

DOI: 10.7596/taksad.v8i2.2147

Citation: Pokotilova, T. E., Sergeeva, A. A. & Ulibina, L. K. (2019). Care for the Poor as a Factor of Russia's Domestic Policy. *Journal of History Culture and Art Research*, 8(2), 326-332. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.7596/taksad.v8i2.2147>

Care for the Poor as a Factor of Russia's Domestic Policy

Tatyana Evgenevna Pokotilova¹, Anzhelika Anatolyevna Sergeeva²

Lubov Konstantinovna Ulibina³

Abstract

The article deals with the problem of genesis and evolution of such a factor of Russian domestic policy as care for the poor. By the particular historical examples it is shown how, under the struggle for power between secular and religious authorities, in the period of completion of the unification of the Russian lands and the establishment of autocracy, the idea of care for the poor promoted by the church developed into ideology. As a church thesis on the necessity to take care of each other and give alms, it provided an opportunity to use the ideology and traditions of charity established in Old Russian society not only for harmonizing and stabilizing social relations and mitigating socio-economic contradictions but also for strengthening the position of the state in struggle for property and power against the Russian Orthodox Church. The continued aspiration of the church to defend its privileges through the ideology of care for the poor as a major means of struggle alongside the manipulation of the idea of care for the poor on the part of the state led to strengthening the patriarchal thesis of poverty blessed by the God in Russian public consciousness.

Keywords: Mercy, Charity, Public care, Care for the poor, the Russian Orthodox Church, State authority, Struggle for property and power, the Old Russian State.

¹ North Caucasus Federal University (NCFU) 1, Pushkina Street, Stavropol, Russia, 355009. E-mail: t.pokotilova@gmail.com

² Saint Petersburg Institute (Branch) of All-Russian State University of Justice, 10th line of Vasilievsky Island, 19, letter A, Saint Petersburg, Russia, 199178. E-mail: anzh-sergeeva@yandex.ru

³ Kuban State Agrarian University named after I.T. Trubilin (FSBEI HE Kuban SAU) 13, Kalinin St., Krasnodar, Russia, 350044. E-mail: ulibinalk@mail.ru

Introduction

In A. Toynbee's point of view, who singled out Orthodox Christian civilization (in Russia) among 21 civilizations, civilization is a closed society characterized by a set of determinative features. He considered religion (and the form of its organization) and territorial basis as the most stable criteria and proved that civilization develops by means of "challenge and response". The issue to be studied in this article is associated with the direct involvement of both the secular authority of the Old Russian State that completed the unification of the Russian lands and the Russian Orthodox Church into its historical realization. And the very process and its result constituted the content of one of the "challenges and responses", according to A. Toynbee (1946). Thus, the authors of this article intend to give reasons for the further study of the history of Russia as history unique in its way by considering the phenomenon of care for the poor as one of the factors of domestic political life of the Old Russian State that, in its turn, determined one of the civilizational features of Russia.

Methods of Research

The authors used the civilizational approach, the main principles of the research included objectivity, historicism, the principle of social approach to the study of history and the principle of a comprehensive study of the problem.

The objectivity principle allowed investigating the patterns that had determined the processes of socio-political development of Russia within Muscovy and analyzing the historical facts in their unity.

The historicism principle allowed identifying where, when and why the studied phenomenon had emerged, how it had developed and its role had changed.

The use of the principle of social approach gave an opportunity to trace the manifestations of social interests of the state and the Orthodox Church in the course of approving and utilizing the ideology of care for the poor as a factor of Russia's domestic policy.

The principle of a comprehensive study ensured the consideration of all aspects and interrelations that had affected the studied process.

The research methods used in the work included structural-functional, historical-comparative and historical-systematic methods.

