

## NEW TEXTS

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# The Economic Ethics of Contemporary Russian Orthodox Christianity: A Weberian Perspective



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### Abstract

This article presents a discussion of the economic ethics of contemporary Russian Orthodoxy, manifested in the practices of economic actors, and Orthodox economic ideology, drawing on the approach formulated by Max Weber in *The Protestant Ethic*. Orthodox ideology and economic ethics are analyzed using popular Orthodox literature (1990–2004), doctrinal texts on social and economic issues, as well as materials gathered in ethnographic expeditions between 1999–2004 to eight monasteries in various regions of the Russian Federation. Key aspects of the economic ideology include love for one's neighbor and work as a means for self-sufficiency; the result of work is considered to be the gift of God. Key categories of economic ethics are obedience and humility. This article concludes in the framework of Weber's approach, that such ethics of obedience and humility determine the attitude towards economic activities, which the Russian Orthodox Church generates among its followers.

**Keywords:** economic ethics; Russian Orthodox Church; Weberian sociology of religion; Russian monasteries; work; obedience.

### Introduction

Weber's famous work *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* [Weber 1992] has been widely quoted in sociological studies.<sup>1</sup> The connection between a theology and an economic ethic has also been applied to other settings, such as the religious roots of Indian [Singer 1956; Kapp 1963], Jewish [Tamari 1987] or Japanese society [Bellah 1985], the role of Pentecostalism in Southern America [Martin 1993, 1998; Gooren 2001], Islam and Buddhism in Asia [Sarkisyanz 1965; Sarachandra 1965; Moans 1969]. Weber's insights were applied to a historical review of Russian Orthodoxy before the Soviet period [Buss 1989a; Buss 1989b]. However, Weber's insights have not yet been applied to contemporary Russian Orthodoxy. What is the economic ethic of contemporary Russian Orthodoxy? This question is of central importance because Orthodoxy dominated in Russia for most of its history and is re-emerging today as one of the most influential institutions of Russia's ideological and social life [Kääriäinen, Furman 2000: 11–16; Evans, Northmore-Ball 2012]. Thus, the Russian Orthodox

<sup>1</sup> The literature on *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* itself is so huge that to review it today is a practically impossible task. There have been a few important reviews of reviews [Eisenstadt 1968; Marshall 1982; Nelson 1973; Kalberg 2011]. To understand the current state of debate, one may turn to collections of articles which appeared around the 100th anniversary of the original publication of "Protestant Ethic" [Swatos, Kaelber 2005; Schluchter, Graf 2005; Lehmann, Roth 1995].

Church by virtue of its dominant position may have a significant influence on the economic lives of Russians, so understanding the Orthodox economic ethic gives us more insight into economic conditions and future of the Russian people.

### **Logic of the Argument and the Concept of Ethics in Weber's *The Protestant Ethic***

In this article we follow Weber's logic of argument from his *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, focusing on the analysis of ethics as Weber understood it. In *The Protestant Ethic*, Weber used the term 'ethics' relatively infrequently and never consistently defined it. Only in one passage did he dwell on it in some detail [Weber 1992: 54–56], distinguishing ethics from 'doctrine' and 'practice.' On the basis of this threefold division, Weber described the Calvinist doctrine of predestination; examining the "Westminster Confession" of 1647. He then set forth the problem of religious Christian ethics:

How was this doctrine borne in an age to which the after-life was not only more important, but in many ways also more certain, than all the interests of life in this world? The question, Am I one of the elect? must sooner or later have arisen for every believer and have forced all other interests into the background. And how can I be sure of this state of grace? [Weber 1992: 65.]

Thus, for Weber's Protestant, the problem of ethics is formulated as "Was I elected to salvation or not." Having described the Protestant ethics and a specific Reformed response to the question of "how could I be saved," Weber went on to describe the economic ethics of Protestantism. The description is mostly contained in the section, "Asceticism and the Spirit of Capitalism" [Weber 1992: 102–25]. For a better understanding of the meaning of economic ethics according to Weber, we should turn to the relevant text of *The Protestant Ethic*:

...For everyone without exception God's Providence has prepared a calling, which he should profess and in which he should labour. And this calling is not... a fate to which he must submit and which he must make the best of, but God's commandment to the individual to work for the divine glory. ... It is true that the usefulness of a calling, and thus its favour in the sight of God, is measured primarily in moral terms, and thus in terms of the importance of the goods produced in it for the community. But a further, and, above all, in practice the most important, criterion is found in private profitability [Weber 1992: 106–108.]

From the above passages, the main issue of economic ethics can be formulated as "How should I do business (act in the world) to be saved?" The answer to this question should indicate the mode of action, which would include the process of verifying what the person is doing or what is happening to the person in terms of salvation.

Importantly, in Weber's analysis the works of Baxter play a part no less than Luther's papers or "Westminster Confession." When depicting the procedure of determining whether one is predestined to salvation, Weber relies on Baxter's works, as follows:

"It is true that the usefulness of a calling, and thus its favour in the sight of God, is measured primarily in moral terms, and thus in terms of the importance of the goods produced in it for the community. But a further, and, above all, in practice the most important, criterion is found in private profitability. For if that God, whose hand the Puritan sees in all the occurrences of life, shows one of His elect a chance of profit, he must do it with a purpose" [Weber 1992: 108.]

Thus, a research subject related to economic ethics of a soteriological religion should be represented by the answers of economic actors to the questions of how they should act in the world in order to be saved and how they understand that they act in accordance with God's will.

However, here we are faced with a problem. The responses of religious economic actors to fundamental questions concerning the meaning of economic activities in Orthodoxy may differ from the principles which guide the same actors in their economic practices. Therefore, it is desirable to conduct a separate analysis of the 'proclaimed' and practice-based, 'actual' economic ethics.

