

Philosophy of religion and religious studies in modern-day Russia

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Abstract In Russia, philosophy of religion, likewise religious studies, only managed to claim their name, let alone their right for self-realisation, as late as the early 1990s. The article represents an attempt to elicit the maximum possible number of primary methodological accounts, conceptual divergences and discussions pertaining to both the domain of understanding and that of studying the phenomenon of religion and the variety of religious expression, as well as methods of establishing the actual interdisciplinary relations between religious studies and the philosophy of religion, with their disciplinary scope defined, on the one hand, and contiguous scientific disciplines and worldview discourses on the other.

Keywords Philosophy of religion · Religious studies · Theology · Religious philosophy · History of religions · Sociology of religion · Psychology of religion · Phenomenology of religion · Methodology · Periodisation

Developments in philosophy of religion

Philosophy of religion (hereafter referred to as PhR) has become a rather popular philosophical discipline in Russia over the last 20 or 25 years. It is now an integral part of curriculum in a large number of universities, secular as well as religious, and there is no shortage of conferences, seminars, monographs, and scientific publications related to this discipline. However, PhR is still a new discipline as far as the Russian philosophical community is concerned. There were only a handful of publications on the subject prior to the Russian Revolution of 1917, most

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published as part of the rational theology curriculum, while in the Soviet era this domain of philosophy was de facto incorporated into the discipline of “scientific atheism,” which represented a Marxist critique of religion and questions concerning the nature and the origins of religion. This may be the reason why there was no entry devoted to the philosophy or religion in the famous five-volume *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.¹ This historical context defines the scope of major related issues as discussed by contemporary Russian philosophers: PhR was regarded as a tabula rasa for which reason the question of defining the thematic field of PhR stands in the foreground. In addition there is the derivative question concerning the demarcation of PhR from the several disciplines of religious studies, theology and religious philosophy.

The first discussion of the question concerning the object of PhR is found in Yu. A. Kimelev’s *Contemporary Western Philosophy of Religion* (1989), which provides an account of the views of such prominent figures in the field as Anthony Flew, D. Wiebe, J. King-Farlow, W. Christensen, Alvin Plantinga, N. Smart, R. Schäffler and B. Welte. The author also describes his own vision of the object and aims of the philosophy of religion. Since Kimelev’s approach has become paradigmatic for the majority of discussions concerning the object of PhR, it is appropriate to quote him at length:

Philosophy of religion can be defined in a broader or narrower sense. A broader definition is that philosophy of religion is the sum total of actual and potential philosophical accounts of religion, its nature, and its function, as well as of philosophical arguments concerning the existence and nature of a deity, and the relation of this deity to humanity and the world. <...>. In the narrower sense the philosophy of religion is an articulated autonomous philosophical discourse concerning divinity and religion. It is a distinct type of philosophical speculation. Defined narrowly it is seen either as having a specific subject, typically of paramount importance—being thus a special domain within major philosophical systems—or as a philosophical discipline with a distinct identity of its own. Clearly, the two are not mutually exclusive. The relevant component of a philosophical system may constitute an integral part of the philosophy of religion as an independent philosophical discipline (Kimelev 1989, pp. 4–5).

In a later publication Kimelev restated the distinction between the “broad” and “narrow” interpretation of PhR in virtually the same wording (Kimelev 1998, pp. 7 and 9). Apart from these two interpretations of the subject of PhR, Kimelev distinguishes two fundamental forms of PhR: “... philosophy of religion always assumes the form of either philosophical religious studies or philosophical theology” (Kimelev 1989, p. 18; Kimelev 1998, p. 12). The object of philosophical religious studies is perceived as the human being’s “religious relationship” or “religious consciousness,” wherein the emphasis falls on the subjective side of religious life, religion being the result of a human being’s creative activity, a cultural phenomenon. Philosophical religious studies are oriented towards the research and understanding of the phenomenon of religion (Kimelev 1989, p. 20; Kimelev 1998, p. 12). Philosophical theology seeks to establish the “ontology” and

¹ TN: published in the Soviet Union in 1960–1970.

“metaphysics” of religion (Kimelev 1989, p. 20). In «Философия религии: систематический очерк» (Philosophy of Religion: A Systematic Essay) Kimelev distinguishes between a broad and a narrow (or strict) sense of philosophical theology as well, the former being the theoretical articulation of a positive relation to theology on the part of philosophy (conversely theologians may relate positively to philosophers), and the latter, the creation of a doctrine about God by philosophical means. It has to be pointed out that, according to Yu. A. Kimelev, philosophical theology can be defined as “natural theology,” “religious philosophy,” “religious metaphysics,” “Christian philosophy,” “Christian metaphysics,” or “rational theology” (Kimelev 1998, pp. 14–18). What makes these two interpretations of the subject of PhR and the two forms of PhR truly cohesive is the fact that PhR deals with “religious knowledge.” In the former case, extant religious knowledge is subject to examination (possibly, PhR in the broader interpretation and philosophical religious studies), and in the latter case, it is the product thereof (possibly, PhR in the narrower interpretation and philosophical theology) (ibid, p. 10). At any rate, if we follow Yu. A. Kimelev, PhR becomes a virtually boundless and rather amorphous discipline that incorporates virtually everything associated with religion in one way or another.

