

**RUSSIAN / SOVIET CULTURAL INFLUENCE IN SERBIA / YUGOSLAVIA**  
**(THE RELIGIOUS PENDULUM)**

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Although there are many doubts regarding the phenomenon of religion and religiosity, their importance cannot be questioned, since they emerge as complex, changeable, and controversial constructs, but also stable spiritual and social categories. Sociology is predominantly interested in the social aspects of religion and religiosity, not only how the evolution of human religious consciousness influences the society in which humanity lives, but also how society influences religion, the church and human religiosity. When the relationship between society and the state, on one side, and the church and religion, on the other, is observed over a long period, then their relationship could be defined as a motion of sorts, a religious pendulum, with its sinusoid curve. In both orthodoxies, the Serbian and the Russian, this curve is perceivable. In this context, the conventional, Orthodox religiosity and human bonds with Orthodoxy in Serbia and Russia, during the twentieth century, can be analyzed within the perspectives of a few different, general socio-political frameworks. The social position and the social and spiritual influence of Orthodoxy and the Orthodox Church, within their traditional religious-confessional spaces have not only been ambiguous, but also diametrically polar. In this regard, the general religious situation was not unambiguous and immutable, but also diametrically different, and can be analyzed on its essential surface, and with inherent abstractions, through two ideal-type models. One is stimulating, and positively and systematically values human religiosity and the Serbian and Russian Orthodox Churches, implying their privileged social positions, respect and great national and cultural importance. However, the other approach had a strong dissuasive influence on human religiosity and the Orthodox church, deteriorating their social position, spiritual influence and national importance, putting them on the margin of social life, without any real possibilities of addressing their, hitherto unproblematic public implications.

The religious situation in Serbia up until the end of the First World War, and in Russia during the imperial period, can be considered as the initial period, or one position of the religious, Orthodox pendulum. During this period, both religion and the church were considered affirmative, and religious values were an integral part of commonly accepted social values. The church was closely related to the state, whether the nature of this relationship was agreement, cooperation and mutual support (harmony), or service to the state and the fulfilment of many social functions (such as: education, marriage, etc.). Although human religiosity in that period, primarily in Russian, was certainly not exclusively Orthodox, but also pagan and sectarian, in the formal sense it was an absolute, which says a lot about the overall social and

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spiritual climate of the pre-revolutionary phase of Russian society. Although there are no doubts that formal, statistical criteria about confessional membership do not provide a real picture about the religiosity of the population, state and social reasons undoubtedly had a strong influence on an unproblematic, pro-religious and pro-orthodox consensus in both Russian and Serbian society.

A shock-wave of ideas, destabilizing the religious pendulum from its solid believer-foundation occurred in Russia with the October Revolution in 1917 and in Serbia after the end of the Second World War. A new religious reality, directly opposite the earlier one, was established in the Yugoslav socialist state and in the anti-religious Bolshevik Soviet state, in which the cultural hegemony of scientific atheism reigned. Rarely does the pendulum of religious ideas switch to the opposite position with preordained consequences on Orthodox religiosity and its social importance. That specific example of Orthodoxy implied a continuous low index of religious expression among the population, a paling impression of dogmatic beliefs, a dissolving dogma of the faith, an intermittent sporadic practice of the Orthodox rite, visible erosion of conventional religious behavior and marginalization of the importance of religion and the church itself.

At the end of the eighties and the beginning of the nineties of the last century, the spiritual pendulum, following a "second shock-wave of ideas", evidently swung back in Serbia and Russia, from declared atheism back to declared faith. The believer structure has been gradually consolidated during this process of restructuring ideas, thus a new, relatively stable believer structure, with its own specific features, was consolidated during the first decade of the new century. Although the euphoric feelings of Russian citizens at the beginning of the nineties and their great expectations from the Russian Orthodox Church in solving a mass of social problems, from moral complexities through to family, spiritual and social issues, later waned, the common Orthodox consensus in Russian society has not been questioned to date. All empirical surveys over last twenty years have shown that the majority of respondents agree that Orthodoxy is of huge social importance and deserves great respect. Orthodoxy and the Church have a great symbolic importance to the people, proportionally much greater than its effective capacity to solve the concrete problems of contemporary Russian society. Unlike the other social institutions, Orthodoxy and the Church are not uncertain, temporary, changeable and contentious, but 'everlasting', secure and unquestionable. Thus, only the Russian Orthodox Church has the social and spiritual capital to unite and homogenize the economically and politically disunited Russian society. The Serbian Orthodox Church, appearing on the post-socialists public scene, a socially and culturally conflict-ridden arena, fulfills a number of specific social functions: it provides the Serbian community with a particular identity and integrates individuals into a collective; on a religious and national level, it mobilizes people as a collective, which, in conflict situations, is opposed to other collectives. If the overall culture of one community is disadvantaged in such a conflict, religion and the church represent a resource of the community's own resilience and a guarantor and defender of its culture and tradition. When an individual and his/her emotions

