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Original article



The Orthodox Parish as a Social Unit during the Civil War in the White-controlled Territory of Southern Russia

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Abstract

Introduction. The regional aspects of parish reform during the Civil War period have hardly been studied. At the same time, research in this direction will allow not only to recreate a complete picture of the reform of the Orthodox parish in the synodic and post-synodic periods in the dioceses of the Orthodox Russian Church, but also to understand more deeply the processes of social and political activation of the Church in this period, its role in the outcome of the Civil War in Russia.

Materials and methods. The model of parish revitalization that emerged in the process of discussing parish reform in the synodic and post-synodic periods is examined on the basis of White Guard government documentation and church periodicals.

Results. Not only the church community but also the social and political forces of the white South were actively involved in the parochial reform debate. The Orthodox parish in the conditions of the Civil War in the South of Russia appeared in two main ways. On the one hand, it was a factor in the politics of the White movement. On the other hand, there was a comprehension of its significance by ecclesiastical and social thought. Under the influence of White policy, parish revival began to be perceived within the Church as a leader for the restoration of Russian statehood. The emphasis in understanding the functions and significance of the parish finally shifted to its “public” model, understood as a self-governing zemstvo unit.

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

Keywords: Orthodox Russian Church, parish, clergy, parish revival, church reform, sobornost, revolution, Civil War

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Научная статья

Православный приход как общественная единица в период Гражданской войны на контролируемой белыми территориях Юга России

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Аннотация

Введение. Региональные аспекты приходского реформирования в период Гражданской войны почти не изучены. Вместе с тем исследования в этом направлении позволят не только воссоздать полноценную картину реформы православного прихода в соборный и послесоборный периоды в епархиях Православной Российской Церкви, но и глубже понять процессы общественно-политической активизации Церкви в этот период, её роль в исходе Гражданской войны в России.

Материалы и методы. Модель приходского возрождения, сформировавшаяся в процессе обсуждения приходской реформы в соборный и послесоборный периоды, рассматривается на материалах документации белогвардейского правительства и церковной периодической печати.

Результаты исследования. В дискуссии по вопросам приходской реформы активно включилась не только церковная общественность, но и общественно-политические силы белого Юга. Православный приход в условиях Гражданской войны на Юге России предстал в двух основных ипостасях. С одной стороны, он был фактором политики белого движения, с другой, происходило осмысление его значения церковно-общественной мыслью. Под влиянием политики белых приходское возрождение стало восприниматься и внутри Церкви как локомотив воссоздания российской государственности. Акцент в понимании функций и значения прихода окончательно сместился в сторону его «общественной» модели, понимаемой как самоуправляемая земская единица.

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

Ключевые слова: Православная Российская Церковь, приход, духовенство, приходское возрождение, церковная реформа, соборность, революция, Гражданская война

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Introduction. Researchers of the reform of the Orthodox parish have identified two of its basic models, which had developed by the beginning of the 20th century. The first considered the parish as a self-governing “social unit”, the second looked at it from the institutional point of view, as a part of the diocesan structure with full subordination to the higher institutions [1, p. 879]. Further development of the reform in the period of preparation and holding of the All-Russian Local Council of 1917–1918, went along the path of finding a balance between the two beginnings – social and hierarchical [1, p. 883]. At the same time, the problems of practical implementation of the parish reform in church life in the local dioceses of the Orthodox Russian Church, the impact that the events of the Civil War had on the parish reform and the Orthodox parish, have been little studied. The answer to the question, which of the two above models of the parish was in demand in practice in specific conditions will allow us to understand more deeply the processes of parish reform in the early 20th century, as well as the public role of the Church.

Materials and methods. The model of parish revitalization that emerged in the process of discussing parish reform in the synodic and post-synodic periods is examined on the basis of White Guard government documentation and church periodicals.

Results. Ha To date, there is little historiography on the subject of parish revitalization in the early 20th century. Researchers of political confrontation and socio-cultural changes of the era were the first to pay attention to the parish. Thus, historian V.J. Tsvetkov noted the importance of the Orthodox parish for the White camp as not only a hierarchical, administrative and economic, but also spiritual, educational, and social unit [2, p. 26]. The largest in the white South Russian right-wing nationalist party “Union of Russian National Communities” is devoted to the work of A.A. Chemakin [3, pp. 133–148]. The ideology of the union was to combine the national idea with radical progressivism, which were carried through the parish to the general public.

