
RELIGION, NIKLAS LUHMANN AND RUSSIAN RELIGIOUS STUDIES PROJECT OF OVERCOMING THE DICHOTOMY OF THEOLOGY AND ATHEISM

Evgeniy Arinin^{*}, Lyutaeva Maria and Nataliya Markova

Vladimir State University, Gorkiy str. 87, Vladimir, 600000, Russia

(Received 12 November 2021, revised 17 April 2022)

Abstract

The article presents the results of analysis of a number of Russian researches of the religion phenomenon in the philosophical publications showing the reception of the Niklas Luhmann's concept describing the religion as a special autopoietic subsystem of the society. The authors focus on the description of the formation of 'differentiations' and their 'autopoiesis'. Russian descriptions of the religion implicitly start in the ninth and the tenth centuries in the context of reflections on the 'true faith' (истинной вере/Theology), which was distinguished from 'lie/lawlessness' as the 'truth/law'. The term 'religia' (религия) itself becomes an explicit part of the Russian language in the eighteenth century, but until the nineteenth - twenty first centuries it remains uncommon and only then it acquires about 20 meanings in the spectrum of connotations from extremely elevated (tradition of true piety 'традиция истинного благочестия', saving truth 'спасительная истина') to extremely profane (obscurantism 'мракобесие', the opiate of the people 'опиум для народа'). The semantics of the soviet period texts is especially notable, when the authorities begin to construct 'communism' as the global perspective of the 'kingdom of truth' where 'atheism' should be established and all religions should 'die away'. Modern Russian academic religious studies describe the phenomenon of religion in a number of specialized research approaches with their differentiation of the 'true/false', including the understanding of religion as the 'autopoiesis' of beliefs of fellow citizens and their communities as the 'actors' of the communication processes included into the social subsystems of Science, Law, religion, media, etc. with their differentiation of 'atheistic/religious'. Russian religious studies publications of the twenty-first century discuss the variety of meanings of the Latin word 'religio', denoting both infinitely complex and indescribable 'extra-linguistic reality' of human existence in the world and the local forms of 'supervision of the unknown' reducing all 'unfamiliar' to the conventional symbols of confessional 'piety' and non-confessional 'religiosity' manifested in the practice of harmonious life and communication with the divine principles of being that can be understood 'theologically, atheistically', or 'academically'.

Keywords: religion, atheism, Russia, differentiation, autopoiesis

^{*} E-mail: eiarinin@mail.ru

1. Introduction

The presented text describes some results of the Russian studies of the religion phenomenon in the context of reception of N. Luhmann's works (Niklas Luhmann, 1927-1998), with the predominant focus on *differentiation* and *autopoiesis*. The first documents describing religion in the Russian context appear from the reflection on the *true faith* (истинная вѣра, Theology), which as the *truth/law* steered clear from the *lie* in the chronicle writing on *choosing of faith* (выбор вѣры) presented in the *Tale of Bygone Years* (1039-1117). The Cyrillic transliteration of *religia* (религия, religion) explicitly enters Russian language in the eighteenth century but according to the academic philological resource Russian National Corpus (RNC) remains rare in that century, gaining wide spread only in the nineteenth - twenty-first centuries when it acquired a whole spectrum of meanings from extremely elevated (tradition of true piety, saving truth) to extremely profane (obscurantism, opium of the people) [1].

The latter descriptions were more characteristic of the publications of the periods of *militant* and *scientific* atheism in the USSR of the twentieth century when the thousand-years-old ideas of truth and lies were radically transformed in the course of the radical *attack on Heaven* and the government's perspectives of building *communism* as the coming *kingdom of truth* where all *religious superstitions* should *die down* as a false *belief in supernatural* that stands in the way of *subduing the nature* and improving social reality, which is only possible on the basis of *atheistic worldview*. Seventy years of soviet ideology predominance combined with the desire to describe the religion phenomenon in the most negative way as *obscurantism* reduced all the variety of the meanings of the Latin word *religio*, which for 2500 years denoted an ancient ideal of global joint residence as the *republic* in *Pax Deorum* (God's peace, harmonious life in communication with the divine principles of existence), to simple *faith in supernatural*.

New Russian academic religious studies present religion as the *autopoiesis* of beliefs of our fellow citizens and their communities as free, communicating subjects included in the social subsystems of science, law, religion, media, etc. This viewpoint is used in examining the life events of separate individuals and of various *inner circle fraternities* representing the historical and modern variety of religious communities including a number of similar phenomena, the inclusion of which into the domain of *religion* may be disputed (fairy tale, fantasy, etc.).

The example presented in this study of the analysis of the description of religion as an evolution of its self-description demonstrates the prospects of using the methodology of N. Luhmann, based on the analysis of semantic differences. By revealing the markers of the official, literary, scientific description of religion in Russia, the sociologist's thesis about religion as a unique communication is confirmed, which, on the one hand, differs in different cultural and historical eras, and on the other hand, has a systemic memory and acts as a network of ongoing linguistic autopoiesis, which is constantly refers to

his own meaningful past. Since the phenomenon of religion cannot be finally determined, such a study can be carried out in any cultural and linguistic tradition, which will undoubtedly enrich the field of religion research with new unique material.

2. Reception of N. Luhmann's works in the Russian religious studies

Niklas Luhmann is one of the major social theoreticians of the twentieth century. According to E.A. Ostrovskaya, his views of religion “conclude the classical period of theorization in the sociology of religion” [2]. His theory of society is based on the concept of autopoiesis as a systemic self-production, self-constitution, which he borrowed from the biological theory of H. Maturana and F. Varela and adapted for social theorizing [3]. In social systems, autopoiesis occurs through linguistically fixed communication, within which the formation and development of separate discourses is carried out due to the formation of a unique conceptual apparatus, a problem-thematic complex and commentary traditions. In the context of such an understanding of social phenomena, the analysis of the evolution of semantic distinctions becomes the main method for studying social dynamics.

Russian authors beginning from the extensive analysis in the dissertation of A.F. Filippov note that Luhmann deserves credit for creation of the original social theory describing the society as a system of communications differentiated by specific problem-thematic directions of generalization of mutual expectations [4]. Starting from the 1960's, Luhmann's scientific research in the field of social theory gained wide spread in Germany and starting from the 1970's they gradually rise to international fame, including in Russia, where since 1991 the translations of more than thirty of his articles and ten monographs were published [5]. However, his texts specifically devoted to the religious problematics have not yet been translated.

