
ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL THOUGHT OF MYRRHA LOT-BORODINE

Marta Lechowska*

Jagiellonian University, Golebia St 24, Kraków, 31-002, Poland

(Received 5 February 2022, revised 26 September 2022)

Abstract

The paper presents the thought of the first Orthodox female theologian, Myrrha Lot-Borodine. She was a representative of the 'theosis' theology, which emphasised the divinised nature of man. According to Lot-Borodine, Catholic and Protestant theology, on the contrary, emphasised the importance of sin in the constitution of man. For this reason, the Russian thinker gave the priority to Orthodoxy in the field of Christian anthropology. However, there was one sphere in which the Orthodox theologian found it easier to perceive the imperfection and sinfulness of man than his divine-human nature. It was the religious culture of her compatriots, presented in the second part of the article. It was demonstrated how the thinker who in all her work exalted Orthodox theology in relation to the Western denominations of Christianity, became a severe critic of Orthodoxy in the Russian version. The latter was perceived as the apogee of particularism, superficial ritualism and, above all, nationalism - features incompatible with authentic Christianity.

Keywords: Christian, anthropology, deification, religious, culture

1. Introduction

Myrrha Lot-Borodine - a Russian thinker considered the first female Orthodox theologian [1], the representative of Neopatristic movement of the first half of the 20th century, which "was intended to renew the Spirit of the Fathers" [2] - left a legacy including the writings in the field of Orthodox theology, the collections of poetry and the studies of medieval French literature but also works devoted to the criticism of the Russian religious culture.

The work of Myrrha Lot-Borodine - born in St. Petersburg; a graduate of the Sorbonne and the wife of a professor at that university; mother of three and a social activist cannot be ignored when talking about the history of the Orthodox thought in general and the religious culture of the Russian emigration in the 20th century. This Russian woman who lived in France since the age of 26, left behind her works not only in the field of Orthodox theology, but also works devoted to the criticism of Russian religious culture, as well as collections of poetry and studies of medieval French literature. Completely devoted to the

*E-mail: marta.lechowska@uj.edu.pl, tel.: +48 505 164 026

study of mystical theology, the focus of which she saw in the doctrine of *theosis*, she deepened and popularised the teaching of the Eastern Church Fathers, showing the Catholic West a diametrically different view on man and, thus, becoming a true inspiration for the West, as confirmed by the words of the greatest Western intellectuals.

Among the researchers who made the works of Lot-Borodine the main subject of their research Fyodor Poljakov was the first to write about Myrrha Lot-Borodine, emphasising, above all, the role she played within the Russian diaspora [3]. Boris Danilenko wrote about Lot-Borodine, focusing primarily on the poetry of the Russian emigrant [4]. Taking into account the English-language works, the subject of Lot-Borodine's work was first taken up in 2012 by the professor of Theology and gender studies, Helen E. Zоргdrager, emphasising the feminine aspect in the history of Theology, including the history of *theosis* [5]. Until recently, the aforementioned works constituted the entire literature on the subject. It was until 2020 that the first monograph on Lot-Borodine was published in Russian [6]. Its author is Teresa Obolevitch - a researcher studying Russian religious philosophy, including the neo-patristic trend. Moreover, Teresa Obolevitch is also the author of the article in English Myrrha Lot-Borodine, the first female Orthodox theologian, also published in 2020 [1].

As we mentioned, despite the wide spectrum of topics, the work of Myrrha Lot-Borodine was undoubtedly dominated by the study of the *theosis* doctrine. The choice of the concept of deification developed in the writings of the Eastern Fathers of the Church as representative of Eastern Christianity was dictated by the fact that this category, like *pars pro toto*, reflected, according to Lot-Borodine, the depth of Christian truth about man (which Catholicism and Protestantism failed to fully grasp.) In the field of Anthropology, therefore, the Russian did not hesitate to give priority to Orthodoxy. The apology of it, however, was not devoid of criticism. This is evidenced by Lot-Borodine's works mercilessly and radically stigmatising Orthodoxy in the Russian version: a religious attitude permeated with particularism, self-centredness and nationalism.