At this point we should recall one of the main criticisms of Weber's arguments from *The Protestant Ethic*. Some have argued that it was not possible to ascribe the idea of 'vocation' to Protestantism, since written documents about the economy (for example, the statements of Luther and Calvin concerning work and interest) contained very different requirements both in terms of specific instructions and the overall tenor of the documents [Samuelson 1964; Robertson 1933]. However, Weber's claim was exactly that the emergence of a specific capitalist ethos was not triggered by specific instructions concerning economic actions, but by general requirements concerning paths to salvation [Weber 1992].

Thus, the logic of our study partially replicates the logic of *The Protestant Ethic*, and will consist of the following: (1) to clarify the categories applied by Orthodox economic actors who are involved in various economic practices; (2) to assess whether these categories correspond to categories from Orthodox popular literature on salvation, containing specific recommendations for believers; (3) to determine the categories used in dogmatic and popular texts specifically dedicated to the subject of economy. This approach provides an answer as to whether we may speak about the formation of a particular ethos in contemporary Russian Orthodoxy.

## Russian Orthodoxy in Context

There exists a predominant viewpoint in the scholarly works on economic ethics of Russian Orthodoxy in spite of a sufficiently large diversity of studies and viewpoints. According to this view:

1. A special type of economic ethics has evolved in Orthodox Christianity with the main categories including 'love of one's neighbor,' 'social simplification' (including the love of poverty), 'walking before God,' 'gratuitous work,' and a 'combination of work and prayer' [Elbakyan, Medvedko 2001; Koval' 1994].
2. Orthodox ethics has not become a permanent part of the non-monastic world. Orthodoxy is directed towards the other world and does not instruct on how to act in this world, according to several scholars [Koval' 1994; Zarubina 2001; Shkaratan, Karacharovsky 2002, Buss 1989a]. This is also why Orthodoxy cannot be productive in economic life [Snegovaya 2012], according to this view.

This position can already be seen in Weber's works. In 1910, Weber said, inter alia, that "There lives in the Orthodox Church a specific mysticism based on the East's unforgettable belief that brotherly love and charity, those special human relationships which the great salvation religions have transfigured (and which seem so pallid among us), that these relationships form a way not only to some social effects that are entirely incidental, but to a knowledge of the meaning of the world, to a mystical relationship to God." [Weber, 1973: 144–145]. In the course of this discussion Weber mentions Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and Khomyakov.

To a certain extent, this very viewpoint has survived and can be easily found in scholarly papers. Many prominent scientists are and were among its followers. In the middle of the 20th century A. Müller-Armack wrote "The crucial function of the Eastern Church for the economy attitude is so quite indirect. It created a turn in

overall mental development to mystical feelings, irrational, which on their own did not offer the development of an active economic attitude in the East” [Müller-Armack 1981: 366].

More recently, Buss has stated, “what kind of ‘spirit’ lived in it and influenced the conduct of life of Russian-Orthodox humanity? It was a spirit composed of magical-traditional, ritual and mystical aspects” [Buss 1989a: 250]. Buss further argues “An economic ethic in the narrow sense of the term, which might have settled the questions of the ‘just price’ (*iustum pretium*) and of the justification of interest, was not developed because of Orthodox indifference towards the world” [Buss 1989a: 255].

However, representatives of this view rely on the works of Russian religious philosophers and writers as a basis for their researches. There are many references to Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Soloviev, Khomyakov, etc., (see [Weber 1973: 144–145; Buss 1989: 252; Dinello 1998: 45–48; Koval' 1994]). These were representatives of the intelligentsia and possibly did not express the ethics that dominated large estates in pre-revolutionary Russia. Furthermore, often the viewpoint of these writers and philosophers is mistakenly equated with Orthodox ethics in general. One may see such comments as: “the Biblical sentence comes unconsciously into force which deeply marked the soul of Tolstoy and the whole Russian people: Do not resist evil!” [Buss 1989a: 254–255].<sup>2</sup>

Although authors of this position who investigate Orthodox ‘work ethics’ tend to draw upon Weber’s works, they did not quite succeed at following Weberian logic, especially in the part that addresses ethics. Here we mean The Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism. In “The Protestant Sects and the Spirit of Capitalism”, “The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism”, “The Religion of India: The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism” as well as in “Ancient Judaism” the ethical component is significantly smaller than in “The Protestant Ethics”. Much greater attention is paid to analysis of social institutions (estates, government, administration, law, etc.) that shaped religions.

Nevertheless, it appears to be that Weber’s analysis of ethics could be useful for understanding the position of Russian Orthodoxy. It would not be a great exaggeration to say that in “The Protestant Ethics”, unlike his other works, Weber was trying to investigate what could be called the utility function of a ‘typical’ Protestant, — an instrument that nowadays gains great attention in different spheres of contemporary economics and sociology.<sup>3</sup>

In contrast to the dominant view of Russian Orthodoxy, a different group of studies presents practices and economic situations which do not follow the ethics described by such authors. Most of these works belong to historians, partly of the Soviet period. The main counter-theses are the following:

1. Orthodoxy had a worldly orientation, and many Orthodox economic actors led successful economic activities, including both monks and laymen<sup>4</sup> [Zimin 1977; Kholodkov 1993].
2. The real economic practice of monasticism had nothing to do with any other-worldly ethics and gave numerous examples of exploitation and competition [Milyutin 1862; Budovnits 1966; Savich 1929; Klyuchevskiy 1993; Zimin 1977; Zyryanov 1999; Rostislavov 1866]. A third of the lands of the whole country

<sup>2</sup> The work of O. Kharhordin differs from this approach. In his book (based on the methodology of Foucault) Kharhordin analyzes the text of the Charter of St. Joseph of Volokolamsk monastery, pointing to the similarity of the principles laid down in it, with Makarenko’s principles of the personality formation in a collective [Kharkhordin 2002: 122–139].

<sup>3</sup> There are some attempts towards mathematization of the utility function picked out by Weber (such as [Alaoui, Sandroni 2013; Becker, Woessmann 2007]).