Currently his heritage is used in Philosophy, Sociology, Political studies, Law, Mass media and other scientific fields. A great contribution to the study and application of Luhmann's theory for scientific description of the modern society was made by the works of Y. Antonovskiy that published the translations of a number of his works and presented the understanding of the theory of social systems within the context of common problems of epistemology, social subsystem science [6-8], conceptualization of the notion of *communication* [9, 10]. The monograph of A.V. Nazarchuk [11] is devoted to the complex examination of N. Luhmann's society theory; a separate chapter therein reflects the problems of religious communication. These publications predominantly focus on general provisions of Luhmann's sociological theory, while a number of authors representing Russian religious studies analyse his heritage in their articles and dissertations, beginning from E.A. Ostrovskaya Jr. [12, 13], E.V. Vorontsova [14, 15], E.I. Arinin [16, 17], Y.G. Matushanskaya [18], Z.V. Latysheva [19], I.E. Vikulov [20], M.S. Lyutaeva [21, 22], and others.

The pioneer of this trend was the dissertation of E.A. Ostrovskaya Jr. *Institutionalization of the Religious Model of the Society*, where the author attempted to apply the N. Luhmann's religion concept for the description of the institutionalization process of Buddhism [12]. In her later works in the sociology of religion she exposes the importance of N. Luhmann's heritage for solving the methodological problem of study of the traditional religious ideologies [13].

E.V. Vorontsova described Luhmann's development of the organization theory for the explanation of the phenomenon, structure, dynamics and perspective of modernization of Christian churches in Germany as well as its reception in Christian theology [14]. Later she analysed the evolution of his scientific interests that started from the organization theory dominance. Later the meaning of *autopoiesis* ideas for sociological study of religion was presented [15].

A number of works by the authors of this article are devoted to theoretical coverage of the understanding of religion as an *autopoietic* system based on Luhmann's views. They note the importance of analysing the meanings of the term *religion* that can act in a special and extremely broad sense encompassing not only historical *Roman* and European phenomena explicitly denoted by the word *religio*, but also implicitly similar ancient symbolic systems that differentiated in history by performing the function of turning the frightening uncertainty of the world into the certainty of ritual, mythological and theological ideas [16]. The inclusion of an article about Luhmann in the Russian dictionary *Sociology of Religion* [17] was of great importance.

Y.G. Matushanskaya showed the relationship between the *self-reference of the conceptual model of the historical process in the Bible and the autopoiesis of the European civilization* based on the methodological basis of the structural functionalism of N. Luhmann [18]. The work focuses on the development of biblical ethics in socio-cultural dynamics from the ancient world to our time. The study is based on N. Luhmann's idea of the text as a public self-reference and self-observation, the written record of the practice of organization, production, structuring of significant meanings. Z.V. Latysheva analyses the N. Luhmann's concept from the point of view of its application in the process of social transcending, overriding, overcoming of *personal daily borders* [19]. I.E. Vikulov applies the N. Luhmann's theoretical and methodological framework describing the mass-media construction of the religious on the basis of the conflict of *normativities* from the perspective of modern society's differentiated subsystems, such as science, religion, law, politics, using the examples from the sphere of education, mass media and cinematography on the basis of differentiation of the *appropriate, tolerable and forbidden* [20]. M.S. Lyutaeva published a number of articles on Luhmann's understanding of religion and art as autopoietic systems of modern time, as well as the problem of their comparison using philosopher's conceptual and methodological framework [21]. The attempt to apply the theoretical and methodological framework of N. Luhmann's theory to describe and analyse specific regional examples of the existence of religion in the Vladimir region became new [22].

3. N. Luhmann and approaches to the definition of religion in Russia

In his works translated into Russian, N. Luhmann used several terms to somehow determine the specifics of the phenomenon of religion. In 1977, he used the term *unbestimmbar* (undeterminable), noting that in religion “indeterminate complexity is transformed into determinate or at least determinable complexity” [23]. In another text, Luhmann uses the term *unvertraut* (unfamiliar, unreliable), noting that “in religious developments such as myths and rites that guard the boundary to the unfamiliar, magic and the basic norm of reciprocity regulated segmentary societies internally...” [24], i.e. “magic and affiliated further religious continuations like myths and rituals guard the boundary with the unfamiliar” [25].

Additionally, Luhmann noted that etymologically, the word religion expresses a *new conversion*, a repeated *connection with the primary*. It is no coincidence that the etymology of *religio* is based on the notion of ‘rebinding’ [24]. In the last works, he connected religion with the phenomenon of *transcendent*, which conceals the *unfamiliar* (transcendence, when it is specified, conceals the unfamiliar [das Unheimliche] [26].

These terms (undeterminable/unfamiliar/primary/transcendent) have similarities among themselves, since they can be considered as several degrees of universal relationship with the *unfamiliar* as a special area of *extralinguistic reality*, distanced from *linguistic reality* as *familiar*, including in language. Such *familiarity* begins with the fact that everyone recognizes the intuitively obvious fact of the existence of the *unfamiliar* as such, always, like covid-19, capable of invading the inhabited world of the *familiar* and therefore needing symbolic labelling by means of language. In a civilization, sophisticated concepts emerge, such as those that entered the global intellectual culture from ancient Greece, where for the first time the poets and philosophers wrote about the *primary* (ἀρχή), *undeterminable* (ἄπειρον) and *ethereal-divine* (Αἰθήρ, Θεός, εἶδος, ἄτομος, θεωρία, ὑπόστασις, ἐπέκεινα), and later Christian authors began to translate those into Latin as *transcendent* (transcendere) [27]. These two degrees correspond to certain subcultures and social groups that support the *autopoiesis* of such interpretations

3.1. The lexemes *вера* (faith), *невѣрные* (infidels) and *релѣя* (religion)

Implicitly, the idea of religion enters the Russian language after the baptism of Russia (988), when the Cyrillic lexeme *вера* (faith), was recorded in the texts acting as a special status designation of the exclusive and divisive *truth* adopted by Prince Vladimir for *Ryŕskaa zemla*, which became part of the global brotherhood *Pax Christiana*. Distinction characteristics of *true* and *false* important for any culture existed before writing in the context of the contradictory *autopoiesis* of internal and external relations of the community with the surrounding reality. Internal connotations were associated with the division of fellow tribesmen into the subculture of *благовѣрные христiane*