The idea of this article is to juxtapose the apologetic, in a broad sense, aspect of the work of the Russian theologian with its unexpected - as referring also to Orthodoxy - aspect of merciless criticism of the religious culture of Russians. This juxtaposition will allow us to see the motives of the aforementioned criticism, so incomprehensible and causing indignation in the circles of Orthodox Russians contemporary of her.

2. The 'Theosis' theology and the impact of Lot-Borodine's works on the Catholic west

Myrrha Lot-Borodine devoted her entire mature life to the search for the most appropriate and authentic formula of Christian anthropology. The question about a human being, about his deepest nature, was the main issue that troubled her for almost thirty years of studies on Eastern Christian spirituality. The Russian theologian found the answer to it in the concept of *theosis*, inalienable

to Eastern Christian anthropology, but pushed aside in the course of history. This forgotten doctrine, so different, according to Lot-Borodine, from Western Christianity's characteristic focus on human sinfulness, proposed a return to the 'maximalist' approach to human being.

Lot-Borodine explained the essence of the *theosis* concept in the text *The Grace of Deification through Sacraments in the Christian East* (1953), following the sense of Basil the Great's words, in her opinion rather bold, that "man belongs to creation, but he is called to become God," as well as after Maxim the Confessor's statement that "man should become by grace what God is by nature" [7]. Lot-Borodine described deification as a mystical symbiosis of divine and human nature, the pattern of which (this symbiosis) is Christ. In the aforementioned text on deification, we read: "Deification (...) is actualised by the Spirit (...). Mystical symbiosis of what is divine and what is human, an ideal pre-image that was given by the God-man himself." [7, p. 13]

It is worth emphasising that the deified man participates in God's life by grace, and in no case - as Lot-Borodine emphasises, renouncing the position of metaphysical monism - not on the basis of an ontological 'merging' with God. The ontological difference, as the Russian theologian claims, in line with the tradition of Eastern Christianity, is preserved at every stage of the development of the human spirit. Eastern theology, although it clearly speaks of an ontological difference, does not make the latter an insurmountable barrier, which, according to Lot-Borodine, is the case in Western theology, including Saint Augustine. On the other hand, grace, whether given through the sacraments or present in the various manifestations of ascetic life, allows man to resemble God again, carrying out the most important task set by the Creator: the deification of human nature, tantamount to rediscovering the image of God in man.

The category of deification is closely related to the category of *imago Dei*. This connection can be seen in the two passages from the Lot-Borodine writings cited below. The first is as follows: "The distortions of sin, however serious they may be, cannot destroy in us the imago – freedom–intelligence that is *ens*. (...) It comes down to saying that man, since he was a privileged being from birth, will keep (...) the secret of his nature - being the bearer of the Spirit." [8] Elsewhere, Lot-Borodine writes that the Eastern Christian tradition sees man in a relation of fundamental participation in God's reality - from creation to the Incarnation (excluding Adam's fall), in which human nature was elevated to the level of God, in other words, deified. This conviction about the divine nature of man, 'radiant' also by the condition of man marked by sin, is expressed by the following words: "nature corrupted by guilt, but still alive and practically reborn in the deifying Incarnation" [8].

The above-mentioned "rebirth in a deifying Incarnation" is possible only through the fundamental participation of man in the divine reality, thanks to the primal communion of man and God, called *koinonia* in the Greek tradition: "Created as the image and likeness of God (...) Adam's exalted soul in an earthly paradise, a symbol of heavenly bliss, was obviously divine in nature. As such (...) it freely clung to the source of the light. It lived in the presence of the

Creator, who was reflected in the clear mirror of this soul: it was a close communication of humanity and divinity through an immanent path, an initial communication, called *Koinônia* by St. Irenaeus and recognised by all the Greek Fathers. The divine principle (...) was thus imprinted in our clay in the very act of creation. (...) This essential, not added, gift is therefore an inalienable property of human nature.” [8, p. 188]

The last sentence contains a reference to the concept of Saint Augustine, who, according to the Russian theologian, considered the grace necessary for the salvation of man to be an ‘added gift’, separate and alien to human nature. According to the Russian theologian, who followed the Greek Fathers of the Church, divinity did not cease to be the deepest identity of man, even when he turned towards sin. In this context, Marianna Mahn-Lot, daughter of the Russian theologian, writes: What “for Myrrha Lot-Borodine is the essence of Greco-Eastern theological thought (...) is a constant reference to the <image and likeness> to be restored; man is called to deification because his nature belongs to the supernatural” [9]. This paradox - the supernatural hidden in Nature - is a fundamental truth of deification theology.