At the same time, the parish was studied through the prism of the legal and material situation of the parish clergy on the eve and during the events of the Revolution and the Civil War in the works of T.G. Leontieva [4–6] and Y.I. Belonogova [7, 8]. One of our previous works is devoted to the legal and property status of the South Russian clergy after the revolution of 1917, its dependence on the peasantry [9].

In parallel, the topic of parish reform was considered in the framework of studies of church-state relations and the Synodic movement in the Russian Orthodox Church, including their regional aspects. The fundamental work of A.L. Beglov, “The Orthodox Parish at the end of the Russian Empire: state, discussions, reforms” [1], devoted to the topic of parish reform and parish revitalization. He raises the problem of the synthesis of hierarchy and sobornost, and the problem of soborocentricity of church processes on the eve of the Local Council. Regional aspects were not addressed in his work, but are recognized as relevant.

Foreign historiography touches upon the topic of the Orthodox parish only partially, mainly in the context of studying the “Church Revolution” and the Local Council of 1917–1918 (Edward Roslof, Daniel Scarborough, George Kosar, G. Schultz and others.) [10–12].

Despite the coverage of some aspects of this problem in the existing historiography, the problem of parish reform in the synodic and post-synodic periods in the South of Russia has not yet received special scientific consideration. Therefore, in this study we will focus on the discussion on the role of the parish that took place during and after the All-Russian Local Council of 1917–1918, and in which both the church community and the socio-political forces of Southern

Russia participated. We will also find out what role the “white idea” played in the church consciousness’ comprehension of parochial problems.

With the fall of the Synodal system, church reform, including parish reform, began immediately in the dioceses of southern Russia. Diocesan congresses of clergy and laity one after another considered the “parish question”, often forming special departments for this purpose, and made decisions on the establishment of parish church councils. The main task of the parish councils was declared to be the revival of the parish, the ideal for which was the original Christian community [13, p. 36.]. Stavropol clergy saw the revival of the parish on the basis of synodic-canonical principles [14, p. 653]. With the organization of parish councils there was a significant revolution in the system of management of parish property, which was out of the control of the parish, as well as the consistory and diocesan authorities [15, pp. 6–7]. In general, the parish was understood as a social unit, a local government body or a small zemstvo community, and the discussion increasingly shifted towards this understanding.

In the “Stavropol Diocesan Vedomosti” in May, 1918. The Statute on the Orthodox Parish, adopted by the All-Russian Local Council, was published. This was an unofficial publication, as the requisitioning of synodal printers and disruption of communication made it difficult to disseminate the Council’s decrees. Representatives of the Caucasian-Stavropol diocese participated in the second session of the Council, and brought one copy of the Parish Regulations, which was published, with reservations, before the official distribution by the Council Chancellery [16, p. 330].

With the transition of power in Southern Russia into the hands of the Whites, a new page in the history of parish reform was opened. “The parish question” attracted the attention of the political forces of the white camp. In the conditions of the Civil War, the proponents of the idea of the parish community as a public zemstvo unit found the ground for the realization of their ideas in reality.

On July 14–20, 1918, a congress of the Union of Russian National Communities (hereinafter – the Union) was held in Essentuki, where all significant national communities of the Don and the Caucasus were represented, as well as other political organisations – the All-Russian National Centre, the local branch of the Council of the State Association of Russia, the Old Believer communities, and the society “For Russia”. Representatives of Orthodox, canonical and Old Believer, clergy took an active part. The main thesis was that the devastation in Russia was caused by the fall of faith, and therefore, in order to recreate Russia, it was necessary to “restore the religious feeling of the Russian people”, which was best realised through the revival and renewal of church life and the living activity of the parish. The awakening of Russian national consciousness is best accomplished “through Orthodoxy organized into a parish”. Therefore, the parish, in the context of civil strife, must move from a “passive state” catering exclusively to the religious needs of the population to active work, up to and including political interventions. The parish, believed the participants of the Congress, should act on behalf of the Orthodox Russian nation, it can become a platform for the unification of all Russian national parties, their agitation work and political speeches [17, l. 76, 83 ob.¹].

At the South-Eastern Russian Church Council in May 1919, one of the key issues was the question of the organization of the parish community on the basis of the principles laid down by the All-Russian Local Council. For this purpose, a special department was opened within the South-Eastern Russian Church Council. The same prominent place was given to this issue in the activities of the Provisional Supreme Church Administration formed by the Council [18].

