Article

Christianity and Slavic Folk Culture: The Mechanisms of Their Interaction

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Abstract: In Slavic folk culture, Christianity is a foreign, borrowed cultural model, while the oral tradition is native and familiar. The different areas of folk culture were influenced to varying degrees by the Christian tradition. The most dependent area of Slavic folk culture on Christianity was the calendar. In many cases, it only superficially accepted the Christian content of calendar elements and reinterpreted it in accordance with the traditional mythological notions. The same can be said about the folk cult of saints. The Christian saints replaced pagan gods and over time were included in the system of folk ideas, beliefs and rituals. The mechanism for regulating the balance between man and the world is a system of prohibitions, the violation of which is recognized as sin and is punished by natural disasters, death, disease and human misfortunes. The Slavic folk tradition adapted not only the individual elements, structures and semantic categories of Christianity, but also the whole texts, plots, motifs, and themes developed in various folklore genres. Therefore, the pre-Christian folk tradition of the Slavs was able to assimilate many Christian concepts, symbols, and texts, translate them into its own language and fill them with its own content.

Keywords: Christianity; Slavic folk culture; mythology; beliefs; rites; folklore

Christianity and the oral folk tradition represent two different cultural models that have coexisted in the same ethno-cultural space since the adoption of Christianity by the Slavs. They differ in several important ways. The oral folk tradition has its roots in deep antiquity, and Christianity, as a cultural model, emerged in more recent historical times—although it, too, draws largely on folklore. In Slavic culture, Christianity is a foreign, borrowed cultural model, while the oral tradition is native and familiar. These two cultural models contrast in several different ways: written form—oral form; codified—non-codified; official—non-official; closed—open; reflection (the presence of theory and metalanguage)—non-reflection (the lack of theory and metalanguage); and consciousness (the conscious maintenance of tradition)—spontaneity (the unconscious adherence to tradition). The first characteristic in each pair relates to the Christian tradition, while the second relates to folk culture. These characteristics determine the relationships between the two cultural types. While the two cultural systems can be contrasted as religious and mythological (mythopoetic, cosmological), they are very similar in "genre" composition. Both combine a certain range of ideas about the world (the Christian cosmology and anthropology and the folkloric mythopoetic picture of the world, respectively,) with developed ritual forms (religious cult and folk rites); both are equipped with a large number of texts (verbal, musical, visual).

Historically, the direction of influence has been mostly one-sided from Christianity to the folk tradition: that is, from a stronger, more organized, strictly codified and ideologically shaped closed system to a less organized, amorphous, non-rigid and "open" system. The reverse effect was much weaker in both scope and significance and did not affect the structural and ideological foundations of Christianity; although Christian demonology was influenced by folk ideas and some church rituals adopted elements of folk customs. Therefore, first of all, we should talk about the mechanisms of adaptation of Christian elements in folk culture.

Every researcher of folk culture and folklore has to separate the pre-Christian, primordial and pagan elements from those imported from Christianity. However, the interpenetration and inevitable transformation of these elements over the centuries have created such complex forms of cultural syncretism that separating one from the other is a very difficult and sometimes impossible task.

Specialists in the field of Slavic folk culture are often accused of excessive fascination with paganism and attributing antiquity to the ritual and non-ritual folklore forms, texts and symbols recorded in records and observations of the 19th and 20th centuries. In some specific cases, this reproach may be justified, but, in general, it is likely to be a function of the ambiguity of the very concept of paganism. We must distinguish between paganism as a historical form of Slavic culture stemming from pre-Christian times and as a cultural model with its own specific "picture of the world", axiology, patterns of behaviour and symbols. Paganism as a cultural model adapts and assimilates material from many other traditions, including "foreign" belief systems such as Christianity. This assimilation sometimes happens to such an extent that, strictly speaking, it no longer makes sense to talk of paganism at all.

Therefore, the concept of dual or even triple-belief can be applied to traditional Slavic culture, primarily or almost exclusively in the genetic sense: it is, indeed, a special fusion of primordial, pre-Christian, pagan elements, Christian elements and elements of late antiquity and non-Slavic cultures that came with Christianity or from elsewhere. In part, the concept of dual faith may refer to the functional distribution of genetically pagan and genetically Christian (or non-Christian) forms in some specific situations (for example, in fortune telling on the one hand, and in church rituals on the other).

However, in terms of typology and "ideology", many areas of folk culture remained pagan in the nineteenth century and, where folk culture is preserved as an integral tradition, remain so even today. A powerful layer of Christian ritual forms, motifs, images, characters, symbols and concepts and, finally, texts assimilated by the folk tradition was in many cases subjected to mythological reinterpretation and adaptation in accordance with the traditional pre-Christian picture of the world. At the same time, different areas of folk culture were influenced to varying degrees by the Christian tradition.

1. Folk Calendar

The most dependent area of Slavic folk culture on Christianity was the calendar, which adopted the Christian system of holidays and weekdays, fasts and meat-eating as the structural basis of the entire ritual annual cycle. While folk culture borrowed from the Christian calendar the composition, order and names of festivals, in many cases, it only superficially accepted the Christian content of calendar elements and reinterpreted it in accordance with the traditional mythological notions of calendar time and in relation to the magical elements of agricultural practice.

Thanks to the practice of church worship, Christian influence on the national calendar is not erased, but remains constantly relevant. At the same time, the popular interpretation and extra-ecclesiastical ritual pragmatics of the calendar are mostly mythological in nature. Some characteristic features of the national calendar illustrate this point well.

