

The phenomenon of charity in Russia: characteristic features

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ks. Rostislav Yarema, *Zjawisko dobroczynności w Rosji: cechy charakterystyczne*, Elpis, 19 2017: 211-216.

Abstract: The history of Russian charity is full of vivid and amazing examples, as well as perspectives that distinguish it from Western analogies. The article reveals the characteristic features of the phenomenon of charity, which help to comprehend it more deeply. One of its fundamental foundations is defined as a deep and all-round relationship with Orthodoxy, as well as traditions of mercy that were formed in the pre-Christian period of the Russian history, and then became an organized public system for helping the needy. As a separate aspect of domestic charity, the relationship with entrepreneurship is considered, which left a unique phenomenon of the "golden age of Russian patronage" in history at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries.

Streszczenie: Historia rosyjskiej dobroczynności pełna jest zadziwiających i jaskrawych przykładów, a także perspektyw odróżniających ją od analogicznych zjawisk na Zachodzie. Autor ukazał cechy charakterystyczne zjawiska dobroczynności, co pomoże w dogłębniejszym jego zrozumieniu. Jedną z jego fundamentalnych podstaw została określona jako głębokie i wszechstronne powiązanie z prawosławiem, a także tradycjami miłosierdzia ukształtowanymi już w przedchrześcijańskim okresie rosyjskiej historii, które następnie przybrały postać zorganizowanego społecznego systemu pomocy potrzebującym. Autor rozpatrzył jako oddzielny aspekt rosyjskiej dobroczynności jej powiązania z przedsiębiorczością, które pozostawiły w historii unikatowe zjawisko „złotego wieku rosyjskiego mecenatu” na przełomie XIX-XX wv.

Keywords: tradition of mercy, charity in Russia, Orthodoxy, Russian entrepreneurs of the late XIX - early XX centuries, philanthropy

Słowa kluczowe: dobroczynność w Rosji, tradycje miłosierdzia, prawosławie, przedsiębiorcy końca XIX – początku XX wv., mecenat

The Russian experience of charitable activity in many ways is a unique phenomenon. It is impossible to deny its significance for modern Russia and for any civilized countries.

What is the specificity of Russian charity? It has special characteristics that play the role of system-forming qualities that determine the nature of charitable activities in our country, regardless of the period of its history under consideration.

In the opinion of V.O. Klyuchevsky, charity among our ancestors was of a personal, non-public character and so did not require a reward to the giver that was done in secret. "...Ancient Rus," an outstanding domestic historian writes, "understood and appreciated only personal, direct charity, alms, given from hand to hand, and "by stealth", secretly, not only from the outside eye, but also from its own "shield-arm"¹.

An integral quality of charity in Russia was unselfishness, the absence of any expectation and hope for a reward. How much such an activity in its motivations and consequences for the donor itself differs from the charity now widespread in our country as a fully conscious investment

in improving one's own or corporate image, where the benefits are obvious.

In fact, nowadays the concept of "charity" as a gratuitous activity has received a clear line of distinction with the concept of "sponsorship", implying an advantageous investment of capital. Charity, of course, affects the reputation of the company and may well be seen as an intangible asset². As a whole, the result of such a transformation of charitable activity was the fact that Russia is now in the second hundred countries of the world by the rating of charity. Only 2% of Russians are aware of the activities of charitable organizations, 21% have heard of such organizations, but know a little about their activities, 55% of Russian citizens know nothing about the activities of charitable organizations and only 2% have faced it personally³.

The modern Russian business community finds it hard to believe that the condition of Savva Timofeevich Morozov for helping the founders of the Art Theater, was that his name in this regard should not have appeared in the

¹ Klyuchevsky V.O. Historical portraits. The figures of historical thought, Red., Intro. art. and note by V.A. Alexandrov. M., 1990. P. 79.

² Kulibina M. The influence of corporate social responsibility on the brand and business reputation of the company / Kulibina M., V. Antonov // Marketing. - 2008. - №5. P.66.

³ Business and Charity [Electronic resource] / Center for Scientific Political Thought and Ideology. - Access mode: <http://rusrand.ru/docconf/> (reference date is July 10, 2017)

newspapers⁴. Donations of one of the largest Russian philanthropists P.G. Shelaputin exceeded 5 million rubles, but he hid genuine expenses for charity even from relatives⁵.

