



The Perception of the Ideas of Fr. Wilhelm Schmidt in Russia in the Context of the History of Russian Religious Studies

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Abstract. – Fr. W. Schmidt is usually associated with the theory of primitive monotheism, diffusionism, and the concept of cultural circles. His impressive attempt to do both Christian apologetics and empirical science in the field of ethnology and religious studies generated a broad discussion concerning the limits of science, the role of presuppositions in scientific knowledge, the problem of evolution, etc. The article examines the Russian contribution to that discussion. First of all, it presents Schmidt's main ideas that became a topic of discussion in Russian science, then main historical antecedents of their perception, and the initial, prerevolutionary reactions on them. Afterwards the author's attention concentrates on the main tendencies in the discussion concerning Schmidt in the period extending from the 1920s to the 2000s. [*Wilhelm Schmidt, primeval monotheism, militant atheism, ethnology, religious studies in the USSR*]

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The works of Fr. Wilhelm Schmidt – a Roman Catholic priest and member of the missionary Society of the Divine Word (SVD), anthropologist, and student of religions – are well-known in Russia though still insufficiently examined. This is caused not only by

the “mosaic structure” (Krasnikov 2007: 7) of our notion of history of religious studies in general, but also by the fact that the peculiar character of the history of Russian religious studies made a calm academic discussion of his ideas very difficult. Thereby, even a short survey of the history of perception of Schmidt's theories in Russia can be very useful for understanding both his thoughts and the history of Russian science of religion. In what follows, I will successively describe Schmidt's main ideas that became a subject of discussion in Russia, examine main historical antecedents of their perception, and the first, pre-revolutionary reactions to them. I will then concentrate my attention on main tendencies in the controversy around these ideas that are characteristic for the period 1920–2000.

1 Wilhelm Schmidt: The Basic Tenets of His Theory

The main ideas of W. Schmidt concerned the theory of primitive monotheism (*Urmonotheism*), diffusionism, and the notion of cultural circles. Guided by the conceptions of the outstanding German scientist and geographer Friedrich Ratzel, as well as ethnographers Leo Frobenius and Fritz Graebner, Schmidt marked out the “ethnologically most ancient” cultural circle of tribes that knew neither cattle-breeding nor farming (*Urkultur*). Unlike the more developed ones, the peoples of *Urkultur* had a pretty sophisticated idea of one God who was the creator, eternal, omniscient, omnipotent, and mor-

ally good. Although it is unlikely that such a sublime idea “could have been acquired from human experience” (Henninger and Ciattini 2005: 8169), this fact suggested to Schmidt that divine revelation could have been its original source, as God’s answer to men’s questioning about the sense of their existence. In more complex cultures – matrilineal-agricultural, patrilinear-totemic, and patriarchal-pastoral – the concept of a supreme God become more or less degraded and obscure, or it even faded away forced by different forms of totemism, animism, magic, etc. The vast empiric evidence supporting his theories, gathered by Schmidt and his colleagues from the “Anthropos Institute” (Vienna, Fribourg) and the Missionary Ethnological Museum (the Vatican City) (both of which he founded), was explained by him on the basis of a systematic reflection conducted on the ground of history, ethnology and religious studies, with the application of rigorous methodology of ethnological research.

Schmidt’s theory is frequently considered to be transmission of his theological conceptions into the field of anthropology that was not quite supported by field data (cf. Brandewie 1990: 123). Schmidt objected to that critique by arguing that his theory was not a new apologetic argument supporting the existence of God but rather an indication of a possibility to interpret ancient beliefs, indeed the notion of God itself, with scientific rigor. The discussion that followed not only paid attention to the whole range of earlier unknown empirical facts but also contributed to the overcoming of primitive evolutionism. In what follows I shall present the Russian contribution to that discussion.