The mythological model of time in the Slavic folk calendar is based on the opposition of pure, good and sacred time and impure, evil, unkind and dangerous time. Days and weeks can be defined by the epithets holy, Divine, bright, pure, great, joyful and good on the one hand, and evil, filthy, unclean, "unbaptized", harmful, terrible, dangerous, crooked, empty and vain on the other. Days (and holidays) can be male and female, young and old, short and lame, mad and stupid, rotten and deaf, dead and cheerful, strong and heavy, rich and poor, tough and lazy, fat and hungry, warm and cold, dry and wet, fire and water or hail and wind.

In Slavic folk chrononyms, different symbolic codes are used—colours, plants, animals and others. Days, weeks and holidays can be white, red, black, green or variegated (cf. White week, White Fryday, Green Yury, Green week, Red week, Black Wednesday,

Colorful Shrovetide and many others). Among holidays, we can see Apple Spas[1], Palm Week, Coloured (Flower) Sunday, Maple Saturday, Nut Spas, Grass Friday and similar names. In the folk calendar of the Bulgarians and the Serbs, there are autumn "wolf days", which are marked so that wolves do not attack livestock (SD 1995–2012, vol. 1, pp. 427–28), as well as "mouse days", which are marked so that mice do not eat grain in the fields and barns (SD 1995–2012, vol. 3: pp. 346–47). In the Polish and Kashubian calendar, one can find such chrononyms as *Matka Boska Niedźwiedzia* 'Bear Mother of God' (Candlemas), *Matka Boska Żabiczna* 'Frog Mother of God' (Annunciation) or *Matka Boska Zielna* 'Herb Mother of God' (Assumption of the Virgin). Calendar days and holidays may be related to each other: for example, as father, mother or nephew. In Belarus, St. Barbara's Day is the mother of St. Nicholas's Day and St. Sava's Day is the father of Nicholas's Day, while, in Russia, Shrovetide is Semik's[2] niece.

In the popular interpretation, a holiday is a stop or break in the chain of time, a moment when the border between two worlds opens. A holiday is a dangerous time fraught with threats to the inhabitants of our world and, as such, necessitates special protective measures. The meaning of individual holidays and segments of the annual cycle also often has a mythological and primitive magical basis. In the popular consciousness, even as big an annual holiday as the Annunciation often loses its original Christian meaning and "the good news" is understood as the news of the coming of spring. Similarly, Christmas is associated primarily with the advent of the new year—the magic of the beginning, the first time or the sacred proto-event.

The Russian word *prazdnik*, 'holiday', is of Church Slavonic origin. This name reflects one of the relevant features of the concept of holiday, namely the meaning 'idle, empty, free from labour'. The same word is used in all South Slavic languages. In addition, in the West Slavic and western part of the East Slavic languages, another Proto-Slavic word is used, namely **svęto,* that literally means 'holy' (Ukrainian and Belarusian *sviato, sviatok*, Polish *święto*, Czech *svátek*). This word actualizes another relevant feature of this concept—the sacredness of the holiday. Both ideas have a great weight in traditional folk culture. It is known that, in the popular consciousness, the main feature of the concept of holiday is the ban on work in general or on certain types of work and the violation of these prohibitions is considered a great sin. In turn, the sanctity of the holiday, which goes back to the pre-Christian era and is supported by the Christian canon, serves as the main reason for the honouring of holidays and justifies the prohibitions and regulations that are observed. Both names contrast the holidays as a sacred time dedicated to the divine powers with the profane time of everyday life.

In the folk tradition, it is not only etymologically that the concept of a holiday and the concept of holiness are connected. The Christian calendar, which forms the structural basis of the Slavic folk calendar, prescribes the veneration of most of the holidays as days of remembrance of a particular saint. Accordingly, the canonical names of holidays are a kind of calendar formula, including the name of the saint or the name of the venerated event: for example, "the day of the prophet Elijah", "the day of Apostle and Evangelist Mark" or "Entry into Jerusalem". In real church and folk practice, this formula was simplified and rolled up to just the name of the venerated saint (Mark, Peter and Paul, Elijah, etc.) or a two-word construction such as Peter's Day, Elijah's day, etc. Such constructions and even one-word anthroponomic nominations of holidays have been known since ancient times. In the Novgorod birch bark letters, starting from the XII century, we can see "on Peter's day" and even "before Proclus" (XV century) (Zaliznyak 1995, pp. 611, 568).

This method of denomination leads first to the identification of the name of the holiday and the name of the Saint, then to the identification of the holiday and the person of the Saint and, finally, to the complete personification of a holiday. Hence, Holiday can come to a house to punish for violation of the prohibition on work and other rules. The object of personification may even be a holiday, which in the Christian calendar is dedicated to some event, and in its name does not contain the name of the Saint (Tolstaya 2005, pp. 377–84; Tolstaya 2011).

We can see the identification of the saint and the day dedicated to him, for example, in the Belarusian Easter songs. They tell about the order and distribution of roles between the holidays-saints. For example: "Saint Boris carries sheaves and Saint Anna takes them home" (VP 1980, p. 116). In such texts, it is not the saints themselves who act, but the personified feasts. This is indicated by the transformation of female names into male names and vice versa (for example, Saint Eudokia is called in the masculine gender "Saint Eudoky", and Saint Nicholas is called by the feminine name Saint Nikola). The use of the names of saints in the plural form (for example, Barbaras, Savvas, Avdotyas, Androses) can also be seen, as well as the pairing (doubling) of the names of saints to whom the same day is dedicated (for example, Peter-Paul). But the most important thing is that among the saints-holidays there are such characters as the Saint Christmas, the Saint Annunciation, the Saint Forty Martyrs, the Saint Ascension, the Saint Intercession and the Saint Assumption. Such quasi-saints participate in the distribution of functions in the same way as the holidays dedicated to real saints.

