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## NEO-PAGANISM: THE LATENT THREAT OR INFLUENCE OF "SOFT POWER" ON THE RUSSIAN YOUTH

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This study considers the neo-pagan worldview as a factor influencing certain social strata with the aim of forming a specific set of specific socio-cultural, political, and historical-cultural representations. The main social group, to which the activities of neo-pagans are directed, is youth. In the course of a survey conducted by questioning 360 respondents in 2019 in the cities of Shakhty and Rostov-on-Don in order to determine the religious and cultural identity of survey participants. It was proved that the role of Orthodox moral education in the formation of national-cultural identity continues to be decisive for the majority of believing youth. More than half of the survey participants are inclined to believe that paganism cannot be recognized as a traditional religion. It is shown that the adoption of the National Security Act creates opportunities to limit the influence of destructive cults on the Russian youth.

Key words: neo-paganism, orthodoxy, national security, youth.

**[Т.С. Оленич, А.В. Орешин Неоязычество: скрытая угроза или влияние «мягкой силы» на российскую молодежь]**

В данном исследовании рассматривается неоязыческое мировоззрение, как фактор влияния на определенные социальные слои с целью формирования определенного набора специфических социокультурных, политических и историко-культурных представлений. Основной социальной группой, на которую направлена деятельность неоязычников, является молодежь. В ходе исследования, проведенного методом анкетирования 360 респондентов в 2019 г. в городах Шахты и Ростов-на-Дону с целью определения религиозной и культурной идентичности участников опроса. Было доказано, что роль православного нравственного воспитания в формировании национально-культурной идентичности продолжает оставаться определяющей для большинства верующих представителей молодежи. Более половины участников анкетирования склонны считать, что язычество не может быть признано традиционной религией. Показано, что принятие Закона о национальной безопасности создает возможность для ограничения влияния деструктивных культов на российскую молодежь.

Ключевые слова: неоязычество, православие, национальная безопасность, молодежь.

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In modern historical-religious discourse, many aspects of the emergence and functioning of paganism were considered, but a relatively new phenomenon that is neo-paganism, its genotheistic and syncretic religious ideas have not yet been systematically studied, although at the beginning of the 20th century in Russia, a large number of public organizations and movements that promoted pagan and neo-pagan beliefs functioned. In 2017, according to the Federal Service of Russian Statistics, 17 pagan associations were officially registered in the Russian Federation [2]. The real number of such organizations

exceeds the official statistics by a hundredfold. Representatives of Neopaganism are issued as ordinary public associations, or are not registered at all. According to unofficial data, confirmed by religious scholars, there are certain features that characterize adherents of neo-pagan groups: a small number of members and an average age from 16 to 40 years, i.e. youth audience in general. For carriers of neo-paganism, various ritual activities are characteristic, including various cultural and everyday customs, which sometimes duplicate Christian traditions, a complex hierarchy of priests.

The study of neo-paganism, namely, its various philosophical-religious ideas and features of different subcultures that are included in its composition, is an urgent task for the national religion and philosophy. The neo-pagan worldview, exerting a spiritual influence on certain social strata (in some cases - marginal), forms a certain set of specific sociocultural, political, and historical-cultural representations among the bearers. Based on this, the task of this work is to examine the influence of neo-paganism on the Russian youth, using materials from a current sociological study.

As we indicated, the original term "paganism" comes from the Church Slavonic word "language", meaning "people." In the Old Testament, "nations" is the cumulative designation of nations with polytheistic religious views and cults. They are characterized by a certain set of signs: the deification of the forces of nature, polytheism, magic, expressed in the belief in the ability to get supernormal abilities with the help of spells, rituals and sacrifices. The phenomenon of neo-paganism contains the prefix "neo-" - that is, "new." Unlike paganism, neo-paganism is formed among monotheistic peoples, representing a reconstruction of the pagan tradition, the carrier of which was the ethnos of this territory before the adoption of monotheism.

Under neo-paganism they usually mean the doctrine that "is artificially created by the urban intelligentsia from fragments of ancient religions in order to revive the national spirituality" [14, p.3]. Considering neo-paganism as "a new religion constructed on the basis of polytheistic beliefs in order to search for a new ethnic identity and / or to develop a new ideological system". In our opinion, the most successful definition of "neo-paganism" was developed by A. Gaidukov: "A collection of religious, parareligious, sociopolitical, historical and cultural associations and movements that appeal to pre-Christian beliefs and cults, ritual and magical practices that revive them and reconstruction" [4, p.12].