[Christians of good faith] (*friends* of the prince) that had been normative and prevailing since the tenth century and the collective community of subcultures of *pagans* and *heretics* as *невѣрные* [unfaithful] (*enemies*). External connotations reflected the community's complex connections with *Pax Chazarica* and *Pax Islamica* when, according to the annals of the *choice of faith* (Tale of Bygone Years, 1039-1117), Prince Vladimir chose between Bulgarian Islam, Roman *papacy*, Khazar Judaism and Greek *philosophy*, which on the one hand were all diplomatically qualified as *вѣра* (right/truth/law), while on the other hand the *shortcomings* (i.e. *невѣрность*) of the first three were noted, which did not allow them to eventually become the *princely law*, i.e. the *truth* of the Rus. All the first *charters/laws/truths* of the Rurikids dynasty (*Church Charter of Prince Vladimir*, *Pravda rousska*, etc.) distinguished *their own* as distanced from *aliens/невѣрные* (Jews, besermen-muslims, magicians, etc.) with whom it was forbidden to eat or marry. Thus, from the first written texts, the collective understanding of *вѣра* as a respected *law* adopted in neighbouring countries and among their peoples was combined with its divisive understanding as the exclusive princely *Pravda* of the Rurikids.

Relationships with the *невѣрные* included not only confrontation, but also various forms of alliances with them, when, for example, the princes conducted active trade and contracted inter-dynasty marriages and military alliances, calling them *brothers* in diplomatic correspondence. The princely subculture was condemned by representatives of the subcultures of the metropolitan and monasteries that warned the princes of the danger of *вѣры варяжской/латыньской* [enemy/Latin faith] and forbade not only marriages, but also any form of communication [28]. The situation became more complicated during the period of civil strife, when the distancing of *вѣрные* and *невѣрные* could become scandalous, as in 1093, when Prince Rostislav Vsevolodovich (1070-1093) ordered the drowning of Gregory the wonderworker from the Pecherskiy monastery for calling him to repentance, and Prince Andrei Bogolyubskiy (1110-1174) asserting his understanding of the *правой вѣры* [right faith] ravaged Kiev and plundered the Hagia Sophia Cathedral (1169), but was justified by the chronicler because of the need to punish the metropolitan for *untruth* in the *debate on fasts* [29]. A similar argument was later used in the annals of Ivan III's campaign in Novgorod, presented as a victorious war of the *Orthodox* with the *infidels* (1471).

Differentiation in *Pax Slavica* of the brotherhood of *правовѣрных* (right faith) *Christians* into *Catholics* (*Latins*) and *Orthodox* (*Greeks*) became especially conflicting after the signing of the *Brest Union* (Unia brzeska, 1596), which led to the use of lexemes *вѣра* and *релѣя/religio* as synonyms in texts where the local minorities of followers of the Greek religion (*вѣра старожитно-гречеська, релѣя греческа*) who lived in territories that changed hands in the military conflicts of Poland, Lithuania and Muscovy, began to defend their rights to *autopoiesis* enumerated in the *Act of the Warsaw Confederation* (1573) in disputes with those who were supporters of inclusion of

all *невѣрные* (dissidents, i.e. Protestants and *schismatics*, i.e. Orthodox/Greek faith) to the one royal Roman *релѣя*, Roman *вѣра* (Apocrisis, 1597-1598).

Similar problems after the capture of Kazan (1552) and the *conquest of Siberia* (1581-1699) had to be solved by the authorities of the Russian state, which forever turned from a mono-confessional community of faithful to the prince into *autopoiesis* of forms of cooperation development with the communities of *their* *невѣрные* that had become the new subjects. Along with this, the Council Code (Sobornoe Ulozhenie, 1649) was adopted, where Russian Orthodox Christians were separated from the *blasphemers*, *rioters* and *Church rebels*, who should have been *burned* after the investigation. *Knizhnaya sprava* and Nikon's reforms give rise to the division of the society into Orthodox and *schismatics* (*невѣрные*), including the unprecedented massacre of the Solovetsky Monastery uprising (1668-1676) participants.

Along with the extermination of *невѣрные*, a new variable form of communicative *autopoiesis* is formed - a special secular (metaconfessional) discourse, an example of which was the first ever 10-hour theatrical performance (Artaxerxes Action, 1672), successfully staged for the king and courtiers under the leadership of a Lutheran pastor (John Gotann Gregorii, 1631-1675) based on the Old Testament book of Esther. The phenomenon of theatre that emerged in antiquity allowed the *transcendent* to be presented as the controlled *observed*. Strictly speaking, in terms of the Council Code, the *правовѣрный* royal court approvingly looked at the *action* created by a *невѣрный* (Lutheran pastor) and about the life of the *невѣрные* (Jews in the Assyrian Empire). This laid the foundation for a new tradition of visual presentations of a person's inner world and special *true devotion*, which through the *artistic truth of art* showed the coexistence of different types of complex relations of *вѣрность/невѣрность* both in the society and in an individual.

Explicitly, the word (lexeme) *religion* has been spreading in the Russian language since the eighteenth century, starting with a group of similar lexemes (*релѣя*, *релѣя*, etc.), collectively marking exclusively *aliens* and *infidels*, which is reflected in the travel notes of prince B.I. Kurakin (1676-1727), Peter the Great's diplomat, who wrote: "in England there are four different religions (*релии*)" (1705) [30]. In 1722, a translation of the Latin treatise *Sistema de religione et statu Imperii Turcici*, 1719, was published, where the term *Muhammedan religion* was used; the author, prince D.K. Cantemir (1673-1723), made the first attempt in Russian history to impartially describe the phenomenon of Islam [1, 31]. The word *релѣя* was not included in the *Military Article* (1715) published in Russian and German for subjects and foreigners (unorthodox contractors), collectively called *Christians*; it stated that *all idolatry, enchantment... are prohibited, punishable by burning*. Nor does it appear in the *Spiritual Regulation* (Duhovniy Reglament, 1721), which introduces the distinction of subjects as *simple hearts* and *book people*, united in the desire to *seek... truth*, that is, to be in unity with the imperial *Orthodoxy of the Synod*, and the opposing several groups of *infidels*, including those who live *under the guise of Orthodoxy in superstition of schismatics*.