Here are a few examples from Belarus: "The saint Eudoxias broke the winter; the saint Forty Martyrs do not walk on the river; the Annunciation begins to plough with black horses and a golden plough in its right hand"; "Oh, the first feast is Saint Yuri, the second feast is Saint Nikola (fem.), the third feast is Saint Peter, the fourth feast is Saint Elijah and the fifth feast is the Saint *Spas* (Transfiguration); Saint Yuri drives the cattle out to pasture; Saint Nicola sows the field; Saint Peter puts bees in the hive and Saint *Spas* (Transfiguration) sows wheat" (VP 1980, pp. 135, 186). In Serbian ritual songs, the quite human character *Božić* (Christmas) appears. He greets people "from behind the water (river)", shouts to them from a high mountain or from a spring or bridge and asks them to give him wine and rakiya (vodka), Christmas smoked bacon, figs and other dishes from the festive table. He wishes everyone fun and joy." (Moroz 1998).

The anthropomorphising and personification of holidays, however, is not only due to the linguistic form and pragmatics of calendar discourse. It is connected primarily with the general, mythological concept of time in folk culture. This concept gives units and time periods a positive or negative rating. A person is afraid of the elements of time and seeks to master time and subdue it by magical manipulations; for example, by compressing, stretching or deceiving time (Tolstaya 1997). The anthropomorphising of holidays is one way of mythologizing time. There is evidence of this in both language data and ritual practice.

It seems clear that the main feature of holidays is their danger to humans. According to popular beliefs, all holidays are dangerous, and the larger and holier the holiday, the more dangerous it is. In Polesie,[3] they say *varovity* day or holiday and in Serbia *varovni dan*. People are no less afraid of holidays than they are of evil spirits, and it is out of fear of them that they strictly observe prohibitions, restrictions and regulations and seek to protect themselves from them in the same ways and with the same care as they do from demons. The Serbs in Bolevac believe that: a child born on the feast of St. Simeon (September 1) will be *siromašno* (poor); one born on Christmas Eve will be unhappy; and one born on Christmas Day will be even more unhappy. It is said that, in the old days, such children were burned as they were considered unworthy to live. Mothers would keep secret that a child was born at Christmas. A child born at Easter was a forewarning of the imminent death of his parents (Trebješanin 1991, pp. 99–100).

Holidays are attributed human properties and actions. They can get angry, take offense at people and punish them for not following the prohibitions and regulations. In Polesie, they say: "We celebrate Mikhail, so that the thunder does not beat the hut. On this day, we do not chop wood, do not wash clothes, do not pick up a knife, do not weave a cross. So as not to offend Mikhail" (PA n.d., Velikiye Avtyuki, Gomel region). Another Polesian story personifying a holiday recounts: "One woman was weaving on the minor holiday (*prisviatok*) of *Warm Aleksey* (March 17). She was told: "What are you weaving, because today is a holiday!" She replied scornfully: "What kind of holiday is this!" So, at night

someone came with a big stick. The woman got scared and died. It was this holiday that came and scared her" (PA n.d., Chudel, Rivne region).

In Polesie, stories are popular about the autumn holiday Miracle (the day of remembrance of the miracle of Archangel Michael, September 6/19) and how dangerous and insidious it can be. The peasant was going to plough the field on the Miracle holiday, and was punished by it. According to the stories, he and his two oxen were petrified in the field or nothing came up in the field or the oxen died. In another story, a hostess released a cow to graze on the Miracle, and the Miracle punished her by causing her cow to bloat, and then she died, and, in another, a woman began to whitewash the house that day and went blind. Other Slavs have similar beliefs. The Serbs believe that if they had not celebrated the Thursday before Trinity, the river would have risen and the flood would have begun (Zečević 1981, p. 34).

However, holidays are attributed not only punitive, but also positive magical functions. For example, according to Polesian beliefs, in order to avoid meeting with a snake in the forest in the summer, it is necessary to say that the Annunciation was on such and such a day of the week (PA n.d., Kobrin district, Brest region). According to Ukrainian beliefs, if a person gets lost in the forest, he should remember on what day of the week Christmas fell. Then he should take some soil from under his feet and sprinkle it on his head. Then he would be able to find his way home (Nomis 1864, No. 280). In Ukrainian and Belarusian lucky charms, people turn to the holidays for help in the same way as to the saints, to God and the Mother of God. For example: "Annual holidays, great, small, please start to help me..." or in the Belarusian charm: "Holy bright day (Easter), get up to help! Holy Mikola, get up to help! Holy Friday, get up to help! Holy Ascension, get up to help! Saint Peter-Paul, get up to help! Saint Elijah, get up to help! Saint *Spas* (Transfiguration), get up to help! Saint Cover (Intercession), get up to help! ..." (Zamovy 1992, No. 1044).

The holidays are called "God's saints and quick helpers": "Let us pray and worship the Lord God, the Holy Spirit, the Holy Trinity, the One and Most Pure Mother of God, and the holy Resurrection of Christ, the honest, the merciful, and all the holy holidays, the annual holidays–from Kiev, Pechera and Rome, Jerusalem, Isaak and Jacob, and Anthony, and Theodosius, and Saint Yuri and Georgy, and Holy Father Nikola. Holy Father Nicholas, you are a saint of God, you are a quick helper, your prayers are powerful you quickly help, you drive away *volos* (a disease imagined in the form of a long and thin worm that bites into a person's body) and send it to mosses and swamps" (Ibid., No. 749).

One old woman from the village of Sporovo, Brest region, talking about her difficult and joyless life, admitted that the holiday helped her survive: "You know, I still think that this holiday helped me. In our language, it is called Onuphrius. [There was a church dedicated to St. Onuphrius in the village.] He turned my life around. Thanks to him, the pigs began to breed in twos and threes and the cow gave milk, and there was more sour cream and milk. I remember this holiday, and it seems to me that he helped me" (PA n.d.).

