

Pål Kolstø:

“The Russian Orthodox Church and the New Discourse on Traditional Values in Russia”

“The traditional family“ in Russian Orthodox ideology and praxis

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“Traditional values“ is a key trope in the new conservative rhetoric in Russia after 2011 (Pecherskaia . The Russian Orthodox Church is one of the main incubators of this ideology (Stoeckl, 2016, 2017), in fact, the church has been talking about traditional values far longer than that, it can be found in Patriarch Kirill’s speeches as early as around 2000, that is, long before he became the head of the church (Kirill 2000). In statements by Russian politicians and churchmen the concept of traditional values is often used without any definition as if it were self-explanatory, and indeed, much of the value of this concept for the users is probably that it is so vague that the listeners can include in it almost whatever they want. Adherents of all the historical religions in Russia – which indicatively are called “traditional faiths”, can use it as justification for resuscitating their particular traditions, also when they are at odds with each other.

For the researchers it is a problem that if we focus our attention on political speeches and official statements only we may remain on the same rhetorical surface. It is then easy to

conclude that “traditional values” and similar expressions are catch-all phrases devoid of content and we suspect that that is what makes them so attractive to Russian politicians. They are “empty signifiers”. However, for the church – or to make a less sweeping statement: for very many people in the church – “traditional values” is not just nice-sounding words, but contain an entire program of action, in a campaign to engineer a moral revolution in the Russian people. In order to grasp what the Orthodox are aiming for we must move beyond the soundbites and analyse how they themselves apply these concepts to specific aspects of social and private life. If we do, we will often find surprisingly detailed programs and visions, also ideas that many Russians who claim to support the “traditional values” program as enunciated by church, would balk at.

The deeper we go into the details of the Orthodox ethics, the more controversial it becomes, but, interestingly, it is contested also within the church itself. While many of the most vociferous promoters of Orthodox traditional values propagate not only conservative but outright reactionary positions, they are met with resistance from other quarters in the church. The fault lines run in very many different directions, which are not always easily predictable. There are both clergy (parish priests and monastics) and laypeople, men and women, on both sides of the barricades.

A detailed analysis of Orthodox ethics will reveal a remarkably high degree of heterogeneity in the Russian church with regard to ethics and morality. This is nothing new, but is often forgotten. Also before the revolution, there were lively debates on many topics within the church in which a surprisingly high number of people participated. To be sure, the church structure is hierarchical, with the Patriarch at the top and the Synod below him, passing decisions on important issues, but this pertains first and foremost to issues of theology and dogma. When it comes to ethics, there is more room for a plurality of viewpoints. It is true that, in 2000 the church adopted a long, elaborate and eloquent statement (more than

37000 words) on “The Bases of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church”, which hammered out an Orthodox ethics for the modern world (*Osnovy* 2000). But this document clearly does not have a status as a dogma, and many Orthodox publicists feel free to contradict it on certain points. And moreover, even with its extensive exegesis of biblical texts and attempted application of evangelical precepts for contemporary society, it often leaves open blank spaces which believers are free to fill in.

In order to capture some of the width in the Orthodox morality debates I will in this paper limit myself to an analysis of what is claimed to constitute an ideal Orthodox family. The church has always regarded itself as an authority on family matters – indeed, prior to the revolution, civil law cases on family-related issues such as marriage and divorce, upbringing of children etc. were adjudicated in the ecclesiastical courts, not in the regular judicial system – and while such an authoritative role is denied it today, the church does what it can to influence family policy. It achieved a small victory when the revised Constitution which was adopted in June 2020 contains the phrase that ‘marriage is a union between a man and a woman’, but this is primarily a statement directed *against* something, against LGBT activism and same-sex marriages, and does not say much about how relations between a man and a woman, the father and the mother, should be within the family. Here we find a polyphony – sometimes a cacophony – of voices in the internal Orthodox debates. Some debaters surprise us with their outspokenly reactionary views while others show that there is also room for liberal voices in the church.

The multifaceted Orthodox debates on family relations can be divided into several separate issues. Some of the most controversial no doubt are de/criminalization of wife battery, corporeal punishment in the upbringing of children, and under what conditions the state institutions can take minors away from their parents and into custody. These topics are high on the agenda not only for the church but also for the public at large and for the political

class in Russia. Several legal initiatives have been presented to the Duma, some of which have been adopted and others not (Bluhm and Varga 2019). These huge important topics I plan to return to later, but in the present paper I will limit myself to an inquiry into Orthodox views on man-woman relations in general and in the family in particular: should they be hierarchical or egalitarian? This can be divided into two related issues: on egalitarianism: is there room for feminist perspectives in the Orthodox thinking about family and gender relations? And on hierarchy: should the Orthodox family be patriarchal?