are put under close scrutiny, religion has a psychological-emotional and compensational function.

Although in the professional, sociological and, generally, in the religious community, the term *revitalization of religion* or even *religious renaissance* has become common usage, referring to the end of the eighties and beginning of the nineties of the last century, such a revitalization has its inner limits in Russia and Serbia. It is important to realize that progressing from a general level of thinking about religion and the church, expressed in undivided sympathies, towards deeper levels of religiosity and human bonds with religion and the church, it becomes evident that the revitalization of religiosity and religious institutions are not such an unproblematic phenomena. The empirical surveys, previously mentioned, did not only show a strong confessional, pro-orthodox consensus, declared religiosity, belief in God, but also syncretism of ideas, amorphous religious consciousness, selective belief in the dogmatic principles of Christianity and confusion regarding appropriate, practical religious behavior, i.e. ecclesiastical devoutness, among a population of declared believers. Although many Orthodox theologians speak about their believers as honest, they still consider them as lukewarm churchgoers whose faith needs to be nourished. From the point of view of Orthodoxy, the process of ecclesiastical re-appropriation is a difficult task awaiting the Church and its ecclesiastically and religiously non-socialized congregation that wishes to become Orthodox. These new Christians are on their "Christian path", which is non-problematic, easy and straight-forward by definition for a small number of believers, while for the majority it is long, winding, thorny and unpredictable.

#### *Two views of the revitalization of religion and religiosity in Serbia and Russia*

There are two theoretical frameworks for the interpretation of the return and revitalization of religion in Serbia and Russia. The first defines religion as a public institution and implies a logic of mutual support among religious and non-religious factors, while the second implies a logic of independent, inherent religious renewal, from the core of religion and the church itself as God's institution and the individual's spiritual need for piety and might be defined as 'terminal faith' (Lebedev, 2005). There is a common consensus among professionals regarding the first framework and its obvious manifestations and its validity cannot be questioned. This framework identifies the process of revitalization, and develops arguments based on facts about religions and churches as public institutions and their specific social functions in life patterns and a global society over the last twenty years. It can be defined as the *return of religions* (in the spheres of public life, politics and education). However, this process was much more powerful than a mere *return* (of people) *to religions*, thus causing sociology to formulate, probably too hastily, a theory on the return of religions. If the return to religion is a reality in these societies, several questions regarding the reasons behind this return stem from this fact: were these motives primarily of a religious nature or just a desire for social promotion through religion and the church, now recognized as an affirmative and desirable cultural model? (Cvitković, 2009:15–23). Unfortunately, there have been no systematic and representative empirical

surveys on this topic; nonetheless, such research ought to start from the premise that the reasons why the population returns to religions and churches are neither uniform nor unchanging. Moreover, one should start from the assumption that mass religiosity is certainly connected to co-called *cultural religiosity* (Filatov, Lunkin, 2005), which implies confessionality and religious self-declaration, thus seeing church religiosity and piousness in such a context as minor phenomena in these societies. When we talk about the revitalization of religion and religiosity in Serbia between the end of the eighties and nowadays, the character of this religion and religiosity can be primarily recognized, throughout the Balkans, in terms of collective religiosity within the context of the existence of historical faiths throughout the centuries, and not in terms of de-institutionalization and individual religiosity, where an individual and his/her inner religious needs are central and satisfiable through personal choice and decisions taken on a free and rich market of religious ideas and practices. Having observed the key aspects of religious revitalization on the post-Yugoslav territory during the nineties, as re-traditionalisation, re-totalisation, re-collectivization and renewed spiritual re-rooting, we can conclude that these authors are right (Vrcan, 1999). From the main features described above, some authors believe that such a renewal should not be defined as a believers' conversion and eschatological mind-shift, but simply an all-embracing, socially and politically omnipresent expression of religiosity (Jeleč, 2008; Velmar-Janković, 2009).