Thus, this form of religion is synthetic and is a mixture of fragments of ancient beliefs, myths and legends, which are constructed in a special way by historians, philosophers, folklorists, etc.

Neo-paganism does not have a one-stop centre and consists of many different directions that have different approaches and religious activities, including the approaches to the self-identification of organizations. However, the researchers did describe a number of patterns that are common to almost all the native religious versions of neo-paganism. These features include, first of all, anti-Christian and anti-Semitic rhetoric. "The Christian biblical Scriptures do not have any relation to the Russian people and are equated with the ordinary mythology of the peoples of the world, which is useful to know, but making a textbook out of it is harmful and unwise" [6]. Criticism of Christianity is very sharp and painful: neo-pagans consider "Christians to be slaves, whom the cunning Jews cheated" and took as slaves, while neo-pagans are heirs of free and strong Russians who existed before the introduction of Christianity.

For neo-pagan cults, attachment to the swastika symbol or, as they call it, kolovrat is a characteristic claiming that it is an ancient Slavic symbol of the sun. "Kolovrat (swastika) is one of the most revered pagan symbols, the most powerful protective sign is the sacred symbol of the sun, expressing the unity of Kin (Axis of the World - the Fixed Center of Kolovrat) and the Native Gods (moving sides)" [6]. The historical circumstance of using the

swastika as a symbol of one of the most brutal political regimes in the history of mankind does not confuse adherents of the cult.

One of the common signs of neo-pagan groups is the use of sacred texts of dubious origin as sources of their religious beliefs. As we have already noted, the adherents of the neo-cults are mostly young people. This is due to a number of objective factors. Firstly, the youth face problems of deprivation. Young people are quite uncompromising in defending their ideals and at the same time, they are defenseless in the case of a collapse. Moreover, modern girls and boys are greatly influenced by social networks, in which traditional dogmas lie on individual pages and constantly expose the shortcomings of society. In addition, a study conducted within the framework of this research reveals the spiritual ignorance of young people, which, against the background of the information war with the Russian Orthodox Church, contributes to the rejection of Orthodoxy and the adoption of neo-pagan ideas.

Non-traditional beliefs in Russia inherited the characteristics of modern non-traditional religious organizations, the main feature of which is religious syncretism. At the same time, there are also peculiarities of neoreligious movements in Russia. First of all, it refers to the conditions in which non-traditional religions originated and were popularized. If in Europe and America neoreligions arose in conditions of weak traditional religiosity, in Russia the emergence of neoreligion coincided with a period of religious renaissance, which suggests that this phenomenon is a consequence of the crisis of traditional religions and at the same time actualization of the pluralism of the spiritual life of society. In the West, sects were an alternative to traditional religions, and in Russia, they were a specific form of protest against the communist ideology. That is why, in our opinion, neo-paganism became a kind of compensation for the spiritual vacuum that was formed after the collapse of the USSR and in the conditions of instability of the subsequent period.

Neo-paganism manifests itself mainly using the concepts of patriotism and respect for the ancient history of Russia. Using books, films, computer games, role-playing games and historical reconstructions as a tool of social influence, neo-pagans construct an attractive image of a heathen as a strong, free and fair warrior. According to the pagans: "There is almost no philosophy and / or religion that allows people to simultaneously feel themselves united, spiritual and ideological community, but at the same does not suppress individual differences of personality, but also develops them in every possible way, supporting and stimulating a variety of feelings and approaches to all phenomena of life "[10].

The trend towards neo-paganism that has developed over the past 15–20 years continues to act destructively. According to the researcher O.I. Marar it is "the absence of a holistic, purposeful state socio-cultural and educational policy, especially a policy designed for the long term and meeting the needs of not the elite part of society, but all the people" [7, p. 21]. According to N.N. Ponarina the subject, "limiting the sphere of spiritual and moral security, its sociological understanding, empirical analysis, advocates the spiritual and moral life of an individual, society and government, representing their actually functioning practical consciousness, considered in connection with the activity on the production, distribution and consumption of spiritual and moral values. The result of this diverse activity is the spiritual and moral character of the individual, certain states of mass and specialized consciousness, which are the main blocks of the system of spiritual and moral security" [11, c. 83].