One important benefit of focusing on grassroots contributions to the Orthodox debates on these issues is that ordinary Russian believers normally read neither the *Bases of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church* nor any of the patriarch's speeches. Instead, to the degree that they seek moral guidance from the church on family matters and private morality more generally they are more likely to approach their local priest or look up advice in Orthodox publications. Virtually all such publications have internet versions which can be accessed from abroad, which I have been doing while awaiting the reopening of international travel after the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, many of the relevant articles from Russian devotional literature are republished by one of the webpages of the Moscow patriarchate, either patriarchia.ru, pravmir.ru ('Orthodoxy and the world') or the webpage of the Patriarchal Commission on Family, the Support of Motherhood and Children (pk-semya.ru). In those cases, the articles from more unofficial Orthodox institutions and publications receive, as is were, the *imprimatur* of the central ecclesiastical authorities.

Orthodox stances on feminism

The concept of "feminism" cannot be found in the *Bases of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church*, but the Patriarch has expressed a strong view on this -ism. In April 2013 he

received in his residence in Moscow a delegation from the Ukrainian Union of Orthodox Women, and on that occasion he presented some thoughts about the role of women not only in contemporary Russian society but generally. He maintained that while a man's gaze is turned "outward" – he must work and earn money – a woman is always turned "inward", toward where her home and children are.

"If this extremely important function of a woman is destroyed, then everything will be destroyed - both the family and the homeland" ('Patriarkh Kirill' 2013). Today, the Patriarch added, this crucial role is regrettably being threatened by "propaganda and false values" from "a very dangerous phenomenon called feminism". Feminist organizations proclaim a pseudo-freedom for women, a freedom which according to this teaching primarily ought to unfold outside of marriage and the family. "At the centre of feminist ideology is not the family, not the upbringing of children, but another function of women, which is often opposed to family values." With an *ad hominem* attack on feminists, the Patriarch claimed to have observed that the majority of feminist leaders, "probably not by coincidence" are not married ("Patriarkh Kirill" 2013).

Kirill hastened to add that he did not see anything wrong in women making a career, engaging in politics or business life. Indeed, many women are very successful in professions which primarily is a field of action for men, he pointed out. Even with this qualification, however, he will easily be understood as a proponent of a "Kinder, Küche und Kirche"-ideology,

With his statement, the Patriarch also provided legitimacy to even more bombastic views on this issue in the church. Some priests denounce feminism through and through as "contrary to the essence of the Holy Scripture and the Canons of the Church" (see e.g. Kruglik 2020), while others distinguish between various directions within this movement. Many point out that historically, feminism has played an important role in securing women equal rights in

many societies, and claim to reject only what they see as “extreme” feminism (see e.g. Kolomeitsev, and Roshchenia, 2017). But since all the legitimate demands of feminism have already been met in contemporary Russian society, feminism is dismissed as unnecessary at best and in most cases as positively harmful.

One Orthodox polemicist, for instance, argues that feminism does indeed have Christian roots: it is no coincidence that women received the right to vote in Christian countries earlier than elsewhere. But in the 21st century, he claims, feminism has become “a pronounced anti-Christian phenomenon”. Today’s feminists “support the rights of sexual minorities, condemn the institution of the family, and deny childbearing”. All this stems from “an absolutely anti-Christian plan to oppose all women to all men on earth” (Rychkov 2019). Similar views are expressed by the priest Maksim Koskun. While feminism began as a movement for equality with men, the modern version of it often goes to the other extreme, expressing “humiliating and dismissive attitudes towards men”. Aggressive feminism “undermines the traditional family and the foundations of society that are directly related to Christian ideology (Kaskun 2012).

Women who strive at all costs not to be inferior to men, place too heavy a burden on their fragile shoulders, Kaskun warns. There is no shame in knowing your place in the family hierarchy. But modern nonbelieving women often fail to do that, and the result of such “exorbitant pride and self-conceit” is a large number of broken families (Kaskun 2012).

Most of the harshest Orthodox attacks on feminism come from priests, but also some laypeople join the chorus. Writing in the journal “Orthodox Life”, Valentina Novikova maintains that wholesome feminism has outlived itself long ago. Today, it resembles a cult which is aggressively trying to impose on society its ideas of the role and place of the woman in the modern world, and insist on her unconditional right to dispose not only of her own body, but also of the destiny of her offspring. Equal political and social rights for men and

women is a good thing, but at the physical and psycho-emotional levels equality cannot be achieved. The very nature of the sexes determines that certain tasks are easier for men to fulfill, others - for women.

Constructive feminism has almost exhausted itself. It has already gone beyond securing basic freedoms for all women and is now focusing narrowly on asserting the rights of a particular group of people, the LGBT community. This variety of feminism has “a pronounced godless character”. It openly undermines the traditional family and the social foundations that are directly related to the Christian faith, trying to change the order of things as established by the Creator. This is why feminists see the Christian Church as their enemy (Novikova 2019).

It is hardly a coincidence that the strong attacks on feminism as an anti-Christian movement became especially vituperate after the punk group Pussy Riot performed its stunt in Christ the Savior Cathedral in Moscow in February 2012 (Emelianov 2012). Although the group itself has glossed its action as political and directed against the too cosy relations between the secular and spiritual powers in Russia, almost everyone in the church understands it as a deliberate provocation to hurt the feelings of Orthodox believers. Since the group presented itself as feminists, denunciations of the group is extended to feminism in general.