<sup>4</sup> A number of studies emphasize the predominantly Old Believer origin of merchantry, which is sometimes compared to “Protestantism in Orthodoxy,” and distinguish it from the mainstream version of Russian Orthodoxy [i.e. Buss 1989b].



belong to monasteries which professed non-possession of properties [Milyutin 1862]. Others argue against the 'love of neighbor' ethic if a monk could expel a hermit from a certain place [Budovnits 1966]. Scholars see a contradiction of the idea of 'social simplification' if bishops kept huge households, entourage, stables, etc. [Rostislavov 1866].

Thus, the potential direction for the motivation of Orthodox economic activity is unclear. To put it simply, why would people in a close relationship with Orthodox clergy, not resort to any Orthodox ethics to organize their activities. Yet in this regard their situation did not differ much from that of "Weberian Protestants" whose "Westminster Confession" is also not a vivid example of this-worldly relations. Thus more research must be done on the actual economic ethics of Orthodoxy.

## Research Method

In order to formulate the Orthodox economic ethics manifested in practical activities, it is necessary to observe Orthodox economic actors or, even better, Orthodox economic communities. Since it is difficult to identify a particular economic actor as a carrier of Orthodox ethical ideas,<sup>5</sup> for this study we have chosen Orthodox communities emerging around monasteries. They are chosen for several reasons: (1) monasteries constitute the moral center of Orthodoxy; (2) management of the Church in Russian Orthodoxy belongs to monks: only a monk may become a bishop, while, for example, the Catholic Church does not have such a requirement; (3) identification of any economic actor as Orthodox is severely hampered in the current situation of Russia after its forced secularization; (4) in contrast to parish communities, the communities emerging around monasteries are forced to engage in economic activities, and it is much easier to observe their economic methods.<sup>6</sup>

For analyzing communication in monastic communities and identifying categories of economic ethics in Orthodoxy, we used participant observation and records of semi-formalized interviews with members of monastic communities during the ethnographic survey in eight monasteries located in various economic regions of the Russian Federation. Upon arrival at the monastery, the author would join the group of pilgrims and monastery workers and receive a certain "obedience" or task to perform.<sup>7</sup> In almost all the monasteries the author lived together with monastery workers.

The monastic community will be understood as the community of people living in the monastery as well as people living outside of the monastery but in contact with it. The main groups of this type of community include monks, novices, workers, pilgrims, parishioners of the monastery church, people turning to the monastery not for religious reasons (for example, for taking a small loan), salaried workers, and benefactors. Normally, neither novices nor monks constitute the main part of a monastery's population, especially in the Asian part of Russia. At the time of the study, the Orthodox monasteries beyond the Urals which were studied included a fairly small number of monks (3 in the Sakhalin, 4 in Primorie, 2 in Buryatia, 5 in Eniseisk, 3 in Barnaul, and 6 in Tyumen) and novices (0 in Sakhalin, 0 in Primorie, 3 in Buryatia, 5 in Eniseisk, 0 in Barnaul, and 10 in Tyumen).

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<sup>5</sup> In post-Soviet Russia, in the country that went through the process of forced secularization, choosing a proper object for the study is a great problem. On the contemporary market of small and middle transcendencies [Luckman 1996] the vocabulary of motives [Mills 1940] of the believer or follower of the Orthodox Church is formed not only by the latter. Moreover, in the Russian Orthodox Church there is great importance placed on personal communication between a priest and a believer (due to the fact that a much greater emphasis is put not on written documents). In the situation of forced secularization when a big part of the Church was repressed, this attachment of believers to (Orthodox) small and middle transcendencies became extremely complicated and intricate. This is why the communities that were formed in monasteries (where there was a bigger chance to find old priests, or the representatives of tradition) were chosen as an initial object of the study.

<sup>6</sup> I intend to analyze the categories used by the clergy and lay people not directly related to monasteries in a separate text.

<sup>7</sup> More about the category of 'obedience' — in the section on 'Results.'

The main part of the community is represented by monastery workers, who do not intend to become novices or monks. There are various groups of workers. Mostly, they are people who come to stay in the monastery as a place where presumably the most spiritually experienced people live, and then return to their regular life; people who are trying to part with various addictions, such as alcohol, drugs, etc., in the monastery; people who have nowhere to live — the homeless, ex-convicts, etc. Such a community, formed around a monastery, has quite an extensive geography. Using the example of one of the monasteries, Fig. 1 shows where the members of the community came from (the territorial description).

The empirical part of the research, associated with visits to the Orthodox male monasteries, was carried out in three stages (see Fig. 2.)

1. Familiarization with the object of research, first visit (Kursk Root Hermitage in 1999, Solovetsky Monastery in 2001).
2. Piloting of research tools (visits to Solovetsky and Kemsy monasteries in May 2003).
3. Main stage of collecting material (research trip to monasteries of the Russian Orthodox Church located in the Far Eastern, Siberian, and Ural Federal Districts in July–September 2004).

Observation objects were Orthodox male monasteries on the territory of three economic regions of Russia — Eastern Siberian, Western Siberian, and Far Eastern. The sample of monasteries was made from the list provided in book *Monasteries of the Russian Orthodox Church. A Guidebook* [2001] where the full list of Orthodox monasteries in post-Soviet Russia was given.