Let's consider the practical aspects of the impact of neo-paganism on the Russian youth. With questionnaire survey of the period from January to February of 2019, 360 young people (aged 15 to 35 years) were interviewed, living in the cities of Shakhty, Rostov-on-Don to determine the religious and cultural identity of the respondents. The main purpose of the study was to describe the attitude of young people in the Rostov region to neoreligious cults, among which neo-paganism stands out.

The results of the study, on the one hand, confirm the hypothesis that neo-cults (including neopaganism) tend to take part in the moral and spiritual education of modern Russian youth, creating a social space around a person in which he/she would feel like in the family circle. The young man receives landmarks, care, reliability, "bombardment of love." However, these efforts are not effective. The results prove that the role of Christian (Orthodox) moral education in the formation of national-cultural identity continues to be decisive for the majority of believing young people.

So, 74% of respondents consider themselves to be believers, but 24% identify themselves as non-believers. 60% of respondents are Orthodox, 3% identify themselves as agnostics, and another 6% identify themselves as atheists. Among those surveyed 3% of Buddhist adherents and 1% of adherents of Catholicism. 16% did not give a definite answer to the question about their religious affiliation. An interesting fact is that 77% of respondents are unanimous in the opinion that religious/spiritual views do not affect their professional/educational activities, but 51% of respondents agree that their religious / spiritual views influence their behavior.

If we talk about the possible recognition of paganism as a traditional religion along with Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism, then 34% of respondents believe that "rather not," and 43% the opposite. Thus, more than half of the survey participants are inclined to believe that paganism cannot be recognized as a traditional religion. Moreover, another 44% of respondents are inclined to believe that the statement: "At present, paganism in the Russian Federation is reviving" is incorrect, another 40% of respondents refute this thesis. In addition, most of the survey participants did not take and do not participate in pagan rituals and festivals and are not the bearers of the pagan worldview.

In our opinion, the tendency to expand Orthodox values and worldview and, accordingly, reduce the significance of neoreligions, despite their propaganda, is associated with effective measures taken by state authorities, whose representatives are fully aware of the facts of a coarse planting in a society of spiritually harmful kinds of religiosity. The most active in the territory of Russia are various pseudo-religious sects, foreign missions, occult and satanic organizations, and neopagan groups have developed the most large-scale. Many of them, breaking the thresholds of morality and rights, carry within them the threat of the spiritual and moral security of society. Partly in many ways this caused the deformation of the mechanism of production, distribution and consumption of spiritual and moral values [1, pp.12-14].

In the context of a significant increase in sources of spiritual danger and threats to the integrity of Russian society, we also see a weakening of "spiritual immunity". At the same time, the threat of spirituality to society is borne by the hostile actions of certain forces (starting with foreign special services and ending with criminal communities). Spiritual threats, according to Professor P. Chizhik, are "internal and external processes, phenomena and conditions of existence of society, which contain a destructive potential. They have a negative impact on the spirituality of society and its subjects, forcing citizens to expend additional efforts to adapt to the changed conditions of social life. Threats require the state, society and individual to take measures to protect their interests and value orientations, to strengthen the spiritual elements of national security, to make changes in the strategy and tactics of ensuring it" [13, p.15].

For national security in various fields, such a variety of religious organizations as "destructive cults" poses a particular threat. According to the Center for Religious Studies in Russia, there are from 300 to 500 different sects totaling 600-800 thousand people [5, p.34], which has a correlated connection with the degree of influence of traditional religions in a particular region, to be exact, where Orthodox traditions were lost in Soviet times, the number of parishes was reduced, non-traditional religions were more common in the territories; where Orthodox traditions are more widespread the representatives of neocults are

less. However, it should be noted that in urban areas objectively representatives of non-sectoral more than in rural areas, due to the tendency of villages to more conservatism and less commitment to the modernization of the spiritual sphere and life. The largest number of sects operated in Moscow, Primorsky and Khabarovsk Territories, the Jewish Autonomous Region, Taimyr, the Komi Republic, the Arkhangelsk Region, the Sakhalin Region, North Ossetia, and Khakassia. The smallest number of sects was observed in Vladimir, Kirov, Kostroma, Kursk, Smolensk and Yaroslavl regions, Dagestan, Tatarstan, Chuvashia, Bashkortostan, Kalmykia.