Discussion and Results

Ivan III (1462-1505) had two main tasks during his great reign: the completion of the unification process, which required a decisive and final fight against feudal practices, and the establishment of the political power of the Grand Duke as a single sovereign leader of a centralized state. Due to historical circumstances, both tasks were interrelated, as successful centralization implies the creation of monarchy (usually in the form of monarchical government), and the latter, in turn, is the key to more consistent unification of the territorial structure of the state (Zolotukhina, 1981, p.11). In the implementation of this political program a special place was occupied by the controversy about the legal regime of the Russian Orthodox Church and its economic independence. This was primarily due to the intensified process of redistribution of land property.

The agenda included the issue of the secularization of church lands. Its favorable solution gave the secular authorities an opportunity not only to achieve a number of social and economic objectives (strengthen the nobility economically, improve the position of trades people, craftsmen and the "state-dependent" peasants, "chernososhitsy", who were in servitude under to the Russian State but not under separate landowners, etc.) but also to make autocracy irreversible. After all, the secularization of church lands destroyed the material base of the church's claims to political authority, thus, increasing the prince's power.

As to the Russian Orthodox Church which in the XIV-XV centuries was caught in the political crossfire but determined the character and forms of this struggle in medieval theologized society, it became rather strong economically due to internal processes that occurred in the Russian state at that time. Possessing strong economic potential the church began to actively seek to strengthen its influence on the state policy. At the end of the XV century, various versions of the theocratic theory were widespread among the church-related groups. One of its interpreters, a member of the Novgorod Coterie of Archbishop Gennady, conveying the position of the church on this issue, explicitly stated that the primacy of spiritual power over secular authority was established by the God (Zolotukhina, 1981, p.14).

A collision between the Grand Duke's power and the church became inevitable, for the interests of the church hampered the unification of the Russian lands. In order to put the church in a position dependent on the Grand Duke's power, it was necessary to undermine its economic might and strike at its ambitious political plans. But the church hierarchs headed by the Novgorod bishop Gennady, who were reactionary towards the Grand Duke's power, mobilized all available forces. They rallied a bloc of reactionary hierarchs against the Great Duke.

That was the reason why the Grand Dukes contrived secularization plans: the success of the centralization policy depended directly on the opportunity to publicly eradicate the church's resistance. However, the church was rather enough. Taking advantage of feudal disintegration, deftly maneuvering between political opponents (for example, the Grand Duke and his brothers, feudal princes), it, in fact, dictated the terms of an alliance to the Grand Duke. Although, the position of the church did not at all coincide with the interests of the Grand Duke's power, the complexity of the social and political situation in the country, both external and internal, (increased resistance of the opposition boyars to the beginning of the XVI century, the lack of solid support from the nobility, a dramatic upsurge of class contradictions) forced the Grand Duke to compromise with the church.

In this situation, the position of the official church was most clearly represented by Iosif (Joseph) Volotskiy, the Prior of the Volokolamsk Monastery. Justifying the legitimacy of the existence of the economically powerful church organization that by moral and law owned lands inhabited by peasants, I. Volotskiy provided the theoretical basis for Iosifism ("Iosiflyanstvo"), which later became the dominant trend in the official ideology and, subsequently, consolidated the union of the state and the church for a long period of existence of the Russian monarchy (Gromov & Kozlov, 1990, p.198). One of the most convincing arguments in favor of the church made the followers of Iosifism was the thesis of a god-bequeathed need to take care of one's neighbors and give alms: "... to the poor and strange and passers-by alms should be given" (Messages of Iosif Volotskiy, 1959, p.152).

It happened when monasteries remained a source of different alms for poor people, when various "meals" and "wakes" were arranged there that were especially important for the salvation of a dead person's soul. Rich people made contributions to monasteries which became the most essential part of income. Thus, the thesis of the necessity to give alms became one of the most convincing arguments for Iosif Volotskiy and his followers to justify morality and legality of the policy of "possessors" monasteries.