The implicit (and occasionally also explicit) influence of Kimelev’s theories can be detected in the works of several authors. Thus, M. M. Shakhnovich claims in her monograph on Epicurean PhR that PhR can be divided between a “hermeneutic” (religious studies) and a “constructive” (philosophical theology) orientation (Shakhnovich 2002, p. 8). This division corresponds entirely to the conceptual framework of Kimelev’s “broader” and “narrower” interpretations of PhR. The former interprets mythologies and cults (PhR in the “broader” sense—the conceptualisation of the nature and the functions of religion, the philosophical grounds for the existence of a divine being, philosophical discourse about the nature of divinity and its relation to the world and the human being), while the latter is represented by specialised treatises “On deities” (PhR in the “narrower” interpretation—the philosophical discourse on deity).

A more independent position is held by K. M. Antonov, a renowned specialist in the field of Russian religious philosophy. He reproduces Kimelev’s “paradigm” in some of his works. Thus, in a preface to a publication by Yermishin (2008) Antonov makes two qualifying statements, taking into account the conception of “broader” and “narrower” interpretation of PhR. Firstly, the term itself requires qualification due to the specific nature of Russian philosophy; secondly, the subject of PhR is “religion as such and not some particular aspect thereof, not God or a creed... Philosophy of religion strives to study the most basic and definitive aspects of religion using philosophical means” (Antonov 2008, p. 7). General though this interpretation is, it does nevertheless draw a distinction between PhR and theology. However, Antonov abandons this more specific definition in his (Antonov 2009, p. 9) and once again agrees with Kimelev’s division of PhR into “philosophical religious studies” and “philosophical theology,” pointing out that PhR “constantly walks the very fine line between turning into either a theology or a specialised area of scientific study” (Antonov 2009, p. 9). This is also where he establishes the demarcation between PhR and religious studies with reference to their respective

sources of knowledge—religious studies is an empirical science, while PhR is more theoretical (*ibid.*).

S. S. Avanesov adheres to the same principle. He distinguishes between PhR and religious philosophy on the assumption that every religious system contains a philosophical component. PhR examines religion from epistemological point of view, and this can take two forms, the “broader” interpretation being the subject of relation, and the “narrower,” the subject of research. The latter is PhR in the proper sense—a distinct type of philosophical research as pursued by S. S. Avanesov. And from this follows the main aim of PhR—to provide a non-reductionist account of the fundamental nature of religion (Avanesov 2013, pp. 9–15). In general, Avanesov fully accepts and adapts Yu. A. Kimelev’s position.

Kimelev’s influence can also be detected in the works of such renowned authors of textbooks and readers as S. A. Konacheva. She adds a third meaning to the two proposed by Kimelev, namely, PhR as religious philosophy (Konacheva, 2003, pp. 616–639). In his textbook, P. S. Gurevich, defines PhR as “the sum total of all philosophical presuppositions involving religion, the philosophical comprehension of its nature and function, as well as the philosophical grounds for the existence of God, considerations on the nature of divinity and how it relates to the world and humankind” (Gurevich 2008, p. 4).

Another approach to understanding the subject and aims of PhR, as well as its place within philosophy as a whole, is evidenced by the representatives of the Department of Religious Studies and Philosophy of Religion at Moscow State University. Of note are the textbooks for university students authored or edited by Professor I. N. Yablokov, as well as publications by A. N. Krasnikov. Yablokov rejects the “broader” and “narrower” interpretation dichotomy, pointing out that PhR is “the sum total of philosophical concepts, theories and principles that provide a philosophical explanation of the object” (Yablokov 1994, p. 6). This definition reflects the simple and consistent idea that any philosophical interpretation of religion and any answer to the question of its nature or origin ultimately depends on a bias reflecting a particular worldview of a more general nature, such as materialism, phenomenology, pragmatism, psychoanalysis, hermeneutics, or theism (it should be mentioned that the latter is absent in the author’s list of “subordinating principles,” even though theism can be considered a specific type of worldview). The issues with which PhR is meant to deal are represented by Yablokov in the following hierarchy: (1) establishing the status of the philosophy of religion within the general system of sub-disciplines pertaining to philosophy and religious studies; settling the question of the philosophical methods applied to the comprehension of religion, etc. (the scope of meta-problems concerning the philosophy of religion); (2) analysing the structure and distinctive characteristics of religious studies, the general patterns pertaining to its development, and the place of religious studies amidst related disciplines (the scope of meta-problems concerning religious studies as a scientific discipline); (3) analysing the variety of ways to establish the fundamental nature of religion, establishing the contours of its definition as well as proposing a philosophical definition of religion; (4) establishing the ontological basis of religion and analysing its epistemological prerequisites; (5) a study of how we can understand religious mind; (6) a study of religious worldviews, creeds,

concepts, beliefs, postulates, inferential structures, the language of religion, theistic teachings about God, and the grounds for affirmations of the existence of a supreme being; (7) establishing the content and specific characteristics of religious philosophy (Yablokov 2001, pp. 34–35).

However, Yablokov and his MSU colleagues' approach are primarily concerned to underscore the synthetic capacities of PhR in relation to range of disciplines belonging to religious studies. According to Yablokov, one may claim that, in relation to the individual disciplines studying particular aspects of religion with their own methods, the philosophy of religion plays the part of a meta-theory and methodology with the function as well of a worldview. (Ibid, p. 37).

