

## ***ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY AND NEW AGE BELIEFS AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS OF RUSSIA: A Case of PostCommunist Mixed Religiosity***

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**ABSTRACT:** In this article, we discuss the social phenomenon of mixed religiosity of university students in postSoviet Russia. The results for this study are based on research conducted among a sample of 323 Russian university students between 18 and 25 years of age. Nearly 68 percent of respondents stated that they believed in God. However, religious faith was ranked second-to-last out of 14 most important life values. As little as eleven percent of respondents could be attributed to the group of 'practicing believers'. We argue that this gap between practicing Orthodox believers and self declared believers among Russian students might be explained in terms of non-institutionalised forms of religion and mixed religiosity. Mixed religiosity is a combination of different elements of religious concepts and practices and is typical of postmodern secularised Europe. We argue that a disrupted religious socialisation between generations is an important factor for the emergence of mixed religiosity among Russian university students. In contrast to the 1990s, there is much public discussion within contemporary Russian society on corruption and bureaucracy in the Russian Orthodox Church. Nevertheless, Orthodox Christianity is still primarily regarded by young people as a carrier of national and cultural identity.

**KEYWORDS:** secularisation, mixed religiosity, New Age, Russian university students, Orthodox Christianity in the postSoviet era

While there has been a gradual shift towards secularisation in Western European countries, during the twentieth century, Russia witnessed two radical episodes of changes in attitudes towards religion: from the idea that religion has no place in a communist society to the perception of Orthodox Christianity as an element of national identification in contemporary Russia. For Russia, the second-half of the last century was marked first by atheist propaganda and later by a radical shift towards religious freedom. In the early 1990s, Russia adopted the law on freedom of conscience, and Russian people were able to express their religious views. For many, religion was their opportunity for inner stability in the midst of social chaos. In a very short space of time, this resulted in a higher percentage of formal Orthodox Christian

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believers but a lower proportion of practicing believers. In 2012, according to a survey carried out by the Russian Research Institute of Sociology (Dobrynina 2013), seven percent of Russians held atheistic views, 79 percent identified themselves as Russian Orthodox Christians, while eleven percent of respondents considered church service attendance a religious requirement. Four percent of Russians considered themselves devout believers and revered all religious canons. On the one hand, the role of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) in modern Russia is growing. On the other hand, criticism of the Church as an institution by a number of scholars and public figures has also been rising. Anticlerical criticism of the ROC, discussion on possible models of the relationship between the Church and the state remain critical issues in modern Russian society.

In addition, in the early 1990s, after passing the law on freedom of conscience in Russia, new religious movements began to flourish. Particularly popular were the various New Age movements (Egilsky 2013). Often, this “new spirituality” was mixed with traditional religious practices. Consequently, the religiosity of Russian students at the beginning of the twenty-first century is marked by the following historical circumstances: a perception of Orthodoxy as part of the cultural and national identity as well as a spread of different religious and spiritual practices.

In this article, we explore the religiosity of Russian university students, possible premises as well as historical, cultural and social factors that explain this religiosity. The article aims to describe how social and historicocultural powers in Russia affect religious practices and religiosity levels among university students who declare their affiliation to traditional religions. In our opinion, the religiosity of young people depends not only on the process of secularisation in modern Russian society but also on other factors. The research question concerns how the process of secularisation and the specific factors of postSoviet society affect the religious views and religious behaviour of traditionally religious university students in Russia.

Results for this research are based on interviews conducted among a sample of 323 Russian university students in Ekaterinburg (Russia) who were 18 years or older. Interviews were conducted in two waves; the first was on October 11-17, 2010 (Survey A, quantitative structured interviews), and the second was on January 20-27, 2011 (Survey B, qualitative, in-depth interviews). Respondents – male and female Russian citizens – represented several universities in Ekaterinburg. In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting interviews can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls. Problems associated with using data from university students include the instability of this social group and the relatively short period of time of the group’s existence. However, from a research perspective, this group, as well as its religiosity, has not been the focus of extensive study in current Russian sociology.