That is why Nil Sorskiy, the spiritual leader of "non-possessors", who argued with the followers of Iosifism about monasteries' land ownership, had to pay significant attention to the issue of alms. In his biggest work, "The Charter", Nil Sorskiy considered the issue of alms in two ways: to give alms and to receive alms. Understanding perfectly well that the statement about the necessity of alms inevitably leads to the conclusion that it is necessary to have the means to give alms, he contrasted his view of "non-possessors" to the traditional doctrine of charity established in Orthodoxy, proposing to establish a view on alms not as a piece of bread but as moral spiritual instruction (Arkhangelskiy, 1882, p.137).

Naturally, Nil Sorskiy's views on charity as a cornerstone of his "non-possessors" attitude that implied denial of both monk's individual possessions and property of monasteries could be understood and accepted

neither by Russian society nor by secular authorities due to established worldview stereotypes and social practices. The opportunity to give alms implies inequality, whereas impossibility of alms in conditions of complete non-possession implies equality. In the same way they could not accept the desire of the followers of the "spiritual attitude" to create the phenomenon of a free, independent of the state, not related to economic activity of thinking people and to achieve recognition by society of the right of such people to exist, united in spiritual brotherhood (Gromov & Kozlov, 1990, p.186).

It could be expected that the solution of the question of monopoly and the obligations of the Russian Orthodox Church in the sphere of active charity must be considered in terms of political struggle and not in terms of theoretical and ideological disputes. The Stoglav serves as a proof of our retrospective forecasts. The Stoglav is a document that was created as a result of the Stoglav Council in 1551, which was and still is controversially assessed in the church and civil Russian historiography. It is of interest for us as an attempt to "reform the church in all respects, from the standpoint of church servants, clergy's morals, people and monasticism, the ecclesiastical court and administration, an attempt to define the attitude of the church to the state, an attempt that had been made neither before nor after..." (Lebedev, 1882, p.3).

The Council was summoned by order of Ivan the Terrible who started it in the royal chambers on February 23, 1551; it was held according to the program determined by the sovereign and his "rada" (council). In addition to the tasks of the Council declared in the speeches of Ivan IV who encouraged "not to be lazy about the dispensation of all Orthodox Christianity" (The Stoglav, 1862, p.26), he was concerned with the monastic domains. The Kazan War, unsuccessful by the time the Stoglav appeared, caused this specific task. Any war requires great expenses, an unsuccessful one in particular. The sovereign needed money. The richest legal entity was the church: bishops and monasteries. It was precisely the difference in positions on the question of monastic possessions and the debates about this issue that constituted the internal history of the Stoglav Council.

Out interest in these debates, above all, is concerned with the position of Metropolitan Makariy and his supporters in favor of inviolability of monastic possessions. Justifying the traditional right of the church to property, Makariy referred to Roman and Byzantine history and examples of the Great Russian Princes Vladimir the Sacred and Andrei Bogolyubskiy describing their donations to the church and their rulings regarding church properties. The Metropolitan even pointed to the history of patronage on the part of Khan Uzbek, who had given Metropolitan Pyotr a label on the inviolability of rights and privileges of the clergy, both in the territorial and in other respects.

The resistance of the church was so great at the Council and the sovereign needed money so that Ivan IV had to choose another way and to discuss another question of public life, in solving which moral interests could be combined with state-financial interests. It was the question of monasticism. Why? In clarifying this, we were faced with facts that paint a picture of monastic life and morals in a way that is a little different from that presented by the chronicles and biographies. The veracity of this picture is confirmed by the support which the sovereign received from the "strict monks" Sylvester, Artemiy and Kassian Ryazanskiy, "who saw the source of drawbacks of monastic life in possession of immovable property" (Lebedev, 1882, p.22).