A holiday, like a saint, can be considered the patron of a family, clan or native land. Interesting in this respect is the famous South Slavic custom *Slava*, known mainly in Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and named *slava* (glory), *krsno ime* (Christian name), *svetac* (saint), *svechari* (saints) or *praznik* (holy day). A family or clan praises one saint (or two saints) on the day(s) of their memory. The most popular of these patrons are Saints George, Nikola, Sava, Jovan and Luka. However, it is not only saints that can be glorified, but also holidays that do not have their own saint: such as the Exaltation (*Krstovdan*), the Intercession (*Pokrovitsa*), the Ascension (*Spasovdan*), as well as the Candlemas of the Lord (*Sretenie*), the New Year, the Assumption of the Virgin and others (Nedeljković 1990, p. 317). In essence, the same meaning is given to votive holidays among Russians, only they are not generic, but individual or rural and sometimes occasional in nature.

On the further path of personification of the holidays, new "saints" may even be created, who are venerated to the same degree as Christian saints. This is how the Bulgarians acquired a saint named *Mladen*, who owes his origin to the feast of the Forty Martyrs

(March 9), which in some Bulgarian regions is called *Mladenci* (Young men). People turn to the *Mladen* as well as to the traditional saints with prayers and requests: "Saint Mladen, rejuvenate us with God's help". Among Bulgarians, however, the most venerated saint is St. Theodor (who united the cult of Theodor Stratilat and Theodor Tyron), and he is a figure as sacred as he is demonic. St. Theodor's Memorial Day (*Todor*) is considered the first Saturday of Lent. Researchers of folk tradition pay attention to the fact that this saint, with the usual male image, is sometimes (in the northern Bulgarian regions) given the female name *Todoritsa*, *Tudurichka*, *Baba Tuduritsa* and is revered as a female saint. In this we can see traces of the androgyny of the pre-Christian pagan deity (Popov 1994, p. 84). I believe that there may rather be calendar and linguistic reasons for turning a male *Todor* into a female *Todorica*. In the folk calendar, the Slavic nouns for the first week of Lent (*Todorova nedelja*) and the Saturday of that week (*Todorova subota*) are feminine in gender (*nedelja, subota*). Thus, the names *Tudorica* and *Baba Tudorica* simply personalise these feminine-gender units of calendar time.

The same can be said about such calendar characters as *Baba Marta* (personification of the first day of spring, March 1, or the entire month of March) and *Baba Korizma* among the Southern Slavs. In Slavic Catholic traditions *Post* is the personification of the period of Great Lent. Among the Bulgarians, *Baba Marta* is thought to be a wayward and capricious old woman who does not tolerate other old women, who, in consequence, must try not to leave the house on her Saint's Day. Her character is explained by the changeable weather at this season of the year. *Baba Martha*'s relatives are considered to be the personified months of January (*Golyam Sechko*) and February (*Malak Sechko*). In relation to them she is either a sister or a spouse. As a punishment, she can send strong cold winds or blizzards (BM 1994, pp. 17–18). In Serbian calendar beliefs, *Baba Korizma* is endowed with all the features of a mythological (demonic) character: she is an old, skinny, evil and cruel old woman who menacingly drags chains and carries seven sticks on her shoulder, symbolizing the seven weeks of Great Lent (Nedeljković 1990, p. 8).

Another striking example of the personification and anthropomorphising of holidays in the Slavic folk calendar is the so-called semantic model of kinship. In popular ideas reflected in calendar terminology, paremiology and folklore, holidays and calendar days are related to each other: father or mother, brother, niece, etc. In terms of such a family-generic model, the semantic association between calendar units that are chronologically contiguous or symmetrical in the annual cycle becomes one of the ways to structure annual time. (For more information, see Zaykovsky 1994; Tolstaya 2005, p. 12). Family relations link not only one holiday to another, but other units of calendar time (months, seasons): for example, in Belorussian folklore "November is the grandson of September and the son of October and winter's own father" (Lozka 1993, p. 176).

Thus, the personification of holidays and other parts of the annual cycle derive from two different sources. First, it is the book-written, ecclesiastical tradition of designating and interpreting holidays in connection with the names and images of Christian saints which gives the calendar characters and personified holidays a sacred status and makes them objects of veneration together with the canonical saints. Secondly, it is an oral, folklore tradition that involves calendar time in the sphere of mythological representations. This tradition gives them demonological or semi-demonological features which brings them closer to characters of a completely different type—to representatives of lower mythology. However, the Christian saints themselves are also subject to mythologization in the oral tradition see (Tolstaya 1995).

2. Sacred and Magical in the Folk Cult of Saints

It has been said and written many times that in the popular consciousness of the Slavs, Christian saints replaced pagan gods, taking their functions and their place in the pantheon. For example, St. Elijah replaced the god of thunder Perun, St. Nicholas replaced the animal god Veles-Volos and St. Paraskeva took the place of the goddess Mokosh. That such replacements were possible seemed to compensate for the loss of polytheism and

smoothed the sharpness of the transition from one cultural model to another. Over time, all the Christian saints were more or less included in the system of folk ideas, beliefs and rituals. They adapted to it and were ultimately mastered by it. In the process of this adaptation, the way in which their images were presented in the lives of the saints and other apocryphal texts changed radically. To a certain extent, the images of God, the Virgin and other evangelical characters seen in folk Christianity have also undergone significant changes.

The events and deeds that justified the canonization of the saints and the circumstances of their lives and of their death for the faith live on only in church texts or similar genres. In the oral peasant culture, the popular stories, legends and songs about these saints ceased to be significant and disappeared from memory even though their names still figured in the national calendar. The saints themselves are often relegated to the level of mythological, semi-demonic or completely demonic characters, and the sacred texts of prayers often mix with and dissolve into primitive magical spells.

