
RELIGION AND CHURCH IN THE SCIENTIFIC WORKS OF NIKOLAI IVANOVICH KOSTOMAROV

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Abstract

The article looks at the religious and ecclesiastic views of the outstanding historian and public figure of the 19th century Nikolai Ivanovich Kostomarov. The research methodology is based on the principles of historicism, objectivity, historiographical analysis and synthesis. It has been found that it was religion that played a key role in Kostomarov's worldview and served as the main factor of his scientific quest. The authors also examine Kostomarov's attitude to mythology and its connection with religion. A conclusion has been drawn that Kostomarov can be fairly considered one of the founders of secular Russian ecclesiastical historiography.

Keywords: ecclesiastical, historiography, Orthodox, Christianity, mythology

1. Introduction

The development of culture and Science in Western Europe is connected with socio-political transformations that resulted not only in the creation of new frameworks but also in the evolvement of new spheres of scientific knowledge. The turn of the 19th century was the time when the global thought in the sphere of Theology developed rapidly, which led to the emergence of a new discipline - Religious studies. It was during this period when Nikolai Ivanovich Kostomarov, a philosopher and historian, took part in the accumulation of a resource base that served as a preparatory stage for the establishment of the

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science of Religious studies, which resulted in the publishing of a few dozens of research papers on the history of the Russian state, including the fundamental multi-volume book 'Russian history in the lives of its principal figures' [1], as well as other individual research works aimed at the development of scientific thought in the sphere of Religious studies.

Research into Russian religious and ecclesiastical historiography remains a relevant and, hence, an important task not only for historical studies but for society in general. Despite the secularization of public morals and consciousness, religion and Church are still a significant factor in the development of the Russian state. Besides, post-atheist society has formed in Russia, which is now searching for its own spiritual and political benchmarks. It will be impossible to deal with these issues in the future without analysis of earlier religious and ecclesiastical views [2, 3].

The most thorough research among the modern studies devoted to the works by Kostomarov is the one by S.A. Venglovskii [4]. Apart from that, in the context of our research, it is worth mentioning the works by V.A. Zamlinskii [5], R.A. Kireeva [6] and N. Pavlenko [7].

It must be pointed out that some researchers [4-6] describe Kostomarov's activity as historically oriented based on the idea of Pan-Slavism, unity, and 'reciprocity' of the Slavic peoples, somewhat consonant with the first principle of the S.S. Uvarov's 'theory of official nationality' (Orthodoxy, Autocracy and Nationality) - the united Orthodox faith [8]. Moreover, according to researchers [7, 9], the rest of the research he carried out is perceived as secondary and conducted in the sole interest of historical science. However, as we see it, the scholar's activity encouraged the development of many Humanities, such as Ethnography and Folklore Studies, as well as the subsequent establishment of Religious studies as an individual discipline in Russia due to the accumulation of the resource base and expansion of the sphere of historical interests encompassing studies of the folk component and accomplishment of the objectivity principle. In this connection, in our opinion, Kostomarov's contribution to Russian ecclesiastical historiography has not been fully examined; therefore, it requires additional analysis.

Kostomarov was the first Russian thinker in all of the Russian Empire who started proving that the main content of a historical process is determined by people, which probably had its origin in S.S. Uvarov's principle of nationality, the national identity of the two-sided (according to Kostomarov) Russian people. Thus, people should become the main research subject [10]. In his opinion, people's life is determined by the internal depth of their spirit, which represents the foundation of historical development and serves as the product and maker of history. The spirit of people manifests itself in language, art, historical memory, religion, daily routines and customs. The scholar wrote, "People's life lies in the movement of their spiritual and moral being: in people's concepts, beliefs, feelings, hopes and sufferings... Research into the development of people's spiritual life - this is what people's history consists of." [11, p. 302]

The objective of this article is to explore the topic of Church and religion in the works by Kostomarov, including his understanding of religion, biographical descriptions of the saints in the Russian Orthodox Church, and the interrelation between religion and Slavic mythology.

