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HIGHER SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS

Boris K. Knorre

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CONTEXT OF “EMPOWERMENT”
AND “OPPRESSION” PARADIGMS
OF POST-SOVIET ORTHODOXY**

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*Boris K. Knorre*¹

“CULTURE OF GUILT” IN THE CONTEXT OF “EMPOWERMENT” AND “OPPRESSION” PARADIGMS OF POST-SOVIET ORTHODOXY²

The paper analyzes ethical-behavioral categories of the contemporary Orthodox ecclesiastic culture in Russia to determine the correlation of the cultural paradigms of "oppression" and "empowerment" therein. The main emphasis is placed on revealing oppressive stereotypes, social action imperatives, social regulators present in the cultural model of Russian Orthodoxy which condition the processes opposing the "empowerment" strategy and reducing its social capital. The hypothesis proposed by the author in this paper is that the key socio-cultural attitude conditioning the system of oppressive-restrictive stereotypes of behavior in the ecclesiastic milieu is the prevalence of the awareness of culpability in the modern ecclesiastic ethos, a certain "culture of guilt". In this connection the author pays most attention to the category of "guilt" and its discontent in Orthodoxy.

JEL Classification: Z

Keywords: ethical-behavioral preferences, cultural model, guilt, Church culture, oppressive attitudes, empowerment, Russian Orthodoxy

¹ National Research University Higher School of Economics. Faculty of Philosophy, Department of History of Philosophy: Associate Professor; E-mail: knorre@hse.ru

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Introduction

Let's specify here before we pass on to the basic discussion of the topic of this article that by the oppressive-deprivational cultural paradigm in Russian Orthodoxy we shall mean a set of ethical-behavioral principles, cultural preferences of the oppressive character, conditioning to some extent deprivation of the consciousness and sensations of the Church adherent.

Our analysis will not be reduced to considering only external forms of restriction of human activity in Orthodoxy, nor shall we consider any questions of restriction of human rights, or in general any problems related to the political plane. We are interested in the problem of oppressiveness from the point of view of the culture and psychology integrated with Orthodoxy, that is, internal preconditions, and these are by far all restrictive attitudes of the church ethos. First of all, we are interested in the restrictions conditioning decrease in the powers, independence, readiness to make independent decisions, curbing the opportunities of social realization of an individual, and ultimately reducing the social impact of a particular system.. Secondly, these are the attitudes which ultimately condition different elements of deprivation of conscience³, while reducing also the possibilities of the knowledge of life. In case of prevalence of the cultural preferences of an oppressive character in a particular social system it is possible to speak of the corresponding "oppressive strategy".

By the motivational-inspiring / motivational-empowering paradigm we shall mean here a set of ethical-behavioral tendencies and cultural preferences of the motivational-encouraging character which authorize the person to engage in a particular kind of activity, to follow his or her aspiration, interests or even calling. In other words, it is a set of those ethical-behavioral lines which can promote awakening of some creative activity, enterprise, various forms of personal self-realization, associative and self-organizational intentions, and as a result promote an increment in the social capital.

We proceed from the conceptual-instrumental understanding of the category of "empowerment" accepted by today's science as a strategy of world perception and behavior aimed at expansion of the opportunities for human activity and the social role of people through increase of competence and knowledge [Rodenberg and Wichterich 1999], [Batliwala 2012], involvement [Abdallah and Ahluwalia, 2013], which is in turn integrated with increase in delegated powers, independence in decision making and responsibility for the acts performed [Sheafor and Horejsi 2008]. Accordingly, the concept of the "empowerment-strategy" means the priority of internal motivation and competence over the external administration factors in the

³ We mean deprivation as deficiency of sensory, cognitive and emotional stimuli experienced by man, reduction of the sphere of sensual, intellectual experience, some vital demands of human being

course of organization of a particular activity or social initiative, greater readiness to take grounded decisions adequate to the to possibilities and actual necessity.

Let us note that while applying the very category of "empowerment" (capacity building) we do not limit ourselves with the gender approach, as it is often done in the corresponding scientific literature when the focus to consider "empowerment" is linked with the problem of expansion of opportunities for women in Third World countries [Rodenberg and Wichterich 1999], [Sanders 1995], [Cosby 2000]. We do not limit our considering 'empowerment' through the perspectives of increasing the chances of people to join the global Knowledge Society and the knowledge-based economy as associated with some universal culture, as it is sometimes declared, however we assume that the concept of "empowerment" includes the state promoting involvement of the person in different areas of knowledge and activity.

