

Renovationism (Obnovlenchestvo) as a Theological Instrument for the Adaptation of the Russian Orthodox Church to the Socialistic Revolution

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Abstract. In the article shows that the October Revolution brought about profound transformations in Russian society, which posed a serious challenge to the Russian Orthodox Church. The answer to this challenge was the ideological and theoretical activity of theologians, aimed at adapting the Russian Orthodox Church to these transformations. The theologians of Renovationism developed the principles of the social ethics of Orthodoxy, which allowed the church to adapt to the new social realities that emerged as a result of the October Revolution. One of the main tasks of Orthodox theology of that time was interpreted by the Renovationists as the task of religious and moral consecration of the October Revolution.

1. Introduction

The first attempts to renew traditional religious consciousness in Russia using the methodology of Western philosophy, history and psychology began in the middle of the XIX century. They resumed, but on a completely different basis, in connection with the revolutionary events of 1905, which exacerbated the search for the place of the Church and Church Christianity in the modern cultural and socio-political life of the country. Within the Church itself, there were also reasons for the crisis that led to the emergence of the reform movement – a social stratification among the clergy, an imperfect system of education in the theological school, a violation of the canonical management of the Church, its social passivity.

The relevance of the study of this problem is determined by the transformations taking place in Russia in all spheres of public life, including in the spiritual and world-view sphere. The church as a social institution, in order to maintain its influence in society, is forced to respond to these transformations, determine its attitude to social transformations and seek its place in fundamentally new social conditions. Efficient tool of the church's response to social processes is theological

modernism. Religious modernism reinterprets many fundamental categories of Orthodox faith, including the concept of God, the supernatural, and religion. He recreates the world-view of modern man, his moral searching, vital and practical positions. At present, Russian society is undergoing a liberal democratic revolution and the Russian Orthodox Church has the task of adapting to new social conditions. In solving this problem, it can rely on the experience of modernization of social attitudes, which at the beginning of the XX century was developed by renovationism.

2. Methodology and literature review

In the humanities literature, a number of works are devoted to the study of the ideological, theoretical and social sources of renovationism both of direct participants in this movement: the church historian, professor of theology B.V. Titlinov [1], archpriest A.I. Vvedensky [2] and independent historians of the Russian Orthodox Church: A.I. Kuznetsov, P.K. Kurochkin, A.A. Shishkin, S.V. Troitsky, D.V. Pospelovsky, V.N. Tsypin, O.Yu. Vasilyeva, V.Yu. Vorontsova. One of the main issues of this problem: the influence of previous social movements in the field of church modernization on the emergence of renovationism. A.I. Kuznetsov wrote that “the renovationist schism in the Russian Church was the logical outcome of the church renewal movement, whose ideas were born in the depths of the nineteenth century, which is rich in a diverse aspiration for a critical reappraisal of values” [3, pp.155-156]. P.K. Kurochkin evaluated “renovationism” as a variant of the Russian reformation [4]. A.A. Shishkin interpreted the theological modernism of renovationism as an intention to hold back the ideological gap between the believers and the Church, to bring together the ideals of Christianity and socialism [5]. B.V. Titlinov insisted on the organic connection of renovationism with the «Moscow Religious and Philosophical Society», which existed in the early 20th century. [6]. V.A. Tsypin also expressed the view that there is a close connection between the church and reform movement of 1905-1907 and renovationism [7]. Shkarovsky, in contrast of Tsypin gives Renovationism positive assessment and supposes that “currently the Russian Orthodox Church faces an acute internal crisis” [8, p.64]. S. Troitsky held the opposite position, believing that the “origins of renovationism are in the church policy of the Bolsheviks” [9, p.99], this position was shared by O.Yu. Vasilyeva, who put forward the thesis about the organization of the “‘renovationist schism’ of the State Political Administration (GPU) in order to divide the Church into groups” [10]. D.V. Pospelovsky acknowledged that the programs of “‘32” capital priests and the platforms of various social and Christian ‘unions’ after 1917 and the programming concepts of the ‘renovationist’ schism had much in common” [11, p.66]. I.V. Vorontsova considers renovationism as a kind of Christian modernism and concludes that “Russian Christian modernism, being deeply integrated into the course of history of the XX century, was a social movement that evolved under the influence of the main events of the 1st quarter of the XX century, showing its activity in historical modernization of Russia in all the most important periods of 1901-1917” [12, p.23]. E.V. Belyakova pointed ideals of renovationism have the political subtext [13].

