

**COMMUNICATING CHRISTIAN
“GOOD LIFE” VALUES
IN A SECULAR PUBLIC SPHERE**

**РАСПРОСТРАНЕНИЕ
ХРИСТИАНСКИХ ЦЕННОСТЕЙ
ПРАВЕДНОЙ ЖИЗНИ В СЕКУЛЯРНОЙ
ПУБЛИЧНОЙ СФЕРЕ**

*Victor M. Khroul, PhD, Associate Professor,
Chair of Sociology of Mass Communications,
Faculty of Journalism, Lomonosov Moscow State University,
Moscow, Russia
amen@mail.ru*

*Виктор Михайлович Хруль, кандидат филологических наук, доцент,
кафедра социологии массовых коммуникаций,
факультет журналистики МГУ имени М. В. Ломоносова,
Москва, Россия
amen@mail.ru*

The Christian concept of the “good life” is well-articulated in the documents of various Christian denominations, but, despite of its accessibility, this idea has a low profile in public opinion and in everyday life of Russians. Based on original empirical surveys and a secondary analysis of sociological data the paper examines the problematic mediatization of the concept of the Christian “good life” in Russia and finds dysfunctions and systematic errors of the process. Communicating Christian concept of the “good life” in Russian secular public sphere encounters three main challenges located in: 1) articulation – lack of content production; 2) communication – lack of channels to translate

and 3) interpretation – lack of understanding. Beginning with the analysis of the audience this paper examines various anonymous texts of Russian internet users according to their religiosity, religious identity and attitudes towards God, Orthodox Christianity and the Russian Orthodox Church as an institution. The author proposes a normative model of interactions between media and religion based on the principles of transparency and availability of well-articulated religious values. The model criteria may also be considered as a check-list for empirical evaluation of the mediatization of religious values.

Key words: *Christian values; public sphere; mass self-communication; spontaneous texts; journalism; mediatization of religion; Russian Orthodox Church; dialogue.*

Христианское учение о добродетельной жизни четко сформулировано в открытых документах различных христианских конфессий, но, несмотря на доступность, христианская система ценностей слабо представлена в российском общественном мнении и в повседневной жизни. На основе эмпирических исследований и вторичного анализа социологических данных в статье рассматриваются проблемы медиатизации христианских ценностей, которая в российской публичной сфере сталкивается с тремя основными вызовами: 1) артикуляции ценностно-нормативных структур (производство контента); 2) коммуникации (каналы и коммутация) и 3) интерпретация (конфликт кодов и форматов). Анализируя отношения к Богу, христианским ценностям и Русской Православной Церкви в спонтанных текстах российских пользователей сети Интернет, автор предлагает нормативную модель взаимодействия религиозных организаций со СМИ, основанную на принципах прозрач-

ности и доступности четко сформулированных религиозных ценностей. Предложенные критерии можно рассматривать в качестве «контрольного списка» для эмпирической оценки медиатизации религиозных ценностей.

Ключевые слова: христианские ценности; публичная сфера; массовая коммуникация; спонтанные тексты; журналистика; СМИ; медиатизация религии; Русская Православная Церковь; диалог.

The Christian concept of the “good life” is well-articulated in the documents of different Christian denominations (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1992; Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 2004; “The Basis of the Social Concept” of Russian Orthodox Church, 2000). It contains prescriptions regarding personal and family life, labor, health, property, as well as nation, state, law, international relations, politics, globalization, war and peace, crime, punishment, ecology and bioethics, science, culture, education, public morality, mass media, and other issues.

However, despite its availability, the Christian concept of the “good life” is not well known and not implemented in everyday life by Russians (Levada Center, 2014). According to public opinion polls, the level of awareness of how to live according to Christian commandments is still low in comparison to Western countries (Furman, Kirijajnen, 2006).

The contradiction between the availability and awareness of the Christian “good life” raises a number of questions about the reasons, obstacles, and communicative filters for its implementation. The answers to these questions are located in the *modus operandi* of two actors the journalists and the audience – and the *locus* of their interactions, which traditionally is deemed the public sphere.

Despite religion is still being described in terms of global “resurgence” (Toft, Philpott, Shah, 2011) and the widening presence of religion in the public sphere questioning the theory of secularization (Casanova, 1994), religious doctrinal texts transmitted and actualized by religious media play more and more marginal role in the forming of what scholars call “public religion” (Lovheim, 2014). Therefore “public religion” (what people truly believe in and consider to be sacred) differs greatly from dogmatic, theologically accepted religion. Such a phenomenon has been empirically described in Russia (Furman, Kaariajnen, 2006) and is still a key argument for understanding the nature of the Christian values’ transformation in a secular public sphere.

