

Russia's Use of the Orthodox Church as a Tool of Influence

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ABSTRACT

The article is devoted to the study of the topical theme of the influence of the Russian Orthodox Church on all spheres of society in the Russian Federation. The author of the article conducted a historical analysis of the interaction of religion with the state, assessed the phenomena occurring in modern society, and studied the views of domestic and foreign scientists on the influence of the Russian Church on society. The article also reflects the main conclusions on this issue.

Keywords: Religion; Russian Orthodox Church; State; Politics; Instrument of influence; Interaction; Contradictions; Society; Criticism; Current state

INTRODUCTION

The topic of religion in the Russian Federation is currently actively developing, is becoming increasingly important. Theorists' debates about the clericalization of Russian society are gaining popularity. Meanwhile, the Orthodox Church is integrating in all spheres of society. This is explained by the increase in the number of citizens who identify themselves as Orthodox, and the spread of church institutions not only to culture, politics, but even to the country's economy [1].

Due to this circumstance, a question arises about the influence of the church on the consciousness of citizens of the Russian Federation and its content.

METHODOLOGY

For a detailed study of this phenomenon, it will not be sufficient to use one method - an integrated approach is needed. In the process of research it is required to apply general philosophical, dialectical, systemic methods, as well as general scientific methods, such as analysis, synthesis, generalization, induction and deduction. Separately, it seems necessary to single out a historical-retrospective method, with the help of which one can analyze the results of the activities of clergy and draw conclusions that could not be carried out by the contemporaries.

We suggest to begin the examination of this problem with a historical study.

While analyzing the historical aspect of studying the role of the church institutions in the state, it should be noted that throughout the entire period of development of the Russian state, the church played a significant role, despite the different attitudes of society and the state towards it. The interaction between religious and political institutions has a long history, spanning ancient times. Then the role and authority of religion were so high that political power sought to use it as a way of spreading power and occupying a dominant position in society.

The positive role of the church, which carried out such necessary functions for society as cultural and educational, should also be noted. One can agree with the statement of the American sociologist T. Parson that "religion supports the value-normative order in society". Now, what did the theorist mean when talking about maintaining order through religion? We can conclude the following: through religion, political forces could influence the consciousness, role and behavior of citizens, thereby regulating certain social relations. It was a powerful tool for understanding the world as the political power imagined it, hence why certain mentality and actions stereotypes were imposed. Thanks to this, the process of legitimizing power was accelerated in society [2].

Thus, it is possible to make an intermediate conclusion that the church, representing a system of certain views and ideas, had power over the consciousness and behavior of citizens, that is, was a way of manipulating people.

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But such interaction between the religious and political institutions has not always been this way; it depended on a specific historical period. For example, in ancient times, commanders always visited priests before an important campaign, asked for an advice and sought for blessings. The main confrontation between the two authorities consisted in the following: in whose hands the reins of government would be. For political power, the most important feature was the presence of military force, whose ideology was completely and utterly, obeyed the church.

Having studied the historical side of this problem, we come to the conclusion that, starting from deep antiquity, religion was as important an institution of power as the state itself. The constant battle for supremacy between religious and political institutions eventually led to their interaction.

Currently, the church plays an important role not only in the social and cultural life of society, but also in the political and economic. Besides, the Orthodox religion is positioned as one of the factors influencing the development of our state, which it cannot ignore.

The changes that have and are occurring in Russia over the last ten to fifteen years affect not only the above-mentioned spheres of social life, but also the church. Thus, in comparison with those historical stages that was considered earlier, the Orthodox religion experienced significant changes since the society itself has transformed.

Changes that occurred with the church strengthened the role of this institution in society. It penetrated not only into the minds of people, but also into those spheres that seemed not to depend on it at all. Its influence is increasing every year.

The existence and regulation of religion, including the Orthodox, in the Russian Federation are determined by a number of regulatory legal acts, of which the Constitution of the Russian Federation is fundamental. In accordance with Article 14 of the above act, the Russian Federation is recognized as a secular state, and religious associations are separate from the state and equal before the law. On the basis of this act, Russia is stated to be a multinational state in which representatives of different religions live, none of which can be established as state or obligatory. However, despite the provisions established in the law, the Russian Orthodox Church has a special status. Such a high position in society is explained by the fact that it is the Orthodox Church that binds the majority of Russian citizens. In this case, such a relationship is not real, rather nominal. More than fifty percent of the citizens of our country consider themselves Orthodox. The society notes the recent increase in the influence of the church, the enhancement of its role in the activities of the state. It is surprising that this influence concerns not so much the area of moral ideas and notions of the citizens, but the political life of the state. For example, the church has put forward a number of spiritual initiatives related to the upbringing of the younger generation. What is this about? As of 2012 in Russia, first in test mode in some regions, and now already in all regions of the Russian Federation, a subject designed to teach students the basics of religious culture was

introduced. Again, in accordance with the Constitution of the Russian Federation, the church is separated from the state.