It must be recognized that a certain material has been accumulated in the study of renovationism, but the problem of the social doctrine of renovationism, designed to adapt the Russian Orthodox Church to the socialist revolution, has not received proper background.

The purpose of the article: to explore renovationism as a kind of theological modernism, which acts as a tool of ideological and theoretical support for the adaptation of the Russian Orthodox Church to the socialist revolution.

To solve this problem, a cultural and historical approach was used to clarify the relationship of the socio-cultural context and the situation in the spiritual and world-view sphere.

3. Results

As history would have it that the Russian Orthodox Church, as a result of the radical transformation of public life in 1917, was forced to seek its place in fundamentally new social conditions and develop an ideological justification for its activities in a socialist society. Until the end of 1917, the Church leadership believed that the Soviet government was weak and would not take decisive action against

the Church and its interests, fearing the wrath of the religious people. Until mid-December 1917, the specific measures taken by the new government against the Church were limited to the closure of some of the front churches and churches attached to state institutions in the capital. Then the government began to implement regulations that put the Church in strict conditions of various prohibitions and restrictions. On January 20, 1918, a decree was passed known as the “Decree on the separation of Church from state and school from Church”. The authorities of the Church, closely associated with the ruling elite of imperial Russia, represented by the newly elected Patriarch Tikhon (Bellavin), embarked on the path of struggle with the Soviet regime. In the most acute form, this struggle took place during the periods of the Civil War and the confiscation of church treasures to help the starving in the Volga region. On February 28, 1922, Patriarch Tikhon published a message in which the confiscation of treasures was exposed as blasphemy, bringing anathema to its participants, and the clergy and the religious were recommended to oppose its implementation in every possible way. In retaliation, the Soviet government brought to justice a number of prominent figures of the church for concealing treasures, including Patriarch Tikhon.

In connection with the arrest of Tikhon and the open anti-Soviet position of the authorities of the church, unrest began inside the church, which ended with an internal schism. A broad social movement has been formed in the Russian Orthodox Church for the canonical, political, and democratic reorientation of the church called “renovationism” (*obnovlenchestvo*). Through the efforts of the leaders of renovationism: archpriest A.I. Vvedensky, archbishop Antonin (Granovsky) and archpriest V.D. Krasnitsky, an ideological and theoretical justification for the modernization of church life was developed, the basis of which was the left-wing radical social doctrine of the church, justifying the need for the church to move to positions of cooperation with the Soviet government and support the ideas of socialism.

The social doctrine of the renovationists was justified on the basis of the concept “on the dignity of Christianity and the unworthiness of Christians”, in accordance with which it is necessary to distinguish between the church and ecclesiasticism. According to A.I. Vvedensky, “the church of the Lord is holy and unshakable, ecclesiasticism is always relative and sometimes erroneous, temporary... The church is a social organism and therefore inevitably falls into ecclesiasticism” [14, p.8]. How did it happen that the “holy church” was struck by “ecclesiasticism”? He tries to explain the theology of renewal with the help of the image of a bird in a golden cage. According to A.I. Vvedensky, “Christ brought into the world the idea of universal love, and this idea, by virtue of its irresistible attractiveness, quickly conquered the world. The bearer of the idea of love – the Christian church – received a huge influence. Those in power wanted to take advantage of this influence, who wished to turn the church into their ally. Princes, kings, emperors bring loot, gold and silver, jewelry, all they give to the church, color its domes, and here it is in a cage” [14, p.8]. The question arises: does this not mean that the church is forever enslaved by these forces and is no longer able to preach the truth? No, according to the ideologist of renovationism, being “in a cage”, the church was significantly deformed, but thanks to the saints and the righteous, it did not lose its holiness. There were always living forces in the church who wanted to change this situation, but they were negligible. Now, when, thanks to the revolution, the old forms of statehood collapsed, it was time to drop the golden chains from the church and restore its appearance in the form that Christ, the saints and the righteous gave it. And on the basis of these considerations, Vvedensky formulates the main idea of renewal: “The face of Christ was soiled, stained with their unclean kisses. It is necessary to erase this human dirt. It is necessary to destroy all falsification of the church. The gospel must appear in its pristine purity and beauty, in its clear simplicity. The attacks of Byzantism, desecrating the church with an alliance with the state, should be swept away not by a bold but boldly loving hand. It is necessary to liberate the church. It is necessary to review all the treasures of the church and understand what is God’s and what is human tinsel” [14, p.29].

