



Heretical Virtual Movement in Russian Live Journal Blogs: Between Religion and Politics

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Abstract: The article explores how the heresy of the post-denominational community is presented in Russian *LiveJournal*. The definition of heresy and the rhetoric associated with it is determined by the so-called 'opinion leader': Vladimir Golyshev, who creates high quality 'heretical content' which is spread by other users within the LJ community. Golyshev's heterodoxy is highly politicized; his desire to undermine the social and political authority of the ROC leads to the non-institutionalized spiritual interpretation of Christianity which is free from any external dogmas. Golyshev's heresy is typical of post-secular society, where the line between politics and religion is blurred, and various religious ideas are mixed into a whimsical kaleidoscope of notions. Golyshev's online heresy reflects the patchwork religiosity that exists in off-line Russian society; while, on the other hand, the simple language he uses is imposed by the specific demands of cyberspace. The post-denominational bloggers consider LJ a unique opportunity to discuss hot political issues and serious problems related to the ROC, and to express their religious views and identity as outcasts.

Keywords: religion in cyberspace, Russian Orthodox Church, heterodoxy, politics, mixed religiosity.

Since the religious renaissance of the early 1990s, the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) has become an important social institution which has a significant influence on Russian society. The growing political and social influence of the ROC is not openly discussed in the press but instead has become a subject of constant debate in cyberspace. The Russian blogosphere is full of discussions about the ROC as a political actor, in particular in Patriarch Kirill's work. In 2012, just before and after the presidential election, these debates were especially intensive, fuelled by Pussy Riot's performance in the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour

(February 2012) and the notorious photographs showing Patriarch Kirill's luxurious apartment in the centre of Moscow and his luxury watch (March/April 2012).

In 2012 Russian *LiveJournal* (thereafter LJ) became the most suitable platform to discuss problems associated with the ROC. Evgenii Gornyi points out that Russian LJ is well structured and provides a highly intellectual level of discussion (Gornyi 2009). LJ is used as a place for discussion and cooperation, as a source of information and the latest news (Kurchakova 2006). For that reason, LJ is also a good source of empirical information about intellectual and socio-political movements in Russian society. In 2012 the post-denominational bloggers were particularly active in LJ. This group is a kind of heretical community criticizing Orthodox clergy. They also use heretical ideas to express their own religiosity.

Post-denominational bloggers define their views as heretical and consider their heterodoxy as a tool for discerning true Christianity from false doctrine. The Christian doctrine of the post-denominational bloggers is very close to the ideas of post-denominational believers, especially in their understanding of the nature of the Church. The understanding of the Church as a non-institutionalized group of believers is at the heart of both doctrines; the true Church is always Christ-centered and does not aim to have any significant social and political influence. The post-denominational bloggers seek to introduce liberal changes and innovations to the traditional Christian theology; their 'do-it-yourself' theology contravenes the ROC's conservative line of theological thinking.

On the basis of the same heretical ideas, the bloggers create a branching network of users with varying degrees of involvement in the discussion and creation of heretical content. The most influential post-denominational blogger, the so-called 'opinion leader' or heresiarch, is Vladimir Golyshev (golyshev.livejournal.com¹). He creates high quality 'heretical content', and other users spread his ideas within the LJ community through reposts and comments, sometimes making minor additions. This article concentrates on an analysis of the ideas put forward by the heretical post-denominational community, more specifically on the ways in which this heterodoxy is presented in cyberspace. This analysis will address three main research questions:

- What is the difference between the definition of heresy in the theological discourse and that presented in the post-denominational heretical discourse of Golyshev's blog?
- How are traditional Christian concepts such as God, the Church, and sin, transformed in Golyshev's heterodoxy?
- How does cyberspace influence the way in which heterodoxy is presented?

