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Novikov: from masonry to Orthodoxy

Novikov: od masonerii po ortodoksję

Nikolai Ivanovich Novikov was born in 1744 in Moscow. He spent his childhood on his noble family's estate in Avdot'ino near Moscow. In 1756, he went to the gymnasium of the Moscow University. After he was expelled from school in 1760 "for laziness and not going to classes" and stayed at home for two years, he began his military service in St. Petersburg in 1762 at the moment of Catherine II's rise to power. In 1766, while still in the military, he started his career as a publisher. In 1767, he moved to Moscow to become a secretary in the Legislative Commission, and, the next year, he was transferred back to St. Petersburg in the rank of lieutenant but soon left the military service to devote himself to the publishing business. In St. Petersburg, he published a series of short-lived satirical journals, *Ancient Russian library* containing sources of Russian history, and authored a dictionary of Russian writers. In 1775, he joined the masonic movement, which played a significant role in his life. In 1779, he moved to Moscow to run the University Press. He published several journals and some 400 books. In 1784, the Typographical Company was established that included a press run by Novikov in which he published 450 books. In 1792, he was arrested by the order of Catherine II primarily because of his masonic allegiance that was considered treasonous and was sent to the Schlüsselburg fortress. In 1796, he was released after the death of the Empress and until his death in 1818 he lived with his children in Avdot'ino.

IN ST. PETERSBURG

At the beginning of his career as a publisher and a writer, Novikov published a series of short-lived satirical journals: *The Drone* (1769-1770), *The Tat-*

tlar (1770), *The Painter* (1772-1773), and *The Hair-net* (1774) in which he was the main contributor under various names. The journals concentrated on the satire of foreign, mainly French, influences on the Russian mores and fashion. Russians, particularly the elites and wannabes, forgot Russian customs and morals and blindly imitated the new Western trends. This contributed to the decline of family and thus of society. Moreover, foreigners were caricatured as wanting to take advantage of Russians. For example, when a Russian learned that a Frenchman lost money in a card game, the Russian offered him a loan believing the Frenchman to be an honest and grateful man (K 11).¹ However, this Frenchman, chevalier de Mensonge (14) intended to make money in Russia by cheating according to his maxim: “cheat a fool: it is not sin nor shame” (39). The Russian who loaned him money was naïve, gullible, and just stupid because Russians cannot distinguish truth from cunning (22). On the other hand, a letter sent to *The Hair-net* defended the French by pointing to the fact that good morals of Russians was a myth. For instance, when Christianity was accepted, barbarity of morals was somewhat tamed, but superstition flourished. There was little love of man, but a lot of love of war (35). After Tsar Ivan threw off Tatar’s yoke, morals and ignorance did not change much since “morals can never be improved by the whip, the yoke, and the sword” (36).

Although an assertion was made that “all Russians are inclined to virtue” and are very helpful, which is a human duty (K 10), their inclination to virtue does not make them free of vices, and these vices were targeted by Novikov’s journals. They criticized corruption of bureaucrats and judges for which foreign influences cannot be blamed. He criticized superstition, crudeness, and rampant ignorance of Russians which he believed should be addressed by proper education.

Novikov announced that his journals would publish particularly satires and critiques sent to him that served the improvement of morals. However, no work would be published that was “against God, government, decency and common sense” and, hopefully, no one would write against God or government “who has at least a spark of understanding” (T 10). Sacrilege and politically unacceptable statements had no place in his journals. He believed that traditional Orthodox religion was a foundation of good morals and should only be protected, not criticized.

¹ Following references to Novikov’s works will be used:

IS – *Избранные сочинения*, Государственное Издательство Художественной Литературы, Москва 1951.

K – *Кошелек, еженедельный журнал Н.И. Новикова*, Суворин, Санкт-Петербург 1900.

P – *Письма Н.И. Новикова*, Издательство имени Новикова, Санкт-Петербург 1994.

Pu – *Пустомеля, сатирический журнал 1770*, Селивановский, Москва 1858.

T – *Трутенъ Н.И. Новикова 1769–1770*, Типография Н.И. Глазунова, Санкт-Петербург 1865.

Zh – *Живописец Н.И. Новикова 1772–1773*, Типография Департамента Уделовъ, Санкт-Петербург 1864.

What can be criticized is the misuse of religion for one's own benefit, and one of the vices Novikov's journals criticized was hypocrisy.

The Drone presented an image of a licentious and cruel judge, who "does not order anything to do to his subordinates before a prayer to the St. Trinity" (T 55). The journal mocked a hypocrite who humbly went to church, prayed ostentatiously, did not even look at women, but prayers, piety and fasting did not prevent him from ruining and oppressing others like him (172-173).

Religiosity should be authentic, not pretended. Religiosity should also be enlightened. In a letter,² an uncle urged his nephew Ivan to come back from Petersburg where Ivan read secular books, which he should abandon since such books only make people proud and turn them away from salvation and faith (T 92, 94); Ivan should also stop futile learning of foreign tongues since the tongue was given to praise God (95). *The Hair-net* even made a curious supposition that former wise Russian rulers apparently hampered the development of science since they were afraid that morals would be undermined. They preferred people to be ignorant in some areas but "with good morals, virtuous people, faithful to God, the Monarch, and the Fatherland" (K 26).