Indeed, specialised studies by A. N. Krasnikov demonstrate that contemporary religious studies require a sub-discipline allowing for a synthesis of theory and methodology (Krasnikov 2007, p. 165). This approach is distinctly at odds with that suggested by Kimelev (1998, p. 31). Yablokov recognises the synthetic potential of PhR and thus gives it priority over other disciplines pertaining to religious studies such as history, sociology, psychology, phenomenology, and hermeneutics of religion. This bears likewise on the question of the relation between PhR and such disciplines as religious philosophy and philosophical theology; both should become PhR research subjects (issues 6 and 7 from the above list).

Some researchers attempt to combine the approaches outlined by Yablokov and Kimelev. Of those, the most interesting position is held by L. M. Gavrilina. She rejects the “wider”-versus-“narrower” interpretation dichotomy, agreeing with the synthetic understanding of the discipline and integrating it into religious studies: “Indeed, modern religious studies are in great need of a synthesis between theory and methodology—a new paradigm of religious studies is being sought, and philosophy of religion could play a part in the process of establishing one.” (Gavrilina 2003, p. 7). L. M. Gavrilina opines that, because there is no single understanding of the object and tasks of PhR, one should rather speak of “the development of several paradigms within contemporary philosophy of religion corresponding to distinct worldviews and methodological outlooks” (ibid, p. 9). She does not deny philosophical theology its right to self-identification, but points out that PhR and philosophical theology are concerned with the same object, although PhR approaches outside religious doctrine, while theology remains grounded in tradition. Thus, providing a philosophical critique of religion is an important (but not the only) component of PhR. On the other hand, PhR “studies the phenomenon of religion and its cultural significance by studying religious consciousness” (ibid, p. 10). The task is carried out by examining religious beliefs, practices, language and propositions. She views religious consciousness in what she considers to be its three primary “manifestations”—religious faith, knowledge, and experience. For Gavrilina, it is possible to combine the positions of Yablokov and Kimelev: religious consciousness is the object of philosophical religious studies and philosophical theology (recall that for Kimelev they are the two primary forms of PhR). However, these forms of PhR are concerned with different objects: philosophical religious studies take as their object human beings interacting with the world, whereas philosophical theology is concerned with God and other extrasensory phenomena (ibid, p. 11). Gavrilina proposes, therefore, the following

disciplinary structure of PhR: it is included within the system of disciplines making up religious studies and addresses religious consciousness by examining beliefs, practices, and the language of religion. The influence of Richard Schäffler, a well-known German Catholic scholar, is easy to detect in this scheme, all the more so since, in her article, Gavrilina summarizes Schäffler's views on PhR (*ibid.*, p. 13).²

Finally, mention should be made of V. K. Shokhin's views on PhR presented in a number of articles as well as in his book devoted to the subject. With an eye to analogies with the domains of other "genitive case philosophies" (a term coined by Shokhin) he states concerning PhR that:

... its object should be neither God nor even "God," nor the logical verification of religious beliefs (general or particular,) but rather religion that it is called to study by non-empirical methods (Shokhin 2010a, pp. 210–211).

Because he attributes a general methodological perspective to PhR Shokhin gives the following formal definition of the discipline:

a set of rationally possible and justified applications of philosophical interests and methods to the study of the multidimensional phenomenon of religion, to related scientific disciplines ("sciences studying religion" and "sciences studying spirit,"), and (in view of the self-reflexive nature of philosophical discourse as such) to its own discourse (*ibid.*, pp. 213–214).

Shokhin is especially concerned to emphasize that a philosopher of religion does not study religion in the same way as a theologian or someone specializing in an area of religious studies do. Philosophers rely on purely philosophical (or non-empirical) methods. He suggests distinguishing three levels within a religious phenomenon: religiosity, religion as a generic concept (in the singular,), and empirical religions (in the plural).

Based on this understanding Shokhin characterizes the tasks of PhR in the light of 11 Anglo-American and 13 Continental philosophical positions pertaining to the domain of competence of PhR. (1) The investigation of religiosity based on Rudolph Otto's phenomenology of religion, but, complemented by a rational examination of whether or not religiosity can be reduced to other factors of human existence. Included here is the question of the genesis of religion. (2) It falls to PhR to investigate the generic concept of "religion" apart from the empirical religions (contrary to the popular view according to which only religions exist, but not religion). (3) PhR should try to determine whether a definition of religion is possible. (4) A philosopher of religion should move from the enumeration of the generic characteristics of religion to its essential properties. Shokhin acknowledges (in agreement with Yablokov) that this can only be done with reference to a broader philosophical perspective—materialism, theism, etc. (5) Finally, the question of the essential properties of religion requires taking a further issue into account—establishing religious universals. Apart from the universals pertaining to "religious

² We may recollect that R. Schäffler distinguishes between five different types of PhR—PhR as critique of pre-rational cognition, transformation of religion into philosophy, philosophical theology, phenomenology of religion and analysis of religious language.

