
WORLDVIEW ORIENTATIONS OF RELIGIOUS LITERATURE AS AN AGENT OF SOCIALIZATION IN THE MODERN SOCIETY

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Abstract

The article explores the concept and the essence of religious socialization as well as the role of religious literature in the socialization of individuals. The authors suggest a classification of religious texts and give recommendations regarding usage of religious literature as an agent of socialization in the modern society. The relevance of this topic lies in the fact that local cultures might lose their identities when borrowing the features typical for other world cultures. As a result, the process of individual socialization often includes the adoption of immoral and anti-spiritual ideas. However, religious literature, as one of the agents of socialization, can exercise a positive influence on this process. Scientific novelty of the paper consists in the analysis of factors involved in religious socialization and determination of the function of religious literature in this process.

Keywords: values, moral, standards, development, society

1. Introduction

Religious institutions play a significant role among other various social institutions. Religious institutions should prepare a person for future life, introduce them to the world of national and universal cultural values, teach them to stand for their values in the society, and form moral standards.

According to A. de Tocqueville, there is a direct and indirect influence of religion on private and public life [1]. R. Payton described religious philanthropy as a form of ‘moral discourse’ that promotes ethics between politics and the free market and wrote about using the religious non-profit sector to project its moral obligations [2]. D. McPherson called religion ‘central’ in the meaning of civil conflict due to the profound influence of religion on those who deal with the conflict first-hand [3].

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O. Butler, a well-known public figure, founder of Indianapolis University, believed that public consciousness is not just a matter of personal conviction, but a consequence of religious influence [4]. In support of this thesis, T.S. Austin analysed the role of philanthropic activities of Christian higher education institutions and religious charitable institutions as a means of asserting their values in society [5]. Thus, according to K. Watkins, religious leaders have always used religious institutions as a tool for establishing their values in society [6].

Presently, both in Russia and all over the world the process of individual socialization, including religious socialization, is influenced by the globalization of culture. When mass culture popularizes modern lifestyle, modern types of relationships and imposes new role models, it often relies only on basic consumer needs of an individual.

However, the main task of culture as such is to spread spiritual values. At the same time, according to researchers, the role of religion in Russian society has grown significantly in recent years. Therefore, it is necessary to use its spiritual potential to improve the moral and psychological climate, shape a certain spiritual ideal, which would determine the behaviour and actions of a person in any situation [7].

Speaking of socialization as “a process of integration of an individual into the society and into various types of social communities by adopting elements of culture, social norms and values, which become the basis for development of socially significant features in their personality” [8], it should be understood that proper implementation of this process is impossible in the society which lapses into moral deterioration and, as a result, loses its identity.

Therefore, according to A. Matveeva, it is necessary to restore the authentic spiritual identity with the help of the developed and restored spiritual code [9]. The traditional spiritual and cultural code common among Russian people included the following value priorities: Orthodox Christianity (spirituality), patriotism (great powerness), collegiality (communal spirit), and solidarity (involvement in the social world). The only thing that changed over time is the internal hierarchy of these priorities. Spiritual self-determination is a certain tool of socialization for a person, which encourages the development of one’s own spiritual code.

Although socialization continues throughout a person’s life and can be divided into two stages: primary (socialization of children) and secondary (socialization of adults) [10]; an individual is not always able to decide which social experience they will turn into personal values and life orientations. Thus, the complex way of transformation of an individual into a person cannot be regulated only by one’s own preferences and by choosing separate features one would like to adopt. One’s worldview, religion and mind-set also play an important role in this process [11].

Religious socialization influences the formation of consciousness and self-identification, responsibility towards society, family, friends and oneself. The code of life guiding a religious person determines their behaviour norms,

responsibilities towards the Lord and the people around them. Religious laws structure the life of a person, due to which they experience socialization and personal growth. At the current stage of social development, new confessions and religious buildings appear, the number of Sunday schools increases, affecting the process of individual socialization. Religious socialization implies “transferring the system of religious orientations, knowledge, attitudes, and moral norms acquired within the lifespan of an individual, nation, or humankind from one generation to another” [12, p. 208]. Accordingly, the agents of religious socialization as such are family, Church and religious literature.