In the process of identifying the religious changes in Serbia and Russia, unraveling the dilemma of the return of religion or the return to religion is certainly very important. However, such dilemmas do not represent an obstacle in drawing a conclusion that the revitalization of religion in different extents and intensities is present in both levels of its "renewal": the fact that the socio-political dimension in this process is dominant does not mean that rigid religious renewal did not happen at all. This process did come about and is ongoing now, but it is not a mass phenomenon.

#### *How Many Orthodox Believers are there today? – Three Approaches*

Russian sociology and religiology in the last twenty years have produced considerable empirical evidence on the religiosity of the population in both the Russian Federation in general, but also in its federal units or geographic areas. Moreover, analyses related to the criteria of religiosity, thus Orthodox religiosity in particular, are available. However, there is no general agreement on the theoretical questions and the interpretation of research results. The question of the criteria of religiosity is certainly not only a general sociological or scientific matter, but also a practical-political question and a church issue, since it also provides an answer on the importance of spiritual and socio-political capital, the proclaimed domain of confessional organizations, and is also related to the identification of the general social, even spiritual and legal aspects of a given confession. In this regard, for example, the Russian Orthodox Church, according to the opinion of some clerics, politicians and journalists, should be formally granted the status of privileged Russian confession (which it already has, informally), because of its historical importance for Russia and Russians, i.e. Orthodoxy is the religion of

Russians, and the Russians are the dominant population in the country (80 percent).<sup>1</sup> The socio-political implications of numbering believers are based on two different general conceptions and methodological positions on the criteria for defining (Orthodox) religiosity. The sociologist Sergei Lebedev summarily names these two groups of researchers as the representatives of a *classical*, and a *post-classical* concept or approach to the issues in question. Distinguished sociologists and researchers of religious phenomena of repute belong to both groups: Furman, Lunkin, Filatov, Voroncova and Mitrohin to the first, while Česnokova, Sinelina, Pejкова and Naletova, to the second (more in Lebedev, 2006).

The first group of researchers ascertains that the criteria of religiosity should undoubtedly include some practical confirmation of a specific cultural religiosity among the population. Thus, it is not sufficient for the person-believer to proclaim him/herself as such, nor for a particular confessional community, this subjective position needs to be confirmed in life by objective doing, or, in other words, by regular cult and ritual practice. This means that we cannot come to exact figures on believers without parameters that include regular visits to church, presence at the liturgy, participation in the Eucharistic rite, fasting and other ritual acts of piety. Without respecting all the parameters above, the defined number of believers is only fiction and without any real content, and believers defined in such a way are imaginary believers.

In this context, a general comment on the limited range, superficiality and formality of the religious renaissance in Russia, and a devaluation of the notion of believer, was handed down by Furman, Kaariainen, Filatov, Dubin and others, and was based on empirical data on a very limited part of the population of believers, who can be recognized, by their dogmatic beliefs and religious behavior, as true, serious or traditional believers, who really live their faith in their lives and whom the domestic sociology of religion most commonly call devout activists. Furman and Kaariainen shed some light on this problem by creating the index of the "traditional believer", based on data from the Russian-Finnish surveys, carried out in 1996 (Kaariainen, Furman, 1997:38 and further). This group of traditional believers was comprised of respondents who answered positively to a series of questions related to dogmatic identification and actual religious behavior. When applying such a methodology, which is not severely "strict", according to the authors themselves, there were only 4 percent of such respondents in the sample, while this number increased to 8.8 percent in 2005. According to this

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<sup>1</sup> In this regard, the opinion of Kirill I, the former Archbishop, later Metropolitan of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, now the patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, is paradigmatic. At a press conference in 2002, on the occasion of an international festival of TV and radio programs of the Orthodox station "Radonjež", he pointed out: "We are obliged to forget the term multi-confessional country, which brings only disagreements. Russia – it is an Orthodox country with national and religious minorities. All statistical surveys, carried out in our country, show a perfectly clear picture: the existence of religious minorities and an absolute Orthodox minority. . . . These speculations on multi-confessionality should come to an end, once for all. If we have 4 to 5 percent of Muslims (and that's what the statistics say), then this is not multi-confessionality, but a majority. If there is less than 1 percent of non-orthodox Christians – they are then a minority; that minority should not be discriminated against is another issue" (Сколько верующих, 2004).

methodology, the post-Soviet traditional believer does not differ substantially from the Soviet one. It is a group of believers, which is not only predominantly female, but also decidedly “old”, with the lowest level of education, and predominantly rural (Furman, Kaariainen, 2006:59-65; similar data also at: Petrova, 2004).