But in considering the category of "empowerment" as applied to religion we do not exclude another, more extensive meaning of this category, also employed in modern science when trying to analyze religions – for instance, when considering the possible impact of religion on the appearance of special religiously-conditioned spheres of social activity. That is, it is possible to speak of "empowerment" (or "empowering factors") as a characteristic feature of a social impact made by religion in case of religiously-conditioned promotion of new cultural interests of an individual or social groups, as well as promotion of the formation of the relevant social networks, associations, communities to implement these interests. Such statement of the question was evident, for instance, at the inter-disciplinary conference: 'Empowerment and the Sacred' organized by the Institute for Colonial and Postcolonial Studies (University of Leeds, 24-26th June 2011) and "Religion and Power Relations in Central and Eastern Europe" ("Petre Andrei" University of Iași, Romania, April 19-21, 2012), where it has been stated that religion can inspire social processes, but the modern social arena is crowded with different agents, different positions, interests and strategies of acting, and the different networks inside which they operate.

How can the oppressive-deprivational paradigm and "empowerment" be related to Orthodoxy, in our case to Russian Orthodoxy?

It should be noted that attempts to define two cultural paradigms in the cultural model of Orthodoxy which would conventionally correspond to the motivational-inspiring/motivational-empowering and the restrictive-deprivational models have not actually been undertaken in science. In fact, such distinction has been rather infrequently applied in relation to other Christian faiths - Catholicism and Protestantism, though, of course, works do exist where Catholicism in some Third World countries is analyzed from the point of view of where it acts as an oppressive cultural factor, and where it allows empowerment. But this consideration was

mainly reduced to finding out how Catholicism influences the position of people in the society of a particular country in the context of globalization [Grenham 2003]. As to Protestantism, it was analyzed for "empowerment" mainly with reference to Pentecostal revivalism, charismatic movements and Afro-American groups [Aihiokhai 2010].

Note that the precondition for the aforementioned differentiation in Orthodoxy is comprehension only by some external observers, but remarks from some priests (that is, internal actors) of the existence of two ecclesiastical-ascetic paradigms. Thus, archpriest Alexander Shmeman, and following him our contemporary hegumen Peter (Meshcherinov) say that Orthodoxy today has one paradigm which considers that the corner-stone for spiritual life is communication with God, live, incessant and joyful feeling of belief, capability to do God's will with awe and comprehension of "filial dependence on God", and that there is a second paradigm in Orthodoxy which proceeds from unworthiness of man and his inability in actual life to accept God's grace because of the sinful and passionate state of his "fallen nature" [Meshcherinov 2006].

Meshcherinov is known not only for his publicistic, but also scientific works on sociology, for instance, *"Modern church consciousness and secular ideologemes from the communistic past"* [Mescherinov 2012]. Let us note that we do not consider the distinction formulated by Meshcherinov as a correlation of the oppression and empowerment paradigms, but only as a certain reference point, a hint that preconditions for differentiation of cultural preferences and ethical-behavioral categories in accordance with the motivating/restrictive principle are inside Orthodoxy, as well, which seems significant to estimate internal processes in Orthodoxy. Besides, it is important to understand that domination of oppressive cultural attitudes and preferences is connected with the particular (deprivational) paradigm in Orthodoxy, and not with all Orthodoxy as a whole. That is, it is not correct to extend the oppressive-deprivational paradigm on Russian Orthodoxy as a whole, not to say on the Orthodoxy of other local churches. In other words, this distinction as voiced by the priest is important, as it shows the presence of different trends in Orthodoxy proving that this faith **is not an absolute cultural monolith**.

On the basis of our observations we may say that neither of the paradigms is, of course, encountered in a pure form in the real life of believers, for these are but "ideal models", but elements of both paradigms are present to a certain extent in the communicative culture of each ecclesiastic community, be it a parish or a parochial-secular organization focused on activities not directly connected with religious worship. These paradigms seriously influence the psychology and behavior of people deeply involved in the life of ecclesiastic communities (we shall refer to them also as to "ecclesiastic actors"), their motivation, decision-making, and determine the specific features of a parish as a whole as a social subject. The extent in which the

attitudes of the first or second paradigm prevail in the life of the ecclesiastic community allows us to conditionally refer the particular community to the first or second type.

There are as many priests inclined to the first, as to the second paradigm. However, the second paradigm (which we call deprivational), if not prevailing in modern Russian Orthodoxy, forms at least a major layer in the ecclesiastic subculture (as will be discussed below). In particular, archpriest Schmemmann as far back as 30 years ago drew attention to the fact that Orthodoxy began to turn into a certain "*religion of guilt*", "*religion of fear*", "*religion of pseudo humbling*", while proving his conclusion with that an "inability to rejoice" had become a phenomenon of Church life. Schmemmann connected '*refusal of joy*' with the prevalence of the psychology of guilt in ecclesiastic consciousness [Schmemmann 2000. p. 129.].

We cannot fail to agree with archpriest Alexander Shmemmann concerning the aforementioned conclusion. And we suppose that this prevalence of presumption of guilt in the system of values of contemporary Russian Orthodoxy, some kind of a "culture of guilt" is the key factor conditioning domination of the other oppressive-restrictive cultural attitudes in the ecclesiastic ethical-behavioral system. Thereupon we will pay special attention to the "culture of guilt" in Orthodoxy.

