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DEVELOPMENT GAPS BETWEEN EASTERN AND WESTERN EUROPE AS A DERIVATIVE OF RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL FACTORS

Abstract. *The Purpose of the Study* is to sum up the key development gaps between Western and Eastern Europe as seen through the paradigm of these regions' religious development. **The Research Methodology** includes bibliographic, analytical, comparative methods, field research and polling which allowed us to come up with relevant conclusions about the research topic. **The Scientific Novelty** is defined by putting a comparison of development of Western and Eastern Europe along the lines of historical evolvement of religious culture in these regions. Applying religious and cultural factors to substantiate the development gaps in various regions of the European continent became a basis for producing results that allow to see these gaps differently. Using history of theology and Church teachings as a basis for explaining the development gaps brings several new perspectives in understanding the European history. **The Conclusion.** After looking into specific features of Western and Eastern Christianity we may see a set of differences which led to having different lifestyles in these regions of the continent, different ethical priorities and different approach to having a profession and performing a job. This led to substantial development gaps in how Eastern and Western Europe have been performing politically, economically and culturally.

Keywords: Church, theology, development, labor ethics, religion, religious culture, philosophy of religion, national worldview, Eastern Europe, Western Europe.

The Relevance of the Topic. It's interesting to see how the Christianity shaped European history in a decisive way. There are several ways to see Europe,

but one of the most popular ones is seeing it through East vs West axis – a principle defined by two traditions of Christian faith, Western and Eastern.

Overall, we see countries within the Western Christian tradition enjoying a higher material prosperity, having a larger GDP per capita ratio and better infrastructure development. Meanwhile, countries where the Eastern Christianity has been a prevailing spiritual tradition throughout the ages are behind their Western peers on all of these indicators.

The Formulation of the Problem. Christianity is a religion where ethics plays a crucial role, defining the lifestyle, one's interaction with larger society and with the government. That's why we see gaps and differences in a quality of development within various European regions as a derivative from that place's religious culture.

Let's look at most recent developments. We have Greece, a nation with a traditional Orthodox culture, going through a number of financial crises in 2010s. Cyprus, another Orthodox culture, had the same problems back in 2013. Balkan countries have all kinds of disagreements on their political future – whether it's joining the EU or joining the NATO. Russia, that declares Orthodoxy its official religion, is a big, but rather poor country that's never been able to maintain a sustainably policy of regional development, finally choosing to invade Ukraine to get a hand over this country's vast resources.

Meanwhile, countries of Western Christian tradition have been having a much richer life. Germany was having a fiscal surplus each year before 2022, when the war-related inflation ruined health of economic environment pretty much everywhere on the continent. Norway has its €1-trillion sovereign fund that allows to have much more comfort in planning the future for the coming generations of Norwegians. Sweden provides a social support scheme worth roughly 30% of GDP that creates several layers of economic protection for those who might have all kinds of troubles in their lives.

The Purpose of the article. Now we are going to proceed to analyzing the way religious culture affected societies, countries and economies of Eastern and Western regions of Europe.

The Presentation of the topic. To find the answers to the questions we have, it's needed to look at Medieval Ages and see how the tectonic changes occurring in European culture back then divided the continent along the West-East axis. Post-Roman age was a highly challenging environment, when all the European nations stepped to a teeth-cutting competition, which included classical warfare, but also cultural and economic methods of winning over the peers.

At this point of time, Christian Church received its final division into Eastern and Western churches, which happened in 11th century, but was prepared by two centuries full of disagreements on religious matters that were guiding rules for

how the societies in Europe were developing. Western Church then was sure its liturgy provides a better aesthetics, while is also helping people to have their best instincts developing in a proper way, so it was looking for ways to break with the Eastern Church after too many political scandals in Byzantium Empire involving all kinds of corruption. According to Medieval theologians, political sins, including corruption among judges, was too deadly of a sin, so the Western Church decided it didn't want to have sacramental communication with the Eastern Church for this reason.

Take monasteries. After the Roman Empire broke up and Christian intellectuals started looking for a different cultural infrastructure that would allow them to pursue their studies, Western Europe came up with the idea of monasteries. Celtic Church started having monasteries as early as 5th century AD, followed by France and Germany. Eastern Church had a developed monastic culture at that time but supported spirituality of solitude for those who wanted to devote their life to God. We can see Eastern monasteries operating in Egypt in approximately same time, but in terms of daily comfort of life there were much more challenging than what Western monasteries had.