The 8th item of the Tsar's program described the monastic morals in the following way, "... some chernetsy (monks) and priests take the monastic vows for bodily peace, in order to always carouse and to gallivant around villages for their own pleasure. Archimandrites and hegumens reach power through bribery. They do not participate in church services, they do not attend the fraternal meal, but enjoy peace in their cells with various outsiders, place relatives in monasteries and keep them in abundance at the expense of the monastery. Wives and girls go to monastery's cells, young males live in cells unhindered" (The Stoglav, 1862, pp.53-54]. According to the Stoglav, usury and drunkenness were other moral shortcomings of monasteries associated with possession of immovable property. After what we know about the asceticism of monks, it

is very strange to read the sovereign's speech, in which he said very gently that it was desirable for him that monasteries took care of monks at least and helped the state solve the most pressing needs. Such needs, first of all, included church aid to a socially deficient population in all relevant forms. Obviously, not being able to use the property of monasteries directly for the state needs, as a result of opposition by church hierarchs at the Council, Ivan IV tried at least to encourage them to more active and responsible social charity.

This situation is of interest for us from both factual and hypothetical standpoints. It changes our ideas about monasteries in medieval Russia as the focus of moral and humane principles based on the Commandments of Jesus Christ. We believe that it is from the time of the Stoglav that the church began to gradually lose its monopoly on the right to concentrate the whole charity at its disposal. It was due to Christian tradition and church regulations and the strengthening state that entered the arena as the real head of the charity and welfare. As the first step the state tried to force the church to engage in the practical charity work more conscientiously and with its own money but under the state control. In this regard, the question arises: was the described step the beginning of the real concern of the state for the welfare of all its subjects, or was it a convenient situation only to subordinate the church that was too rich and independent and fairly deserved glory of the unifier of Russia to the politically and economically developing state?

Let us follow the logic of Ivan IV in the clarification of the truth in the further development of events at the Council. In wartime, which was the time of the Stoglav Council, there were many captives. Ivan the Terrible drew the attention of the Council to this subject: "They bring captive boyar males and females and all kinds of people from the hordes for ransom, while others leave on their own with the obligation to redeem themselves. But, having no estates, they are not able to pay ransom" (The Stoglav, 1862, p.63). In this case, bishops and monasteries were not called for charity directly, but the sovereign's idea to involve them in the ransom case was very transparent. Continuing to point the Council at people's needs and seeking to reduce the state expenses, Ivan IV offered to discuss the question of worldly begging. "Annual needs such as salt, money and clothing in poorhouses are provided by our (the Tsar's) treasury in all cities, whereas Christ lovers (ordinary laity) give alms".

Secular government was not in charge of poorhouses; on the basis of old charters they were under the authority of church government (bishops and estate managers ("prikashchiki")). These "prikashchiki" put men and women with minor diseases in poorhouses for money. And "real beggars, cripples, rotten, wretched old men endure hunger and frost, nakedness and heat, and all sorrow, they have no place to sleep, they wanders from place to place; due to their strong and contagious diseases, they are always disdained; sometimes they die from neglect without repentance" (The Stoglav, 1862, p.58).

The fact that the struggle of the state against the church for priorities of power was only at the beginning and that the Russian church of the middle of the XVI century was still very strong can be proved by the Stoglav. 35 chapters (6-40) that followed the Tsar's program related in chapter 5 were the Council's "response" that completely ignored the first part of the program in which the issues of morality of monasticism, the interests of charity as well as state-financial and public questions were touched upon. Conversely, the Council "focused solely on the second part of the program that pursued liturgical and canonical interests and dealt with misbehavior of the "white clergy" (those who did not take the monastic vows, married) and laity" (Lebedev, 1882, p.48].

It was exactly the position of the Council on the question of charity that became evidence of a compromise between the ruling party and the followers of Iosifism. The Stoglav Council of 1551 recognized the fact of widespread begging in the country and spoke in favor of organized charity. That is, high priests gathered at the Council, representing a strictly disciplined mass with an influential leader Metropolitan Makariy, indirectly agreed with the recognition of insufficient work of the church in that area, which from ancient times was its prerogative and duty, based on the formula "the wealth of the church is the wealth of the

poor", and, in fact recognized the right of the state to direct the hierarchs in their care for the poor and needy.