**Figure 1.** Territorial Representation of the Social Network in a Community of an Orthodox Monastery (Village of Posolskoe, Buryatia)

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|---|---|
| 1. Posolsky Holy Transfiguration Monastery on the Lake Baikal | 7. Monastery workers (Zima)                         |
| 2. Paid workers (Ukraine)                                     | 8. Monastery workers, pilgrims, novices (Irkutsk)   |
| 3. Monastery workers (Moldova)                                | 9. Monastery workers (Kyrgyzstan)                   |
| 4. Abbot (Mordovia)   | 10. Monastery workers (Chita)                       |
| 5. Spiritual father (Yeniseysk)                               | 11. Pilgrim (Nikolaevsk-na-Amure)                   |
| 6. Spiritual father (Krasnoyarsk)                             | 12. Pilgrims (Blagoveshchensk)                      |
|   | 13. Monastery workers, pilgrims, novices (Ulan-Ude) |



**Figure 2.** Monasteries Visited (1999–2004)

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. Kursk Root Hermitage of the Nativity of the Theotokos (1999, pilot survey) | 7. Yeniseisk Holy Transfiguration Monastery (2004, field work)               |
| 2. Solovetsky Holy Transfiguration Monastery (2001, pilot survey)             | 8. Posolsky Holy Transfiguration Monastery at Lake Baikal (2004, field work) |
| 3. Kem Annunciation Monastery (2003, pilot survey)                            | 9. Holy Trinity Nikolaevsky Monastery (2004, field work)                     |
| 4. Holy Trinity Monastery (2004, field work)                                  | 10. Protection of the Theotokos Monastery (2004, field work)                 |
| 5. Aleisk St. Dimitry Monastery (2004, field work)                            |  |
| 6. Korobeinikovo Kazan Icon of the Theotokos Monastery (2004, field work)     |  |

For the analysis of the Orthodox doctrinal position concerning the meaning of economy, we used the doctrinal text of the modern Russian Orthodox Church on the subject, *The Basis of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church* [2000]. For better understanding of its characteristics, it was compared to a similar Catholic doctrinal document, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (a document of the Vatican II) [1965]. For the analysis of popular pastoral literature we used publications related to the topic of economy, which were approved by the bishops or Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church. The list of publications was compiled on the basis of the *Book Chronicle*, the official publication of the Russian Book Chamber, which contains information about all published editions exceeding 100 copies [Knizhnaya letopis... 2004] for 1990–2004. Theoretically, this source should mention all publications in Russia for a specific period of time, but for a number of reasons, not all publications are listed. Therefore, in addition to the *Book Chronicle*, in March 2005 the author visited parish bookstores of several large churches in Moscow, and viewed the catalogue and open collection of a large Orthodox parish library in Moscow.

## Results

### A) *The Meaning of Economy in Doctrinal Texts*

Before discussing the attitude of the Orthodox Church toward the social problems of our day, we need to determine the understanding of the world, society, and human actions, from the point of view of Orthodoxy. To highlight its position we will use the comparison of Russian Orthodox Church documents with the doctrine

of Catholic church.<sup>8</sup> Do the world, society, and human actions on Earth or ‘in the world’ have any meaning, and if so, what? The Catholic Pastoral Constitution contains a paragraph (no. 34), entitled “Value of Human Activity,” which says:

Throughout the course of the centuries, men have worked to better the circumstances of their lives through a monumental amount of individual and collective effort. To believers, this point is settled: considered in itself, this human activity accords with God's will [Gaudium et spes: 34].

We can compare that statement to the Orthodox opinion from *The Basis of the Social Concept*:

From a Christian perspective, labour in itself is not an absolute value. It is blessed when it represents co-working with the Lord and contribution to the realisation of His design for the world and man. However, labour is not something pleasing to God if it is intended to serve the egoistic interests of individual or human communities and to meet the sinful needs of the spirit and flesh [The Basis...: VI. 4: 302].

The Catholic authors continue:

...Thus, far from thinking that works produced by man's own talent and energy are in opposition to God's power, and that the rational creature exists as a kind of rival to the Creator, Christians are convinced that the triumphs of the human race are a sign of God's grace and the flowering of His own mysterious design [Gaudium et spes: 34].

The relevant fragment of the Orthodox concept seems to profess an almost opposite worldview:

The improvement of the tools and methods of labour, its division into professions and move to more complex forms contributes to better material living standards. However, people's enticement with the achievements of the civilisation moves them away from the Creator and leads to an imaginary triumph of reason seeking to arrange earthly life without God. The realisation of these aspirations in human history has always ended in tragedy [The Basis...: VI. 3: 301–302].

If we also consider the argument about the ‘autonomy of earthly affairs,’ it turns out that a devout Catholic may practically engage in almost any worldly business, moving along according to its inner logic. The situation is entirely different in Orthodoxy. Worldly affairs are justified only in two cases and do not have meaning in and of themselves, nor are they pleasing to God by themselves. Economic activities are morally justifiable only in two cases: self-support and help for one's neighbor. It is meaningless for an Orthodox person to follow the logic and the laws of the sphere in which he works.

## ***B) Meaning of Economy in Pastoral and Popular Orthodox Literature***

If we apply Weber's model to the Orthodox texts, the first thing we will see is that there is no pastoral literature devoted to the economy. There is some literature on individual economic phenomena, but it is rather scarce. As far as specific topics and categories are concerned, the leading category is wealth. Some attention is given to taxes, trade, and entrepreneurship.

<sup>8</sup> Comparison with the Catholic doctrine is introduced here for the sake of better understanding of the Orthodox Church's position. Thus, we neither claim to provide our reader with a full and comprehensive representation of Catholicism nor intend to do so. We are fully aware that it is another labour-intensive task that deserves a separate article. Nevertheless, this brief comparison supported by the vast amount of literature dedicated to the subject is quite sufficient to substantiate the hypothesis that nowadays the ‘obedience / humility’ ethic is common for the Orthodox Church in Russia and unlike the ‘vocation / calling’ ethic that is currently championed in Catholic teachings. For more information please see [Naughton, Rumpza 2004; Chamberlain 2004a, 2004b].



If we make an attempt to move away from specific phenomena and answer two basic ethical questions, “What is the meaning of the economy from the Orthodox point of view?” and “How to pursue economic activities to be saved?,” the best reference to economy as an activity will be *work*. Many pages of pastoral literature are devoted to the phenomenon of work, and we will focus on work in our analysis.

1. In order to assist in salvation, work should be directed not at increase in personal wealth, but at the process of moral perfection.