True religiosity should not be afraid of true knowledge since the latter can only enhance the former. A reader of *The Painter*³ wrote about his dream: he saw before a church "some wise men who in French and in Russian proved using physics that the sun, the moon, stars, the earth, and the entire structure of the world could get its existence without mediation of God" and some people believed them (Zh 280) and returned home with proud hearts and hating those who rejected these proofs. The reader was humble in respect to "the Being inaccessible to the human reason surrounded by abysses of errors." An old man said: "Sciences bring great benefits to the society and unite it with strong ties of common sense: they teach how to live virtuously and give God honor due [Him]; but people who did not perfectly investigate yet what they can always see, want also to know what is hidden behind a black curtain from their weak sight, which is caused by their own madness. This plague can be prevented only by frequently reminding young people that whosoever forgets God, he justly brings upon himself his righteous anger" (281).

Ignorance is harmful to religion and leads to obscurantism. On the other hand, knowledge, regardless of how wide, always has limits which cannot be overcome with human means. Knowledge can make man better appreciate the work of God, but it will never fully reveal His devices. Therefore, if no efforts can lead to full knowledge, people should concentrate on the improvement of their personal life, or virtuous life since "virtue is the only happiness of all mortals" (280). To illus-

² The letter was probably authored by Mikhail Popov (T 330, 346).

³ The text was probably authored by M. Kheraskov, A. Monnier, *Un publiciste frondeur sous Catherine II: Nicolas Novikov*, Institut d'études slaves, Paris 1981, p. 143.

trate that, an essay presented as translation, entitled *Fate*, told a story in which a soldier came to a brook to drink some water and then left. Then came a shepherd boy who found at this brook a moneybag; he took it and left. Then an old man came who quenched his thirst and fell asleep. At that time, the soldier returned to search for his moneybag. Suspecting the old man of stealing it, the soldier killed him. The scene should invoke a sensation of great injustice, but the punch line of the story explains that the old man had once mercilessly killed the father of the shepherd boy (205–206).⁴ The story points to God's justice that is present in all events, although inadequate human knowledge may judge events to be anything but just: "Oh, mortal, fruitlessly you try to investigate the way God governs the world. Regardless how hard you try, you will never reach with your limited reason how supremely wise God arranges human affairs." In spite of appearances, nothing happens accidentally and God is just in all His decisions (T 205).

In satirical journals, dogmas of Christianity were never attacked; intolerance of the church was never criticized;⁵ they even opened their pages for texts of high-ranking ecclesiastics. *The Painter* published texts of Archbishop Amvrosii Podobedov (Zh 101–102), Bishop Antonii Zybeline (165–166), and Bishop Georgii Konisskii (266–268).⁶ It also published a poem by Silvester Medvedev placed above the grave of Simeon Polotskii praising him for his religiosity and his writings (273).

Novikov's journals express very strong religious feeling mixed with patriotism, in particular, in eulogies to the Russian rulers. A hymn to Catherine on the acquisition of White Russia in 1772 (Zh 157)⁷ proclaimed that God heard the voice of White Russia "from [His] holy heights: / Cut short your groans and tears" to blossom with the land "famed for its laws and wars." (160). Incidentally, Novikov was not troubled by the fact that this accession of new lands was the result of the first partition of Poland, an aggressive act executed by three empires. Apparently, the voice of Poland was not heard then in heavens.

In a vision presented in the *Ode to Russia*,⁸ omnipresent God said to the enemies of Russia, "I myself defend Russia / And while I protect her / What man can do?" (K 71/149). The poet's soul is raptured to heaven where Eternity standing with Fate before the omnipotent Right Hand holds a book; the book is opened by the Hand's command to write in it Its laws for mortals and "Prescribe happiness

⁴ The story is an allusion to Voltaire's *Zadig* in view of A. Monnier, *op. cit.*, p. 246–247.

⁵ A. Monnier, *op. cit.*, p. 254; Novikov's journals "did not fight with the Church nor with sincere faith. They were engaged only in the case of a misuse of religion. The orthodox believers mocked by them were all false believers who paraded their beliefs and their religious practices to circumvent more easily the commandments of Christianity", p. 255.

⁶ A. Monnier, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

⁷ The hymn was authored by P[avel] P[otemkin], A. Monnier, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

⁸ The ode was authored by A[pollon] B[aibakov], Monnier, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

for Russia. / Generation of Peter the Great in there / Will settle down for eternity: / I am handing her victory; / May sciences be established there: / Knees of earthlings bow / Who fearfully prostrate before her / My love for her is infinite: / Peter the Great earned it. / Eternal Truth will reign there: / Which my Father placed there. / May concord and peace be with her, / And may envy stay away from her: / Cunning falls down before her. / As a pledge I gave her Catherine / In the likeness of Edenic lily / She will save her from evil” (73/153). Novikov surely did not consider the message of this ode to be “against God.” In the spirit of the times, he apparently considered Russia to be favored by God Himself over other nations. Therefore, he did not have any problem to reproduce a speech of the Bishop of Moscow, Georgii Konisskii, which proclaimed Russia to be like Israel (Zh 266), and thus Catherine II to be like Moses, and, for a good measure, like Cyrus and Constantine; and in Russia, as the prophet said (Is. 11:6), a wolf dwells with a lamb (267).

This, however, was patriotic religiosity, a religious consolation of sorts for those who lamented over the cultural, scientific, and economic backwardness of Russia. Russia may not have been best developed country, but it was a chosen nation and as such, at least in the future, its situation would improve with the help of divinely appointed monarchs.