In order to define the level of religiosity among students, we used Chesnokova’s (Chesnokova 2005) research method, which allowed us to measure the degree of a person’s religiosity reflected in his or her involvement in church life. It involves two main components: the first one defines the value representation by a respondent, and the second one relates to his/her behaviour. Setting these two components in the study enabled us to investigate the correlation between values and behaviour. “Actively practising” students regularly participate in the ritual practices of the Oriental Church established by the Apostles and know the credendum of the Christian faith. Further to this textual knowledge, we call them “practising believers”. “Formally religious student” groups consist of respondents who defined themselves as believers, but either got involved occasionally or did not report to confessional activities. Religiosity in this group has an individual/noninstitutional character.

## MIXED RELIGIOSITY AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

The religious beliefs and practices of Russians do not fit neatly into conventional categories of institutionalised religion. Our research finds that the majority of Russian university students engage in multiple religious practices, mixing elements of diverse traditions. Many also blend Christianity with Eastern or New Age beliefs such as reincarnation, astrology and the presence of spiritual energy in physical objects. We use the term “mixed religiosity” to define this kind of religiosity whereby bits and pieces of various spiritual practices are put into one “bowl” like a salad or melting pot. Mixed religiosity is specific to formally religious and spiritual students (on this distinction, see below).

The phenomenon of mixed religiosity has been described by numerous theologians and sociologists. Berger cites Wuthnow who used the term “patchwork religion” to describe a situation whereby religion became a matter of individual choice (Berger 2007). He also points out that in secular society, where knowledge of alternate religious possibilities becomes more available than ever before, religious pluralism leads to a “patchwork religion”. Dobbelaere points out that “the loss of church authority, a more pluralistic religious market, and the growing individualisation have led to a religious bricolage, an individual patchwork or recomposition” (Dobbelaere 1999, 239). Ammerman notes that religious pluralism already existed in Medieval society when people mixed Christian beliefs with pagan practices (Ammerman 2010). As such, religious pluralism is not specific to postmodern secular societies but existed in earlier periods of European society. Lovheim maintains that some people who do not belong to the ROC believe in some sort of spiritual realm. “They indicate that experiences and events that evoke transcendent meaning for these people are handled through an individually constructed, loosely organized, heterogeneous mixture of beliefs and practices often referred to as being “religious in my own way” (Lövheim 2007). Titarenko, a Belorussian sociologist, uses the term “eclectic religiosity” to describe a combination of different religious beliefs which is typical of Western and Eastern European societies (Titarenko 2008).

Mixed religiosity is a combination of different elements of traditional religious concepts and spiritual ideas and practices. In some cases, mixed religiosity is conjoined with belonging to a traditional religion, while in other cases, it is a “religion in my own way”. We put forward the following components with the aim of describing the phenomenon of mixed religiosity among Russian university students.

1. Religious experience is individual and less dependent on traditional religious institutions. People do not trust the ROC as a social institution and understand it as a bureaucratic structure. Religion is a private but not a social thing.
2. Religious experience is fragmented. Ideas of different world religions are eclectically combined; in most cases, it is unsystematic and an ill-considered mix of different religious ideas and practices. Respondents often do not realise the contradictions within their own religious system, for instance, the contradiction between monotheistic and polytheistic ideas. In rare cases, a respondent seeks to create a coherent system of religious beliefs and resolves conflicts arising from it.
3. A person chooses from a variety of religious ideas and practices those which are most suitable for his/her lifestyle and discards burdensome practices. This person tends to use religious and spiritual practices as an instrument to solve his/her own problems, family problems, difficulties at work, etc. It can be seen as a type of consumer approach to religion.