However, justice needs to be noted that such cases are also in our time, as sometimes reported by the media.

“An analysis of the scope of charity in Russia ... - the well-known cultural scientist A.A. Aronov writes - fully allows to connect the essence of charity with another well-known phenomenon – mercy”⁶, in which the empathy of human misfortune or need is not separable and real help to the needy in it.

Mercy is one of the most important human values and is significant not only in philosophical reflection, but also in Orthodox teaching. It is the Gospel that teaches true mercy, and in the Orthodox Church “the true doctrine of mercy, which is actual from ancient times to our days, has been preserved⁷. Moreover, “one of the most authoritative Church Fathers, St. John Chrysostom notes that mercy is embedded in the very essence of a man and nature, and we are called by God to develop and increase this gift in ourselves. Our true purpose is revealed precisely through the performance of works of mercy.”⁸

It is no accident that the problem of mercy was of deep interest to the fathers of the Orthodox Church, by turning the postulates of the Christian doctrine of mercy into quite specific temporal affairs. This subject is extremely relevant until now. It is not for nothing that the approved social concept of the Russian Orthodox Church (2000) notes that “mercy and charity, development of joint social programs are areas of cooperation between the Church and the state in this historical period.”

The secular and ecclesiastical interpretation of mercy is significantly different not only in the meaning, wealth, depth and breadth of definition. So, Ozhegov’s dictionary defines mercy as “a willingness to help someone or forgive someone in compassion, humanity”. However, a willingness to help automatically does not mean succour activity or an act of forgiveness.

The main difference between secular humanism and Christian mercy is that man is the center of the world, for the believer such center is God, hence the end in itself of Christian mercy is not only a help to a particular person, but also the self-salvation of the donor by a charitable act.

Church Fathers distinguished two types of Christian mercy - corporal and spiritual. Repeating the message of the Apostle Paul in the Epistle to the Galatians (Galatians 6: 2), Saint Jerome of Stridonium calls alms as the first kind of mercy, and the second, spiritual, is “... indulgence

to every sin of a brother, when we will bear the hardships of one another.” The meaning of this kind of mercy is expressed in rendering assistance “not with property only, but with words, and if you do not have anything, then - with tears and a sigh” (Theophilactus the Bulgarian). This kind of mercy reflects the essence of the Christian faith, because “bows compassionately to all of them: whoever is worthy of evil, does not reward (evil) and who is worthy of good, he overflows with abundance” (Rev. Isaac the Syrian).

Another inseparable feature of Christian mercy is its unchanging, permanent character. “At the moment of inspiration, at the moment of enthusiasm, - Archimandrite John Krestiankin writes, “we are ready sometimes for every sacrifice, but doing mercy work constantly, relentlessly in everyday life, among the constant small daily irritations, seeing ourselves as misunderstood, unjustly condemned, rejected by the all, <...> - this we consider an impossible feat for ourselves! <...> Hence, we are suffering incurably with the sins of heartlessness and mercilessness.”

The main source of mercy in the Christian Orthodox tradition is the love of man for God and for his neighbor and the love of God for all of us - sinful ones. The derivative of this love is compassion for another man, the ability to take on his troubles and cares. “There is no mercy without love. And the Lord said to us: “*I give you a new commandment, do love one another*; As I have loved you, and you, do love one another” (John 13:34).

Another commandment of Christianity is striking in its depth and, as they say now, constructivity in the parting words of the faithful. It is a question of refusing the illusion that only by great deeds and vivid accomplishments one can be pleased with God. “Through a small, easy, most easily done work,” Archimandrite John Krestiankin wrote, “the man is most used to good and begins to serve it unwillingly, but from the heart, sincerely and through it more and more enters the atmosphere of good, lets the roots of his life in a new soil of good. The roots of human life adapt easily to this soil of good and soon can no longer live without it ... Thus a man is saved: the great comes from the small. “

Mercy as a universal psychological quality was organically inherent for the Russian man, formed in the conditions of a special oecumene, and this quality appeared, evidently long before the adoption of Christianity. Even in the archaic period of Russian history, there existed various forms of mutual assistance within the clan, communities that had the persistent nature of generally accepted traditions and rules: sacrifice and alms on the day of holidays or burial for the poor, general work (“help”), allocation of land to widows and old people, donation alms to pilgrims during prince feasts, etc. It is known that the princely charity in Ancient Rus was reduced to giving alms, feeding in the prince’s court and delivering food for the miserable.