In no way we intend to challenge the main thesis of business — its ultimate goal is profit. Unprofitable business cannot be properly called business. Yet the fact is that all our actions and choices are being made not only within time, but also within eternity. ... Therefore, an Orthodox businessman must also set the moral purpose for his actions [Volobaev 1997: 60–61].

2. Work should be aimed at helping those who are in need. Helping your neighbor is understood not only as material assistance, but also as giving him the opportunity to work, guidance on the right path, etc.

As a priest, I am convinced that God will bless our endeavors only if we establish moral priorities while making a business plan and thinking about implementation of a business idea, not deviating from the voice of our conscience. “I am establishing a business because I want to help my compatriots. My bakery will produce high-quality inexpensive bread for the residents of the area where I live” [Volobaev 1997: 60–61].

It is possible to notice that work in itself is not considered to be meaningful or worthy. For example, the logic of winning a competition for the sake of victory would be condemned. To do something because of personal inclination is also objectionable. The goals of man as an economic actor should always be directed toward someone else (the best option is ‘the neighbor’). Orthodox authors do not see other versions of purposeful function (goal-oriented rational action).

3. Work should praise God. The result of work is a gift from God, and not a person’s merit. A person who is not thinking primarily about how to praise, glorify, and thank God with his work, in fact, is a thief.

The Lord said this parable: a certain rich man had a good harvest in the field, and he thought within himself, saying, “What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?” This rich man did not raise his eyes to the heavens and did not exclaim joyfully, “Glory to Thee and praise, O Almighty and Merciful God! ... No, instead of remembering the Giver of such gifts, he first is worried about where he would put these gifts and where they would be stored. Like a thief, who, when he finds a purse with money on the road, does not think where this purse came from, or who it belongs to, but is primarily worried about where to hide it! In reality this rich man is a true thief [Velimirovich 2003: 9–14].

4. In doing work, one needs not to put trust in his own powers, but in God. If something does not work out, one should pray to God and ask him for help.

... whatever work or economic activities we conduct on Earth, we need to rely not on our own abilities, but on God [Tulupov 2001: 52–54].

It can be said as a preliminary summary that general ideas in the pastoral and popular literature on the one hand, and in the doctrinal literature on the other hand coincide and show similarities with those authors who had argued for the ‘otherworldliness’ of Orthodoxy. Here, the case is demonstrated with contemporary autho-

ritative Russian Orthodox texts, and not with writings of philosophers or intelligentsia of the nineteenth century. It is worth noting that the topic of salvation is not specifically emphasized when discussing work and economy in the Orthodox texts discussed her.

### *C) Ethical Categories, Embodied in the Practices of the Communities which Emerge around Monasteries*

We should now turn to the analysis of categories which are used by economic actors in their economic practice. Analysis of the author's diary entries made during participant observation suggests that the related categories of obedience and humility are used by economic actors of monastic communities to describe the meaning and importance of specific activities. It is through these categories that the economic practices of the communities which have formed around monasteries are organized. The analysis of the literature on salvation makes it possible to suggest that these categories are transmitted into the world as being suitable for organizing the life of laity. We should describe these categories in some detail.

1. 'Obedience' as a set of tasks. Different categories of monastery inhabitants carry out different kinds of tasks. More 'crude' household tasks are assigned to monastery workers. The work of novices may be partly related to household needs, but in our days it is mostly associated with church care. The 'obediences' of priests and hieromonks are almost always associated with church, daily liturgy, and occasional services.

For giving some idea of possible things to do in a monastery, I may say that, for example, one day I was given an 'obedience' 'to scale fish.' This fish was a 30-kilogram bag of omul which I cleaned all day from seven a.m. until seven p.m. with an hour of lunch break. During my work time, I was visited by the monastery's housekeeper (*ekonom*) once, and we talked for about twenty minutes about prayer, fear of God, and salvation. In principle, the life of all monastery workers is spent this way, only sometimes they work in teams and have a better opportunity to talk to other people (from the diary of the author).

2. Obediences are distributed, assigned, and not chosen. Accordingly, one cannot leave an obedience of his own volition. When leaving an obedience without permission, a person goes against the will of the superior, and therefore against the will of God. This in turn means a departure from his salvation.

In the morning, usually after breakfast, the abbot of the monastery or the housekeeper (less frequently someone else) distributes 'obediences' among the brethren. In this situation an obedience is an activity which should be done by the person to whom it was assigned. Sometimes a newcomer is asked whether he has any special skills, who he is by occupation, and what he is able to do well. In principle, you can express your own preferences to work here or there, and not to work somewhere. It is desirable to somehow explain your wish, but in general, any kind of "I want" is not encouraged in a monastery. People should carry out their obediences at the time assigned to obediences in the daily schedule. You may not leave it without permission (from the diary of the author).

3. Obedience may be (or seem to be for the actor) stupid, pointless, contrary to the normal course of things. It may not enhance the welfare of the monastery or even contradict it. Despite all this, it should be carried out.

There was a conversation in the evening before bedtime. One monastery worker Gena, 35-years old, lively and cheerful,<sup>9</sup> asked another worker: "Sanya, why did you start plastering today — it has not dried yet?"

Sanya: They said to plaster.

<sup>9</sup> Formerly he used to 'retrieve' debts from various businessmen.

Gena: But it will fall off?

Sanya: Well... (he threw up his hands.) Roots up...<sup>10</sup>

Gena: Ok, and what are you gonna do after that?

Sanya: I will build the brick stove, and then will do what they say” (from the diary of the author).

4. Obedience is a special blessing for the worker, not for someone else. The person who carries out obedience, ‘works for God’ and not for another person or himself. He also works not for the welfare of the monastery or for the benefit of others. If we try to formulate the ultimate purpose, he works for his own salvation. In such cases, the welfare of the monastery and the well-being of the neighbor are the means for reaching salvation, and are pleasing in God’s eyes. In other words, all external results are secondary compared to the movement towards salvation, and their absence should not discourage or disorient the person who is seeking salvation.

