
THE CHANGES OF RELIGIOUS PRACTICES OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE AS CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MODERN SPIRIT

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Abstract

The article deals with the evolution of the social doctrine of the Russian Orthodox Church since the second half of the 20th century up till the modern time. The objective is to explore the impact of the social transformations on the Orthodox social views and development of the new religious practices. In the 20th century the relations between the Russian Orthodox Church, society and government evolved through a certain chain of transformations. The author concludes that qualitatively new religious practices have appeared, i.e. out-of-confessional social ministry. This fact is backed with new Church documents and agreements about supporting the risk groups signed with the federal and regional (e.g. Nizhny Novgorod region) government bodies. Social activism is caused by the social needs and it leads to changes in the social doctrine of the contemporary Orthodoxy in accordance with the epoch and poses a question about institutional changes within the Church itself.

Keywords: Russian Orthodox Church, social conception, state-confessional relations, social partnership, social ministry

1. Introduction

After the changes in the Russian Orthodox Church's public and legal status, caused by the Revolution of 1917 and until the 1960s, the predominant position of the Orthodoxy in the socio-political and cultural spheres was social neutrality. In the 60-70s the so-called 'communist Christianity' became the Church's official doctrine. There are prominent theologians and Church activists of that period among the authors of the doctrine: professor-archpriest V.M. Borovoy, Metropolitan Nikodim (Rotov), professor-archpriest L. Voronov, professor of Theology N.A. Zabolotsky, etc. The conception served as the basis of the Orthodoxy since the 1960s till the middle of the 1980s, and included such parts as 'social ethics', 'theology of revolution' and 'world theology'.

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‘Social ethics’ claimed that Christianity does not separate a personality from the society, and one can save himself only by saving others. To reach salvation a Christian ought to take part in socially useful activities. In ‘theology of revolution’ theologians of that period advanced a statement: Christ considered that the world may develop in an evolutionary way as well as in a revolutionary one. The Creator said: ‘Making all things new’ – is a revolution, so it may be considered as an act pleasing to God, and a socialist lifestyle should be accepted as a completely Christian. ‘World theology’ supposed that a human being, as at all times, lives within two relations: the first – determining the human’s relation to God, the second — subordinated, determining the human’s relation to people. That is why religious activity is an effective way of unity and making peace in the society, and world peace too.

Since the changes of Perestroika, the doctrine of ‘Christian communism’ has been negatively evaluated within the Church as well as outside of it. There is a growing sense that this theory does not reflect the meaning of Orthodoxy, and that it was imposed from the outside by the conditions of a forced secularization, becomes more popular. It is difficult to agree with such flat statements, as one of the greatest Soviet specialists in Soviet-era Church history, P.K. Kurochkin, remarked: “Subjective intentions of the churchmen, both sincere and opportunistic, reflect in general an objective logic of the events, among which the Orthodoxy was put” [1].

2. Methodology

The research is based on the analysis of the published documents of the Russian Orthodox Church, hierarchs’ speeches, printed and internet materials of the period concerned. The research methods combine retrospective and problem-based analysis.

The Church had to develop a new social doctrine under the rapidly changing conditions of Perestroika and the collapse of the USSR in 1991. This process was largely completed by the early 1990s, indicating the flexibility and vitality of the Church and the versatility of its accumulated theological and philosophical experience. Among its authors of the new social doctrine of the Russian Orthodoxy there were: Patriarch Alexy (Ridiger), Metropolitan John of Petersburg and Ladoga (Svytchev), Mitropolitan of Kaliningrad and Smolensk Kirill (Gundyayev), Metropolitan of Volokolamsk and Yurevsk Pitirim (Nechaev), theologians: archpriest V. Borovoy, archpriest I. Ekonomtsev, professor A.I. Osipov, etc. Theology, formulating principles of the attitude towards society, began to claim that the Church is not a political party. Within its pale it gathers people of different views, who are united by belief. That is why the Church cannot have a single-line, monosemantic doctrine.