The renovationists warmly welcomed the October Revolution, judged the actions of the church authorities and proclaimed a course for cooperation with the Soviet government. Acceptance of the ideas of the socialist revolution and unequivocal support for the policy of the Soviet regime was

interpreted by supporters of the Orthodox position of the Russian Orthodox Church as a new form of politicization of religion, the creation of a kind of “golden cage” for the church. Objecting to the orthodox, the ideologists of renovationism denied the political thrust of their teachings. “We have always fought against all politics because our business and our policy are the same: to love and serve with love to God and the world... The church serves the world with love. It should not interfere in the political game, it cannot stain its white robe with political posters” [14, p.29], said A.I. Vvedensky. However, the renovationists were faced with the task of formulating the theological foundations of their political orientation. And this was done through the ethization of the social doctrine of the church. According to the ideologues of renovationism, the church is not a political organization, but it cannot be outside of life. And modern life is characterized by a keen struggle between capital and labor. What should the church do under such conditions, can it say, I don’t interfere in politics, asks rhetorical questions A.I. Vvedensky and then answers, in a sense, yes. But, in our opinion, the affirmation of moral truth is the most important duty of the church. Thus, the theology of renovationism formulates the concept of social ethics of Christianity, which, in their opinion, allows the church to invade the field of politics, remaining within the framework of ethical teaching. In the theology of renovationism, from the standpoint of social ethics, the religious and moral consecration of the October Revolution is carried out. In their opinion, the principles of the original Christianity are clearly expressed in the ideas of the October Revolution, which means that the Church must accept the correctness of the social revolution committed by the revolution and actively bring this truth to life through church means available to it. This attitude was clearly expressed in the appeal to the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, convened by the renovationists in 1923, Of the Local Council of the Russian Orthodox Church, “The Great October Revolution enforces the great principles of equality and labor by state methods, which are also found in Christian teaching. Throughout the world, the strong crush the weak. Only in Soviet Russia the struggle against this natural lie began. The Council believes that every honest citizen should actively stand among these fighters for human truth, fully implementing the great beginnings of the October Revolution” [15, p.8].

4. Conclusion

Any religion in the course of its development can not be subject to significant or partial changes. Revisionist processes that naturally accompany differences of each religious system. In the Russian Church history of the past and present century, the concept of "religious renewal" is perhaps one of the most controversial and painful.

At the beginning of the renovationism, members of the movement insisted on the need to revive religious feelings, return to the Apostolic beginnings of Church life, to the early Christian experience of the development of the initiative of the ordinary clergy and laity. Socio-economic development of society of Churches renovationists of the early XX century saw in the form of the construction of the Kingdom of God on earth—in other worlds the creation of an authentic socio-cultural space in which religion occupied a dominant position. Hence originates the idea of the need to develop in Russia a broad Christian community, which was understood by the leaders of the *obnovlenchestvo* as “a system that should elevate all to the moral level of the Church” and contribute, in their opinion, to the victory over the “triumphant heresy of our days” — the principle of separation of religious from the public sphere of life [16, p.79]. S.V. Troitsky drew attention to the similarity between Russian Renovationists and Western (Catholic) modernists – it is that there is nothing in religion that is not capable of change, including dogma, Church, cult. However, the Catholic “modernism fights against... the connection of Catholicism with scholasticism... raising it on the level of dogma, and has the character of a theoretical Orthodoxy... never built the inventions of human wisdom on the same level with divine truth, and because our movement – not breaking away from the Church the source of truth, fighting for the realization of this truth... and has the character of practical” [17, p.33]. In the post-revolutionary period, the Russian Orthodox Church found itself in a tragic situation due to the change in the policy of the Soviet government aimed at the destruction of Orthodoxy. L.E. Shaposhnikov said that since the

50-s of XX century began the modernization of the Orthodox ideology, highlighting the problem of the relationship between Church and society [18, p.199].

The historical merit of the renovationists to the Russian Orthodox Church consists in the fact that they developed the basic principles and arguments for combining the social ethics of Christianity with a socialist orientation, which were later used by Orthodox theologians, making it easier for them to adapt to activities in a socialist society. The same principles are used by the modern authorities of the Russian Orthodox Church, as evidenced by the document adopted by the Council of Bishops in 2000, "Fundamentals of the Social Doctrine of the Russian Orthodox Church" [19].

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