Today at lunch Father Isaiah in the presence of others rebuked one tough old lady. She was told to go to the fish factory and ask for some fish for the monastery. She said, I am Valentina, would you please help, do you have any extra fish for the monastery? The abbot became angry that she asked not on his behalf, but on her own. I was very surprised — the old lady did something for them, and there was no gratefulness. Isaiah spoke to everyone in such a way as though not he should be grateful to them for working in the monastery for free, but that they should be grateful to him because they have a place where they may save their souls. And when the old lady flared up in response to this, the abbot stopped her and replied quite firmly, “You have no humility; you do everything according to your own will; you seem to be pious, but just pick at you a bit — and everything starts coming out” (from the diary of the author).

5. Obedience is an inner struggle with a demon (with being possessed by laziness or something else). The main means of salvation is humility of spirit. Accordingly, the barriers to work need to be ‘demolished,’ ‘removed,’ rather than avoided and averted. Obstacles are sent by God to strengthen a person in the work of salvation. In this logic actions may often contradict a ‘reasonable’ result-oriented course of action.

After the brothers’ prayers Father Isaiah would distribute obediences. I was sent to whitewash the walls of a monastery building. The morning was foggy and wet. I could see my breath. An hour after I started to work a downpour began. I asked the abbot to wait until the rain ended so the whitewash would not get washed off. The abbot looked at the wall, said that the canopy would be enough to protect the whitewash from being washed off, and did not allow me to leave the obedience. He also added, “The devil (attacks) you with laziness, and you (attack) him with the brush, go” (from the diary of the author).

7. Accordingly, the result of the work becomes irrelevant. The process is important as a ‘form’ for humility.

For several days I bugged the monastery steward Sergius with questions about the meaning of the production and things like that. He avoided me for a long time, postponing the conversation. But the last day I cornered him, and he broke down. “Ivan! Why are you bugging me, God forgive me! Don’t you get it? Lord have mercy! Which production? It’s all fairy tales! Lord gives to us — this is our whole production. We live on a gold mine — in a resort area. We might not produce anything at all. These cows, this garden make no profit. We keep them only for humility” (from the diary of the author).

<sup>10</sup> He means the maxim widespread among the Orthodox, “If you are told to plant something roots up, do that. It will grow thanks to obedience.”

This data indicates that obedience and humility (1) are regarded by the economic actors as a means of salvation, and (2) are used as a means of organizing household practices. It is the obedience-humility connection that becomes the equivalent of Weber's categories of Beruf / success<sup>11</sup> and provides an answer to the research problem of economic ethics in soteriological religions — “how should I engage in economic activities to be saved,” formulated by Weber in his *The Protestant Ethic*. If the economic ethics of Orthodoxy is how we see it, it may better explain the contradiction between the two positions on Orthodoxy outlined above.

The accumulation of wealth in the monasteries, do not fall under the category of social simplification, or mysticism, other-worldliness, but to the ethic of obedience and humility. The Ethics of ‘obedience’ and ‘humility’ in turn should be indifferent to the accumulation of wealth. For a humble person, it does not matter how much wealth was accumulated by someone else — he is not worthy to judge; condemnation is considered to be one of the major sins in Orthodoxy.

#### D) Popular Literature on Salvation

However, we need to verify whether the ethics described are specifically (1) modern or (2) a monastery phenomenon which does not extend beyond monastery communities. In this section, we present a view about the right way to salvation that is commonly heard in modern Russian Orthodoxy. In fact, these texts are in a way the equivalents of the text of Richard Baxter, quoted by Max Weber. We are going to present a modern answer given to lay people, and then juxtapose it with some texts written one hundred and fifty years old (e.g. by Theophanes the Recluse of Vysha [Feofan Zatvornik 1991, 1997] and Ignatius Bryanchaninov [2001a, 2001b]). These texts will be important to our study since modern Orthodox laymen, priests and monks primarily refer to these authors. According to the *Book Chronicle*, these authors have the most frequently republished books in modern Orthodox literature (*Knizhnaya Letopis*).

As an example of the modern view, we may consider a book by Hieromonk Sergius Rybko, entitled *Is Salvation Possible in the Twenty First Century?* [2002]. This text is composed of transcripts of radio broadcasts, designed for a wide audience. Near the beginning of his text, in a chapter entitled “The Great Commandment” Father Sergius advocates a link between obedience on the one hand and the ultimate values of Orthodoxy on the other. It is important to note that the chapter in question was written for people “searching or recently coming to church,” that is, not for religious connoisseurs, but for those post-Soviet neophytes who are searching. This is how this relation is explained:

What is the most important idea of Christianity? You should love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, with all your strength, and your neighbor as yourself. ... On the one

<sup>11</sup> It is worth noting that Bulgakov in his article “Heroism and Asceticism” that was written under Weber's influence (see Davydov [1998: 137–148] pointed at ‘humility’ and ‘obedience’ as categories that describe ascetic, Christian relation to the world (as opposed to intelligentsia's heroism perceived by him as self-will)). “No word is more unpopular with intelligentsia than humility, and few concepts have been more misunderstood and distorted, or fallen such easy prey to intelligentsia demagoguery. Its hostility to this concept is perhaps the best testimony to the intelligentsia's spiritual nature and betrays its arrogant heroism resting on self-worship. And yet, in the unanimous witness of the Church, humility is the cardinal and fundamental Christian virtue; and even outside of Christianity it is an extremely valuable quality which, at the very least, attests to a high spiritual level. ... True asceticism consists in faithfully fulfilling one's duty, in bearing one's own cross in selfrenunciation (not just outward, but, still more, inward) and leaving all the rest to Providence. In monastic usage there is an excellent expression for this religious and practical idea: obedience. That is the term for any occupation assigned to a monk, whether it be scholarly toil or the coarsest physical labor, as long as it is performed in the name of religious duty. This concept can be extended beyond the walls of the monastery and applied to any work whatsoever. In fulfilling their obligations the doctor and the engineer, the professor and the politician, the factory owner and his worker, can each bear obedience, guided not by personal interest (whether spiritual or material is not of concern) but by conscience, the call of duty. The discipline of obedience, ‘worldly asceticism’ (from the German expression ‘innerweltliche Ashese’), had an enormous influence on the development of the personality in various fields of work in Western Europe, as can still be seen today” [Bulgakov 1994: 35–39].

hand, love is the easiest virtue, because mercy and compassion are inherent to the soul of any human being... And on the other hand, this commandment is the highest, that is the hardest. Why so? What prevents people from loving everyone and everything? Our selfishness, our pride. Selfishness is a proud love, a wrong love of yourself [Rybko 2002: 35–36].