The research methodology is based on the principles of historicism, objectivity, historiographical analysis and synthesis. In the course of the research, the biographical approach was used extensively, helping to identify historiographic phenomena and principles through the prism of Kostomarov's scientific heritage.

2. Understanding of religion in the works of N.I. Kostomarov

The heyday of the Romantic movement, which sees one's inner world and feelings as the main object of interest, promoted identification of the role played by each ethnic group in the global historical process. Romanticism directs the global scientific thought towards the irrational, so a trend towards an interest in religion emerges [11], resulting in polemics that encourages the accumulation of theoretical material, which will later help the scientific community to represent Religious studies as an individual discipline.

Kostomarov also viewed the questions of religion within the romantic paradigm. The way in which he regarded the topic of religion to a large extent depended on his own attitude to religion and faith, as well on his personal choice, i.e. religious self-identification and confession. From a very early age, the religious consciousness of the future historian wobbled between atheism imposed on him by his father, who was a landlord and, as remembered by Kostomarov himself showed "extreme unbelief", and the Orthodox Christian tradition practiced by his mother, a serf by origin [12]. According to S.A. Venglovskii [4, p. 68], after the tragic death of Kostomarov's father, it was the strong religious commitment of his mother and Orthodox Christian peasant environment that determined further views and consciousness of the scholar.

Kostomarov belonged to the Orthodox Christian confession; however, his religious behaviour was different from commonly accepted norms. Like all genuine Christians, the scholar attended church services, went on pilgrimages to monasteries and holy places, read the Holy Scriptures and often prayed, but at the same time criticized the way things were organized in Church, its commitment to dogmas, the ritual side and the activity conducted by certain members of the clergy [13]. Such perception of religion is more typical of Protestant denominations.

From S.N. Terpigorev's memoirs, it is known that Kostomarov was fond of occultism, magic and hypnosis [14]. These activities clearly contradicted the canons of the Orthodox Church. Besides, the idea has ingrained in the literature that Kostomarov, who was a member and one of the founders of the Cyril and Methodius Brotherhood, was actually a Mason. It is not certain whether the scholar was a member of a Masonic Lodge, largely due to the secret nature of the organization. However, we agree with the opinion of T.P. Malyutina, who

believes that the ideology and tactics of the brotherhood “were strongly influenced by the Mason ideology” [15, p. 188]. The official Church in Russia has always viewed Freemasonry as evil undermining the faith of eastern Orthodox Christians and detaching them from God [16].

Thus, Kostomarov’s religiousness was more likely to be mystical piety beyond the scope of any historical religion. Nevertheless, it was religion that played a key role in Kostomarov’s worldview and served as the main factor of his scientific quest.

The very first Master’s thesis written by the scholar entitled ‘On the reasons and character of Church unions in Western Russia’ [17] dwelt upon a religious issue, namely, it was devoted to the 1596 Union of Brest. Because of the censorship, which existed in the Russian Empire, this thesis was not defended. Innokentii Borisov, the Archbishop of Kharkiv, estimated the thesis as revolt and expressed his discontent openly. As Kostomarov wrote himself in his autobiography, the Archbishop Innokentii did not like the criticism of the aspiration for power among the Christian Church’s highest hierarchs. Apart from that, he found the accusations of deterioration of the clergy’s morals and heavy charges imposed on the lands of Rus by the Patriarch of Constantinople unacceptable [18]. After the Archbishop’s public statement, an official order issued by S. Uvarov, the Public Education Minister, was received to destroy the whole edition of the thesis.

We agree with S.A. Venglovskii [4, p. 45] that turning to the topic of Church unions and writing his first thesis was Kostomarov’s attempt to find and implement his own religious self-identification. Therefore, it was the scholar’s internal spiritual need that served as a motive for choosing the topic of his first serious scientific research.