However, this methodology, which identifies real Orthodox believers, was seriously analyzed and questioned in Russian sociological literature. The issue was raised whether a real number of Orthodox believers (up to 6 percent of respondents) was defined correctly, and whether this number can be correctly defined at all. Should respondents, who identify themselves as Orthodox, be included in the group of believers if their knowledge of Orthodox dogma is weak and they rarely participate in Orthodox rituals? As we can see, Furman does not include them in the group of real Orthodox believers. In a context in which there is also a symbolic number of “real” atheists, according to this author, in post-soviet society “religion does not win over atheism in Russia, but both of them, religion and atheism, deviate before a rising tide of value freedom and eclectic ideas”. Sinelina has questioned (Sinelina, 2001; 2005) the basic conclusions of a series of empirical researches (Cesnokova, 2005; 2005a). She has defined three groups, based on the criteria used in empirical surveys to define respondents’ religious views: the criteria related to familiarity with church dogma, prayers and the Bible; the criteria such as belief in magic, sorcery, astrology, spiritualism, reincarnation and, finally, criteria related to the current rituals of religious practice, such as attending church and receiving communion.

According to Sinelina, the following question should be raised: how many real believers would there have been in pre-revolutionary Russia if the definition was not based on the formal-legal criteria of belonging to this or that confession based on birth, or baptism, or another appropriate ritual from non-Christian religions or the criteria of self-identification, but on the criteria of familiarity with the Christian dogma and belief in Christian dogma, such as ideas about God, life after the death, the resurrection of the dead, paradise, hell, familiarity with the Bible and Orthodox prayers. It is obvious that, in this case, the number of Orthodox believers would be very low. According to this author, there is evidence of a great rural population at the end of the nineteenth century with completely pagan ideas about God, which did not prevent them from identifying themselves as Orthodox believers, nor the Russian Orthodox Church from treating them as its believers. Lack of familiarity with the dogmatic assumptions of one’s own religion, thus, the absence of belief (Russian villagers were, practically all illiterate, and the Bible itself was translated completely into the Russian language only in 1875) did not mean that they were not real Orthodox believers. Their belief was not an intellectual, sophisticated belief, but the “simple” belief of the people, and that was the essence of Russian Orthodoxy. Consequently, the Bible did not exist for illiterate peasants, thus the church ritual and a few prayers that were orally passed from one generation to another, were the unique common denominator between an individual and the church. Without going into an already complex and un-solved problem – whether the truth of the faith (God) comes with reason or belief (will) – the author only questions the issue of the

cognitive part of belief as the key element in defining religiosity, defining also another two necessary moments in understanding the problem of the dissolution of dogmatic content in faith and religious syncretism. The first moment is related to the complexity and high spirituality of Christian dogma, where behind each dogma there is not only the high intellectual capacity of those who wrote them, but also centuries of disputes, divisions, wars, the disintegration of states and many human causalities. The second moment is related to the absence of an organized religious upbringing among the youth of the Soviet Union over a period of decades – the absence of catechism, and therefore, according to Sinelina, it is no surprise that modern Russian believers have difficulties in understanding Christian dogmas, such as: the identity of God, the Holy Trinity, The resurrection of Christ, the immortality of the soul, the Last Judgment etc.

