'religiousness' as 'scientism' and perhaps 'poetry' (magic) [40]. R. Bellah noted that representatives of the "educated and well-minded segment of the population", are no longer able to "take on faith the traditional commitments", and "all inherited from the past becomes the subject of careful study and examination" [R. Bellah, *Sociology of Religion*, [http://sbiblio.com/biblio/archive/averianov\\_xrreligiya/hm21.aspx](http://sbiblio.com/biblio/archive/averianov_xrreligiya/hm21.aspx)]. Election of the supreme power in Russia in December 2011 - March 2012 showed the growing influence of the 'middle class', i.e. 'educated and well-minded segment of the population', religiousness of which is compatible with the 'science' and 'poetics'. In recent years, the criticism of religion emerged, especially regarding the Russian Orthodox Church, by the representatives of mass media in terms of 'extreme laicism' (anti-confessionalism) [A. Nevzorov, N. Strizhak, K. Kopeikin, V. Khomiakov, M. Ardov, E. Pisareva, "Caution: blasphemy!", online at: <http://apocalypse-2012.com/miscellaneous/alexander-nevzorov-3.html>].

Today religious studies on the Internet and mass consciousness act as a 'postmodern project', where logically inconsistent forms have mixed, being understood in the academic environment as a science that studies the "laws of the origin, development and operation of the religion, its structure and various components of its diverse phenomena as they appeared in the history of society, the relationship and interaction between religion and other areas of culture" [41]. First forbidden 'bourgeois religion' studies are published; a critical rethinking of Soviet religious studies began [42]. There is a 'dialogue in religious studies', focusing on the existence of religious meanings in the culture [43]. 'Information guide of religiovedenie' became an important publication, summarizing the development of recent years and containing a description (self description) of religious studies centres and departments of the country [44].

Thus, in modern Russia there are all the 'historical types of religious studies' which can be generalized in the form of three basic models:

- 'comparative' and traditional from the XIX<sup>th</sup> century critical-philosophical, scientific-critical and self-critical 'maintenance of religion and religions' (academic, none-apologetical, neutral, analytical, fair, etc. [45]), 'centrifugal' scientific-philosophical description and generalization of

empirical aspects of religion as personal and social phenomenon, suggesting the development of appropriate regulatory languages, terminology, understandable to colleagues from any country and any university;

- an exclusive - holistic field, tending to the regulatory 'the only true religious studies' is inextricably linked with the conflict of interpretation in the modern world, including Russia, as a matter of fact speaking, can be classified as religion, differentiated today on 'true theology' ('confessional religious studies', 'sectovedenie' by A.L. Dvorkin, etc.), 'esoteric religious studies' [46], security 'religious studies of law enforcement agencies', human rights 'legal religious studies' or 'anti-confessional' ('neo-atheistic') fields;
- academic 'dialogue' or 'centripetal' field, development projects of 'the fundamental theory of religion', 'meta-theology', 'theoretical synthesis', which is sometimes referred to as 'understanding', clearing up the personal and social aspects of faith as the moments of the mystery of individual being in a world, where 'categorizations' to faithful and unfaithful, clerics and scholars, philosophers and anthropologists are relative, but openness to dialogue and professionalism are significant, mutual dependence of 'meta-theology' and 'meta-philosophy' as a special level of dialogue for theology, philosophy and empirical religious studies [47, 48].

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