In his thesis, Kostomarov [17] set forth a few key points:

- the main reason for the Church union lies in the split of Christianity into two branches: the eastern and western;
- having borrowed Christianity from Greeks, Rus from the very beginning adopted their dislike for Catholicism;
- the prerequisites for the Union of Brest were the Council of Florence and the Union of Lublin;
- Jesuits played the major role in the facilitation of the Church union;
- the aim of the Church union was exclusively political, namely, Polonization of the Russian population through their Catholicising.

Later Kostomarov continued working on the topic of Church unions. He described his own vision of the Union of Brest in his monograph ‘Southern Russia at the end of the 16th century’ [19] (1861), which represents an expanded and revised version of the historian’s first Master’s thesis. This work was written at a much higher scientific level since it appeared two decades after the first thesis. The author had accumulated certain experience and analysed a great number of new documentary sources, including the Acts of St. Petersburg Archaeographic Commission compiled by Kostomarov himself.

The monograph was supplemented by details of Cossack uprisings, which were, according to Kostomarov, caused by religious oppression from Catholics. The scholar also dwelt upon the activity of Church brotherhoods. He interpreted the right of stauropegion and control over the bishop as an aspiration of the Patriarch of Constantinople to supervise the local Church hierarchy. As far as the genesis of brotherhoods is concerned, Kostomarov adhered to the external borrowings theory and said the following, “the idea of brotherhoods was adopted by Russians from the Western Church, where it was customary to create voluntary corporations on the religious basis” [19, p. 633]. Kostomarov evaluated the activity of Orthodox Christian brotherhoods positively and considered them to be carriers of the high mission of protecting the Orthodox Christian faith. In general, the historian’s conceptual evaluation of the Union of Brest was not much different from the one given in his thesis.

3. Biographical descriptions of the saints in the Russian Orthodox Church

The topic of the Church was also raised in other works by Kostomarov. He created several biographical descriptions of lives of equal-to-the-apostles and venerable saints in the Orthodox Christian Church, as well as outstanding clerical and secular people whose activities were directly or indirectly connected with the history of Orthodox Christianity. These works reflected the existing patterns and structure of the Church, hierarchical relations between the Church, state and people, and most importantly, contained the scholar’s personal subjective observations, which allows us to analyse his own views on Church and religion [1, vol. 2, 587-601; 1, vol. 3, 300-317; 20; 21]. The essays were different from the canonical ‘Lives of the Saints’ and had a clearly defined structure and content; it is logical since they were written by a secular historian rather than a member of the clergy. Chronologically they encompassed the period from the 10th to the 13th century and were included in the popular science series ‘Russian history in the lives of its principal figures’ prepared by Kostomarov [1] in 1872-1875.

The essay by Kostomarov devoted to the venerable Father Theodosius of the Kiev Caves is of special interest. Telling the life story of Theodosius, the scholar reflects upon the significance of monasteries and monkhood for society [20]. The historian did not deny the great role of monasteries in the spread of Christianity and education. On the other hand, he criticized monasteries for being disconnected from real life. The scholar did not appreciate the asceticism of the life led by monks because he believed that abuse of the human spirit and body was not acceptable for God.

In his works, Kostomarov [1, vol. 2, 587-601] also explored the personality of Dimitry (Tuptalo), Metropolitan of Rostov and Yaroslavl. The scholar assigns an important role in the spread of education throughout the Russian lands to this saint. Kostomarov gives him special credit for creating the ‘Cheti-Minei’ (religious books, where the lives of saints, traditions and teachings are placed according to the corresponding dates as commemorated by the

Church) and writing sermons. Kostomarov attached the greatest social significance to the work ‘Investigation into the Bryansk faith’ by Dimitry of Rostov, where he criticized schismatics, who caused harm to Orthodox Christianity as a result of their ignorance.

It is worth mentioning here that N.I. Kostomarov expressed a very peculiar attitude to the schism in the Russian Orthodox Church, which was different from the majority of opinions shared by most researchers of that time (Table 1).

Table 1. Comparative analysis of the views of the 19th century historians on the schism in the Russian Orthodox Church.