The activity of the post-denominational Orthodox bloggers does not go beyond cyberspace: bloggers do not assemble offline, have no specific rituals, and for many of them discussion of their personal heretical views is possible only on the internet. Therefore, it can be concluded

¹ Vladimir Golyshev is a popular blogger and publicist who discuss political and religious issues in Post-Soviet space. When this research was conducted, in 2014, Golyshev was on 402 place of 500, according to the Yandex ranking of the most popular Russian LJ bloggers; by autumn 2015 he made 10 069 post, sent 84 360 comments and received 236 079 comments via his LJ account. Since 2014 his activity is mainly concentrated on Facebook, where he has over 4200 fellows.

that this new heretical movement exists only online and has a relatively minor impact on social reality.

Methodology

By means of discourse analysis (Foucault 2000; Fairclough 1989; van Dijk 1998) the author discusses bloggers' subject positions that are shaped by religious and political discourses. Discourse is a social practice which systematizes and regulates social interactions through power relations, relationships of communication and objective capacities. Within the discourse, the language is controlled by power institutions: people cannot say everything they think to whomsoever they wish (Foucault 2000). The traditional religious discourse is highly regulated: power relations are institutionalized by the ROC and expressed, for example, through the inequality between the priesthood and the laity; the content of the discourse is based on the requirements set in the Scriptures and Tradition. Golyshev, who created a heretical doctrine, constructs an alternative religious discourse, free from the ROC as a subject power, transforming the meaning of existing terms.

The language of the blogs reflects any changes in the discourse and beliefs of the participants in power relations as well as any of their knowledge transformations. An analysis of the blogs allows us to describe the conceptual content of Golyshev's heretical discourse and his political criticism of the ROC. All entries (from golyshev@lj, elijah-morozoff@lj, vasia-tapkin@lj,) in the period from February to May 2012 and posted key papers were studied and sorted according to their titles and content. The text fragments were analyzed to identify the religious views of the users, and then copied to separate files. The selection of relevant blog posts has depended on the texts and this researcher's underlying values and perspectives, as a consequence of which the research has become a co-production between the researcher and the individuals studied (Burr 2003: 152). To systematize the disparate ideas expressed by the bloggers on religious topics and to present their heretical beliefs as a unity, the research applied the elements of grounded theory (Strauss 1997), which were used as an auxiliary tool to organize different ideological meanings in clusters. The method of an online survey was used to cast light on the way cyberspace influences the presentation of heterodoxy.

Vladimir's gospel, or Why one should not believe in god

Vladimir Golyshev is the mastermind of this heretical movement. By analyzing the basic facts of Vladimir Golyshev's biography, we can reveal the background for the evolution of this heresy. According to Golyshev's 'User Info' page, he lives in Rostov-na-Donu and Moscow; for several years he was involved in journalistic and public activity. He worked on the newspapers 'Zavtra', 'Effective Policy Foundation (FEP)', 'Russian Journal', 'National Information Group'; he was the editor-in-chief of the website *Nazlobu.Ru*; supported Vladimir Putin and had anti-opposition views in 2002-2005 but then turned to liberal ideas. In 2006-2008 he was a regular contributor to the website *kasparov.ru*. In 2009 Golyshev deliberately refused to continue his career as a journalist and political consultant and began to write plays:

‘*Barnaul’skii natariz*’, ‘*Prebiotics*’, ‘*Lyzhneg*’ (a satirical play with the protagonists being Patriarch Kirill and Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeev).

Vladimir Golyshev has a higher theological education, which allows him to construct his own heterodoxy (he graduated from St. Tikhon’s Orthodox University). In the 1990s, he, like many others, came to accept the Orthodox Church and became a very active parishioner; many people saw in him a future priest. His active church-going (*votserkovlenie*) was the reason for his entering St. Tikhon Orthodox University. In one of his posts, he writes:

When in 1990 I came to the Church, I was captured by the idea of following the wonderful man of faith who was honoured to ‘see God as He is’. I was reading the ‘Philokalia’, Abba Dorotheus, ‘The Ladder’, ‘The Unseen Warfare’, and similar works, saw myself exclusively in monastic clothes, once a week (invariably!) went to the Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra to make a confession to a red-bearded monk who I identified as my spiritual father. (golyshev@lj, 30.01.2015)