studies” (such as “deity,” “cult,” “community,” etc.), there are also universals pertaining to the worldviews of a given religion (“creation,” “emanation,” “fall from grace,” “salvation.” etc.).³ (6) A philosopher of religion should turn to study issues concerning the contrary subject—namely, atheism. (7) It belongs to him as well to provide more precise definitions of the fundamental characteristics of such religious worldviews as “theism,” “pantheism,” “panentheism” and “polytheism.” (8) The issue of classifying religions is related to the definition of religion, but as well to the topic of “religion and culture” (here we distinguish “world religions,” “traditional religions,” and, correspondingly, “non-traditional” forms, etc.). (9) A comparison of religions on the basis of a variety of characteristics, implying in this way an evaluation. (10) If PhR itself can only be a philosophy-about-religion, its object should be philosophy-in-religion as represented by rational theology and religious philosophy across a variety of religious traditions. (11) According to Shokhin, a critique of religion does not imply repudiation, but rather the analysis of the correspondence of historical traditions to their respective *eide*. (12) PhR should also deal with “meta-theoretical questions” related to neighbouring discourses (theology and religious studies). Here Shokhin suggests that the philosopher of religion turn to the very methodological problems deemed insoluble within this framework by Kimelev (whereas Yablokov adheres to the contrary position). However, Shokhin is of the opinion that PhR should not be involved in the construction of meta-theories applicable to individual disciplines. Finally, the last PhR task advanced by Shokhin (13) is critical self-reflection in order to deconstruct mythical stereotypes, analyse distortions substitutions of concepts, etc. (*ibid*, pp. 217–237).

The wide scope of issues assigned by Shokhin to PhR is not that dissimilar to Yablokov’s proposal, although there are obvious substantial discrepancies between them. The first is that Shokhin recognises theism as a distinct type of worldview and

³ Obviously enough, the universals of “fall from grace” or “salvation” do not apply to religions that regard the cessation of human suffering as their goal. This fifth problem depends on the solution of the fourth, since a positive solution of the latter (finding essential properties of religion in general) makes the search for the universals of religion possible in the first place. Shokhin points out that a philosopher of religion “is perfectly free to select any worldview paradigm” when attempting to establish the essential characteristics of religion, that is, when solving the fourth problem (Shokhin 2010a, b, pp. 220–221). Thus, a theistic philosopher of religion will find his own essential characteristics of religion based on theism, whereas a Marxist philosopher will select a wholly different set of characteristics, the same being true of an adherent of psychoanalysis. We are thus confronted with two questions. Firstly, will essential characteristics of religion discovered in this manner really reflect the actual nature of religion in general, thus being invariant for all religions, or will those characteristics reflect a certain world view in its relation to religion? Since the task of determining general universals of religion follows from the task of determining essential characteristics of religion, determination of universals has the same drawback as determination of essential characteristics—those universals are not common, as the author mentions, but universals of either specific religion or one or other researcher’s worldview. Secondly, it is unclear whether or not we should search for essential characteristics and universals of a given historical religion, such as Christianity, Buddhism, Shinto, or Zoroastrianism, of a religious worldview (theistic or Buddhist, for example,) or of various forms of religion (such as totemism or ancestor reverence). Each of these choices will leave us with a different result. It is advisable to contemplate the possibility of a certain “correct” solution for these problems with a plausible scientific result, but we might want to establish areas of research with a greater or a lesser number of prospects.

deems it possible for a philosopher of religion to adhere to it in his research,⁴ whereas Yablokov disagrees. Secondly, unlike Yablokov, Shokhin removes PhR from the disciplines making up religious studies, apparently for two reasons: the range of issues covered by PhR surpasses the narrow confines of religious studies (Yablokov takes the opposite view considering that PhR is subordinate to the complex of disciplines comprising religious studies). Besides, the discipline's meta-theoretical functions place it outside the scope of disciplines to which such functions apply; indeed, how can meta-mathematics be a part of mathematics, for example? Shokhin likewise rejects Kimelev's "wider-and-narrower-interpretation" dichotomy, pointing out perfectly reasonably that the "broader" interpretation of PhR "does not differ from religious philosophy in any way at all" (Shokhin 2007, p. 56). However, the diversity of questions to be dealt with as outlined by Shokhin (although his list remains tentative and approximate) testifies to the broad scope of issues confronting a philosopher of religion.

Another important issue discussed in contemporary Russian PhR is the genealogy and the periodisation of PhR. It is an important question since the object and scope of a given domain of knowledge depend on how we see its genesis and history. In the overwhelming majority of cases, Kimelev's "wide and narrow interpretation" dichotomy is uncritically transferred to the question of genesis and periodisation, which results in the "duplication" of not merely the subject, but history itself. Kimelev is of the opinion that PhR in the "broader" sense has existed for as long as philosophy itself, whereas in the "narrower" sense it came into existence during the modern age, as religion started to isolate itself from other aspects of human existence (we shall refrain from judging the historical justifiability of this notion,); he names Spinoza, Kant, Hegel, Hartmann, Lotze, Cohen, and Natorp among its pioneers (Kimelev 1998, p. 11). Tracing PhR back to Spinoza reveals the influence of Otto Pflieger. The PhR entry in the *Novaja filosofskaja entsiklopedija* by V. I. Garadzha and L. N. Mitrokhin claims that PhR in the "broader" sense (a rational consideration of religion as well as the onto-theological, ethico-anthropological, and soteriological problems posed by particular religions) can be traced to Cicero's *De Natura Deorum*, while in the "narrower sense" (examination of the nature of divinity by rational means alone) PhR was born in the modern age and can be traced to Kant's *Religion Within the Bounds of Bare Reason* (Garadzha and Mitrokhin 2001, pp. 230–231). We encounter the same opinion in textbooks by Gurevich, Pivovarov, and Konacheva, as mentioned above. Yablokov agrees: on the one hand, religion has always come within the scope of philosophy; on the other hand, PhR as a distinct philosophical discipline emerged in the eighteenth century (Yablokov 2000, pp. 11–12). By contrast, G. G. Majorov and M. M. Shakhnovich take a more original line. Shakhnovich holds that both forms of PhR trace their origins to classical antiquity, adding that the non-existence of a special term does not imply the non-existence of a corresponding subject matter and philosophical discourse. Furthermore, she writes not only of "ancient PhR," but likewise of Democritus, the

⁴ Moreover, he is of the opinion that similarly to how a philosopher of science is unlikely to achieve any success in the absence of actual scientific endeavours, a philosopher of religion who finds any kind of religious experience thoroughly alien is also incapable of forming a comprehensive picture of the object of his research.

