Religion and Philosophy

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History of Russian Christianity

Christianity was first introduced to Russia in 988 AD by Vladimir the Great (Chap. 15). Before the arrival of Christianity, paganism was common in Russia as well as other Slavic countries. In the eleventh century, Slavic churches were separated from Catholicism, as the influence of the Papacy was seen as too strong by the Eastern leaders. They called their belief "orthodox," which derived from Greek and meant "correct belief" or "right thinking." Christian Russian Orthodox is one of several Orthodox denominations. Similar to other forms of Christianity, Orthodoxy postulates that God revealed himself in Jesus Christ and that his crucifixion and resurrection were real events. The Orthodox Church differs from the other Christian Churches in way of life, worship, and in certain aspects of theology.

Orthodoxy remained an important part of peoples' lives through the Czarist era. After the October Revolution, religion was prohibited, as Lenin and his followers viewed religion as supportive of the czarist power and tradition. This was carried out through forced secularization, transforming Communism into a quasi-religion to replace traditional beliefs. The majority of churches were destroyed or served as museums or stores. Clerical books were burned and icons were stored in cellars.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, religious freedom was enshrined in the Russian Constitution (Fig. 21.1). The collapse of the USSR became the starting point for the crisis of identity on a national scale. As a result, religion in Russia has become a national tradition once again—however, religion does not play a large role in everyday life. In Russia today, there are essentially three categories of religious

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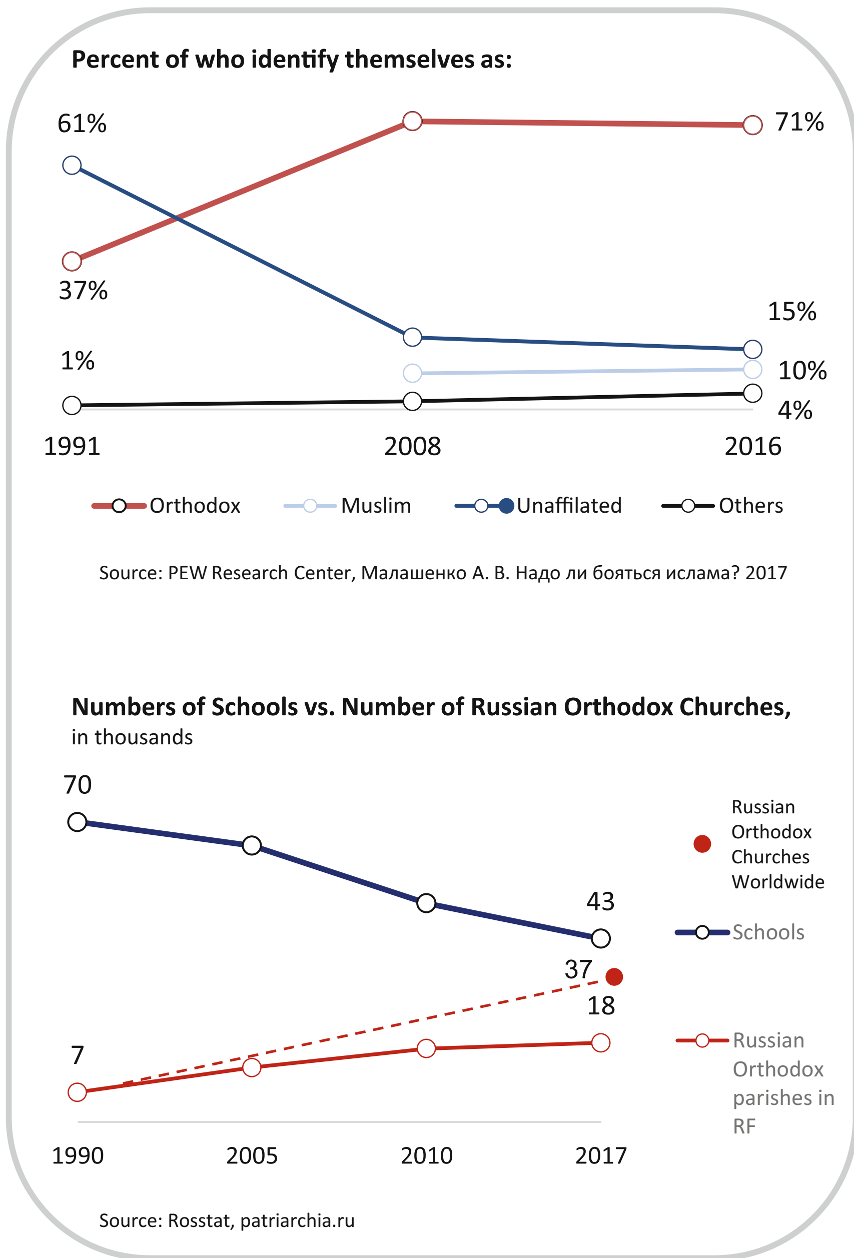

Fig. 21.1 Upraise of religion in Russia

identity: those with faith in major world religions (especially Russian Orthodoxy, Islam, and Buddhism), secular people and esoterics (Arinin, 2005). Presently, around 71% of Russians identify themselves as Russian Orthodox,[1] but only 4–8% of the population falls within the traditional Church's understanding of religiosity (including activities like daily prayer and regular church attendance). The majority visits church only several times a year while 3% of the population visit the church once a week, and 18% do not go to church at all.[2]