Note that the analysis of the category of "*guilt*" in human culture was paid much attention to by literary critics [Tsvetkova 2013], psychologists, culturologists [Lebedeva 2010]. There were works analyzing the phenomenon of the "culture of guilt" in the context of the analysis of the phenomenon of "kenotic consciousness" and "cult of humility and self-denial" in Russian religious culture [Gorodetzky 1973], [Billington 1966/2010, p.96 - 97], some of which indulge in ideological and methodological exaggerations towards a certain propensity to reduce explanations with answers based on psychoanalysis [Rancour-Laferriere 1995]. The phenomenon of the "culture of guilt" has not been given sufficient attention from the point of view of religion anthropology, in particular, with reference to Orthodoxy.

At the same time the "culture of guilt" has been subjected to practically no analysis as a theological problem. For various narratives formulating the concept of metaphysical guilt of man in theological texts (theology handbooks, dogmatic manuals) are, as a rule, perceived from the point of view of the Orthodox doctrine not as a problem, but as something that should be, as an important cornerstone confirming the traditional trend of Orthodox ascetics.

Not laying a claim to an exhaustive answer to this question, we will try to propose our suggestions concerning it. Besides the category of "guilt", we will also touch upon *other concepts of ecclesiastic communicative culture in which the psychology of guilt may be shown, for instance: "unworthiness", "sin", "humility", "will distorted by sin", "self-humiliation", "obedience", "temptation", "grief", etc.*

Theological, cultural and historical preconditions of 'the culture of guilt'

When attempting to analyze various ethico-behavioral categories, ideological and esthetic values in Orthodoxy, it seems that the category of "guilt" has not specifically focused the attention of anthropologists or sociologists, though it has been considered somewhat latently - within the context of analysis of other categories of parochial culture, such as "humility", "self-abasement", "obedience", "sin", "unworthiness", and also in the course of consideration of the culture of declaration of will in Orthodoxy, attitude to free will and understanding what "will deformed by sin" is.

Let us note that the Gospel does not always make it possible to see any underlined requirement of man's focusing on his "culpability", "faultiness", comprehension of guilt before God and those nearest to him, as a certain permanent condition necessary for salvation and inheritance of Heaven. A most vivid example is the parable about the Publican and the Pharisee where the Pharisee, considering himself unworthy and hoping only to God's grace, that is to pardon, turns out to be more exonerated than the Pharisee (Luke 18:10-14. 18:10). This parable contains actually not so much the factor of comprehension of "guilt", than the "unworthiness" of man in relation to *God's truth*, that is a category somewhat distinct from the category of "guilt", though guilt in this parable is meant, too (for, after all, "unworthiness" is declared not metaphysically, but within the context of wrongful acts, the Publican's continuous infringement of the Law of God). As a whole this parable keeps within one of the main ethical leitmotifs of Christ's evangelical preaching - an appeal to self-abasement and refusal of self-justification. Those whom Christ cures often confess their sins, that is state their guilt, but in their case it has as a rule a specific character, not a generalized, metaphysical one.

It is necessary to understand that in most cases when Christ speaks about the necessity of self-abasement and about the malignity of self-eminence, *"whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted"* (Matth. 23:12), He does not argue in the categories of guilt. He, as a rule, does not demand from the person to focus on his "wickedness" or "fault" when He offers in the sermon something like a social inversion - that is, overturning the gradations of people accepted in usual society, hierarchies, principles of respectability and self-positioning in the Gospels: *"Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister. And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all."* (Mark 10:42 - 44). Let us note that this overturning of the socially habitual respectability has been developed and

refracted in the whole spectrum of ethico-behavioral categories of the Christian church culture, in particular, such as "humility", "spiritual poverty", "self-abasement", etc., but for them in themselves the category of guilt is not yet an indivisible element, if the evangelical context is considered. For one can humble oneself without self-condemnation, feeling "poor in spirit" does not necessarily mean to be "not good", though in historical Christianity, in its parochial moral theologism these categories and comprehension of a certain generalized "guilt", "wickedness" and "unworthiness" seem to have been connected.

Actually some difference in the attitude to the category of guilt is found at comparing on this subject the message of Christ and the doctrine of Apostle Paul, a theologian by right considered the systematician and the principal developer of the evangelical sermon. It is he who in his Epistle to the Romans develops the idea that *"all the world may become guilty before God"*, and that *"we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one"* (Rom. 3: 9, 10). From here comes the demand to concentrate on comprehension of "sin" and the demand of self-condemnation: *"For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world."* (1 Cor.11: 31,32). In general, it is Apostle Paul who speaks about the total complicity of all people in the original sin, even implication in it: *"Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned"*(Rom. 5:12).