Golyshev left the parish after five years of active church-going. He does not regret his decision to ‘turn his back on the ROC’, because he sees it as a secular structure that has no relation to true Christianity and personal salvation. Golyshev evaluates modern Christianity through the opposition of true/false, personal/social. The personal spiritual experience of fr. Seraphim as filled with grace is opposed to the ROC, which is presented as a corrupt social mechanism stifling people’s freedom. Thus, Golyshev perceived his decision positively, as a rejection of untrue Christianity, and became fiercely critical of the ROC, denouncing it as corrupt.

Golyshev’s heterodoxy: a shift from theological to political definition

In Orthodox theology, heresy is defined through its opposition to the concept of dogma. Dogma is a divinely revealed doctrine about God and His economy (from the Greek word ‘*ekonomia*’) in the world which is adopted by the Church and has a binding character. Heresy is a false opinion which distorts the essence of dogma and is shared by a group of people who deny their affiliation to the official Church (Davidenkov 2013). The word ‘heresy’ comes from the ancient Greek ‘*airesis*’, which means selection, direction, doctrine and from the verb ‘*aireo*’: to take, seize, choose, elect. Andrei Kuraev (Kuraev 1994) clarifies that heresy is always a rational interpretation, a simplification of the content of dogma. Various kinds of heresies focus on only one part of the doctrine and try to make it more comprehensible to the human mind. It is necessary to distinguish between heresy and theologumen, a private theological opinion, which does not contradict and does not affect the essence of dogma.

The post-denominational bloggers do not turn to the classical theological definition of heresy but use another one, proposed by Patriarch Kirill in his sermon on the Sunday of Orthodoxy in 2008. This definition inadvertently equates to heresy and schism and in some aspects contradicts the definitions of Orthodox theology. The concept of heresy is used to protect the Church from internal schisms and to criticize Orthodox fundamentalists. It is closely linked to the political situation and has an ideological significance. The post-denominational bloggers have applied Patriarch Kirill’s definition of heresy to construct their own concept of

heterodoxy. They use the notion of heresy mostly in political contexts to struggle against detractors by simplifying its theological meanings; they repeat phrasings from Patriarch Kirill's sermon such as 'the dangerous fire of anger appears in his eyes', 'a wolf in sheep's clothing' etc.

Every heresy produces schisms, but where there is schism there is no love [...] Where there is no love, there are no honest relations and no unity [...] If we meet a man who claims to struggle for the purity of Orthodoxy but there is a dangerous fire of anger in his eyes he is ready to fight for the schism of the Church [...] when we do not find love but find only anger in the man who is the leader of heterodoxy, this is the first sign that he is a wolf in sheep's clothing. (Patriarch Kirill 2008).

Theologians point out that the wrong interpretation of the Christian doctrine as well as the lifestyle and spiritual mistakes of the theologizing individual could provoke heresies. Patriarch Kirill uses a less complicated method by pointing out that the main problem of heresy is the lack of love and the anger at one's neighbour; he absolutizes the role of the psychological preconditions for a heretical movement against the theological. The post-denominational bloggers mentioned the same qualities: anger, the lack of love, dissimulation, pride, but they invert the definition of heresy given by Patriarch Kirill and attribute the heretics' characteristics to the Orthodox hierarchy itself, and see heretics as true Christians.

On the contrary, in the works of theologians there is no idealization of heretics; they are characterized as followers of the antichrist, as liars and thieves, which should emphasize their negative effect on the Church and the need for their anathematization. Patriarch Kirill, like the post-denominational bloggers, idealized heretics when he wrote that they had always attracted people by their high moral and spiritual qualities. Golyshev understands heresy in a positive way as a tool that can improve modern Christianity. In this sense a heretic is a true Christian who, following Christian precepts, denounces the ROC clergy, whose way of life contravenes Christian principles, and denies his / her affiliation with the ROC. As Golyshev puts it, 'I even want to call my heresy KHRISTOSLOVIE [theology of Christ]' (golyshev@lj, 30.01.2015).

