

## **ECOLOGY OF CULTURE: THE FOLKLORE AND CHRISTIAN ASPECTS OF THE REBIRTH OF A CULTURE**

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It is not long since three words were repeated as a magical spell that was to change our lives drastically – ‘scientific-technical progress’. The whole idea and final goal of the progress became an end in itself and the progressive social movement for the realisation of the principle ‘Everything to the benefit of man!’ receded into the background. The intensification of the self-destructive processes was accompanied by local ecological shocks such as the pollution of the water of Lake Baikal, Caspian and Ladoga, soil amelioration at Polesye, construction of the St. Petersburg dam, etc., the logical succession of which was the global disaster of Chernobyl. Cataclysms in the nature and economy shifted humanitarian values to the background. Time will show whether it will be uncontrollable nuclear energy or a spiritual Chernobyl paralysing the aesthetic and historical processes of culture that will prove to be a more destructive force in laying waste civilisations. No doubt the triad *ecology of mankind – ecology of culture – ecology of environment* is very topical. In the present article we shall treat some aspects of the rebirth of the centuries-old traditional and Christian culture.

There is no need for historical retrospection to view the complicated relations between the Byelorussian heathen tradition and Christianity that led to the medieval stakes of the Inquisition. Our task is also not the reconciliation or forceful melting of these two powerful directions of consciousness. For example, the magical spells combined ancient dominantly pagan contents and ideas with Christian initial, final and, rarely, medial formulas.

It will be our goal to define the possible ways of rebirth of these two levels of culture, with the aim to preserve their humanist potential and to ensure the moral perfection and purification of each individual and the society as a whole.

The contemporary renaissance of folklore is multifarious and inconsistent, by no means moving in one direction only. A pietist attitude to spiritual values that has developed and taken root during the long process of ethnic development attempts to preserve the fixed local relations of space and time, the structure of rhythm and melody and functional peculiarities. There is also still the tendency to modernise the ancient tradition and to ‘folklorise’ the professional singing culture.

The complicated processes of the 20-th century brought about essential

changes in the ancient Byelorussian tradition; Christian culture was eliminated from the natural processes of development of the spiritual culture of the ethnos. The sub-culture of the new age gave birth to its singing culture, traditions and rites that often were not dominated by ethical or aesthetic standards with some ethnic traits, but by pompous and refined *elite* cult that came into collision with the realities of everyday life. Artificial rituals elaborated in methodology of offices did not always take into consideration the peculiarities of the historic development of the ethnos, their level of consolidation and specific traits of their self-consciousness; they were not grounded on thorough researches in folklore sociology – and as a result, the ethno-psychological aspects of modern culture were all reduced to the same level. Moreover, while introducing new customs by administrative order, the historically developed local cultural structures, existing religious cults, etc., were ignored. The main aims of the new historic social group developed at the period of ‘advanced socialism’ were adaptation and assimilation.

After shredding the fetters of ideological censorship, the intellectuals once again had the opportunity to express themselves freely and there was more variation in the ways of the development of culture. Now the viewpoints of the representatives of the same social or age group may be quite opposite to each other, in fact, exclude each other. The young generation was subjected to the influence of various phenomena of mass culture. Besides, there is a conspicuous and deepening interest in the spiritual sources of folk culture.

Strictly scientifically speaking, the contemporary rebirth of folklore differs essentially from the traditional methods of the translation of culture. The interest in one’s cultural heritage testifies to the fact that the previous era was not able to cause genetic or ethnic mutations in their ethnic self-awareness. It seems that an unbroken cultural succession was preserved in the people’s memories. The consciousness, whose task it is to universalise and standardise one’s environment is coming gradually closer to the recognition of the real and permanent value of the mosaic relics of the traditional material and spiritual culture. Hence the reconstruction of churches, development of arts and crafts, celebration of popular holidays with all the relevant components, restoration of old names of the settlements, etc.

A heightened interest in the traditional spiritual culture causes substantial transformations in its forms and ways of usage, combination of folklore with different arts, which results in the modern folklore substratum being considerably more widespread than its ancient syncretic foundation of folklore. The most important task of the folklore specialists is to give instruction to folk groups, so that they would be able to maintain the main characteristics of singing culture and rely on the natural forms of the current tradition. Today the

older informants are seen as links between the past and the present. Every time such a connecting thread snaps, it means discontinuance of a tradition and a loss for the future. Therefore it is extremely necessary to set up an information bank of folklore and traditions with the help of high-quality video and audio devices. The Byelorussian TV and radio are shooting video films about popular holidays and ethnographic folk groups. Some of the films are impaired by the tendencies of simplification and publicity, the peculiarities of national costumes and singing culture are ignored. The films have been shot in a hurry, no experts have been consulted, the ancient meaning of the presented material has been distorted, the most archaic, ritual part of it has not been unfolded.