2 Pre-Revolutionary Premises: Animism and Orthodox Theology

The idea which considered belief in one single God to be the original form of religious consciousness and the view that the subsequent development of religion was a degradation of that original, “pure” idea can be also found among Russian theologians and philosophers of religion of the 19th century. This concerns, first of all, such representatives of spiritual-academic science as Orest M. Novitsky (1860: 60), Bishop Khrisanf [Retivtsev] (1873: 49–74), Viktor D. Kudryavtsev-Platonov (1892: 60), and others. On the other hand, Vladimir S. Solovyev (in his youth; 1873: 7–9) and before him Aleksey S. Khomyakov (though with great precaution) were secular religious philosophers who embraced that idea. They drew on both Western theology (and Khrisanf gives a very detailed survey of them) and Western

philosophic thought, in particular the conceptions of Gotthold E. Lessing, Friedrich W. J. Schelling, as well as the representatives of the romantic school of mythological research (Georg Friedrich Creuzer). Those who published works on that subject were also Inozemtsev (1880) and Pokrovsky (1901).

However, there emerged eventually a more cautious approach to this question. V. S. Solovyev, for instance, referring to Max Müller declared “abstract categories of monotheism and polytheism which were taken from latest spiritual condition to be irrelevant” (1890: 165). A bit later, the historian of religion and apologist, and professor of the Moscow Theological Academy, Sergey S. Glagolev, came to conclusion that it is impossible to reconstruct scientifically the original form of religious consciousness, and researchers can only state that “as our knowledge goes deeper into ancient times we meet all types of religion known to us: pandemonism, polytheism, pantheism, monotheism. And atheism has always existed closely to these believes, not as ignorance of God but as denial of religious forms which obtained” (1915: 218; Antonov 2011: 52f.). In 1908, Aleksandr V. Smirnov spoke only with caution about possible traces of primeval monotheism in faiths of “savage and uncultured peoples.”

On the other hand, the typical to Russian thinkers of the 19th and the early 20th century criticism of the unilineal evolutionism became a good starting point for possible acceptance of Schmidt’s ideas. There even appeared ideas similar diffusionism. Khomyakov in his “Semiramida,” for instance, stated: “The mental seed was transferred in the form of a word from one edge of the world to another and religious syncretism came out of spiritual exchange” (1994: 141),¹ and meanwhile “besides rough accretion of different mythologies and rites the mutual penetration of sense and symbol had to be happening” (142). This was the ground for a positive approach towards the theories of Schmidt. Darwinism that flourished within the framework of anthropology was about to be confronted by conceptions inspired by Christian theology.²

The first direct reactions to Schmidt’s ideas took place during that period as well. The most

1 “Semiramida” is conventionally accepted among Slavophiles and reserved until today the name of Khomyakovs’ fundamental work devoted to world history and published after his death.

2 The critique of the theory of the original monotheism (Lagrange) and of the theory of original revelation (Freppel), written by the famous Russian sociologist and historian of ideas, Maxim M. Kovalevsky can be a good case in point. For more information about Kovalevsky see Mikhail Y. Smirnov (2008: 17f.).

detailed one was formulated by Evgeny G. Kagarov in his review of the first volume of Schmidt's *opus magnum*, published in the journal of the Moscow Theological Academy *Theological Bulletin*.³ It is obvious that the author's aim was to give readers of that theological journal a general idea about the development of religious studies and especially about then actual issues concerning religion rather than just present Schmidt's conceptions. Schmidt's work, which gave a conceptual survey of philological, ethnological, and theological ideas, suited perfectly to this purpose. Kagarov points out to "the talent, clearness, and fascination" of Schmidt's account (1913: 832), and states that his work "is of undoubted interest as a bright and true picture of modern attitude to the sphere of religious studies" (1913: 833). As the main deficiency, Kagarov identifies not Schmidt's "Catholic point of view," but rather his "australocentrism" which, nevertheless, may be forgiven because of the specificity of Schmidt's own interests in that area of the world. He further argues that Western theologians are "too neglectful attitude to animistic theory, weak grounding in ethnology and absence of accuracy and distinctness in criticism towards theory of animism" (Kagarov 1913: 830). In this statement we can also see Kagarov's implicit suggestion that Russian theologians of his time should pay more attention to the general problem of relations between theology and ethnology. Kagarov argues in this context that "animism, which is understood in a proper way, doesn't have to contradict to the teaching of the Church" (1913: 830).