The definition of heresy put forward by the post-denominational bloggers resembles that of Patriarch Kirill: it is not deeply rooted in the theological tradition. The bloggers invert Patriarch Kirill's definition and criticize the ROC hierarchy, comparing it to false Christians who have forgotten Christ. They use the concept of heresy as a marker of their marginal position in the ROC, of their deep spiritual and political confrontation with the traditional religious institutions. They also tend to liberalize the main concepts of the Orthodox doctrine to construct their personal Christian theology, appropriate to their lifestyle and political views. Golyshev's heterodoxy is used as a tool to criticize the ROC, which sometimes makes it difficult to determine whether or not these religious ideas are used as political attention-getters.

Concepts of church, sin and the role of the scriptures in Golyshev's heterodoxy

As part of his politically charged criticism of the ROC, Golyshev points out that the Church as a social institution is not a prerequisite for salvation because of its bureaucratization and the drive to accumulate profits. The Orthodox clergy are identified with the hieratic priesthood; thereby Golyshev emphasizes how far they are from true Christianity. Golyshev identifies institutional Christianity with paganism by drawing an analogy with primitive societies and the Byzantine Empire, where state power was closely associated with religion.

In demonstrating the pagan and heretical character of the Orthodox clergy, Golyshev named Patriarch Kirill the antichrist, and mentioned the following signs of the advent:

Try to make a 'composite sketch' of the antichrist:
 he Is distanced from Christians,
 but active in missionary work;
 he speaks a lot about sins and the Church,
 about heavenly bliss and the torments of hell,
 about the virtue of maidens, of sheep's wool;
 about anything except Christ,
 who came in the flesh,
 was crucified and was raised from the dead (golyshev@lj, 22.12.2010).

According to Golyshev, Patriarch Kirill as the antichrist serves the Church but does not serve God: his activities are formal, hypocritical, and pharisaical; they are primarily concentrated on the retention of power and the preservation of the Church's material well-being. Moreover, such activity contradicts the voice of conscience and thus deprives the person of the grace of the Holy Spirit.

In naming the ROC a heretical organization, Golyshev contradistinguishes faith in Christ and faith in the 'United Holy Apostolic Church'. He writes that bureaucratic games and acquisitiveness are more important than the imitation of Christ for the modern Orthodox clergy who have betrayed Christian ideals. The Church has ceased to be a marginal social institution as it was at the time of the Roman persecutions of the early Christians or in the Soviet period. Nowadays it is no longer open to marginalized people (such as beggars, homosexuals etc.), and non-acquisitiveness has been replaced by the pursuit of luxury. The Church today is a social institution which tries to solve the economic and demographic problems of Russian society, and protect its traditional values, but it does not perform its basic function: to provide its parishioners with spiritual guidance on their way to Christ. Recognizing the importance of fasting, prayers and worship established by the Church, Golyshev believes that in modern society these practices are useless because the Church itself no longer abides by Christian ideals.

To be free from the corrupt institution of the Church, Golyshev develops his own understanding of the nature of religion which is different from that of Orthodox theology. A true believer should leave the ROC in order to remain a true Christian and to save his/her soul; personal salvation does not depend on affiliation with the ROC. Faith in God is no longer a value in itself; the direct, personal encounter with Christ is much more important and is associated with spiritual knowledge, not faith. Abstract inenarrable Christian faith emerges as a

result of formal observance of the Christian commandments, while spiritual knowledge is something different, being based on continuing spiritual practice: 'internal doing' (*vnutrennee delanie*). Golyshev's 'internal doing' is not described exclusively within the framework of the Hesychastic tradition but can also be compared to Zen Buddhist practice; for example, the apostles and saints are called 'sensei'. The narrative of Orthodox theology and the ideas of Zen Buddhism are mixed in many of Golyshev's posts on religion:

Sensei taught us not only faith but something else:
To hope for the Father,
To be Christlike,
Inhale the Holy Spirit. (golyshev@lj, 21.12.2010)

Golyshev emphasizes the importance of the right attitude, 'the correct posture' in 'internal doing'; he uses metaphors borrowed from Zen Buddhism to explain the way of Christ and how to follow it. The ideas of Zen Buddhism are clearer and more understandable to the reader than Orthodoxy; consequently, they are more suitable to explain Golyshev's ideas to his followers.