The basic principle of the social interpretation of Orthodoxy is reliance on spiritual traditions and Orthodox values. This is intrinsic to the Church, but under modern historical conditions, it acquired additional importance. Hence Metropolitan Pitirim’s (Nechaev) call: “It is high time we objectively evaluate

the possibilities of a religious outlook as a constituting factor in the process of the economic and socio-political development” [2]. The reliance on spiritual traditions and Orthodox values was a basic criterion for the appraisal of society in the Orthodox theology of that period. Neither the capitalism that came to Russia in the 1990s nor totalitarian socialism are ideal social models according to Orthodox theologians. In the manner of the Russian religious philosophy of the 19th and early 20th centuries, they claim that it is necessary to find ‘the third way’, the original way of Russia, giving a new interpretation to Orthodox messianism and the Russian idea. In the society the Russian Orthodox Church stands for, spiritual values should take priority over material ones, because consumer society leads to the moral degradation of humanity. Theologians actively stand against mass culture and for the transmission of national cultural values and traditions across the generations. A harmonious society may be founded upon the doctrine of collegiality accepted as unity in diversity – the unity of people in faith, but preserving the individuality of each person. The most prominent representative of the Russian religious philosophy of the first half of the 20th century N.A. Berdyaev considered collegiality as the very idea of the Church and salvation. According to him “it is the mutual collegial responsibility of everybody for everybody, of everybody for the whole world; all the people are brothers in misfortune, all the people share the original sin, and one may save himself only together with the world” [3]. The ideas of the Russian religious philosophy of the beginning of the 20th century had a decisive impact on the development of the social doctrine of contemporary Orthodoxy.

On these principles ‘The Foundations of the Social Conception of the Russian Orthodox Church’ were prepared, and then accepted on the Bishops’ Council in August 2000. ‘The Foundations...’ cover a wide range of problems: the Church and Nation, the Church and secular mass media, international relations, problems of globalization and secularization, etc. The document systematically states a new understanding of traditional problems; it links all phenomena of social life to the Divine and Salvation.

The Russian Orthodox Church, being guided by the original moral spiritual values of a significant part of members of the Russian Civilization at the turn of the century, tried to give answers to topical social questions, which were meant to ensure material and spiritual wealth of the people and contribute to progress in different spheres of social life. There are historical reasons for such an activity on the part of the Russian Orthodox Church. The tradition of secularized Orthodoxy, expressed in extralitururgical social ministry, is a longstanding feature of Russian civilization. Historical memory records patriotic activity of the Church during periods of crisis, aimed at consolidation and political mobilization and providing a civilizational identity. This memory affirms an original system of spiritual values: the idea of justice, serving the people and state, love for one’s neighbour, ability to help the weaker, and supremacy of moral norms [4].

The increasing authority of the religious organizations in the modern society is caused by the people's conviction that they are able to solve social problems, 'heal the social ulcers', and by the opinion that these organizations are the stronghold of morality and the spiritual life, both individual and social. Patriarch Kirill often says: "In the present order of our earthly being, the Church is a fundamental and formative structure alongside the secular power and civil society. But if the secular power and society provide stability, self-development and safety of human life, then its supreme content and imperishable meaning is provided by religion" [5]. This meaning and the religious activity itself is conducted through the various religious practices. Religious practices are the actual expressions of the believers' affiliation, expressed in exercising of a religious cult as stated in dogmas and interpreted by theologians. In prayer, religious ritual, sermons, and missionary activities, religious consciousness is put into practice, believers satisfy their religious needs and prove their compliance with doctrine. Affiliation to any religion is determined not only by the way of thinking, but also by religious practice. Religious practices reproduce the religious tradition and believers take part in them as in an obvious action, which often does not require a profound understanding of their sacral sense. Every member of the community while being initiated accepts shared sociocultural norms, meanings, and values. However as they immerse themselves in the Church environment, they bring along the legacy of their secular life. This causes inevitable differences between the canonical knowledge of the Church and popular religiosity, as well as private theological opinions. Despite the stability of religious practices, they should not be considered as invariable.

How do the changes of the religious practices of the Russian Orthodox Church go on now today in the context of dynamics of the social and civilizational processes? Religious convictions are characterized by a high level of subjective importance, intensive motivational force that influence day-to-day religious practice. Religious practice is a certain activity, connecting words and actions, consciousness and behaviour, at the same time the social practices of the believers "have two modes: on the one hand, these are the practices within the pale of a religious routine, on the other hand – day-to-day practices in the non-religious sphere" [6]. The main activity of the religious organizations is to practice a religion, exercise a cult, while social activity is just an accompaniment. However, social ministry of the religious organizations today is in high demand in Russia, moreover it has a deep moral base: the dogmas of all religious denominations direct to help neighbours, the stricken and the needy.

The survey conducted by [7] revealed the notion that the state should solve social problems in cooperation with religious organizations – this option was chosen by 62.9% of the respondents. 51.1% of the respondents think that religion and politics can interact only solving social problems. Religious organizations can positively influence the public morality — 36.9%, develop charity — 26.1%, rehabilitate the people facing a difficult situation — 24.4%, contribute to the development of the culture — 17%. The representatives of the

Orthodoxy are the most active in social life, charity and culture (85.5%). That is determined by covering of the Russian Orthodox Church's social projects in mass media, while the activity of other religious organizations is neglected in the media sphere.

