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Infosphere and the Study of Religious Education in the Russian Empire

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Abstract. For humanitarians, the latest century was a period of active search for new methodological approaches. New informational technologies have expanded the capabilities of the human body; they have become “prostheses” expanding the perspectives of scholarly research. And it applies not only to data processing methods, but to the search for necessary research information as well. Thanks to digitized archives and research publications, which are located in virtual libraries, knowledge is coming into the infosphere. The concept of “infosphere”, that complemented a series of other “spheres”, such as “bibliosphere”, “noosphere”, etc, was introduced into the modern research vocabulary by Luciano Floridi. In the 1990-s, he stated that the emergence of new information systems means the onset of “the fourth revolution” and shaping the infosphere. But, in fact, the infosphere and the “virtual world” existed earlier; they appeared along with book collections. In this sense, we may talk about the infosphere in the context of the nineteenth century and even earlier epochs. The article sets issues of the reconstruction of the infosphere of the Orthodox educational institutions of the Russian Empire. The sources for such research include descriptions of book collections of seminaries and theological academies, the periodicals of those educational institutions, memories of teachers and students, and so on. The basis for the study of the infosphere of the Orthodox educational institutions is built on the numerous research works on the process of teaching in theological educational institutions, and on the history of their book collections. It is acceptable to talk about the infosphere of the Orthodox educational institutions of the Russian Empire in relation to virtual collections that are actively created in the Internet.

Keywords: infosphere, history of religion, orthodoxy, Religious Studies

Contemporary researchers note that the “cultural turn” in social and humanitarian knowledge has led to the intensive development of various aspects of the problem of collective ideas, including concepts of the past and the “history of memory”. Nowadays, historians are actively interested in such issues as: how people perceived the events they were contemporaries or participants in, how they stored and transmitted information about those events, interpreting what they saw or experienced in one way or another [1]. In an effort to take a fresh look at cultural and historical matters, scholars are constantly in search for new approaches [2]. Interdisciplinarity becomes a norm for researchers. Peter Burke notes: “The cultural relativism implicit here deserves to be emphasized. The philosophical foundation of the new history is the idea that reality is socially or culturally constructed. The sharing of this idea, or assumption, by many social historians and social anthropologists helps explain the recent convergence between these two disciplines... This relativism also undermines the traditional distinction between what is ‘central’ in history and what is ‘peripheral’.” [3, p. 3–4]. Information technology has become a powerful impetus for

the transformation of research approaches; and its importance is steadily growing. Databases, digitization of books, newspapers, and magazines change the algorithm for searching for information, its processing, and storage. Making bibliographic reviews in professional literature, researchers have already provided direct links to databases, at least, sometimes. In the same book Joan W. Scott wrote: “Rather than list a long bibliography, I refer readers to another new development: the Internet. There are now a growing number of sites which furnish comprehensive bibliographic and archival references.” [4, p. 70].

Over the past decades, Russian and Western researchers have done a great deal of work to study various aspects of the activities of the clergy of the Orthodox Church in the Russian Empire [5, 6]. Also, in the late twentieth – early twenty first centuries, huge arrays of documents and books were digitized. Through that process, a new information environment, the infosphere, was created, which increased the ability of researchers to process large amounts of information. It includes electronic databases of libraries and archives. Databases of pre-revolutionary journals is at work now.

Thanks to this array of information, we have the opportunity to try to reconstruct the picture of the world of the Orthodox clergy, relying both on the existing studies and on numerous sources.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the clergy of the Russian Empire got some features of a subculture. To a large extent, it was stimulated with the legislative activity of Empress Catherine II, who fixed the concept of “social estate” (*soslovie*) in the legislation. Researchers note, however, that, unlike France of the eighteenth century, Russia has developed a polymorphic social structure with competing social hierarchies based not only on their legal status, but on many other characteristics as well. The point is not whether the pre-revolutionary Russian society should be interpreted as “neither class nor estate” or as “estates and classes” (a formula perhaps more consonant with the intricate complexities of the late imperial Russia), but that social identities remained quite ambiguous and changeable, fluctuating between legal class, economic status, and occupation. Despite the fact that the events and conditions of the revolution of 1905–1907 partially destroyed the system of those “social estates”, it remained largely intact in consciousness and legislation, even when the “estates” were reinterpreted as cultural and common groups, that is, social groups defined by their subculture and specific lifestyle [5, p. 33]. G. Freeze notes: “Indeed, *soslovnost'* as a legal principle, as mentality-formed a crucial barrier to the political modernization of the old regime, for it was utterly antithetical to the creation of a modern civil society, which is a *sine qua non* for a democratic order. Hence, *soslovnost'*, if not *sosloviia*, survived to the end of the ancient regime and, in some significant respects, even into the Soviet period. At least nominally, the *soslovie* system did not disappear until November 1917, when it was formally abolished by the new Bolshevik government [7, p. 35]. It contributed to the separation of the clergy and the state, which — in the desire to distinguish the spheres of activity of secular and ecclesiastic authorities — actually created structures that duplicated the activities of state institutions, thereby separating it from them. Thus, the Church had its own censorship apparatus, its own theological schools, its own system of academic degrees, its own ecclesiastic courts, and its own secular bureaucracy” [7, c. 56].