The main direction of change and transformation that Christian saints have undergone in oral folk culture has been their mythologization and their endowment with supernatural magical abilities that give them power over natural phenomena and human life.

Following the pagan model, saints have undergone a specialization: each of them is assigned certain areas of nature such as rain, hail, wind, animals and birds or certain human activities such as breeding and farming, beekeeping, spinning and weaving and folk medicine. The archaic worldview of the ancient Slavs was based on the obvious desacralization of the saints, their separation from the higher divine sphere and their joining with the true holders of power over earthly life—the ancestors and dead relatives. The saints are perceived as belonging to the "other world" joined with the deified ancestors and with the characters of lower mythology (evil spirits).

At the same time, Saints descend to the ground, walk through fields and roads, enter houses, and punish people for violating norms and prohibitions. For example, Paraskeva-Friday spins at night on an abandoned spinning wheel, mixes up the yarn or breaks the tools of any woman seen spinning at an untimely time or on a holiday. The saints are asked for help in all aspects of life through prayer or with charms. People make them vows, offer them sacrifices and gifts and take offense with them when their requests are not granted. They even punish the saints; for example, by taking their icon and scratching out the eyes, turning it to the wall, breaking it or dropping it in water. Communications with the saints are not much different from those with mythological characters such as a brownie, a house goblin, a water-sprite or mermaid.

All collections of charms contain direct appeals to the saints for help: for example, in the Serbian charm "Lord, help, and Saints Kuzma and Demian, help, and Saint Ilya, and Saint Basil" (Radenković 1982, p. 209, No. 343), or in the Northern Russian Archangel charm: "Kuzma-Demyan, the god of artisans and selfless adherent of Christ, come to me and my little sister and help stop the blood, so that the 'meat' (body) does not hurt and the bones do not ache. From now on and forever and ever. Amen" (LLZ 1992, p. 23, No. 20). However, more often the figure of the saint acts as a wonderful fairy helper and a defender from evil forces. For example, in the Archangelsk charm against fever, "Saints Kuzma and Demyan meet twelve shaggy, hairy and girdle-less virgins, take out sharp sabres and prepare to take their heads off" (LLZ 1992, p. 42, No. 72). Compared to the Serbian charm: "Saint Tomas, bring the golden cart, burn the *vilas* and *veshtitsas* and all the other wicked" (Radenković 1982, p. 46, No. 56).

The saints serve as sacral prototypes, so that, when magical actions are performed, people turn to the saints to give their actions a sacred status and make them successful. For example, "Mother Most Holy Virgin, Queen of heaven, you washed your son in a steam bath and I (name) brought you water" (LLZ 1992, p. 39, No. 66). Finally, the names of the saints in the charms can curse evil power and disease: for example, "Come out, I conjure you by Saint Jacob, God's brother" (Radenković 1982, p. 211). Saints are also often presented with gifts and sacrifices; for example, there is a widely known custom of leaving

ears of grain on the field at the end of the harvest. This is called the beard of Christ or Volos, or Ilya, or Nikola or Kuzma-Demyan. In various folklore formulas (ritual sentences, incantations, etc.), saints often replace each other. For example, when girls seek for their fortunes "Andrew, Andrew, I'm sowing hemp on you (i.e., on your day). Let me know who I will be sleeping with". The name of Andrew can be substituted with other saints who are venerated in the calendar such as St. Basil, Alex and Makovey (often depending on the day of divination). However, there are many cases when sacred characters or saints are united with characters of a completely different level, with lower-level mythological characters or demons. For example, invitations to Christmas dinner may be addressed not only to God, the Mother of God, All Saints and St. John the Baptist, Nikola, Herman, etc., but also to the personified forces of nature (frost, wind, cloud). This example is found in Polesie: "Frost, frost, go to eat *kutia* (a Christmas dish)!" Invitations can also be offered to animals and birds, dead ancestors and even evil spirits (the witch, the brownie, the devil or demons who control the clouds) (Vinogradova and Tolstaya 2005).

In the texts of Serbian incantations directed against hail clouds, the names of the saints are invoked equally with the names of the dead (hanged or drowned), who, according to popular beliefs, control the clouds: for example, "Don't you dare come here, Saint John! Don't you dare, I beg you!" (Tolstoy and Tolstaya 1981, p. 64). In another prayer-incantation, there is an appeal to Saint Sava, who has become seen as the lord of the heavenly cattle (the hail clouds): "Saint Sava, drive away your cows from our village…" (ibid.). The name of a real drowned or hanged person from a given village can also be used in a prayer-incantation for the same purpose: for example. "Oh, Radojka Zimonia! Drive away your cows, keep them out of our fields. Don't you dare, don't you dare, don't you dare!" (ibid., p. 74) or: "Milija, drowned woman, burn your cattle, drive them away! Let them go to the mountains and to the water, where nothing grows" (ibid., p. 77); and "Drowned and hanged, drive your cattle there, do not come here" (Radenković 1982, p. 363, No. 588). This kind of parallelism, the isofunctionality of the characters of the sacred and the mythological, confirms the way in which popular culture assimilates Christian motifs and images—the process of mythologization.

In Russia, the cult of St. Nicholas (commonly called *Nikola*) provides a striking example of mythologization. As Uspensky (1982) showed, the veneration of Nikola can be attributed to the cult of the pagan god Veles–the patron saint of cattle and the opponent of the thunder god Perun. In his book, there are many examples of Nikola being seen not only as a pagan god, but also as a character of lower mythology, revered at the same level as the goblin or even the bear. A similar transformation takes place among the Serbs in the widely revered St. Sava, who in popular belief becomes the patron saint of cattle, their protector from wolves and, at the same time, the wolf master. On his day in December, St. Sava climbs on a pear tree, summons the wolves, entertains them and indicates whose cattle will be their prey for the next year (SMR et al. 1998, p. 263).