B. Lomov points out the inseparability and interconnection between the processes of socialization and individualization of a personality [13]. In his opinion, personality gets ever more involved in the system of social relationships. As humanity accumulates knowledge and experience, as Science and technology move forward and every person gets more involved in globalization processes, everybody gets an opportunity to choose sources of information, learning styles, etc. In other words, the process of socialization becomes easier and more accessible due to the increasing number of its agents (the Internet, television, etc.). However, the augmentation of sources of knowledge and spheres of their application does not mean by default that the socialization process happens correctly and successfully, since many of the new agents undertake their activity in order to raise doubts or even to corrupt members of society. The problem is that the new socialization agents start dominating over the traditional ones (Church, family, teachers, etc.).

Representatives of the religious sphere define the socialization process as an essential factor of becoming a part of the social environment through the adoption of culture, value system and moral norms. Socialization of a religious person is quite specific - it involves a combination of religious culture and the system of social values, which shapes the so-called medium behaviour pattern.

According to T.V. Sklyarova, socialization is a dialectically integral process of development and self-development and can be described as a contradictory unity of opposites, namely adoption of the environmental conditions and adaptation to them, on the one hand, and individual activities undertaken by a person in different spheres, on the other hand [14].

Speaking of ‘religious values’ in the context of socialization, it should be noted that such values are accepted and preached in the modern world not because they are related to religion. They are called ‘religious’ because of their eternal, genuine, humanistic and, finally, logical character. Religion reflects the general level of social development, including the humanistic sphere. Every religion, with no exceptions, proclaims elements of the universal moral system common to the whole of mankind, which are the pinnacle of the corresponding stage of intellectual development reached by society. These values are incorporated into the basic beliefs and values at the core of religions, such as holy writings, religious commandments and ecclesiastical canons. Adoption of religious values leads to the formation of religious consciousness, which is defined by a theological dictionary as “the way a religious person treats the

world determined by the system of views and feelings, the meaning of which consists in their faith in the existence of the supernatural” [15].

2. Methods

The most common religion in Russian society is Christianity (Orthodox), so the conducted research will look only at its characteristics. The aim of this research is to analyze the worldview landmarks provided by religious literature acting as an agent of socialization in Russian society. The main method of research is analysis of the role played by religious literature as an agent of personality socialization and analysis of research literature devoted to the same subject matter as well as a survey among experts in this field.

Respondents who took part in the survey included specialists in theological and religious studies (19 people), among whom there were 8 theologians and representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church, 11 religious studies scholars and teachers from religious studies departments.

In our opinion, the choice of experts representing all aspects of the influence exercised by religious literature on personality socialization, such as the Orthodox denomination and scientific community, will allow us to get a deep insight into the role of religious literature as an agent of socialization in the Russian society. The experts were asked several questions, mainly regarding primary sources of Orthodox religious literature, which had the greatest influence of the further change of ethical and social paradigm of the Russian society.

The survey was conducted using an e-mail questionnaire, which included the following questions with the request to answer as fully as possible.

1. In your opinion, which are the main factors influencing the socialization of the individual?
2. In your opinion, what is associated with the formation of ancient Russian culture?
3. In your opinion, what is associated with the formation of the ethics of medieval Russia?
4. Name and characterize three literary and religious works of Russian literature, which, in your opinion, had the greatest influence on the formation of the worldview and the subsequent change of the ethical and social paradigm of Russian society?