Our quantitative and qualitative research among university students in Ekaterinburg (Russia) during 2010-2011 have enabled us to distinguish three major typologies of Russian university students according to their religious practices and selfreported affiliations. The first typology is “formally religious”. The second is conventionally denoted as “actively

practising". The third can be labelled "spiritual" in their own way. The religiosity of these types of university students is based on their religious beliefs and practices.

Nearly 68 percent of respondents said that they believed in God; 12 percent described themselves as atheists; 20 percent were undecided and 19 percent did not indicate their religious affiliation.

The first typology consisted of 53 percent of the interviewed students. "Formally religious" students were baptised within or affiliated with a particular traditional Russian religion, mainly Orthodoxy, in their early childhood (during the 1990s) on account of their parents. However, these students only occasionally practiced religious customs (for example, they attended a place of worship mainly on important religious holidays). Among these respondents, 66.6 percent claimed they were Christian Orthodox and 4.1 percent referred to themselves as Muslim. We argue that this type is initially powered by the religious aspiration of students' families but lacks profound evaluation and a responsible personal choice. Religion plays a crucial role in terms of national/ethnic identification but does not bear much spiritual importance in their lives as such. Thus, figuratively speaking, students begin to bead various elements of spirituality onto a thread similar to a Pandora bracelet. Formal religiosity makes students receptive to different religious and spiritual ideas, i.e., their nominal affiliation to a traditional confession coexists with an interest in, for instance, yoga, feng shui, etc.

Davie has found a mismatch between religious values that people profess ("believing") and actual churchgoing and religious practice ("belonging"). Davie has researched, articulated and explained this phenomenon most clearly and has coined the memorable phrase "believing without belonging" to describe it. In our research, this relates more to formally belonging to a religion but not believing according to dogmas. According to Dasha, a 19-year-old art student:

*I wear the Star of David on my neck; at home, I have icons on the shelves; my mother was baptised Orthodox Christian, and my father is Jewish. When I was a child, I was told that when you believe, it is good. Then, I was asked: 'Do you want to be baptised?' I said: 'No.' 'That's OK', they said. I don't pray, but I have this naive childlike prayer: 'Someone, please let everything be good'. I was raised by a Christian grandmother, but she got baptised at a very old age and asked me about it. When my sister was born and my Nana wanted me to become her godmother, she begged 'please, please'. I said, "But I don't feel like it; let it stay the way it is". I have an inferiority complex as I don't feel fully Jewish, but I long for it. I am not ready to follow any religion though. I'd like to be more Jewish, not in a religious sense but in a cultural way. I tried to enrol in the local synagogue, but they asked for proof of my Jewishness. I never returned because according to my father's passport, he is Russian.*

Tatiana, a 23-year-old physics major stated:

*"I come from a mixed family...my mother was Tatar and Muslim, so when she passed away a few years ago, I converted to Islam as a sign of appreciation to my ethnic roots and my mother. I don't really know much about rituals, but it is just something that defines me".*

The second typology was identified as "actively practicing" and constituted eleven percent of students interviewed. This was the smallest group, and respondents saw their religious faith as an important value in their lives. Regarding lifestyle, they regularly attended worship services and strove to fulfill as many religious precepts as possible. There was a possibility of mixed religiosity among these students as they did not genuinely accept the dogmas of a chosen religion and did not responsibly decide to live up to the standards set by the Church. They regularly went to confession and received communion; they knew the content of the basic tenets of Christianity and were generally involved in the life of their parish community. For instance, Anton, a 21-year-old biology student confirmed:

*I am Christian, I got baptised a couple of years ago when I just started my studies at the uni. I try to read the Bible everyday to grow deeper in my faith. Praying is important to me as well. I also*

*go to weekly Bible study groups at the church for young people. We just drink tea and discuss questions from the Bible with our priest.*

There was a gap between actively practicing and formally religious students. Among those who considered themselves religious and were affiliated with one of the traditional religions in Russia, 67 percent were formally religious and eleven percent were actively practicing. At the same time, two percent of the total number of respondents said that their reason for living was to build a personal relationship with God or to be saved. On a list of the most important values, religious faith held the penultimate spot out of 14. A four-percent minority believed that religious faith influenced their choice of life values. Despite the fact that the majority of students considered themselves religious to some extent and even firmly defined their religious affiliation, their religiosity could be seen as formal. Religion did not determine their worldviews, and religious faith was not a meaningful value in life.