We assume that this corruption is caused by the secular media effect, but this process is not evident and transparent. Secular media are not just channels for the transmission of religious doctrines; they form sacred spaces for the exchanges of meaning, identities, and social relationships (Lynch, 2012). Moreover, media coverage of religious life and values dominates in the public sphere and provokes criticism towards institutional religion while strengthening individualized and eclectic, bricolage forms of religion (Hjarvard, 2012).

In the Russian context, the Christian concept of the “good life” faces 1) ignorance of media practitioners towards ethics and social accountability, 2) a normatively disoriented audience with a low level of media literacy and religious practice, and 3) predominant problems in social dialogue processing within the secular public sphere.

Beginning with the analysis of the audience, this paper examines communication in the public sphere, discovering the shortcomings in journalistic coverage of religious life and proposes a normative model of interactions between the media and religion based on the principles of transparency and availability of well-articulated religious values in a public sphere.

Audience: post-atheism trauma

The approach to attributing religious identity and discovering religious values in mass consciousness has always been a challenge for researchers – both in Russia and abroad. Scholars have suggested many criteria to assign subjects to a particular religious group because of certain empirically observable indicators (Media, Ritual and Identity, 1998; Taylor, 1989; Sinelina, 2001; Kloch, 2011; Campbell, 2013).

Different approaches to this classification often give contradictory results. The most natural approach is based on *self-identification data*. It works well in Western countries but fails in Russia. Approximately 60 to 80 % of Russian population claim to be Orthodox Christians. Radically different results are obtained by estimating the number of *observant followers* of every religion, because members of many ethnic groups often choose to self-identify as adherents to a certain religion for cultural reasons, although they would not fit any traditional religiousness criteria (church attendance, familiarity with basic dogmas of their faith). For example, even though 80% of ethnic Russians self-identify as Russian Orthodox, less than 10% of them attend church services more than once a month and only 2-4% are considered to be integrated into church life.

According to three sociological indicators of religiosity analyzed by Levada Center, the level of practicing (taking part in liturgical life), observing of God's commandments (i.e. do not kill) and Church commandments (i.e. to observe Lent), the Russian population is far from maintaining an Orthodox Christian identity (*Tables 1, 2 and 3*).

Table 1

Have you celebrated Easter and if so, what did you do during Easter time?
(In % of all respondents)

Painted eggs	73
Bought paschal cakes	50
Baked paschal cakes	24
Visited relatives/friends	24
Visited cemeteries	23
Received guests	22
Went to the Church to bless cakes	21
Cooked paschal food	11
Made gifts to relatives/friends	9
Attended Easter liturgy	6
Other	2
Did not celebrated Easter	9

Source: Levada, Center, 25-28 April 2014 (Levada 2014)

Table 2

Do you agree that abortion is a legal killing?
(In % of all respondents)

definitely yes	10
rather yes	18
rather no	35
definitely no	16
Difficult to answer	20

Source: Levada Center, 15-18 November 2013 (Levada, 2013)

Table 3

Did you observe Lent?
(In % of all respondents)

No	70
Partly	25
Fully	3
No answer	2

Source: Levada Center, 25-28 April 2014 (Levada, 2014)

According to the Levada Center's longitude research, religious identity for Russians is still much less substantial in comparison with ethnic identity. Responses to the question "Who do you perceive yourself with pride and – with respect?" demonstrate that during the period from 1989 to 2008 the share of respondents who chose "I am Russian" rose from 43% to 50%, while those who chose the option "I am a believer" increased from 4% to 15%.

Sociologist D. Furman suggested in his research that the increase in ideological uncertainty and eclecticism with beliefs in reincarnation and astrology, ufology, energy vampires, witches, shamans and so on, rather than traditional religion demonstrates religion is not dominating atheism in Russia, rather atheism is overtaking religion (Furman, Kaarijainen, 2006).

The nation's confidence in the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) may be also considered as a marker of Russian religiosity. The greatest degree of confidence in the Church is expressed by the inhabitants of small towns and villages (about 50%), while among the residents of Moscow and St. Petersburg only 31% said that "the Church is quite credible". Highly educated and older people gave greatest amount of negative responses while the villages and

towns expressed the greatest number of positive attitudes toward the Church (Gudkov, 2012: 35).

Public sphere: attitudes towards God in mass self-communication

Underscoring the public opinion formation function, Jurgen Habermas mentioned the conditions of the public sphere as 1) open access to all citizens; 2) unrestricted discussions about matters of general interest, implying freedom from economic and political control (based on the freedom of assembly, the freedom of association, and the freedom to expression and publication of opinions); and 3) debate over the general rules governing relations (Habermas, 1989: 136).