3 "The Historical Proof of God's Existence"? The Perception of Schmidt's Ideas in the Religious Studies of the Soviet Period

The development of scientific reflection in Russia during that period was characterized by the gradual imposition of "scientific atheism" – the term which was used in the USSR for the description of the Marxist current in the areas of philosophy of religion and religious studies. In what follows I iden-

tify typical features of that program in relation to the discussion on the perception of Schmidt's ideas.

3.1 1920s–1930s: "Religious Drug" or "History of Ancient Cultural Migrations"?

The premise of such perception was developed in the works of the first generation of representatives of the Soviet "militant atheism": Emel'an Yaroslavsky, Ivan Skvortsov-Stepanov, Anatoliy V. Lunačarsky (Antonov 2012: 119). They precisely formed the theory of an areligious state and the principle of negation of the history of religion as an independent process, they made the conclusion of its total social-economic determination, formulated key attitudes to the alternative concepts, and created fundamental elements of an Soviet scientific ethos. In their opinion the question of the origin of religion has been resolved in general. Possessed by the pathos of exposure of the Church and its malicious effect on science, they examined the idea what "the primitive religion of savages is degeneration of the earlier religion, which God himself gave to Adam or first people" as "the ordinary bunch of different sophisms and finesses" summoned "to protect the prestige" of religion from blows of science. They were the first who invented the argument popular in the future of a spoiling of the original ethnographic materials by "pious Christian researchers of everyday life of savages" (Skvortsov-Stepanov 1921: 8). They formed "the canon" of authors to be considered as "classics of Marxism-Leninism" having indisputable authority in every question. They also claimed the incompatibility between religion and science. Their followers would take for granted all these ideas and would define their perception of ideas of a "Catholic Pater Schmidt"⁴ who dared to criticize Morgan, whose "writings about primitive societies were studied by Marx and used by Engels" (Matorin 1932: 6f.).

Thanks largely to their influence in the 1920s/1930s in the writings of Aleksandr T. Lukačevsky, Nikolay M. Matorin, and others the idea of a "Marxist-Leninist history of religion" is formed, "which serves to great mission of deliverance of mankind from fetters of religious drug ... being a sharp weapon of atheistic propaganda" and "exposing the class and exploitative character of religion and showing its temporal and historical features" (Lukačevsky 1934: 17). From this point of view the theory of a primeval monotheism, to which Lukačevsky reduc-

3 E. G. Kagarov (1882–1942) was a Russian historian of religion in the first half of the 20th century, a specialist in ancient religion and magic, and a professor at Kharkov University. Before the Bolshevik Revolution, he had published in church-academic periodicals, gave speeches sympathetic to representatives of church-academic circles, and corresponded with P. Florensky. After the Revolution, he became an active "voistvuyusčiy bezbožnik" ("staunch atheist," an expression that denotes in a typical way for that time the professional fighters with religion in the USSR), and a popularizer of the Marxist view on history of religion and culture.

4 The word "Pater", in that context acquired inevitably negative, indeed derogatory connotations.

es Schmidt's ideas, appears certainly as "a masked proof of God's existence" (1934: 21; 1930: 101–104; 1933: 44f.), a reactionary phantom conception emerged on the background of some economic relations in the process of class struggle. It was so clear for Soviet authors that such an idea needed irony and exposure rather than thematic criticism. To the company of "Bergier's abbots of XX century"⁵ together with "hardened bison of Catholicism" goes Russian pre-revolutionary historians of religion such as archpriests Aleksandr Klitin, A. Smirnov, Yakov Galakhov, and they, of course, did not have an opportunity to give a public answer neither to mockery nor to critical arguments. However, Marxist researchers of that time usually went even further pointing out not only the theological but also the social intention in Schmidt's concept: from their point of view it was indeed called to justify "the initial essence of private property and monogamous family" (Tokin 1930: 109) – the pillar of the bourgeois system.