This is how Western European Christianity produced a new labor ethics. It was somewhat based on Eastern theology – like the writings of St. Basil the Great and his basic ethical principle “work and pray”, but St. Basil's teaching remained mostly a theory for the Byzantium Empire, while they became everyday practice for the Western Church.

At a monastery in Western Europe, a monk could spend all day long reading and writing which allowed to produce a totally new European culture. Intellectual work was recognized as an important contribution to the economic and cultural development, while it was still impossible to do intellectual work outside monasteries. We know very few intellectuals among the laity in Medieval Ages, though at a later stage – in 13-14th centuries, more and more people with intellectual vocation were able to establish own way of life without taking monastic vows. Good example for this is Dante Alighieri, an Italian writer (1265–1321).

Meanwhile, in Eastern Europe intellectuals had all kinds of problems. St. Gregory the Theologian, who lived and worked in 4th century, was complaining a lot that his degree obtained at Philosophical Academy in Athens was doubted by many as one produced within the non-Christian tradition (St. Gregory Theologian, 2002). This had an impact on popularity of his writings. Having produced great examples of spiritual poetry of late Hellenism, St. Gregory was pressured all the time for his style of writing and his ideas, full of aesthetical revelations.

Take Pechersk Lavra, a monastery in Medieval Kyiv. From several manuscripts left from that age, including “Journey of Theotokos through Hell” and “Glorification of Father Abraham”, we know local monks also felt they were underappreciated by the society, which is why the texts they were writing are mostly focused on having a monastic audience. That was sort of a Medieval snobbism of Kyiv monks.

Also, Kyiv Lavra produced a certain theology on “disagreeing with God”. It’s a Medieval theological concept that includes several logical arguments about the nature of Holy Mother’s ability to pray for the sinners. This theology spread not only around Ukraine, but also in Bulgaria, Poland, Serbia, Greece and Russia. Basically, Kyiv monks back in 11th century believed Theotokos had a moral right to disagree with God and argue with His will. Later, disagreeing with God became an argument for those Eastern Europeans who would live unethical life, but still needed a worldview without serious religious contradictions in it. Western Theotokos theology was somewhat different at that time and was presenting the nature of Holy Mother’s relationship with Holy Trinity as an ecosystem where exchange of positive spirituality takes place.

Now I’ll share a piece of field research on Eastern monasticism that I conducted in 2004. Then, as a philosophy student who was seeking to obtain a master’s degree at the Russian State University for the Humanities in Moscow, I went to a monastery in Northern Russia to find and analyze how the Medieval forms of Eastern monastic life survived through the centuries in that particular place. That was St. Nil Monastery near the town of Ostashkov. That place provided the monks with a high degree of solitude with only a huge lake and woods around, though some small villages were located nearby with people from there coming to the monastery for the Sunday liturgy.

At St. Nil Monastery, I attended a monastic funeral – an interesting religious ceremony, where monks pay tribute to their spiritual brother who died and, according to Church teachings, has good chances to find himself in heaven if his life on earth would be considered worthy of the angelic calling that Eastern monasticism is practicing.

The dead monk’s name was Seraphim, and he didn’t have a priesthood rank. While carrying his body to the place of burial on monastery’s land, younger monks, those aged under 40, were singing all kinds of local spiritual songs. There were several ideas mentioned in those songs and all of them had to do with suffering during the life on earth. The religious ceremony with a tribute to fr. Seraphim was a way to remind the participants these messages:

1) Earthly life is full of temptations, suffering and pain, so fr. Seraphim will have a much better life in heaven compared to what he went through at St. Nil Monastery.

2) A necessity to do hard daily physical work wouldn't allow monks to pursue serious theological studies, which is why they're asking St. Nil and St. Nektariy, local saints, to pray that their sin of ignorance would be forgiven.

3) A presentation of own pessimism, fears and deficit of spiritual hope which is a request for better life conditions at a monastery that senior monks, present at the ceremony, could have a chance to hear.

St. Nil Monastery is a late Medieval age Russian place with most of the monastic practices left intact throughout the centuries. So, we may conclude that Eastern monasticism and Christian culture in this part of the world had serious problems with creating a fruitful environment for intellectual work which would lead to a better labor ethics.