Russian society and Russian media hardly fit into the criteria described above (Obshhestvennoe mnenie, 2013), therefore the engagement in public debate requires the active participation in Internet communication – uncensored, with much more lenient regulations in terms of gatekeeping and agenda-setting.

Not only public opinion polls, but also spontaneous texts of mass self-communication may become a source of valid knowledge about audience attitudes towards religion. Mass self-communication (Castells, 2007: 238) is becoming an increasingly promising subject of mass consciousness studies particularly of general and religious values. But at the moment the prosperity of “big data” research methodologies and techniques still has not provided academia with valid methods opinion surveys representing the public based on the analysis of texts of self-expression.

From a sociological perspective, texts of web discussions may be considered as “spontaneous responses to a big open-ended

question” and therefore allow more exploration of a subtle and detailed picture of Russian mentality and spirituality than can be obtained by representative public opinion polls (Anikina, Khroul, 2011).

German scholar Oliver Krüger highlights the promising perspectives of Internet based research: “Religious Internet research is just beginning and some of these questions have provoked initial answers – but most of the questions have stimulated even more issues with regard to substantial and methodological demands. The social aspects and consequences of religious Internet use, particularly, still have to be considered in further research. Immanent Internet research offers many new perspectives for religious studies. While traditional media like books, magazines, and television enable us to see only the supplier and the supplies on the *religious market*, the Internet – as an *interactive* medium – now makes it possible to be aware of the consumer’s perspective as well”. (Krüger, 2005: 1). Krüger suggests that despite of the Internet enabling us to trace many instances of “invisible religion,” the empirical field of research possesses some new methodological challenges that must not be ignored.

In order to receive a more detailed description of the religious beliefs and identity of Russian Internet users, we analyzed visitors’ texts on the *lovehate.ru* website, which is one of the most well-known places for spontaneous self-expression and discussions. As of August 10th, 2014, the site had 249,812 registered users (125,556 men and 124,256 women) who expressed their attitude about 76482 subjects with the total number of messages exceeding one million (1,000,352). The discussion topic “I love / I hate God” is one of the largest on *lovehate.ru*. We conducted an analysis of the semantics and structure of all 1,715 posts on that topic (“I love” = 1039, “I hate” = 676).

There are several hundred Orthodox groups on *Vkontakte.ru* (the largest group, *Pravoslavie*, is comprised of more than 70 000 users) and *Facebook.com*, demonstrating some orthodox media sites interact with the most popular social networks. Mostly all the groups and pages are those of believers and priests. They usually have some discussions, calendar, and useful articles. These groups recruit Orthodox or pro-Orthodox members and therefore cannot represent average users in comparison to *lovehate.ru* and other neutral websites.

The procedural “framework” for statements about God, which is set by the administrator, *lovehate.ru*, for all themes, is sharply polarized: I love / I hate. This division caused a certain confusion: “I write this column, not because I hate God, but because there is no neutral option”; “In my opinion, you can not just say I like God or not”. For example, in the “positive” column “I love God,” one of the users published the following messages: “I do not believe in God do not believe in the devil... I am my own god and the devil”; “I think so: one day you will understand that it is absolutely not necessary to believe in God”.

Several specific features of Russian Internet users’ relationships with God have been found after processing the data.

1. A relationship with God is described mostly in a personal and group (family) context, not the context of the public sphere.

The space of the relations between users and God is characterized by an evident shift towards personal space (40.7%) and small groups (family and friends – 27.8%), while society as a whole is mentioned in 13.8% of posts and global space is discussed in 23.4% of the users’ messages (total sum exceeds 100% because there are several levels in some posts).

This situation seems to be quite logical if we take into account the proportion of interpersonal communication in the religious

sphere. Meanwhile, a high percentage of the universal level can be explained by the allocation of respondents to various world religions, as well as the consideration of God as the creator of the world.

Many submissions emphasized the personal aspect of a relationship with God, and for some authors, religious dogmas are secondary in relation to the feeling, “Religion – this is what a person feels within himself”; “God is yourself, you can manage own destiny by yourself”; “God is not necessary to impose, God is personal to everyone”; “He is always with me, with my friends and relatives!”

In principle, the proportion of private, public and individual, and global aspects found in the texts on the target site can be assumed to reflect the proportion of the mass consciousness of Russians, but this assertion needs further verification using other methods (for example, opinion polls).

2. In spontaneous texts describing a relationship with God, Internet users mostly refer to their own experience (59.5%) and the experience of other people (16.4%), not on faith (10.6%), authority (6.1%), or tradition (3.1%).