Sophists, and Epicurus (Shakhnovich 2002, pp. 7–12). Majorov traces the origins of PhR as “a philosophical discourse on religious faith, the gods and their relation to the world and mankind” to the first philosophers, but original special treatises on PhR to Cicero’s treatises *De Natura Deorum*, *De Divinatione*, and *De Fato* (Majorov 1989, pp. 3–4).

However, Shokhin has been the first to break away from the tradition of a “double genealogical tree.” First of all, to reiterate, he decisively rejects the “broader” interpretation of PhR, identifying it as religious philosophy. He dates the origins of PhR in classical antiquity: the first studies of religion and its fundamental categories are found in Plato’s *Euthyphro*, Cicero’s treatises, and in Aquinas’ treatise on the definition of religion in *Summa Theologiae*. As for the birth of PhR, Shokhin traces it to *Die Philosophie der Religion* by Sigismund von Storchenau, published in 1773, and the work of François Para du Phanjas under the same title, published in 1774. With these works PhR is said to have attained its initial disciplinary identity. Not only does Shokhin present a very broad panorama of comprehension of PhR as a discipline by diverse writers, in particular German authors of the eighteenth century (Para du Phanjas, Reinhold, Kleuker, Kant, Schelling, J. G. Fichte), but he points out also that Fichte was the first to reflect on the methodological questions inherent to PhR and constructed a non-theological PhR by drawing a distinction between philosophy-about-religion and philosophy-in-religion, demonstrating that no hybrid of the two would be viable. Shokhin declares that the Fichtean “mapping of the subject field of PhR as a hierarchy of dimensions pertaining to what is “religious”—the phenomenological, the ontological, and the categorial-conceptual, retains its validity to this day requiring nothing but minor qualification” (Shokhin 2010b, pp. 37–38).

To conclude our small review let us remark that to date Russian PhR has only managed to solve a single problem—that of methodology. Substantive philosophical discourse about religion remains in the shadows. The methodological issues involve, first, establishing the discipline’s subject matter, by demarcating it from religious studies, theology, and religious philosophy, and, second, reconstructing the genealogy of PhR. Even though a dichotomised approach to the subject matter of PhR was once popular, today we see a tendency towards the specification and precision of the object of PhR as well as a more careful approach to the consequences of settling methodological issues, testifying thereby to the attainment of more “maturity” by the discipline. One must also point out the growing number of peer-reviewed publications in which articles on PhR appear. *Philosophy of Religion*, an international Yearbook, published since 2007 by the Philosophy of Religion Department of the RAS Institute of Philosophy, deserves a special mention. The yearbook publishes articles on PhR by representatives of the Anglo-American and, though to a much lesser extent, the Continental tradition; materials are included discussing the establishment of a native tradition of PhR.

Developments in religious studies

Since our review deals with the tendencies characterising the development of religious studies in contemporary Russia, we shall forego a detailed account of their history. Let us merely note that the very issue of whether or not the discipline existed in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, or prior to the first half of the 1990's, is much disputed. Some researchers optimistically date the emergence of religious studies in Russia starting in eighteenth century and trace the tradition of objective religious studies to scientific atheism (see Menshikova and Yablokov 2011; Shakhnovich 2006, pp. 24–29 and 181–197), while others adopt a critical stance towards the Soviet and imperial Russian legacy, citing its high susceptibility to ideological bias and the lack of a developed methodological basis (see Smirnov 2013, pp. 151–157).

Scholars are just as interested in the problem of religious studies in contemporary Russia and their future prospects. Nor is there consensus here, however. Opinions range from positive to moderate (see Kostylev 2006), to negative (Pismanik 2006; Smirnov 2013, p. 171–190; Folieva 2011). Both views are justified to a certain extent. On the one hand, religious studies in modern-day Russia are an institutionalised scholarly discipline that has become an integral part of the Russian tertiary education structure and represented by a number of research centers⁵ and professional associations⁶ (information concerning the number of scholarly and educational institutions and organisations associated with religious studies in Russia as of early 2009 is provided by Folieva 2009, pp. 5–143), as well as specialised periodicals.⁷ Specialised textbooks and other study materials pertaining to the discipline appear regularly (e.g. Shakhnovich 2012; Yablokov 2008); this includes dictionaries and encyclopaedias as well (e.g. Zabayko et al. 2006). Conferences, roundtables, congresses and schools abound. On the other hand, the lookout is less than optimistic: the Russian religious studies community is highly fragmented and poorly integrated into the global scholarly community; some professional associations exist only nominally; many initiatives founder due to insufficient funding; religious studies departments are often closed or restructured into theology departments, etc.