The church participates not only in the domestic affairs, but also takes the initiative in international relations, speaking on behalf of all citizens of the Russian state.

For its part, the state exempted the church from paying tax duties; property of religious significance was transferred to the ownership of religious organizations, all of which further strengthened the influence of the ROC. Every year, the state allocates huge sums of money for the construction of churches, temples, sometimes neglecting the rights of citizens. For example, the situation that has caused heated discussions about the construction of a temple on the site of a square in the city of Yekaterinburg.

Based on this, it can be concluded that the separation of the church from the state is a formal phenomenon; though in fact, a reverse process occurs - the unification of the Russian Orthodox Church with the state power. Gradually, it becomes a state, as confirmed by the church itself. Thus, in the Foundations of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church, it is stated that the present position of the church is defined as the middle ground between the separation and the state churchliness. Many well-known scientists are critical of this approach, since they believe that in this way the church will lose its main purpose. For example, Andrei Vorobyov, academician of the Russian Academy of Sciences and the Russian Academy of Medical Sciences, believes that: "Religion is separate from the state, it cannot be introduced in schools as the subject of "the study of Orthodoxy" - this is a direct invasion of the integrity of the state." The scientist also argues that the society "has accumulated so much evil, resentment and separation, it needs more peace and less disunity." The philosopher V. Solovyov wrote: "In the state uniform, the church will cease to be itself and will become a ministry for the confession of the demand." Despite numerous negative judgments, the church continues to actively interfere in state affairs, which is reflected in the frequent meetings of politicians and representatives of religious institutions, in continuous interviews with representatives of the media, as well as in participation in government meetings. The relationship between the state and the church is a special type of relationship that suits both parties. Such relationship can be described as joint activities based on common features inherent in politics and religion. Relations on the principle of "symphony", - this is how their main document regulating the activities of the Russian Orthodox Church characterizes it. The said principle speaks of mutual cooperation and is confirmed in practice: the President and the Government of Russia strive to create favorable conditions for the activities of the church, free it from any control from the state, and turn a blind eye to the violation of current legislation. "Symphony" in the state - religious relations is also manifested in the fact that:

- Religious ceremonies are held not only in church organizations, but also in state ones;
- The main Orthodox holidays are held at the state level and possess the status of state celebrations;

- Budget funds for the construction of religious buildings are being allocated, despite the fact that the distribution of the budget does not imply such a practice;
- Church television channels on television and numerous interviews of the Patriarch in print media are present;
- There is the eradication of atheism in favor of the church, etc.

A rather large number of examples of distinctive benefits for the church were listed, and this list is still not complete.

A rather large number of examples of certain benefits for the church were listed, and this list is not finished. What objectives does the state seek? The religious ones? The answer is unfortunately negative. The goals are purely political. Thus, for example, Father Alexander, rector of the Moscow church of St. Sergius of Radonezh in Krapivniki, spoke about political figures: "When some official holds a candle in his hand, and not in the right hand, mind you, and crosses himself incorrectly - it does not indicate his churching. Rather, it indicates a certain fashion." Such behavior of politicians is explained by the low level of trust and numerous critics not only from the local, but also from the foreign citizens. Having realized this, the statesmen found powerful assistance, manifested in the help of an influential social institution - the Russian Orthodox Church. By granting the freedom and privileges to the church, the state acquired an ally in its face that could influence Russian citizens. Knowing about the growing authority of the church, each of the political forces are trying to lure the clergy to their side, because together with the clergy, several hundred thousand believers will follow. This race is especially intensified during the election campaign. In its turn, the Russian Orthodox Church is ready to support the state. For the purpose of mutually beneficial cooperation, the Council on Religious Associations under the President of the Russian Federation was created, at which the Patriarch introduces his proposals or specific political tasks are put before the church. This way, in 2018, at the next Council, issues of youth education were discussed. Still, politicians understand that the younger generation pre determines their future state. Respectively, the church can become the spiritual mentor which can attract young people to its side, to exclude the emergence of intolerance towards the church. Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Alexy II said: "Miss a few generations - and there will not be the Russia we all know and love." The question of expediency of introducing in schools a subject of religious studies can now be closed.

In addition, religious studies became widespread in Sunday schools and even kindergartens. All this is undoubtedly reflected in the still poorly formed children's consciousness and leaves its imprint for the future.

State leaders expect that the church will be able to make Russian citizens tolerate difficult life circumstances. According to the politicians' plan, it is exactly with the help of religion that will be possible to convince the inhabitants of our country of the need for the social and economic reforms that are required by the state, as well as avoid discontent and outrage of the people and prevent their depressive state. For these reasons, representatives of Russia, Ukraine and other former republics that formed part of the USSR show a new type of attitude towards the church, and in general, towards religion. Ukraine

currently wants to achieve complete independence from Russia; an important step towards this is the acquisition of spiritual independence. A researcher at the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Taras Kuzio stated the following: "The main way to harm Russia's interests without a single shot is to provide strategic support to the Ukrainian Orthodox autocephaly by a more resolute lobbying in Constantinople and forcing all religious denominations to re-register. The renamed Ukrainian Orthodox Church will become the Russian Orthodox Church of the Russian national minority". Thus, the opposition also uses the church as an instrument of influence on relations with Russia.