The conclusion would be this. Western Christian culture managed to create an ethical framework where analytical work, deep expertise and knowledge-based order were considered to be very important virtues. Western theologians wrote a lot of explanations for why one should pay attention to things said by the intellectuals and let himself or herself be led by other people's analysis. Eastern Christianity, at the same time, created an important layer of ethical support for people going through all kinds of suffering, though it didn't create an intellectual foundation for knowledge-based order which would be recognized, respected and accepted by millions.

An important comment on this is needed. It's not that we believe Western Christianity is a "better" or "purer" form of religious culture. Our message is this: for a number of historical reasons, Western monasteries were able to promote a knowledge-based order, while historical realities in Eastern Europe didn't let local monasteries to do the same thing at a comparable scale. Western Christian intellectuals felt they were needed and appreciated by the society, while those working in the Eastern region didn't have such a feeling which was a problem.

Another important thing that Western theology did was a restriction on how Church preaches philosophy of a sin. We'll use this popular example: Pet Shop Boys, a British pop-band, produced the song "It's a sin" in 1987 which was a declaration that the Western ethics considers most conversations about sins as a thing of the past and these should be done only by individuals who conduct a mission within the Church. By 1987, this was a well-established thesis: sin is a secondary theological concept for the Western church, while a person's societal contribution is a much more important factor in terms of living a life inspired by the Christian ethics.

In early 20th century, European intellectual culture was full of opinion leaders whose way of life might have been questioned by classical Christian ethics, but their intellectual contribution to the European development was great. This is why the Western Church – including Roman Catholic Church, Anglican

Church, Lutheran Church and other protestant denominations – changed its ethical narrative, downgrading the importance of the theology of sin.

Meanwhile, Eastern European culture at that time was still driven by old Christian ethics which was restricting many of the individuals who would want to produce intellectual writings and contribute to the Eastern European societies' development. On one hand, this produced an Eastern type of secularism which is an extremely complicated philosophy. On the other hand, this led to bolshevism and communism spreading around the region. It was a deep political instinct in game aimed to step outside the Christian ethical narrative and also do a number of things coming from Russian nationalism, philosophy of “pochvennichestvo” (“worldview driven by closeness to land”) and collectivism.

When John Maynard Keynes, a British economist, was producing his great writings – like “The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money” – he was enjoying this deep intellectual freedom that the British culture in early 20th century was able to provide (Keynes, 1936). We don't see economic writings of such importance produced in Eastern Europe at that time, though several things deserve a serious attention – like “Philosophy of Economy” by Sergey Bulgakov (Bulgakov, 1993), who worked for some time at the Kyiv Polytechnical Institute as a professor of political economy, and articles on economics by Ivan Franko, a professor in Lviv, Western Ukraine (Franko, 1984).

The Western intellectual culture at that time produced a proper understanding of interest rates that became a concept of fundamental importance for how the Western economies started operating. It's not that Eastern Europe didn't have its own understanding of interest rates – it did. In 1910s, the city of Kyiv had a stock exchange that was trading all kinds of financial instruments with interest rates. A little bit later, a stock exchange was organized in the city of Lviv which also had experts on interest rates back than.

The key difference was this. While Thomas Aquinas, a well-known Medieval Western theologian, managed to create a Christian basis for interest rate theory in his writings, Eastern Christianity somehow kept its controversial approach to interest rates. (Aquinas, 2014) In the Bible, you may still notice several ethical teachings that applying interest rates to loans contradicts the standard of what is good and what is bad. Thomas Aquinas developed the interest rate theory and provided a theological foundation to it, while the Eastern Christianity mostly remained silent on the issue, while also using old Biblical narratives on this. Islamic tradition, that was spread in southern Ukraine and Balkan countries and was sometimes interacting with local Christian culture, condemned the interest rates as such.

That's why many Christian believers in Eastern Europe tend to see interest rates either as a sin or a temptation that is better to be avoided. “Don't ever take

any loans” – is quite a popular consumer logic in this part of Europe. That doesn’t mean that Eastern European loan markets haven’t been developing. This just means these markets sometimes lack proper theological foundation, which has an impact on how Christian faithful see them.

I’ve conducted field research in Europe, both in Eastern and Western regions, in 2016–2021 for understanding the economic behavior of the locals. These are the countries that I used for my research: Ukraine, Montenegro, Bosnia, Serbia, Albania, Greece which represent the Eastern Europe and Orthodox tradition; Germany, Belgium, Netherlands, Switzerland, Norway, Denmark which represent the Western Europe and Catholic/Protestant tradition. I also include my survey in the U.S. to the second part of polled countries – that’s not Europe, obviously, but also a part of the Western Christian tradition.