Repercussions of this controversy can be felt in a survey conducted by the journal *Pravoslavnyi Vzgliad (Orthodox View)* among priests and other “experts” (Iuriefev’ia, 2014). Here are some examples of the viewpoints that were expressed: One Orthodox psychologist characterized feminism as “a deep moral and psychological pathology.” The feminist movement originates in Western civilization, and by destroying the traditional roles in the family it aims at destroying the very institution of the family (Mikhail Khas’minskii).

A priest, Dimitrii Nenarokov, offers an original civilizational explanation for the emergence of feminism: it is a consequence of the scientific and technological progress. In contemporary society, men no longer carry weapons in order to fight for the honour of a lovely lady, for their family, etc. As soon as a man stopped carrying weapons, he became a little like a woman, because it is the weapon that characterizes him a man. Moreover, with the scientific and technological progress, women began to occupy the same positions as men, and thereby the distinction between the sexes became blurred. “Men have become effeminate, and therefore women have been forced to take on masculine functions.”

Some of these priests are disarmingly honest in their assessments of feminism. One of them, Sergii Baryshev, admits that women are often smarter than men: they are more educated, more well-mannered, and more delicate, while men are often lazy and aggressive. “But a man must remain a man. In the house, he is the head of the family and is primarily responsible for everything that happens to his family”. Therefore, no matter how smart, well-mannered and educated the wife is, she should know her place, even if the man begins to drink and does not try to achieve anything in life. “A woman in such a situation should show wisdom, stay in the shadows, and show only her face, and her face is her husband”. And then, without any transition, Father Baryshev exclaims: “Feminism like Pussy Riot is an abomination and devilry not worth talking about at all! These are mad, stupid ladies! The West is rotten, it is corrupted. Gay marriages, perversion, pedophilia, which they are trying to impose on us, are legalized there” (Iuriefev’ia 2014).

But there is still room for alternative voices in the church. Writing on a webpage for liberal Orthodox Christians called *Predanie* (Tradition), Vladimir Shallar’ has presented what he calls an “Outline of an Orthodox feminism”. He argues that patriarchy is indeed a pervasive social institution, but it belongs to the world as it is after the Fall of man. The fallen world lies in evil; it is a world of masculine order, dominated by men. The purpose of

salvation is to free humanity from the consequences of the Fall – and therefore from gender inequality as well. Christ saved us, and gave us the opportunity to return to the order in Paradise before the Fall, in other words, to equality. To break out of the order of this world means – among other things – to break the male order.

The oppression of women is built into the system of evil, Shallar' argues. The supremacy of the husband over his wife was the first domination: The establishment of patriarchy introduced power and oppression into the world. The conservatives suspect that the liberation of women will lead to the “feminization” of men, and at the end of the road they will become homosexuals. But feminization, as many sociologists point out, leads to a decrease in violence in society, in other words, a more evangelical society.

‘For what is the ideal of the traditional female behavior? – meekness, peacefulness, chastity, gentleness, etc. But these are precisely the qualities that Christians impute as obligatory for everyone. Christ is on the side of the weak, of the humiliated, and so on – that is, of women too, for they have been humiliated from times immemorial. This is simply what is usually called morality.’ (Shallar', not dated).

Shallar' may possibly be dismissed as a liberal daydreamer, but Sergei Khudiev cannot so easily be overlooked. He is a well-known theologian and writer, the editor of the ‘Faith’ section in the popular Orthodox journal *Foma* (“Thomas”), and a host at the radio program “Christianity: Difficult Questions”. Unlike Shallar, Khudiev accepts that feminism is “basically wrong”, but he argues that one cannot object to feminism by trying to establish medieval relations between the sexes, as some do. He points out that both Marxists and feminists attack religion on the grounds that it is used to justify exploitation and injustice. The appeal of these attacks to many people, he believes, is due to the fact that they are partly true – religion can be used that way. “The strong tend to suppress and exploit the powerless, the rich the poor, and dominant ethnic and social groups oppress the less fortunate. At the same

time, the oppressors often refer to the order established by God (or in a secular version – by nature), as if suppression, exploitation, and disregard for the human dignity of others emanates from outside society” (Khudiev 2016).

The way men – husbands, above all – treat women is marked by grave sin. A sin that the Orthodox justify for themselves with the fact that the Bible undoubtedly sees the family as a hierarchy – “the head of the woman is the man” (1 Cor. 11: 3). And the thesis “I am placed hierarchically as the head” is perceived as “I have a God-given right to suppress and exploit you.”

However, while the world order according to the Bible is indeed hierarchical, the evangelical order is an *inverted hierarchy*. Christ washed the feet of his disciples and the authority of the husband in the family is, in the same way as authority in the Church, similar to the authority of Christ. ”Male dominance in the family is manifested in the fact that the husband imitates the One who alone is Dominus, the Lord. And it consists in washing the wife’s feet and serving her, and at the same time meekly and patiently enduring her shortcomings” (Khudiev 2016).