It was with the adoption of Christianity - this largest historical event of Ancient Rus, with the formation of monasteries, charity began to evolve as an organized so-

⁴ See: A.Aronov. The golden age of Russian patronage. Moscow: Moscow State University of Culture, Publishing House, 1995. - P.4.

⁵ Buryshkin P.A. Merchant Moscow: Memoirs. M., 1991. P.33.

⁶ Aronov A.A. The golden age of Russian patronage. Moscow: Moscow State University of Culture, Publishing House, 1995. - P.5.

⁷ Samal I.N. Dubik O.V. Patristic doctrine of mercy // Russian Athos as a factor of spiritual enlightenment of Russia: by the millennium of Russian presence on the holy mountain (1016-2016): Collection of materials of the III International Scientific and Practical St. Tikhon Conference. Pskov, 2016. P.188.

⁸ The same source. P. 189.

cial system⁹. By itself, the Christian commandment “Love your neighbor as yourself” can be considered a landmark starting postulate of any charitable activity. The moral paradigm of Christianity, based on humanistic values, structured not only the spiritual life of our compatriots of that time, but also set certain social standards, which were fully consistent with charitable deeds. After all, one can not deny the fact that the first hospice and sanatoriums arose at the monasteries. The Holy Great Prince Vladimir, Equal of the Apostles, the baptizer of Rus, found the first hospitals. Grand Prince Yaroslav Vladimirovich opened a school for orphans in 1016. Vladimir Monomakh gave generous alms to the needy. “Strange and poor, feeding and giving to drink, like a mother doing this for her children,” he said. His sister Anna Vsevolodna opened a school in Kiev, in which she taught girls to read and write.

Many representatives of tsarist and princely families were engaged in charity. Wonderful words belong to the outstanding commander Alexander Nevsky: “Take under your shelter widows, orphans, all weak and persecuted, appealing to your justice. God sees their tears; He will hear their sighing; He will demand spiritual sorrow from me and from you...” Ivan the Terrible legalized charity with special laws on rendering assistance to the needy, opened a number of charitable institutions with funds from the state treasury and private donors. And even “Matrosskaya Tishina”, which later became a prison, was built by Peter the Great as a hospital for sick and injured sailors.

The Church formed and supported the traditions of mercy and charity, and helped to mold the inner need in the soul of the person to help the “downtrodden”. The monks of the Kiev-Pechersk Monastery built a house for beggars, cripples and lepers, priests helped parishioners, brought up their children. The church exempted the peasants who settled on monastic lands from the taxes.

The kindness of church leaders and boyar generosity in accordance with the social changes taking place over the centuries was supplemented by noble philanthropy of the 18th and early 19th centuries, which left the descendants Golitsyn, First Grad, Mariinsky hospitals and many other charitable institutions. Even in 1775, Catherine II made orders in the provinces for “establishing, custody and oversight” for popular schools, orphanages, hospitals and almshouses.

It should be noted that at the beginning of the XIX century private charity acquires the features of an almost formal social institution. In 1802, a philanthropic “Imperial humanitarian society” arose with the branches in most Russian cities, in 1816 its Statute was approved, which defined its task “to give alms, to emancipate the poor from their misery with their own works, to take care of the old and crippled, and bring up the poor juveniles¹⁰”. In 1814, the Patriotic Society, taking care of the wounded and sick defenders of the Fatherland and a special Committee deal-

ing with wounded generals, officers and their families appeared.

Gradually, the active role in the implementation of charitable activities goes to the provincial authorities, and after the abolition of serfdom to the county, city authorities that begin to arrange shelters and “hospitals” for the elderly and crippled, “shameful babies” (illegitimate children), there are “orphans” and “creches”, forms of care of the blind and deaf and dumb. The document of 1870 - City charter - pointed to the inadmissibility of begging and the need to place beggars in social institutions.

