

RELIGIOUS SITUATION IN POST-SOVIET RUSSIA: TOWARDS THE ANALYSIS OF THE PRO-ORTHODOX CONSENSUS

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Abstract

This paper is dedicated to the theoretical analysis of the religious phenomenon of modern post-Soviet Russian society using the example of the so-called pro-Orthodox consensus. The pro-Orthodox consensus became relevant in the 1990s and endured until the end of the 2000s. In the context of major changes in late modern societies, the religious structure became increasingly complex while social reflexivity gained more autonomy. Sociologists and other scientists introduced the concept of the “reflexive attitude towards religion”. This concept means that in late modernity an individual conceives a sum of socially significant manifestations of everything implied and incorporated in the concept of “religion” and its derivatives. This attitude towards religion is not correlated with religious practices, religious belonging and religious experience as such. On the contrary, it is possessed by any person regardless of his/her inclusion in the religious context or his/her own religious identification. The result of such a religious structure is the fact that in the world of late modernity the epicenter of religious inequalities lies in the symbolic and communication sphere related to religion and its relationship with social institutions such as culture, education, ideology, morality and family.

The authors present the idea that those who “gain” most from the emerging religious inequalities are those who present themselves as supporters or opponents of certain religious initiatives, groups or symbols. Therefore, special significance lies in cultural and symbolic types of capital which are not concentrated in the circles of active believers now but spread widely among a broad mass of sympathizers of certain religious trends. The authors attempt to correlate the mentioned types of religious/denominational capital with new sorts of inequalities: inequalities on social networks and so-called situational (trend-related) inequalities. On the basis of this, the authors suggest the criteria for evaluating the vitality (sustainability) of modern religious feelings, including short-term (the general public’s support for certain religious initiatives), medium-term (self-identification with the denomination(s) of socially prestigious social groups) and long-term sustainability (shaping the image of future from the perspective of a particular religious position).

Keywords

Pro-Orthodox consensus in post-Soviet Russia, religious inequalities, religious situation, reflexive approach to religion, modern social changes.

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1. Introduction

The pro-Orthodox consensus is a unique phenomenon of social consciousness and mass psychology which characterized a relatively long period of creating the religious situation in Russia following the dissolution of the Soviet Union – approximately from the late 1990s to the mid or late 2000s. It appeared in front of our eyes and authoritatively introduced correctives into social processes and relationships: paradoxically, it is “virtual” in its form and completely material in its consequences. It can be said that this phenomenon has become a significant component of the social capital of the largest religious organization in Russia, the Russian Orthodox Church - Moscow Patriarchate. Consequently, this has had a significant impact on the development of religious, socio-political and global situation in Russian society. However, sociologists’ interest in this phenomenon is not limited only to specific aspects of the relationship between the secular mainstream on the one hand and the dominant denomination in Russia on the other hand. Namely, it can be reasonably assumed that the “pro-Orthodox consensus” is popular not primarily because of its reality as a social fact. The pro-Orthodox consensus has attracted researchers’ attention much more because of its specific range and derived socio-political significance. However, the mark of the denominational consensus is not only left by Orthodoxy but also by any other religion and it spreads much further than its direct influence does. Therefore, examining this concept appears to be a proper laboratory for studying this new kind of relationship with religion. This relationship with religion is the relationship without participating (such as, for example, participating in a religious ritual). However, this does not mean that this relationship is less important when making life decisions at the personal or social level than the “classical” introduction of people into the religious community and their inculturation into the symbolic space of the religion and cult. The phenomenon of the modern relationship of people with religion and church is particularly relevant in view of the problematic complex of social inequalities in modern society in the last decade. It has been recognized as a global tendency, similarly to the issues related to social changes and ecological and information technology risks. This indicates that modern conditions transform the very concept of the “social basis” of significant social institutions, cultural meanings and subjects representing them. In order to have a broad impact on society, a religious organization does not longer require a significant number of people engaged and employed as religious or active believers. Their number can be relatively small, since there are a significant number of people in the background comprising a respectable “periphery” of layers and groups known as “sympathizers”, the “approving” or sometimes merely “not intruding” citizens. If this “substitution” is stable, universal and functional, it may represent a practical, research and theoretical problem for sociology and related socio-humanistic disciplines.

2. Methodology

The main methodological “strongholds” in examining this issue are sociological approaches from the aspect of reflexivity and social inequality. The reflexive approach helps us better understand what happens to the subject of our research, while the approach based on social inequality enables us to specify how our research subject is manifested in the actual social life with all its practical consequences and outcomes. In the last few decades, the phenomenon of reflexivity has become a significant form of social activity and the study of this phenomenon has developed into a separate field of social research. Traditional matrices for making decisions depreciate quickly both due to the frequency

of social changes and due to the reduced impact of the institutions which support them (Giddens, 1990; Krupkin, 2010). Specific weight of the reflexive component has significantly increased in the structure of social activity at all levels of subjectivity. On the other hand, this increases the total attention directed at it in different spheres of social life. Among other things, reflexivity means redirecting attention towards the intermediary elements of the attitude to the subject. These elements are gradually “reified” thus gaining independent or sometimes central significance and moving themselves from the category of means to the category of aims (Golitsyn & Petrov, 2005). This phase should include the social evaluation of religion or denomination.