Another example of this kind is the cult of St. Herman among the Balkan Slavs, especially in Bulgaria and Macedonia. Saint Herman is considered as the lord of clouds, thunderclouds, rain and hail. In many areas, he was called *gradushkar* (from the word *grad* 'hail' or the *cloud*). This character has already lost the features of a Christian saint and has acquired the status of a natural spirit or a deity of the elements. The only feature that connects him with the Christian belief system is the timing of the rituals, which are performed on St. Herman's Day (May 12). However, these rites are already absolutely pagan in nature. Participants make a clay doll named Herman, then symbolically bury it and mourn. The ritual is perfected during a drought to cause rain, or prophylactically on St. Herman's Day to prevent a summer drought. When people see that a thunderstorm or hail cloud is approaching, they go out of the house and address the cloud, calling it Herman, with the words: "Go away, Herman, there is no place for you here! Go to the desert, Herman, where the meadows are not mowed, Herman, where the wheat is not gathered from the field, Herman, where the vineyard is not harvested, Herman, where the young men are not married, Herman!" (Radenković 1982, p. 368, No. 608).

Thus, in the perception of Christian saints, there is often no trace left of the veneration for either the traditional religious or moral aspects of their holiness. It seems that the cult of saints can be transformed through reduction and desacralization with the ideal of Holiness eliminated, but it can also remain part of a dual faith, in which one aspect is a dominant Christian culture, where the ideal of Holiness has not only been retained but further developed in both the religious and moral senses (Toporov 1995).

Life-cycle rites and everyday practical activities were noticeably less influenced by Christian culture. Here, Christian elements were used almost exclusively as a means of sacralising various ritual acts of a magical (productive or protective) nature and most often did not influence their deep (mythological) content. Examples of this include priests leading processions with icons and banners around fields, saying prayers, sprinkling water to bring on rain and praying for the harvest. Similarly, the objects of Christian worship and even the clergy themselves often became the object or instrument of magical actions; for example, when people girded the church with a long ribbon of cloth, drank water from icons, poured water on the priest during a drought or forced the priest to roll around in the field to make the crops grow better.

3. Folk Ideology and Axiology

Understanding Christian concepts was often facilitated by the presence in the Slavic languages and collective consciousness of similar concepts and values inherited from the pre-Christian era. For example, the concept of holiness, which we perceive exclusively as an element of the Christian worldview and the Christian value system, was actually a most important pre-Christian concept. As V. N. Toporov showed in his works, many texts of Ancient Russian literature, especially those about the first Russian saints Boris and Gleb and Theodosius of Pechersk, contain a pre-Christian substratum of holiness as the highest spiritual value. Etymological analysis of words with the root **svęt-* in Slavic languages and their comparison with related words of other Indo-European languages (above all with the Sanskrit word *śvanta*, found in the Rig Veda and derived from a verb meaning 'to swell, or grow') shows that the original, pre-Christian definition of this word was associated with a fairly specific meaning of swelling, growth or fertility, which was then abstracted and extended to the spiritual sphere and sacralised. This semantic "elevation" determined the further evolution of this word towards such new meanings as righteousness, purity and virtue (Toporov 1987).

We can also be confident that another key concept of Christian culture—the concept of sin—also has ancient pre-Christian origins. Of course, the content of these conceptual and axiological categories of folk culture could not stay the same and would have changed under the influence of the Christian faith. At the same time, the Christian concept was not only assimilated, but also underwent serious semantic transformations.

Sin is one of the main concepts of Christian ethics. The theory of sin is a specially developed component of the Christian doctrine with its own concepts, arguments, motives and texts, etc. In the oral folk tradition, there are no texts discussing the concept of sin. Such texts are found only in the so-called spiritual verses, and this genre derives from a mixture of folk and church sources.

This, however, does not mean that the concept of sin is generally alien to the conceptual sphere of folk culture. It is not just the result of a mechanical assimilation of the Christian concept or a simple cultural borrowing. There is every reason to believe that, as in the case of holiness, there was a certain "correlate" of the Christian concept of sin in the pre-Christian world view. It is clear that it was one of the most important concepts of pre-Christian culture, which, after the adoption of Christianity, underwent a significant transformation. In the same way, the Christian concept underwent profound changes as the adaptation to folk beliefs developed.

Thus, what can be called the folk concept of sin is a complex mix of religious (Christian) and mythological (pre-Christian, pagan) ideas, elements of oral and book culture, postulates of popular law and of traditional value systems. The main parameters and

coordinates of this concept are not given to us in pure form, they can only be reconstructed from a variety of indirect data: from the evidence of language (vocabulary, phraseology, paremiology); from customs, rituals, prohibitions and prescriptions (and especially from explanations of the reasons behind them); from stories, legends, songs and narratives about the consequences of sins that tell of the posthumous fate of sinners and the righteous and about the atonement of sins; and from other diverse folklore texts that discuss the motives of sin and sinners.

While the Christian interpretation of sin is "any, deviation by act or word and even thought from the commandments of God (either free and conscious or forced and unconscious) and a violation of the law of God" (Khristianstvo 1993, p. 430), the semantic boundaries of the Slavic word of sin in its literary and dialectal use are much wider. Sin is the violation of any law or rules or regulations, whether it be the law of God, the law of nature or popular laws or behavioural norms (Tolstaya 2000).