However, patriotic religiosity was not personally fulfilling. It was not sufficient to satisfy the thirst of the soul for truth that surpasses human understanding and for inner peace in all situations. The church should be the source of such consolation, but hypocrisy of believers, incessant violation of moral laws in their personal lives, widespread ignorance and obscurantism not only among believers but also among the clergy were hardly forces that could draw a searching heart to the church. Spiritual thirst remained, but answers were missing. The summary of such a spiritual situation can be found in the last issue of *The Tattler* in the poem entitled *A letter to my servants Shumilov, Van'ka and Petrushka* written by “the Russian Boileau” (Pu 104)⁹ in which a question was posed to the three servants about the meaning of the world. The first servant immediately answered that he did not know why the world and people were created (99). The second servant said that the world is absurd (100) and vain, full of stupidity; people do not live by truth; priests deceive people, servants deceive masters; people chase money; priests fleece their flock and forgive any sin for money; “both shepherd and the sheep are ready to cheat the Most High Creator for money” (101); and no one knows why the world exists. The third servant said that the world was a child’s play; it is better to live and be merry than to pray to God for entering the paradise. “The creator of all creation for his own glory / Threw us into the world like a pup-

⁹ That is by Denis Fonvizin. In the poem, there is a “discrete but indisputable” allusion to Voltaire, in particular, to his famous poem on the 1755 earthquake in Lisbon, A. Monnier, *op. cit.*, p. 249.

pet onto the table” (102); no one knows why the world is the way it is. Finally, the servants turned to the poet for an answer, but he closed his poem with the line, “I do not know for what [purpose] this world was created” (103). This was not a spiritually satisfying answer. Although Novikov’s journals stated that full knowledge was impossible for humans and reasons for particular events were frequently hidden from them and known only to God, the desire to possess some of this knowledge was overwhelming – after all, as soon would be stated in the *Morning Light* (1777), people have an inborn desire for knowledge (IS 384/64) – and Novikov turned to those who he thought may provide some answers, the masons.

MASONRY

Masonry was a fairly popular and fashionable movement in eighteenth -century Russia, particularly in St. Petersburg and Moscow. The movement came from Western Europe where it had different shades depending on the country and leadership, and also in Russia it was not a uniform movement. Masons formed secret or semi-secret societies in which they were supposed to be initiated to various mysteries depending on the degree of initiation. Frequently, this secretive component was overshadowed by the social role of masonic lodges which often were reduced to social clubs used to dine and play cards together.

At that time in St. Petersburg, Ivan P. Elagin was a grand master of 14 lodges of the so-called English system. An oath to an initiate to Elagin’s lodge reflected the values which masons were supposed to espouse: “I swear on my honor before the most high Creator of the world that having joined the virtuous society of masons, through my sincere desire I will always remain an honest and humble man, its good, obedient and peaceful member, an unshakeable witness of the majesty and supreme wisdom of the most high Creator, a loyal subject of my merciful Sovereign, a just and worthy son of my beloved Fatherland, a peaceful and good citizen. That at this minute I will excise from my heart not only vengefulness but also any indignation against those who despise and insult me in my life, that through my power and my own property I will always try to help the poor, comfort the unfortunate, defend the persecuted, not only my masonic brother but people of any rank.”¹⁰ The oath reflected the commitment to upholding moral values, civic duties, both founded on the belief in a Creator. This set of values was akin to what Novikov promoted in his journals. For this reason, he was approached by members of Elagin’s movement to join them. At this point, as Novikov confessed, “being on the crossroad between Voltaireanism and religion, I did not have a point of

¹⁰ Г. В. Вернадский, *Русское масонство в царствование Екатерины II*, Издательство имени Новикова, Санкт-Петербург 1999 [1917], p. 154; W. Gareth Jones, *Nikolay Novikov, enlightener of Russia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1984, p. 133.

support or a cornerstone on which I could base spiritual peace and thus unexpectedly I got to the society,” that is, masonry.¹¹ He joined masons under the condition that, as he said, “without making any oath nor performing any duties, only the first three degrees are revealed to me and if I find anything contrary to my conscience, then I should not be counted among masons” (IS 607).

Soon, many Elagin’s lodges united with Baron Georg von Reichel’s lodges and recognized in 1776 the leadership of the Minerva lodge from Berlin (or Potsdam). The Reichelian system had even greater emphasis on self-improvement and self-perfection than the Elagin’s system. It embodied the true masonry which “leads through self-knowledge and enlightenment to moral improvement by the shortest path down the road of Christian ethics” (IS 608). This was particularly important for Novikov: he did not want to associate himself with a masonic system that in any way contradicts Christianity; even more, he wanted this system to be based on Christian principles and be active in exercising them – and he found it in the Rosicrucian masonry promoted by Reichel.¹² Moreover, as once von Reichel told Novikov, false masonry has political goals; true masonry, on the other hand, is “free of any political aspects and associations, drunken feasts, the depravity of morals of its members; where they speak among masons about freedom of not being a slave of passions and vices, but to rule over them, then such masonry is true or it leads to finding and acquiring true [masonry]; true masonry is small in numbers and they do not try to get [new] members; because of large spreading in these times of false masons, they are quite reserved and stay out of sight” (IS 609). It is quite ironic that Novikov’s desire to concentrate on self-improvement in a religious and completely apolitical atmosphere did not save him from Catherine II’s politically motivated imprisonment order.

