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Original article



The Attitude of the Clergy to Socialism and the Struggle Against the Influence of Socialist Ideas in the South of Russia Territories during the Period of the Civil War

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Abstract

Introduction. The reaction of the clergy in the South of Russia to the revolutionary upheavals, its political outlook has largely remained a white spot in historiography, but the topic has undoubted scientific and social significance and provides insight into the mechanisms of political outlook formation within the framework of traditional religious culture. The purpose of the article is to examine the ideological platforms of the Orthodox clergy in the aspect of their attitude to socialism, as well as their ideas about the methods and means of struggle against this ideology.

Materials and methods. The solution of our goal is achieved on the basis of modern methodology of historical research, by analyzing and interpreting written sources, mainly materials of church periodicals with the involvement of unpublished sources – summaries of the Propaganda Department of the Special Conference.

Results. From the public-church discussion that unfolded in the periodical press, in public speeches and lectures, it follows that the clergy in general rejected socialism as a materialistic anti-Christian ideology. The forms of struggle against it can be divided into ideological and practical. It was proposed, for example, to organize a party of Christian socialism. But the most popular idea was to oppose socialism with a revived and specially organized parish. A project of a parish cooperative was developed to fight against the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries, who had created an apparatus for supplying the population with food and were therefore very popular.

Discussion and Conclusion. The study will provide materials for further study of the history of political ideas and the history of the Church, research in history, philosophical anthropology, political sociology, political science, and theology.

Keywords. Orthodox clergy, socialism, Bolshevism, White movement, ideology, Orthodox parish, national community

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Научная статья

Отношение духовенства к социализму и борьба с влиянием социалистических идей на территориях Юга России в период Гражданской войны

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Аннотация

Введение. Реакция духовенства Юга России на революционные потрясения, его политические воззрения в значительной мере оставались белым пятном в историографии, однако тема имеет несомненную научную и общественную значимость и позволяет получить представление о механизмах формирования политического мировоззрения в рамках

традиционной религиозной культуры. Цель статьи – рассмотреть идейные платформы православного духовенства в аспекте его отношения к социализму, а также его представления о методах и средствах борьбы с этой идеологией.

Материалы и методы. Решение обозначенной нами цели достигается на основе современной методологии исторического исследования, путём анализа и интерпретации письменных источников, в основном материалов церковной периодической печати с привлечением неопубликованных источников – сводок Отдела пропаганды Особого совещания.

Результаты исследования. Из общественно-церковной дискуссии, развернувшейся в периодической печати в публичных выступлениях и лекциях, следует, что духовенство в целом отвергло социализм как материалистическую антихристианскую идеологию. Формы борьбы с ним можно подразделить на идеологические и практические. Предлагалось, например, организовать партию христианского социализма. Но наиболее популярной была идея противопоставить социализму возрождённый и особым образом организованный приход. Разрабатывался проект приходского кооператива для борьбы с эсерами, создавшими аппарат снабжения населения продовольствием и потому имевшими большую популярность.

Обсуждение и заключение. Исследование предоставит материалы для дальнейшего изучения истории политических идей и истории Церкви, исследований в области истории, философской антропологии, политической социологии, политологии, теологии.

Ключевые слова. Православное духовенство, социализм, большевизм, белое движение, идеология, православный приход, национальная община

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Introduction. The Don land, the core of which was the Oblast of the Army of the Don (Oblast of the All-Revolved Army of the Don), became the theater of the fiercest battles and acute civil confrontation of the Civil War in Russia. In the works of specialists on the history of the Civil War, such as V.P. Fedyuk [1], V.J. Tsvetkov [2–3], R.G. Gagkuev [4], V.B. Lobanov [5], A.S. Puchenkov [6–8], V.A. Ternovsky [9], attention is paid to the southern regions of Russia. However, these scientists focus mainly on the coverage of the military-political perspective of the problem, and the church problematics is either not touched at all, or is covered in separate aspects. Meanwhile, the Orthodox clergy in the territories controlled by the Armed Forces of Southern Russia was highly politically active. From the public-church discussion that developed in the periodical press, in public speeches and lectures, it follows that the church community and the clergy in general rejected socialism as a materialistic anti-Christian ideology, an integral part of Bolshevism, which must be counteracted in order to protect believers from harmful ideas. The purpose of the article is to examine the ideological platforms of the Orthodox clergy in the aspect of their attitude to socialism, as well as their ideas about the methods and means of fighting this ideology. The purpose of the article is to examine the ideological platforms of the Orthodox clergy in terms of their attitude to socialism.