Thanks to this message - about human nature ‘illuminated’ from the inside by the supernatural element, about the man called to become God - Lot-Borodine managed to open Western intellectuals to such pearls of Orthodox spirituality as the *theosis* doctrine. It should be emphasised, however, that even the most devoted Western friends of the Russian thinker and, at the same time, her attentive readers, enchanted with the discovery of Eastern Christian anthropology, noticed in Lot-Borodine’s attitude a certain sense of superiority and the accompanying lack of openness shown by representatives of Western culture, fascinated with Orthodox teachings. It was manifested in the constant opposition of the Eastern tradition to the West.

The aforementioned sense of superiority was perfectly sensed by a friend of the Russian thinker, the French historian of Medieval philosophy, the professor whose lecture the Russian woman attended at the Catholic University of Paris [1] - previously mentioned Étienne Gilson. He wrote about the clearly different valuation of two Christian intellectual traditions - Eastern and Western - as follows: “I believe I would not have betrayed her by thinking that deep down, Mrs. Myrrha Lot-Borodine felt in a better position than her friends, Christians of the West, to see the deeper meaning of ways of thinking and feeling that thirteenth-century Latin theology had long hidden from their eyes, but which her beloved theology of *theosis* has kept present and alive in the heart” [10].

These words indicate a clear preference of the Russian thinker who perceives the superiority of Eastern Christian theology over Catholicism and Protestantism. Preference itself, however - natural to anyone who considers a given theory to be closer to the truth - would not be a problem if it did not degenerate into a tendency to polarise Western and Eastern Christianity at all costs. The accusation of intentional exacerbation of the incompatibility between the two traditions and their deliberate confrontation can be read from the words of the representative of Western theology, Jean Daniélou, who was most moved

by Lot-Borodine's writings, yet perceived the excessive emphasis on the contradiction of both traditions by the Russian, while diminishing the importance of the fundamental experience common to all of Christ's disciples, underlying both branches of Christianity. He wrote as follows: "She [*Lot-Borodine - M.L.*] tended to exacerbate the opposition between Eastern theology and Latin theology, while it seems to me that, returning to the source of disputes that have been distorted by violent feelings, one should see that there is no irreconcilable opposition between them" [11].

There is no doubt that, according to the Russian theologian, the Western understanding of man ignored the fundamentally important truths about him, the 'seeing' of which was preserved by the Eastern Church Fathers. Lot-Borodine's words on Western Christian human science are harsh, critical and sometimes sarcastic. According to the thinker, Western anthropology, regardless of the degree of mental and religious maturity of its representatives, can be reduced to a finding about the fundamental human tendency to sin; this man must be lifted up and 'saved' over and over again by supernatural forces external to him.

It is worth mentioning here that Myrrha Lot-Borodine was the one who in the 1930s acquainted the West with the Eastern Christian human science. Three of her articles on the foundations of the spirituality of the Christian East laid the foundations for the knowledge and understanding of the West about the distinct understanding of man through Orthodox doctrine. The realisation of this distinction turned out to be more than inspiring for the West - for its representatives most aware of the insufficiency of Western formulas. In this context, it is enough to recall the words of J. Daniélou, revealing the admiration, showing the importance of Lot-Borodine's writings for the development of Christian thought in Western Europe in the first half of the 20th century: "The years 1930-1950 were a period of discovering Byzantine mysticism in the West. This discovery occurs simultaneously in different centres. (...) Among the most active ferments of this movement were three articles published in the 1930s by Myrrha Lot-Borodine (...) on the doctrine of deification in the Byzantine Church. (...) I still remember the amazement I felt reading them. Their strange style, overloaded with Greek and Latin words, wonderful neologisms, stood out in this austere and erudite overview. But it felt as if they were suddenly bringing us to the very centre of a unique experience, gathering - as in a beam of light - clues scattered elsewhere. Reading these articles was decisive for me. They crystallised something I was looking for, namely a vision of a man transformed by divine energies." [11, p. 10-11] That is how Cardinal Jean Daniélou, one of the most outstanding Catholic theologians of the time, a spokesman for the "renewal of Theology by returning to biblical and patristic sources, as well as to the liturgy" [12], the representative of the *Nouvelle Théologie* (aiming to return to the sources and develop the thoughts of the Church Fathers [13]), the author of deep essays on the Holy Trinity [10, p. 17-75], described the meeting with the theological thought of Myrrha Lot-Borodine.