But it does not stop at the presence of external causes only; a sufficient amount of contradictions within the church itself is present too. In recent years, conflicts have begun to arise between the lower and the higher levels of the clergy. The priests of the lower and the middle clergy express their dissatisfaction with the activities of the Moscow Church. They believe that the head of the church does not care about the problems of the citizens; they are not interested in improving the lives of the people. Such approach is explained by the type of relationship that takes place between the state and the church, which are indifferent to the fate of Russian citizens. The factual unification of religion and politics in order to influence people's consciousness and behavior is unconditionally contrary to the legislation of the Russian Federation, which is also a confirmation of the disregard of society. On the contrary, citizens themselves would have liked to see an independent church, which does not rely on anyone, including the state, and which can defend its interests. The attitude of the opposition to the occurring changes was presented in the form of resolutions, drawn up by the dioceses of various subjects of our country. In these documents, mistrust was expressed not only to their leadership (church elite), but also to government bodies. The answer to the opposition objection became the very Basics of the social concept, where the positions that the church's activities would be aimed at improving the quality of life of citizens were fixed.

Now, along with the change in attitude towards politics, the attitude towards religion is also changing. A low percentage of people who truly believe can be observed in Russia, there is much more of those for whom faith is simply "a trend". Such it has become precisely due to the merger with the state and its support.

The attitude to religion, in particular to the Russian Orthodox Church, is expressed not only by Russian citizens. For example, the German scientist I.E. Metz considers the social function of Christianity to be pro-bourgeois and sees in it the social support of the ruling classes that have a decisive influence on the church.

There was an article published in France by Anaïs Llobet, which is called "Religion as a tool of nationalism: the Kremlin's ties with the Russian Orthodox Church" [3,4]. In the article it says that "Orthodoxy is not only a component of patriotism, but also a great tool for Russia's influence abroad." It was noted that after the annexation of the Republic of Crimea to Russia, where the strategic naval base in the city of Sevastopol is located, Putin,

in his speech, recalled that Saint Vladimir had been baptized on the peninsula. In the capital of France, Paris, in 2016, the Russian Spiritual and Cultural Center, located not far from the most famous landmark, the Eiffel Tower was opened recently. According to expert Marlene Laruel, the construction of this complex, which includes a temple, a school and a spiritual center, cost Moscow 150 million euros and confirmed "the use of Orthodoxy as a tool of Russia's soft power." Boris Vishnevsky, a deputy of the City Duma of St. Petersburg, who opposed to the transfer of St. Isaac's Cathedral to the church, said that the cathedral brings a large income of ten million euros annually, which the church will now receive. "I don't understand why the state makes such gifts to the church," says Vishnevsky [5]. "The most important thing is not the influence of the church on everyday life, but it's symbolic capital," said Kati Russle, an expert on the Russian Orthodox Church. As long as the state needs it as a defender of traditional values, "the government will keep submitting before the priests," Vishnevsky believes. According to him, "such cross-pollination can produce a real monster [6,7]."

Experts, in the course of comparing this year with a decade earlier, compared the two patriarchs, concluding that Patriarch Kirill is a more dynamic activist, initiatively giving interviews to the press. Undoubtedly, Kirill is perceived as a political figure by the society, unlike his predecessor Alexy, who was considered a man out of politics. Religious scholar Konstantin Mikhailov believes that the church has significantly increased its influence. "The church has become so noticeable that it's time to put an end to its expansion," says Mikhailov [8].

RESULTS

Thus, the examples of the influence of the Russian Orthodox Church on the state cited above make it possible to speak about the clericalization of society and the interference of the church in matters that are not related to its competence. Certainly, such integration into state affairs goes beyond the legal framework, but there is no objection from the side of the political forces. Is

this due to the fact that the state benefits from this state of affairs? Yes, it seems. Russia has enough resources with the help of which it could have influenced the church and limited its spread to all spheres of public life. However, not everyone perceives the church solely as an instrument of influence. It is my wish to summarize the conducted study by the words of a person belonging to that small percentage of "who really believe". Father Alexander expressed the following thought: "Within itself, the church, of course, must resist and, I hope, will resist any attempts at conciliation and simplification. The church should always speak with the people in modern language about the problems and situations concerning them, but first of all it speaks about the eternal: about salvation, truth and Holy Scripture. All this is above the opportunistic political subjects - education, the armed forces, Donald Trump. Nevertheless the church, like any public institution, has the right to speak on "the most important key issues of social being," although I am against the church's violent intervention in public affairs, I would not want forcible Orthodoxy of schools and armed forces".

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