Here are examples of a generalized theoretical understanding of personal experience: “Just can not live without faith, I can not believe in nothing”; “I communicate with God without intermediaries”; “I believe in God. Only a few in his own way, no incense and candles. Just he and I are good friends.”

Some posts represented concrete evidence of site visitors on the intervention of God in their personal experience: “I am not religious, and not from such a family. Just noticed a strange phenomenon – I feel bad and want to help. And then I come to the old icon and pray. And intervene unearthly powers! Helps for 6 day of my period is no easy exams!”

As a working hypothesis, we assumed that faith and tradition (“the holy Orthodox Russia – ‘Sviataya Rus’”) will be the dominant way to justify the relationship to God. However, this hypothesis has not been supported by data, since faith is referred only 10%. Orthodox Christianity is mentioned very rarely and mostly in a neutral or negative way: “I’m not sentenced to Christianity. I just believe”. Broken tradition is an essential obstacle for the transmitting and promotion of Christian “good life” model.

3. *The arguments in the text are based mainly on emotions and feelings (61.6%), much less on logical arguments (34.1%).*

Sometimes feelings are not specified, but simply described as existing (“God exists. Cause I can feel his presence”), and sometimes they are referred to as feelings (“I do not love God, I’m afraid of him”). Some users try to equate God with the mind (“This is the highest cosmic intelligence of the universe, without which there would be no life on Earth”), or to perceive its presence in all the surrounding world (“If he – all, how can you not love him and ignore him”) as well as to emphasize the rational principle in God (“The proof of the existence of God can be built on an empirical basis”, “There’s pure logic. And it’s pretty logical painted”). The opposite side is a uniquely configured and expresses itself in a less nuanced way (“Reason is the greatest enemy of faith”; “Any religion restricts the bounds of reason and imagination”).

Generally speaking, the textual analysis of the self-expressions and discussions on *lovehate.ru* shows that young Russians rely mainly on their own experience and the experience of other people (family and friends) in matters of belief/disbelief, and not on faith, authority or tradition, as would be expected initially. The most convincing evidence is the socio-historical explanation for this phenomenon: the Russian tradition of faith was consistently eradicated over a fairly

long period of time. This minimizing appeals to faith, tradition, and authority, and is the birthmark of Russian history, which can be described in terms of post-atheism trauma.

Another notable birthmark is the exclusion of religion from the public sphere from the minds of the Russians and the displacement of it *ad marginem* and into the inner circle of communication (family, relatives, friends). In Western societies, this process is related to the general secularization; Russia, after perestroika, probably expected a more active influence of religion in the public, up to its political manifestations when there was the creation of the Christian democratic parties. However, this has not happened. And, in addition to the external factors of a social nature, our investigation uncovered one of the internal reasons. People rarely even think about the possibility of a public level consideration of the relationship with God. The global level is manifested in the form of a stereotype (“all have to believe in God”/ “everyone understands that there is no God”).

It is also natural that the arguments in the texts about the theme “I love / I hate God” are based mainly on an appeal to emotions and feelings rather than on logical arguments. Here, the initial hypothesis has been confirmed.

This study can be continued by using qualitative methods. In particular, the analysis of 1715 texts may allow a more accurate description of “a matter of faith”, the subject of enunciation and reconstruct “credo” (“Creed”) of the *lovehate.ru* users with the possibilities of its extrapolation. In most of the texts, the authors quite specifically and clearly explain in whom or what they believe or do not believe. Such an analysis seems to be very important for understanding the current state of religion in the society.

Christian “good life” articulation and promotion: why so poorly visible?

The promotion of Christian values is hardly noticeable in the Russian public sphere. Christian churches and communities do not provide systematic moral monitoring of social events and phenomena in media. In this context the moral navigation of citizens is hardly realizable: being confused in conditions of varying values Russians are often not able to make sensible choices; they are liable to succumb to the normative pressure of different forces.

Even the voice of the most powerful sources and theoretically the most united community in modern Russia, the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), is not heard regularly and systematically. The Church makes interventions in an *ad hoc* manner, such as when some scandalous and extremely immoral event happens. For instance, the Church intervened with the release of the film “The Last Temptation of Christ”, and with the concert of pop-singer Madonna crucifying herself on a cross, etc.

In ordinary life there is no regular production and distribution of moral judgments on television broadcasts and a wider enunciation of diverse socially significant problems and situations made by the Russian Orthodox Church. Moreover, as former ROC spokesman, priest Vladimir Vigilyanskiy, said, the Moscow Patriarchate did not plan to establish the structures for regular moral evaluation of cinema and TV production like the ones created by Roman Catholic Church (Vigilyanskiy, 2008).