Both Cardinal Daniélou and Lot-Borodine's daughter, Marianna, drew a wide circle of influence of the work of the Russian theologian on Western thinkers; the works were known and appreciated by Yves Congar and Marie-

Dominique Chenu [9]; the Russian thinker also corresponded with the future cardinal, Henri de Lubac [9]. In addition, it is necessary to emphasise the close intellectual ties of Lot-Borodine with the eminent historian of medieval philosophy, Étienne Gilson, for whom, as he himself wrote, the friendship of the Russian woman was an honour [10, p. VIII]. Also Loius Massignon - a Catholic scholar devoted to the idea of reconciling Christianity and Islam, highly appreciated the works of Lot-Borodine, while Léon Brunschvicg found in Lot-Borodine's writings a "great light for the problems of the West" [9, p. 749]. In this context Teresa Obolevitch writes that thanks to Lot-Borodine the turn of Western theology towards forgotten patristic sources was made [6, p. 233].

Let us add in this context that Lot-Borodine, throughout her studies of patristics, followed the evolution of Western Christian doctrine, with particular emphasis on the role of such theologians and religious thinkers as Saint Augustine, Saint Thomas Aquinas, Saint Bernard of Clervaux, Saint Anselm, and finally - Luther and Lot-Borodine's contemporary theologian - Karl Barth. All of them, according to Lot-Borodine, share the same conviction: the divine nature of man was destroyed by sin, and thus the image of God in man was almost completely blurred: "There is a (...) tendency in Western theology to minimise imago by accentuating the primal deficiency in creation. (...) The dispute between the Greeks and the Latin people (...) concerns the act of *creatio hominis* itself. Where the first ones discover the innate character of the image, incorporated into our race like a living embryo, from the very moment of its birth, Augustinism sees only an (...) added gift that perfects nature." [8, p. 189-191]

The last sentence is a reference to the teachings of Saint Augustine, according to which grace, as the thinker claims, is a certain addition to the basic human nature, spoiled by sin, which makes the latter - if not taking into account the "gifts from above" - doomed to its own imperfection and the associated helplessness (let us add that Saint Augustine's writings confirm this view of man [14]). Such a reading of the writings of Saint Augustine is confirmed by the Polish philosopher of religion, Józef Tischner: "For Augustine, nature is no form of mediation of grace. (...) It seems that St. Augustine is more concerned with the presence and power of evil." (*than with good* - M.L.) [15] The words of Lot-Borodine referring to all Western theology sound consistent with it: "Adam's *amor imperturbatus* needs constant grace, *auxilium sine qua non*: the whole organism made supernatural must be supported by invisible supports and is thus implicitly considered to be decaying" [8, p. 189].