That subjective community was preserved partially even by those people from that milieu (priests’ children — *popovichi*), who received secular education and “went into the world” [8] becoming an integral part of the Russian intelligentsia. Lory Manchester argues that the worldview of the priests’ children was based on a special (often secularized) form of religiosity, and they brought such views into the ranks of the intelligentsia, contributing to the formation of modern forms of self-consciousness within the framework of the intelligentsia ethos. The gap between the pre-reform and post-reform intelligentsia, described by Turgenev as a clash of “fathers” and “sons”, actually had more social than intergenerational basis. *Popovichi* (priests’ children) perceived themselves as “ascetics in the world”; they sought to recreate the world around them, based on patterns taken from the past, on the memory of childhood spent among the clergy. The “paternalism” of the intelligentsia in relation to the “common people” (*narod*) is considered by researchers to be a characteristic feature of the Russian intelligentsia.

The study of subcultures of the past centuries is quite effectively implemented within the framework of such a direction of scholarly research as “intellectual history”. When studying the infosphere of religious institutions of the past centuries, the method of intellectual history can be used in some combination with the methods of socio-cultural contextual analysis and historiographic description. At the same time, the emphasis should be made on the methods of microhistorical research, and on studying “local histories” (as pieces of the “rhizome” of the infosphere). An example of such research we

can find in the work by G. Freeze “Rediscovering the Orthodox Past: A Microhistorical Approach to Religious Practice” [9]. A thorough analysis of sources, including textual analysis, is an important part of such work.

The formation of the subculture of the clergy was greatly influenced by many factors; one of them was the infosphere into which the members of this estate were immersed.

The concept of “infosphere” is actively used in the philosophy of information, which was shaped at the end of the previous century, when “digital” technologies began to blur the boundaries between the real and virtual worlds [10]. Luciano Floridi called that cultural turn “the fourth revolution” [11]. In the late twentieth century, he offered the concept of “infosphere” to designate a new cultural phenomenon. Floridi wrote that the concept was constructed by him on the model of the “biosphere”. The word “infosphere” successfully fits into the chain of terms denoting a certain reality, natural or man-made one. Here, we can recall the term “noosphere”, which has been inserted into the Russian intellectual space since Soviet times, proposed in 1927 by Eduard Le Roy, a mathematician who became a natural philosopher trying to understand the evolution of spirituality. “Drawing on the philosophy of his teacher Henri Bergson, Le Roy advocated the view that that the biological evolution was coming to an end and that with the appearance of man a new, spiritual phase of evolution had begun that led to the creation of a new sphere beyond the biosphere” [12, p. 2]. Together with his friend Teilhard de Chardin, he tried to reconcile science and religion, in search for a holistic relationship between the biosphere and the noosphere [13, p. 66]. After it, the concept of “noosphere” was used by V. I. Vernadsky; but, nevertheless, it possesses a fairly strong spiritual component; besides, Vernadsky considered human thought in the context of the life of the cosmos, and his view at the Scientific Thought was much more global. “The decisive role in this is assigned, as Vernadsky writes in his last book “Scientific Thought as a Planetary Phenomenon”, written in 1937–1938, to scientific thought which he considered the main driving force for this transformation of the earth (Vernadsky, 1997). Through planned, systematic activity man would master nature, achieve a just distribution of wealth, and would finally develop a united humanity” [12, p. 3]. On our opinion, for research matters, however, the concept of “infosphere” suits better. In the philosophy of information, the infosphere is considered to be a semantic space consisting of a set of documents, agents, and their operations. The term “documents” describes all types of data, information, and knowledge, encoded and implemented in any semiotic format without any restrictions on size, types, or syntactic structure.