3. Results

According to the majority of experts (89%), one of the main factors which influences socialization of a personality is Christian commandments quoted, among other sources, in Christian literature that can be classified into following categories: the Bible, prayer books, Book of psalms, information about the history of Church and religion, interpretation of religious foundations, stories with a religious subtext, stories about outstanding people and lives of the saints,

texts aimed to promote Church, religion, and faith and texts which promote spiritual values without mentioning religious aspects.

From the perspective of their moral significance, Christian commandments represent universal human values, and modern secular ethics largely rely on them. At the same time, looking back on the past, most of the experts (84%), answering the question ‘What, in your opinion, is associated with the formation of ancient Russian culture?’, claim that the evolution of the old Russian culture is deeply connected with the development of values and a new worldview based on Christian ideals. This is proved by literary works of that period where the authors describe moral principles of their time and point out their Christian basis.

The majority of the experts (79%) suggest that the formation of ethics in medieval Rus relates to a defining event which led to the switch from pagan worldview to the new Christian way of thinking. This event was the adoption of a new religion by Rus - Christianity similar to that practiced in the Byzantine Empire. Slavic tribes, which were quite isolated from each other in terms of large territories and worshipping different pagan gods, received new social values, which encouraged their integration into a single unity. The unprecedented cultural rise of Rus in the 10-11th centuries is closely connected with Christianization, the cultural influence of the Byzantine Empire, and formation of new worldview orientations and ideals, which were reflected in the creative activity of that epoch - primarily, in literature.

Saints Cyril and Methodius were not only the founders of the Slavic writing system but also the translators of the main corpus of Christian liturgical literature. They are thought to have made a great contribution to the establishment of the Christian liturgical literature in the Old Slavic language: they translated the text of the Holy Scriptures, works by many Byzantine theologians and preachers, and collections of moral and ethical quotes. Saints Cyril and Methodius started the tradition of high respect to books: by the reign of Yaroslav the Wise there was a whole library of translated and original books.

During the analysis, the experts pointed out several literary and religious works of the Russian writing culture. The most frequently mentioned texts were ‘The Anthology of 1076’ (84%), ‘Preaching to the brethren’ by Luka Zhidiata (74%), ‘The Instruction’ by Vladimir Monomakh (74%) and ‘Sermon on Law and Grace’ by Ilarion (68%).

One of the books devoted to moral issues, ‘The Anthology of 1076’, is a collection of extracts and rewritings from different books, making up a text about ethics. This collection was compiled to encourage the spiritual growth of people and explain the main questions connected with human existence. The tone and layout of the books remind that of a manual aimed at ethical education of its readers. It is no coincidence that ‘The Anthology of 1076’ starts with an explanation of how important education and understanding of books are.

Another book ‘The Instruction to my Brothers’ (Pouchenie k bratii) was written by Luka Zhidiata, a preacher who lived in the 11th century and was one of bibliognosts serving to grand prince Yaroslav the Wise. The book is centred

around articles of faith and the necessity for every Christian to fulfil responsibilities towards God and other people. These are the main Christian commandments based on the Ten Commandments recorded by Moses and reflected in the Gospels. Luka tried to use simple and clear language to convey the main Christian principles which should be followed by any religious person. This piece of writing is an example of an ethical teaching created at the time when Christianity was established in Rus and new worldview was evolving.

‘The Instruction’ (Pouchenie) by Vladimir Monomakh has a deep humanitarian and philosophical meaning: based on religion as a means of the spiritual and practical world, the author draws a number of moral values. This piece of writing does not only establish strict moral rules but also calls for action, invites to put these ideas into life, which is why it is often called ‘a spiritual constitution’. ‘The Instruction’ presents social, national, and personal problems in the form of appeals to the author’s own children and further generations. Moral statements contained in this book are still relevant today; it propagates mercifulness, respect to elders, righteousness, fair treatment of others, self-perfection and education.