From the middle of the 1920s, Vladimir K. Nikolsky joins actively this "atheistic work" (*bezbožnaya rabota*). In his "The Essay on Primordial Mankind" (1926), in the chapter "The Origin of Gods," he gives a social explanation to the origin and spreading of primeval monotheistic conception. His premise is a picture of the relations between religion and science discussed above: having lost the "taste for atheism", "Western scientists do not risk to claim that to study rudiments of faith is none of ... [Schmidt's] concern" (Nikolsky 1926: 253). The critical argument of Nikolsky, which can be called "the argument from anthropogeny," is of greater interest. Pointing at the absence of an articulated speech and conceptual thinking connected with it among primordial people, he thinks that "neither Neanderthals nor Homo heidelbergensis, their predecessor, could believe in gods, let alone in God, nor even in souls and spirits" since an idea of them is nothing else but "abstraction from reality" (1926: 260). Here, however, the author's world outlook and general philosophic premise enter the argument: for him "the concrete" means "perceived by senses" and he does not make any difference be-

tween ideal-abstract (notions) and spiritual-concrete (soul) types of existence. This argument is obviously irrelevant for a person who considers God and a soul to be real substances but not abstract ideas.

Religious studies in Russia always have been closely connected with ethnographical researches. The evolving attitude of Soviet ethnographers in the 1920s to the 30s towards Schmidt's ideas deserves a special examination because of its illustrativeness. Precisely here we can find the unique case of a correct narrative and objective analysis of the German scientist's ideas, i.e., the writings of researchers of the senior generation: Lev Y. Sternberg and Petr F. Preobražensky. Sternberg examines Schmidt's ideas in the context of a criticism of evolutionism from the position of the diffusion theory. Ignoring the problem of "primeval monotheism" and pointing at the "tendentiousness" of the German author, he still highly appreciates his works in the sphere of "ethnolinguistic interrelations" and studies of the "psyche of a primitive man" (Sternberg 1926: 21, 38), stresses the influence of "Anthropos Institute," and ponders carefully and objectively advantages and disadvantages of "the new school." Diffusionism, as "every new concept, gives the impression of pursuing new ways" and opening new perspectives in the study of "the history of ancient cultural migrations" (Sternberg 1926: 25–27). However, in general in Sternberg's opinion it yields to evolutionism: in fact, "anti-evolutionists themselves began to invent stages of evolution, giving to them only new names of historic-cultural stages" (Sternberg 1926: 31), but their ideas have a partly tendentious and speculative character. Being fond of these speculations the representatives of this new movement, as the Russian anthropologist suggests, distract the thought from vital problems of the genesis of certain cultural phenomena.

The "Course of Ethnology" by P. F. Preobražensky⁶ is written in the same objectivist manner. The author speaks about Schmidt as a representative of "the cultural-historical school" of Ratzel, Frobenius, and Graebner. The criticism of the "Anthropos" ideas has a clear scientific character. First of all, it is directed to the idea of "a cultural circle" whose characteristics in the author's opinion "suffer from the absence of inner connection between separate elements of cultural unity" (Preobražensky 1929: 27). He points at the "museum origin" of the theory, whose representatives "too fervently look for similarity where its existence is doubtful" (Preobražensky 1929: 25). As an evolutionist,

5 We mean Nicolas-Sylvestre Bergier (1718–1790), a famous Catholic apologist of the 18th century, who criticized Charles de Brosses' idea of fetishism as the original form of religion. For a better understanding of the specifics of Soviet science concerning religion it is interesting to know, that the name of this, in his time very famous scientist and one of the founders of Indology and a quite liberal theologian became a denominative name for *mrakobes* ("obscurantist"), only for being a priest and his polemics with one of "high-status" representatives of Enlightenment.

6 To learn more about P. F. Preobražensky as an ethnologist and religious scholar, see Ivanova (2002: 248).

the Russian scientist appreciates the significance of diffusionism and even primeval monotheism. The source of the image of the supreme deity he finds in the answer to the question of the origin of the world, which is given on the ground of the “analogy with a man-creator of things, a man-magician, a maker of magical effects” (Preobražensky 1929: 182). Both authors are based on an idea of the existence of an objective inner logic of the development of scientific ideas and, in spite of the prevailing view in Soviet science, exclude social and political conditions as factors of this development.