What exactly should I do?
1. Hope for the loving and forgiving Heavenly Father and wait for a meeting with him;
2. To imitate Jesus Christ, who was crucified and rose from the dead;
3. Become a tabernacle for the Holy Spirit, who will eliminate all misunderstandings;
So, here we are dealing not with an abstraction or the Code but the Path ('dao'),
modus vivendi and modus operandi rolled into one.
To accept the apostolic teaching means practice, it means following Christ.
(golyshev@lj, 30.03.2014)

Golyshev wants to overcome the formal rituals and rules of institutionalized religion because the Church as a social institution is corrupt; this connects Golyshev's heresy with Protestant theology. Another common feature is that Golyshev uses the concept of predestination but has not developed it in detail in his posts. As some Protestant leaders, Golyshev spiritualizes Christianity, but he claims that external religiosity and formal reading of the Scriptures is not helpful. For him the voice of conscience and the internal spiritual experience of a believer is more important than the Scriptures. In Protestantism, on the contrary, admitted the importance of the texts of the Old and New Testament for Christians. In words of Bengt Hegguld, 'we must hold on to certain commandments and apostolic writings to prevent the Church from being destroyed' (Hegguld 1989).

Golyshev initially creates his heterodoxy within the framework of his political criticism of the ROC and his own political activity; that is why his heretical ideas are mainly concentrated on criticizing the Church as a social institution and tend to be shallowly theological and profane. He is interested in non-institutionalized Christianity free from formal theological dogma, which will allow believers to realize personal spirituality. At the same time it means contradictions or even the absence of any theological background in his heterodoxy.

To present Christianity as an internal personal practice, Golyshev narrows the concept of sin adopted in Orthodox theology. In order to have the Holy Spirit inside one, one need not

succeed in fulfilling the commandments formally (it is equivalent to being hypocritical), but instead succeed in following the ‘voice of conscience’. Conscience should prompt a person in how to act, so his actions will be endorsed by Christ.

Sin is commonly called a bad thing
 or not a good tendency (passion) but
 what is sin, generally speaking?
 I think it's the wilful destruction of conscience
 and silencing the voice of the heart, that is, Dukhoborchestvo.
 A man tries to expel the Holy Spirit from his soul,
 It leaves him,
 But there remains an ‘alarm button’, a flashing heart forever’
 ‘The fact is that for Christians there is ultimately only one sin:
 To think I have no sin
 or: I am not as sinful as that tax gatherer (or harlot).
 (golyshev@lj, 22.12.2010)

Sin has nothing to do with the external observance of commandments; it just depends on the extent to which a person is internally close to Christ. Conversely, external God-likeness is often associated with a self-righteous attitude toward Christianity; a person who has violated the commandments and is aware of his or her sin is closer to God than the righteous one who formally follows all Christian commandments but does not see his or her sins. On the one hand, this approach certainly emphasizes personal freedom and the importance of human freedom for God but, on the other hand, it makes moral choice vague and shaky.

By contrast, in Orthodox theology the person's consciousness and his/her actions are closely interrelated. Sin is damage to human nature in general, to its physical and spiritual components. Having the willingness to commit a sin actually means committing a sinful act. Sin manifests itself in non-observance of the commandments, which are the preconditions for physical and moral health. Golyshev emphasizes only the inner aspect of sin; for him a person's conduct is secondary.