This situation is by no means exceptional; it is also typical for a large number of humanities in post-Soviet Russia and is due to a variety of factors, some of them of

⁵ ReligioPolis Centre of Religious Studies Research, Moscow, Ethna Religious Studies Research Centre, St. Petersburg, Religious Studies Research Centre at G. R. Derzhavin Tambov State University, Tambov, Centre for Religious and Social Studies Non-Commercial Partnership, Perm, etc.

⁶ For example, The Association of Russian Centres for Study of Religions (est. 2011), The Russian Association of Scholars in Religion) (est. 2002), The Nizhniy Novgorod Association for the Study of Religions) (est. 2008), Moscow Society for the Study of Religions (est. 2004), The Association for the Study of Esotericism and Mysticism (est. 2009), etc.

⁷ Including such periodicals as *Study of Religion (Religiovedenie)* (since 2001), *State, Religion and Church in Russia and Worldwide (Gosudarstvo, religiya, tserkov v Rossii i za rubezhom)* (since 1968), *Researches in Religious Studies (Religiovedcheskie issledovaniya)* (as of 2009); also, the first issues of the *Yearbook of Moscow Religious Studies Society* and the *Courier of the Russian Association of the Religious Studies' Lecturers* have been published in 2008, and the *Candle (Svecha)* yearbook series is still in publication (since 1997).

social, economic, and political character, quite outside the scope of the developmental logic of the disciplines (such as the long period of subordination to the paradigm of scientific atheism). Factors such as these explain certain traits characteristic for religious studies in modern-day Russia: a tendency to introspection and concentration on methodological issues, often viewed as manifestations of self-centred sectarianism. Some critics claim that it has ceased to be a “study of religion” and become instead “the study of scholars of religion” (Kozyrev 2011, p. 175, 177).

In general, apart from the history of religious studies, the meta-theoretical discourse also focuses on at least three contiguous areas, namely: (1) the issue of demarcation from other disciplines, primarily theology and philosophy; (2) the issues of the subject matter of religious studies as well as the number and interrelations of the sub-disciplines; (3) the question of a specific methodology.

Let us look at some aspects of the latter two issues. Historically, religious studies in Russia have been institutionalised within departments of philosophy,⁸ which has resulted in the inclusion of PhR among religious studies disciplines for which reason it has been interpreted occasionally as the major and integrating part of studies of religion (see Yablokov 2008, pp. 27–33). As of late, different tendencies can be observed, some of which make of PhR the meta-theory of religious studies (see Kimelev 1998, p. 31), while others exclude it altogether (see Pismanik 2006, pp. 194–195).⁹ However, the affinity between religious studies and philosophical institutions is still very much intact, and the effects are quite tangible. Research within actual sub-disciplines of religious studies is conducted by historians, sociologists, psychologists etc., and not by established experts in religious studies, whereas the discipline itself, having given up the ideological framework of historical materialism, is in a “theoretical and methodological vacuum.” This is the reason for the emphasis on elaborating a set of working tools proper to the discipline. Steps to this goal include, on the one hand, reflection on the experiences of Western colleagues in the domain (see Kolkunova et al. 2007); tempered, on the other hand, by warnings against “reverential acceptance of foreign conceptions, approaches, and terminology” (Smirnov 2013, p. 275) since these may fail to describe Russian realities satisfactorily.¹⁰

In what follows we consider briefly development tendencies within the major religious studies disciplines in Russia.

A substantial amount of research conducted in the history of religions in contemporary Russia is carried out on an interdisciplinary basis, crossing over into history, culture and folklore studies, anthropology, history of philosophy, etc.¹¹ Unfortunately, we cannot consider these developments here. However, the

⁸ The most notable exception being the Russian State University of Humanities’ Centre for the Study of Religion.

⁹ The textbook under the editorship of M. M. Shakhnovich that came out in 2012 (first edition: 2005) is very illustrative in this respect: it fails to include anything in the way of a PhR section.

¹⁰ A good example would be the often unsubstantiated discussions concerning secularization and the post-secular society in the USSR and post-Soviet Russia.

¹¹ This fragmentation is also characteristic of the institutional aspect of the Russian history of religions.

interested reader will find a bibliography of works on the history of religions published in the USSR and post-Soviet Russia in the article by Kolkunova et al. (2007–2008, pp. 307–324) concerning Biblical, Qumran, Gnostic, Manichaeism, Sufi and Shinto studies, as well as studies of history of religions in Tibet. For the time being, suffice it to say that, notwithstanding the enormous amount of research carried out in Russia today, no one has attempted a systematic analysis of the theoretical and methodological foundations of the history of religions as a self-sufficient discipline.¹² The only exceptions involve either retrospective descriptions of the experience of foreign scholars (see Krasnikov 2007, pp. 179–198; Yablokov 2008, pp. 377–404) or the periodic question regarding whether or not it is justifiable to transfer Eurocentric categories (often of Christian origin) to non-Christian religions.¹³

Sociology of religion receives a great deal of attention today. The major issues under discussion here are as follows: (1) investigating current Russian religiosity, in particular, the recent compilation of an atlas of religious life in Russia today in three volumes, providing a picture of the current religious situation in the 78 constituent entities of the Russian Federation (Bourdeaux and Filatov 2006–2009); (2) analysis of new religious movements (e.g. Balagushkin 2002; Kanterov 2006); (3) research into quasi-religious phenomena, in particular, cyber-religiosity (see Zabyako et al. 2012); (4) discussions of secularisation and post-secular society (e.g. Sinelina 2004; Uzlaner 2012).