Therefore it is not by chance that the connection of the categories of self-belittling and "guilt" of man before God for his sinfulness was seen by monks, venerables, and even the earliest devotees of piety from the moment Christianity appeared. Let us recollect that many of them quite often said that they are not only unworthy of the Divine favor, but also of human burial, ordering their bodies to be thrown to feed dogs. The degree of comprehension of one's sinfulness and unworthiness in the life of holy men was even seen as some kind of criterion of sanctity - the greater the holiness of the person, the more sins of his he sees. That is, self-abasement became the criterion of spiritual prosperity in historical Christianity – not so much in the social, as in the moral sense - the greatest possible acknowledgement of one's sinfulness, considering oneself the worst of sinners, infinitely guilty to God.

One should not forget that the attitude of "guilt" received its institutional consolidation in the interpretation of the doctrine of the original sin, according to which we are successors to this sin, and according to Augustinus Sanctus - not only successors, but also accomplices (for more detail see the dispute of Augustinus Sanctus with the monk Pelagy [Shaff 2007]).

At the level of the Russian theological tradition the "culture of guilt" is fixed in the creations of various devotees of piety, but particularly strongly in the works of saint bishop Ignaty

(Bryanchaninov) who underlines that in the course of passage of the spiritual way the believer, trying to follow the church norms, is not rid of the sense of guilt, but, on the contrary, is urged to perceive this *guilt* all the more sharply... *'The one who keeps the commandments, comparing his fulfillment of them with the highness and purity of all-saint commandments, constantly admits his fulfillment as extremely insufficient and scanty before God; he sees himself as a person deserving temporary and eternal punishment for his sins, for the non-broken communication with Satan, for his fall common for all human beings, for his own staying in **that fall**; at the end, for the very insufficient and often wrong fulfillment of the commandments.'* [Bryanchaninov 1995, p.46] (*emphasized by me - author*).

And contemporary theological handbooks used by theology students give already a didactic justification of the importance to engraft the feeling of guilt in the child from early years (sic!). Archpriest Vladislav Sveshnikov [2000, p.196] notes about the conscience of guilt in his *Essays of Christian Ethics* – a book, which serves to be the **principal** schoolbook in “Moral Theology” for religious schools in Russia today: *«it is not by chance that a person just entering the “age of reason” is told: “Repent! Even if a person is only seven or eight years old. Repent! – it means, admit your guilt. Guilty means wrong. And so, gradually, half-consciously, a person entering the ways of the rightful life receives an experience of his or her own wrongness.»* [Sveshnikov 2000, p. 179 – 180].

It is necessary to say that in modern ecclesiastic didactic literature such concepts as "fall", "impurity" are encountered as the key ones and express a certain aspect of comprehension of "guilt". Thus, in the works of archimandrite Rafail (Karelin), most popular in the modern ecclesiastic circle, it is proclaimed: *"The original sin, the fall of man and impurity connected with it act in all of us. We are sick with passions, and our spiritual life is in many respects a healing process"* [Karelin 2008].

The consequence of such negative anthropological attitude in relation to human nature most important for us consists in the generalization and exaggeration in the notions of human will distortion by sin, in the stable tendency to look at human will expression with suspicion and mistrust. The dangers and potential harm proceeding from the individual's will expression are globalized, and the presence of individual interests, desires, will expressions (and sometimes initiatives, as well) at an abstract theoretical level is often considered not as a positive phenomenon, but as a problem, and is viewed through the prism of such negative ethical-behavioral categories, as *"svoevoliye"* (**willfulness, self-will expression**), "headstrongness", "selfishness", etc.

Sveshnikov gives the following image to describe "willfulness":

"Flocks of various wishes continuously arising and swirling like a cloud of mosquitoes around a lonely traveler in the North - from small stings of thoughts to careful considering of plans - become the main content of spiritual life. "I will" becomes the major principle of the peccable heart" [Sveshnikov, 86], that is Sveshnikov gives a negative characteristic to the very principle of "I will", calling it also the main principle of sinful life [Sveshnikov, 196].

The propensity to characterize vital intentions through the prism of *"svoevoliye"* (willfulness) is expressed, besides the abstract level, also in practical application, for example, in discouraging emotional involvement in work and enthusiasm often encountered among people coming, for example, to work in ecclesiastic social organizations [Knorre 2012]. The organizations and firms created by Church efforts are characterized, as a rule, by the priority of external administrative principles over self-organization of people, that is. in the course of organization of work the stake is placed on the authority "from the outside" to the detriment of the authority "from within". We obviously see here an attitude contrary to the "empowerment strategy", as these principles do not promote the development of personal engagement in the process. Let us note that the church worker at the initial stage usually happens to be strongly enough engaged in the activity he or she is involved in - up to equating of his/her interests with the interests of the church organization - but once the rigid external administration is discovered, this engagement disappears.