The issue of self-improvement by doing good works remained all-important for Novikov throughout his entire life. Already in the preface to *The Drone* he quoted as his guiding principle a poet who said that “To live uselessly in the world is to burden the earth” (Т 9).¹³ Publishing his satirical magazines was a way of being useful to others: by criticizing vices, by satirizing people exhibiting them and extolling virtues. In his masonic years, the emphasis remained in publishing, but one thing changed: satirizing people was found inappropriate because of the lofty status of man as the crown of creation; however, vices could and should be criticized (IS 385/65). In the Moscow years, Novikov published a long array

¹¹ Quoted in М. Н. Лонгинов, *Новиков и московские мартинисты*, Типография Грачева, Москва 1867, p. 99; cf. IS 607.

¹² R. Faggionato, *A Rosicrucian utopia in eighteenth-century Russia: the Masonic circle of N. I. Novikov*, Springer, Dordrecht 2005, p. XIII, 56, 63, 73–74, 82, 86, 88, 118, 125, 135–137, 150; W. Gareth Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 133, 182.

¹³ A. P. Sumarokov, *Semira*, act 2, scene 9.

of journals or additions to journals in which satire was almost entirely absent.¹⁴ However, they were filled with virtue-building and virtue-promoting articles and essays, and many popular science articles, literary criticism, and classical authors, mainly translations.

Novikov's faith deepened even more as the result of his four-month illness in 1783. In his quarterly report submitted to his masonic superior, Baron von Schröder,¹⁵ he wrote: "Sincerely and with pure heart I confess before you, m[ost] w[orthy] L[eader], that I did not understand the precious columns on which the holy Order is based, i.e. love of God and of neighbor, or, to phrase it better, I understood them poorly and incorrectly, since I thought that man by himself loves God and neighbor; I was even mistaken [in thinking] that I did just that; with tears I give thanks to my Savior that He allowed me to feel and know my blindness; that He allowed me to understand and experience that love is God's gift which He gives to His saints to sense and enjoy, and, by His infinite mercy, He did not deprive even great sinners of this sweetest enjoyment; there are minutes when they feel love for their neighbors and have the sweetest hope of loving God. But these minutes pass quickly! Every day, on rising and going to bed, I bring to the Father of the world, in the name of His Son our Savior, my unworthy prayer for a gift of this sweetest feeling of love and I thank my merciful Savior that, in His mercy, He not infrequently gives me a strong desire to love the neighbor and God. Our Savior Himself in His holy word explains to us that there is no greater love than laying down one's life for one's friends, and that He sealed this holy and divine truth by laying down His life for His friends – for all sinners. How far am I still from this divine love! Still, often, very often, I do not want to get up early and go to bed late, and go into mud for my friend. With tears I write these lines. I thank my Savior and will forever be thankful and extol His mercy, that during my illness about which you know, m[ost] w[orthy] L[eader], and afterwards, He gave such feelings and sensations to which I was alien: how sweet, joyous and delightful is the momentary feeling of humility that is followed by love! Pride, blind stubbornness, or willfulness often concealed from me such feelings" (P 32-33). Through this illness, he continued, "I feel in myself, by the mercy of the Savior, great transformation. From this time I consider a new epoch in my life; at that time and

¹⁴ *Sankt-Petersburg Scholarly News* 1777; *Morning Light* 1777–1780; *The Fashionable Monthly Publication* 1779; *The Economic Magazine* 1780–1789; *The Moscow Monthly Publication* 1781; *Evening Light* 1782; *The Town and Country Library* 1782–1786; *Supplement to Moscow News* 1783–1784; *The Resting Hard-Worker* 1784–1785; *Children Reading for Heart and Mind* 1785–1789; *Magazine of Natural History, Physics, and Chemistry* 1788–1790.

¹⁵ A quarterly report which was at the same time a confession and presentation of one's spiritual situation was required in the Rosicrucian circles, which even elicited a suspicion of "crypto-Catholic tendencies" in otherwise a Protestant-leaning movement, А. Н. Пыпин, *Русское масонство. XVIII и первая четверть XIX в.*, Огни, Петроград 1916, p. 340–341. See also W. Gareth Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 177–178.

from this time I so vividly sense the merciful right hand of the Savior that pulled me from the abyss of hell and the claws of satan” (35). This illness marked his spiritual rebirth, the renewal of the heart, full absorption of Christian tenets not only by the mind, but also by the heart.¹⁶

THE HEART AND MIND

Pride and willfulness may have concealed the *feeling* of love for God and fellow human beings, but it did not conceal the *realization* of the need for such love and all that is associated with it: preparation of the heart and mind and practical expression of this love in good works and making oneself useful to others. The latter was a principal point of Novikov’s philosophy of life from the very inception. What changed with time was a deeper saturation of this philosophy with religious aspects and making religion not only the matter of the mind but also of the heart – primarily of the heart.

In one of the most significant journals of his Moscow period, the *Morning Light*, Novikov wrote in the preface (1777) that one should be useful to reasonable men (IS 382/63).¹⁷ The journal should serve improvement of the spirit and soul (383/63). Pages should be filled with “truths that are based on human nature, truths that stem from what exists and thus are explained by it.” In the spirit of physico-theology, he stated that “if we deliberately investigate the heaven, earth, water, air, and fire, in a word, everything that exists/nature, then we will see, first, nothing else but man for whom everything created by nature is worthy of investigation. The majestic sun with the splendid multitude of stars would be unworthy of our attention if their beneficial influences would not show us that they in no small measure contribute to our welfare” (383/64). The investigation of nature indicates that nature is well-organized with interdependencies between its parts and with hierarchical structure, whereby, in Novikov’s view, this investigation will show that man is a master of the whole of nature and that of all beings, man is the finest, most majestic, the noblest, and his attributes stem from “the source of the good.” Man is “a true center of this created earth and of all things” (383/64). Novikov saw his task in making people realize their elevated status: people in general, and readers of the journal in particular, should be taught that they would consider themselves “the center of all things” and “an image of goodness and virtue,” whereby each person would see himself as “an important and worthy part of this center” (384/64). This, incidentally, imposes a certain kind of writing about

¹⁶ It is „a religious experience” mentioned by Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 177, and regeneration mentioned by В. Боголюбов, *Н. И. Новиков и его время*, М. и С. Сабашниковы, Москва 1916, p. 163.