According to the experts, a special place in the old Russian religious and ethical thought belongs to ‘The Sermon on Law and Grace’ (Slovo o zakone i blagodati) by Ilarion, Metropolitan of Kiev. In his literary work, the author highlighted historical inheritance and described how the narrow-mindedness of ‘Law’, which was common only among the Jews and did not spread to other nations (speaking of Judaism), was overcome by Christianity, which spread all over the world and became an international religion. The author called it ‘Grace’ - a universal comprehensive truth based on moral principles and ideals. Any Christian can become God’s child and celebrant, while strict regulations imposed on a person by ‘Law’ inevitably give way to the free choice of moral norms. Optimism, humanism, and confidence in the value of human life are the main ideas of Ilarion’s ‘Sermon’.

Overall, the experts emphasize that the introduction of Christianity to Rus led to significant mental changes. One can with good reason speak of a shift in worldview orientations and value preferences; the traditional moral values of Russian people changed dramatically. Meanwhile, another perception of the world was shaped, which was substantially different from the pagan worldview: imbued with ethical and moral ideals inspired by Christianity, it was reflected in the literature of that time. The above-mentioned literary works encouraged humanization and social harmonization of the society and established moral and ethical principles guiding people’s behaviour. The experts suppose that getting back to them is relevant today, both in terms of looking for the ethical foundations of modern society, studies of religious and ethical norms that formed the foundation of Russian spirituality, and in terms of their restoration, considering their universal human importance and the crisis of spirituality.

4. Discussion

The results of the research have shown that as far as religion and religious literature are concerned, unlike other ideological forms, main worldview ideas existing in these media remain unchanged for long periods of time not only due to traditions, but also as a result of their conscious entrenchment by clergymen as holy or inspired by God, i.e. as a result of their sacralisation. For this very reason, an integral part of worldview orientations proclaimed by religious literature is dogmatism. The flip side of religious dogmatism is worldview pluralism manifesting itself in the fact that based on any system of religious dogmas a number of religious movements arise, which interpret the dogmas and foundational beliefs depending on particular trends and circumstances of social development. Polysemantism of worldview orientations proclaimed by religious literature allows them to adapt to the socially changing environment and interpret the information acquired from other worldview systems within their own paradigm.

The key role in worldview orientations proclaimed by religious literature belongs to the idea of God as the primary source and foundation of all things, which creates, acts and produces, i.e. God is perceived not as the initial state or an ancestor, but as a Creator. The idea of God is used as a starting point when it comes to developing a worldview and as a basic principle explaining all events which take place in the world. Therefore, a person can change the course of events for their own benefit only by addressing God.

Worldview orientations expressed in religious literature are also constructed in the social environment based on sacralisation - their sanctification and inclusion in the sphere of religious authorization. Orthodox theologians 'sanctify' social principles governing behaviour patterns and society as well as its cultural values by means of Orthodox religion, proclaiming conscious participation of believers in the life of the Church. Due to this approach people think that Orthodox Christianity is something that brings 'light, meaning and purpose' to all manifestations of life.

As we study the role of religious literature in the process of socialization, it is necessary to outline the fundamental difference between religious literature, on the one hand, and religious and social mass media that sometimes cover the issues of Church and religion, on the other hand. First of all, it should be noted that "a book is different from other means of mass communication because it fully obeys your will and choice: it waits patiently and does not impose itself on you. The reader can come back to it again and again... they don't need either additional technical equipment or external help to do it. It is books that aid people with understanding the interconnection and background of current events; they help us to find a benchmark against which plenty of often contradictory pieces of information can be evaluated. A book can convey almost any message, going far beyond superficial data and current events... it helps to comprehend the fullness of our existence and raise the question of the reason for it and further directions of development." [16, p. 16-17]

In the course of socialization, a person undergoes moral upbringing (if it at all happens in their life), including learning from literature, whereas the press, radio, television and Internet are merely additional sources of information. An interesting aspect can be singled out from this statement relating to the process of formation of public consciousness. It consists in the fact that, apart from opinion leaders, the key factors that influence public opinion are mass media. However, it is literature that is responsible for the formation of individual opinions the exchange of which produces the state of mass consciousness called public opinion.

