

6-1992

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Recommended Citation

Naumov, Nikolay A. (1992) "Religion and Philosophy in the Soviet Union: The Problem of Outlook Communication in a Pluralistic Society," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 12 : Iss. 3 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol12/iss3/3>

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RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY IN THE SOVIET UNION
The Problem of Outlook Communication in a Pluralistic Society

by **Nikolay A. Naumov**

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Without going into details about the term "pluralism," we can definitely say that in regard to East European social structures, this term nowadays expresses the overcoming of totalitarianism in all spheres of life, not only in economy or politics but in the spiritual culture as well. Totalitarianism in the spiritual sphere of life in the Soviet Union was manifested in the official Communist ideology by a prevailing "scientific materialist outlook." Propagation and excessive apologia of this ideology was one of the functions of the state-administrative bodies, which suppressed any different trends of thought as the expression of political disloyalty to Soviet power and socialist society.

The acknowledgement of another kind of world outlook-- religion, side by side with the official ideology was a specific feature of Soviet totalitarianism. Manifesting its tolerance of church-religions associations activities in the USSR, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union directed the energies of its ideological institutions, propagandists, "scientific atheist" lecturers into an active struggle against a religions outlook.

Since Lenin's days, atheism has been defined as "fighting" uncompromisingly, "militantly." In fact, the ruling Communist Party made atheism its state policy; though, according to Constitution of the USSR, full and free execution of liberty of conscience principle was proclaimed. The policy of religious discrimination persisted for years, and many other antihuman after-effects have led to dogmatization, stagnation, and even to the decline of religious thinking in the country and its influence in spiritual culture.

Stagnation in the spiritual sphere was caused by this sway of "scientific materialism," and the atheistic outlook influenced religion as well. Such an outlook had much in common with the totalitarian social order and at the same time was its theoretical base.

The attitude of officially acknowledged Marxist philosophy towards religious ideology and theology was determined by the stereotype in the attitude of Marxist philosophers to bourgeois philosophy, which was oversimplified by most of them. This attitude brought about an uncompromising struggle against such philosophy, as it was regarded idealistic, antidialectical, and antiscientific in its essence and bourgeois-apologetic in its social role. Most papers were usually begun and finished by the invitations to unmask the political and theoretical reactionary nature. Criticism and exposure was the only possible attitude toward the fruit of bourgeois thinking.

The absence of revitalizing impulses in the Soviet philosophy in recent years and the ban on the search for constructive forms of dialogue with the trends that were characterized as ideologically harmful to the progress of society and culture have led to a decline in philosophy. So, in addition to decline in the prospects for the development of religious and theological thinking and its contacts with "secular"spheres of spiritual culture, a decline in philosophy also resulted as philosophers had to proclaim their antireligious and atheistic orientation.

The development of socio-economic and political situation in the Soviet Union towards the overcoming of totalitarianism and towards pluralism in the ideological and cultural outlook has now considerably changed the place of religion as one of the elements of the society's spiritual life. The growth of national self-consciousness, the increase of interest in national history, the understanding of the role of culture in the reconstruction of social life, the critical re-evaluation of socio-political and historical-cultural ideas of "bolshevism" and its theoretical sources, Marxism-Leninism, contributed to this process.

The weakening of official ideology and the pressures and providing free access of the opponents of orthodox "scientific atheism" and allowing religions figures to have access to mass media have led to emergence of some new materials in scientific papers and mass media. These materials contain true evaluations of religion and its role in the development of spiritual culture, its influence on social order, on forming and keeping of human values, national spirit, moral upbringing of younger generation, etc.

Changes in the spiritual climate concerning the existence of religion in the system of culture influence the process of theoretical comprehension of religion as a phenomenon of world outlook. Theoretical premises for a new envisionment of religion in philosophy and science are being formed against the background of the crisis of a scientifically oriented Soviet philosophy under conditions of aggravated global problems, caused by the costs of the scientific and technical progress of civilization. The understanding of the contradictions of

the development of science, caused by its one-sidedness, leads to a new perception of the development of science as a social institution. The aim of scientific activities must be changed; optimum existence of the human being in the "man-nature" system must become its main purpose.