The redogmatization of the concept of sin leads to the liberalization of Christianity in Golyshev's posts. In the series of posts entitled ‘Sex with Christ’, Golyshev formulates his attitude toward the possibility of premarital sex for Christians. Initially, he describes three hypostases of human nature: angelic, human, and animal. In sexual relations in a family a person can appear in the animal hypostasis despite following the commandments; externally virtuous behaviour does not mean a change in the inner man. Golyshev does not justify but nor does he prohibit premarital sex; he emphasizes that the eternal taboo is less important than the person's internal attitude to what is happening. For Golyshev it is unacceptable to perceive another human being only as a sexual object: if a person seeks to be Christ-like, this behaviour is unacceptable for him.

Golyshev emphasizes that the clergy who require everybody to obey the commandment ‘thou shalt not commit adultery’ actually do not obey this commandment themselves. This devalues their external pharisaical righteousness even more.

The idea of personal salvation and the denial of the significance of the institutional Church, the concept of predestination, and the criticism of the ROC as a social institution and

political actor – all this at some point brings together Protestantism theology and the doctrine of Golyshev. Golyshev makes a sincere attempt to reform the existing Church, to return to the true Christianity of the first centuries, but Golyshev's heterodoxy is highly politicized. The desire to undermine the social and political authority of the ROC leads to a personal interpretation of Christianity, which is liberal and spiritual, free from any external dogma. Golyshev's doctrine is a simplified version of Christian theology; he has also mixed Christianity and Zen Buddhism, presenting his heresy as a light version of religion which does not imply any deep religious search.

Golyshev's online heterodoxy and offline mixed religiosity

The non-institutionalized post-denominational version of Christianity appeared as a result of political criticism of the ROC. Golyshev's heterodoxy is not deeply rooted in Orthodox theology; it is focused on individual needs and personal spiritual experience with rituals and commandments being perceived as formal and unnecessary. The combination of various religious ideas and the simple, understandable model of Christianity are not the preeminent features of Golyshev's online heterodoxy, they correspond to the mixed post-secular religiosity in offline society.

Mixed religiosity is a combination of different elements of traditional religious concepts, spiritual ideas, and practices. In some cases, mixed religiosity is conjoined with traditional religion, while in other cases it is a 'religion in my own way'.

In modern Russia, on the one hand, the role of the Russian Orthodox Church has become extremely important, but on the other hand, the number of actively practicing believers is decreasing (Lebedev, Sukhorukov 2013; Pronina 2014; Sinelina 2013) because of religious pluralism, pragmatic values, and a utilitarian approach to life, an interrupted tradition of religious socialization, and the lack of basic religious education (Grishaeva, Cherkasova 2013). For all the above-mentioned reasons, mixed religiosity prevails in Russian society. Thus, the representation of mixed religious ideas in Golyshev's blog reflects the level and the forms of religiosity in offline society. This conclusion is confirmed by the results of other research which has demonstrated that online religion is an integral part of the transformations undergone by offline religion (Lövheim 2012; Lövheim and Linderman 2005; Campell 2010).

The salience of cyberspace particularly influences the way in which Golyshev's mixed religiosity and heterodoxy are presented. Such high-ranking bloggers as Golyshev are engaged in a struggle for rating supremacy: they know that their posts should be clear, interesting and original in order to win readers' recognition. The fragmentary perception characteristic of internet users and the high speed of information transmission also require the texts to be more simplified. Most texts are written in order to convince the reader, which makes original but simple ideas more suitable for this purpose.

Golyshev, like other top bloggers, often refers to the mass media: he discusses hot news to attract readers to his blog and to express his political and religious views. This makes the content of Golyshev's heterodoxy even more politicized. Golyshev covers current news about the ROC by writing several posts a day, which enables him to repeat his basic heretical ideas; his posts tend to be monotonous and contain little new information. The specificity of the

news format affects the stylistic patterns of Golyshev's posts on religion. Information should meet the criteria of novelty and edginess to become popular and sell well: therefore, preference is usually given to conflicts, scandals, and breaches of norms (Luman 2000). Most of Golyshev's heretical posts have a polemical, provocative, even shocking character.