From the analysis of the survey data, the gap between formal and actively practicing students in Russia can be explained in terms of non-institutionalised forms of religion and “mixed religiosity”. Due to the processes of secularisation, religious institutions have lost their influence, but this does not mean that the importance of religion has decreased.

The third typology was labeled “spiritual” and made up 21 percent of the respondents. This type is a mixed religiosity by default. Students within this typology either doubted that a personal God existed or had never seriously considered the question. According to Boris, a 19-year-old social science student:

*Religious views are important to me, but I am an observer. I have a philosophical stance towards such views. I'm interested in the history of religion. I've read the Bible. There is no particular god for me, but he is in each and every one of us. I acknowledge all religions, but I have a negative attitude towards the Church as an organisation. I see very little or no good impact of the Church and other religious organisations in modern society. If I were religious, I'd be reading religious literature, possibly praying; I'd talk to god directly but not through the Church or a third party. I admit there is a god; I believe in god, but I don't give him any name.*

Institutionalised religion is perceived by this type of student as having too many dogmas, overly restricting their freedom and lifestyle. This type is generally interested in religious knowledge and take part in different New Age practices but perceive and mix those ideas that are most suitable. Within this category, students may simultaneously believe in Slavic pagan pantheon, karma and reincarnation and visit Orthodox Church worship. It can be characterised as “pick and choose” religiosity. According to Oksana, a 23-year-old psychology student:

*I believe in reincarnation and karma: life is given to study here and now and to correct our mistakes. God is everywhere in all religions; I do not care about the ritual aspect. What is more important is the presence of God within a man. I believe in the Slavic gods, but they are subordinate, serving deities and are managed by the supreme god. This is the god in whom Christians and Muslims believe. Dogmatism in traditional religions turns me off, step to the left step to the right – [you are] shot. Very religious people have this narrowness of thinking; they have a negative attitude towards other religions.*

	Number of students	% responded
Yes	215	68.5%
No	38	12.1%
Agnostic	61	19.4%
Total	314	100%

**TABLE 1:** Distribution of belief in God's existence among university students.

Religious affiliation	Number of students	% interviewed
Orthodox Christian	209	66.6%
Islam	13	4.1%
Protestantism	10	3.2%
Buddhism	9	2.9%
Pagan beliefs	8	2.5%
Catholic	5	1.6%
Judaism	1	0.3%
Refused to answer	59	18.5%
Total of answered	255	100%

**TABLE 2:** Distribution of religious affiliation among Russian university students.

### **THE PROCESS OF SECULARISATION AND MIXED RELIGIOSITY AMONG ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN STUDENTS**

In the mid-twentieth century in Western European countries, religion began to lose its social importance. The resulting secularisation processes can be characterised by the decline of traditional religious institutions and the emergence of new religious forms. Today, similar processes can be observed in Russia: people declare their religious affiliation but do not regularly participate in religious practices. They are actively interested in esoteric and quasi-scientific ideas and different cults, especially New Age movements. The same situation is true for Orthodox Christian students: there is a significant gap between the number of formally religious and actively practicing believers. We now analyse how secularisation and specific preconditions influenced mixed religiosity among Orthodox students. Arguably, the process of secularisation is one of the main reasons that Russian students have experienced mixed religiosity.