But how should one achieve this love? Let us quote the answer of the author in some detail:

Obviously, we need to somehow get rid of our selfishness, and here we need to learn and understand that only a humble person can really love his neighbor, only a person who is conscious of his own sinfulness, a person who in fact has forgotten about his own interests... He sees his task and his duty in helping... people for the sake of Christ... How can we acquire humility? The easiest and simplest way to acquire humility is through obedience.

— What is obedience?

The person who wants to learn obedience looks for a spiritual guide, a mentor, a spiritual father, and entrusts himself to him for Christ's sake. And he tries not to do anything without asking advice from that man, without his blessing, but if he gets his blessing, to do everything as he is told [Rybko 2002: 37–40].

Once again we should emphasize that the cited work is an example of popular Orthodoxy; it is not the summit of ascetic experience, but is offered to those who are searching and maybe not even Orthodox yet. The book is written by a monk, but not for monks, and the point of view presented in it is not unique. The above thought is repeated in different ways with greater or lesser clarity and precision in various modern editions, or sermons by various authors.<sup>12</sup>

If we review the references given by economic actors in monasteries and references from popular and pastoral literature, we can reasonably assume that the culmination of previously written Russian Orthodox traditions collected at the end of the nineteenth–early twentieth century, and from which the modern Orthodox literature gradually expanded, is represented by the texts of two authors — Theophanes the Recluse of Vysha (1815–1894) and Ignatius Bryanchaninov (1807–1867). This section presents the views of these two authors on salvation in the context of the meaning of the Christian life and other categories. We will start with the works of Ignatius Bryanchaninov. In order to explain his position, we will present excerpts from *The Sermon to the People during the Visit to the Diocese On Salvation* (2001b), a text which was intended not for monks, but for lay people.

Whoever wants to be saved, must belong to the One, Holy Orthodox Church, to be her faithful son, to obey all her precepts. ...Schismatics keep long and hard fasts, spend entire nights in prayer, make numerous prostrations, but alas! They work in vain, because they do not want to humble themselves. ...True humility is from obedience, ... Without obedience to the Church there is no humility; without humility there is no salvation [Bryanchaninov 2001: 453–54].

<sup>12</sup> See, for instance, the text of abbot Savva “The Way to Salvation” that begins with the chapter “On Humility” “The Lord says: learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart and ye shall find rest unto your souls [Matthew 11: 29]. Thus, in order to be at peace, one has to achieve humility. How can humility be achieved? According to Abba Dorotheus, if a man begs God for humility, he must be aware that he actually asks Him to send someone who would insult him. Disgrace and reproaches are cures for a proud soul. Thus, when you are being humiliated by somebody, seek to achieve humility from inside — prepare and rear your soul [Savva 2000: 645]. Many popular Orthodox texts are selections of quotations from the Holy Fathers. One example of such a collection about humility was made by the famous Soviet-era Russian priest Father Valentin Mordasov, 1930-1998. — [Mordasov 2010]. His text was republished several times.



Thus, we can see that the beginning of the sermon on salvation preaches about humility and obedience, in particular, obedience to the Church.

The same position can be seen in the writings of Theophanes the Recluse [Feofan Zatvornik 1997]. Theophanes wrote for laymen and was recommended to us in the monasteries as an author for laymen. The answers to the questions of interest for us in the most simple and understandable form are presented in the letters of the saint, for example, in the collection, *Letters on Christian Life*.<sup>13</sup> One of the letters is titled “On How to Be Saved”:<sup>14</sup>

(Christianity is) The image of saving the fallen. The Lord Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners ... [1 Tim. 1, 15]. ... And how have they [saved people] been saved? In the Church of Christ. Let him live as the Church commands, and be saved... Let us humbly hope for the grace which was brought to us through the revelation of Jesus Christ without doubts and hesitations [Feofan Zatvornik 1997: 123–24].

And this is his interpretation of success, that is, recognition and praise:

You are praised. What is so marvelous about it? It is even very disadvantageous for you. ... Praise tickles the heart, causes zeal to cease, and makes you weak. ... Stopping in the spiritual life is already going backwards. ... You should humble yourself and suppress haughtiness of thought and heart with all sorts of humble feelings about yourself... Desire humiliations and more so unjust humiliations... But do not think of doing anything using your own efforts. Seek the Lord who humbled Himself to the form of a servant [Feofan Zatvornik 1997: 131–32].

The author clearly indicates that salvation is achieved through obedience to the Church and humility. This clearly is a contrast from the Protestant ethic which Weber describes.

The categories described above and the links between them are very similar to those that were found after studying the monasteries and observing the actual practice of economic management by the monastery residents.

## Discussion

Thus, we may say that the observation made in modern monastery communities of the Russian Orthodox Church, and the conclusions drawn from the analysis of dogmatic and pastoral literature of modern Russian Orthodoxy, match descriptions of the practices of pre-revolutionary Orthodoxy, given by scholars such as Weber [1973], Müller-Armack [1981], Dinello [1998], Buss [1989a, 1989b], etc. If current economic practices partly differ from pre-revolutionary practices, they, nevertheless, show the same motivational pattern which is implemented in practice and described by ethics. It can be argued that there is continuity between the modern and the pre-revolutionary Orthodox texts and ideas embedded in them.