Political organizations, whose leaders and members sought to influence the Synod, were not left out of the opportunity to promote their views. Thus, the head of the Union of Russian National Communities V.M. Skvortsov outlined the idea of the need to unite the population by unions of national communities, which would serve the cause of state building and prepare the people for elections to the National Assembly [19, l. 45]. And the parish seemed to him to be one form of such communities. South-Eastern Russian Church Council did not react in any way to the initiatives of the political unions, considering parish revival in a purely ecclesiastical way.

Nevertheless, the Union of Russian National Communities owed its success to the clergy. August 15, 1919. The meeting of the clergy of Rostov and Nakhchivan-on-Don decided to take an active part in the work of the Union, acting through the parish. But they decided not to preach and agitate in their favor from the church pulpit [17, l. 113].

The political potential of the parish was seen as a good alternative to socialist ideas. The reports of the Propaganda Department of the Special Conference noted that the only force that influences the broad social masses and enjoys the sympathy of the population, with which the Socialist-Revolutionaries really have to fight, is the Church [17, l. 77].

The overwhelming part of the clergy evaluated socialism as a doctrine of anti-Christian, anti-moral and anti-state [17, l. 83 ob.]. Therefore, it was necessary to fight against the Esers, who had influence on the masses due to the successful solution of the food question. The idea of the parish as a zemstvo unit, extending its activities to the economic needs of the population, came in handy to drive them out of the food business. Around the parish they wanted to create food organizations with the goal of supplying the population with basic necessities at below market prices. It was believed that these shops would be a powerful agitation tool [17, l. 83 ob.].

¹ Translator’s note: l. and ob. are not translated in the text because these are special labels of State Archive of the Russian Federation. The designation “l.” indicates archive document number. The designation “ob.” indicates the turnover of the document.

The formation of national communities in the occupied territories went quite intensively, “in parallel with the organization of the parish, which was reorganized on the basis of the parish charter, developed by the All-Russian Church Council in Moscow in 1917” [17, l. 125–126]. With the permission of Archbishop Evlogy (Georgievsky) and Archbishop Mitrofan (Simashkevich) congresses of priests in the districts were planned, which should give instructions to coordinate the activities of the Rostov National Community and parish councils [17, l. 206]. The network of cooperatives in villages and towns under the leadership of Kholmok Bishop Evlogy and Archbishop Anthony (Khrapovitsky) was compared to the organization of unification of church parishes and brotherhoods in the western outskirts of the empire against the nationalism of Poles and Catholicism [17, l. 307 ob.].

Another political organisation, the Council for the State Unification of Russia, tried to build itself into the general trend of work with parishes. On October 6, 1919 at a meeting of the SOGOR listened to the reports of Bishops Arseny (Smolents) and Archbishop Evlogy (Georgievsky), protopresbyter G. Shavelsky and a member of the Provisional Supreme Church Administration Professor P.V. Verkhovsky on the organisation of the parish, and acknowledged the need to come to the aid of the clergy in their struggle against corrupting moral manifestations, in particular through participation in the life of parishes [17, l. 210 ob.].

V.M. Purishkevich's All-Russian People's State Party also had its own version of the parish's inclusion in state-political activity. The parish also seemed to him a small zemstvo unit, but it could unite for economic purposes not only the Orthodox, but all citizens without distinction of religion, and on ecclesiastical matters – only the Orthodox [17, l. 74].

The socio-political role that the political forces of the White camp saw in the revival of the parish community influenced church rhetoric. Parish revival began to be perceived within the Church as a locomotive for the restoration of Russian statehood. In church thought there was an active search for a reconciliation of the traditional, customary church view of the parish and its functions with an expanded understanding of its activities, including socio-political and economic interests. Quite a considerable place was given to publications on this subject in church periodicals.

Priest Valentine Svetsitsky wrote that not only one military external force can «gather» the divided Russian land, it is necessary to begin with internal creation, to “gather” its foundation, by which he meant the religious life of the Russian people. There was only one way for this to happen – the organization of parish life. “Parish” is that national Russian organization which alone can lead our country on the great path of new life. «Gather in all the churches not a “political party”», he wrote, “but living souls, and not for prayer alone, but for the strengthening of public life”. The clergy need to start the “reform” with themselves – priests need to become fathers. And “fathers” cannot limit themselves to outward ritual, they must gather their children into a family and work tirelessly to create a “home”. They should delve into both the spiritual and material needs of their children [20, pp. 31–32].