Progress in elaboration of the problem of humanitarian value of scientific cognition is connected with the changes and correction of the evaluations of outlook in respect to the considerable improvement in the situation in the world. It may be described as "renewal in world outlook," a world outlook re-valuation.¹ Understanding of the fact that a great number of various outlooks have taken root becomes the starting point of such transformation. Their interrelation does not bring to suppression of one kind of world outlook by another, supposedly more perfect, progressive, etc. As it turns out, "philosophy of priority," monopolism in direction to some definite spiritual values and conceptual structures do not correspond to the tendencies of human spiritual development. Democracy in social relations presupposes the absence of conditions for absolute monopoly on truth, complete supremacy of some values over other. K. M. Kantor considers that a democratic society does not need only one ideology. He wrote that human need in metaphysical self-determination is unavoidable, but if it is satisfied without pressing and not gregariously, there appears a number of outlooks, and each of them is formed by free choice of an individual.²

In a pluralistic society outlook unities are interrelated, interinfluenced, interconnected. The reality of long-lasting outlook pluralism is urgent for spiritual progress of humankind and for the survival of civilization as well. This pluralism must be characterized by dynamism and integrity. Free choice of value orientation nowadays determines a reflective attitude towards acknowledged stereotypes of various kinds of outlook. There exists quite a large number of urgent global problems, connected with the shortages of energy, raw materials, the danger of nuclear, chemical, and biological war, threat of ecological crisis, overpopulation of the planet, hunger, deterioration of the gene pool, and other factors. The necessity of solving these problems demands mobility of aims and orientations, of ability and readiness for the remaking of outlook. That cannot be combined with the former primitive mythologization and ontologization of collective ideas. As for the integrity, the existing variety of outlooks (in the Soviet Union this variety is only beginning to form at the level of social consciousness) is not a fundamental unity, and the appearance of this new

¹Zotov, A. F., "Outlook at the Turn of the Millennium," Voprosy Filozofii, 1989, No 9, p. 15.

²Kantor, K. M., "Two Projects of Universal History," Voprosy Filozofii, 1990, No 2, p. 78.

"feature will be a mutation of outlook."³ It is obvious, that we do not mean any new universal doctrine, all-embracing conception of outlook, no matter whether it is an integrating world religion or some cosmic metaphilosophy. The essence of the problem lies in the progress to understanding of the fundamental principle of dialectic synthesis, opposed to instability of cultural and moral values caused by their isolating and even collision. It brings to the situation, characterized by Isaiah Berlin when "even principal manifestations of the good sometimes can not get on together."⁴ Theoretical thinking only begins approaching this understanding. This sphere of the search can be described as a "philosophy of outlooks."⁵

Greater attention of social thought to the problems of integrity of spiritual culture, its taking root in various spheres of human activities in mastering of the world is taking place in recent years. This process becomes one of the factors that causes this tendency in philosophic research. Variety of cultural forms, manifested as an indivisible complex is the main point of integral vision of culture. The integrity of culture justifies all its elements. Without this integrity of the culture phenomenon would fall into autonomous fields of science, art, myth, religion, etc.

A rather fruitful approach to culture as to a specific kind of communication, connections between various cultural orientations is essential for comprehension of this integrity of the cosmos of culture. In this connection (the idea of "transduction," the idea of interfundamentation and intertransmission in the logics of culture) arouses interest. It is being developed by a Soviet philosopher, V. S. Bibler. His latest work concerns the new philosophical reflection based on dialogical transduction of reason of culture.⁶

One of the aspects of the problem of communication between outlooks in the context of universal comprehension of culture is the problem of interrelations of the leading trends and teachings in modern philosophy, the possibility of their substantial interaction within the frames of the integral self-consciousness of the epoch. Soviet philosophers pay much attention to the subject of interpretation, synthesis or at least of new mutual understanding of trends in the most popular Western philosophical thought such as linguistic philosophy, phenomenology, and hermeneutics. There is also great need in the new comprehension of spiritual sources of Marxism, the influence of various theoretical trends of the past and present on its development. K. M. Kantor writes: "Marxism defined itself not only by its

³Zotov, op.cit., p. 15.

⁴Berlin, I., "Danger of Illusions". Literaturnaya Gazeta, 28 February, 1990.

⁵Smart, N. "The Philosophy of Worldviews: The Philosophy of Religion Transformed." in Smart N. Concept and Empathy: Essays in the Study of Religion. (London, 1986), p. 85.