However, the attitude of ethnographers changes in the 1930s. The representatives of the younger generation – Aleksandr Zolotarev (1907–1943) and Sergey P. Tolstov (1907–1976) – descend on this theory with tough criticism, which includes an explicit political component. In their perception the theory of cultural circles, developed by Graebner and continued by Schmidt, is ranked together with racism and fascism, and “evolves into full-fledged fascist ideology,” “militant anti-evolutionism,” and fideistic apologetics of capitalism (Tolstov 1938: 140, 143, 148). Embracing this officious rhetoric, they accept that specific ethos imposed by it, even though they show the high technical level and culture of scientific work inherited from the older generation. The consequences of such integration is to be seen in the mature postwar writings of such outstanding representatives of this generation as Sergey A. Tokarev and Berta I. Sharevskaya.

Summarizing the discussion, we will define the main dispositions of the examined period. The aggressive ideological criticism of Schmidt’s concept on the part of the “Soviet” scientific program, dominating in this period, which opposed primeval monotheism with the symmetric idea of an “areligious period,” was confronted by separate efforts of an objective analysis (Sternberg, Preobražensky), and which were directed more to diffusionism and ethnolinguistics, while potential apologists of this concept were excluded forcibly from the discussion. At the same time, the style of relations in science established by the first group opens wide door for the atmosphere of terror spread in the country, and its representatives become its victims just as well as representatives of the second and the third group.

3.2 The Perception of Schmidt’s Ideas in Russian Religious Studies in the Years 1950–1980: “The Falsification of Ethnographic Materials”?

In the postwar science we do not find any trace of an objective approach to Schmidt’s ideas neither

among official religious scholars nor among ethnographers. The burst of polemics starts at the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s, when Schmidt’s arguments become the target for criticism in a number of articles and monographs.

Precisely at this time, Vladimir F. Zybkovets the idea of an areligious period, and in two of his monographs one can also find a thorough criticism of the hostile concept. However, eventually this criticism is a sum of standard rhetoric figures and accusations in “falsification of ethnographic materials” (Zybkovets 1959: 71 f.).⁷ The only effort of substantive polemics – the examining of the question about the religion of Tasmanians – turns out to be an attempt to prove his own thesis about their primordial irreligion and leads as a result to a simple opposition of two equally metaphysical concepts.⁸

Zybkovets’ tendency for a rhetoric exaggeration weakens many of his own arguments. From his point of view, there is no essential difference neither between viewpoints of Lang-Schmidt and Claas J. Bleeker (Zybkovets 1967: 33) nor even between them and the opinions of such researchers as Taylor, Sternberg, and the Harusin’s. All of them have evident or concealed theological premise. All of them are explicitly or implicitly apologetic and “rest on recognition of religion an eternal characteristic of a man” and, therefore, do not differ from the “dogma of Abbot Bergier” (Zybkovets 1959: 24).

But almost simultaneously with Zybkovets’ first monograph there appear the more informative and well-founded writings of Yosif A. Kryvelev and Berta I. Sharevskaya. The outstanding ethnographer and religious scholar S. A. Tokarev refers to the history of Viennese school too. Kryvelev studies the concept of primeval monotheism in the context of debates concerning world’s outlook between Christianity and atheism and the philosophic discussion between idealists and materialists. Indeed, in these contexts “churchmen” “need ethnographical and historic-cultural grounding” (Kryvelev 1960: 137) of the theory considered. Therefore, Kryvelev directs his main efforts to the criticism of the empiric basis of Schmidt’s concept: “a vast number of ethnographical materials gathered by Schmidt is in inverse proportion to scientific quality of the latter” (Kryvelev 1960: 140). Giving to readers the