A specific feature of Russian legislation in the field of spiritual and moral security is the adoption of the Law on National Security, in which the state and religious organizations are considered as full-fledged subjects in the system of ensuring national security in the spiritual sphere, which undoubtedly imposes certain rights and obligations on these subjects. In such a context, it is clear that those organizations whose activities do not run counter to the interests of the state and society legally function. In most cases, such organizations are legalized, have an official legal address and their activities are open. These conditions are an important factor, because the truth claim of a religious teaching already creates a certain conflict potential and competition for new converts and influence in society.

At the same time, despite the efforts of religious organizations in this area, it is not possible to completely level the sources of interfaith conflicts. Among them we can mention: the ethnic exclusiveness of a particular religious system; politicization of the spiritual sphere; a high level of intolerance of individual confessions to other faiths, which has deep historical roots; proselytism, i.e. activities aimed at spreading their faith and involving as many supporters as possible, based on criticism of existing religious identity, which in fact leads to competition between religions; the presence of disputes regarding the property of temples and religious property; unresolved requests of national minorities for the realization of their own spiritual needs [9, p.124].

The task of state bodies is still to modernize national legislation in this area and to promote propaganda of religious tolerance. A key element in countering the activities of destructive cults is also the promotion of the introduction of a system of religious education.

The use of religious education as a tool for resolving contradictions in society is also characteristic of the experience of foreign countries. For example, in Sweden there are compulsory courses in the state Evangelical Lutheran Church in schools; in Greece, compulsory study of Orthodox knowledge; in Germany, Denmark, Ireland, Norway, Poland, Portugal organized electives on the study of world religions and the course on ethics; Belgium has a system of compulsory religious education (Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam, Judaism), which is enshrined in Article 24 of the Belgian Constitution; in Great Britain, religious education in public schools has been an obligatory subject of the curriculum since 1944 [9, p.125].

Note that religious education does not mean the popularization and implantation of a single spiritual system by the state. This is a course aimed at understanding the role of religion in society and its etymology. Nevertheless, religious education is an important legal and functional way to counter the spread of sects and radical extremist ideas. Russian President Putin V.V. at the opening of the World Summit of Religious Leaders back in 2006, he said: "Ignorance of the elementary foundations of religious culture makes a person, and especially a young person, vulnerable in the face of dangerous extremist movements" [3]. Religious education as a way to ensure religious security is optimal and reliable from a historical perspective. The foundations of religious literacy increase the level of critical thinking of the population, which will not allow destructive cults to propagate their teachings.

There are sociological studies that convincingly prove the social benefits and the effect of the “soft impact” that the above-mentioned cultural measures have. Based on the sociological research “Attitude of youth of the Rostov region to the Russian Orthodox Church and believers in the context of their support of traditional cultural values”, conducted by the Don State Technical University to assess the readiness of young people to accept spiritual and moral subjects since 2014. At the initial stage, more than 1,000 respondents aged 18 to 35 years were surveyed. To obtain quantitative characteristics in the study, a survey method was used, which was carried out according to a formalized questionnaire, which allowed generalizing the results and confirming the hypothesis about the readiness of young people to study subjects of spiritual and moral orientation, in particular, related to Orthodox themes, namely, “Principles of morality” and “Basics of Orthodox Culture”, which were supplemented by a block of practical exercises- conversations in the church of the Holy Martyr Tatiana at DSTU [8, pp.59-60]. The study revealed a high level of Orthodox religious youth. The main indicators were considered the identity of young people regarding faith in God and the confession. The study is of an applied nature, aimed at in-depth study of certain aspects of the pedagogical process, opening the patterns of multilateral pedagogical practice.

Thus, in modern Russia, two completely opposite tendencies develop in their spirit. The first is associated with the revival and development of the spiritual traditions of the creation of Holy Russia, which more than a thousand years ago were laid by the holy Equal-to-the-Apostles Prince Vladimir and Princess Olga and were strengthened by the work of an infinite host of Russian saints, devotees of piety and simply pious laity. The second, largely due to outside influence, is aimed at deepening the spiritual crisis of Russian society. In order to overcome this spiritual crisis, we face hard work associated with educating the younger generation in the traditions of the domestic spiritual culture, defending their religious and cultural identity from destructive influences from outside [12, p.133].

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