Materials and methods. The solution of our goal is achieved on the basis of modern methodology of historical research, by analyzing and interpreting written sources, mainly materials of church periodicals with the involvement of unpublished sources, summaries of the Propaganda Department of the Special Conference.

Results. Socialism “by its very essence is a resolute opponent of all religion” [10, p. 204], – such a statement was contained in the program article “Bolsheviks and the Church”, published in the “Kuban Church Bulletin”. The author sought to uncover the moral foundations of Bolshevism and socialism, to analyze their value side, in his opinion, “the Bolsheviks do not unite people for friendly work for the common good, but on the contrary, divide them and set them on a class struggle, the civil war, in which only a criminal is good, but not a peaceful, honest worker” [10, p. 205]. To justify their violence and crimes, the author believed that the Bolsheviks “must root out religious faith”, because the Bolsheviks and socialists in general are characterized primarily by the desire for hedonism, the satisfaction of all possible needs, including those that, according to Christian doctrine, are sin, and for socialists are “heaven on earth” [10, pp. 203–205].

In another article of the Kuban Church Herald, its author N. Tikhomirov saw the root of the moral disintegration of society today in the popular ideology of socialism. “The same anti-Christian direction we find in the left currents of socialism, with its preaching of equality and fraternity, and in fact with the proclamation of the dictatorship of the proletariat, i. e., in essence, the same right of the strong. [...] Nietzschean or socialist morality bears the imprint not of progress, but, on the contrary, of regression, not only does not elevate man, but belittles him, does not make him freer, but, on the contrary, enslaves him”, – argued N. Tikhomirov [11, p. 57].

Professor of the Don University, member of the Provisional High Church Administration of Southeast Russia, and later priest P.V. Verkhovsky in the Kuban Church Herald in 1919 blamed the intelligentsia for the spread of socialist ideas. He wrote: “The very teachings in natural science, which so strongly influenced the undermining of the religion authority and the development of the materialism metaphysics, with conclusions from it in the direction of socialism and Bolshevism, in science itself are either abandoned or radically revised” [12, p. 3–4].

Nevertheless, the intelligentsia feeds the people with ideas that are presented as “the last word of science”, although they are outdated 50–100 years ago.

In an article published in the journal Church and Life, on the problems of the attitude of the laity to the clergy and the material support of pastors, Professor P.V. Verkhovsky noted the reproaches that were hurled at the clergy and analyzed their origin and correspondence to reality [13, pp. 3–4]. Professor Verkhovsky concluded that the bitterness with which the clergy are attacked indicates that they are done by “evil and unbelieving people poisoned by socialism, [...] envy always decides that the neighbour gets more than they should”, he wrote [13, pp. 3–4].

The article “Revolution and the Clergy”, reprinted in “Don Christian Thought” from the “Bessarabian Church Voice”, analyzed the main accusations levied against the clergy. The hostile attitude to its representatives of the masses of the people, defending the gains of the revolution, was connected with the accusation of adherence to the monarchy and resistance to the introduction of the new system. Because of this, the clergy were deprived of their freedom and bullied. This attitude toward the clergy was explained by the lack of understanding of the “spirit of pastoral ministry” by the general population. The Church is not engaged in the organization of the earthly kingdom and does not call for the overthrow of the existing system, because its goal is the Kingdom of Heaven. She should not interfere in the organization of state life, because “it is indifferent for the Church whether the country will be ruled by a czar or a president”, its desire is only that the rulers are Christians and live according to the Gospel law. The Church’s concern for the welfare of the czar’s subjects was expressed in the anointing and crowning of a czar to impart to the czar the gifts of the Holy Spirit, necessary to govern the state, “wisdom, gentleness, and strength”. The misunderstanding of the meaning of the sacred actions gave rise to reproaches of the people against the clergy: “You prayed for him, you supported him, you deceived the people that the czars are God’s anointed, that they have the right to do as they please. The misunderstanding of the nature of spiritual ministry was expressed in the demand that the clergy “participate in gatherings, demonstrations and rallies, and that they have the right to do as they please. The misunderstanding of the nature of spiritual ministry was expressed in the requirement that the clergy participate in gatherings, demonstrations and rallies, that they shout loudly, harass, and murmur”. However, violent methods should not be used by the clergy. “The clergy should bring peace into life, not strife and protest, as they are often required to do”, the author concluded [14, pp. 194–196].