In the sociology of religion, the concept of “secularisation” was introduced by Max Weber, and since the 1970s, secularisation has been widely used in the sociology of religion (e.g., Berger 1969; Luckman 1970; Parsons 1968; Fenn 1970; Martin 1978, among others) as a multi-meaning concept. Shiner (1967) identifies six meanings of the term “secularisation”: the decline of religion, its adaptation to the “world”, squeezing religion from a society (differentiation), the transformation of religious beliefs and institutions into secular alternatives, world de-sanctification and, finally, the transition from “sacred” to “secular” society (Shiner 1967). In our study, we have used the concept of secularisation proposed by Karel Dobbelaere who has analysed various secularisation theories and proposed three levels of secularisation processes: macro, meso and micro. We examine how the processes of secularisation in modern Russia form mixed religiosity among university students at the macro, meso and micro levels.

The macro level describes the interaction between religion and other social systems. In the twentieth century, religion lost its significance because of functional differentiation. It disappeared from the public sphere and became part of the life world. At the macro level, according to Dobbelaere, secularisation is “a process by which the overarching and transcendent religious system of old is being reduced in a modern functionally differentiated society to a subsystem alongside other subsystems, losing in this process its overarching claims over the other subsystems. As a result, the societal significance of religion is greatly diminished” (Dobbelaere 1999, 232).

Dobbelaere describes the connection between the macro processes and the micro level although it is not a tight connection. “The religious situation at the individual level cannot be explained exclusively by the secularization of the social system: other factors - individualization

of decisions, detraditionalization, mobility, and utilitarian and expressive individualism – were at work” (1999, 239). This means that secularisation is one of the preconditions of a religious rational choice, and individuals may then mix different religious narratives and develop unorthodox beliefs and various degrees of belief and unbelief.

Russia has been a so-called secular society since 1918. During the Soviet period, religion was officially allowed but remained marginal: anyone who participated in religious practices demonstrated that he/she was alien to the communist regime and rebelled against society. In Soviet society, a religious man was like a black sheep. The gospels and other religious literature were banned and practically unavailable. Employers punished parents of newly baptised children and, in some severe cases, even terminated their employment. (Forest et al. 2005, 53).

In the late 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, the ROC was rather weak as a social institution, recovering after significant loss of clergy, flock and property. We argue that a so-called renaissance of Orthodoxy in Russia since the 1990s was powered by: (1) mass media activity, (2) politics and (3) a spiritual quest by Russian people. Beginning with Boris Yeltsin’s presidency, the Church began to flourish (given the granted freedom of religion and beliefs, property return, tax subsidies, etc.). The media was also actively engaged in promoting the Church: the first Orthodox Christian TV channel and a radio station were established, and politicians and show business celebrities boldly confessed their religious affiliation to the Russian Orthodox Church. Today’s Russian Orthodox Church is an affluent religious organisation with a significant amount of politicians who officially identify themselves as Orthodox Christians.

In Russia, there is currently a movement of anticlericalism and criticism of the Russian Orthodox Church as a social institution. This may be explained by the controversial links between Patriarch Kirill and President Putin and his team as well as financial scandals surrounding the Church. Interference of government with Church matters has always been frowned upon, especially in times of protest movements during 2011-2012. International experience shows that the greatest moral influence comes from those religious organisations that are independent of political authorities. Thus, the convergence of Russian state structures and the Russian Orthodox Church may lead to a reduction of respect and credibility in the community, thereby strengthening the process of secularisation.

To begin with, at the meso level of secularisation, different religious organisations interact: pluralism implies that there is space for competition between different religious sects, a “free market of religion”. Consequently, “the slowly perceived useless character of Christian religions on the societal level accompanied by a loss of status and power, allowed exotic religions to improve their position on the religious market”. (Dobbelaere 1999, 235). Secondly, in Europe and Russia, various new religious movements compete and are worldly in orientation. Dobbelaere notes that these religions, as opposed to traditional religions, are worldly in nature and are focused on achieving success and prosperity. Religious pluralism allows the rational choice of religious and spiritual practices. From our point of view, the emergence of religious pluralism and the free market of religion in modern Russia since the 1990s has been associated with the adoption of the law on freedom of conscience, and it is essential for understanding the formation of mixed religiosity among university students.