Western theology, therefore, in various configurations, upheld, according to Lot-Borodine, the thesis that without the help of the grace given from above, man is in fact not able - by the power of the incarnation deifying human nature - to return to the perfection from before the Adam's fall. Helen Zorgdrager, a contemporary Dutch professor of theology, and insightful researcher of Lot-Borodine's creativity, concludes the gap between Lot-Borodine's praised theology of the *theosis* and Western theology in the following words: "German liberal theologian Adolf von Harnack (...) characterised deification as a pagan and Hellenistic idea, incompatible with Christian theology. This assumption was

reinforced by the Protestant crisis theology of Karl Barth with its radical emphasis on the 'Otherness' of God. In such a theology the idea of human being 'taking part in God' or even 'becoming God' seemed fairly blasphemous." [5, p. 289] If, in the words of H. Zorndrager, the relationship between the theology of the Christian East and West in the first half of the twentieth century was best defined by the word 'blasphemy' - on a psychological and axiological level - the radicality with which Lot-Borodine fought for the Eastern understanding of the man becomes understandable. For it is clear that the West was not a favourable environment for the *theosis* doctrine. It seems, however, that this unfavourable environment was not an obstacle, but a strong catalyst for the adoption of the attitude of genuine disagreement and the perceptible indignation with which the theologian posed fundamental questions to the entire Western tradition. One of them, addressed directly to representatives of Protestant theology, reads as follows: "If man is truly a being marked by the Spirit from the beginning of his existence, as the patristic supposes, bearing in his impermanent clay a sign of adoption, how could he have completely changed, how could he fall to such an extent that the divine image that made him immortal disappeared without a trace? From Luther to Barth inclusive, none of the reformers answered this nagging question. (...) If prayer itself cannot lead to the Creator, then by what channel the Holy Word reaches the hermetically sealed soul, how does it hear the call, through which organ it receives the Revelation?" [8, p. 197]

In the light of the above question concerning the channels of communication between God and man, the deepest *differentia specifica*, as understood by Lot-Borodine, is clearly visible, between Eastern and Western Christian doctrine. Nevertheless, it must be mentioned that elsewhere Lot-Borodine says that the difference between Eastern and Western Christianity is not in doctrine but in types of spirituality [16]. This difference is in the relationship between nature and the supernatural within a human being. The West finds here complete separability - human nature, in its corruption, is opposed to God's nature; man comes into contact with God only on the initiative of the latter. The East, on the other hand, following the teachings of the early Church Fathers, perceives the interpenetration and symbiosis between the natural and the supernatural. "Nature and supernatural interpenetrate" [8, p. 189], writes Lot-Borodine. In this context, it is clear for Lot-Borodine that the West is forced, in a way artificially, with the help of any intervention of higher forces, to 'save' human nature inclined to evil, while the East is forced to defend the human divinity - natural, lost and regained in the act of the Incarnation.

Lot-Borodine brilliantly and poignantly summarises the history of Western Christian thought: "All these systems, locked in rigid frames, pose the problem in antagonistic, more or less insightful terms. The most profound ones seem to be convinced that God's glory suffers because of man's freedom and that creation must be humiliated in order to exalt the Creator." [8, p. 200]

The nature of Western theology, which degrades man to exalt God, was, as we have seen, utterly alien to Lot-Borodine. By consciously rejecting it, the Russian theologian chose the path of Eastern Christian anthropology, which, in her opinion, was best expressed in the theology of *theosis*. There was, however,

one sphere in which the Orthodox theologian found it easier to perceive the imperfection and sinfulness of man than - according to the above findings - his divine-human nature. We are talking about the religious culture of her compatriots. In this context, she became a ruthless critic, stigmatising their self-centredness, particularism and stupidity.

3. Criticism of the Russian religious nationalism

Myrrha Lot-Borodine begins her reflections on the level of religious culture of her countrymen with a reflection on the concept of culture, which, according to the Russian theologian, should be contrasted with the concept of civilisation (material values versus intangible values) and should emphasise human activity in relation to values sanctified by history and tradition. Importantly, Lot-Borodine does not emphasise individual (as opposed to personal) religious experience; it is the aspect of community and tradition - ensuring the identity of faith in the face of the changing world - that is central to it. The author attaches great importance to the knowledge of the history of the Church and the truths of faith sanctified in the history. She compares this knowledge to the 'compass' which enables the believer to stay on course in the face of various trends and temptations [17]. Moreover, Lot-Borodine emphasises the role of reason in religious attitude: each believer, to the best of his strength, should acquire knowledge about the history of the Church, otherwise he or she may lose the inheritance entrusted to them. Like a withering branch on an evergreen tree, so unaware of the historical heritage of his Church, the faithful dies, cutting himself off from the life-giving juices of the whole organism. By relying on individual consciousness, we deprive ourselves of belonging to a powerful, centuries-old, stable whole, serving as the axis of identity throughout history. By turning away from it (this whole) - the thinker is convinced of it - a person loses orientation and, in this particular sense, life. It is hard to find a more eloquent symbol: a baptised man, thus gifted with the grace of the sacrament, reducing his religiosity to individual consciousness, cuts - in accordance with the proposed metaphor - the bloodstream and, falling away from the "tree of life" [17, p. 26], condemns himself to death; a single, isolated branch dries up and falls off. This evocative image shows what the adoption of an individualistic religious attitude isolated from the historical context leads to; in the end, it leads to death (in the spiritual sense).