By the end of the XIX century the scale of charity in Russia demanded the creation of a special commission regulating the legal and financial problems of this activity in 1892, there was public control over charity, trust in it increased and the number of donors increased very much.

It is characteristic that the social tradition of charity and the corresponding mental feature of Russian society was manifested in the new class, which was the engine of the emerging capitalism. “...The industrial millionaire, the banker and the owner of the barn,” P.D. Boborykin wrote, ... begin to support mental and artistic interests with their money, set up galleries, buy expensive works of art for their offices and salons, establish scholarships and become patrons of different schools, scientists and poets, actors and writers.¹¹”

One can not disagree with the opinion of the researcher that one of the defining reasons for the flourishing of patronage at that time was the specificity of the national mentality and the profound religiosity of the Russian bourgeoisie: “The attitude of the entrepreneur to his business was somewhat different than in the West. They looked at their activities not only, or not so much as a source of profit, but as a task, a kind of mission entrusted by God or destiny. About wealth they said that God gave it for use and would require a report on it, which was expressed partly in the fact that it was in the merchant community that both charity and collectorship were extremely developed, and they were looked upon as fulfilling some sort of over assigned work¹². “In addition to wealth and ambition, the desire to excel, to earn the courtesy of the court,” M.L. Gavlin notes, the main source that determined the scale of patronage, were the inner motives of Russian donors, conditioned by religious upbringing and religious perceptions of the soul in the other world.”¹³

Moreover, for arisen on the domestic spiritual and religious grounds of Russian business, charity has become an organic feature that has manifested itself in so many

⁹ Aronov A.A. Golden Age of Russian patronage. M: Moscow State University of Culture, Publishing House, 1995. - P. 5.

¹⁰ Dmitriev M.N. Houses of diligence. - St. Petersburg, 1900. - P.21.

¹¹ Mercury of Europe, 1881. № 3 (Cited by: Aronov A.A. The Golden Age of Russian patronage, Moscow: Moscow State University of Culture, Publishing House, 1995. - P.6)

¹² Buryshkin P.A. Merchant Moscow // Kuzmichev D.A., Shapkin I.N. Domestic entrepreneurship. Essays on history. M: Progress-Academy, 1995. P. 152.

¹³ Gavlin M.L. Russian Entrepreneurs: spiritual appearance, patronage // History of Entrepreneurship in Russia. The second book. The second half of the XIX - the beginning of the XX century. - M.: ROSSPEN, 2000. P.480.

representatives of this class – there are enough examples¹⁴. Of course, the shift in the share of donations in the field of education, above all professional, indicated a practical focus of charity, but the essence of the motives and the nature of the donations did not change from this.

It should be noted that “devotees who received satisfaction from the consciousness of their own benefit, from serving their country through philanthropy”¹⁵ were represented not only by the propertied classes. And this feature of Russian philanthropists also goes back to the origins of Christianity, which never considered charity the service of only rich parishioners. “Many Orthodox Saints gave everything that they had to the poor,” I.N. Samal and O.V. Dubik write. - The model for understanding mercy for us is Saint John the Almsgiver, St. Philaret the Merciful, Rev. Sabbas the Sanctified, Rev. Sergius of Radonezh, St. John Chrysostom, St. Nicholas the Wonderworker and many others.”¹⁶

The period of the late XIX - early XX centuries in Russia is not accidentally called the “golden age” of patronage and charity. Reflecting the socio-historical rise of Russian society and culture of that time, patronage and charity became indicators of Russia’s enormous spiritual potential - a potential based on Orthodox traditions and spiritual origins of the people, a vivid manifestation of its national character that developed during the great historical period of the survival of Russian civilization.

It is important to note that the energy of godly charitable activities went to those non-commercial spheres of Russian society that belonged to its social and scientific and cultural dimension and were the least developed in Russia at that time: education, health care and, of course, culture, especially artistic one (theater, visual art).

Undoubtedly, there is the internal connection of charitable activities with the rise of Russian science, the flowering of culture and artistic and creative searches of the time, largely determined the trends in the development of art and culture in our country. Art galleries and museums created by the largest patrons of art became centers of cultural enlightenment of the people, the theaters supported by admirers of art turned into generators of new creative ideas and styles that had exerted and continue exerting invaluable influence on the development of national and world art.

