

*Michael Smirnov*

**Sociology of Religion: A Dictionary.  
(Социология религии. Словарь. / Sotsiologiya religii. Slovar')**

*St. Petersburg: St. Petersburg State University, 2011. 412 pages. ISBN: 978-5-288-05093-0. 1300 rub / 31€.*

**Religion and Religious Study in Russia.  
(Религия и религиоведение в России / Religiia i religiovedenie v Rossii)**

*St. Petersburg: RHGA, 2013. 365 pages. ISBN: 978-5-88812-586-1.*

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The position of the sociology of religion in Russian social science illustrates, among other things, the state and position of religious study in Russia in general. Accordingly, this situation is characterised by two main features. Firstly, the situation of the sociology of religion as a science is not defined in the Russian scientific and educational space. There is only one academic centre in the country and two organisations with sociologists of religion, but at the same time, there are no sociology of religion departments within Russian universities. Meanwhile, the sociology of other professions, like social philosophers and scholars of religion, also deal with the sociology of religion. Therefore, this science has an indistinct status; there is an absence of a professional community, the position of the "borderline" between sociology, religious studies and cultural (social) anthropology.

Secondly, Russia's sociology of religion was and is currently isolated from the achievements of world science. During the Soviet period, contact between domestic and foreign scholars was limited by the authorities. Nowadays, we can speak of self-isolation, the basis of which is the language barrier, since large numbers of Russian scholars (especially in the regions) do not have proficiency in foreign languages. As a result, in terms of teaching and research work, scholars are most often targeted for translated works, editions of which have been delayed in Russia for decades.

Undoubtedly, the Russian scientific community understands the criticality of the situation. Currently, there are works whose purpose it is to change the current situation. Such publications include books written by Michael Smirnov – Doctor of Sociological Science, Professor of Sociology, Professor of the Faculty of the Philosophy of Religion and Religious Studies of Saint-Petersburg State University.

Smirnov's book *Sociology of Religion* was published in 2011 and was quite favourably received. The dictionary consists of three parts: "Brief Overview of the History of the Sociology of Religion" (p. 5-33), "Dictionary" (p. 34-311) and "Bibliography" (p. 312-404). The first section includes four chapters: "Background and the Beginning of the Sociology of Religion", "Foreign Sociology of Religion in XX – The Beginning of the XXI", "Sociology of Religion in Russia", "The General Conditions and Prospects of Russian Sociology". The second section – "Dictionary" – consists of 250 dictionary articles, starting from "Adept" and ending with "Yablokov". The third section consists of a vast bibliography that includes foreign, translated and Russian literature. The book is an attempt (quite a successful one) to solve the problem of the self-isolation of the scientific community, to systematise and generalise accumulated

information; and as the author points out, it is “a monographic study... summarizing the set of existing approaches” (Smirnov, 2013, 18). The dictionary contains the basic concepts of the sociology of religion, articles on Russian and foreign authors and both classical and modern theories and concepts. Such a work can be referred to as the Titanic – the volume of covered material and the quality of its presentation are testimony to this. However, the fact that the author singlehandedly carried out this work influenced some of the book’s shortcomings. For example, Smirnov does not disclose the fieldwork of a sociologist; there are no articles on the methods of study; and the characteristics of qualitative and quantitative measurement of the level and degree of religiosity are not given, etc. An article on the religious situation in Russia, which would have contained relevant statistics, is surprisingly absent; there is no information on specific religions, in general, and on the territory of the Russian Federation, in particular. All of this does not reduce the value of the dictionary; however, in the event of a second edition, we would like to see that the author has made adjustments to the title of the book to “Sociology of Religion: *The Theoretical-Methodological Dictionary*”.

The second book *Religion and the Study of Religion in Russia* has a monographic nature, reveals the author’s views on the religious situation in the Russian Federation and on the position of religious studies and the sociology of religion in the Russian scientific and educational space.

The book begins with the section “From the author” (pp. 3-24), which is autobiographical in nature. Note that in Russian religious studies, three generations of scientists are apparent – (1) the “senior” generation – who worked in the field of scientific atheism, (2) the “middle” generation – the followers of the first generation, which have been brought up in the ideology of scientific atheism, survived the scrapping of the system in the 1990s of the last century (Smirnov belongs to this generation), and (3) the “younger” generation – whose formation of professional interests began in early 2000. A specific feature of the Russian situation is that the gap between “middle” and “younger” generations is 20-30 years, which increases misunderstanding between them as well as internal tensions within the professional community; this is why an autobiographical description of the author’s professional development as the representative of the medium generation is a subject of interest to colleagues and scientists whose professional development have had a place in modern circumstances despite the scientific specialisation.