According to popular beliefs, every action or act of a person receives a certain "response" from the world, nature and the cosmos, and every act or action that violates the "norm" (i.e., the existing unspoken prohibitions) also violates the balance of the world and threatens negative consequences for the world and for man. In these parameters, the folk concept of sin is formed. Sin is anything that contradicts the norm and triggers a punishing reaction by nature (or a higher power). In the folk tradition, the composition of sins and their ranking in strength differs from measures of the severity of sin in Christian thought. Note, for example: the notion of mortal sin; the notion of the seven deadly sins; and punishment, in accordance with the severity of the offense often set out in quantitative terms (such as the obligation to bow down to the ground forty or a hundred times and observe a certain number days of fasting). According to the Polish researcher of Polesie, Czesław Pietkiewicz, "sin in the concept of a resident of Polesie is not a simple question. He keeps in mind an extensive list of sins, but he ranks them himself: a great sin, simple sin and small sin. He considers many acts sinful, including some that are not recognized by the church. Among the great sins he includes: murder for the purpose of robbery or for the sake of revenge, mutilation, disrespect for the cross, perjury, arson and the theft of bees. At the same time, the murder of a horse thief, a bee thief, or an arsonist is not considered a great sin, not even a small sin, which is the term used to define the most minor offenses" (Pietkiewicz 1938, pp. 271–73).

According to folk ethics, almost every sin can lead to the most serious consequences for a person, for society, for the whole world or for the cosmos. For example, hail can be a punishment for what we would see as incomparable crimes: on the one hand, the birth of a bastard or its murder and, on the other, the chopping of firewood at Christmas. However, in some folklore texts, there is an idea of sin that is particularly close to the tradition of the Church. So, in spiritual verses, according to G. P. Fedotov, the most terrible sins are considered: 1. sins against mother earth and the religion of genus; 2. sins against the ritual law of the church; and 3. sins against the Christian law of love (Fedotov 1991, pp. 84–86).

In those areas of culture that have not experienced the direct influence of Christian ideology, the gravest sins are the crimes against the "law of genus", such as murder and disrespect of parents, incest and marriage between godchildren and adoptive parents. In Slavic folklore, the motif of incest of a brother and sister and the disastrous consequences of this terrible sin is widely known. This is either the death of the sinners themselves or the "punishment" of nature: for example, rivers can dry up, forests can wither and animals run away.

Often in this respect, the folk tradition is stricter than the church tradition. For example, in some areas of Serbia, marriages are prohibited between members of the family of up to the sixth generation. They are also sometimes prohibited between families bearing the same surname or having the same patron saint, between persons having the same godfather, between persons related by a twinship and their descendants, between foster brothers and sisters, etc. In fact, disregard of ritual kinship can be considered as an even more serious sin than incest. The consequences of violating these prohibitions may concern

not only the perpetrators themselves (their marriage will not be successful, they will face death, they will have sick or freak children, etc.), but also their entire house and family (the family may die out, the house will burn down from lightning, etc.).

The bride who lost her virginity before marriage is seen as a great danger to society and nature. All Slavs know a variety of ritual forms that establish the "honesty" or "dishonesty" of the bride during the wedding night, as well as a system of punishments for the non-virginal bride such as a ritual scolding that is usually addressed to the bride's mother. In addition, measures are taken to protect the fields from the eyes of such a bride. When she is taken out of the house, she is blindfolded, so that her "sinful" look does not make the fields barren. The voice of such a bride is capable of killing cattle and so she is forbidden to use her voice outside of the house (Tolstaya 1996).

The most common and strictly observed regulations among the Slavs are temporal (calendar, daily, lunar) in nature: notably, bans on working on holidays, especially at Christmas, Easter and the Annunciation. The severity of these prohibitions was explained not so much by the veneration of these holidays as by the fear of them. According to popular beliefs, the penalty for violating such prohibitions could be the birth of ugly offspring in both humans and cattle. Ukrainians believed that freaks would be born when a husband and wife had sexual intercourse on solemn holidays. People were sure that if a pregnant woman painted a hut before the holiday, her child would be born blind, as she will "paint over his eyes". If the husband cut wood on a holiday, the child would be born a cripple (Chubinsky 1872, p. 18). In Polesie (Oniskovichi Brest region), children conceived on memorial days would be born deaf (PA n.d.).

An interesting feature of the folk normative system is the idea that a sin can be atoned for by special magical actions that will enable the avoidance or mitigation of the prescribed punishment. For example, if during the Christmas holidays a woman had to sew or spin despite the ban on doing so, then she could "transfer" this sin to an old broom and after the holidays she should cut the broom into pieces on the doorstep or on the stove door with the words: "What you knitted—let be unknitted, what you sewed, let be unsewed, what you whipped—let be unwhipped" (PA n.d.).

While in customary law the punishing force is society (often through its authoritative representatives or the elders of the family), in Christian law, the punishment comes from God. As the examples cited above have shown, in folk religion, the punitive functions are attributed to an unpersonalised higher power or to nature itself. The object of punishment in folk religion is not the sinner, as in common law, but society as a whole or even the whole world. Of course, the criminal can be punished but the punishment in mythological law is very different to the one in the common law. Mythological punishment is always understood as the intervention of otherworldly forces as is evidenced in the following examples.

The South Slavs adopted various forms of social punishment for those who committed grave sins such as murder, theft, arson, violence and adultery. In these cases of serious crime, the Serbs would gather at the edge of the village and call a curse on the head of the guilty person, regardless of whether he was known or not. For this action, a holiday was chosen, and the more significant the holiday, the greater the effect of the ritual was expected to be. While uttering curses and incantations, people would throw stones, clods of earth and sticks to make a large pile and everyone passing by would have to throw their stone on it and utter a curse. This rite was called anathema or *prokletije* or *kamenovanje* (SD 1995–2012, vol. 1, pp. 106–7).