It is difficult to assess which of the two views on feminism that can be found in the church — rejection or acceptance – is more accepted among ordinary believers, and among women in particular. Circumstantial evidence would suggest that the reactionaries have greater impact, but some young Russians apparently feel free to ignore the preaching they hear in the church if it is not to their liking. A (secular) website for young women (“Wonderzine”) interviewed a group of Orthodox believers about their attitude towards the church and discrimination, inquiring whether it might be possible to be both Orthodox and feminist. While their answers in no way can be regarded as representative, they at the very least document that pro-feminist attitudes on this question at least can be found. Anna

explains that she must agree with the Church on all fundamental theological issues but in private matters (presumably she means moral questions) she is entitled to her own opinion: The only criterion here is her conscience. The Old Testament texts should not be taken literally, and the saints could make mistakes (Savina 2017).

The church is very heterogeneous. Despite a general conservatism, there is room for liberal views. All this allows me to combine religion with feminist perspectives. ... Sometimes religion demands from me what my conscience opposes – in such situations I “solve” the issue “tête-à-tête” with God. That is, I act as I believe is right and get prepared to stand before God at the Last Judgment (I assume that the court hearing there will be completely fair and that my position will be heard out) (Savina 2017).

The real problem, Anna argues, is not so much the church as the prevailing sentiment in society, which is very conservative: Religion is just used as a convenient justification: you can prove almost anything by picking out scattered quotations from the Scripture.

Similar viewpoints is expressed by another girl, Daria. She maintains that feminists are often portrayed as man-haters with fire in their eyes, and Orthodox Christians as militant opponents of abortion and advocates of corporal punishment. As so often is the case with stereotypes, however, they have little root in reality.

Feminism is based on the idea of equality and mutual respect, while Christianity is based on love for one’s neighbour, where is the contradiction? ... The opinion of individual clergymen do not have to reflect mine. They are people, like everyone else, and just like everyone else, they can make mistakes. Nothing of what they say can detract from my personal faith.

Daria is in favour of the legalization of same-sex marriage and does not believe that a wife should obey her husband unquestioningly. But at the same time she identifies herself as an Orthodox Christian (Savina 2017).

The very conservative Orthodox radio station Radonezh surprised its listeners by inviting into the studio a professed Orthodox feminist (“Feministka” 2020). Zhanna Grigor’eva was in charge of the Department of scientific-theological literature in the publishing house of the Moscow patriarchate for 10 years. While she had now become a feminist, she remains a believer and her views on certain issues continue to coincide with those propagated by ‘Radonezh’. In particular, she is adamantly opposed to transgenderism which also Radonezh is strongly against. But feminism also influences her views on how women are treated in the church. She claims that a lot of feminist believers are deeply unhappy about how men and in particular priests behave towards them.

We often hear the priests tell us: “Here, she comes to confession, begins to chatter, she complains about this and that, she only takes up my time.” I’ll tell you how this is experienced by the other side. It happens that a woman comes to confession, and the priest begins to ask her about her intimate life. This is quite common ... the women ask, “Why should we have to answer these questions?” (“Feministka” 2020)¹.

This is a form of harassment which should be prohibited and Zhanna Grigor’eva believes it ought to be possible to complain anonymously about such priests. She tells that she belongs to a large feminist group in which there are many believers who share her views.

¹ In the article, some priests are named.

The patriarchal family – an ideal model or a remnant of the past?

The *Social Concept* does not use the expression “patriarchal family”, but it does quote Ephesians 5, 22-23 which is one of the most popular biblical references for supporters of the idea that the wife shall be subordinated to her husband: “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church.”

The priest Dimitrii Roshchin quotes this passage when he explains that the wife should submit to her husband not because she is an inferior being, humanly speaking, but because the family is a hierarchical institution. Indeed, everything in the world is built on a hierarchy, since the world was created by God hierarchically. “Everything that opposes the hierarchy falls out of the good order of the world. Where there is resistance to the hierarchy, division begins, and pride reigns.”

Father Roshchin is not afraid to draw the consequences of this view, and when he is asked what a wife should do if she knows that she is right regarding some question, and her husband thinks differently, the priest offers “a simple practical advice”:

A wife should not be an advisor to her husband, and it would be wrong of her to insist on her view. If she has a contrary opinion, and it seems to her to be correct, then she has every right to express it – once, very gently and reasonably, and the husband must have patience and understanding in order to listen to this opinion. Having expressed her opinion, the wife should stop there.... because re-expressing your opinion is already a small revolution. Experience shows that this does not lead to anything good. (Roshchin 2020).

We should not believe that such attitudes are expressed only by priests or other men in the Russian church, they can be found also quite often among women, also among educated

women who work as professional family counsellors. Thus, for instance, psychologist Irina Rakhimova who is in charge of a centre called "the Orthodox family", explains that the main prerogative of being the head of the family is to be in charge of decision-making. The head of the family is the leader, followed by all family members. They feel protected by him as behind a stonewall.

Marital roles are spelled out already on the first pages of Holy Scripture: God delegated to the man the function of being the breadwinner by saying to Adam, Rakhimova explains: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread" (Genesis 3:19). According to St. Paul, a woman will be saved through childbirth if she abides in faith and love and in holiness with chastity (1 Tim. 2, 8-15). "These family roles are given to us by God. Violating them means going against God's plan for man and against his nature" (Rakhimova 2018).