¹⁷ The preface was translated into English as „On man’s high estate” in M. Raeff (ed.), *Russian intellectual history: an anthology*, Harcourt, Brace and World, New York 1966, p. 62–67. Page numbers for this translation are indicated after the slash.

people. Revelation teaches that man was created in the image of the All-High before all creation and that the Almighty breached into him “live-giving breath.” The fact that the Creator honored humans that way should inspire in us respect for others. Savages are people who abase this dignity which is in them. Therefore, satire should be directed against human vices, not against people themselves (385/65). This should be done in the spirit of love of man (385/66). This indicates that the investigation of nature is not a detached task but is and should be colored by revelation. In fact, it appears that this investigation should confirm what revelation states about man’s high dignity. It is an open question if an investigation of nature free of any religious perspective would be able to see that man is the loftiest among existing beings and a master of nature. This elevated status of man was a topic of an essay, *On dignity of man in relation to God and the world* published in the first issue of the *Morning Light*. However, although the essay seems to convey Novikov’s views and was commonly considered to have been written by him, it was a translation of a German article.¹⁸

The dignity of man is recognized in the realization that man is God’s creation that crowns all of creation. Thus, the religious conviction of benevolent God leads to the conviction of the dignity of man. The latter, in turn, strengthens the religious belief in God the Creator of all that makes humans what they are or what they can become: rational beings that act in an upright manner because of the purity of their heart.

What is the reason of not recognizing the true status of man in the universe? What is the reason for not recognizing the fact of God’s existence and the fact that He created the world? Not infrequently learning was blamed for it. As Novikov wrote in the preface to the *Moscow Monthly Publication* (1781), some people thought that learning results in abandoning religion and that heresies and schisms are also caused by learning. However, “ignorance is the cause of all human errors and knowledge is perfection.” If it is said that unbelief and godlessness are fruits of learning, then the answer should be: “this does not come from sciences, but from ignorance in sciences” (IS 407). “The object of all science and knowledge is threefold: ourselves, nature, and the Creator of all. If a scientist does not unite these three areas together and does not direct his cognitive effort to perfect solution of mystery – to what end man is born, lives, and dies – and if with all his learning he has an evil heart, then with all this learning he is a true ignoramus, harmful to himself and to society. All the meanness in the earth stems from such scientists.” Such scientists “not only do not enlighten [their] reason and do not

¹⁸ Von der hohen Würde des Menschen, *Der Mensch: eine moralische Wochenschrift* 1751, no. 1, p. 17–24; this was first noticed by Симанков, Виталий И., *Из разысканий о журнале „Прибавление къ Московскимъ Вѣдомостямъ” (1783–1784), или Об авторстве сочинений, притисывавшихся Н. И. Новикову, И. Г. Шварцу и Ф. В. Каржавину*, [self-published], Харьков 2010, p. 128.

improve [their] heart, but they even more fortify themselves in their pride and all vile vices ... Even the last peasant can better feel the truth than an astronomer with a deprived heart. ... Depravity in science and evil stemming from it come, as it appears, from not knowing the source from which sciences spring and not knowing the object toward which they flow” (408). Adam, our forefather (411), while in paradise, named all animals; he had incomparably better knowledge than we do about the Creator. It would be highly desirable to restore this knowledge. And this is where masonic teachings served Novikov as a guide: Egyptian hieroglyphs contain the oldest wisdom (405). Greeks learn their wisdom from Egyptians. Moses and Solomon left us many hieroglyphs that are still preserved. What is needed is an ability to read the “hieroglyphic language,” which seems to be the language in which God inscribed knowledge about Himself in nature.¹⁹ The first man, Adam, had pure reason and excellent senses and was so perfect that he could (412) “read the entire nature.” Later, people lost their perfection and had to transmit their knowledge about the makeup of the world through hieroglyphs (413).

Knowledge by itself is not an impediment to the true view of the world – that God is the Creator and providential ruler of the universe, that man is His highest creation, that humans should make their lives useful to others – but can confirm and enhance it. However, knowledge left to its own devices can only fortify humans in their pride and sense of self-sufficiency. Reason, mind, rationality are great, but not the greatest. The greatest is the heart and it should be the starting point of defining one’s own life.