In February 2011, the Bishops' Council of the Russian Orthodox Church, following the general logic of Russian social development, while adjusting its own positions in terms of the modern crisis of Russian society, adopted the document 'About the Principles of Organization of the Social Work in the Russian Orthodox Church'. Earlier Orthodox theology considered social ministry as serving Christ in the largest sense. Social ministry as diaconic activity is a new phenomenon in the religious practices of modern Orthodoxy. That is why there is no unified understanding of its spheres, target audiences, and methods. This often causes overlaps between charitable activity on the part of the Church and attempts to establish state-confessional relations. The new document initiated the establishment of social services at all levels, from the Patriarchate down to parishes, charging them with the obligation to exercise charity, underlining that "life in the Church is an incessant serving God and people." By its definition, "The social ministry of the Church (charity, social activity, diakonia) is an activity, initiated, organized, coordinated and financed or supported by the Church, aimed at supporting the needy" [8]. Diakonia is a practical form of Christian mercy and love that should not be restrained or limited by any frameworks, either religious, national, state-political or social: "The Church spreads its philanthropy not only over its members, but also over those who do not belong to it" [8]. In a new system of relations between the society, the Church and the state, newly favorable conditions promote the complete realization of the Christian mission in the world and transition from such proven methods of social ministry as intraconfessional and confession oriented social ministry to social ministry for everyone in need.

Intraconfessional social ministry existed even during the times of religious persecution, uniting the community with bonds of sympathy. Confession oriented social ministry is a part of the missionary service: through opening convalescent centres, arranging free meals, introducing confession oriented education, new members get involved in a religious organization, and it spreads its influence. The document states new principles of the social ministry: to give a person what he/she needs and where he/she is. Earlier such principles were accepted in a compendium of the social teaching of the Roman Catholic Church: "Human society is therefore the object of the social teaching of the Church since she is neither outside nor over and above socially united men, but exists exclusively in them and, therefore, for them" [9]. New principles were determined by the position of the Christian church within a secular humanistic culture and civil legislation. J. Casanova notes: "In the conditions of globalization all world religions develop not only based on their own traditions, but thanks to other traditions" [10]. The question to what extent these principles will be realized remains open-ended.

Social activity may take different forms: supporting and strengthening the family, supporting sick people and the elderly, orphans, imprisoned or recently discharged persons, poor, fire victims, migrants, alcohol and drug addicted persons, all the needy. The help may be medical, rehabilitating, social, psychological, consultative, moral, as well as material, including financial support, fundraising, distribution of food, personal things, medicine. However, the most important is helping to find a personal way of life, because a Christian ought to consider every person seeking for help as the Divine image and unique personality.

The document determined not only the principles, but also a vertical structure of the Orthodox Church social work: 1. Coordinator of the social activity — a member of Ecclesiastical staff or a layman, accountable to the ruling bishop. 2. A staff member of the ecclesiastical social institution (orphanage, asylum, poorhouse, charitable canteen, etc.). 3. Nurse – a member of the sisterhood, i.e. a community of women headed by a clergyman, willing to devote themselves to the social ministry; it usually has regulations and a special ritual of initiation; a nurse may serve in her free time. 4. Volunteer – a person who takes part in the Church's social activity in free time. 5. Benefactor – a churchman or a layman, who financially supports the Church's social ministry. 6. A member of the board of guardians at a social institution (Church, state and others) – a person supporting the institution social ministry and taking certain responsibilities, e.g. observing the life condition of the wards.

Developing and accepting basic principles of the Orthodox Church's social ministry is one of the achievements of the head of the Church charity and social ministry Synod department Panteley (Shatov). He was the founder of an effective service 'Miloserdiye' (Mercy) in Moscow, a confessor of Svyato-Dmitrievsky Nurse College, and according to B. Knorre, before him "the organization of the social activity was in many cases chaotic" [11], and now they prepare a database of the social ministry. More and more materials dedicated to this topic appear on the pages of 'Moscow Patriarchate Journal'.

Partnership of the Church and state in the social ministry is one of the document's principles. The Constitution of the Russian Federation declares secularity of the state, freedom of conscience and tolerance. At the same time the public-legal status acquired by the religious organizations poses a question about the interaction with the authorities in practical issues, the most important of them being social ones: working with risk groups, education and moral upbringing. The question of cooperation between religious organizations and state bodies at different levels has become topical too. Collaboration is put into action through public consultative bodies at the federal level, directives and recommendations of the President of the Russian Federation.