The "culture of guilt" widely spread in the ecclesiastic milieu does not allow the employees realizing the existence of the above-mentioned contradictions to articulate the relevant questions.

Declarative stylistics, low self-esteem and lack of responsibility

It is important to note that the attitude of "presumption of guilt" and "humility" as an integral component of behavior in the ecclesiastic society are expressed in the presence of special declarative stylistic forms of behavior in the ecclesiastic environment (church milieu), when within the framework of the existing communicative culture it is required from the individual to expressly declare his "guilt", "wrongfulness", certain artificial stylistics of behavior, in connection with which archpriest Alexander Shmemann used the expression *"garment of piety"* [Schmemann 2000, p. 33].

One expects from the person a certain form, stylistics of gestures, behavior. As the researcher Ivan Zabaev remarks, "humility is easily fixed by Orthodox actors using external manifestations: beginning with the posture and facial expression and ending with the absence of

objections to any remarks by standard response" [Zabaev 2007, p.20]. Declarative humility is legitimized even by the church etiquette in special "guides", for example, "What should one know about church etiquette" by *hieromonch Aristarch (Lokhanov)*. The brochure states: *"Very often the look - meek, humble, downcast - speaks at once that the person is well brought up, in our case - church-ed"* [Lokhanov 1999]. We will recollect that in 1990ies, in the beginning of the process of revival of ecclesiastic life in Russia there was a popular image of the believer who with his downcast appearance expressed "humility". Certainly, for the Orthodoxy of the 2000ies such image is encountered much less often, but the problem of "depression", a certain passivity is reflected from time to time in the Orthodox mass-media. For instance, one of the articles published in the Orthodox magazine "Neskuchny Sad" (31.07.07) had a self explanatory heading: *"Why do Orthodox believers often look like dead fish?"*»

The "stylistics of humility" still remains a component of ecclesiastic subculture, at least, where they try to consistently appeal to the ecclesiastic ascetic heritage. For example, it is especially vivid among the parishioners of the Church of all the Saints in Krasnoye Selo and the students of the St. Dmitry sisterhood.

The absence of the *stylistics of humility* can cause censure in the ecclesiastic environment and even sanctions from the priest concerning the person in any way administratively inferior to him. Thus, for example, the parishioner of one of the churches of Nizhny Novgorod (Hanna, 35 years old) shares the following episode from he life during training at the Nizhny Novgorod religious school:

"They used to wake me up at night and send to wash all toilets ... Or gave me a week's kitchen order because I did not look "humble" enough..."⁴.

Thus, the demand of declarative forms of behavior within the framework of the established "culture of guilt" can be the basis for both despotism, and administrative arbitrary behavior of the prior or any priest in relation to the layman.

One must confess that the "boss-subordinate" relations the in conditions of the "culture of guilt" make a very specific impact on the business relations within the church milieu.

The matter is that owing to the specificity of labor organization in the majority of church institutions the employees as a rule find themselves in a situation not allowing to perform the volume of work planned according to the norms. Let us recollect that reduction of rigid contractual legal grounds of work in favor of ideologically-religious ones is connected with lower payment in comparison with similar secular organizations, which frequently leads to the impossibility of the corresponding full-time work of the expert required for high-grade

⁴ Personal Archive of the Author (PAA). Conversation at 13.12.2009.

accomplishment of the tasks set. That is, owing to the payment not corresponding to the living standards in the society, the church employee has to work additionally somewhere else, and thus not to give all he can to the "church work". The heads of ecclesiastic organizations, understanding the situation, allow the employees (at times not officially) to reduce the initial work schedule, that is, connive at "infringement" of labor discipline, as though condescending to the living conditions, allow certain liberties. Thus, the employees of church organizations are **in the position of people whose "shortcomings are forgiven"...**

Such psychology as a result makes the employee feel permanently vulnerable, and, which is more important, have a **low self-esteem which inevitably affects the efficiency of work!**. For, after all, his faults may at any moment cease to be "forgiven", and he may be punished with all the rigor of the law ... It would be logical to expect that such feeling should sooner or later lead to an internal and externally expressed protest against such unclear situation. But the employee is inclined to reconcile himself to this state of affairs because of the "culture of guilt" so widely accepted in the church milieu – for the feeling of guilt for him within the limits of the church environment is habitual enough.

The individual knowingly admits his inability to perform the obligation according to the requirements and by so doing he willy-nilly reduces the degree of his responsibility for the orders he carries out, as totally efficient work appears impossible. That is, here we come up against the situation of insufficient involvement of the employee in the work entrusted to him. Speaking **from the point of view of the concept of “empowerment”**, the general strategy of building up business relations in church is directed away from such **“empowerment”**. The individual is to a lesser degree involved in his work, he is unable to use a creative approach ... He finds himself in a situation when he does not have sufficient powers delegated to him, he cannot be completely responsible for the job entrusted to him, and has to be guided by the estimate of his work based not on the results achieved, but on the personal attitude of his superior to him. The culture of behavior, value of the form, stylistics of behavior, even if it does not appear more important than the results of the work, then seriously competes with them as the criteria of estimation of the employee by his superior.