⁶Bibler, B. S., From studies to the logic of culture: Two philosophical introductions to the XXI century, (Moscow, 1990), p. 38.

attitude towards philosophy, political economy, utopian socialism, but towards Christianity as well, and mainly to it."⁷

The process of recomprehension of the nature and direction of philosophical-methodological and historical-philosophical analysis of scientific problems is taking place in various aspect of the changing situation in outlook, in the search of theoretical means of appropriation in the frame of various philosophical trends. The thesis that science as a kind of intellectual creative activity is integrated in the general context of human activity is being acknowledged in philosophical theoretical conscience. That is why it has a cultural-ideological base which feeds conceptual structures. The attitude toward science from the perspective of an "ecology of culture" in its diachronical and synchronical aspects is becoming more and more urgent for philosophical thinking nowadays.

Soviet philosophers analyzing the problems of scientific cognition in a wide socio-cultural context of creation and development of science are reaching the new level of research of the interrelation of scientific and religions conscience. They have to overcome nihilistic purposes and stereotypes against the role of religion in the development of culture and spiritual progress. Thus, analyzing the change from the ancient understanding of the cognitive process as contemplation of an object by a passive subject to the modern ideas of the active constructing of an object by the subject, P. P. Gaydenko writes: "How and why did this radical upending happen? Perhaps, it was being prepared for a long time and Christian teaching about nature created by God out of nothing and about man as an active volitional subject of action has performed an important role in it."⁸ The estimation of the role of Christian ideas in the development of the scientific revolution is being considerably changed: "It is impossible to imagine the scientific revolution, which gave birth to a new epoch in the development of science without those accumulations, that were given by medieval science, as well as without those changes in understanding of man and space, brought in by Christianity (both these items are closely connected with each other)."⁹ As for the recognition of the influence of religious-theological conceptions on the precesses that are taking place in science today, for instance, L. N. Mitrokhin believes that religions and theological thought as parts of socio-humanitarian culture fix subjects of the new scientific perspectives, the non-trivial programs of research, on the whole accumulate real knowledge,

⁷Kantor, K. M. "Two projects of universal history," Voprosy Filozofii, 1990, No. 2, p. 78.

⁸Gaidenko, P. P., Evolution of the conception science, (Moscow: 1980), p. 427.

⁹Kosareva, L. M., Socio-cultural genesis of science of the new time.: The Philosophical aspect of the problem. (Moscow: 1989), p. 51.

that can enrich our understanding of life of an individual as well as of global social processes.¹⁰

There is also quite a large number of examples of a rather objective approach to the estimation of religion as a socio-cultural phenomenon. Of importance is not only adequate reflection of the real role of religions ideas in the development of scientific conceptions but also the intention of changing the paradigm of research of religions phenomenon as a whole. The paradigm was based on Marx and Lenin's ideas about the social and gnoseological nature of religion as a reactionary and illusory outlook. Investigations of Soviet philosophers of the role and place of religion in the process of formation and evolution of science and culture need their further development, a new search of approaches, emancipation from ideological stereotypes and restrictions. There is no special device that deals with the history and philosophy of religion at the Institute of Philosophy in Academy of Sciences of the USSR, the leading center of philosophical research. It was caused by the ideologization of the problems connected with religion and theology in recent years. The absence of academic institutions dealing with this problem had brought about the situation when competent and profound research of these problems was carried out by a small number of people. There was no coordination, no effective system of scientific communications. The arrangement of scientific research in the Soviet Union is being changed in the course of democratization of Soviet society. There is a hope that it will bring greater freedom of creative work of scientists, destroy strict discipline borders between them, and bring birth to new educational and scientific establishments dealing with religions-theological and philosophical problems. The lack of sources of financing humanitarian projects is the main obstacle.

The revival of philosophical thinking, active investigation of religion as a socio-cultural factor, and intensification of theologians' attention to the problems of spiritual culture in our country will contribute to the dialogue of religion and philosophy. Then the situation, reflected in papers which try to evaluate the contacts between Marxists and Christians, will improve. Really, a new society will have a new philosophy. But I do not know the answer that theology will give to this developments in the field of philosophical ideas.

¹⁰Mitrokhin, L. N. "Professionalism is effective: Philosophy and life," Materials of conference of the Philosophical Society. Voprosy Filozofii, 1987, No. 12, p. 51.