7 Occasionally he still generously considers this falsification to be an unconscious mistake for the wish.

8 Regarding this, Vladimir R. Kabo coevally already has paid attention (Kabo 1975: 154). In addition, this work is a good example of the reception of Schmidt’s ethno-linguistic ideas, concerning the problems of the origin and development of the Tasmanian languages, and continues L. Y. Sternberg’s tradition in this respect (Kabo 1975: 173–176).

evidence of falsehood of certain of some Schmidt's factual statements, he certainly does not implement any serious discussion of the German scientist's methodology as well as a value of this material as a whole. The recognition of the limits of his conception by the German thinker and the reconsideration of some of his essential theses by his followers are taken by Kryvelev as demonstration of weakness of the whole theory and understanding by Catholic scientists its "tendentiousness and allegation" (Kryvelev 1960: 146). This polemic revealed the initial premises of scientific atheism, which were taken for granted by Soviet scientists when Kryvelev's article appeared: a strong belief in the existence of an absolute truth attainable by scientific means, identification of this truth with roughly interpreted Marxist doctrines, opposition of this "scientific" truth to "Biblical teaching," to "fanciless Biblical myths" (Kryvelev 1960: 146), which on the one hand are still understood as some particular physical or historical theories, but on the other hand received a deliberately primitive and simplified interpretation.

However it is advisable/appropriate to pay attention to ethnography which often entwines with religious studies and which bases in general on the same original premises in this period. The most important writings here are again the works of S. A. Tokarev and B. I. Sharevskaya. S. A. Tokarev's attitude to Schmidt's concept is sharply negative, though the one to diffusionism as itself is quite calm and considered. He supports the common idea of other Soviet authors according to which "W. Schmidt's works (as well as the works of his associates) are nothing else but an attempt to make ethnography serve Church dogma," but his own main critical argument is "a striking lack of originality" in Schmidt's writings. From his point of view "all the stock of Schmidt's ideas can be reduced to three sources: 1) Graebner's scheme of 'cultural circles,' 2) 'Kollman's pygmaean theory,' and 3) Andrew Lang's concept of original faith in god-father" (Tokarev 1978: 153).⁹ Polemics with the idea of a primeval monotheism in Tokarev's "Earlier Forms of Religion and Their Development" (1964) is mainly confined to ironic comments and sarcasm.

But the most complete description of the formation of Schmidt's concept and the history of the Anthropos Institute is written by B. I. Sharevskaya (1959), a famous Soviet ethnographer-Africanist and author of works on history and methodology

of ethnology. Her article "Ethnology and Theology (About the Anthropos Journal and the Anthropos Institute)," though very informative is just as structural and emotional as Kryvelev's. She examines the sources of the main postulates of Schmidt's theory, analyzes critically its empiric proof, narrates triumphantly about reconsideration of some main statements of Schmidt's concept after his death by his followers, and finally finishes the review with a victorious disclosure: "everywhere we deal with theology masked under science," with the attempts "of the Church to make science serve religion one way or the other and with interests of exploitative classes hidden behind this" (Sharevskaya 1959: 201).¹⁰

For a clarification of the approach specific to the authors just mentioned it is necessary to address an analysis of the rhetoric component of their writings. First of all, all the mentioned works are marked with a very specific lexis and a whole range of expressive methods, directed at discrediting and humiliating the opponent. In some cases it is impossible to draw the line between this rhetoric and the informative critical argumentation.

Here are some of the most indicative examples: "a scandalous ending of primeval-monotheistic theory," "a robe-wearing scientist" [*ryasonocnyiy uchenyi*], "exercises in primeval monotheism" [*pramonotheističeskiye upražneniya*], "theological ears stick out too notably" [*slishkom yavno torčat bogoslovskie ushi*].¹¹ It is more difficult to deal with expressions which claim to be informative – for example: "they proved to be agents of imperialism," and so on – and in which a distinct negative attitude is justified by the seemingly sociopolitical analysis. Such rhetoric permeates the texts of Soviet authors so much that it is impossible "to take it away" in the majority of cases. Therefore, the widespread idea according to which such rhetoric served the scientists of that time as an outward cover for true scientific reception of various movements of Western thought is very questionable.