We can present this pattern more vividly by comparing it to the pattern described by Max Weber in respect to Calvinist Protestants. According to the Calvinist pattern (as it was depicted by Weber)<sup>15</sup>, the participant

<sup>13</sup> The main texts of this author are *The Path to Salvation* and *The Outline of Christian Moral Teachings* (the *Path* was published as a separate edition, but, in fact, it is the third part of the *Outline*). In general, however, these works repeat the fundamental points of works of St. Ignatius and for this reason will not be considered here.

<sup>14</sup> The titles were given to the *Letters* by their editors.

<sup>15</sup> Strictly speaking, the comparison here is the one between Russian Orthodox Christianity and “Protestantism-as-it-was-depicted-by-M.Weber” (as an ideal type) for “Weber’s essay of 1904–1905 entered the sociological canon. The influence of this

(a Protestant) is completely separated from God: God does not hear him; prayer to God is meaningless. Some people are originally pre-elected to salvation, and this pre-election reveals itself in the worldly life as prosperity and success. The simplest measure of prosperity is external wealth, easily expressed in monetary terms. Respectively, those who thrive in the world will be saved. Further, Weber suggested that every person in such a situation would want to check whether he is pre-elected or not. The way to check this is the attempt to reach prosperity in this life with honest work. If a person is successful, this means that he is elected.

The pattern for motivation of economic activities works quite differently in the religious ethics of Russian Orthodoxy. The participant (an Orthodox Christian) perceives his economic activities not as a means to please God or to attain salvation.

The Orthodox layman who is forced to carry out economic activities, does not consider economy as a means of salvation or pleasing God in the same sense as the Protestant of Weber's description. Faced with the economy or economic (worldly) problems in a situation when decisions have to be made, the Orthodox economic actor seeks the blessing of his spiritual father or the priest with whom he is in contact. The economy does not possess its own intrinsic value on the path to salvation, and the management of economy requires some additional legitimization. An Orthodox Christian in the world palpably encounters God through the Church. He encounters priests, monks, sacraments, and rituals; on the one hand he receives an intermediary for his dialogue with God, and the other hand a visible and tangible means for this. The appeal to God is carried out through a priest, a monk, or a saint (represented by his relics or icon). Moreover, a layman cannot but address God through these means; presently, every Orthodox Christian ought to regularly (and rather frequently) go to confession, take communion, and receive the sacrament of the holy oil. 'Ought to' here has less to do with external enforcement, but with the inner urge towards the corresponding actions and states.

Thus, the Orthodox motivation pattern for economic activity is as follows. For the Orthodox layman, economic activity is not a means to salvation (at least in the same way as for Weber's Protestant). The means to salvation are rather obedience to the Church or participation in Church life. The semantic core of the pattern of such practices is represented by the ethical categories of humility and obedience. It is these categories that describe the role of the mediator (the Church) in this pattern and the ideal nature of communication. Without this kind of relationship such a pattern could not have emerged. Yet, economic activity in this pattern takes up a very small space. To put it simply: for an Orthodox Christian, 'good action' in the economy (or his 'utility function') is action which aids his humility and obedience, not that which aids his success.

## Conclusion

Returning to the beginning of the article, we may reasonably assume that a specific ethos of behavior in the world, leading to salvation, has developed in Orthodoxy. However, it is not so much described as mystical and magical, not as a way of isolation from the world, but as action in the world according to obedience (and not vocation as for Weber's Protestant) in the search for humility, and not for success.<sup>16</sup> Repeating Weber's

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model is by no means restricted to sociology and social theory but has penetrated the teaching of history in many parts of the world. Weber's archetypal Protestant is taken to be the ideal of a 'modern' citizen, who has no need of priests, sacraments and material encumbrances of any sort to communicate with the deity" [Hann 2011: 10]. Here we would like only to depict Russian Orthodoxy more clearly. Our thesis is not about Protestantism.

Of course, there is a difference between "The Westminster confession of Faith" [Weber 1992: 57] and for example "The Confession of 1967" [The Constitution 1983: 252–262] but the comparison between contemporary Orthodox believers and contemporary Presbyterians is not the task of this article.

<sup>16</sup> It may be claimed that reform impulse that affected Western Christianity led it in the direction of 'vocation/calling' ethics and its recognition. Apparently, the 'obedience/humility' ethics was not completely foreign to Catholicism, nor was it to Protestantism (at the very least to its early forms) (to see more about Catholicism please see [Asad 1997]). As for Calvinism, Gorski wrote that "Justification, according to Calvin, was the process through which by [God's] Spirit we are regenerated into a new spiritual

logic of argument step by step, we may conclude that the specific character of Orthodoxy is that it regards not vocation or professional activities as a means to salvation, but obedience and humility in relation to a (spiritually) more experienced person or a person at a higher place in the hierarchy. In turn this can be assumed to be selectively more in tune with hierarchical and distributive models of economic organization, rather than for example, the market type of organization [Zabaev 2009]. The connection between theology and secular economic activity will be more fully addressed in a future article.

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nature' [Spitz 1985: 116], able to live in perfect obedience to God's law as revealed in the Bible. Growing faith, Calvin believed, was manifested in the attainment of 'voluntary' and 'inward' obedience [Little 1969: 41, 46]. One might then say that Calvinistic 'this-worldly asceticism' consisted not only of a 'work ethic' but also of an ethic of self-discipline. In order to maintain self-discipline, the Calvinists employed a wide variety of techniques, many of them derived from long-standing monastic practices" [Gorski 1993: 273].

Nevertheless it should be highlighted that present-day Orthodox Christianity is still the biggest Christian confession that did not undergo any more or less significant modernization. And, if the thesis is correct, 'obedience/humility' ethics turns out to be a distinct characteristic of Orthodox Christianity (on the subject of a "Orthodoxy and modernization" polemics please refer to [Makrides 2005, Makrides 2012]).

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