It is difficult not to notice the sheer volume of quantitative empirical research aimed at measuring the religiosity of the Russian population.¹⁴ However, it fails to take local qualitative specifics into account (as exemplified by the drastic discrepancies among the results of such surveys, primarily as a result of sociologists adopting divergent and often quite ambiguous definitions of religiosity in their research (see Vovchenko 2011, for more detail). Furthermore, scholars often remark on the insufficiently developed theoretical and methodological base of the sociology of religion in Russia (see Smirnov 2008, pp. 71–72; Kolkunova et al. 2007–2008, p. 326). Nevertheless, notwithstanding the “rudimentary nature” of the theoretical component of the discipline (Smirnov 2008; p. 71) the following tendencies are observable: (1) taking into account the experience of Western researchers (see Prutskova 2010; Smirnov 2013, pp. 191–228) and attempting to devise original

¹² Let us emphasise that we are not referring to the lack of theoretical reflection within the separate branches of history of religions in Russia, each of which has schools and trends differing in their methodological principles.

¹³ In particular, the paper entitled “Eurocentrism in history of religion as seen in the example of Zoroastrian studies” (*Evropocentrism v istorii religii: na primere issledovanij zoroastrisma*) presented by I. L. Krupnik at the History of Religious Studies Scientific and Practical Conference of the Russian Religious Studies Professors Society (Moscow, 2010).

¹⁴ Apart from the empirical activities of the scholarly research centres mentioned above, one might also name the projects of the Religion in Modern Society Research Centre at the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, The Institute of Socio-Political Research of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the Sociology of Religion research seminar organised and supported by Saint Tikhon’s Orthodox University, the Sociology of Religion Research Committee within the Russian Society of Sociologists as well as the surveys conducted by the All-Russian Centre for the Study of Public Opinion, the Levada Centre, Sreda Independent Research Organization, etc.

approaches and methods (see Smirnov 2008); (2) defining a specifically Russian conceptual and terminological framework (see Smirnov 2011).¹⁵

In particular, one question within general theory, receiving the attention of a large number of Russian sociologists of religion, is whether researchers should espouse the beliefs of the religious traditions they study. Proponents of the confessional approach think it necessary to introduce what they call an “interpretative sociology” in a specific version adapted to the realities of Orthodox Christianity. This is required for a comprehensive study of the “social and individual experience” of a representative of a given religious and cultural tradition (Astakhova 2007, pp. 222–224). Opponents of this approach point out its subjective and non-scientific nature, objecting to the “apologetics of a particular creed in the guise of sociology” (Smirnov 2013, pp. 203–204).

The psychology of religion is not notably active in contemporary Russia, be it of the theoretical or the practical kind.¹⁶ This stagnation can be explained by the lack of specialised research centres, organisations or university departments, as well as little interest in psychology of religion on the part of Russian psychologists¹⁷ as well as by the general lack of demand for specialists in this area.

Apart from relatively low-key research interests in religious and mystical experiences as well as in psychological practices (e.g. Muskhelishvili et al. 1996; Torchinov 2005), empirical research on religious phenomena is conducted sporadically, often focusing on the socio-psychological analysis of religion’s role in an individual’s socialisation.¹⁸ The research is often subject to confessionally biased interpretation or is aimed at “curtailing the activities of sects and cults of a destructive nature.”

As far as as theory is concerned, Russian psychology of religion does not venture beyond recounting and analysing conceptions of foreign authors of the first half of the twentieth century. With the exception of a handful of textbook (see Arinin and Nefyodova 2005; Ryazanova (Oryol) 2008) there are virtually no valid methodological works.

¹⁵ It must be noted that the project of publishing a comprehensive encyclopaedic dictionary of the sociology of religion is currently being actively discussed at a series of scholarly and practical seminars organised at the initiative of the Sociology of Religion Research Committee at the Russian Society of Sociologists.

¹⁶ The lack of special scholarly events involving this discipline is very illustrative indeed. The only precedent is probably the summer school “Religion in Psychological Dimension,” which took place in Saratov in 2010, and the materials of which were published in the yearbook *Socialisation of Young People in Modern Russia: Problems and Prospects (Socializaciya molodezhi v sovremennoj Rossii: problemy i perspektivy)* (see Medvedeva 2010).

¹⁷ Psychologists appear to be a great deal more interested in the problem of a dialogue between psychology and religion, as well as so-called Christian psychology; there are regular conferences on related topics (for example, the conference series *Psychology and Christianity: a Way of Integration*) and numerous textbooks and study aids have been published.

¹⁸ A notable exception is the work of Dvoinin (2011), which adheres to a more general psychological tone and contains research on a religious person’s value and meaning orientations based on the students of the Orthodox educational institutions. The research uses as its framework a number of theoretical and empirical tools developed by Russian psychologists such as the projective method of self-consciousness structure deprivation by V. S. Muknina and K. A. Khvostov, the Value Orientations of Person—8 method by G. E. Leevik and the Life Meaning Orientations Test by D. A. Leontiev.