When asked what a wife should do when she is more competent in some matters than her husband and he, in her opinion, makes the wrong decision, Rakhimova gives the same answer as father Roshchin: "A man has been given such power by God that in the end his decisions are still correct, even if at first it may seem to the woman that the opposite is true." There can be no happiness in a family where the leader is a woman.

The family in which the main breadwinner and head of the family is a woman will be dysfunctional, and the children will fall victim to this role disorder. They will absorb the model of parenting and reproduce it in their own marriage. If the parents do not understand in time that their hierarchy has been violated, and do not try to restore and change it themselves, they run the risk of creating unhappy futures for their children.

If the parents give their children the traditional-patriarchal concept of marriage, this will be the best guarantee of their happiness. Only by her own example can a mother

instil in her daughter the right attitude towards her husband and teach her feminine behaviour (Rakhimova 2018).

In the liberal press such family advises are often pilloried as attempts to resurrect a societal ideal from the dark Middle Ages, as exemplified by the *Domostroi*, a house manual from the 16th century which contains a collection of rules and instructions in all areas of human life, including family, economic, and religious issues (see e.g. xx). Somewhat unexpectedly, some Orthodox writers are prepared to defend *Domostroi* against criticism. One also maintains that this is an extremely rich document, in which education by beating makes up only a very small part. Moreover, the norms that *Domostroi* advocates are softer than what was customary at time. The book, for example, clearly states that one should not hit anyone on the eyes or ears, or under the heart with a fist, with wooden or iron objects. Punishment should not lead to damage to health. “In other words concentrating the experience of the era, *Domostroi* imposed a taboo on reckless ferocity” (Volodikhin, 2013). It remains an open question to what degree *Foma's* readers would find this explanation reassuring.

In a provisional diocese journal, an Orthodox woman explains that what we can learn from *Domostroi* is that husbands shall educate their wives with love and by setting a good example: the wives shall ask their husbands about everything. They shall please God and their husband, bring their house in order, and submit to their husband in everything. When their husbands discipline them, they shall receive the punishment “with love and fear.” However, the times are changing, and a woman no longer wants to be an unpaid housekeeper and a cook. In addition, modern men are unlikely to want to live according to "*Domostroi*" since it demands from them first and foremost a colossal *responsibility*. In many families, the husband is lying on the couch, and the wife is in command at home.

But aren't we women ourselves to blame for this? We put on men's trousers, chose a male model of conduct, and take upon ourselves male responsibilities, but no one took

off our female responsibilities. Therefore, having achieved emancipation, we increasingly dream of a strong back, behind which we can hide. Maybe we should try to look into Domostroi to find the key to family happiness? (Vladimirova 2012).

Several Orthodox authors explain that since the family is the smallest building brick of society, the entire social fabric and indeed the stability of the state is threatened when the traditional family model comes under attack. Thus, for instance, at a meeting in the Russian Public Chamber in 2017, the head of the patriarchal Department for Relations between the Church and Society, Vladimir Legoida, expressed the view that ‘the traditional family is what allows society to exist fully, in a healthy way. In this sense, a threat to the traditional family is a threat to society.’ (Traditsionnaia, 2017) Simeon (Mazaev), a monk, maintains that to ask “what does the woman want?” is to pose the wrong question. Masculinity is a way of exercising power. The male and the female principles are present in the relation between teacher and student, poet and crowd, the sovereign and the people, God and the human soul. Pursuing this analogy, Simeon claims that a ruler who seriously believes that he must fulfil the will of the people is in error. He behaves like a simpleton who asks his wife: "What do you want, darling?" – not noticing that the sharp edge of this question hits his own chest. Instead, in the "Ruler's Handbook" it should be written: ‘Are you capable of living up to the expectations of the nation?’ Or do you have to make excuses to this disgruntled woman, referring to democratic traditions?" The ruler of the state and the ruler of the family must behave in the same way: make decisions on her behalf without having to consult with her (Simeon 2020). It is remarkable that such misogynist and (semi?)-Fascist views are expressed on an official website of the Moscow patriarchate.

Speaking at the All-Russian Popular Council, Nina Zhukova, co-leader of “the Union of Orthodox women” explained that the Russian family – and thereby also the Russian state – has been undermined from two different quarters, Soviet communism and Western influence.

In the twentieth century, a revolution took place in family relations, and the Soviet matriarchal family was formed. It manifests itself in such norms in contemporary Russian society as the preferential transfer of children to the mother in the event of a family breakdown, and in the women's peremptory "right to dispose of her body," without the involvement of the father – to give birth or kill a conceived child. In addition, since the 1990s, Russia has unnecessarily opened itself up to the Western world, something which has made it possible for the West to actively influence Russian family values.

In Russia, the traditional hierarchy of family ties has been destroyed. The men have ceased to be breadwinners and heads of families, while the women are no longer keepers of the family hearth.

What did we get as a result of the emergence of liberal ideas in 1917, and then in the 1990s? At first, liberalism "freed man" from the authority of the Church, then from the state, and then from all other social affiliations. We got rid of the family, the identifiers "man" and "woman" were abolished. The result, and not only for Europe: LGBT communities and same-sex marriages.