In the article “How Our Socialist Parties Solve the Question of the Church”, printed in the magazine “Don Christian Thought”, the outlook of the leaders of socialism was characterized as follows: “They, in the words of one writer, “long for an earthly paradise and hate the heavenly paradise”, they would like to eliminate God altogether for the happiness of people” (N. Berdyaev), they would like to bind people more firmly to the struggle for earthly things, and, according to the expression of Berdyaev, socialism is a thirst to arrange this world, not only apart from God, but against Him [15, p. 260]. The author of the article warned that the ideology of socialism is hostile to Christianity, and the statement contained in socialist programs about freedom of religion and the fact that faith is a private matter for everyone, is only a political trick aimed at ensuring that the masses do not oppose socialist ideas [15, p. 261]. As a consequence, the support of Orthodox Christians for socialist parties, the author of the article argued, is a dangerous and harmful delusion.

A famous Don priest Vasily Kozhin devoted an article to the question of the relationship between Christianity and socialism. He wrote that “the socialist worldview is a kind of new religion”, which they want to replace all existing beliefs, including Christianity. An attractive feature in socialism is the call for the protection of the lower classes of society, so many religious people saw in it something akin to Christianity, and are ready to join the socialist parties. In fact, it is not so, “and between Christianity and Socialism there is a profound difference, in the very foundations”. Socialism reduces the whole meaning of life to earthly material values, while Christianity reduces it to ideal values. “External goods in themselves are of no essential importance to the Christian”. Socialism has therefore gained strength and power over modern minds, striving by means of social revolution and class struggle to achieve what they desire, because the love for the brothers in faith has weakened among Christians, the desire to make sure that there are no needy among them. “Therefore”, concludes Priest Kozhin, “all the efforts of the united forces of the Church should be directed toward clarifying the true Christian view of the attitude toward material goods, and the broad organization of assistance to the needy”. In addition, Fr. Vasily believed that the equation of all in material goods is not feasible [16, p. 82].

Socialism's view of marriage and family was also criticized. In particular, he criticized the "patriarchal theory" and the ideas of K. Marx, F. Engels and F. Bebel, who promoted it, as consisting of fantasies and hypotheses [17, p. 259]. Marriage according to socialists does not "have any moral meaning, no moral purpose, but is understood only as a means of satisfying the lust of the flesh", cohabitation or "wild marriage" is preached. Thus, man returns to the state of barbarism from which they was brought by culture. Parental education is abolished: "the child is soon given to a kindergarten, and then to a state educational institution, where the purpose of education is more accurately achieved" [17, c. 261].

In response to criticism of socialism, liberal newspapers printed anti-Church articles depicting the Church as a symbol of everything reactionary, cosmic and backward, an institution that cannot revive and exist in the new reality [18].

At the Southeastern Russian Church Council, whose main decision was the establishment of the Provisional Higher Church Administration, held in May 1919 in Stavropol, the ideas of the necessity of the Church's public condemnation of socialism were voiced. The Department on Church Discipline expressed the opinion that the Council should compose a proclamation to Orthodox people defining socialism as a materialistic and anti-Christian doctrine. However, this did not happen. At the same time, the messages of the Council condemned Bolshevism as an anti-human phenomenon [19, p. 107; 20].

Metropolitan Platon (Rozhdestvensky) of Kherson and Odessa held a special position on the relationship between Bolshevism and socialism. In 1919, in his second message, addressed to "all archbishops and spiritual leaders of all Christian churches, all brotherhoods and all Christian communities in general, all the United States of America", he noted, "Everything that has happened in Russia has nothing to do with socialism, communism, or any other kind of society building, as it happens among the nations. This was established at the Socialist Congress in Bern, which condemned Russian Bolshevism as organized terror and a complete denial of the revolution" [21, p. 73].

Forms of counteraction to the spread of the ideology of socialism in the South of Russia can be divided into ideological and practical.