In 1960s’ American sociology, the metaphor of the free market of religion was popular. It began with the eminent sociologist Peter Berger. “The pluralistic situation is, above all, a market situation. In it, the religious institutions became marketing agencies and the religious traditions become consumer commodities. And at any rate, a good deal of religious activity in this situation comes to be dominated by the logic of market economics” (Berger 1967). Berger noticed a causal link between religious diversity and secularisation, and the late Finke found a link between religious diversity and religious vitality (Benek 2010, 326). “The market has not served as an instrument of mass oppression or crass salesmanship. On the contrary, it has always served as a tool of the masses themselves, a truly liberating and truly enlivening force

in the nation's spiritual affairs" (Benek 2010, 67). It is arguable that religious pluralism is a precondition to consumer attitudes towards religion.

In a consumerist society, relations with religion are transformed, and various religious and spiritual goods and services can be part of the endless process of consumption. Baudrillard (2006, 355) notes that consumption not only satisfies the material needs of a person, but to a greater extent, it is necessary in order to indicate the social status of a person as belonging to a particular class. What matters is not the things themselves, but their signals: "the desire for status and a high standard of living are based on signals, that is, not on the things or the good in themselves, but on difference". Therefore, a person consumes brands, i.e., symbols and images by means of which he/she aspires to express his/her difference from others, in other words, his/her identity. How and what a person consumes are the markers of his/her social status. People use not only things, goods and their signs, but also religious ideas, political theories, etc., to express their uniqueness. Religion becomes a commodity when religiousness has an external ceremonial character; a person's religious preferences are formed under the influence of the mass media, political circumstances, cultural and historical traditions and popular literature. In this case, religion is used as a sign or as a brand to express belonging to a certain culture, social group and/or to demonstrate a person's uniqueness. The relation to religion is based on clichés and stereotypes.

Nowadays, there is much information about different religious practices in Russia. Here, attitudes to religion depend on personal needs and desires rather than the on requirements set out in the sacred texts. Consumer attitude to religion means that a person chooses those religious ideas and practices that are personally suitable and discards those that are too burdensome. Thus, religious experience is fragmented and less dependent on traditional religious institutions. For instance, 22-year-old psychology student, Oksana, may combine the visit to a temple, a church wedding and a consultation with a shaman. She got married in the Orthodox Church as she believed it would help her new family to be happy and united in spirit.

At the micro level, the process of secularisation is characterised by individualisation, bricolage, and decline of church religiosity (Dobbelaere, 1999). Several aspects of the emerging trend of mixed religiosity are specific to Russia, however, there are other general factors at work.

Traditional religions principally encourage a focus on the afterlife aspect of spiritual life, in opposition to certain materialistic orientations offered by some New Age beliefs. Our research finds that Russian students have predominantly pragmatic values and demonstrate a rather utilitarian approach to life (see Table 3). Therefore, students may not choose to follow one of the traditional religions as it is believed to limit aspirations they would like to achieve in this life. The sense of worldliness seems to dominate the spiritual choices of modern students in Russia. Students demonstrate a lack of willingness to renounce the habits of an established lifestyle for an Orthodox way of life. For instance, according to Svetlana, a 20-year-old physics student:

*There are usually two days off, but on Saturday night, a parishioner should cancel all entertainment and fun events and focus on prayer to prepare for the sacrament and then get up early on Sunday morning to go to church. It's just too much of a hassle for me.*



Values	% answered	Rank
Family	71%	1
Health	59%	2
Selffulfillment	50,6%	3
Love	53%	4
Friendship	39,9%	5
Education	33%	6
Job	28%	7
Financial wellbeing	24,5%	8
Career	22,3%	9
Creativity	22%	10
Sex	19%	11
Volunteering	18%	12
Sport	12%	13
Faith	13%	14

**TABLE 3:** Russian students' value rankings

According to research by Belyaev (2009), in the case of Russia, there is a correlation between age and adoption of various New Age beliefs. Belyaev finds evidence that for young adults (n=1601, aged 18-29 years), beliefs in astrology, reincarnation, telekinesis, as well as in science are more common than for older age groups. At the same time, faith in God and in the divinity of Jesus Christ is proven to be less present than in the older age group (5570 years old). No statistically significant difference was found regarding other heterodox religious beliefs. Thus, the popularity of New Age beliefs among Russian university students may be interpreted as age-specific.