The categories of good and evil, the basis for the traditional model of society, has been abolished. Along with this, the concept of sin has also been removed. The Kingdom of Antichrist, the Babylonian harlot sitting on the back of a beast with seven heads, the New Sodom – all these images are intertwined with the modern symbol of the rainbow-colored White House in the United States (Zhukova 2017).

It would not have been worth the while to cite this somewhat confused apocalyptic message were it not for the fact that the author presented it at the All-Russian People's Council, which is the Russian church's main conduit for bringing its message to the world.

However, there are also other less conservative voices within the church. Some try to uphold the patriarchal model of the family and society but modifying it at the same time. Thus, for instance, Aleksandr Tkachenko acknowledges that the New Testament does indeed speak of the subordinate position of the wife in the family. However, this subordination is very paradoxical and affirms the equality of man and woman rather than deny it, he insists. Tkachenko refers to St. John Chrysostom who compares the relationship between a man and a woman in marriage to the bonds among the persons within the Holy Trinity: "Although the wife is subordinate to us, at the same time she is free and equal to us in honor. So is the Son, who although he obeys the Father, is also God as the Son of God. "

The lordship over the wife which the Bible gives to the husband after the Fall was given not as a reward but as an additional duty: when necessary, the husband must make decisions and bear the responsibility for them, not only for himself, but also for his beloved half. And before God he and she are absolutely equal in honor (Tkachenko 2017).

Writing in the daily newspaper *Vecherniaia Moskva* (Evening Moscow), metropolitan Kliment of Kaluga tries to steer a middle course: he acknowledges that St. Paul addresses first the husbands, making them responsible for the Christian family. At the same time, the bishop emphasizes that "Christianity has radically changed its attitude towards women, affirming gender equality. 'there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus,' writes the Apostle Paul (Gal. 3:28)" In marriage, both husband and wife must relinquish egotism, but how they achieve that, whether on the basis of the husband's patriarchal supremacy or on the basis of mutual consent, is not important. The main thing is that all family members grow in Christ through unity and evangelical love (Kliment, 2019).

Some Orthodox writers go further and leave the position that the patriarchal family can be both good and bad. They attack it as potentially harmful to both husband and wife. Writing on the Orthodox webpage “Orthodoxy and the world” Svetlana Morozova asks whether it is really a Christian duty for a wife to remain in her marriage when her husband is a tyrant. Morozova has often heard that since the institution of the family is established by God, the only thing left for an unhappy wife is to be silent, obey, and endure. “In Orthodox literature, one can find many confirmations of this viewpoint; and from the priests we sometimes hear about the need to humble the wife.”

However, in Morozova’s view, an Orthodox person is not obliged to follow these advices. The most outrageous argument she has heard is that a tyrannical family may be a good thing for a woman: if she endures to the end, she will receive a martyr's crown, following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. However, those who tormented and crucified Christ were not Christians, Morozova points out. “So why should Christians within a family play such a strange game where one person becomes like Christ, and the other, according to this logic, should be her tormentor? Christ did not call His disciples to torment and beat each other, but to love one another (John 13: 34–35)”. Submission to domestic tyranny is a senseless slavery that does not carry any positive meaning and causes a lot of suffering not only to the victim, but also to those who depend on her, including the children. What is remarkable about this article is not so much what Morozova has to say, but that it was necessary to write and publish it at all. Apparently it was.

In another article on the same webpage archpriest Vladimir Puchkov attempts to dispel “stereotypes about the family”. He begins by asking his readers to count how many families they know who follow a classic patriarchal lifestyle. In his experience, patriarchal families

today are “only a few out of thousands”. And, moreover, the few examples we are familiar with are not models of patriarchy, but inept stylizations. If a woman is humble by nature, that is normal, natural and good. But a man who seeks female obedience should be censured: such behaviour reveals insecurity. Only those who are weak and not confident in themselves seek domination.

Women are diverse: Does the wife want to be a housewife? Then give her that opportunity. Does she want to develop professionally – then rejoice with her in her success. Does she strive to be submissive – then respect her humility. Does she want to be an equal partner – then appreciate that (Puchkov 2016).

Male dominance in the family is obvious and undeniable. But it is not about the ability to bang the table with a fist and bark: ‘Because I said so.’ It is about caring and kindness. Not the ability to get the upper hand in any argument and prove your own, but the ability to avoid conflict. In any family, the man is the centre of stability, peace and tranquillity. A woman is unable to take on this role, while a man has no right to refuse it (Puchkov 2016).

Archpriest Puchkov may have succeeded in dispelling certain stereotypes about gender roles in Russia, but in the process, he also reasserted some.

Gender roles seem to be more open to discussion in the Russian Orthodox Church than what is often assumed. Several authors acknowledge that they cannot look for guidance only in the Holy Scripture and the writings of the church fathers, they also have to take into account how society is changing around them. A frequent contributor to the devotional journal *Foma*, Aleksandr Tkachenko, argues that for objective reasons women have entered the social world outside the family and firmly taken her place there. The male monopoly on leadership in society is broken. The women work on an equal footing with the men and no

longer depends on them economically. In and of itself, this is neither good nor bad, it is simply a fact of life.