Schools, colleges and institutes, opened thanks to donations, played a huge role in raising the educational level of the population of Russia at that time. Hospitals, shelters, built with the help of benefactors, have preserved health for many thousands of people.

It is enough only to start listing all the well-known famous names of the remarkable centers of culture and art,

health and education, which were created with the funds of patrons and which continue to work for the goals pursued by the donors who built them: the Tretyakov Gallery, the Bakhrushinsky Theater Museum, the Moscow Art Theater, Morozov clinics and many renamed hospitals, schools, colleges ... And how many collections of priceless paintings, books that have made the pride of numerous art galleries, museums, libraries were donated to the state by patrons?

The spiritual roots of the Russian bourgeoisie of that time were connected with Orthodoxy so deeply that in the conditions of the socio-cultural and economic upsurge of that time immediately gave so many sprouts. These sprouts reflected not only the state of the spiritual life of that time, but also the internal creative and humanistic potential of Russia, which could become the engine of world civilization, the exponent and example of a human social system based on orthodox ideals.

The individual features of the spiritual image of Russian patrons - kindness, philanthropy, compassion to their neighbor - reflected Christian virtues and were human qualities opposed to the egoism and soullessness of Western civilization, fully manifested in the crises of the twentieth century and dominant in today’s aggressive globalism of the American type. One can even make the assumption that the comfortable way of development of Russia could give an opportunity to manifest these features in the person - the bearer of high moral ideals and form a completely new type of society that opposes the world trends of dehumanization and dechristianization of the twentieth century. “Personal qualities, - A.A. Aronov writes in this connection – of known patrons of the “golden age”, the spectrum of their leading interests and spiritual needs, the general level of education and upbringing, and finally the moral motives of charity give grounds to assert that we have genuine intellectuals that fully meet the known criteria that distinguish people of this type”¹⁷.

Serious evidence of the socio-historical and even civilizational significance of charitable activity in Russia at the turn of the century is the indisputable effect of social diffusion of this phenomenon, embracing not only the economically well-to-do classes and appeared in economic growth of the national bourgeoisie, but also the representatives of social groups that are modest in their economic position, county figures, representatives of creative professions.

The transfer by N.V. Gogol funds received from the fourth and fifth editions of “The Inspector General”, “in favor of the have-nots.”¹⁸ Yasnaya Polyana school of L.N. Tolstoy, selfless work of the professor I.V. Tsvetaev for the Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow, schools and infirmaries of the great singer F.I. Chaliapin, charitable concerts and financing of the magazine “Signal” by L.V. Sobinov, gratuitous activity of architects and writers ...It is a pity that present generations know little about this asceticism of many famous and not known people of that time in the

¹⁴ See: Kuzmicheva A., Petrova R. Russian millionaires: Family chronicles. M., 1993.

¹⁵ Vlasov V.P. Abode of mercy. M. 1991. P.5.

¹⁶ Samal I.N. Dubik O.V. Patristic doctrine of charity. // Russian Athos as a factor of spiritual enlightenment of Russia: by the millennium of Russian presence on the holy mountain (1016-2016): Collection of materials of the III International Scientific and Practical St. Tikhon Conference. Pskov, 2016. P.190.

¹⁷ Aronov A.A. The golden age of Russian patronage. M.: Moscow State University of Culture, Publishing House, 1995. - P. 11.

¹⁸ Gogol N.V. Collected works. V. 4.-M.; L., 1951. - P. 109.

field of charity. It is necessary to pay tribute, honor and respect to them for their unselfish service to people.

Charity was not a manifestation of fashion, but an inner need of many entrepreneurs, a characteristic feature of many representatives of this new class. It is a pity that today attempts are being made to belittle the socio-spiritual role of this unique phenomenon of Russian life, since, allegedly, “charitable activity, as a rule, is not able to solve any of its tasks with its own forces.”¹⁹

The scope of charitable activities in Russia at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries is by no means an accidental episode of social and spiritual transformations at a certain point in time before the change of historical epochs and only in a narrow social group of well-off people who have not yet learned how, in the West’s dominant social type of entrepreneur personality, to take care only of increasing profits – anyway and by all available means.