And in case of relations of consecrated church actors the corporate rules play a still larger role. Archpriest Georgy Krylov characterizes the role of corporate rules in the Russian church as follows:

"There is so much in Church that is determined not by the qualities of the person, but by the impression he produces in short seconds on the bishop. From this follow numerous protocols: how to approach, what to put on, how to cross oneself and bow ... For, as they

say, first impressions are most lasting. And you catch yourself that it is only the impressions that you care about..." [Krylov, 2011].

That is the clerics have constantly to think of making a good impression upon the bishop. And this is *"worry over the external "corporate conformity". Quickly changing norms of appearance for priests: this is what they have to care about first of all so as **not to be punished**" (italicized and emphasized by me - B. K.),* father Georgy notes [Krylov, 2011]. The last phrase does mean that in his psychology the cleric proceeds from the permanent threat of 'punishment', that means clergy is also involved in "the culture of guilt".

Ethical understanding of "sin" and reduction of the area of the "permitted" in the living space of Orthodox believers

Let us note that through the concept of *"guilt"* in the parochial system the concept of "sin", fundamental to the whole ecclesiastic system, is interpreted. Dogmatically sin is determined, first of all, as *"disobedience, i.e. mismatch between the will of man and the will of God, a kind of revolt of man against God"* [Davydenkov 1997], [Abashidze 2005]. That is, Church understands *sin* not impersonally, but in the context of subject-object relations with the Creator. *To "sin"* in the language of church images means *"to crucify Christ" ...*

We will note, on the basis of personal experience, that in parochial practice the concept of *sin* is applicable to very many things in life. These are any conflicts with other people - parents, relatives, close friends, colleagues at work, discord in the family, failures in study, and, certainly, such illnesses as alcoholism, drug addiction or tobacco smoking. The notion of *"sin"* is related to any real-life situations breaching spiritual composure of people, and the breach of such spiritual composure itself (loss of "peace of mind"). A detailed "list of sins" is given in the brochure *"Opyt postroeniya ispovedi"* [experience of forming confession] by archimandrite Ioann (Krestyankin) (Moscow, 1997), which is very popular in the parishes. That is, it is a question of actual problems upsetting human life and mentality. However, by classifying them as a "sin", the church practice today suggests to consider them, first of all, as "guilt", instead of as problems requiring solution.

Natalia Kholmogorova, a parishioner of the Moscow Church of the Holy Martyr Tatiana (rector – archpriest Maxim Kozlov) and then of the Church of All Saints in Krasnoye Selo (rector – archpriest Artemy Vladimirov), recalls her experience of discussion with the priests of complexities in her relations with her mother. Instead of the approach *"let us try to get to the bottom of it and then we'll think what is to be done about it"*, she was usually told: *"yes, it is very*

bad, you are guilty, repent" (Kholmogorova 2007). As she said, instead of attempting to understand the problems priests usually advise to *"suffer, exercise patience"*... *As a result any ordinary everyday minor trouble in which there has originally been nothing awful, is preserved, loaded with the sense of guilt and turns into some purulent wound in one's soul...* " (Kholmogorova 2007).

In turn, extensive application of the category of sin to the reality of life imposes quite a peculiar view on this reality, radically changing the notions and the system of coordinates of this reality for a church member.

The concept of "sin" plays a key role in differentiation between the "true" and "false" in life, corresponding to God's will and "godless", and, ultimately, the "permitted" and the "non-permitted". And it is interesting that the second category within the framework of the ecclesiastic system of values embraces an overwhelming part of actions dictated by ordinary human wishes and will, for this "ordinary" will is "fallen" will, as it has been deformed by "sin" as it was mentioned above. In the Russian ecclesiastic tradition this dichotomy is especially vividly presented in the writings of Father Ignaty (Bryanchaninov) who has become the "classic of piety" for the parochial culture. He writes, that there is no consent between the Evangelical good and the good of the fallen human nature. The good of our fallen nature is intermixed with evil, that is why this good itself has become evil, as any tasty and healthy food when mixed with poison becomes poisonous itself. Beware of doing good for the fallen nature! Doing this good, you will deepen your fall, you will develop self-conceit and pride in yourself, you will reach the nearest similarity to demons. [Bryanchaninov 1995].

But what particular good is considered "evangelical" and "true" from the ecclesiastic point of view? From church pulpits they tell us, for example, about the value of the institute of family – a "home church" which every Christian is urged to create and protect. They tell us about love for our Motherland and our relatives, about respect for sacraments, diligence in work and many other things. However, the virtue of all these things appears far from being warranted, as, according to the ecclesiastic ascetics⁵, each kind act is accompanied by an impending danger that it may be used "to the detriment", *"in the interests of the devil"* ...