3.2. *The lexemes религия (religion), атеизм (atheism), суеверие (superstition) and сверхъестественное (supernatural)*

New distinctions appear with the establishment of the Academy of Sciences (1724) as part of the subculture of the *Respublica literaria* global community, forming a special understanding of the *truth* gradually separated from the moral *right*, the legal *law*, and the confessional *theology/religion*. The *science* subculture beside the *useful* and profitable *natural* studies began to recognize *dandified* forms of knowledge (poetry, etc.) important for life at court and distinguished from the unambiguously *harmful/foolish* (*magic*, etc.) and *vain*, to which belonged alchemy or gold making (called ruinous fabrications [32]).

At the same time, representatives of the Church elite saw among educated people of *high reason and doctrine* the *godlessness* of those who prefer *атеистское* (atheistic) *thinking* (Feofan Prokopovich, *Discussion on godlessness*, 1730). In the middle of the century, the ruling elites begin to bring the *Greek Russian Church* under the general category of European *religion*, as noted by the future Empress Catherine the Great, who wrote that the *вера русских* (faith of the Russians) is one of the regional forms of the general *our holy religion* (notre sainte religion, 1744). This understanding was also noted by M.V. Lomonosov, who identified the Russian *shining piety* and the foreign *Religion* (1761) by translating the expression *zealots of Orthodoxy* as *Eifererin der Religion* [33]. He was one of the first to criticize the unnamed *zealots of faith* who exist in all religions (denominations), whom he described as *ignorant ferocious*, fighting against the *truth of scholars* [34]. At the same time, he proposed to judge grammar-school students for *serious crimes against religion* (1758) [35]. In the same years, Lomonosov edited the first Russian translation of the French presentation of *Cicero's Opinions* (1752, 1767), where the word *religion* was first translated by the Cyrillic lexeme *Закон* (*law*), which was understood as *natural* and one for all times and nations *experience of the existence of God*, recognizing that it is *incomprehensible* because there is no *precise idea* about it; it was contrasted with the *anxieties of a superstitious* (суеверного) *person*, scared of *lightning*, *sorcerer*, and other *common people superstitions*. It was noted that *it is a harmful and wicked business to argue against the existence of the gods, jokingly or in truth*; one should rely on conscience in life; this was supported by a story about the power of the *magic ring*, making a person invisible, which allowed him to commit any crimes, while *truly good people maintain honesty even without witnesses* [36]. Witchcraft had been described as intolerable *lawlessness*, but after 1770, it began to qualify as a *deceit of common people* punished by *flogging* rather than by execution [*O predosterezhonii sudey ot nepravil'nykh sledstviy i resheniy po delam o koldovstve i charodeystve i o nakazanii klikush plet'mi, yako obmanshchits* (*On the warning of judges against wrong consequences and decisions in cases of witchcraft and sorcery and on the punishment of hysterics with whips, as if they were deceivers*), 14.03.1770].

In the second half of the eighteenth century, theatre and fiction become a kind of *soft force* allowing to demonstrate visual examples of worthy ideals. D.I. Fonvizin (1745-1792) presented several images of social characters, describing the irreparable heterogeneity of the elites' *faith and character*, where mainly *Orthodox nobles* are personified as a distinction between the negative Skotinin and the positive Starodum (*Nedorosl*, 1781). Catherine II (1729-1796) writes the comedy *The Shaman of Siberia* (1786), where the fascination of some of the elites with the *unusual* was ridiculed; she was trying to marginalize the popularity of *Count Cagliostro* and the so-called *mysterious sciences* after the rise of the publications caused by a *noble desire... to hold back the growing madness and unbridled attachment to miracles* [37]. There were attempts to divide between the proper piety of the *true religion* and the morally but not legally condemned *unbridled attachment to miracles*.

N.I. Novikov (1744-1818) noted that true religion is not so much a local *confession of faith* as a moral basis of the person and *the soul of every virtue*, which in fact allows the authorities to recognize it as a socially necessary establishment (N.I. Novikov, *On upbringing and instruction of children*, 1783). In addition, translations of books on *mesmerism*, *animal magnetism*, and the views of Freemasonry are published, containing the word *religion* in their titles [38-40]. The specific *truth* and social significance of the poetic description of religion as a special reality by the *dandified sciences* are emphasized [41].

In the second half of the eighteenth century, all these separating discourses begin to be marked by a new lexeme *supernatural* and its derivatives (RNC, M.D. Chulkov, 1768). Initially, only the *striking* observed phenomena are marked in this way, somehow exceeding the common norm of *ordinary* (*supernatural eloquence*, etc.). At the end of the century, a new construct *some invisible and supernatural power* is recorded, which became widespread in the nineteenth-twentieth centuries (RNC, F.V. Rostopchin, 1796). Thus, the term *supernatural* from the artistic epithet denoting unusual phenomena of everyday life, i.e. from the field of *Nature*, by the end of the century turns into a fixed designation of an unusual mystical substance as a special source of being (*supernatural power*), opposite to the *forces of Nature*, the same in countries with any dominant *confession*. Along with this, under the influence of *romanticism* charmed by everything *mysterious*, *medieval* and *fabulous*, the phenomenon of *witchcraft* begins to be redefined from a *dark folk superstition* to the first form of *natural religion*. The ethnographers and folklorists start documenting such narratives as an important part of the *national culture*. According to the Russian National Corpus, the concept of *some invisible and supernatural power* becomes widespread at the beginning of the nineteenth century, corresponding to the mystical moods of Alexander I (1777-1825) and the interdenominational *Act of the Holy Union* (1815).