As in some other European countries (Germany, France), Christian media in Russia lost a significant part of the audience because of normative, didactical style of writing “from above”, using language overloaded with ecclesial terminology, which many are not able to understand. This one-way style of communication

instead of dialogue led to economic problems because part of the audience was lost.

According to Anna Danilova, the Editor-in-Chief of the “Orthodox Christianity and the World” web portal (*Pravmir.ru*), there are several essential negative presuppositions of Orthodox religious identity for the missionary work within mass media. “Still for a religious community the process of exploring new media normally is connected with at least one of these potential obstacles: 1) the tendency of any religious institution to be conservative in everything including the media; 2) an unclear impact of the new media on the psychological state, society, and interpersonal relationships; 3) the tendency to interpret many innovations as diabolic ones (one of the best cases of which was demonstrated by the fear of many people in Russia to accept a personal tax identification code, even though the Church has officially stated that it had nothing to do with the number of the Antichrist)”, writes the Orthodox journalist. (Danilova, 2011: 20).

Contrary the topic of self-expression towards God, which demonstrated mostly positive attitudes (“I love” = 1039, “I hate” = 676), the analysis of *lovehate.ru* discussion topics about Orthodox Christianity and the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) evidently shows rather negative attitudes and opinions. Our observation is proved by the numbers of pro/contra messages “ROC” (46/151), “The idea of studying Orthodoxy in secondary schools” (227/507). Interestingly, the general evaluation of Orthodoxy is more balanced and less negative: “Orthodox Christianity” (191/195).

Social and political activity of ROC face more criticism than Orthodox Christianity as religion: “ROC proposal to impose a dress code for the people of Russia” (8/18), “ROC proposes to create a criminal penalty for heresy” (36/50), “when Orthodoxy is called the only true religion” (27/42). This suggestion may be proved not

only statistically and quantitatively, but also qualitatively, with the rhetoric of users' voices: "ROC is a bunch of scams, to brainwash people. Their desire is just power"; "What is the ROC? Ordinary sect, pumping money from gullible citizens and providing a corrosive effect on the moral and cultural foundations of the nation"; "ROC is a business project"; "ROC, in most cases do not care about people, but about the godless government".

The difference of the attitude towards Orthodox Christianity and ROC is evident in the following statements: "I love the Orthodox religion and Orthodox culture, myself, am an Orthodox man, but terribly hate ROC..."; "Orthodox faith, in my humble opinion, the only leads to salvation of the human soul ... But there is a wish to the ROC. I would not like to see our church was transformed into a house of merchants".

The arguments of those who are in favor of ROC and defend it are mostly rooted in ethnical and geopolitical discourse: "I am Russian and therefore I am an Orthodox. It is natural"; "ROC is an integral part of the thousand-year history of Russia, she has always supported our morals and I will always be with her, as the rest of the true believers"; "It is the link between Russia and Ukraine and other fraternal Orthodox peoples" (written in 2013, far before the conflict in Eastern Ukraine).

The objections and protests expressed by *lovehate.ru* users against the politically marked activity of ROC generated the set of arguments against the establishment of moral censorship in Russian media within the frames of public debates over the idea for a Public Council for Morality on TV (2008-2011). Finally the idea has been rejected both by the public and the State Duma (Khroul, 2010a, 2012b).

Elena Zhosul from Russian Orthodox University (ROU) mentioned during the conference at Moscow State University

in November 2012, “the question of mutual expectations of the Church and the media is the key issue that defines the background of discussion about religion in public space, which is now underway”. Zhosul suggested that “missionary work is the function of a narrow segment of Orthodox media”. According to the representative of ROU, there is a lack of mutual transparency: “Today Russian society wants to hear the Church voice on some sharp and crucial questions, actual for every citizen. Such as corruption, the legitimacy of the parliamentary elections, social instability, ethnic tensions. Effectiveness of public participating in combating social ills, such as alcoholism and drug addiction. Both society and the journalistic community await some honest, poignant and even undiplomatic answers from the Church. The readiness of the Church to such open discussion will determine the degree of credibility of Church on the part of the intelligent part of the society. I can say that this task is discussed in orthodox official and intellectual circles, and there are some evident steps toward its implementation. These rates may seem small and slow to someone. But to deny movement in this direction would be slander against the truth”.

The ROU Department, in partnership with the Synodal Information Department, is editing a specialized reference book for journalists, but still many reporters are indifferent to their own mistakes. This is an important aspect of relations between the Church and mass media today, because the willingness to understand each other is an important aspect of a constructive dialogue.