Natalia Kholmogorova, having been a parishioner of the Moscow Church of the Holy Martyr Tatiana and then of the Church of All Saints in Krasnoye Selo, recalls that over the course of her experience in those parishes, both the spiritual fathers and her fellow parishioners who were most deeply involved in ecclesiastic life, strove to inculcate within her the idea of the

⁵ The vulnerability of human good-doing is especially vividly described in the books, well-known among Orthodox believers: "Lestvitsa" [Stairway to Heaven], "Nevidimaya bran" [Invisible abuse], "Dushepoleznye poucheniya avvy Dorofeya" [Edificatory talks of Father Dorofey], 5-volume publication "Dobrotoliubie" [Philokalia]- literature primarily intended for monks but having become quite popular among the lay believers in Russia.

difficulty of making a properly evangelical and edificatory choice in one's life, in contrast to the ease with which one may slide towards the opposite:

"Non-edificatory phenomena detrimental to the soul relate to edificatory ones on the average as 99 to 1. Provided that it is necessary to consider also that edificatory action can well result in a soul-detrimental disposition. For example, having performed a good deed you might become proud of it - and the result will go into the red... [Kholmogorova 2007].

The potential space of "*sin*" appears to be extremely great, increasing pro rata the activity of the living position of the individual, with the space of the possible "good", on the contrary, decreasing. Accordingly, the **space of the "permitted" in life in such paradigm appears to be essentially underestimated**. In the language of psychology, we are dealing with a situation where ecclesiastic culture demands that any human declarations of will ("*pomysly*" in the Church's lexicon) be considered as a ' risky zone ' and **be subjected to obvious deprivation, meticulous filtration and narrowing**.

Let us note that accentuation of the vulnerability of good gives additional arguments not only in favor of the priority of protecting attitudes over actively-creative ones in the Orthodox ecclesiastical ethos. Due to the danger of "sin", the church believer is urged to once again reflect, doubt what he or she is doing. The non-act attitude as the first reaction to an idea coming to one's mind appears more preferable than that calling for fast implementation of the idea. **It is better to "slow down" ...** It is much too probable that the initiative will entail problems, the one who is ready to show the initiative is too much afraid to make a mistake.

Without going too far, we will state that besides the fear of the "world" as such, the essence of the behavioral model here is also that inspiration, enthusiasm is not something on which to build any activity. It is better to wait until the enthusiasm burns out, so as to perform the work "not to please oneself", but as an act of "obedience". Thus we see that the "culture of guilt" ultimately leads to the formation of a "culture of mistrust".

Some general observations and attempt of quantitative study of the prevalence of oppressive cultural attitudes among Orthodox believers

Summing up the discussion above, it is possible to note that the cultural model appearing at the analysis of the Orthodox culture in modern Russia shows domination of the cultural attitudes not promoting expansion of independence and powers of people in the lines of their activity. Accordingly, these preferences reduce the social impact of Russian Orthodoxy, therefore we can

see many discrepancies in the Russian society to the Orthodox ethical principles, despite the formally dominating place of the Russian Orthodox church in the country. Anyhow, the value given to protecting attitudes in most ecclesiastic Orthodox communities, the peculiar "culture of mistrust" create obstacles for the "empowerment-paradigm" development in Orthodoxy, though do not completely exclude it. However, it is necessary to bear in mind that the oppressive attitudes we described are mainly typical of the believers immersed in the neophyte ecclesiastic culture, whereas in the 25 years of Orthodoxy revival in Russia the neophyte culture has not constituted the predominant layer, and therefore the oppressive attitudes described above may fail to be found among a considerable part of Orthodox adherents. The extent in which the oppressive cultural preferences and the corresponding ethic-behavioral categories are typical of Orthodox believers will be better understood from the following table.

Oppressive attitudes and cultural preferences in the Russian Orthodox Ethos

(According to polls, conversations and interviews with the priest (50 persons) and laymen (800 persons) conducted by the author, while using collecting data inside the Church organizations, from 2005 – 2013 in the large cities).