At present, there are two ways of presenting folklore in Byelorussia. Folklore groups prepare a classical program of folklore that is performed in adaptation to spatial and temporal co-ordinates, i.e. it is spatially limited: it is performed on the stage of a concert hall or TV studio. On the other hand, there is a growing tendency to revive the traditional village festivals in an urban environment. Such are, for example, the spring welcoming festival, St. John's Day, memorial day for the dead (*dzyadou*) and *kolyada* during the New Year celebration. There is a tendency by amateur folk groups to popularise the archaic culture. They try to practise the authentic culture in separation from its social and historical spatial, temporal and ethno-cultural circumstances. A widespread 'folklorisation' of modern art helps the forming individual consciousness to come to his ethnicity, to regenerate the environment of ethnic tradition by perceiving their innermost relationship, economic, denominational a. o. bonds, by ritual and ethnic norms of regulation. It is a complicated and controversial process. The most complicated part of it is to make the modern passive on-looker into an active bearer and upkeeper of the tradition. What makes the task more difficult is the modern way of organising events, which is wrong in principle. In an isolated urban environment the whole action is focused in a particular epicentre (a park, a square). In such a case the theatrical show cannot be changed into a strictly regulated rite.

In principle the widespread acceptance of folk tradition by all social strata is a positive phenomenon. However, its realisation requires a long period of socialisation of the personality in an ethnographic folklore environment, so that the borderline between the rebirth of folklore and mass culture would not be obscured.

Besides the traditional heritage, Christian culture is becoming increasingly topical: the number of church christenings, weddings and funerals is increasing. The expansion and revival of the influence of the Church Slavonic sphere of culture is another controversial and complex process. typologically it does not differ from the renaissance of culture. A long period of neglect of Christian

culture has led to the condition when generations of young people have been isolated from it and therefore are not even familiar with its basics. As a result, their natural desire to partake in this immense and complex world recoils at their inability to understand this world with its inner essence. Today there are several ways to learn the basics of the Christian world outlook. Sunday schools are established where parents and children are sitting together at a table; history of religion is taught at *lycées* and grammar schools; there is an increasing network of theological seminaries and academies. TV companies of Russia and this country have given their contribution to familiarise people with church culture, as they translate vespers and programs about the history and fate of some masterpieces of architecture.

Such a powerful impulse of Christian revival is very encouraging, as it brings broad masses to the Christian world order. In reality, however, there are endless discussions about the advantages of one or another denomination. Lack of debating skills, distorted value orientation, absolutisation of one's own denomination, have led to many situations of conflict.

Very frustrating are the unending quarrels between Orthodox and Catholic Byelorussians (the latter persist in their claim of being Poles). The inhabitants of the village of Vereika (Volkovyski region, district of Grodno) are arguing among themselves whether the destroyed shrine should be reconstructed as an Orthodox church or a Catholic cathedral.

There is another aspect in the political and ideological situation in Byelorussia that is connected with the revival of Christian culture. A part of the people were enchanted by the Marxist concept of development, while others did not believe in it, but they had no chance to say so; at present they are inclined to accept the church culture. The situation was similar in Poland after 1980 when 'Solidarity' played a very active role. Partially, the people's return to the church is a specific reaction to the ideology that had ruled for a long time.

Our perception psychology is oriented to the universalism of stereotypes ('Existence determines consciousness', was Marx's statement). Soon you get used to it, accept it without noticing it yourself, and after a while you recognise it as the only correct criterion. We have been living in repentance for some time and in our purification there is a question that prevails: does this path take us to the temple? How did it happen that a human being – a child in time – wandered off that path or for some reason just gave up the path that leads to eternity?

In this connection, I would like to caution you not to repeat the mistakes that once have been made, to warn you against the opinion that Christian view is the only correct one. I would like to ask my opponents how they would act in

a situation (and I agree with J. P. Sartre that consciousness is situative) when a black cat crosses the street or a horse starts to kick on their way to the temple?

I wish that on his way to the temple, a human being would be able to see from afar the brilliance of the cupolas illuminated by the Sun god. Neglect of the pagan faith that symbolises the unification of man and nature can hardly contribute to the formation of a person of good morals.

Thus, the active rebirth of the two rich layers of culture – the traditional and Christian ones – allows the nation to maintain its original and unique ethnic characteristics and to hold its rightful place in the spiritual heritage of the world. We can reach this goal only when we change the principles of social life and priorities in human values.

Translated by Kai Vassiljeva

## FROM INCANTATIONS TO RITES

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Incantations, one of the oldest folklore genres, have changed during their centuries-old traditions. And yet they have maintained their niche among the modern phenomena. A wonder that they did not vanish together with folk tales, runo songs and other archaic folk tradition. The contemporary stock of magical incantations is characterised by a narrow circle of themes and techniques. The function, religious significance and background, in fact the whole traditional foundation of incantations has changed. Their meaning to an Estonian today cannot be compared with their effect a century ago. And yet, the recent years have seen a whole succession of public, even national performances of incantations. Apart from public incantations before multitudes of participants, verbal magic has also been used within closed social groups. It is quite a new practice at holidays or in a situation of crisis to appeal for help, using ancient traditional magic formulas or improvised incantations. In this paper I would like to deal with the distribution, ways and motivation of usage of magical incantations in Estonia today. Simultaneously, I have tried to give a sketch of the general changes in the people's attitudes to folk medicine, mediums and the casting of spells, as well as to explain the reasons and different ways of realisation of the incantations. I have used earlier reports about the casting of spells