3.3. *The lexeme религия (religion), атеизм (atheism) as a religion and supra-denominational context*

In the nineteenth century, a *positive* approach to the *supernatural* takes shape in the spirit of anthropological explanations of how the *first moral and religious concepts of each nation are usually formed under the influence of the striking natural phenomena*, when an *uneducated mind, being unable to explain them naturally, goes into the most ridiculous interpretations, attributing everything to the action of some supernatural power*, as was described by N.A. Dobrolubov in 1855 [42]. The description of the *first moral and religious concepts*, was undertaken by the new *science of religion*, which was presented in Russian by the translation of M. Müller's lectures (Friedrich Max Müller, 1823-1900), who proposed to describe the religions on the basis of the new criterion of *trueness*, taken from *comparative linguistics*, where *the intellectual chivalry of the sciences of our age was able to discuss the religions of the world according to a strictly scientific method*, that due to its *noble intentions* and the ability to listen *with calm impartiality* noted the linguistic dimension of the problem, which allows us to distinguish between the two meanings of the word *religion*, the first of which expresses the features of Judaism, Christianity, or Hinduism as teachings *transmitted through oral tradition or canonical books*, while the second - the *thirst for the Infinite* itself [43]. There appeared numerous attempts to define the *essence of religion as such* in the whole spectrum of statements from *attitude to God and the invisible world* (1876) to *connection with the unconditional source and essence of all things* (1878) and *organized worship of higher forces* (1899). *Religion* stops being just various forms of *connection, relationship, worship* of God, deities, and other *forces* practiced by one or another local *denomination*; it is re-imagined as a universal *thirst for the Infinite*, an intrinsic anthropological basis inherent in every person in any era and any place. At the end of this century, cinema is being invented. It became a new art that challenged the theater because it was able to make the *invisible* stunningly visible by presenting it in the images of *religion, magic, fabulous, fairytale, mysterious, sacred, and supernatural*. At the beginning of the next century, a translation of the pamphlet by Charles Bradlaugh (1833-1891) was published, claiming that *the greatest of all revolutions is being made* when there is a transition *from a supernatural religion to a natural religion, which is atheism* [44].

3.4. *The Century of the Child and re-evaluation of the sacral context*

The beginning of the twentieth century is sometimes called the *Century of the Child* (1906) from the name of the world-famous book by Ellen Key (Ellen Karolina Sofia Key, 1849-1926), which revealed, as I.N. Arzamastseva noted, the special truth of the *greater art for little ones* manifested in the *game, fun, fleeting life moment*, and which influenced K.I. Chukovskiy (1882-1969) [T. Sysoev, *Chukovsky as a symbol of the 'age of the child'*, <https://portal-kul>

tura.ru/articles/books/328269-chukovskiy-kak-simvol-veka-rebenka/]. In 1911, he wrote that a child has an innate *religious giftedness* and for him “miracles are real... beasts are able to speak, and terrible monsters living under the bed need to be pacified” [I. Lukyanova, *Do not tear off the tadpoles' tails*, http://www.semya-rastet.ru/razd/detskaja_vera/]. Modern psychologist E.V. Subbotsky notes that *fairy tales, magic and wizardry* act as *indestructible* cultural phenomena [45].

The beginning of the twentieth century is characterized by the appearance of another (although little known at the time) lexeme *sacral* and its derivatives (RNC, F.F. Zelinsky, 1914); its use in the Russian language has been increasing only since the '70s of the twentieth century, marking the phenomenological understanding of religion as special intentions in the everyday life separated from the *worldly (profane)* and the sphere of the *familiar* (RNC, A.Y. Gurevich, 1972).

3.5. The lexeme religion, assault on Heaven and faith in the supernatural

The two revolutions of 1917 were accompanied by the adoption of a new legal norm *freedom of conscience and religion* and a radical *assault on heaven*, including the appearance in the first Criminal Code (1922) of a new form of crime - *teaching of religious beliefs to minors and underage children in public or private educational institutions and schools*, punishable by *forced labour for up to one year* (art. 211) [*Ugolovnyy kodeks (Criminal Code) of the RSFSR 1922*, <https://constitutions.ru/?p=5341>]. In 1929, a resolution *On Religious Associations* was adopted (08.04.1929); it was the first of the Russian publications where the difference between Church/sect, religion/superstition, etc., was ignored, but it was argued that *religious associations* include all *Churches, religious groups, creeds, religious movements and other religious associations of all types*, that they are all registered in the form of *religious societies or groups of believers*, while *every citizen can be a member of only one religious-cult association (society or group)* [*On Religious Associations*. *Resolution of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars of the RSFSR*, 8.04.1929, https://www.1000dokumente.de/?c=dokument_ru&dokument=0007_rel&object=translation&l=ru]. The neologism *cult association* reduced the *thirst for the Infinite* to the forms of ignorant *cults of various forces*.

A.V. Lunacharsky (1875-1933) considered as *scientific* his statement that *until now shamans (oracles, mullahs, priests) are the same as sorcerers who supposedly differ from all other people by the knowledge of how to pray, that is, they know how to solicit the necessary actions from spirits and gods controlling the nature and life of people* [A.V. Lunacharsky, *Art and Religion*, <http://lunacharsky.newgod.su/lib/religia-i-prosvesenie/iskusstvo-i-religia>]. At the same time, since the publication of J. Frazer's monograph *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (1890), anthropologists had been well aware that magic (witchcraft) as the ability to *solicit from spirits and gods* (mastery of the

unseen) was distinguished from religion as the *ability to pray* (worship of the unseen). The usual definition of religion during this period was *faith in the supernatural*; science as *the knowledge of the natural* was supposed to confront it, allowing everyone to build *communism* as the *kingdom of truth*. In 1937, the translation of the monograph *Le surnaturel et la nature dans la mentalité primitive* (Lucien Levy-Bruhl, 1931) was published; it made the term *supernatural* a part of the official academic discourse for the entire Soviet period [46].

The official sources establish the new universal formula *belief in supernatural forces* [47] starting with the first edition of the Great Soviet Encyclopaedia (1941), where the article *Religion* began by quoting the words of F. Engels (1820-1895) that *each religion is nothing more than a fantastic reflection in people's heads of the external forces dominating them in everyday life*, that it is *worship of god or gods, faith in supernatural forces*, that it is *in its very essence anti-scientific, the enemy of science and deterrent of knowledge*. No less figuratively, metaphorically, and epically was religion described in the subsequent two editions of the Great Soviet Encyclopaedia, the last of which (1975) qualified religion as a *worldview and perception... based on faith in the existence of... some or the other kind of the supernatural* [48]. Only the *New Russian Encyclopaedia* (2015) noted that using the concept of *supernatural* to define religion is fraught with significant difficulties [49].