No.	Author	Opinion
1	I.S. Aksakov	“The schism started wandering just like the human mind wanders in the questions of faith if it is left to its own devices.” [22, p. 638]
2	I.V. Kireevskii	“By the 16 th century, spiritual unity had been substituted for a predilection for external ritualism and religious formalities in all social relations. Respect for tradition as such had turned into respect for its external, ritualistic side.” [23] I.e. the schism was seen as spiritual deterioration and deviation to formalism.
3	A.S. Khomyakov	Regarded the people’s ignorance in terms of remaining pagan superstitions, where conversion to Christianity relied mainly on the rituals rather than sensibility. It was this fact that served as the cause of the schism, i.e. the reason for the Old-Believers schism was the excessive commitment of Russian people to Church rituals [24].
4	P.I. Melnikov (Andrei Pecherskii)	Represents the schism as one of the means used by the landlord class to combat the revolutionary movement of people, thus rebutting the accusations of Old Believers’ unreliability (which earlier was the main reason for persecutions of Old Believers) [25].
5	V.V. Rozanov	“The schism gained the image of a heroic sacrifice made by Russian people who did not betray their faith or give up on it; the schism was the Russian response to the changing reality and a way to save one’s own fundamental principles.” [26, p. 38]
6	N.I. Kostomarov	“In our history, the schism was virtually the only event when the Russian people, not as stand-alone individuals but as masses of people, carried out certain activity in the sphere of thought and persuasion without any management or inducement from the authorities or representatives of a more educated class. The schism was a significant event in terms of the people’s intellectual progress.” [21, p. 265]

Therefore, Kostomarov believed that, despite all the mistakes, the schism was a peculiar, though an imperfect, form of folk self-identity, which to a certain extent was consonant with the views of I.V. Kireevskii with his approach to

“popular religiosity”, who wrote that “religion is not one rite and not one conviction” but “for the full development of not only true but even false religion, the unanimity of the people is necessary” [23, p. 16].

Kostomarov also wrote about outstanding ecclesiastical figures of the 18th century and created an essay about the theologian, writer, philosopher and translator Feofan Prokopovich [1, vol. 3, 300-317]. According to Kostomarov, “in the 18th century among the members of the clergy, there was no one who was as influential, not only in Church matters, but also in the whole political system of the state, as Feofan Prokopovich. His name is connected with a fact of major significance - the foundation of the Holy Governing Synod - and the early development of this institution.” [1, vol. 3, p. 300] However, the overall evaluation of his personality in Kostomarov’s work is quite controversial. Endowing Prokopovich with great intelligence and talent, the scholar denies his human virtues and argues that he was characterized by all typical imperfections of his time.

4. Mythological issues and their connection with religion in the works by N.I. Kostomarov

After the enforced liquidation of his first thesis, Kostomarov wrote a new scientific work called ‘On the historical significance of Russian popular poetry’ [27] based on folklore, whose academic profile he was trying to improve.

It should be noted that Kostomarov considered the problem of mythology in the context of the Christian tradition. However, this approach was typical for scientists in the 19th century. A.N. Krasnikov draws attention to this fact in his analysis of the initial period of development of Religious studies when it was extremely difficult to attempt at dispassionately studying religion. “The thing is that Christian categories, concepts and images have been so deeply ingrained in the consciousness of Europeans that we view any religion through their prism, and Christianity is placed above any of these religions.” [28]

Kostomarov highlights the close connection between natural religion and symbolism. “In general understanding, the symbolism of nature represents a continuation of natural religion.” [29] Relying on the theory of symbolism, Kostomarov develops his own vision of mythology. He used this theory to prove the innate nature of religious experience, namely, the human ability to notice the spiritual side of material things, which is an indicator of the eternal idea of Deity present in human nature, “The Creator reveals himself in his creation; the human heart loves the omnipresent spirit in the phenomena of the physical world.” [29]. Kostomarov proved the idea of the innateness of religious ideas through the need to find something spiritual in material things. Besides, having analysed poetic folklore, he found how closely Russian spirituality corresponds with this definition since it spiritualizes all physical natural phenomena. All of it leads Kostomarov to the conclusion that Russian mythology is based on the symbolization of Nature.