The traditional form of counteraction was, of course, the ideological struggle against socialist ideas through preaching and publications in the periodical press.

Thus, Rutkevich in the newspaper "Kuban Church Herald" wrote: "It is time for every pastor in his parish to work hard to explain the doctrine of Bolshevism in a word understandable to the people and to warn his flock from the abyss into which they can fall in search of the earthly paradise, land and will promised by the Bolsheviks" [22, p. 53].

Ambitious tasks set for itself the "First Religious-Philosophical Society of New Russia" under the chairmanship of V.I. Zyzykina, which sought to unite religiously-minded secular circles and the clergy in order to wage an ideological struggle with materialist views, unbelief, and "therefore, with the ideology of socialism. The blessing of Bishop Arseny (Smolents) of Rostov was requested for this joint work with the clergy" [22, p. 53].

A significant role in the struggle against socialism was assigned to the parties and organizations of the white South. For example, as an alternative to socialist parties, it was proposed to organize a party of Christian socialism.

Priest Cherniavsky considered the People's Freedom Party quite acceptable to the clergy as corresponding to the ideals of Christianity. The party consisted of centrists who supported the Volunteer Army and the Armed Forces of Southern Russia. It is noteworthy that at the same time he believed it was necessary for the clergy itself to organize a party. Such an association should, according to Fr. Chernyaevsky, strive to realize not only political and social, but also religious and moral tasks. As an example, the priest cited the party of "Christian Socialism" that existed at that time in Europe [14, pp. 197–198].

The Brotherhood of the Life-Giving Cross of Fr. Vladimir Vostokov also proclaimed its task "to participate in the defense of the holy Orthodox faith, in helping those persecuted for the holy faith and in the struggle against unbelief, materialistic socialism and all violence by word and deed to the best of their ability" [23, pp. 12–13]. He was also created in Novocherkassk right-wing publishing house «For Holy Russia», which issued a clerical-monarchical magazine "Vechevoi blagovest" [24, p. 215].

As a direct and immediate practical measure to combat socialism, the idea was put forward to oppose it with a revived and specially organized parish, parish community.

The Local Council of 1917–1918, which the famous historian P. G. Rogozny rightly defined as a central event in the life of the Russian Orthodox Church in the twentieth century [25, p. 216], actualized the problems of parish revival. Projects for the development of the parish as a church and community center were also heard during the meetings of the South Russian Orthodox Church Council, and the same topic became one of the central ones in the work of the All-Union Church Council. There was an increase in the importance of the parish community in the political programs of right-wing and centrist parties and supra-party alliances – they saw in it a space for cooperation between the Orthodox Church and the political sector, as well as an excellent alternative to socialist ideas.

The most popular in the circles of Orthodox clergy in Southern Russia was such a rather large organization as the Union of Russian National Communities, which emerged in 1918. The Union condemned socialism as an anti-Christian, anti-moral and anti-state doctrine, and proclaimed itself as an anti-socialist union [26, fol. 83 ob.]. The parish also played a key role in its political concept.

On July 14-20, 1918, a congress of the Union of Russian National Communities was held in Essentuki. The Orthodox clergy, who participated in its work, said that in order to recreate Russia it is necessary to restore the religious feeling of the Russian people. “The parish should go from a passive state, conditioning only the religious needs of the population to active work” – recounted the content of the discussions at the Congress analysts of the Political Chancellery at Denikin’s Special Council [26, l. 76]. The congress also discussed measures for the moral revival of the population, recognized the need for broad public education, public education and health care.

It follows from the same analytical note that the involvement of the clergy gave the union “a ready, cheap agency in the villages in the form of a cadre of priests, which will play a huge role in the fight against the socialist-revolutionaries, on the side of which the majority of the rural population” [26, fol. 85 ob. [26, l. 85 ob.]. “The idea of using for political purposes the Parish and the Clergy as a bulwark against socialism, which only nationalism and religion can oust from the people, was first put forward in 1905, but then, not having met with any sympathy in society, did not receive any development. Now its appearance will be very timely, because due to the turning point that has occurred in the direction of religion and nationalism in broad circles of society, this idea is becoming very popular”, – reported in the above-mentioned document [26, fol. 76 ob.].