Understanding religious syncretism and pagan poly-demonism, expressed by a majority of respondents and typical among a great number of believers, is considered inappropriate by the author as a fact by which to question declared conventional religiosity. She does completely agree that religious eclecticism exists, and lists evidence from surveys, showing that believing in conjure, sorcery, the evil eye, spiritualism, astrology, telepathy, reincarnation is on exactly the same level, sometimes even on a higher level, especially among younger generations, than dogmatic beliefs in God, paradise and hell. Such a religious eclecticism is not only characteristic of Russian Orthodoxy, it is extended throughout the annals of human history, in widespread belief in primitive magic, side by side with belief in the dogmatic ideas of monotheistic religion, thus showing how superstition hotly pursues Christianity. There is no doubt that medieval Russian peasants were superstitious, together with being devout Orthodox believers. There is evidence in Russian literature which shows that the Russian courtiers had their fortunes read even after being baptized. Furthermore, the medieval Christians undoubtedly believed in sorcery, charms and soothsayers. The Catholic Church was fighting with the fire and brimstone of the inquisition against these phenomena. Based on the above mentioned factors, the author is convinced that people who define themselves as Orthodox believers should be comprised in the group of Orthodox believers, especially in the context in which Russian modern Orthodox believers are not in any already completed state of unproblematic conventional religiosity, but in a complex process of spiritual self-improvement and ecclesiastical re-appropriation (Cesnokova, 2005).

For this group of researchers, the crucial criterion in defining religiosity is *self-identification of an individual*, a human who is aware of belonging to a certain confessional group. “According to my understanding, the self-identification of a respondent is the key in approaching Russian religiosity. The status of Orthodoxy as the national religion allows the stress to be put, not only on respondent’s personal beliefs, but also on their closeness to national culture and the collective consciousness of the people. This is exactly Rižov’s approach when underlining that the determining criterion for belonging to the Orthodox church is not regularity in attending religious service, but the

ritual of baptism” (Naletova, 2004).<sup>2</sup> In addition, these authors do not discuss much about religiosity, but introduce the notion of the *ecclesiastical re-appropriation* of people, which is not some discrete greatness, or fixed momentary state, as religiosity is defined by the first group of authors, but a process, an evolution whereon a person embarks at a certain moment, growing closer more or less, in time, to ideal obligations that ought to be fulfilled by a real, deeply ecclesiastically re-appropriated, a true (Orthodox) believer.

The third approach in defining the criteria of (Orthodox) religiosity is expounded by Lebedev (Lebedev, 2006), as a synthesis *sui generis* of the previous two approaches. According to this author, the positive element in the first approach is its insistence on the complexity of such criteria and its demand for confirmation of the respondent's subjective self-religious evaluation with facts of an objective nature based on actual behavior. The weak part of this methodological position lies in the great number of filters, presented in formal canonical demands, put before believers, and moreover, the calculation of their final number. Following this logic, a very small group of pious believers can be identified among the people, who fulfill all the commandments of their religion and the church, live a very devout life which is substantially different from the secular life of the great majority of others.

The weakness of the second methodological position lies in its specific one-sidedness and the monolithic character of the criteria of religiosity. If the self-evaluation of religiosity is an imperative for religiosity or belonging to any confession, it certainly is not a sufficient condition, thus, it should undoubtedly be complemented with other parameters and arguments. The positive aspects of this approach can be seen, according to the author, in connecting a scientific approach with an introspective one in defining the criteria of religiosity.

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<sup>2</sup> This position, in which self-identification is a sufficient criterion for defining Orthodox religiosity, received a lot of criticism in Russian literature. On that matter, Olga Kvirkvelia (Kvirkvelia, 2003) sharply criticizes the basic postulate of Yulia Sinelina that no-one can be defined as non-Orthodox if he/she defines himself/herself as such. Kvirkvelia underlines the absurdity of such a position with the examples that we could not consider someone tone-deaf, if he/she considers himself/herself musical, alien, Napoleon, etc. Since the sociologist is obliged to be non-biased and objective in research, then surveys should include questions that would correct and complement each other. In this regard, the criterion of religious-confessional self-identification should not be rejected, but complemented with other parameters: this subjective picture should be expanded with facts on what a respondent understands in the term Orthodox believer, and what the reasons are for defining himself/herself as a such. Then, these facts should be compared with the official position of the Orthodox Church. The critical observations of Kvirkvelia did not go without the criticism either. Although Yuri Rizov agrees in some aspects with Kvirkvelia, he presents a few critical observations related to her article: people faith, or mass religiosity, cannot provide an “objective picture” about religion, but official faith; in her observations on the dogmatic postures of the faith, Kvirkvelia does not mention baptism at all as a crucial criterion for confessional belonging. According to him, Orthodoxy is not limited to the official position of the religious hierarchy, council of a church and synod, but *sensus populi* should be taken into consideration, the public opinion of the people, regardless of the fact that a respondent “often does not believe in dogmas or has difficulties in giving an answer in a survey” (Rizov, 2003).