Family orientation is one of the top three life values for Russian students (Cherkasova 2011). Significantly, in Russia, the family remains the most influential channel of socialisation for students. Moreover, the family is the most important influence on students' life values and life choices: about 30 percent of the interviewed students believed that their family had the biggest impact on their value systems. The number of those students who considered religious faith as a significant life value was about 13 percent. However, religious socialisation between at least two generations of Russians was interrupted. A lack of experience and practical skill of church life in a family, which in Western European countries continued over centuries, contributed to an interrupted religious tradition in Russia. We argue that this factor may be considered specific to Russia. In other words, there are several generations of people in Russia who do not know that on Sunday morning, Christians go to church.

In the 1990s, Orthodoxy was suddenly rediscovered and became a trendy religion. The Church was once nearly defeated by the authorities, but somehow managed to survive through the difficult times, and later on began to actively attract spiritually unsatisfied people (Anderson 1994; Davis 1995; Mitrokhin 2006). During the decade following the collapse of the USSR, parents of the majority of our respondents were searching for answers to some existential questions. They were brought up and educated in the Soviet atheistic society, and therefore, they did not have sufficient knowledge or experience of institutionalised religious life, nor could they share it with their children. They were looking to religion as a remedy amidst the surrounding social chaos (Johnson 2005). It was typical to be baptised knowing nothing or very little about accepted faith and the moral obligations of belonging to the Church. They got sporadically involved in worship but did not participate in parish activities. In a sense, formal

belonging to the Church was a mere practical and magical act to protect oneself from the evil eye and bad luck. Interestingly, this was the belief even among educated people at the time when numerous New Age beliefs exploded.

We argue that formal religiosity, but not religious traditions, is passed on from generation to generation in Russia. For the majority of students, belonging to the Orthodox Church is a mere formality, and taking part in rituals is not a big deal and does not affect their daily lives. Although it does not necessarily mean that all formally religious parents influenced their children to be exceptionally formal with regards to religion, it is safe to say that all formally religious students we interviewed were influenced by their nonpractising but formally Orthodox families. For instance, Sergey, a 19-year-old philosophy student stated:

*My grandmother was a devoted Christian, but she passed away, and my dad got baptised at some point but doesn't really know much about his faith. I'm not sure if he's practising, we don't really talk about it at home though I was baptised when I was 4.*

These students adopted a rather external way of expressing their religiosity – which meant no practising at all in some cases – as it was exactly what they observed and experienced in their formative childhood years. By external religiosity, we mean following rituals like purchasing candles in a church, revering icons, giving donations to a church community so that the clergy can pray for departed/sick relatives, etc.

Borowik (2002) contends that the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the collapse of communism brought a radical change in the position of religion in Central and Eastern European countries, and that in 1990, the number of people who declared their belief in God and their adherence to the Orthodox tradition rose exponentially. Borowik accentuates that “the nature of this religious revival, and the meaning of the ‘return’ to Orthodoxy and being Orthodox, are unclear because the religiosity of Russians, Ukrainians and Belorussians also includes elements of New Age spirituality. Commitment to the Church, and the level of religious practice, are as low as in the most secularized Western European societies” (2002, 499). The author points out that the picture of religiosity in postSoviet countries, where atheism was imposed for so many years, is quite similar to European countries. Thus, due to the fact that religion was semilegal in Soviet society, there were no deep religious traditions that could be passed on from generation to generation.