Series of cooperation agreements were signed between the bodies of the federal power and the Russian Orthodox Church. In 1999, a cooperation agreement between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Federal Service for Execution of Punishment (FSEP) was signed. In 2010, more than 1,100 priests served in the prisons. In the penitentiaries of FSEP there are 471 prison churches

and 466 prayer rooms. Churchmen organized and support 789 Orthodox communities, which unite 73,177 convicts; there are 265 Sunday schools, where 11,000 people take classes of catechesis [12].

On July 8, 2011, the Cooperation agreement between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Ministry of Health was signed by Patriarch Kirill and the Minister of Health T. Golikova [13]. On December 21, 2011, the Cooperation agreement between the Russian Orthodox Church and the State Anti-Drug Committee was signed. It supposed cooperation in the sphere of prevention and rehabilitation of drug addiction, interaction with the Orthodox social services, moral and patriotic upbringing of youth, charity, volunteerism, and support for groups of drug addicts at Orthodox parishes [14]. On March 29, 2012, took place the seminar 'The Russian Orthodox Church's Rehabilitation Activity Aimed at Drug Addicted of the Volga Federal District' in the context of realization of the signed agreement. The most topical issue is the development of church-based rehabilitation centres as part of the federal system of such centres in all regions of Russia [from <http://nadezhda13.ru/?p=5064>, accessed 24 September 2013], establishing in all the regions of Russia.

Migration of people from the post-soviet republics nowadays has become a new complex problem of the Russian society. On April 19, 2013, Patriarch Kirill and the Head of the Federal Migration Service - Konstantin Romodanovsky signed a cooperation agreement. By 2013 the territorial bodies of the Federal Migration Service of Russia had signed 104 cooperation agreements (62 were signed with eparchies of the ROC; 35 with the Muslim organizations; 2 with the Armenian Apostolic Church; 3 with the Buddhist and 2 with the Judaist organizations). Joint work perspective is arranging the Russian courses for labour migrants, 67 of them are free of charge, 20 are affiliated to the religious organizations.

There are cooperation agreements not only at federal level, but also at the regional one, e.g. in Nizhny Novgorod region [15]. Regional and municipal government, signing cooperation agreements with the religious organizations, were first of all interested in cooperation with historically indigenous religious organizations: the Russian Orthodox Church Nizhny Novgorod Metropolitan and Clerical Board of Muslims from Nizhny Novgorod region, that is why new agreements were signed exactly with them. Since 96 % of the people of Nizhny Novgorod region are Russians, the Orthodoxy dominates here on the confessional map as well, enjoying majority of the signed state-confessional partnership agreements on social ministry. In this respect Nizhny Novgorod Region serves as an example of the new religious practices of the Russian Orthodox Church.

A series of agreements was signed between the Russian Orthodox Church Nizhny Novgorod Eparchy (since 2012 – Metropolitan) and bodies of the executive power. On June 4, 2004, an agreement on protection of the Church art memorials was signed between the Nizhny Novgorod Eparchy and the Nizhny Novgorod Region Main Internal Affairs Directorate [<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/news/10080.htm>, accessed October 26, 2013]. Now they work out a database of

the Church valuables (icons, church plates) and measures to protect them [<http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/468811.html>, accessed 23 October 2013]. In December 2005, Nizhny Novgorod Administration Education and Social-Legal Child Protection Department and the Nizhny Novgorod Eparchy Education and Catechization Department signed a cooperation agreement in the sphere of moral education and upbringing, aimed at the realization of socially important projects and programs, providing children and parents with the right of choosing the content of educational programs [<http://www.nne.ru/news.php?id=2378>, accessed 20 September 2013]. The document presupposes joint evaluation of educational programs and methodical literature, and prevention of phenomena deemed asocial, such as smoking, alcoholism, drug addiction, promiscuity, violence, and the spread of totalitarian sects.