Media professionals towards Christian “good life” values

The logical processing sequence “*pluralism – dialogue – consensus*” in the context of religious identity in contemporary

Russia has problematic fields located in the *dialogue* area, which is the area where journalists play a major role as facilitators.

“The central purpose of being a journalist is to try to tell people the truth about important things”, said Nick Davies, the author of *Flat Earth News*, delivering public lecture at Coventry University (Davis, 2009). Does media always tell the truth about Christian values? Do media professionals consider these values to be important things to cover? Our surveys, conducted during last five years, make positive answers to the previous questions hardly possible. The marginalization of religious minorities (Khroul, 2010b), hateful speech towards new religious movements (Khroul, 2012a), and “mythologization” of Christianity in mass media (Khroul, 2013) empirically proved by content analysis and trace-studies, are the signs of flaws in the mediatization (Hjarvard, 2008) of religion in Russia.

Some of our observations in recent years, based on interviews with journalists and data analysis, lead to the conclusions of: 1) *reducing the possibility* for journalists to articulate Christian values and their identity (for example, some journalists have been fired for expressing their anti-homosexual views); 2) *narrowing the debate* on Christian values in mainstream media; 3) *removing the dialogue* on religious values and identity *into an uncensored and free area* of Internet resources, mostly to blogs or forums of users with similar value orientations.

Therefore, certain Christian concerns about the mediatization of values should be taken seriously. They can be generalized in a following set of objections: 1) the media tends to legitimize or impose *distorted models* of personal, family or social life; 2) the media is *subordinating humanity* and Christian values to agendas dictated by the dominant interests of the day; 3) the media is used for *ideological purposes*; 4) the media presents and supports *models*

of development which serve to increase the technological divide between rich and poor countries rather than reduce this divide. (Benedict XVI, 2008).

Since the level of making decisions has recently shifted up from journalists to higher media positions (top-managers), journalists themselves are less and less involved in processes of setting agendas; therefore their social mission is becoming unclear and reduced mostly to “infotainment”. These reasons lead to the journalists’ lack of responsibility, which is mostly ignored and substituted by obedience to media -managers. Almost half of Russian journalists (47.6%) suggest that the quality of journalism in Russia has decreased (*Table 4*).

Table 4

Quality of journalism according to journalists
(in %)

	Poland	Russia	Sweden
<i>Decreased</i>	61.8	47.6	38.8
<i>Stays the same</i>	18.6	30.6	26.8
<i>Increased</i>	10.8	16.8	19.4
<i>Don't know</i>	8.8	5	15

Source: The ‘Journalism in Change’ Project Survey, 2012.

In conditions of growing variability, the elaboration of a joint and united idea of what is *good and ethically acceptable* becomes increasingly problematic in Russia. For instance, a TV program where polygamy is represented in a positive way could be acceptable for Muslims but would provoke protests by Orthodox believers. The publication supporting the family status of homosexual couples

becomes the reason for indignation for followers of traditional religions while fitting sufficiently within the frame of liberal world views of modern youth. Public discussion about euthanasia, new for Russia, has already divided several European countries, and the list of examples could be continued.

The highest level for aggregate judgment on values and on what is *good* and what is *bad* (in particular, what is a *good life* and what is a *bad life*) is not representative of the entire country's society, but a *united homogeneous community* whose members have a consensus in values. Therefore, the final goal for media professionals is not a consensus on all the values, but the correct articulation and transmission of the different sets of values in order to make them apparent in the public sphere as well as promoting the social dialogue on these sets of values .

The problem of a fundamentally possible consensus on values brings us towards the explanation of a normative model of the interaction between media figures and religious structures. As the British scholar, Nick Couldry, mentioned during the most recent International Communication Association conference in Seattle (May 22-26, 2014), the ethical emptiness of mainstream media “calls to the models of normative debate”.

Supporting this call for a “normative turn”, we suggest that there is a time to rediscover the principles of the religious (Christian) values' optimization of dialogue focused on the basic principles of transparency and availability of well-articulated religious values in the public sphere. The proposed normative model presumes certain expectations from the *Religions (Christianity in particular)* and *media professionals* within all three stages (*pluralism – dialogue – consensus*) and also the *check-list* for the evaluation of present conditions for dialogue (*Table 5*).