Similar critical ideas were expressed earlier, in the *thaw period* (1955-1968), when, for example, Y.A. Levada (1930-2006) noted in 1965 that the very concept of the *supernatural* is the *extrapolation of modern religious and philosophical categories into primitive consciousness* [50]. The famous Soviet ethnographer S.A. Tokarev (1899-1985) also opposed the term *supernatural* during a resonant discussion between anthropologists, historians and philosophers about the *essence of religion* (1979-1981) in the academic journal *Soviet Ethnography*. He noted that it is impossible to scientifically *understand the role of Islam in today's international situation* by referring to the concept that Islam is a *faith in a supernatural power* [51]. Islam, like any religion in general, can adequately be understood only as a completely *real* and *enormous* force, which is more adequately and correctly transmitted by the lexeme *sacral*, which anthropologists, theologians and sociologists began to use from the beginning of the twentieth century, after the revolutionary publications of Emile Durkheim (1912, *Les Formes élémentaires du système totémique en Australie*) and Rudolf Otto (1917, *Das Heilige - Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen*), which were translated into Russian in full only in the twenty-first century.

3.6. The lexeme religion and the sacral

Interest in these issues in the USSR (the country of *mass atheism*) became explicitly noticeable only during the period of *perestroika*, when the authorities (M.S. Gorbachev) in 1988 agreed to a public celebration of the

1000th anniversary of the introduction of Christianity in Russia, along with UNESCO. From this period, the mass publication of *atheistic literature* stopped, the previously mandatory teaching of *scientific atheism* was no longer offered in universities, the works of Mircea Eliade (1907-1986) were getting translated and widely spread. They presented a new *phenomenological* approach to the description of religion for Russian readers, noting that if “we want to understand strange actions or some system of exotic values, then their demystification is of no interest in itself, since it deprives us of understanding of the essential deep meaning of religious existence” [52]. A.P. Zabiako became one of the pioneers of this new field of research, noting that the “history of religious consciousness can be presented as a long line of attempts to express the inexpressible” [53]. He pointed out that the “conviction of the existence of the sacral and the inclination to be involved in it constitute the essence of religion” [54].

3.7. *The lexeme religion as the indefinite and the undeterminable*

In conclusion we shall note that the entire history of mankind, phenomenologically acting as a system of attempts to *express the inexpressible* necessary for its special *exploration*, was explicitly manifested in the desire to affirm the jointly accepted symbols that record the distinction between the *inexpressible* and *expressed* characteristic not only of all known cultures, but also of *autopoietic systems* behaviour in wildlife, as for example was described by Burrhus Frederic Skinner (1904-1990) in the ‘*Superstition*’ in the *Pigeon* (1948) [55], explained by the so called operant conditioning, i.e. the effect of behaviour on the behaviour itself (autopoiesis of practices) through training, punishment, and revision, constituting the *ritual of causing grain*. In 1983, the translation of *Anthropologie structurale* (1958) by Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908-2009) was published in the USSR; it denied the L. Levi-Bruhl’s popular ideas about supernatural (prelogical) conscience, noting the unity of human nature, when “superstitions, even those that seem the most absurd today, originally possessed a progressive philosophical character...” [56]. He cited a case of the Rainbow division that was formed during World War I and randomly received this name, but during several months as witnessed by the researcher, from a social *secular* item - artificially created military group - it became some kind of a religion as a practice of veneration of the *sacral*, similar to totemism, showing that in any subculture all *unknown* tends to be turned into *familiar*, *explored*, and jointly practiced as *ritual* [56, p. 42-43].

Returning to the topic of this study, it can be noted that both oppositions (*natural/supernatural* and *profane/sacral*) developed in the Russian culture of the nineteenth-twentieth centuries, symbolically represent the special *determinations* distanced from all the *indeterminate* i.e. *uncertain*, which it seems appropriate to the authors to describe within the framework of N. Luhmann’s approach. His term *indeterminate* has two related aspects, meaning on the one hand the initially undefined (unknown, unfamiliar, etc.) that in the

future can be *explored* and transform into the defined (known, familiar, etc.). On the other hand, the sphere of the inherently *indeterminate* and *unknown* remains always; for example, the invasion of covid-19 into the world community. Three well-known works created in the USSR may be presented as the examples of the relationship of *indeterminate* and *determinate* embodied in the images of cinematography: Brilliantovaya Ruka (Leonid Gaidai, 1968), *Yozhik v Tumane* (Yuriy Norshtein, 1975) and *Stalker* (Andrei Tarkovskiy, 1979).

In the first film, the character of Andrei Mironov sees a *boy walking on water*, but soon unravels this *mysterious miracle*. The same reality through the skill of the filmmakers during one minute is ironically portrayed as turning from the *familiar-profane* into *sacral* and then returning to *secular* again. In the other two films the *indefinite* is shown as something that seems inherently (fundamentally, forever, truly) *unclear* - seen as *undeterminable* and *vague* - but at the same time clearly experienced as a *reality* (sensual, emotional, etc.) [*German Russian dictionary online*, <https://ru.glosbe.com/de/ru>]. In the film *Stalker* (Andrei Tarkovsky, 1979), the threshold of the room acts as frighteningly *unknown*, and in the cartoon *Yozhik v Tumane* (Yuriy Norshtein, 1975), the same role is played by the *fog*.

It is the phenomenon of the *indefinite* that becomes the basis for everything that is *established* in culture, labeled as *supernatural/sacral*, becoming its eternal shadow (undeterminable, unknown, inexpressible, unpredictable, etc.). This *indefinite* has a specific *real* existence, periodically declaring itself by *sudden invasions* into our practices of relations with *reality* throughout the history of mankind, demanding the *eternal return to the beginning* and the transfer from one generation to another not so much of *faith* but of the extremely serious *knowledge* of the necessary *immediate* and constant *supervision of the unknown*, be that in *theological*, *atheistic*, or *academic* forms.