Punishment in the mythological law would be quite different. There is a well-known belief among Slavs that someone who has committed a grave sin can turn into stone. There are many stories about some specific stone boulders formed from people turned into stone for their sins. According to a Belarusian legend, in the beginning of the world brothers-in-law lived with each other, sisters lived with brothers, daughters with fathers, mothers with sons, godfathers with godmothers not knowing that it was a sin. Then God began to turn them into stones as a punishment. Once, a godfather and a godmother were traveling on

epiphany and were tempted to sin along the way, and at that moment they were turned into stones. From that time on, people began to listen to God and began to marry strangers with strangers (Federowski 1897, vol. 209, N 861). This legend is interesting because it explains the very origin of the concept of sin, and, as we see, the punishment for it precedes the realization of sin.

In Polesie, a drought might be seen as a punishment if one of the villagers had touched the ground before the Annunciation (for example, in digging holes for fence posts), or a woman had baked bread. To stop the drought and bring on the rain, it was necessary to break the fence set at the "wrong" time or pour water on the woman who had violated the ban on working. Another reason for the drought was often considered to be that "unclean" dead (suicides or especially a hanged person) had been buried in "clean", consecrated land in the cemetery. Therefore, to bring on rain, it was necessary to destroy the grave of this person or at least tear up a cross from it and sometimes even dig up the deceased and throw the corpse into the water.

Thus, mythological morality, in contrast to social and religious morality, is based on the idea that there is a direct connection between human behaviour and the state of the cosmos. The mechanism for regulating the balance between man and the world is a system of prohibitions, the violation of which is recognized as sin and is punished by natural disasters, death, disease and human misfortunes. The arbiter of judgment and punishment is nature itself or the higher powers. A person can only appeal to these forces, uttering curses and calling for punishment on the head of the guilty. Curses, although uttered by humans, are a mythological mechanism, as evidenced by widespread legends about the miraculous and literal execution of curses (for example, a mother in her heart says to a child: "May the goblin take you!", and the goblin takes the child).

4. Christian Motifs in the Oral Tradition

The Slavic folk tradition adapted not only individual elements, structures, and semantic categories of Christianity, but also ready-made "texts" (whole or parts), plots, motifs and themes developed in various folklore genres. Intermediaries connecting the canonical Christian text and the folklore text included the apocryphal literary tradition and a certain fund of representations, plots and images already prepared in the spirit of the folk tradition and adapted to it. This forms the "textual" (narrative) basis of what is sometimes called folk Christianity (or folk Orthodoxy).

In its full form, of course, this "textual basis" is not recorded anywhere. After a long break, however, attempts are once again being made to reconstruct it from the material of different Slavic traditions. Consequently, the subject of special (including field) research is the topic of the Slavic "folklore bible" (Bulgarian, Polesian, Russian, Belarusian) (Badalanova 1999; Kuznetsova 1998; Ot Bytiya k Iskhodu 1998; Belova 2004; BNB 2010).

It is from this "secondary" source (folk Christianity) that various folklore genres draw specific biblical (evangelical) plots and motifs in the creation of new folklore texts. Different genres deviate to varying degrees from the direct presentation of biblical events. Whereas spiritual poems tend to preserve both the event outline and the ideological meaning of the source, legends handle it much more freely. Other genre forms, charms, for example, only incorporate individual Christian motifs and symbols.

Once in the folklore context, the Christian element is included in the semantic field of another cultural and symbolic language and inevitably undergoes changes, losing some meanings and connotations and acquiring others. This is well illustrated by the example of a folk song based on the Bible story of the meeting of Christ with a girl at a well. Christ asks for water to drink and the girl refuses him, saying that her water is unclean. More than a century ago, A. N. Veselovsky wrote about this song as a reworking of the gospel story about the Samaritan Woman (John 4). He pointed to the Slavic versions known to him and to some European parallels based on the same the gospel text, but nevertheless very far from the Slavic versions (Veselovsky 1877).

To date, this story has been recorded among the Eastern Slavs (mainly in Belarus and in Polesie) and in the Carpathians. Some examples have been found among the Western Slavs in southeastern Poland and some isolated versions in other Polish regions and in Moravia and Lusatia (about fifty versions in total). No traces of the song have been found in South Slavic folklore. The text is practically unknown in the territory of Greater Russia.

Developing this gospel theme, Slavic folklore follows the Bible story of the meeting of the Lord with a woman at the well quite closely. However, while their conversation stays close to the Bible story, its meaning is very different. The parable of the "living water" of faith turns into a ballad about the punishment of a sinful girl who killed her illegitimate children. In some versions, we find some development of the gospel text and the account of the Samaritan woman's illegitimate husbands: "Jesus said to her, 'You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband" (John 4: pp. 17–18). The ballad also develops the motif of the Samaritan woman's recognition of God: "The woman says to Him, 'Lord! 'I can see that you are a prophet'." John 4: p. 19 (see Tolstaya 1999).

A comparison of the Belarusian, Polesian, Polish, Moravian and Lusatian versions reveals many similarities and differences. They relate primarily to additional motifs and storylines related to such topics as sin, atonement for sin, punishment and salvation of the soul. As for the nuclear part of the text, the variation is much less noticeable. The development of this theme in the Polesian song fully corresponds to the oral folklore tradition, in which all sin (and infanticide in particular) is understood as a mythological and "human" category, and punishment as a reaction of "cosmic force". There is a widespread belief among the Slavs that an illegitimate and murdered child causes torrential rains, hail and natural disasters.

In summary, we can say that the pre-Christian folk tradition of the Slavs did not disappear under the influence of the stronger system of Christian culture. It was able to assimilate many Christian concepts, symbols and texts, translate them into its own language and fill them with its own content. However, in relation to some most important ideas, the folk tradition turned out to be extremely stable and closed. In fact, the cult of the dead and the lower mythology, which form the ideological basis of the mythological (mythopoetic) cultural paradigm, remained untouched by Christian influence.

Notes

[1] Apple Spas is The Transfiguration of the Lord (August 6/19).
[2] Semik is the Thursday before Trinity.
[3] Polesie–border region between Belarus, Ukraine and Russia.

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