But the final triumph of Soviet ethos in official science coincided in time with the development of different marginal concepts. Orthodox authors also turned to the problematic of religious studies (and this was connected with a partial reconstruction of the system of spiritual education during the post-war years). The most important attempt to interpret the history of religion from this point of view

⁹ The same or similar instructions can be found in earlier writings of Tokarev, e.g., Levin and Tokarev (1953); Tokarev (1958).

¹⁰ See also Sharevskaya (1953). We should also mention Aleksandrenkov (1976), Artanovsky (1967), and Levin (1946).

¹¹ In connection with this sharply negative attitude to religion, typical for this time, these expressions get a special sarcastic meaning.

can be seen in a series of books written by the famous apologist and preacher Aleksandr Men. He is equally dedicated to the problem of the beginning of religion in his first two books of the series: “The Origins of Religion” (1991a [1971]) and “Magic and Monotheism” (1991b [1971]). Here we can see not only a very different understanding of Schmidt’s ideas but also a very different and positive attitude both to him personally and to the phenomenon of missionaries-ethnographers in general. Meanwhile Schmidt’s ideas were not the only source of Men’s concept: he depends much more on the ideas of Russian thinkers examined in the first part of this article. Nevertheless, he refers actively to empiric materials (which he ironically supports where possible by reference to the writings of Soviet ethnographers, including works of Tokarev and Sharevskaya) gathered by Schmidt for the sake of a justification of his own theory.¹² Refraining from a detailed description of Schmidt’s ideas, Men concentrates mainly on the concept of primeval monotheism and its ethnographical grounding (Men 1991a: 158–162). Therefore, he studies these ideas in the context of the history and philosophy of religion rather than in the context of ethnological thought. For him the forerunners of Schmidt are Schelling and M. Müller and through them the link between Schmidt and the Russian religious-philosophic tradition is established (Men 1991a [1971]: 159). The main achievement of the Anthropos school according to Men lies in “debunking a myth about some psychic deficiency of primitive peoples” (1991a [1971]: 159).¹³ So, during this period the Soviet program, having achieved the absolutely dominating position as a “scientific atheism,” systematizes its critical argumentation and gives it a pseudo-scientific form. However, namely in this period, Orthodox thinkers turn to this concept, trying to use its apologetic potential.

4 Modern Discussions

It is the last of the tendencies listed in the previous passage which becomes widespread in the years 1990–2000, after the official domination of “scientific atheism” has decreased gradually and the confessional education in Russia has got some addi-

tional opportunities to develop. Andrey B. Zubov (in works on the history of religion) was the first who made an attempt “to insert” the ideas of primeval monotheism into the context of discussions of Western religious studies. He draws a parallel between Schmidt and Mircea Eliade, examines criticism from Nathan Söderblom and Raffaele Pettazoni (Zubov 1997: 188–194). In the 2000s, some representatives of Spiritual Academies (whose publication activity is mainly connected with the Internet portal <bogoslov.ru>) turned to this problem: monk-priest Varlaam Gorokhov compared the ideas of Eliade with those of Schmidt; Dmitriy Golubev published a range of popular articles, which unfortunately did not take into account some critical arguments towards the German thinker and the further evolution of the Anthropos school (Golubev 2009a, 2009b; Gorokhov 2011).

On the contrary, in the sphere of secular religious scholars the interest for Schmidt’s concept decreases. For them, with the falling of the domination of “scientific atheism” in its most rigorous and obvious versions, the question about the original form of religion and existence/non-existence of an “areligious period” moved aside to the sphere of metaphysical questions, which seems to have no scientific solution and, therefore, was without any interest. In this regard it is worth mentioning the works of three authors: Vladimir R. Kabo, Gennadiy E. Markov, and Aleksandr N. Krasnikov.