As a result of his research, Kostomarov developed a view that historical science should be closely connected with Ethnography, the aim of which is to explore not only the external side of people's being but also internal being, which is impossible without studying the religious component - one of the constituent parts of mankind's spirituality. "Together with religion, people's vision of Nature shows what a people represents and what kind of a human being it contains, which in its turn, helps to clarify the following historical questions - why these people acted the way they did, and not differently." [29]

Probably, Kostomarov advocated the approach that the aptitude for religious cognition is innate. In his work 'Slavic mythology', he substantiates the internal feeling of a divine spark and insists on the idea of innate monotheism, which exists in all mythological systems in the world, "In all mythologies, if they had not been distorted by human sophistication and fantasy, truths are concealed, they were open in the deep antiquity of mankind's childhood... It was the idea endowed by the Creator upon the human race: whichever religion man creates... it contains only the principle man was born with; it would be as difficult to pull away from the idea of anthropomorphization of deity as to exterminate people's faith in their own soul." [29, p. 227] For instance, by finding analogies of calendar myths about the burial and resurrection of a deity in various pagan beliefs, Kostomarov proves the existence of internal experience connected with the coming of Christ in the future shared by the whole mankind [29, p. 268].

Therefore, in all of Kostomarov's works, the idea of innate religiousness, or, as he puts it, natural religion, is a recurring theme he relies on when he considers all other issues. Kostomarov concludes that the only idea common for all mythologies is the Christian idea of Christ's death and resurrection. It is this idea that he sets forth in all his mythological research works and in 'Slavic mythology' [29], it becomes the author's main objective.

In his further works devoted to mythology dated 1872-1873, Kostomarov identifies the evolution stages of religious ideas in world religions, Slavic in particular, noting its differences from other religions and specific features as well. According to Kostomarov, the development of religious ideas is equal to the intellectual progress of humankind. He sticks to the evolutionist approach in the sphere of religion, leaving open the possibility of the innateness of a religious idea. Understanding or awareness of this idea depends on the degree of the intellectual development of humankind. The scheme of evolution of religious ideas looks in the following way: nature symbolism represents the first stage of development of all mythological systems; the following stage of progress is the gradual disconnection of myths from physical objects and anthropomorphization of deities (Zeus - the sky, Poseidon - water, etc.). Kostomarov tried to prove that in eastern Slavic mythology, unlike others, the process of disconnecting myths from physical objects did not take place. The author does not view the insufficient development of eastern Slavic mythology as its drawback and develops the idea of its monotheism in this context [29, p. 232]. Kostomarov

was convinced that the most characteristic feature of the Slavic religious worldview is a special understanding of deity that leans towards monotheism.

5. Conclusions

Based on the analysis of the scientific heritage and activities carried out by Kostomarov, certain conclusions can be drawn.

The 19th century was the time of rapid development of fields of knowledge focused on the religious sphere. It should be noted that by the middle of the 19th century, the majority of works on the history of the Church in Russia were written by members of the clergy, while secular researchers largely ignored this subject.

Kostomarov's ideas were not innovatory, for he actively used the European scientific heritage of the 18th-19th centuries and was one of the first people to absorb the advanced ideas of western European society and adapt them to Russian realia. The key subject of his research was the role and significance of the people in the historical process, which he tried to identify based on the religious aspect involved in the life of any society. Therefore, the issues of religion and mythology are of key importance in his research. Above all, Kostomarov's achievements in ecclesiastical historiography include the creation of stand-alone monographs devoted to the history of the Orthodox Christian Church, as well as multiple biographical works. The scholar also paid considerable attention to critical review and analysis of Church and religious literature created by members of the clergy. Kostomarov conceptually enriched Russian ecclesiastical historiography by giving his own evaluation of many events in the history of the Church.

Therefore, Kostomarov can be fairly considered one of the founders of secular Russian ecclesiastical historiography.

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