In August 1919, under the influence of the Union of Russian National Communities, a meeting of the clergy of Rostov and Nakhichevan-na-Donu was organized, at which the clergy decided to participate in its work as actively as possible. At the same time, its potential to fight against the socialist parties, particularly the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries, was noted. Representatives of the party were able to establish cells in the food organizations, and, by receiving contributions from their income, acquired a strong position in the supply apparatus. It was considered possible to fight them only by ousting them from the food business, which would destroy their influence on the masses. It was supposed that the parish could become the center around which food organizations should arise, with the aim of supplying the population with necessities at below-market prices. These shops, as it was pointed out, could become a powerful propaganda tool [26, p. 113].

In October, the Union was busy discussing the issue of organizing people’s cooperatives. For this purpose, with the support of the boards of trustees, such cooperatives were established in some parishes – Nikolskaya and Kazanskaya churches in Rostov-on-Don [26, l. 243].

Opinions of members of the pastoral meeting of Rostov clergy, held on October 22, 1919, regarding the limits of assistance of parishes to national communities were divided: the majority advocated broad assistance, the minority advocated a passive attitude to the work of national communities [26, l. 113]. Supporters believed that cooperatives would serve to bring parishioners closer together and would be a powerful means of combating costliness and speculation [27]. The idea of involving the clergy in the creation of a network of parish cooperatives was opposed by Professor P.V. Verkhovsky (a member of the Provisional Higher Church Administration), who emphasized that “the creation in parishes by representatives of Russian national communities and cooperatives, and various cultural and educational institutions is acceptable, but without the direct participation of the clergy”, the vocation of the clergy – “to awaken souls” [27]. B.Y. Maltsev, a member of the Council of the Union of Russian National Communities, objected to this, seeking to prove that the union of the Union and the clergy in the work “to raise the cultural and economic level of parishioners” is simply necessary. The majority of those gathered supported this position by voting. On the initiative of Bishop Arseny (Smolents), a commission was formed to search for ways of cooperation, which, incidentally, included Professor Verkhovsky, as well as the chairman of the “First Religious and Philosophical Society of New Russia” V.I. Zyzykina [27].

At a meeting of Rostov clergy on October 31, 1919, presided over by Bishop Arseny, a full agreement was reached with the clergy on the tactics of work in the field, a provision was finalized on the opening, with the assistance of the Union of parish and Russian national cooperatives, whose members could be Russian Orthodox people. It was proposed to include in the same Union and mixed cooperatives in the national sense, if all members of the board and 2/3 of the total number of members would be Russian Orthodox [26, fol. 257 ob.].

In October 1919, the work of the Union at the district meetings of clergy and laity of Rostov-on-Don under the chairmanship of the Union. Rostov-on-Don under the chairmanship of Taganrog Bishop Arseny gave good results. The developed charter of the parish cooperative at St. Nicholas Church was submitted to the government for approval [26, fol. 286 ob.].

The ideas of organizing national communities and cooperatives under them found an echo among the Old Believer clergy of the North Caucasus. The Caucasian Old Believer Bishop Theodosius was particularly responsive to them, sending three of his representatives to the congress of the Union of Russian National Communities in Essentuki. The Old Believers also cooperated with the Orthodox, even organized a joint procession in Essentuki [26, l. 309].

To summarize, we can conclude that common to the clergy of southern Russia was a categorical rejection of Bolshevism and socialism as hostile to Christianity, immoral ideologies based on crude materialism. They wanted to oppose them with a national idea, a national community united around the parish. The clergy supported the allied parties fighting socialism and Bolshevism, as well as the idea of parish revival as the basis for the revival of society. A project was being developed to organize a network of parish cooperatives to combat the influence of the SRs, who had created a good supply apparatus and were therefore very popular. To a large extent, all these projects were based on the assumption that the White Movement would win the Civil War as a natural ally of the Church, on whose active support Denikin, Kolchak, Yudenich, and Wrangel could fully rely in their struggle against Soviet power. The victory of the Bolsheviks in the Civil War also meant the collapse of all the preliminary calculations of the opponents of socialism from the camp of the Orthodox clergy. The results of the Civil War, as the perceptive St. Petersburg researcher S.L. Firsov subtly noted, meant “the entry of the Church into the new, Soviet world, in which the goal was proclaimed the establishment of the ‘Kingdom of God’ on earth” [28, p. 83]. The workers of the Church had to struggle for existence.

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