One positive tendency is the growing interest in such new interdisciplinary areas as neurotheology, i.e. the study of religion with the aid of methods and principles from neuroscience, as well as the cognitive science of religion, i.e. the study of religion from the point of view of cognitive and evolutionary psychology,¹⁹ even though all of this remains within the domain of pure theory. For the most part, the discourse revolves around systematising the experience of Western researchers such as Pascal Boyer, Ilkka Pyysiäinen, Justin L. Barrett, etc. (e.g. Sergiyenko 2011; Shakhnovich 2006, pp. 156–166) or attempts to identify similar ideas in the works of Soviet experts in religious studies such as Israel Frank-Kamenetskii and Olga Freidenberg etc. (see Shakhnovich 2006, pp. 161–162).

Phenomenology of religion is a discipline that has managed to attract the attention of Russian scholars despite its relatively new position within the framework of Russian religious studies.²⁰ In general, the following areas of research are prevalent here: (1) the history of phenomenology of religion and pre-classical phenomenology of religion (see Zabiyaکو 2011; Pylaev 2011b; Chelovenko 2006); (2) analysis of classical phenomenology of religion and conceptions introduced and developed by its leading figures such as Rudolf Otto, Friedrich Heiler, Gerardus van der Leeuw, Joachim Wach, Mircea Eliade, et al. (see Vinokurov 2010; Zabiyaکو 2011; Krasnikov 2007, pp. 96–125; Pylaev 2006, 2011b; Chelovenko 2006); (3) the critique of classical phenomenology of religion and analysis of the neo-phenomenology of religion, including the work of Jacques Waardenburg, Åke Hulkrantz, Wolfgang Gantke, et al. (see Krasnikov 2007, pp. 165–179; Pylaev 2006, pp. 68–82; Chelovenko 2006); (4) analysis of phenomenological conceptions of religion in the works of Russian philosophers—V. Solovyov, P. Florensky, V. Rozanov etc. (see Antonov 2011; Pylaev 2011b, pp. 142–156); (5) attempts to rehabilitate the classical phenomenology of religion and practical applications of the phenomenological approach (see Vinokurov, 2010); (6) analysis of the philosophical phenomenology of religion (see Vinokurov 2010, pp. 68–69; Chelovenko 2006).

Finally, the problem of the status of the phenomenology of religion within religious studies remains one of the most vividly discussed issues. V. V. Vinokurov, for instance, holds that talk of the “death” of the classical phenomenology of religion is premature at the very least (2010, p. 9). He considers it to be that discipline of religious studies that serves as a premise for comparative religion. It is distinct from both theology, since “phenomenology of religion tells us nothing about the objectivity of the existence of religious phenomena or the object of historical religious experience of humankind in general and individuals in particular” (2010, pp. 32–22,) and PhR, because “phenomenology of religion does not analyse the concept, but rather the word, acting under the assumption that the definition of religion may contain certain ideological or worldview premises”

¹⁹ In particular, the fourth issue of the Researches in Religious Studies (*Religiovedcheskie issledovaniya*) periodical deals with the issues of psychology of religion and cognitive science of religion.

²⁰ The “Phenomenology of Religion: Between the Sacred and the Profane” International Religious Studies Winter School took place in Donetsk, Ukraine, in 2011. The materials from the school were included in the eponymous yearbook (see Belokobylsky and Kiselyov 2011), and the third issue of the Researches in Religious Studies (*Religiovedcheskie issledovaniya*) (2011).

(2010, p. 35). According to A. N. Krasnikov and M. A. Pylaev, no comprehensive theoretical and methodological program has been put forth in either the classical phenomenology of religion or the neo-phenomenology of religion (Krasnikov 2007, pp. 112 and 165–179; Pylaev 2011b, pp. 7–10). Where the former assumes that classical phenomenology of religion, with its antireductionism, ahistoricism, apriorism, and recourse to empathy, was more of a hindrance to a scientific study of religion (2007, pp. 111–115), the prospects of neo-phenomenology of religion remain nebulous (2007, p. 179). The latter claims that phenomenology of religion “does not represent the past, present, or future of religious studies for the simple reason that empirical religions remain outside the scope of relevant research” and that its “unconditional relevance” only survives in theology and philosophy of religion, whereas religious studies deem it permissible to “conceptualise the transcendental,” or discuss the “sacred” (2011a, pp. 27–28).

Such areas of religious studies as geography and ecology of religion,²¹ anthropology of religion, etc. remain outside the scope of the present review, for they seldom attract the attention of specialists in religious studies; once again, this is due to institutional circumstances. It should be clear from the foregoing that religious studies as an independent scholarly discipline in Russia is still the in the course of formation and self-definition. Regardless of a number of world-class achievements in several fields, it continues to demonstrate a substantial lack of balance among the several sub-disciplines.

Whereas it is difficult to speak of general theoretical and methodological tendencies in the area of history of religions, due to its high degree of institutional and disciplinary fragmentation as well as the amount and variety of actual scholarly research, the case of sociology of religion is of somewhat different; field materials are being actively accumulated and theoretical and methodological tendencies are beginning to become quite manifest. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of the phenomenology of religion or the psychology of religion: the former occupies no more than a handful of authors who hardly venture beyond introspection, whereas the latter is in a state of theoretical and methodological crisis, with an almost complete lack of satisfactory empirical research.

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²¹ One might mention the “Geography of Religion: the Religious World Map and the Sacred Space” Religious Studies Winter School that took place in Lviv, Ukraine, in 2011, organised by the joint effort of Ukrainian and Russian scholars specialising in religious studies.

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