In June, 2012, Nizhny Novgorod Federal Migration Service Directorate signed an agreement on support the Russian Orthodox Church Nizhny Novgorod Eparchy in the sphere of foreign citizens integration, aimed at development of mutual understanding between the local people and immigrants, providing a harmonious combination of rights and interests of the Russian citizens, foreign citizens and stateless persons in the region; adaptation and integration of the migrants, prevention from international and inter-religious conflicts [<http://www.fmsnnov.ru/?id=4782>, accessed 1 October 2013]. In September 2008 the Archbishop of Nizhny Novgorod and Arzamas George and Major-General Sergey Yudin signed a cooperation agreement between the Eparchy and the 22nd Guard Army Command. They supposed to guide the military units: talks, lectures for personnel, organizing pilgrim tours, establishing Sunday schools for the servicemen's children, building the churches on the territories of the military units, rehabilitation of the servicemen who used to work in the hot spots [<http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/468811.html>].

On March 21, 2007, the Nizhny Novgorod Eparchy and the Courier Service signed a cooperation agreement. The agreement's objective is spiritual and moral guidance and interaction in the sphere of the patriotic upbringing of the Nizhny Novgorod Region Courier Service staff by the churchmen of the Nizhny Novgorod Eparchy. As an additional support, Courier Service is ready to help the Nizhny Novgorod Eparchy to deliver priority mail over the whole Russia in the shortest time [<http://www.nne.ru/news.php?id=4005>, accessed 21 September 2013].

On December 29, 2010, a cooperation agreement between the Nizhny Novgorod Eparchy and the Chief Directorate of Russian Emergency Ministry (EMERCOM) for Nizhny Novgorod Region aimed at joint work in the moral and patriotic upbringing of the EMERCOM staff members, and effective coordination of actions for supporting people in emergency situations [<http://www.niann.ru/?id=382991>, accessed 15 October 2013].

On November 5, 2014, the non-profit organization 'New Social Technologies', the Russian Orthodox Church Nizhny Novgorod Eparchy and Nizhny Novgorod Regional Organization of Russian Youth Union organized a round table 'Employment of Ex-convicts. Steps Towards Solving the Problem'.

Representatives of the Ministry of Internal Municipal and Regional Policy of Nizhny Novgorod, Federal Service for Execution of Punishment (FSEP) Nizhny Novgorod Chief Directorate, Public Observation Committee of Nizhny Novgorod, the Russian Orthodox Church Nizhny Novgorod Eparchy, employers took part in the meeting. At the round table the project ‘Rehabilitation Centre’ was presented as a program of support the discharged convicts, with the objective of adaptation, re-socialization and employment. “In total there are 16,000 convicts, 3,000 discharged every year, 1,000 are potential reserve to work with, because there are ‘the lost’ among them, and our support will be effective. FSEP supports them in these ways: free general and vocational education, there are psychologists and groups of the social support working with them. Nobody takes care of employment after discharge, and people have no way to go” – FSEP deputy of Nizhny Novgorod Andrey Mastrukov commented the meeting. A cooperation agreement between the Russian Orthodox Church Nizhny Novgorod Eparchy and Non-commercial Partnership ‘New Social Technologies’ was signed after the round table. There are special complexes of seminars, trainings, webinars and other kinds of educating and motivating activity for ex-convicts [http://fsin.su/news/index.php?ELEMENT_ID=179758].

3. Conclusions

In our opinion the given examples indicate not only a new status of the Russian Orthodox Church in the public-legal sphere and abandoning the separation model of state-confessional relations in favour of a cooperative one, but also the evolution of the social doctrine of Orthodoxy, its qualitative transformation under the conditions of secular society and secular law. The legalization of the Church that has happened for the last quarter of a century caused inevitable changing of the religious practices, starting with their wide publicity, and finishing with involving the Church people and structures in solving various social problems. Russian government is aware of the necessity of modernization of the social legislature in terms of regulation of the social partnership of the state and religious organizations. This argument is supported by the research of the Centre of Problem Analysis and State-administrative Projecting ‘Social Partnership of the State and Religious Organizations’ [16], where the authors justify the necessity of adopting a new federal law ‘On Cooperation of the State and Local Authorities with Religious Organizations’. It is important to mention that recently, in the sphere of state-confessional relations, cooperation agreements between the state bodies and religious organizations in the social sphere have become more widespread. The social functions of the Church have changed under secularization — this is a complicated, non-linear process. In Russia it is significantly determined by the outlook of the persons heading power structures and possessing the right to make decisions, and by the activity of the social groups trying to narrow or expand the Church’s functions in the society. The process of secularization may

cause changes within the Church itself, in the system of the Church management. However these process are reversible and depend on the activity of the social groups, standing for certain values and dogmas. Today social activism of the religious organizations is determined by the social necessities and expectations that should be supported by the power. Understanding the process of secularization as a cyclic one may explain the modern changes of the Russians' religious outlook and activation of the Russian Orthodox Church's role in the public life of Russia.

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