In the context of Lot-Borodine's thought, this vision can also be applied to another situation - when the religious particularism of a given nation, its superiority and sense of being elected, replaces the universal human and pan-Christian dimension. In other words, if we replace religious individual consciousness with an attitude of religious nationalism and messianism (exalting the 'national individual' above the universal truth of Christianity), and replace history with a universal Christian idea, we get a situation analogous to the metaphor mentioned above, culminating in the same result: the spiritual decay of man.

Let's look at the criticism of Russian religiosity in Lot-Borodine's texts.

In 1937, in response to an article by Anton Kartashev, idealising pre-revolutionary Russian religiosity, Lot-Borodine, not concealing her indignation at the uncritical, clearly distorted reality of the approach to Russian religiosity, published the text of *Kritika <russskogo khristianstva>* in the *Put'* periodical. Lot-Borodine, above all, condemns the attitude of religious nationalism, culminating in Russian messianism and in conflict with the declared humility, inalienable to genuine Christianity. Lot-Borodine, pointing to the internal contradiction of such a position, without trying to dull the edge of criticism, writes: "This kind of messianism, which does not exist in any Western church or within (...) Catholicism, openly contradicts this humility, which supposedly was the highest value of the Russian faith." [18] Semyon Frank makes a similar sarcastic statement: "I very much regret that noble universalism (...) has been completely expelled from Russian consciousness by nationalist pride (...); therefore, according to Berdyaev's recent book *Russian Idea*, it almost appears that Christianity was created by the Russians." [S.L. Frank, *Letter to M.I. Lot-Borodine from 24.01.1945*, Bakhmeteff Archive of Russian and East European History and Culture, Columbia University, Frank Papers. Box 2. Lot-Borodina, Mirra Ivanovna]

Let us add that Semyon Frank, full of admiration for the insight of the theological studies of Lot-Borodine, called her, comparing her to the mediaeval philosopher, Duns Scotus, "doctor subtilis" [S.L. Frank, *Letter to M.I. Lot-Borodine from 8. 05.1950*, Bakhmeteff Archive of Russian and East European History and Culture, Columbia University, Frank Papers. Box 2. Lot-Borodina, Mirra Ivanovna]. The first Orthodox theologian - the master of theological nuances - was an equally subtle observer of the religious life of her contemporaries in Russia. We believe that it was the subtlety of her observations, which was a cognitive expression of her steadfast ethical attitude, that made her radically reject all, sometimes secret, manifestations of nationalism at every stage of her life, regardless of the field of its expression. Let us add that the observations of Russian emigration by Lot-Borodine show that the attitude of the proud self-exaltation of the Russian people (the manifestation of which is the idea of Moscow - the Third Rome [17]) did not leave them, even in the face of the terrible years of wars and revolutions. It is worth mentioning that Marianna Mahn-Lot took a similar perspective as evidenced by the following words: "Our great theological tradition has been deformed within the synodal church, tainted by hideous nationalism" [9, p. 753].