In his essay on ethics published in the *Morning Light* (1780), Novikov wrote that ethics gives “true principles of great our obligations toward the Creator, our greatest benefactor, neighbors, and ourselves; it prescribes these obligations and shows means of fulfilling them. ... Ethics is the first, most important science that is useful to all.” It should occupy the preeminent position in Christian teaching. A man who knows ethics and exercises it but does not know theology is more pleasing to God than a theologian who neglects ethics. Inner satisfaction is the first fruit of virtue (401). A person whose actions are ethical is ready for any sacrifices since God helps him; he expects perfect life after death and a reward for his deeds. “Ethics is a science of current and future happiness; it is for the earthly and for the eternal life; consequently, it is the most useful, most needed, and most indispensable of all sciences.” Priests in all times, except for Egypt, were more concerned about spreading their dogmas than about teaching ethics. “It was left to the holy church of the heavenly Father to create a full system of high ethics as the essence of divine teaching” (402). Teachings of Moses show their divine provenance by their perfection and elegance. They show that love of man is the most important principle in human relations. Later, great moral teachers included Socrates, Plato,

¹⁹ R. Faggionato, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

Epicurus, and Zeno. In later times, there was Bacon, Grotius, Wolff, Nicole, Pascal (403). Belief in the immortality of the soul is the strongest principle of all our good actions. It ensures the unity of human society; it brings consolation to a suffering Christian; it gives endurance to those who are the subject of injustice.

The statements have a universalist ring: the same principles of ethics can be found in Egyptian teachings, although this is an article of faith since Egyptians' teaching is hidden in their hieroglyphs (IS 405) and they are as yet undeciphered unless it is assumed that masons who reached the highest degrees of introduction to mysteries possess it. However, the holy church was left to phrase them again. The Christian church, in particular, the Orthodox church. Very likely it is what Novikov meant, although in the list of great moral teachers there is a curious omission of Christ and preeminence is given to Socrates who was "the wisest of all pagans" (438).

That Christian teaching is the basis of a truly virtuous life is made clear in a long essay, *On education and instruction of children*, published in the *Supplement to Moscow News* (1783). However, only a part of the essay was penned by Novikov; its greater part, namely *On moral education of children*, is a translation of a sermon of Georg Joachim Zollikofer.²⁰

"Only education is a true maker of good morals," said Novikov. When education is perfect, the laws are obeyed; religion is "the soul of all virtue, a sound peacemaking subject of the spirit"; learning brings beneficial results; and art adorns existence and encourages virtue (IS 418/69).²¹ The goal is "in educating children [to be] happy people and useful citizens" (421/72). The duty of parents is to care for children's health; to properly educate their heart, i.e., provide moral education; and to educate their mind, i.e., provide them with scientific knowledge (423/73). Children are mostly influenced by an example; therefore, the conduct of parents should be proper so that children have the greatest respect for their parents (426/76). In the home, there should be order and cleanliness since "order is the soul of all works, facilitator in all difficulties, promoter of many conveniences and of pleasant enjoyment of life, and a protector from the many vexations. Cleanliness (all the way), generally refines senses, enhances the beauty of the body, promotes health and makes a man agreeable in society" (429/78).

The part of the essay that was authored by Zollikofer is an elaboration on the principle that education should shape reason and heart and thereby bring a child to virtue, religion, and Christianity. Education of reason is teaching how to see

²⁰ G. J. Zollikofer, *Predigten*, vol. 2, Weidman, Leipzig 1774; his *Abhandlung über die moralische Erziehung*, Weidman, Leipzig 1883; cf. English translation, Teaching words about moral education, in his *Sermons on education, on reflection*, vol. 1, Longman, London 1806, p. 1115; noticed by Симанков, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

²¹ Translation of about a fourth of this article is published in Raeff, *op. cit.*, p. 68–86. Page number to this translation is indicated after the slash.

things properly, to recognize the truth, and thus be wise (IS 456). Education of the heart is teaching how to strive for the best things, how to love all that is true, just, and good and thereby to make fulfillment of duties agreeable (IS 466). In all this, religion as revealed by Jesus Christ (IS 485) is the foundation of education of the mind and the heart.²²

Novikov's Christian faith only deepened with years and this is reflected in his correspondence. Even in letters to his masonic friends and associates, most of the time it would be difficult to guess that a mason is writing to a fellow-mason. Masonic themes are few and far between, and when religious topics are touched upon, they sound like they are coming from a pen of an orthodox Christian. A typical example is a 1788 letter to N. L. Safonov, a mason friend: "To take delight in the second Adam is a matter deserving supreme commendation and agrees with our duties. But – with what Adam, my dearest friend? The new, and thus not with the old. To take delight while examining His immeasurable love for poor sinners; His priceless merits for their sake; His life, works, His illnesses, the cross, and death; and to always look [at Him] as an unmatched example to imitate. All of it is commendable and agrees with our duties and our fate. The Holy Spirit, through His chosen tool, apostle Paul, said: the first man is from the earth, earthly; the second man is the Lord from heaven. Just as we have borne [the image of] the earthly, so we should bear the image of the heavenly, i.e., in his image, etc. (1 Cor. 15:47–49); and in another place: the old things passed away, there is a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, what is to be done is to cast away the old and search for the new. The Savior Himself says: no one pours a new wine into old vessels so that the old vessel does not break; and in another place: no one sews a new [patch] to old cloth, so that the old is not torn even more (Mt. 9:16–17). And many other places point to the same. And it follows from it that not even for a moment we should abandon in our minds the presence [of this principle]: that Jesus is God the Savior and our teacher. He left us the image of His life so that we follow Him. And His divine and earthly life teaches us to abandon what is old, all that is not from Him, and seeks what is new in His life, teaching, and death. Apostle [Paul] said that those who want to live piously will be persecuted (2 Tim. 3:12). Thus, our entire life should consist of the cross and pass under the cross"; etc. to the end of the letter (P 47).