The method of research was this: I was asking people what kind of criticism they usually get from their employers. This was important to understand the ethics of a professional mistake in these countries and regions which would allow to make wider conclusions on how religious traditions are producing certain labor ethics and economic behavior. I’ll give you the answers that I was getting from random people in these countries, both men and women of different age:

Ukraine: “For being late to work”, “For being too heavy on asking the promotion or salary increase”, “For getting criticism from colleagues that has to do with how I interact with them in the office”.

Montenegro: “For not having documents in right order”, “For not taking initiative in my hands when needed”, “For talking to clients in a personal, not a professional way”.

Bosnia: “For making public comments on politics”, “For skipping work”, “For looking alternative employment while still being employed at a certain company or organization”.

Serbia: “For my comments on social media”, “For showing little appreciation for the promotion or salary increase”, “For prioritizing my family over work and business”.

Albania: “For taking too many coffee breaks”, “For being too introvert in the office”, “For not supporting the government’s economic reforms”.

Greece: “For spending too much time talking to my friends during work hours”, “For unwillingness to work overtime”, “For breaking the vacation in several parts which is uncomfortable for the employer”.

Germany: “For left wing political views”, “For asking an individual approach from the employer”, “For having a backward-looking approach instead of a forward-looking one”.

Belgium: “For too many smoking breaks”, “For complains about Belgian weather”, “For the lack of critical thinking”.

Netherlands: “For being too demanding to my colleagues”, “For oversimplification of my professional approach sometimes”, “For unwillingness to participate in all the discussions with colleagues in the office”.

Switzerland: “For being too conservative in my work environment”, “For posts on social media involving alcohol consumption”, “For pretending to be too digital in practical things”.

Norway: “For underestimating the company’s mission”, “For taking career breaks”, “For being too demanding to my colleagues”.

Denmark: “For being too official in how I cooperate with clients”, “For skipping corporate activities like pizza parties”, “For working too long hours which demotivates my younger colleagues”.

U.S.: “For having conflicts with my colleagues”, “For ignoring some of the benefits, like pension plans, as a part of the compensation package”, “For unwillingness to arrive to work at 8 am”.

From these answers to my question, we may do a conclusion that the Western ethics somehow became able to create a better motivating professional environment, where people are able to cope with more complicated tasks and are not pressured by their employers for things that don’t matter much. Part of this culture we may attribute to religious values of Western Christianity.

Again, this doesn’t mean at all that Eastern Christianity is worse in any sense, it’s just different. For centuries, its main mission was preparing people and nations for unrest, pain and suffering – and it did this mission very well. All the 20th century Christian martyrs in countries who were living through Russia-induced communism are a great example of unique ethical strength that the Eastern Church was carrying.

The Conclusions. After looking into specific features of Western and Eastern Christianity we may see a set of differences which led to having different lifestyles in these regions of the continent, different ethical priorities and different approach to having a profession and performing a job.

Western Church throughout the centuries was focused on preparing a knowledge-based economic and cultural development for having a prosperous life – for each individual and a society as a whole. Meanwhile, Eastern Church had somewhat different historical priorities due to the political complexity and uncertainty of developments in this part of the world.

Culturally, Western Europe evolved around the virtues of individualism which was an ethical derivative of a personal path to accepting Jesus Christ and salvation. Eastern Europe didn’t have too many reasons and even opportunities to preach individualism, being obliged to support collectivism to keep heterogeneous societies at a certain degree of cohesion.

Even the post-Christian secularism looks differently in Western and Eastern parts of Europe. It's very bookish and full of intellectual activity in the West, while being a form of modern-day nihilism in the East. A regular atheist in Kyiv just says he or she doesn't see any reasons to go to Church, because liturgy is too long and boring overall, while baptizing the child doesn't matter metaphysically. A regular atheist, say, in Paris is usually a follower of certain political ideology which churned all the religious models of thinking out of his or her conscience.

We see that these two types of Christianity produced totally different cultural results in Europe, shaping societies and nations in a unique way. While having the same starting position in the 1st century AD, two Churches made different choices and pursued different theologies, different policies. This matters a great deal for creating a better Europe which would have politics, economy and culture that work for all.

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