Oppressive/deprivational attitudes and cultural preferences	Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate)	
1. Presumption of guilt as an inner personal attitude. Inclination to deny a personal impact to the doing good. A feeling of one's weakness, victim mentality and victimization. As usual this attitude is accompanied by an inclination to an <i>a priori</i> non-critical position, non-critical concession to any requirements from the administration and from the people who have a higher hierarchical rank.	15 %	
2. Presumption of guilt expressed stylistically. Tendency to declarative forms of self-belittling. The basic meaning of these declarative forms for the Church ethos, in particular, declarative humility.	48%	
3. Tendency to extrapolate the notion of guilt to people around. It can be also an accusation of a neighbor for one`s own hardships. (Probably it is the result of a more critical world-view in general)	45 %	
4. Lack of trust or even mistrustful attitude. Mistrust towards the initiatives undertaken by unknown people or those outside the nearest circle. Very short radius of trust limited by the people who belong to the same Church parish or even less – to the close circle of friends. However this lack of trust is counterbalanced by the trust towards the spiritual father . So as a result there is an inclination of the clergy to recommend their spiritual children, to the flock some most important decisions in their life. Here there is a highest subordination between the spiritual father and the spiritual	35%	

disciple.		
5. Low self-esteem. Tendency to avoid crucial decisions, solving tasks, participation in competitions because of the fear of incompetence in the opinion of people around. Unwillingness to get into the focus of attention of the community (for clergymen this feature is not peculiar, because of the position of the priest as the pastor - i.e. leader, and also because of the result of a high intra-corporation esteem for the clergy inside the Church milieu)	20 %	
P.S. This attitude comes often in conjunction with mistrust in one's own will – <i>"It is really God's will that directs human life to the best, but as a rule not the way the individual would prefer"</i> . <i>"The will distorted by sin recovers through obedience best of all. The obedience accepted cordially totally eliminates the principle 'I will' / 'I want', one of the dominant principles of sinful existence"</i> (Sveshnikov 2000, p. 196).		
6. Absolutization of external authority (concerns consciousness of laymen, perception of the priest as the one responsible for their personal choice in life). Tendency to refuse personal choice and freedom of decisions (it is interfaced with the search for a "confessor", the person capable to specify the program of one`s actions and life)	20 %	
7. Reactive position (tendency to make decisions not on the basis of intrinsic motivation, but exclusively on the basis of external circumstances or orders from anyone else)	43 %	
8. Low critical reflection towards authoritative persons. Reduction of critical reflection towards information coming from the authoritative person, that leads to passive attitude towards the information obtained	32 %	
9. Lack of informational transparency (inclination to keep information opaque, be this information about inner complexities or about the Church social life in general). It would be better to say – there is an attitude to avoid transparency	60 %	
10. Prevalence of external factors instead of inner motivation. Appeal to an external factor as to the argument for refusal of personal responsibility.	60%	
11. Rejection of the secular world. Anti-secular discourse. Communicative restrictions, mistrust towards forms of secular social activity beyond the scope of the Church environment.	22%	
12. Defensive preferences. Priority of human will-restrictive/will-limited attitudes over the empowering and will-expressive ones (inspiration, enterprise, inclination to offer or to implement initiatives in general).	29%	
13. Apocalyptic expectations. Apocalyptic consciousness and increased eschatological expectations	12%	
14. Anti-globalism (different visions for the groups of Churches)	66%	
15. Belief in conspiracy. Accepting different theories and visions of conspiracy. Belief in some world-scope plots and imagination of an 'external enemy'.	65%	
16. Looking for an external support. Dependency. It may be dependent relations with the state/business/local administration.	40%	
17. Distancing and restrictive position in relation to laymen. Attitude to strict maintenance of distance between clergymen and laymen	38 %	

Conclusion. Some additional remarks on the social extrapolation of spiritual experience

For the arguments described above, the reader may suspect that, by criticizing the monastic orientation on self-accusation, I am undermining the *sancta sanctorum* of the ecclesiastical experience, which has produced the highest examples of humility in select saintly figures. This is not so, however. We are not here dealing with monasticism as such, but with the reception of monastic attitudes by contemporary church community, made up primarily of lay people. We speak of the society, the life of modern Orthodox believers which socialize ancient monastic attitudes differently, relaying them in their lives.

Getting into the social context of everyday life of people, the self-incrimination practice ceases to be a spiritually intimate phenomenon and is reflected in the most prosaic reality, generating corresponding relations between people. At that additional vulgarization was introduced into the self-incrimination practice by the Soviet period with its peculiar attitude to standardization of the way of life of people, mass character and generalization. Under the influence of this standardization, which affected even the ecclesiastic social environment, the ascetic principles of self-incrimination received a primitive generalizing simplistic existence - they were revealed not as a deeply individual personal attitude, but as the norm of socialization in the ecclesiastic environment, becoming a corporate character element in the ecclesiastic environment. "The culture of self-incrimination turned into a certain "culture of guilt" where admission of guilt ceased to be a private matter of the individual, but became the demand of the society, legitimating the transfer of guilt from oneself to others and a series of oppressive attitudes as it has been shown above.

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The article is translated from Russian into English by Irina V. Reznik, a candidate of philological sciences, a professor of Moscow State Linguistic University.

Boris K. Knorre,

National Research University Higher School of Economics. Faculty of Philosophy, Department of History of Philosophy: Candidate of Sciences, Associate Professor.

E-mail: knorre@hse.ru; Tel. +7 915 298 82 78

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