In the first part of a book, “Religion in Russia: Perspectives of History and Modernity” (pp. 27-146), “the presentation of the material is given in historical perspective, as a flashback of a number of essential aspects of the religious life of the Russian society” (p. 24). In the second chapter of the first part of the book, the author analyses the religious situation in modern Russia (pp. 101-146). Moreover, this is done descriptively; using research by other authors, sometimes criticising their approach, the author models the religious situation in the country. The author distinguishes the following characteristic features of the modern Russian situation: (a) “a return to religion is predominantly institutional in nature” (p. 104); (b) “modern believers differ from believers in the Soviet era – the difference is in the visible rejuvenation, socio-status characteristics that have appeared, education and other signs” (p. 105); (c) quantitative changes are not associated with quality – an “increase in the number of people who consider themselves believers is not associated with an increase in religious activity” (pp. 107-108); (d) changing the attitude of the “new believers” to religion – the merging of the “religious and national”, “confession without membership” and “membership without confession” (pp. 109-110); (e) changes in church-state relations, “the aspiration of the Orthodox Church to the leading direction” is stimulated by state authorities (p. 112). Smirnov pays special attention to the issue of new religious movements (NRMs): (a) the status and future of NRMs in Russia are characterised by uncertainty (pp. 124-130); (b) the “real weight of the problems of new religious movements is first of all measured by the true extent of their presence in Russian society”; the author believes that the number of organisations has currently stabilised and is not as numerous as representatives of anti-cult movements declare (pp. 130-136); (c) new

religious movements have encountered rejection; as with any new development, “there is hostility towards the leaders and followers of NRMs” (p. 136).

The second part of a book “Study of Religion and Sociology of Religion in Russia” consists of two chapters – “On the Study of Religion and Experts of Religion” (pp. 149-190) and “National Experience of Sociology of Religion” (pp. 191-228). In the first chapter, the author gives his view on the problem of the status of the study of religion in Russia, modern discourses and practices. First, the author believes that religious studies began, in earnest, only in the mid-1990s; and we can only speak of “religious thought” in the pre-revolutionary and Soviet period (p. 168). The author’s position has generated debate in Russian periodicals on the subject of religion because most researchers connect the emergence of research on religious study in Russia with the publication of the Max Muller lectures in 1887. Secondly, the author describes the situation of the study of religion in modern Russian social science as a “threshold” – “when the signs of past institutionality... disappeared, clear signs of a new, stable status has not yet taken hold” (p. 171). Thirdly, Smirnov highlights seven “main issues” in the study of religion: “the establishment and understanding of the subject area of religious studies”, “the structure of religious study”, “the integration of Russian religious study with foreign studies on religion”, “criteria for the professional affiliation of religion experts”, “the conformation of the professional community”, “the attitude of religion experts to ‘the religious factor’”, and “the demand for the scientific products of the religion experts” (pp. 180-186).

In the second chapter of Part II, Smirnov examines the sociology of religion in Russia and focuses on Soviet studies of religiosity. According to the author, the development of sociology and the sociology of religion in Russia in the pre-revolutionary period are inextricably linked because of “the subject of the researching perspectives... about the nature of the impact of religious faith and the church on the historical path and destinies” of the country (p. 192). During the Soviet period, the sociology of religion was marked as “directly connected with the general strategy of the resolution of the religious question” (p. 195) – its total extinction in the 1930s and its recovery in the 1950s-1960s. From the 1970s, the number of concrete sociological studies began to increase, which had not changed up to the second-half of the 1980s “when a principled ‘change of milestone’ took place” (pp. 200-201). The modern sociology of religion, in Smirnov’s opinion, could be characterised as “the existing direction of scientific work”, but as “specialised training is not widespread, there is no clearly articulated demand for the sociology of religion in Russia” (pp. 201-202). The author believes that the greatest attention is paid to “the three key aspects – the role of religious organisations on the national and regional levels; the influence of the religious attitudes of different segments of the Russian population in terms of moral status and political behaviour; prospects for the vesting of the religious status of the social institute” (p. 202). There is a gradual institutionalisation, a professional community is being formed, but the disciplinary uncertainty of the position of the sociology of religion is still real (pp. 205-206).

The third part of the monographic study “Personalia” is devoted to Russian researchers, Gordienko and Shpakova, as well as the V.I. Ulyanov’s (Lenin) views on religion and the Bible.

This monograph illustrates that the author is a theorist of a greater degree than a “field researcher”; his most successful ideas are in the modelling and search of general theoretical foundations. It is difficult to agree with the key aspects of current Russian studies on the sociology of religion. I believe there are only two important aspects – the study of the religious situation (using quantitative polls) and church-state relations. We can hardly speak about the formation of the professional environment; in fact; it does not exist, and there are only a few groups that appear on the basis of either friendly communication or short-term grant projects. These weaknesses, however, do not detract from the value of these books. In my opinion, both these scholarly works show the status of the sociology of religion in Russia – they indicate

the actual directions in modern research, perfectly complementing each other, and could be recommended to students and colleagues. The book *Religion and Religious Study in Russia*, in fact, is the first serious monographic study in Russia which explores the situation of religious studies in the country. *Sociology of Religion: A Dictionary* is the logical sequel of the monograph because it partly fills the gaps which the author reveals in the status of the modern sociology of religion in Russia.

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