Church and State

According to Russian law, Russia is a secular nation. Despite this fact, separation of church and state is still not clearly defined. In recent years, the role of the Russian Orthodox Church has transformed dramatically, now a defining characteristic of Russian identity, the church is actively supported by the Kremlin. For example, when Putin was elected president, the election results were celebrated in a Sunday liturgy in one of the biggest cathedrals in Moscow. Similarly, during the war in Chechnya, the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church blessed the weapons of the Russian troops before they left for battle. Very often, the Patriarch of the church is present in important political meetings. The state uses the church as an instrument of power and as a symbol of the tradition of the nationalist idea. At the same time, other religions and minority beliefs experience social hostilities. Based on the scores of Pew Research Center's *Index on Social Hostilities Involving Religion* and *the Index of* ***Government Restrictions on Religions*** Russia is ranked together with 8 other countries as "very high" in regards to laws, policies, and actions by officials that restrict religious practices and hostilities.[3]

TIPS, OPPORTUNITIES and WARNINGS

When visiting an Orthodox Church women should wear a long skirt and a head-scarf. Men in contrast are not allowed to wear a hat.

Religion and Sexual Minorities

Since 1999, the constitution has guaranteed moral and cultural pluralism and prohibits any discrimination, including based on sexual orientation. However, after the 2013 Pussy Riot case, the Russian parliament adopted a series of laws that set out

[1] Pew Research Center: Russians Return to Religion, But Not to Church (http://www.pewforum.org/2014/02/10/russians-return-to-religion-but-not-to-church/), retrieved on November 2nd, 2020.

[2] https://ria.ru/religion/20170823/1500891796.html, retrieved on February 2nd, 2019.

[3] http://www.pewforum.org/topics/restrictions-on-religion/, retrieved on November 2nd, 2020.

to protect "religious feelings and traditional values." These amendments have escalated the conflict between two sets of values: the traditional values that largely promote the creeds of the historical religious denominations, and the liberal values that prohibit limitations on rights based on discriminatory clauses. Due to their fundamentalist religious beliefs, the traditional denominations (Russian Orthodox Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism) are hostile toward sexual minorities, making open or latent conflicts between their believers and sexual minorities routine, especially in sensitive areas such as education, the adoption of children, marriage, etc. (Antonov, 2017). Religious dogma has a strong impact on decision-making in Russian courts, and can sometimes overrule the formal provisions of the Constitution and laws that grant protection and guarantees to sexual minorities. The prevailing social philosophy is characterized by a significant degree of religious conservatism and emphasizing collective interests. This development, historically rooted in religious ideas, still shapes the general conservative attitudes of Russians towards sexual minorities.[4]

Philosophy

"*The Karamazovs are not scoundrels but philosophers, because all real Russian people are philosophers.*" Dmitry Karamazov, in Fyodor Dostoevsky. The Brothers Karamazov.

The first significant works containing philosophical ideas were created during the introduction of Christianity in the Kiev Rus. Prior to the reforms of Peter the Great (1696–1725), philosophical thought was mostly religiously oriented. Peter's reforms (Chap. 15) and the active social development process in the nation, the spread of education, and cultural contacts with Europe gave power for breakthroughs in philosophical thought. Russian philosophical thought for the next 200 years (late eighteenth–nineteenth centuries) was focused on the liberation of the spirit and the desire for a fair and perfect social order. The determination of national identity, historical and religious purpose, as well as defining their relationship with the West, were central problems discussed in the society (mainly between Westernizers and Slavophiles).[5] Westernizers were guided by ideas of personal freedom and equality for all people. They insisted that Russia, for its own good and prosperity, should imitate European practices. Their opponents, *Slavophiles*, promoted an idea of Russian exceptionalism and rejected conformity with the West. In their opinion, Russia should develop its own way and bring Orthodox truth to Europe who they viewed as having fallen into heresy and atheism. They rejected Peter's decision to connect Russia to the west and bring it closer to the bosom of Europe. They believed

[4]Also Islam is a part of the Russian tradition: in the North Caucasus Islam has been religion for over 1300 years. In the republics like Kalmykia population represent the ancestors of Mongolia. There the main religion is Buddhism.

[5]in the first half of the nineteenth century.

the country must not go the same way as the West. This problem of the "median" position of Russia (between Asia and Europe) and the search for a distinct historical and cultural path remains relevant today.

Among other western philosophical ideas, Marxist philosophy piqued the interest of some Russian intellectuals who had access to it in the 1840s. During the 1890s, Marxist ideas began to quickly penetrate the minds of the masses. G.V. Plekhanov initiated this process in 1883 as he founded the first Russian Marxist group called "*Emancipation of Labor*" in Switzerland (Geneva). One of the main tasks of this group was to spread the ideas of Marxism. The group's activity made Marxism an ideological trend back in Russia despite being abroad. In 1893, Lenin's views came under the strong influence of Plekhanov's philosophical works and he evolved himself into a social democratic. One year later, he formulated the credo of Leninism: "the Russian worker rising at the head of all the democratic elements will overthrow absolutism and lead the Russian Proletariat (side by side with the proletariat of all countries) along the straight road of open political struggle to the victorious Communist Revolution" (Lenin, 1894). This set the foundations for the rhetoric that inspired the October Revolution.

In the following decades, the zeitgeist was no longer religion, but politics instead. Soviet philosophy was, for the most part, of a restrictive and ideological nature rather than an educational or rationalist one. Official Soviet science viewed the philosophical process as the opposition between "bourgeois" philosophies and "socialist" ideology. "Bourgeois" was the Soviet label for contemporary European thought, branded "Eurocentric" and therefore "decadent."

With the religious and philosophical renaissance of the 1990s, scholars became focused on thoroughly familiarizing themselves with the research and works of foreign colleagues, which had long been banned, and the revival of Russian traditions in the field of history of philosophy (Mesyats & Egorochkin, 2014).

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