Golyshev has found a good way to express his religious ideas in an original literary form, which allows him to attract many followers. He is not a religious prophet with a deep personal religious experience; first and foremost he is a public activist, so his clearly expressed heterodoxy is capable of affecting the thoughts of his numerous followers. Golyshev often refers to the Scriptures and quotes from the writings of the saints; some posts resemble a prophet's sermon, some mimic biblical poetics in a caricatured way. It is important to note that, while offering his own understanding of Orthodox theology and asceticism, Golyshev is self-critical and understands his lack of theological knowledge. In most cases, his statements are emotion-driven; sometimes he makes logical mistakes in his arguments or substitutes notions. Despite his ironic, pathetic and provocative texts, in some posts Golyshev emphasizes the intimate significance of the content, the seriousness of his attitude to what he is writing about:

What is VERY, very important to me (I wrote it the whole night and in the morning) is the case when I humbly ask my respected friends TO TAKE NOTICE and click this link: <http://golyshev.livejournal.com/1503063.html> and have a taste of this text and then 'it's in your power...to punish me with your derision' (golyshev@lj, 20.11.2010).

To sum up, the mixed religiosity inherent in Golyshev's heterodoxy is widespread in offline society and it is not determined by the salience of cyberspace. In its turn, the internet environment affects the presentation of Golyshev's heterodoxy: his heretical posts are clear, understandable, monotonous, even provocative. Although Golyshev's religious views represent a holistic system, they are superficial and profane, targeted at attracting the audience's attention.

The LJ heretical community as an online religious minority

A heretical community is a unity of religious bloggers who have no formal affiliation with the ROC; in some sense they are outcasts and the only way they can share and discuss their 'do-it-yourself' Christianity is online. Such religious ideas are unlikely to be supported by the majority of Orthodox believers offline. Some of the post-denominational bloggers use Golyshev's blog as a platform to systematize their political and religious views; they often make reposts or leave positive comments but in that case they do not provide their own interpretation of the situation. For many LJ bloggers the amount of reposted content significantly exceeds the content they produce themselves.

Other LJ users actively support Golyshev by reposts, call themselves heretics and supply his heterodoxy with new ideas. For example, vasia-tapkin@lj mixes heretical views with philosophical criticism of consumer society; elijah-morozoff@lj makes libertarianism part of

his heretical identity. Both are in opposition to the existing social order and play marginal social roles. LJ user groups are not isolated from each other. In LJ the discussion of various problems within one group is often determined by the opponent: for instance, Golyshev's posts are usually read not only by the post-denominational bloggers but also Orthodox users, who get involved in heated disputes and argue against heretical ideas. Thus, different online behavioural strategies can be identified: simple reposting, rethinking of Golyshev heterodoxy, and argument.

The heretical community does not exist outside cyberspace. So, perhaps, religious beliefs which are described in the posts of Vladimir Golyshev and are shared by his followers are only a part of an alternative virtual identity which does not coincide with any online identities. The question of whether the discussion of heretical views is connected with the bloggers' need to find like-minded people in cyberspace or whether it is just a game, a performance, an attempt to attract attention, is still unclear. In one online survey LJ bloggers were asked to describe their online behaviour. Most found it difficult to answer this question because they do not give much thought to their own virtual behaviour: one blogger reflected on his/her offline behaviour quite often but online behavioural strategies tend to be produced unconsciously.

As expected, users evaluate the degree of openness in LJ differently: some claim that there is no difference between their online and offline behaviour, some point out that they create an alternative identity which can be used, for example, when they engage in trolling. Bloggers of the first group mentioned the private character of their posts, they perceive LJ as a personal diary; therefore, the reader is seen as their listener or interlocutor.

'If my presence in LJ was just a game, then any discussion would not be serious. And now I am completely sincere about what I write in LJ and in my comments, so I say what I think and I am ready to repeat the same offline. Sometimes I say even more than I would say offline because it is always easier to write than to speak directly to a person'.