Another specific precondition for mixed religiosity may be the system of education. Starting from the school level, there has been an explicit lack of basic religious education in Russia. As recent as 2012, a new school subject called “Basics of Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics” was introduced to public schools across the Russian Federation. This new school subject, which consists of six modules – “Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture”, “Fundamentals of Islamic Culture”, “Fundamentals of Buddhist Culture”, “Fundamentals of Jewish Culture”, “Fundamentals of the World’s Religious Cultures” and “Principles of Secular Ethics” – was introduced system-wide to all fourth graders from September 01, 2012. As for university students, there is no foundation of substantial religious training, which arguably explains why the majority of students need to start from scratch.

Our quantitative research shows that education as a life value was not highly regarded among students (Table 3). We find evidence that exploring religion(s), studying and acquiring indepth knowledge is not greatly sought after. This makes it quite challenging for students to get involved with a particular religion as it hinders them from a profound immersion into religious practices. Religious choice is based on the appreciation of what Christianity is as well as knowledge of other religions.

According to Tatiana, a 21-year-old biology student:

*“I think I can say I’m Orthodox [Christian] by belief. I definitely believe in a guardian angel that looks after me”.*

*Interviewer: "Do you know that according to Orthodox beliefs, you have to be baptised in order to receive your personal guardian angel?"*

*Tatiana: "Oh really? I didn't know that".*

Orthodoxy plays a significant role in the national and cultural identification of Russian people. It is another important factor for Russia as well as for some other historically Eastern Orthodox countries (e.g., Bulgaria, Greece, Romania and Serbia). In the case of modern Russia, there is no new appealing national idea (in Tsarist Russia it used to be 'Orthodoxy, nation, absolutism'). With the young generation still searching for a definitive identity, Orthodoxy is the most attainable and traditional religion actively supported by the government and families. Despite a few scandals and rumoured corruption within the Church, Orthodox Christianity maintains its position in the society and is still regarded primarily as a national and cultural carrier of identity by the young student generation. Denis, a 20-year-old social sciences major asserted:

*When I was younger, 14 years old, I got baptised; my family and I were [traveling] in St Petersburg at the time, and we decided to get baptised. It was something like: 'Let's get baptised today, let's do it!' Before that, I was thinking about God and that we should abide by the rules; it's not that free and easy. Two years later, I was formally baptised, but I do not go to church now'.*

Thus, amidst the crisis of a national idea in postSoviet Russia, Orthodoxy and Islam may actually be serving the function of maintaining national and cultural identity rather than simply representing dynamics of personal experience and individual choice.

## CONCLUSIONS

In the course of our research, we have identified three types of religiosity among university students: formally religious, actively practising and spiritual. In most cases, the religiosity of young Russian students came across as mixed religiosity that chaotically combined different religious and spiritual ideas and practices. There was a significant gap between formally religious and actively practising Orthodox students because of a widespread mixed religiosity among those students. The processes of secularisation at the macro and meso levels were seen as preconditions to micro level mixed religiosity.

Apart from utilitarian values and respondents' age, there several preconditions of mixed religiosity were identified, specifically for Russia, which cover four distinctive time periods related to the history of religion in the country: the Russian Empire, with Orthodoxy as a state religion and 90 percent of churchgoers; the Soviet regime with closed churches and banned religious practices; the leap to the revival of Orthodoxy in the 1990s and the harsh criticism of the Church and its representatives by liberals in 2010 onwards. For the students, however, formally belonging to the Church did not always mean that they were practising believers. True faith and "votserkovlenie" (the practice of the faith) assume knowledge of the basic tenets of religious faith, church traditions and, most importantly, participation in the sacraments of the Church (speaking of Christianity) so that there is no formal reckoning to a confession, but to actual "membership" of the religious community. In many cases, young Russian students demonstrated a mixed religiosity that chaotically combined different religious ideas and practices.

To sum up, attitudes towards religion in Soviet society, which affected the behaviour of our respondents' parents, continue to indirectly significantly influence students' religiosity.

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