But for the family this change in the patriarchal paradigm proved to be a serious test. After all, the authority of each of the spouses is based either on the role that they play directly in the family, or on their social significance. Having lost the position as breadwinner, the man is simply unable to maintain his former positions. He has lost leadership in society, but in the family the role of the women remains incomparably more important (Tkachenko 2019).

Being unable to change the situation outside the family, the man follows the path of least resistance: he comes up with a certain scheme of relations that has never existed in history, calls this scheme “patriarchal” and in various ways tries to force the woman to follow it. The essence of the scheme is simple: having ceded leadership in the public sphere to the women, a man begins to claim leadership at home, in the family (Tkachenko 2019). The contemporary so-called patriarchal family, then, is not “traditional” at all, but a recent invention.

Interestingly, some of the liberal voices in the church belong to priests. Father Berezin argues that under modern conditions, the role of the father has changed significantly. “The possibility of a return to the classical family model is becoming increasingly questionable.” A father, in order to remain the head of the family, must learn to create his own authority, since neither tradition nor society can create such authority now (Berezin 2020). Father Alexander Diagilev from St. Petersburg is in charge of the Orthodox counselling centre “Spousal meetings” and also the leader of the St. Petersburg diocese Commission on family, motherhood and children. His message is radically different from much of what emanates from Patriarchate’s Department of family, motherhood and children in Moscow. Diagilev

maintains that “the patriarchal family is a thing of the past”. This is a conclusion that he has reached after having worked with family counselling for eight years. He acknowledges that many men of the church disagree with him but points out that there is room for disagreement in the church on this issue. “There is no official view”. (Volozhanina 2017).

Father Diagilev’s analysis echoes much of what Tkachenko writes. The patriarchal order is not a panacea for an Orthodox family. In the modern world, when women have no less education than men and can earn even more than them, the father and mother in a Christian family are often just “playing a game of being a patriarchal family”. The real tradition has been lost, and with the modern social security and pension system the social preconditions for the family are very different from what they were in the traditional society. In Diagilev’s experience, marriages in such patriarchal families, even when they have many children, often fall apart, especially when the children have grown up (Diagilev 2016).

Nikolai Domuschi, a parish priest from Voronezh, believes that the patriarchal family model has a right to exist and can survive for thousands of years to come. However, one cannot ignore that the times have changed, and patriarchy is essentially a relic of bygone days. Luckily, there are many alternatives. They can be denied, but objectively they exist.

Among my friends, good Christians, there are wonderful families, happy, successful ones. In some, the husband is the sole breadwinner, but there are also those where the wife earns more, and the husband can pay more attention to children and home. And there are those where the entire [work load in the family] is divided equally. They don't think about this at all. They need neither Domostroi nor a family

psychologists. Each of them is happy, making others happy. If a family can come to this, it has become Christian (Domuschi, not dated).

Some conclusions

As argued by one Orthodox journalist in “Orthodoxy and the world”, the family has become a theological and philosophical problem of first order for modern Christianity. If earlier Christians argued about the correct exegesis of the word of God, “now the divisions among Christians take place on issues of gender and family” (Roshchenia 2017). Today, Christians find themselves in a situation of strange and frightening freedom, which affects not only questions of spiritual life, but also basic concepts: what is a family? What does it mean to be husband and wife? What is a parental relationship?

Which of the two views on the ideal family identified in this paper predominates among Orthodox believers in Russia today? I am in charge of a large international research project on “traditional values” as legitimation strategy in the Putin regime in which we will also carry out a large-N survey that can provide some answers. While we wait for the results of that survey we can take a look at the findings of a Russian researcher from Krasnoiarisk who carried out a survey on family values in 2009-2010 in her home region. Nadezhda Shibanova describes the “Christian view” of the family as a family in which the husband is the “undisputed authority”, while she adds that relations between the spouses should not be “authoritarian”. Shibanova herself believes that this model has much to commend itself: “Its main advantage is that it clearly delineates the spiritual and everyday responsibilities of the spouses, prevents a ‘power struggle’ in the family, and, coupled with trust in relationships, provides emotional warmth and mutual support” (Shibanova 2011, 204). She found that 60% to 80% of all marriages in her sample were “egalitarian” with equal rights for the wife and an

absence of clearly defined dominance in the family. Among active Orthodox married youth, however, attitudes were different: 60% were in favour of male dominance, while only 34% supported equal rights for the spouses. Among older Orthodox respondents, those who had been married for 10 years or longer, she found that only 33% believed that the father should be the head of the family. 12% ticked off for “the wife”, while 47% chose “equal rights.”

These findings were in her view quite remarkable, as not a single respondent among the youth had pointed to the wife as the natural head of the family. Her explanation for this discrepancy was that the youth perceived the question about family relations normatively, how it “ought to be”, while the older generations described how family relations actually functioned. Summing up her findings, she concluded that “in practice, active believers more than other citizens are oriented toward a traditional distribution of obligations for men and women in the family, but at the same time they demonstrate a rather high degree of flexibility and democratic attitudes”. (Shibanova 2011, 205).

E. B. Mezentseva (Mezentseva 2007) has examined gender stereotypes among Orthodox believers by analyzing texts posted on the discussion website “Andrei Kuraev’s Forum”.