The second group identifies the construction of a virtual identity with the creation of a persona in literature. In this case the difference between the virtual and real identity can be compared to the difference between a written text and speech; it occurs by itself, the same way as a persona does in poetry, regardless of the author's intentions, when he/she begins to create a text. For this category of user, the questions about sincerity online is completely irrelevant. Any text is an independent reality where the author tends to construct a kind of ideal personality.

'We communicate here in writing, so we can change and edit what we write and analyze the words of our interlocutor as long as we want, and we are always aware of the fact that anybody else can read our posts and comments. On LJ I have used foul language only twice (and both times quickly removed those words). In offline communication it is impossible, that is why the word "sincere" can be applied only to personal, real-life conversation'.

Many LJ users emphasize that in LJ posts they talk only about the things they are willing to discuss with others. A conscious choice of topic and a manner of speaking is also a way of constructing a virtual identity. Participation in the survey was voluntary and, hypothetically, it is also possible to single out a third group of bloggers who identify blogging with trolling and who did not want to participate in the survey for obvious reasons.

Most LJ bloggers think that virtual identity mostly manifests itself in debates, while the greatest seriousness and sincerity is mostly found in posts. Online religious discussions are characterized by competitiveness and the desire to win and to prove one's point. Bloggers emphasize that debates about religion often turn into trolling; deeply religious people as well as non-religious users can trick the reader and 'play with their head', so to speak. As a rule, discussions on religious themes in Golyshev's blog have an intellectual character; bloggers have a good level of theological education, are able to provide arguments to support their points of view, and quote from the Bible and from the texts of the Holy Fathers. At the same time a large number of comments cannot be called well-reasoned; they appeal to everyday experiences and emotions. Such comments are not approved of by the readers, who immediately ask the blogger to cite a passage or provide additional arguments. Some of these comments were removed by the users themselves or by Golyshev.

Some of the post-denominational bloggers (elijah-morozoff@lj, vasia-tapkin@lj) who actively participate in discussions make reposts, and produce their own heretical content, and view participation in the life of the online heretical community as a kind of serious experience which enables them to share and construct their own outcast religious identity. The internet provides a relatively safe space where they feel comfortable and protected. On the other hand, the line between bloggers' religious and political identities is blurred and they often use heretical ideas as a means to point out the political mistakes of the ROC and even the Russian government.

Conclusion

The post-denominational bloggers use the internet as a space where they can freely discuss religious and political problems, and construct and maintain their outcast religious identities. The post-denomination definition of heresy is not connected with the Orthodox theological background but rather with the definition of heresy given in Patriarch's Kirill sermon: in both cases heretics are idealized and the political context evidently prevails over the theological meaning. Golyshev uses heretical ideas to criticize the policy of the ROC; in his heterodoxy the boundary separating religion from politics is blurred. Political criticism of the ROC is a key reason why Golyshev presents Christianity as a non-institutionalized spiritual practice which is more focused on individual experience than on theological dogma. Golyshev's heretical ideas are profane, secular, and do not imply any deep religious search. Golyshev constructs a model of Christianity which is simple to understand and follow: to that end he has mixed different religious concepts such as Zen Buddhism, Protestantism, and mystical elements of Eastern Christianity. Mixed religiosity in Golyshev's posts is a widespread phenomenon in offline Russian society and it does not depend on the salience of the internet. Internet space, which does not support a serious and attentive style of reading, influences the way in which Golyshev's heterodoxy is organized and presented. Complex theological ideas are presented in a simple and understandable manner, they do not require any great religious or intellectual effort on the part of the readers and they do not take too much of their time. Nevertheless, like other bloggers, Golyshev emphasizes his seriousness and personal involvement when he creates his posts. The post-denominational bloggers consider LJ as a unique

opportunity to discuss serious problems connected with the ROC and hot political issues because offline discussion is impossible. Thus, bloggers organize their own heretical community to express their minority religious views and their outcast identity. Despite the large number of supporters and opponents, Golyshev's doctrine has not exercised a significant effect on the external social reality but it is likely to create the conditions for social change within the Church.

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