4. Conclusions

The study of the *autopoiesis* of the phenomenon of religion in the Russian culture on the basis of N. Luhmann's theoretical and methodological concept (semantic analysis of differentiations and their dynamics in written sources) allows us to identify the spectrum of the lexemes and meanings referring to the sphere of religion and describing it in various historical and cultural periods, as well as the criteria for the system boundaries through marking the differentiations.

The widespread use of the word *religion* with various (often polarized) connotations has been recorded only since the nineteenth century. Before this period, the dynamics of marking religious communication with the following lexemes can be traced: *вера/вѣра* (faith), *правда* (truth), *закон* (law), *истина* (verity), including *вѣра* (faith) and *релѣя/religio* (religion) (during the signing of the Union of Brest in 1596). In addition to this, at the end of the eighteenth century, the term *supernatural* appeared, which became dominant in the Soviet official discourse for the description of religion from the standpoint of *atheism*

until the second half of the twentieth century. At the end of the twentieth century, the first publications on the anthropology and phenomenology of religion appeared in the post-Soviet Russia; the term *sacral* became widespread and the differentiation of *sacred/profane* was introduced, marking the complexity of religious communication and allowing the reinterpretation of the term *religion* as the *autopoiesis* of attempts to determine the *inexpressible* in the history of mankind and in the modern Russian religious studies.

The oppositions regulating the borders were identified, i.e. distinctions that indicate the increasing complexity of the internal structure of the system from *faithful/unfaithful* in the princely community of *pious Christians* (tenth-eleventh centuries) to *explored/unfamiliar* in the modern global culture. Communication in the *autopoiesis* of the system of religion, while differing in various historical eras, subcultures, and communities, can be described in view of N. Luhmann's concept as a single unique system that forms its memory as the past from which the system *looks into its own future*. The variety of meanings of the Latin word *religio* and its derivatives, denoting both the infinitely complex and indescribable *extralinguistic reality* of human existence in the world and the local traditions of *supervision of the unknown*, allows us to describe everything *unfamiliar* in the usual symbols of various images of *piety* manifested in the practices of harmonious life and communication with the highest principles of being represented *theologically, atheistically or academically*.

Acknowledgement

This work has been supported by the grant from the Russian Foundation for Basic Research under the project № 21-011-44195 - Theology (bogoslovie) and religious studies in Russia: between the media and the dialogue of experts.

References

- [1] E.I. Arinin, I. Nefedova, A. Timoshchuk and O. Shadrina, Eur. J. Sci. Theol., **13(5)** (2017) 5-22.
- [2] E.A. Ostrovskaya, *The Sociology of Religion: An Introduction*, Peterburgskoye vostokovedeniye Press, Saint Petersburg, 2018, 82.
- [3] N. Luhmann, *Introduction to systems theory*, Logos, Moscow, 2007, 113.
- [4] A.F. Filippov, *The theoretical foundations of Niklas Luhmann's sociology (critical analysis)*, Dissertation of the candidate of philosophical sciences, USSR Academy of Sciences Institute of Sociological Research, Moscow, 1984, 198.
- [5] N. Luhmann, *Tautology and paradox in self-descriptions of modern society*, in *Socio-Logos. Society and spheres of meaning*, Progress, Moscow, 1991, 477.
- [6] A.Y. Antonovskiy, *Niklas Luhmann: An Epistemological Introduction to Social Systems Theory*, IP RAS, Moscow, 2007, 136.
- [7] A.Y. Antonovskiy, *Socio-epistemology: on the spatio-temporal and personal-collective dimensions of society*, Kanon plyus, ROOI Reabilitatsiya, Moscow, 2011, 400.
- [8] A.Y. Antonovskiy, Voprosy filosofii (Problems of Philosophy), **9** (2020) 127-138.

- [9] A.Y. Antonovskiy, *Language as a medium of social (dis)organization*, in *N. Luhmann Society of society*, Vol. 2, Russian translation, Logos, Moscow, 2011, 603.
- [10] A.Y. Antonovskiy, *Observation theory and media communication*, in *N. Luhmann Society of society*, Vol. 2, Russian translation, Logos, Moscow, 2011, 602.
- [11] A.V. Nazarchuk, *N. Luhmann's doctrine of communication*, Ves' Mir, Moscow, 2012, 248.
- [12] E.A. Ostrovskaya, *Institutionalization of the Religious Model of Society*, Doctoral Thesis, St. Petersburg University, Saint Petersburg, 2003, 390.
- [13] E.A. Ostrovskaya, *The Sociology of Religion: An Introduction*, Peterburgskoye vostokovedeniye, Saint Petersburg, 2018, 83.
- [14] E.V. Vorontsova, Bulletin of the Orthodox St. Tikhon University for the Humanities. Series 1: Theology. Philosophy, **4(36)** (2011) 52-61.
- [15] E.V. Vorontsova, *The place of the sociology of religion in the system theory of N. Luhmann*, in *Candle-2017. The 'Image' of Religion in Russia: Educational Projects and the Construction of Religious Tolerance*, Vol. 33, Arkaim, Vladimir, 2017, 97.
- [16] E.I. Arinin, Religiovedenie (Study of Religion), **3(31)** (2013) 97-106.
- [17] E. I. Arinin and J.V. Latysheva, *Luhmann*, in *Sociology of religion. Dictionary*, M.Y. Smirnov (ed.), St. Petersburg University, Saint Petersburg, 2011, 173-174.
- [18] Y.G. Matushanskaya, *Autopoiesis of the biblical philosophical and historical concept as the ideological basis of Western civilization*, Doctoral Thesis, Northern (Arctic) Federal University, Arkhangelsk, 2015, 382.
- [19] J.V. Latysheva, *Transcending as a subject of socio-philosophical research*, Doctoral Thesis, Northern (Arctic) Federal University, Arkhangelsk, 2016, 41.
- [20] I.E. Vikulov, *Mass-Media Images of Religion: Socio-Philosophical Aspects*, Dissertation for the Degree of Candidate of Philosophical Sciences, Northern (Arctic) Federal University, Arkhangelsk, 2019, 217.
- [21] M.S. Lyutaeva, Socio-political sciences, **4(9)** (2019) 154-158.
- [22] M.S. Lyutaeva, Religious Almanac, **1-2(6)** (2020) 83-88.
- [23] N. Luhmann, *Funktion der Religion*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1977, 20.
- [24] N. Luhmann, *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1998, 649.
- [25] N. Luhmann, *Differentiation*, Russian translation, Logos, Moscow, 2006, 64.
- [26] N. Luhmann, *Die Religion der Gesellschaft*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 2000, 77.
- [27] V.E. Semenov, Voprosy filosofii (Problems of Philosophy), **7** (2011) 106-108.
- [28] K.A. Kostromin, Khristianskoye chteniye (Christian reading), **36(1)** (2011) 6-7.
- [29] A.Y. Vinogradov and M. Zheltov, Drevnyaya Rus': Voprosy mediyevistiki (Ancient Russia: Questions of medieval studies), **73(3)** (2018) 118-139.
- [30] B.I. Kurakin, *Diary and travel notes of Prince Boris Ivanovich Kurakin. 1705-1707*, in *Archives of kn. F. Kurakin*, Vol. 1, Printing house V.S. Balasheva, Saint Petersburg, 1890, 145.