Researchers note that the concept of “infosphere” can be interpreted in two ways, since it has an ecological and metaphysical dimension. Ecological understanding identifies the infosphere with the environment, along with all existing things, whether digital or analog, physical or non-physical ones, and with the relationships that occur between them, as well as the relationships between them and the environment. Luciano Floridi considers the infosphere as an environment, together with all the entities inhabiting it, as well as their relationships observed from the information point of view [14]. Researchers emphasize also, that the infosphere should not be confused with the cybersphere, since the latter is only a part of the former one. Metaphysically, the infosphere refers to the entire sphere of the reality of the being, and it is based on the assumption of the information ontology. In this case, the infosphere is the totality of the existing phenomenon as soon as its informational nature is revealed. [15, p.363]. Therefore, in this case, we can understand the concept of “infosphere” as a set of sources of various origin (for example, records of verbal sources, memoirs, periodicals, library collections). Library collections play one of the central roles in the current study. They can be considered as the most important part of the infosphere — the “bibliosphere” [16]. Its studying was started in the Classical epoch, but the peak of interest in libraries as places where various communication channels converge, permeated with complex semiotic connections, similar to the rhizome by J. Deleuze and F. Guattari, falls at the end of the nineteenth century.

In our research case, libraries are, first of all, those of theological educational institutions, monastic libraries, as well as personal libraries of clergy (bishops, priests). The structure and content of those libraries help us to get closer to understanding the image of the world that was shaped in the subculture of the clergy. Libraries of theological educational institutions were originally formed from book collections of bishops (the requirement to supply students with books from the personal library of the local bishop was spelled out in the “Spiritual Regulations”). That is why the book repertoire reflected the interests of certain library collectors. So, one of the most interesting spiritual libraries was the book

collection of the Novgorod Theological Seminary, which was based on the personal library of Feofan Prokopovich; during the life of the bishop, it included not only numerous books from his personal collection, but also books from several Western libraries: there were “books of the German Baltic bibliophiles of the seventeenth — early eighteenth century, confiscated from them in the course of the Northern War” [17, p.1]. A noteworthy phenomenon of Russian theological schools was students’ “illegal libraries”, which were compiled by the students themselves. Their content clearly reflected the dynamics of interests of the future clergy; they included works by Positivists, essays reflecting modern natural science ideas, and works by authors who were not recommended to students of Russian theological schools: in particular, we can name the works by N. G. Chernyshevsky, and V. G. Belinsky.

Another important source is the religious periodicals. Their repertoire has expanded significantly since the second half of the nineteenth century. There were both diocesan publications (newspapers) and magazines published by theological academies and private individuals. In this case, not only original publications are of interest, but also reviews of philosophical and scientific works, as well as literary criticism. In recent decades, Russian periodicals of the Imperial period, interpreted as a source of knowledge on the history of science and social thought, attract considerable attention of researchers, both Russian and foreign [18]. Dissertations, articles, and monographs on ecclesiastic periodicals and various ecclesiastic issues in newspapers were presented. The reason for this interest is clear. After all, magazines and newspapers, not books, played the primary role in the literary process of that time. “The overwhelming majority of works were originally published in magazines and newspapers, and only a part of them were later published in separate volumes. As a result, most readers (except for the low-profiled audience) got acquainted with literary novelties on the pages of periodicals, and books were of secondary importance to them” [19, p. 27]. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the number of readers increased significantly, by the end of the same century, according to researchers, their number has increased to 8–9 million people (that is, 6–7% of the population) [19, p. 25]. “The increase in the circulation was mainly due to those cultural strata who were previously poorly attached to the printed word; so, it become more and more differentiated from year to year” [19, p. 25].

