
NEW APPROACHES TO STATE-CHURCH RELATIONS IN MODERN RUSSIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY AND IN THE CONTEXT OF CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN HISTORY

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Abstract

Problems of the history of State-Church relations in the USSR have occupied researchers from the last third of the XX century. Russian historians began to develop this subject eagerly since the 1990-s. There is an established opinion that the contemporary western historiography is still much more various conceptually and methodologically than the Russian one. This article is intended to acquaint foreign researchers with the main achievements and tendencies of the development of Russian historiography of the State-Church relations in the USSR. It is important to investigate the development of approaches to this problem in the context of realities of modern Russia.

Keywords: Russian Orthodox Church, historiography, USSR, institutionalism, social history

1. Introduction

Through many centuries, the Russian Orthodox Church (hereinafter ROC) played a key role in many areas of the state and society. This ranged from the sacralisation of state power and attempts to create a ‘symphony’ in Church-State relations, to its influence on thinking, traditions and culture of the Russians, as well as on the structure of Russian society.

Relations between the two largest institutions for most of the XX century were complicated and antagonistic from the position of the state. The anti-religious policy had contradictory tendencies: periods of ideology of Church institutional destruction alternated with periods of relatively ‘peaceful coexistence’.

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Despite all State attempts to eradicate religion in the USSR, the ROC survived and rose like a Phoenix from the ashes. Nowadays, the Russian Orthodox Church is the largest religious organization by number of its adherents in the Russian Federation. It is still determining the development of the modern Russian society.

State-Church relationships during the Soviet period have occupied scholars for the last two decades. Such State-Church relations have become the place for methodological research and experimentation in contemporary historiography. Current research is based on interdisciplinary approaches that combine elements of History and Social sciences, such as Economics, Sociology, Ethnography, Psychology, Political sciences, etc.

2. The 1990s - the 'source revolution', policy of disclosure and accusation

The history of the State-Church relations was a taboo subject in the Soviet period. No wonder that after opening of archives in the 1990s, historians concentrated on studying the previous State policy toward the Church. It was important to clear up state secrets and confidential policies. On the other hand, researchers concentrated on the reaction of the ROC hierarchy, at first the Patriarch, and then — locums and other bishops which were revealed in various acts, addresses and messages.

The intent of the researchers of that period was to make accusations and find crimes of the state. The history of a martyrdom and the Church's obstinate refusal were allocated to special trends. These trends had such shortcomings as lack of conceptual approaches and the noncritical treatment to sources.

The advantage of the historiography of the 1990s was the publication of anthologies and various collections of documents. Researchers developed an understanding of the State-Church relations during the Soviet period. Their works are objective and written at a high level with the use of earlier inaccessible archival sources. The negative emphasis of State-Church relations and the lack of the non-biased conclusions were shortcomings of the Russian historiography of the 1990s.

3. The 2000s - turn to social history and institutionalism

After the indignation in the 1990s, historical research employed new approaches which gave interesting results to the 2000s. Historians devoted themselves to revealing controversies of ROC history in the XX century, such as: Church renegades, internal heterogeneity of Church, why they supported of the Revolution of 1917, and so forth.

A number of papers are devoted to the reasons the Russian clergy supported the Revolution of 1917. Analysing the ambiguous relations of the ROC and the changing power in 1917, researchers often addressed the matter institutionally. Mikhail A. Babkin examined the role of the ROC in the revolutionary process. He was the first who considered clergy activity on the

overthrowing of Russian monarchy in the context of historical and theological problems of 'priesthood-kingdom' (a centuries-old dispute about superiority). Also, several rare chrestomathies were published with his comments [1].

Larisa A. Andreyeva concluded that the ROC (represented by the Synod, the Episcopate, the parish, the military and naval clergy) considered the overthrow of the monarchy as a 'liberation from oppression' of the Russian people, and as a result - the unconditional support of the Provisional Government by the ROC [2].

The scientific work of Sergey L. Firsov is distinguished by a detailed review of numerous historical sources (both published and introduced into scientific use for the first time). His monograph studies such issues as the place of the ROC in the political system of the Russian state, the preparation for Church reforms and the beginning of their conduct during the First Russian Revolution in 1905, plus debates and discussions that took place in the Church and public environment. Undoubtedly, the merit of the work is the author's desire to avoid excessive politicization in the analysis of complex issues of Church-State relations in the pre-revolutionary years. The Church was seriously preparing for reforms; the hierarchy was keen to restore a canonical system of Church government, while hoping to preserve the former model of symphonic State-Church relations [3].

S.L. Firsov's researches are distinguished by the psychological approach to the analysis of behaviour and mentality of participants of that complicated 'State-Church relations' circle. His works stand out by the analysis of numerous sources of personal origin. For instance, the Lenin's 'Church separation from the State' decree is analysed by the perception of Russian contemporaries [4]. The advantage of Firsov's researches is lack of bias and criticism towards ROC collaborationists with Soviet state [4, 5].

The most successful application of this institutionalism can be found in scientific works on the history of the ROC during World War II. This included a change of state policy, the patriotic activity of the ROC and also on history of the ROC's foreign policy.