Table 5

The model of religious values dialogue optimization

	Religions	Media professionals
<i>Pluralism</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • try to ensure values transparency, availability of texts representing their normative models; • seek correct articulation of their values, use adequate symbolic systems, language and cultural codes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • try to present a complete spectrum of values and normative models (with respect to minorities); • optimize channels and information flows.
<i>Dialogue</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • respect other value systems and normative models they do not agree with; • use the framework of a common cultural code; • commit themselves to participation in the dialogue, send their experts to be active in the public sphere. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • organize and support the search for new subjects of the dialogue, the presentation of new models in mass communication space, mediate, moderate, create forums for discussions; • expand – quantitatively and qualitatively – the space for dialogue in various forms of communication.
<i>Consensus</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are seeking the common good; • are optimizing the “preaching”, the presentation of the religious values from the perspective of consensus. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • consider consensus to be one of the most important goals of journalism; • are peacemakers during conflicts and tensions; • develop professional solidarity.

Conclusion

The contemporary Russian situation of dialogue about the Christian concept of the good life may be illustrated by the coverage

of one ROC initiatives. On the 25th of January 2011, the Russian Orthodox Church presented a list of so-called “eternal Russian values” for public discussion. According to one of the co-authors of the text, archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin, the project entitled “The National System of Values” had been elaborated in order to “fill in the vacuum of values in society”.

The list of ideals included eight public virtues ranked according to their importance, comprising of justice, freedom, solidarity, unity, self-restraint and sacrifice, patriotism, welfare, and love. Each point was accompanied by a commentary: freedom presumes personal freedom, freedom of expression and freedom of conscience, sovereignty, and independence of the Russian people. According to Chaplin, these virtues have remained invariable in Russia “despite all the conservation and modernization processes” (Chaplin, 2011).

The Russian Orthodox Church called for a public debate of the document, saying the list was not fixed and could be amended. “There were many interesting comments, and some of them are included in the document. It will be further updated and modified in line with the debates involving various non-government organizations”, Chaplin said.

But this discussion was almost ignored by the Russian media and was almost invisible to the Russian public sphere, and the dialogue about values failed because of the journalists’ ignorance. On the very first day of the document’s release, it was widely and fairly hatefully commented on over the Internet. However, the popular media were almost silent about the initiative, and the discussion died from the very beginning. The Church officials were portrayed as a rather aggressive people, imposing their values on the entire society.

The question of who is passive, journalists, the audience, or both, is always urgent in societies where the rules of the framework of interaction have been determined from higher positions.

The case previously described explicitly shows a lack of comprehending the necessity of public dialogue and the accountability of Russian journalists. Another question is whether journalists are free enough in Russia to be independent and influential actors?

The challenge for Christian values' mediatization in Russia is much broader, since it is located not only in the promotion and elaboration of an axiological consensus but also in the comprehension of the key role of media professionals in social dialogue of comprehended and well-reflected identities.

As Mia Lovheim stated recently, the mediatization of religion is “a dynamic process where religion is molded by the logic of particular media, but also – in a process of use and negotiation – molds these media to fit its particular dynamic of meaning making” (Lovheim, 2014: 558). This mutual interplay between religion and media cannot be described just in terms of technological functional interaction; it is always value-oriented and in some cases leads to conflict (from the relatively forgiving “Cartoon scandal” in Denmark to radically brutal approach to secular journalism in the so-called “Islamic state”). From a theoretical point of view, such interplay relationship cannot avoid normative modeling, and there is no way to escape from normativity or to hide yourself in ambivalent “functional interactions” analyses. Therefore, we are convinced that a “normative turn” in religion and media studies will help to understand and explain some phenomena and processes that are not clearly seen from other perspectives.

References

Anikina, M., Khroul, V. (2011). Memories about the Brezhnev Era in Public Opinion Polls and Mass Consciousness Texts:

a Comparative Study. *World of Media-2011. Yearbook of Russian Media and Journalism Studies*. Moscow: Faculty of Journalism, Lomonosov Moscow State University.

Basis of the Social Concept of Russian Orthodox Church. (2000). URL: <https://mospat.ru/en/documents/social-concepts/>

Benedict XVI. (2008). *The Media: At the Crossroads between Self-Promotion and Service. Searching for the Truth in order to Share it with Others. Message of the Pope Benedict XVI for the 42nd World Communications Day*.

URL: http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/communications/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20080124_42nd-world-communications-day_en.html

Casanova, J. (1994). *Public Religions in the Modern World*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Castells, M. (2007). Communication, Power and Counter-power in the Network Society. *International Journal of Communication*, 1.

Catechism of the Catholic Church. (1992). Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

Chaplin, V. (2011). *Russian Church Calls for Relying on Faith, Motherland and Freedom Virtues in 21st Century*. URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=8271>

Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church. (2004). Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

Danilova, A. (2011). The Russian Orthodox Church and the New Media. *Religion and New Media in the Age of Convergence*. Moscow: Faculty of Journalism, Lomonosov Moscow State University.