In his letters, he advocated absolute reliance on God and trust even in the most extreme circumstances. To N. I. Khrushchev, a husband whose wife died,

²² "Spiritual experience of the child, received in the family" was for Novikov / Zollikofer "the foundation of the development of all other aspects of personality: good morals, the mind, the body" Т. Е. Безрученко, *Сущность семейного воспитания в контексте нравственной педагогики* Н. И. Новикова, [in:] В. А. Беляевой, Ю. В. Орловой (eds.), *Философско-педагогические и религиозные основания образования в России: история и современность*, Рязанский государственный университет имени С. А. Есенина, Рязань 2008, p. 183.

he wrote in 1806 that it is God's will and when a statement would be made that he loved her and vice versa, then, Novikov asked rhetorically, "whether a created being should love another created being more than God." The husband should turn all his love of his wife to love of his children. He should not forget that God punishes those whom He loves (Heb. 12:6), so we should be grateful for all punishment that comes from Him since this is a proof of God's love. Also, excessive sadness and tears about what was lost means grumbling against the Creator and His decisions (P 107). Novikov gave a similar advice in 1813 to prof. Kh. A. Chebotarev, a mason, who was robbed and ruined (160), and to F. P. Kliucharev, on the death of his son in 1817 (242). Whether such type of consolation can really bring peace to someone, we cannot be certain, but Novikov based it on his own experience, and it was not something that he simply read about in a catechism. When he was in Schlüsselburg, a priest said to him that God punishes whom he loves and who is not punished, is not His son (242); therefore, this is also a consolation that he gave to his friends and fellow-masons.

Suffering is a part of the Christian life. The school of Christ is difficult, bitter to the flesh and blood, like wormwood; however, it is bitter only in the mouth and is sweet in the belly (cf. Rev. 10:9). The path of Christ is not covered with roses but with thorns (P 109). Christ "was born, lived, and died in the cross, on the cross, and with the cross and he will come again under its sign. For all that happens to us, there is one recipe: patience, humility, steadfastness, overcoming one's own will, all of it applied at the same time, in the morning and in the evening, one spoonful at a time" (53). God comes with help only to those who bear their cross patiently and with humility (108). Is. 66:2 says that God will look at the humble, meek, and having fear of God. Masonry also teaches that with three steps the light can be reached: humility, meekness, and the fear of God. "Having made these three steps, we become able to see the light! – What [light]? – The greatest of all lights, i.e., the Bible or the revealed word of God" (152). That is, masonry should lead in the direction of Christianity; if a mason is not a Christian, he should become one when following the three steps prescribed by masonic rules.

Novikov saw masonry as a way of reinvigorating Christian faith. His speech given in a meeting of masons reads more like a sermonette given in a Sunday school than a set of cryptic pronouncements accessible only to the initiated. He said that love for God and neighbor must by all means be made real in its fruits so that "the light of Christ could shine before men through His tools. Most importantly: strive to abstain from ridiculing and judging any man, particularly one's own brother" and to bring oneself to the state when listening to someone who ridicules someone else would be painful. And when something appears laughable in someone, we should immediately examine our own weaknesses and emotions to see that we are just as guilty as or even more than the person that appears to us

to have negative traits (P 253). Most importantly, “our main duty is to build the kingdom of our Savior in our souls” (254).

Because Novikov saw a strong link between masonry and Christianity, he criticized and even ridiculed features of masonry which he considered serving no spiritual purpose, which included some masonic rites. He said about Swedish masonry: “Generously spread everywhere concepts of small capitularies, enlightened capitularies, illuminated capitularies, brothers of violet ribbon, magisters of the temple, clericat, calling up spirits, etc. – all of it are lofty knowledge and elevated notions [that] often are merely amusing and akin to games of children who scare [others] with a Herculean armament; and some ceremonies and rites used in these beneficial capitularies, regardless of their beautiful and attractive disguise, turned out to us to be quite deceitful and fake.” Some of these rites like “invoking spirits are nothing but Balaam’s abomination and the so-called cacomagic that is cursed in many places of the Holy Scripture” (P 22).²³ Just like masonic meetings should not be reduced to social playfulness, so there should be no room in them for some outlandish rituals which artificially add an air of unnecessary mystery to the masonic order.

Masonry did not veer Novikov in a spiritual direction that would be suspect from the perspective of Christianity but made him a stronger Christian. It is interesting to read an opinion of Archbishop Platon who after his interview – or more like a spiritual hearing – with Novikov concluded in his Jan. 1786 report that he wished that “in the entire world there would be such Christians as Novikov” (IS 579) even if some books he published were detrimental to faith and morals, particularly books of the encyclopedists (580). In this interview, “he was questioned about our law in all of its essential parts: and he, Novikov, admitted everything as truth without any doubt about anything; and every year he confesses and takes communion.”²⁴ Platon asked him twelve questions related to particular Orthodox dogmas, and Novikov answered all of them satisfactorily. He said that he believed in: 1. God and His providential care; 2. the immortality of the soul; 3. the Trinity; 4. the divinity of Christ; 5. the sacraments of the Orthodox church; 6. the creed; 7. the Orthodox church as the only true church; 8. the Bible as the word of God; 9. decisions of the seven ecumenical councils; 10. praying to the saints, veneration of icons and relics; 11. confession and taking communion each year. The last point concerned the masonic membership, to which he responded that he associated himself with masons since he did not see there anything contrary to God’s and civic law and the society was not banned and many high-ranking people were its members.²⁵

²³ Interestingly, séances are criticized because they are based on materialist philosophy (P 234).