Let us quote an insightful and absolutely critical statement by the thinker: "If the Christian conscience can hardly accept a sense of national superiority, it is all the more true of religious nationalism. And, in this regard, how bitterly ironic the leitmotiv of the God-bringing nation sounds to our ears! It seems to the author (A. Kartashev - M.L.) that it is not just the recognition of the Russian style within the Orthodox Church - which no one will argue with - that is absolutely obvious, but so is the postulate concerning the impeccable purity and perfection (...) of this style. Kartashev is trying by all means to convince us that Holy Russia is the pinnacle of Orthodoxy." [18, p. 45] In this context, referring to Vasily Zenkovsky, Lot-Borodine writes that in Russia the nationalization of

the Church took place instead of giving ecclesial characteristics to the nation [17].

Moreover, Lot-Borodine's striving for a personal dimension, expressed in an act of personal prayer, and not sanctified by the habit of 'reflexes' of the collective ritualism of the Russians, should be strongly emphasised. The Russian theologian, in her, one might say, polemical fearlessness, poses a rhetorical question: "Is it not proper for us to state here openly that the official Church, under the authority of the Emperor, interfered with the development of individual spirituality within the Orthodox Church?" [18, p. 47]

It would seem that the thesis about the communitarian nature of the Russian faith, about its supra-individual and supra-rational dimension (the main objections to Western Christianity) will effectively reject the accusation contained in the above question and silence the truth that is both imposing and inconvenient for the eulogists of the superiority of Russian religiosity. However, Lot-Borodine's argument does not allow this; the author, rejecting Kartashev's mindless complacency, poses another question: "And further: wasn't the so-called *otserkovlenie* (in the meaning of the acceptance of faith, the catechization - M.L.) a rather existential (pragmatic) than truly religious phenomenon?" [18].

The thinker is convinced that the average Russian - whose straightforward approach to matters of faith has become a characteristic feature of the Russian type of religiosity (and therefore it cannot be omitted in this context), does not understand anything from the sacred mystery of the liturgy, gaining basic orientation in matters of faith thanks to a natural, thoughtlessly used 'compass', which is his or her natural aesthetic sense. In other words, turning to what is subjectively beautiful and turning away from what is aesthetically less attractive [18], a Russian believer does not have 'navigational tools' - other than aesthetic ones - due to the lack of a significant share of the rational element in the religious attitude, as well as the lack of education, telling him or her what to turn to. This does not allow him or her to 'satisfy' his or her innate religious desire ("attraction to what is divine" [18, p. 48], which - according to the law of the "physiology of the spiritual life" - must find satisfaction somewhere.

The above-described accusation of 'superficial ritualism' is made by the thinker not only in historical Orthodoxy, but also in the Russian diaspora in Paris, which is close to her. Here are her bitter words in this regard: "After the great Exodus (*the first wave of emigration from Soviet Russia to Western Europe* - M.L.), the repentant Marxists seemed to have experienced a genuine renewal of souls. In any case, the healthy core of Orthodoxy showed great energy abroad, spreading a whole network of Christian educational institutions and organizations, especially in Paris. (...) Nevertheless, no matter what efforts were made, no matter what some comforting achievements may have been, one must sadly observe the general low cultural and religious level of most of our parishes. With their seemingly sincere devotion, relatively zealous attendance at the temple, external religiosity, they bear the stamp of grey routine and full indifference to 'what is only needed': the life of the spirit and treasures of centuries-old Christian creativity. I am talking not about a simple lack of culture and not even about indifference, which results from the difficult conditions of

refugees' existence. Evil lies incomparably deeper: in the dimension of the conscious limitation of the horizon; not so much insensitivity as denial. This is already a fundamental religious culturelessness." [17, p. 31]

The fragment of Lot-Borodine's writings quoted above clearly shows that this consummate researcher of the patristic tradition, historian, thinker, but also a Christian living in the terrifying times of wars, revolution and the ubiquitous threat, despite noticing the hardship of existence, rebukes religious thoughtlessness and religious illiteracy (*religioznaya antikul'turnost* [religious coulterlessness]) of her countrymen in exile, confidently rejecting the indulgent acceptance of the *status quo*. Her considerations could be reduced to one bitter sentence: "Overdeveloped ritualism was our bad fate, we will not hesitate to say - an opium making us sleepy" [18, p. 48]. This claim, which depreciates the basic determinant of Russian religiosity, is a ruthless and, importantly, consciously delivered blow to the attitude of self-righteousness, lacking reflection and disregarding other types of religiosity.