Ivan the Terrible, fostering absolutist, unlimited monarchy, based his policy on the principle of strict, centralized, controlled organization of all aspects of public life that had various consequences for different spheres of activity. In this case, the mentioned principle gave an opportunity to use the ideology and traditions of charity that had been established in Old Russian society not so much to harmonize and stabilize social relations and to mitigate socio-economic contradictions, but rather as a driving force for strengthening the state's policies in the struggle for property and power against the Russian Orthodox Church, the institution that was originally called to Russia in order to ensure the formation of statehood.

National disasters that were due to the finalization of the serfdom system in Russia, constant wars and natural catastrophes, as well as the social crisis and the intensification of struggle in high places in the conditions of the dynastic crisis led Russia to social explosion of colossal power plunging it into the Time of Troubles at the turn of the XVI-XVII centuries. Thus, not only the absence of any thoughtful and viable system of combating begging and helping the needy could be seen; the struggle between the state and the church ceased for more than half a century. In addition, the church, remaining one of the biggest and influential institutions of the feudal-serfdom Russia of the XVII century, started supporting a new dynasty and gained influence on its first representatives. All this put aside the solution of the question of the property and political contradictions between the state and the church for the time being. The further evolution of the state system in Russia from estate-representative to absolute monarchy, which ended by the end of the XVII century, resulted in the following: the autocracy not only ceased to need the support of its policies by the representatives of the estates; it strengthened its positions in striving to limit the growth of monastic land ownership based on bureaucracy and the standing army, as well as to eliminate judicial and fiscal immunities of spiritual pastors. Against a background of the weakening Russian Orthodox Church, due to the split and as a result of the processes of secularization of public consciousness, the ideology of care for the poor as the most important argument in the struggle between the state and the church gradually lost its relevance.

Conclusion

On the whole, the ideology of care for the poor served as an important, almost decisive argument in the internal church struggle in striving of the opposing forces, on the one hand, to strengthen the church in the conditions of fierce struggle for power and property against the state, and, on the other hand, to strengthen the church's influence on masses of people, "correcting" them. Moreover, the ideology of care for the poor became an important argument in substantiating both the claims of the church to preserve monastic property in the context of agitated struggle for power against the state. At the same time, this ideology was the means of the state that gradually defeated the church in this struggle and took sides in internal church confrontations depending on the situation. The state had its benefits in any case.

Commitment of the church to defend its privileges through the ideology of care for the poor as a major means of struggle alongside the manipulation of the idea of care for the poor on the part of the state led to strengthening the patriarchal thesis of poverty blessed by the God in Russian public consciousness. At the same time, already in the XIV-XV centuries Europe understood that "wealth is a sign of God's favor, whereas poverty seems to be "hell on earth" (Krasnova, 1997, p.23); this position was consistent with emerging bourgeois society. Moreover, taking into account Russia's backward economy and the above-mentioned facts, it can be noted that traditions and customs of charity that did not comply with the requirements for a modernized state were firmly rooted in Russian society.

Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that the data do not contain any conflict of interest.

References

- Arkhangelskiy, A. S. (1882). Nil Sorskiy and Vassian Patrikeyev, their literary works and ideas in Ancient Russia. Historical and literary essay. Saint Petersburg.
- Gromov, M. N. & Kozlov, N. S. (1990). Russian philosophical thought of the X-XVIII centuries. Moscow.
- Krasnova, I. A. (1997). Business people of Florence in the XIV-XV centuries: occupations, way of life, common mindset (PhD thesis). Stavropol.
- Lebedev, N. I. (1882). The Stoglav Council (1551): Experience in relating its inner history. Moscow.
- Messages of Iosif Volotskiy (1959). Text prepared by A. A. Zimin and Ya. S. Lur'ye. Moscow-Leningrad.
- Nil Sorskiy's Traditions and Charter (1912). Moscow.
- The Russian legislation of the X-XX centuries (in 9 volumes). (1985). Vol. 2. Moscow.
- The Stoglav (1862). Kazan.
- Toynbee, A. J. (1946). A Study of History. London: Oxford University Press.
- Zolotukhina, N. M. (1981). Iosif Volotskiy. Moscow.