As mentioned earlier, religious socialization of an individual cannot be guided only by their own preferences. Mass media reach the largest audience and shape the attitude of society to religion and, consequently, to the values it propagates.

Nowadays this attitude cannot be classified as positive. I.V. Simonov thinks that the reason behind this phenomenon is the following: "... journalists are interested not in religion as a specific sphere of the personal spiritual world or as a complex spiritual phenomenon... They perceive it as a set of external manifestations seen in the activity of associated individuals or religious communities." [17, p. 795] Therefore, according to the researcher, the nature of present-day journalism implies slinging mud at all participants of religious life, covering the events in a generally false and biased way and insulting the feelings of believers.

L.Z. Kulova also highlights the fact that most of the modern mass media do not provide enough information on religious issues. "For a person who does not believe in God, who is undereducated, incapable of critical thinking or easily led, superficial acquaintance with religious philosophy may result in involvement in totalitarian organizations or doubtful communities, practices of which contradict generally recognized behavioural norms (for example, Satanism and so on)." [18, p. 97] Such trends in the mass media coverage of religious issues serve as another confirmation of the need for a high-quality, truthful and adequate account of the topic in religious literature. The researcher notes that quality religious literature, in its turn, can improve the moral and ethical climate in the society, form certain ideals, help to prevent ethnic and religious agitation inciting interconfessional enmity, xenophobic attitudes, etc. [18].

In view of the above mentioned facts, it is necessary to highlight the significance of religious literature in society. In particular, when it comes to the reason for human life and purpose of living, religious literature can be very helpful as a way to guide people and assist them in making right decisions. In many cases, people resort to such books willingly to elucidate their problem to themselves or just give it a careful thought.

One of the specific features typical for the influence of religious literature on the process of personal socialization is the formation of a religious worldview, which is clearly defined and stable, thus being safer than the usual one. If a person fully absorbs everything offered to them by a religious

institution in the form of religious literature and starts to implement these ideas in everyday life actively, their activity within social institutions will carry a religious connotation. Hence, religion in general and religious literature can change a person's worldview as a result of their influence. This is the distinctive feature of the impact that religious literature has on the socialization of a person.

However, it is impossible to give an unequivocal assessment of such impact, since its consequences may vary depending on a religious institution. For instance, traditional religions and traditional religious literature exert a relatively limited influence on a person's life leaving some room for their own decisions, whereas destructive cults totally deprive their followers of the right to have their own opinion or personal life. In our view, the current development of various sects is a worrying tendency which should be opposed, since such communities, as a rule, are of pathologic nature. For example, in order to attract new members, sects use a style of propaganda and recruitment, such as heartiness, deceit, psychological and social manipulations including collective pressure and brainwashing, which can be done with the help of corresponding literature.

5. Conclusions

Religious socialization implies adoption of religious values and norms by a person, and the special feature which characterizes the influence exerted by a religious institution on the socialization of a person lies in the formation of religious worldview in a person by their inclusion in a group of believers with corresponding religious norms. Religious socialization is based on satisfaction of spiritual needs of the society. Since religious literature includes elements of religious worldview and at the same time acts as an agent of individual socialization, in order to determine its role in this process it is necessary to take into consideration the following factors: firstly, the functions of religions within which it exists, and secondly, the types of religious literature, classification of which is provided above. By performing the function of an agent of socialization of individuals in the society religious literature promotes the correct implementation of this process. Despite the prejudice against religion as such and texts presenting religious statements shared by a part of society, there is no doubt that inheriting these moral norms and principles cannot lead to any negative consequences nowadays.

The objectives pursued by religious literature are not limited to propagating religion and church. It is meant to promote and establish high moral principles and rules of conduct and encourage the formation of a spiritual worldview that would be able to oppose the influence of the modern mass culture in order to preserve authentic traditions in the society.

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