²⁴ Platon’s report, 29 Dec. [1785], [in:] Н. Тихонравов (ed.), *Летописи русской литературы и древности*, Типография Грачева, Москва 1859, vol. 1, pt. 3, p. 25.

²⁵ Platon’s questions, [in:] Н. Тихонравов, *op. cit.*, p. 26-28; Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

Of course, there is a possibility of opportunism and self-defense leading to such responses. However, Novikov's Orthodox beliefs and practices can be confirmed independently. Novikov pleaded for a "deacon of our church" (P 195) and wrote about a poor condition of the church building across the river from his village and great condition of his church and the bell tower (196). He cared for the church in Avdot'ino donating to it quite expensive gifts: a silver chalice, a silver cross above the altar, an expensive edition of the gospels, and four medallions studded with precious stones. He also designed a mural. He is even buried in this church (309).²⁶ He mentioned in his letters the Trinity (31, 157, 220, 223), his taking communion (191), and the sacred character of the Bible (152); he spoke about prayer for the dead (P 242).²⁷ He referred to a hymn that "we sing in our churches," which suggests frequenting church services (P 231). He constantly mentioned Christ the Savior and because he believed in the Trinity, he thereby believed in the divinity of Christ which is also explicitly mentioned (47).

Novikov was brought up in a religious atmosphere, but religiosity of his childhood and youth did not address all questions he had, in particular the problem of the meaning of it all. He somehow did not find a satisfactory answer in the church, and he turned to masons who seemingly were able to provide some answers. However, Novikov did not at any point turn against the religion he espoused before, and he wanted to find his answers in the framework of the Christian religion. That is why it was so very important for him that masonry, at least the kind he was willing to join, did not violate any Christian dogma.²⁸ Apparently, his masonic quest was not entirely successful and only personal tragedy – a brush with death through a prolonged illness – led to spiritual regeneration, to religious new birth, in which Christian beliefs thoroughly permeated his heart and not just his mind. He practiced his newly rejuvenated Orthodox faith with zest, but he did not sever ties with masonry. In the church, his heart found the proper venue. However, the intellectual level of the clergy was very low, and even more educated ecclesiastics of the age, such as Metropolitan Platon, lamented over this situation. On the other hand, Novikov found among his fellow masons the best from the cultural and scientific elite and the brightest from the political scene. Masonry was for Novikov not only spiritually fulfilling, but also intellectually satisfying. Masonry became

²⁶ Н. Лонгинов, *op. cit.*, p. 380, 384.

²⁷ Particularly the *Morning Light* was interested in this problem offering several articles on proofs of the immortality of the soul with serious, philosophical arguments, А. И. Незеленов, *Николай Иванович Новиков, издатель журналов 1769-1785 гг.*, Типография В. С. Балашева, Санкт-Петербург 1875, p. 250, 252.

²⁸ Novikov held some strange, even borderline weird views (the existence of exactly seven planets, of only four Empedoclean elements, nonexistence of fixed stars since "what has no motion is dead, since life is motion," P 221) which were motivated by some masonic principles and have nothing to do with Christianity; e.g., masons believed that planets and stars are alive (that is why they cannot be immovable), R. Faggionato, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

for Novikov an avenue strengthening his Christian beliefs and his social commitments that he found important as a Christian. Masonry did not separate him from the Orthodox church, it only brought him closer to it. At no point did he espouse any doctrine which would be contradictory to Orthodox dogmas. Both spiritually and doctrinally, he became a better Christian because of his masonic allegiances.

SUMMARY

Nikolai Novikov, an eighteenth-century Russian publisher and writer, started his publishing career in St. Petersburg with a series of short-lived satirical journals. In these journals, he expressed strong religious feelings that were frequently mixed with patriotism. He found such patriotic religiosity unfulfilling and turned to the masons who he thought had answers. He found masonry important to the extent to which it agreed with Christian tenets. His faith deepened as the result of his prolonged illness which marked his spiritual rebirth.

The article argues that in his essays and letters Novikov maintained that religion was a very important part of life, in fact, life's foundation. In particular, education of the mind and the heart should be founded on Christianity religion.

Masonry was very important in Novikov's life, but because he believed that masonry should lead in the direction of Christianity, he remained Christian deeply committed to the dogmas and rites of the Orthodox church.

Keywords: Novikov, masonry, Orthodoxy

STRESZCZENIE

Mikołaj Nowikow, XVIII-wieczny wydawca i pisarz rosyjski, rozpoczął swą działalność wydawniczą w Petersburgu serią krótkotrwałych pism satyrycznych. W pismach tych Nowikow dał wyraz swym silnym uczuciom religijnym, które często powiązane były z patriotyzmem. Owa patriotyczna religijność nie dawała mu poczucia spełnienia, zwrócił się zatem w stronę masonerii, która w jego odczuciu była odpowiedzią na poszukiwania religijne – w takim jednakże stopniu, do jakiego zgodna była z zasadami chrześcijańskimi.

Niniejszy artykuł argumentuje, iż w swych esejach i listach Nowikow utrzymywał, że religia jest ważną częścią życia, a nawet jego fundamentem. W szczególności edukacja serca i myśli powinna wspierać się na zasadach chrześcijańskich.

Chociaż masoneria była ważnym elementem w życiu Nowikowa, pozostał on do końca chrześcijaninem głęboko wierzącym w prawdziwość zasad i rytuałów Kościoła prawosławnego, ponieważ uważał, że masonstwo powinno prowadzić w kierunku chrześcijaństwa.

Słowa kluczowe: Novikov, masoneria, ortodoksja