This movement of ruthless criticism of the 'religious *modus vivendi*', established in Russian culture, can be justified only by one thing - this criticism, however harsh and even vicious, was rooted in adherence to the great Christian truth of the 'divinity of man'. The awareness of such a high vocation of the human race did not allow Lot-Borodine to treat with comprehension any attitudes falsifying this vocation in a fundamental way.

4. Conclusions

Myrrha Lot-Borodine was representative of the *theosis* theology, which emphasised the divinised nature of man in the Incarnation, thus diminishing - contrary to Catholic and Protestant theology - the importance of sin in the constitution of man. The Russian thinker devoted her entire mature life to pointing out the differences between Eastern and Western Christian anthropology, in search of the Christian truth about man. In the light of this truth - revealing the image of God in man - one should also read the merciless criticism of religious life in exile.

In the paper we showed that the thinker who in all her work exalted Orthodox theology in relation to the Western denominations of Christianity, became a severe critic of Orthodoxy in the Russian version. The latter was perceived as the apogee of particularism, superficial ritualism and, above all, nationalism - features incompatible with authentic Christianity. According to the first Orthodox female theologian, Russian Orthodoxy offended the exact profound truth about man that the *theosis* theology was discovering.

References

- [1] T. Obolevitch, Eur. J. Sci. Theol., **16**(3) (2020) 119-127.
- [2] T. Obolevitch, *Filozofia rosyjskiego renesansu patrystycznego*, Copernicus Center Press, Kraków, 2014, 136.

- [3] F.B. Poljakov, *Myrrha Lot-Borodine. Wegzeichen und Dimensionen des west-östlichen Dialoges in der russischen Diaspora*, in *Festschrift für Hans-Bernd Harder zum 60. Geburtstag*, K. von Harer & H. Schaller (eds.), Otto Sagner, München 1995, 401-413.
- [4] B. Danilenko, *Pravoslavnoe knižnoe obozrenie*, **4(6)** (2011) 48-53.
- [5] H.E. Zorgdrager, *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies*, **64(3-4)** (2012) 287-307.
- [6] T. Obolevitch, *Mirra Lot-Borodine. Istorik. Literator. Filosof. Bogoslov*, Nestor-Istoriya, Sankt-Petersburg, 2020, 348.
- [7] M. Lot-Borodine, *Vestnik russkogo khristianskogo dvizheniya*, **26(1)** (1953) 12-16.
- [8] M. Lot-Borodine, *La déification de l'homme selon la doctrine des Pères grecs*, Cerf, Paris, 1970, 200-201.
- [9] M. Mahn-Lot, *Rev. Sci. Philos. Theol.*, **88(4)** (2004) 745-754.
- [10] É. Gilson, *Préface*, in M. Lot-Borodine, *De l'amour profane à l'amour sacré: études de psychologie sentimentale au Moyen Âge*, Librairie Nizet, Paris, 1979, IX.
- [11] J. Daniélou, *Introduction*, in M. Lot-Borodine, *Le déification de l'homme selon la doctrine des Pères grecs*, Cerf, Paris, 1970, 15.
- [12] S. Grabska, *Słowo wstępne*, in J. Daniélou, *Trójca Święta i tajemnica egzystencji*, ZNAK, Kraków, 1994, 5-11.
- [13] H. Vorgrimler, *Nowy Leksykon Teologiczny*, Verbinum, Warszawa, 2005, 228.
- [14] Św. Augustyn, *Wyznania*, PAX, Warszawa, 1982, 7-10.
- [15] J. Tischner, *Spór o istnienie człowieka*, ZNAK, Kraków, 2001, 148.
- [16] M. Lot-Borodine, *Vestnik russkogo studencheskogo dvizheniya*, **35(5)** (1954) 2-6.
- [17] M. Lot-Borodine, *Vestnik russkogo studencheskogo dvizheniya*, **30(5)** (1953) 26-35.
- [18] M. Lot-Borodine, *Put'*, **52** (1937) 45-55.