Davis, N. (2009). *Nick Davis – Award Winning Journalist Visits CU*. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wbd3RQBkprw>

Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds. (2013). / Ed. H. Campbell. New York: Routledge.

Furman, D., Kaariajnen, K. (2006). *Religioznost' v Rossii v 90-e gody XX – nachala XXI veka* [Religiosity in Russia in 1990s and 2000s]. Moscow: OGNI TD.

Gudkov, L. (2012). *Doverie v Rossii: smysl, funkcii, struktura* [Confidence in Russia: the Meaning, Function, Structure]. *Vestnik obshhestvennogo mnenija*, 2 (112).

Habermas, J. (1989). The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article. *Critical Theory and Society: A Reader* / Eds. E. Stephen, B. Kellner, D. Kellner. New York: Routledge.

Hjarvard, S. (2008). The Mediatisation of Religion: A Theory of the Media as Agents of Religious Change. *Northern Lights*, 6 (1).

Hjarvard, S. (2012). Three Forms of Mediatized Religion: Changing the Public Face of Religion. *Mediatization and Religion: Nordic Perspectives* / Eds. S. Hjarvard, M. Lovheim. Geteborg: Nordicom.

Khroul, V. (2010a). Initiatives of TV Ethics Control by Religions in Russia: Challenges for the Implementation. *Religion in Eastern Europe*, XXX (2).

Khroul, V. (2010b). Catholic Diaspora in Russian Media: “Marginalization” and “Self-silencing”. *Religion in Eastern Europe Journal*, Vol. XXX (4).

Khroul, V. (2012a). *Religija, mass-media i predstavlenija o Boge v sovremennoj Rossii. Opyt mezhdisciplinarnogo issledovanija*. [Religion, Mass Media and Concepts of God in Modern Russia. Interdisciplinary Study]. LAP Lambert Academic Publishing.

Khroul, V. (2012b). *Religion and Media in Russia: Functional and Ethical Perspectives*. LAP Lambert Academic Publishing.

Khroul, V. (2013). *Mifologizacija hristianstva v rossijskoj zhurnalistike* [Mythologizing of Christianity in Russian Journalism]. *Vestnik Moskovskogo Universiteta. Seriya 10. Zhurnalistika*, 3.

Internet i Kościół. [Internet and the Church]. (2011). / Ed. J. Kloch. Warsaw: Elipsa.

Krüger, O. (2005). Methods and Theory for Studying Religion on the Internet. Introduction. To The Special Issue on Theory and Methodology. *Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet 1 (1)*. URL: <http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/volltextserver/5822/1/Introduction1.pdf>

Levada Center. (2013). *Obshchestvennoe mnenie o kontratsii, abortah i "surrogatnom materinstve"* [Public Opinion on Contraception, Abortion and "Surrogacy"]. URL: <http://www.levada.ru/02-12-2013/obshchestvennoe-mnenie-o-kontratseptsii-abortakh-i-surrogatnom-materinstve>.

Levada Center. (2014). *Prazdnovanie Pashi* [Easter Celebration]. URL: <http://www.levada.ru/05-05-2014/prazdnovanie-paskhi>.

Lovheim, M. (2014). *Mediatization and Religion. Mediatization of Communication. Handbook of Communication Science.* / Ed. K. Lundby. De Gruyter Mouton.

Lynch, G. (2012). *The Sacred in the Modern World: A Cultural Sociological Approach*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Media, Ritual and Identity (1998). / Eds. T. Liebes, J. Curran. London: Routledge.

Obshchestvennoe mnenie – 2013. Ezhegodnik Levada-centra [Public Opinion – 2013. Annual Book of Levada-center]. (2013). URL: <http://www.levada.ru/books/obshchestvennoe-mnenie-2013>

Religion and New Media in the Age of Convergence. (2011). / Ed. V. Khroul. Moscow: Faculty of Journalism, Lomonosov Moscow State University.

Sinelina, Y. (2001). O kriterijah opredelenija religioznosti naselenija [On Criteria for the Definition of Religiosity]. *Sociologicheskie issledovanija*, 7.

Taylor, C. (1989). *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Toft, D., Monica, D., Philpott, D., Shah, T. (2011). *God's Century. Resurgent Religion and Global Politics*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company.

Vigilyanskiy, V. (2008). *RPC MP poka ne planiruet sozdavat' sobstvennyj sovet po jetike v SMI, zajavil svjashhennik Vladimir Vigiljanskij* [ROC Has no Plans to Create Own Advice on Ethics in the Media, Said the Priest Vladimir Vigilyansky]. URL: portal-credo.ru/site/?act=news&id=59756&type=view