As well, some works were written in keeping with a comparative approach. Comparison of Church-State relations in the USSR and Eastern Europe seems to have been very fruitful in helping identify the similarities and specifics of the Church functioning under the communist regime.

The multi-authored book 'State and Church in the XX century: the evolution of relationships, political and socio-cultural aspects. European and Russian experience' is one the example of successfully combining the institutional and comparative approaches. The first part of the book, devoted to Russia, considers the interaction of the Soviet state and the Russian Orthodox Church from the final period of World War II until the end of the twentieth century. Documents of the Council for the Russian Orthodox Church (1943-1965), the Council for Religious Affairs (1944-1965) and the Council for Religious Affairs (1965-1991) are attached to this part.

The second part is devoted to investigating problems such as the formation of a State-Church relationship model, the changing role and status of the Church in Western, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, as well as the peculiarities of religious processes and the transformation of religious consciousness in Europe in the twentieth – early XXI century [6].

Some of Mikhail V. Shkarovskii research is devoted to a wide range of unexplored issues, one being the Russian Orthodox Church in the occupied territories during the Second World War. On the basis of numerous archival documents, Shkarovskii, as head researcher of the Central State Historical Archive of St. Petersburg, proved that none of the ROC hierarchy collaborated with the Nazis. Nazi authorities failed to split the Church either [7, 8].

Some aspects of State-Church relations during the difficult period of World War II and further USSR occupation of Eastern Europe countries attracted the attention of some European historians. Daniel Maris's conclusion can be extrapolated to the position of ROC in the modern Russian Federation either: "Following a period of 50 years of state atheism, different Churches from Eastern Europe have achieved an unusual record: on the one hand is the respectability conferred by dissidence and on the other hand the heavy burden of compromise and co-operation with former atheistic governments" [9].

The results of the researches devoted to the problem of the communist state interference in the autonomy of the local Churches of the open brethren from Romania makes a huge contribution into study of State-Church relations in countries of Eastern Europe. The communist brutal policy towards different Christian denominations is important for the reconstruction of a full picture of State-Church relations [10].

Historical geography made a huge impact in the study of State-Church relations. Sergey G. Safronov and Dmitri A. Sidorov showed the value of geographical reasoning in analysing State-Church relations throughout Russian history.

Sergey G. Safronov conducted research on the evolution of territorial organization and infrastructure of the ROC, including the system of religious education and network of monasteries. Social, educational, and territorial reasons for significant changes of the state-confessional policy during the second half of the XX century were analysed in his book, as well as the horizontal and vertical mobility within the ROC. His research on the evolution of the ROC elite from the 1940s to 2000 is of great interest. S.G. Safronov exposed the ROC's internal heterogeneity, including so called bishops 'party' [11].

Dmitri A. Sidorov's academic interest was dedicated to the influence of State-Church relations on the distribution of Church property. Also, he continued to study the evolution of the ROC elite and created his own periodization of property distribution according to Church's policy in the USSR during the XX century. He concluded that "some geographic characteristics of the ROC regarding its ruling elite and schismatic fractures reveal political legacies of the uneven distribution of Church holding of the realm" [12].

A.L. Beglov is known as the supporter and the populariser of ROC social history [A.L. Beglov, *Cerkovnjaja istorija v kontekste social'noj istorii sovetskogo perioda (Church history in the context of the social history of the Soviet period)*, <http://www.bogoslov.ru/text/390148.html>, accessed 15.02.2014]. He authored numerous works of which his work on the history of a spiritual eldership and the history of the Church underground are distinguished. A. Beglov also implemented a social history approach, such as studying the emergence of a new type of the believer in the second half of the XX century, a manipulation limit of legality in Church life, etc.

4. Conclusions

In summation we noted that in the Post-Soviet period, Russian historical science passed significantly from a 'source revolution' and accusation of Soviet power's crimes to the application of new methods and approaches. Nevertheless, supporters of these new approaches emphasized that this is the cornerstone of historical research, by paying less attention to the 'interpreting of the fact' method. Russian historians devoted themselves to investigating, processing and judging new archival documents and their source study analysis, for their subsequent use in historical research. It is rather a natural reaction to decades of Soviet over-ideologization, thematic limitation and systematic lying.

According to some historians, at the moment, foreign and domestic historiographies have been approached thematically, but they still develop 'parallel courses'. Methodological distinctions remain serious and deep [13].

The modern western historiography of Russian history is in many respects keen on conceptual and methodological experiments. It is necessary to say that a conscious and purposeful search of new interpretations, methods and approaches to judging particular historical data remains the strength of the Western historiography, especially Anglo-American. The publication of historical sources was never a strong point of Western historiography.

Russian historians are still badly informed about foreign scientists' research on the State-Church relations in the USSR. The language barrier is not the only reason. In the West, many historians do not consider the Russian historiography.

The integration of reliable and factual information as revealed by Russian historians and their employing conceptual frameworks of Western colleagues is capable of yielding significant research and understanding for the future.

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