The era of the Great Reforms contributed to the expansion of the readership of magazines by attracting less educated segments of the population, as well as changing the subject matter of magazine articles. N. V. Shelgunov wrote in his memoirs that “in the sixties, as if by some miracle, a completely new, unprecedented reader with public feelings, public thoughts and interests was suddenly created, who wanted to consider public affairs, who wanted to learn what he wanted to know... When it was possible to believe that Pushkin was flogged, we had only literature (Senkovsky assured us that we did not have literature at that time, but only the book trade), now the media has appeared” [20, p. 113]. Despite censorship, the number of publications of ecclesiastic periodicals also changed, and most importantly, the quality of those publications was improved. B. F. Egorov noted: “If until now ecclesiastic magazines existed only at Theological Academies, and only for a special reason (mainly the desire to convert Latvian and Estonian peasants to Orthodoxy) a magazine was published at the Riga Seminary, then, at the beginning of the new reign, three Theological Seminaries had already got the permission to publish their own magazines: St. Petersburg — “Spiritual Conversation” (*Dukhovnaya beseda*; 1858–1876), Kyiv — “A Guide for Rural Pastors” (*Rukovodstvo dlya sel'skikh pastyrei*; 1860–1917), Kharkov — “Spiritual Diary” (*Dulhovnyi dnevniki*; 1864–1866). The chief editors of those magazines were usually rectors, and the authors of the articles were local teachers. All three magazines were published weekly, so that the periodicity compared to academic publications became much more frequent. And although the programs for greater confidence in obtaining the permission of the Holy Synod were almost completely copied from the programs of academic magazines, designed for a very small circle of educated readers, in fact, seminary magazines were already more popular: the very title of the Kyiv magazine — “A Guide for Rural Pastors” — speaks eloquently about it” [21, p. 97]. Many interesting publications appeared in magazines issued on private initiative of the clergy. Those were such magazines as “The Wanderer” (*Strannik*; 1860), “The Orthodox Review” (*Pravoslavnoe obozrenie*; 1860–1891), “The Spiritual Messenger” (*Dukhovnyi vestnik*; 1862), and others. They were “spiritual publications that owe their origin to private entrepreneurship. That entrepreneurship often did not imply personal enrichment of the founders of the periodical. The publication itself was not intended to get a commercial success. Private periodicals were more free in the choice of topics and authors, in the presentation of certain points of view” [22, p. 111].

Another source, extremely important, but not too often used, is the journals of the meetings of the conferences of Theological Academies. They discussed training courses, actual matters of religious life, significant publications, students' works, and dissertations. Such journals of the meetings were published annually. A significant part of the journals of the Moscow Theological Academy has been digitized; now, they are in the open access on the website of the Russian State Library. Analysis of these materials makes it possible to compile a full picture of the scholarly life of Theological Academies.

Also, one should not forget about such a valuable source for studying not only the everyday life, but the intellectual life of the clergy as diaries. Some diaries of priests were published even before the Revolution 1917, but the bulk of them were introduced into the research field in the last third of the previous century. Among the most famous, there are diaries of John of Kronstadt, Nicholas of Japan, and Innokenty Veniaminov. But new publications regularly appear, thanks to which we learn about the life of ordinary clergy of the Russian Empire.

A scrupulous analysis of these sources shows that the worldview of the Orthodox clergy was shaped under the influence of numerous modern ideas, and, despite the apparent isolation of that social community, it was subject to the same trends as the secular society. The study of the infosphere of Orthodox educational institutions and the clergy of the Russian Empire give us a chance to understand better the cultural and religious transformations that took place in the Russian society at the edge of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

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Инфосфера и изучение духовного образования в Российской империи

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Аннотация. Последнее столетие для гуманитариев стало периодом активного поиска новых методологических подходов. Новые информационные технологии расширили возможности человеческого организма, они стали «протезами», которые расширили возможности научного исследования. И это касается не только методов обработки данных, но и поиска необходимой научной информации. Благодаря оцифрованным архивам и научной литературе, которые располагаются в виртуальных библиотеках, знания становятся частью инфосферы. Понятие «инфосфера», которое дополнило череду других «сфер»: «библиосфера», «ноосфера» и т.д., было введено в современный научный обиход Лучано Флориди. В 90е годы XX века он заявил, что появление новых информационных систем означает наступление «четвертой революции», и появление инфосферы. Но фактически инфосфера и «виртуальный мир» существовали раньше, они появились вместе с книжными собраниями. И в этом смысле мы можем говорить о инфосфере применительно к XIX столетию и более ранним эпохам. В статье ставится вопрос о реконструкции инфосферы православных учебных заведений Российской империи. В качестве источников для такого исследования выступают описания книжных коллекций семинарий и духовных академий, периодическая печать этих учебных заведений, воспоминания преподавателей и учеников и т.д. Основой исследования инфосферы православных учебных заведений выступают многочисленные работы исследователей, которые занимались и занимаются изучением преподавания в духовных учебных заведениях, и историей их книжных собраний. Мы также можем говорить об инфосфере православных учебных заведений Российской империи применительно к виртуальным коллекциям, которые активно создаются в интернете.

Ключевые слова: инфосфера, история религии, православие, религиоведение

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