Thanks to their activities, a new hierarchy of the meaningful values of human life could form, a new type of entrepreneur could emerge and an absolutely unique way of existence of the enterprise sphere, opposing egoistic individualism and based on interpersonal solidarity of people, on the principles of justice, personal and social responsibility, love and mercy to man could spread.

Perhaps their life and activities were a prototype of that social ideal that is formed in spiritual searches of a pan-European civilization that is not able to survive on anti-human and anti-Christian values that have become widespread in the twentieth century and in our time.

The scale of patrons’ charity work of that time, the real result of the influence of their noble labors on public life and the spiritual atmosphere of that time, give grounds to talk about the uniqueness of this socio-cultural phenomenon in the history of Russia and in the world civilization.²⁰

The wave of destruction of all foundations, traditions, Christian virtues and values that soon came to the Russian land, destroyed the rush of society via its best representatives, and dared even the memory of many of them. But this does not mean that such a unique socio-historical phenomenon as charitable activity is left without trace. It manifested itself – albeit in a different form – almost a century later in sponsorship and other patronage activities, it left a deep imprint on the spiritual continuum of the people as an example of philanthropy and altruism.

Patronage and charitable activities were not an anomaly of the Russian bourgeoisie, they were a manifestation of the spiritual nature of the Russian man, his national character, turned not only to his own good, but also favoring his neighbor. The great singer Fedor Chaliapin called the

representatives of this bourgeoisie, who carried out large-scale charitable activities, briefly and, probably, not quite scientifically, but precisely – “trumps of the nation”²¹.

The internal psychological mechanism, which prompted enough rich people to sacrifice significant, and often huge funds for the benefit of other people, is expressed in the title of the article of the Russian scientist about the largest patron of that time, Kozma Terentyevich Soldatenkov²²: “And submitted millions, he was not submitted to millions.” It is a pity that this formula is so little suited to most of those who, on the wave of oligarchic capitalism, have risen to the heights of prosperity in our time ...

The most obvious difference of these seemingly intimate, but centuries-old phenomena – charity, sponsorship – is manifested in the inadequacy of terms in which they are most accurately described. Thus, the modern terms “beneficent” and “beneficiary” in no way reflect the relationship between the donor and the recipient of public charity as a manifestation of civic solidarity between members of society... It is even more strange to hear the current statements about the “applied” nature of charity, as it was dictated by the concern for salvation of the “beneficiary’s” own soul and did not correct the plight of the poor, but even generated not only parasitic mood among the latter, but “commercial, professional, begging”.

“Retrospective of charity, mercy, patronage..., – the professor A.A.Aronov says, – is great in time, rich in the brightest examples, allows us to reveal the obvious continuity of good deeds, the origins and traditions of Russian patronage.”²³ As a result of charitable activities, churches and hospitals, schools and orphanages, art galleries and libraries that have become the main points for the development of the national culture have appeared – and continue to remain until today. But it should not go unnoticed the spiritual influence of this activity, its significance for the social and cultural atmosphere of Russian society of the past centuries and this century. This means that charity has a wonderful perspective. Its implementation can improve the moral climate in modern Russian society, it is beneficial to influence the spiritual appearance of the person now living. We can not but agree with the conclusion: “This may sound strange, but the higher the civilization and culture of society is, the more perfect the system of mercy and charity in the country must be.”²⁴

¹⁹ Sokolov A.R. Russian charity in the XVIII-XIX centuries (to the question of periodization and the conceptual apparatus) // Domestic history. – M., 2003. – No. 6. – P. 155.

²⁰ Aronov A.A. The golden age of Russian patronage. M.: Moscow State University of Culture, Publishing House, 1995. – P. 12.

²¹ Chalyapin F.I. Mask and Soul: My forty years in theaters. M., 1989. P. 277.

²² See: Week, 1990, No. 50, p. 12.

²³ Aronov A.A. The golden age of Russian patronage. M.: Moscow State University of Culture, Publishing House, 1995. – P. 9.

²⁴ Nuvakhov B.Sh., Lavrova I.G. Development stages of mercy and charity in Russia in XVIII-XX centuries. // Problems of social hygiene and history of medicine. – M., 1995. – № 4. – P. 52-53.

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Rozmiar artykułu: 0,8 arkusza wydawniczego

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