Fr. Valentine believed that the Church cannot stand apart from public life; it must become a social unit. The parish is the ecclesiastical foundation upon which a free Church liberated by the state can be erected. Such a parish, which will be organized into a social unit, can give the Church the strength to reveal the positive content of the freedom that is externally given to it [21, p. 211]. Archpriest V. Svetsitsky also supported the idea of the special importance of the parish in politics. If the parishes unite in alliances, the Church will become a real force in the state, able to influence its policy by displaying its moral power, which is its rightful place in a Christian state. And it will do it “without humiliating itself before the authorities and without seizing power” [22, pp. 12–14].

As in the pre-synodic period, the parish continued to be seen as having economic and educational potential in southern Russia. The economic activity of the parish was understood broadly, and was not limited to charity alone. This included the organization of food aid to the population, and above all to their parishioners. Archpriest P. Rutkevich wrote: “Everyone is now in dire need of it, and speculators are making enormous capital by driving up their prices for variety of food. It is our opinion that a parish well organized could take this matter into its own hands and find experienced and able men for it. <...> Near the church, in the parish community, this business of helping its members should be established” [23, pp. 50–51].

The charitable work of the parish was also deemed necessary to be taken to a new level. Make it regular, organized and ubiquitous. It was proposed to revive it by creating parish church trusteeships at each parish church, as well as charitable brotherhoods that would fight the problem of poverty in the parish, because the army of beggars was increasing every day in the conditions of war [23, pp. 50–51].

However, such a wide activation of the parish, especially its social activities, received a negative resonance, not always meeting the understanding and approval of the secular authorities. The local authorities were not ready for such an active role of the Church and a new form of state-church relations.

For example, the parish council of Shkurinskaya village complained about the difficulties and trials it faced at the beginning of its activities. After the establishment of the parish council, local dissatisfied people resented the fact that there were now two authorities in the village: “the lawful authority of the governor-ataman and the autocratic authority of the parish council”. At the same time, members of the council were sarcastically called “priest's workers”, vilifying rumours were spread, and gossip was spread about the participation in the council of lay women, representatives of the

female half of the parish. The parish priest, as chairman of the parish council, found no better solution than to exclude all women from the council [24, p. 55]. This is despite the fact that councillors were elected, not appointed.

The village societies held on tightly to the church plots and the income from them, unwilling to cede to the parish council, which was little understood by them. At the same time, the secular authorities were issuing instructions and directives to take land from the clergy. The parish councils themselves were often unwilling to tax themselves for the maintenance of the clergy, and thus deprived them of their material support entirely. Such parishes, according to the clergy, were to lose their independence and become attached to neighbouring parishes [25, p. 233].

Another example took place in Armavir, where a brotherhood of St. Nicholas was organised, the leader of which, N.F. Sobolev, even suffered harassment for his ecclesiastical and social activities from the secular authorities, whose representatives did not like the activity of the priest. As a result of public-church activity of this priest and his active interaction with parishioners, the latter showed their public position by appealing to the voters in the City Duma [21, p. 212]. Archpriest G. Lomako wrote that in Armavir parishes were able to hold their representatives in the Duma [26, pp. 251–252].

Still, these were isolated facts. The need for a broad church-society movement was noted by Archpriest Valentine Svetsitsky. The social activity of the parish should, in his opinion, become as integral to its essence as the “treba” in religious life. Only then the Church can become truly free and the question of its new relationship with the state will be solved in practice [21, p. 212].

Discussion and Conclusion. The importance of the Orthodox parish in the synodic and post-synodic periods was revealed in the South of Russia in two main directions. On the one hand, the parish played a role as a factor in the politics of the White movement. On the other hand, there was a comprehension of its significance by ecclesiastical and social thought. The clergy of Southern Russia, as well as of other regions, took part in the canonical resolution of the parish question at the Local Council. The active discussion of all aspects of the parish reform, the clarification of its meaning, and the reception of the decisions on the parish question of the Local Council in the field, taking into account the circumstances of the civil confrontation, did not cease.

Parish functions during this period were actively expanding beyond purely ecclesiastical matters. It was to become not only a cultural, charitable and educational centre, but also an economic and political one. The importance of the parish community in the political programmes of right-wing and centrist parties and supra-party alliances grew – they saw in it a space for cooperation between the Orthodox Church and the political wing, as well as a means of combating socialist influence on the people. Socialism was unequivocally assessed by the clergy of southern Russia in the official field as an anti-Christian ideology. The concept of parish co-operatives was developed to combat it actively. The revival of the parish and its new organisation were associated with a response to the crisis phenomena of state and national life. It was to be the basis for Russia’s revival.

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