Lebedev's contribution to the discussion on the criteria of religiosity is not only in simply providing a synthesis of the presented approaches, but in raising the whole discussion onto a higher and broader theoretical level. He starts from the premise that religiosity is a human spiritual, cultural and social state, an inseparable unity of these elements, one naturally leading to the other. When examining contemporary religiosity, as a criteria, the cultural element is the most important for the sociologist, since the spiritual element remains elusive for the sociological approach and research methods, while the social element is not affirmed to such an extent as to be sociologically elaborated. If the cultural element of religiosity is the starting point, then it needs to be viewed within the context of the secularization of society, an ever present factor of modern contemporary societies. The downside of such a process is the appearance of a secular cultural pattern, thus connecting it today with the problem of religion and religiosity or religious culture. Starting from Sorokin's definition of culture, Lebedev stresses three important characteristics: totality, self-organization and self-referentiality. The first, positivistic approach in defining the criteria of religiosity (Furman, Filatov and others) neglects the self-organization of religious culture and approaches it from the position of secularist one-sidedness, while the other, the phenomenological approach, (Cesnokova, Sinelina and others) neglects the totality of researched culture, giving the contours of religiosity a superficial and self-explanatory character.

Based on the two concepts of the criteria of religiosity, Lebedev defines the third as a systemic-dynamic approach, which is closer to the second than to the first position described above. In accordance with the definition of the culture of modern society as an essentially secular culture, the constituents of which are practically, by socialization, all members of society, religious culture exists on the margins of modern society and in a sphere of collective unconsciousness and tradition. Unlike a secular culture, religious culture is not a matter of general institutionalized socialization; it is not interiorized from childhood and is a matter of the persona choice of a believer. In contemporary society, a person of a religious culture can in no way avoid secular culture. In that regard, religiosity can be defined as confessional enculturation, the cultural space of a certain religion and the progressive "deconstruction" of its semantic package. The notion of ecclesiastical re-appropriation, brought into the analysis by the authors of the second methodological approach, represents a real practice of ecclesiastical devoutness in religious culture. While the first group of authors uses the notions of religiosity and ecclesiastical devoutness as synonyms, Lebedev distinguishes the following difference: religiosity is a discrete greatness, which means it either exists or does not, while ecclesiastical re-appropriation (or ecclesiastical devoutness as a process) is a continuous greatness with a wide diapason of quantitative and qualitative manifestations. Thus, religiosity is a vital imperative, but not a sufficient condition of ecclesiastical devoutness.

According to Lebedev, the criteria of religiosity should be defined according to the principle of mutual complementarity of subjective and objective characteristics. At the heart of this criterion, as its quintessence, instead of the notion of ecclesiastical devoutness (the "phenomenologist"

approach), focus should be put on human value orientation, more precisely on the merit of *religious faith*. Religious faith, as a value, sense and life goal, is a *universal indicator*, which marks the differentiation between religious and non-religious persons.<sup>3</sup> When discussing the religious self-identification of respondents, the orientation of the second group of researches on religious faith as a value is merely hypothesized, but not elaborated theoretically. However, self-identification does not automatically imply the existence of religious faith, thus cannot be an independent parameter (Rubicon) of faith. Religious-confessional self-identification does not always have a terminal character as a condition which the criteria of religiosity has to fulfill, but can have instrumental value. Finally, Lebedev argues that the criteria of (Orthodox) religiosity should be defined by three important criteria, as necessary and sufficient conditions of religiosity: (1) Religious faith is a life meaning for a believer; (2) It is concretized through positive religious and (3) Confessional self-identification (Lebedev, 2006).

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<sup>3</sup> “Of course, there are no precise criteria of religiosity. Human *religious sentiments* might be considered as absolute criteria for religiosity, but, unfortunately, this cannot be confirmed. Thus, the only way to define human religiosity is based on human creation, the way one behaves and acts towards other people” (Voroncov, 2008).

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