She found that patriarchal ideas were more frequent among “the stronger sex,” while among the women, adherents of a patriarchal worldview were in a minority. Harsh misogynistic positions were relatively rare, such statements were also expressed on the Forum, but they were not much more widespread than elsewhere in Russian society.

Attitudes of the Orthodox contributors to the forum differed significantly from what was posted by non-Orthodox participants only on those issues on which there are strict doctrinal rules for the Orthodox to follow. On issues where there are no such restrictions, or they are not expressed by the Church in an explicit form, the views of Orthodox participants usually coincided with the positions of atheists and followers of other faiths. Although the official Russian Orthodox Church positions itself as a conservative religion, Mezentseva believed she

could observe a certain “erosion” of a number of moral postulates, including some that until recently had been regarded as obligatory, if they did not fit well with modernity. The clearest

Local researchers-cum-activists often express strong normative positions on moral issues in the spirit of conservative Orthodoxy, particularly in the regions. Thus, for instance, in 2017 a teacher at the Shuia campus of the Ivanova State University published an article on “The contribution of Orthodox culture to the renaissance of spiritual-moral values of a traditional Russian family”. She explains that the birth of a traditional Russian family originates in Orthodoxy. The marriage union of a man and a woman was established by the Creator Himself. “In a healthy Christian family, there is one father and one mother, who together represent the one - ruling and organizing - authority in family life. In this natural form of authoritative power, the child becomes convinced for the first time that power saturated with love is a benevolent force and that order in social life presupposes the existence of such power” The husband is recognized as the sole head of the family: “The domination of the husband over the wife is natural. The husband is older than his wife by creation ... ”. The duties of a husband in a Christian family is to be the spiritual head of the family, its supporter and protector, to take responsibility for the fate of the family, wife and children, to selflessly love his wife and children, and if necessary, to give his life for them (Dzhishkariani 2017).

The duty of a wife in Orthodoxy is, first of all, to be number two in the family, to be obedient to her husband. “The wife should be chaste and morally pure. She was betrothed to her husband in order to be together with him, giving birth to children, help her husband, and take care of the house” (Dzhishkariani 2017).

In Yamala in the high North a teacher explains that a certain hierarchy is the key to a harmonious development of the family. “In the [Orthodox] family hierarchy, each member has its place. ... The best way to bring forth an egoist is to distort the family hierarchy. Only in the family does a child go through a school of obedience and care, in contrast to the

public education in a kindergarten, where he goes through a school of equality” (Sokolova 2014). The public “school of equality” Sokolova regards as pernicious.

As a result of their upbringing, teenagers from Orthodox families will less than other adolescents be characterized by aggression, irritability, and negativism while they will have a higher tendency to self-blame (*samoobvinienie*). Sokolova interprets this as a strong desire to live up to an ideal perception of how they ought to behave. “Thus, the functions of a family, which is moulded by Orthodox doctrine and psychology, are in a state of conformity and consistency [*sootvetstvie i neprotivorechie*]. This is why more and more contemporary families are striving to join Orthodoxy.” (Sokolova 2014).

These local authors from provincial institutions cannot be regarded as authoritative voices in the church, but we may perhaps still be allowed to see their views as symptomatic of a certain tendency. Importantly, neither of them represent the church as such; both articles are presented as contributions to secular, educational sciences but they present the hegemony of Orthodoxy in contemporary Russian culture as a given fact. In this way, they indicate that Orthodoxy with an uppercase O is becoming the new orthodoxy, with a lowercase o.

The stress on hierarchy and authority permeates this new Orthodox orthodoxy. We recall Irina Rakhimova’s view, as described above, that if the mother is not obedient to the father, the children will learn that it is possible to rebel and will develop an antiauthoritarian personality. So, what seems to be at stake in the dispute between the patriarchal and egalitarian ideals of family relations in Russian Orthodox ethics, then, is two different normative anthropologies: the autonomous versus the heteronomous personality: according to the first view, patriarchy is good because it teaches people to be obedient, in the second, as expressed by Nikolai Domuschi, the parish priest from Voronezh, the value of egalitarian family relations is that they make people “happy”.

If we then see this in connection with Orthodox views on church-state relations, then we can perhaps better understand what is behind monk Simeon's claim that the nation should be treated by the Sovereign in the same way as the man treats the woman in a marriage: with total dominance. We may also recall that Nina Zhukova from the rostrum of the All-Russian People's Congress warned that the destruction of the traditional family represents a threat to "the state". Also the Patriarch as we saw has expressed the view that if the traditional view on the role of the woman is undermined, "everything will be destroyed – both the family and *the homeland*" (emphasis added).

They are probably right, if we by "the state" understand a strong and authoritarian institution, which demands submission rather than participation. A family institution and a system of education in society geared towards creating heteronomous individuals will naturally contribute to this kind of state-building. On the other hand, family structures that produce independently-thinking, autonomous individuals, may also be building bricks for a state, but of a different kind, one which encourages active participation, and perhaps even opposition and criticism towards the powers that be. These are topics, which I hope to be able to pursue in further research.

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