The first of them places Schmidt’s concept into the context of discussions on religious studies of the first half and the middle of the 20th century. Kabo represents a detailed analysis of strengths and weaknesses of this concept, as they appeared in the critical argumentation of the opponents and followers of the Catholic scientist. It becomes clear that the main problem of the theory of primeval monotheism is neither the quality of materials gathered by Schmidt and his school nor their Catholic (or even Christian in general, let alone “bourgeois”) involvement, but the complexity, diversity, and openness for various interpretations of those “primitive” religious complexes in which the idea of “One God” is always incorporated (Kabo 2002). Clearly any serious attempt to reconstruct the idea of primeval monotheism should take these arguments into account.

Unlike Kabo, G. E. Markov in his “German Ethnology” pays the central attention not to the concept of primeval monotheism and its discussion in the sphere of religious studies but to the description of Schmidt’s views in general and to their place in the history of German ethnological thought. In this respect, his study proved to be the most detailed and of high-quality among all contemporary Russian at-

12 In the polemics with Zybkovets regarding the religiosity of Tasmanians, Men relies on the already mentioned research by V. R. Kabo (1975).

13 In the official science the recognition of the fact that “this progressive side of cultural-historical teaching was not reflected in Soviet historiographic works” (Markov 2004: 87 f.) appeared much later.

tempts of this type. He gives a review of the main works and ideas of the German scientist (Markov 2004: 84–89), a detailed account of the scheme of cultural circles (119–123) and he claims, pointing at Schmidt's theological premise, that treatment of primeval monotheism as the result of the original revelation and the history of religion as degradation is the most disputable part of his theory. At the same time, he appreciates Schmidt's contribution to the ethnological study of family and property; he recognizes that Schmidt is partly right in his argumentation against Morgan, Engels, and straightforward evolutionism. Markov resolutely rejects all accusations of Schmidt in racism mentioned above and points at "the empiric orientation" of the scientific school founded by Schmidt.

Today, the most important examination of Schmidt's concept in the context of the history of religious studies is given in the book "Methodological Problems of Religious Studies" by A. N. Krasnikov (2007). The theory of religion, its history, and the approaches to its study suggested by the German thinker are described there in relation with his diffusionistic ideas and the theory of cultural circles. The idea of a primeval monotheism appears here as only one means of criticism of evolutionistic approaches and less important than the diffusionism (2007: 93). Krasnikov has a strong theoretical background (he accepts Thomas Kuhn's theory of science and supposes that there is "the original conflict" [2007: 29; Hoffmann 2010] between theology and religious studies) and this in general is an advantage of his work. But in that very case it turns to be its weakness, as they lead him to the negative estimation of the examined concept which he considers one of the main means of "destruction of the inherited paradigm of religious studies" (Krasnikov 2007: 95) and, consequently, to an understatement of its role in the development of this kind of research.¹⁴

In conclusion, I want to point out that the scientific ethos played a decisive role in the attitude of Russian scientists towards Schmidt's legacy. The sound and objective analyses of his concept on the part of those few authors, who appreciated the autonomous value of scientific knowledge and emphasized the inner logic of its development, were confronted by the aggressive attacks of the overwhelming majority to the effect of moral discredit of the personality and scientific legacy of the Catholic scientist. For these authors scientific knowledge

had only instrumental value in "the struggle with religious superstitions" and the history of scientific ideas was determined only by the dynamics of class struggle.

It also worth mentioning that nowadays we cannot find the adequate reception of Schmidt's ideas: professional religious scholars, ethnologists, and ethnographers are inclined to disregard them as "outdated theology," while orthodox authors are interested in them insofar as they provide them with certain apologetic arguments, without examining the scientific quality of such argumentation. Therefore, both groups deprive themselves of the opportunity to think once more over the sense and borders of competence of scientific knowledge and its connection with philosophic and theological thinking. The given presentation let us say that value distortions, brought into our scientific ethos by Soviet era, endure successfully the test of time in the community of Russian researches of religion. The serious studying of the history of the Anthropos school and the concept of its founder can make an essential contribution to their overcoming.

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¹⁴ Compare, however, the more positive approaches in the articles of Krasnikov's colleague Zabiako, in the most complete contemporary Russian encyclopedic dictionary on religious studies (2006a, 2006b).

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