- [31] ***, *Kniga Svstima, ili sostoyaniye mukhammedanskiya religii napechatasya povoleniyem yego velichestva Petra Velikogo imperatora i samoderzhitsa vserossiyskogo v tipografii tsarstvuyushchego Sanktpiterburkha leta 1722 v 22 den* (The book of Svstim, or the state of the Muhammadan religion, was printed by the order of His Majesty Peter the Great Emperor and Autocrat of All Russia in the printing house of the reigning St. Petersburg in the summer of 1722 on the 22nd day), Saint Petersburg, 1722, 3, 5.
- [32] V.N. Tatishchev, *Conversation of two friends about the benefits of science and schools*, University typography, Moscow, 1787, 78.
- [33] M.V. Lomonosov, *Complete Works*, Vol. 4: *Works on physics, astronomy and instrumentation 1744-1765*, AN SSSR, Moscow, 1955, 768.
- [34] M.V. Lomonosov, *Letter on the benefits of glass to the real Her Imperial Majesty the chamberlain and the orders of St. Alexander and St. Anna to the knight His Excellency Ivan Ivanovich Shuvalov from the collegiate adviser and professor Mikhail Lomonosov*, Printed at the Imperial Academy of Sciences, Saint Petersburg, 1752, 16.
- [35] M.V. Lomonosov, *Complete works*, Vol. 9, AN SSSR, Moscow, 1955, 492, 503, 505, 874.
- [36] ***, *Opinions of Cicero from various of his writings*, in *Collected by Abbot Olivet, formerly translated from French into Russian by captain Ivan Shishkin; and now at the Imperial Academy of Sciences corrected after the original Latin by M.V. Lomonosov*, Printed at the Imperial Academy of Sciences, Saint Petersburg, 1752, 15, 19, 21, 55.
- [37] ***, *Description of the stay in Mitava of the famous Kaliotra in 1779, and the magical actions he performed there*, in *Collected by Charlotte Elisabeth Constance von der Recke, nee Countess of Medemsky*, Printed with the permission of the Deanery by Shnor, Printed by Schnor, Saint Petersburg, 1787, 7.
- [38] ***, *The (true) rules of the Christian upbringing of children, proposed in the letters, which also contain the initial foundations of the Christian religion and life for people of every state*, Russian translation, Printing house I. Lopukhina, Moscow, 1785.
- [39] ***, *The fate of religion; a prophecy that will be ridiculed, but fulfilled. Dedicated to all those who destroy and edify Christianity*, Izhdiveniyem Tipograficheskoy kompanii, I. Lopukhin, Moscow, 1785.
- [40] G.-F. Stender, *The truth of religion in general in two parts, of which the first proves the truth of religion in general against the unbelief of free-thinkers and naturalists; and the second affirms the truth of the Christian religion, following the scripture against the disbelief of naturalists*, Izhdiveniyem Tipograficheskoy kompanii, I. Lopukhin, Moscow, 1785.
- [41] ***, *An offering of religion, or a collection of poems by Lomonosov, Kheraskov, Derzhavin, Karamzin and others*, M. Vysheslavtsev, Moscow, 1798.
- [42] N.A. Dobrolyubov, *Works*, Vol. 2, I.N. Skorokhodov Press, 1896, 334.
- [43] F.M. Muller, *Lectures by prof. Max Muller*, Russian translation, Adolphe Darre, Kharkov, 1887, 1, 4, 10-12.
- [44] C. Bradlo, *Atheism. (Natural religion)*, Potok, Saint Petersburg, 1907, 3, 17-18, 21.
- [45] E.V. Subbotsky, *The Indestructibility of the Magic: How Magic and Science Complement Each Other in Modern Life*, Direct-Media, Moscow-Berlin, 2015, 3-4.
- [46] L. Levy-Bruhl, *The Supernatural in Primitive Thinking*, Russian translation, OGIZ Press, Moscow, 1937.

- [47] Y.P. Frantsov, *Religion*, in *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, O.Y. Schmidt (ed.), Vol. 48, State Institute 'Soviet Encyclopedia', Moscow, 1941, 567.
- [48] V.I. Garadzha, *Religion*, in *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, A.M. Prokhorov (ed.), Vol. 21, Soviet Encyclopedia, Moscow, 1975, 629.
- [49] A.P. Zabiyako, A.N. Krasnikov and E.S. Elbakyan, *Religion*, in *New Russian Encyclopedia*, Vol. 14(1), Encyclopedia, Moscow, 2015, 81.
- [50] Y.A. Levada, *The social nature of religion*, Nauka, Moscow, 1965, 72.
- [51] S.A. Tokarev, *Soviet Ethnography*, **1** (1981) 63.
- [52] M. Eliade, *Sacred and secular*, Russian translation, Moscow State University, Moscow, 1994, 13.
- [53] A.P. Zabiyako, *Holiness category. Comparative study of linguistic and religious traditions*, Moskovskiy uchebnik-2000, Moscow, 1998, 5.
- [54] A.P. Zabiyako, *Sacred*, in *New philosophical encyclopedia*, Vol. 3, Mysl', Moscow, 2010, 482.
- [55] B.F. Skinner, *J. Exp. Psychol. Gen.*, **3(121)** (1992) 273.
- [56] C. Levi-Strauss, *Primitive thinking*, Russian translation, Respublica, Moscow, 1994, 286.