In traditional and early modern societies, reflexivity fiercely determined the positions of individuals and groups regarding their attitude towards religion which was, on the other hand, defined by tradition. In late or (post) modernity, reflexivity has gained autonomy and become very changeable. It is not rare for believers to critically estimate their own religious institutions, organizations and cultural and anthropological characteristics of their fellow-believers and hierarchy. Also, they can show affinities and appreciate the merits of other religious and cultural groups, organizations and traditions. However, in the conditions when these traditions overlap and most of the inhabitants of secularly developed countries are objectively and subjectively “excluded” from them, the crucial point which determines the selection of an individual’s world view and denominational self-determination is the social evaluation of the specific denomination, its cultural matrix and the social group representing it.

Growing inequalities represent one of the key tendencies of the modern world’s social dynamics. Naturally, they are also manifested in the religious field. Revitalized religion is actively woven into politics and vice versa – politics becomes an important factor in religious life and in the relationship between different religions. Symbolic aspects of consciousness materialize themselves in institutional and quasi-institutional forms of social interactions. Religions and denominations compete actively in the market of spiritual ideas and practices. All this actualizes the issue of comprehensive but simultaneously complex evaluation of their real or potential social impact, actual state of affairs and certain changes.

The productive concepts of “cultural”, “social” and “symbolic” capital contribute to the research on religious inequality (Bourdieu, 2002). In late modern society the direct sources of power of any denomination are mostly limited (the exception of Roman Catholicism proves the rule). Thus, the indirect impacts of religious institutions actualize themselves by the principle of “soft power” (Mchedlova, 2012). In this respect, Bourdieu’s idea about the mutual conversion of different types of capital is extremely significant. Since the strength of social attitudes is mainly taken into account (approval and support or disapproval and opposition to a religion and denomination), our attention is focused on the symbolic aspect of capital formed in the religious field of social interaction, i.e. on what is related to the “name”, respectability and reputation of a denomination in a particular social area.

3. Pro-Orthodox consensus in Russia

The activity of people and their organizations can be observed through three main modalities which include all of their diversities: subject modality (constructing and transforming the “external” reality); communicative modality (exchanging information with other subjects) and reflexive modality (self-consciousness). An important feature of late modern society is the increase in communication range. Consequently, increase in

the range and specific weight of reflexivity has led to the term “reflexive modernity”. The general characteristic of modern development is the deconstruction of traditions; in the past there was the balance between reflexivity and tradition (Beck *et al.*, 1994). The process of activating reflexivity is evident at all levels of social subjectivity – from individuals to the state and other macro-social organizations. The structure of the most significant institutional “fields” (economic, political, civic and particularly cultural) is becoming increasingly complex. Latently or sometimes explicitly and irrevocably, each of these fields is filled with a large-scale, autonomous standard of meanings – values, evaluations, emotions and expectations. This standard operates by its own rules which are indirectly correlated with the objective logics of economics, politics or sociability. Of course, the religious sphere is not an exception. A significant part of the reality of the current religious situation seems to account for what people know and think about religion or whether they perceive religion as a type of “objectivised” relationship which they experience during their life to a greater or a lesser degree. A corresponding traditional set of ideas, attitudes and feelings, representing the constant of social consciousness, was neither a practical nor a scientific problem for a long time. This set was understood to simply follow from a specific religious/denominational or non-religious/non-denominational position of an individual or a group. It was “natural” for an Orthodox, Catholic, Muslim or Jew to positively evaluate his/her religion, denominational community, cultural tradition and to have approximately the same ideas as his/her fellow-believers about the role of religion in life and society as a whole. It was equally natural for the members of different denominations to estimate and interpret other people’s sacred things, opinions, community and tradition in a considerably different manner than their own. Similarly, it was normal for non-believers and atheists to evaluate and interpret all these traditions in a mostly sceptical, criticizing and negative manner.

In Russia, since the 1990s up to now, one of the strongest proofs of the revitalization of Orthodoxy has been found in empirical data about the unproblematic pro-Orthodox and pro-religious consensus. Affirmation of Orthodoxy and Orthodox religiosity has been judged mainly considering the data of studying the connection to religion and church by means of Orthodox denominational and personal pro-religious identification of respondents. This type of research data shows that the pro-Orthodox consensus has not been questioned up to recently. This denominational identification or widespread feeling of people has marked a new stage in the development of the religious situation in Russia. In the previous religious stage which lasted for more than sixty years, Russia experienced a forced, state-imposed and prevalent political secularization (Blagojevic, 2005). The term pro-Orthodox consensus was introduced relatively late into Russian scientific literature, although the 1990s research data already showed the changing mood of Russian citizens regarding Orthodoxy. This term was introduced into Russian sociological literature at the beginning of the 21st century by Furman and Kaariainen (2007; 2007a) on the basis of data from their longitudinal research on religiosity of the inhabitants of Russia. These authors state that in the collective consciousness “there is the prevailing general conviction that Orthodoxy represents a higher value; that it is inseparable from Russian self-consciousness and Russian culture and that ROC MP should be trusted and protected even by limiting the activity of other religions if necessary.

Nevertheless, the pro-Orthodox consensus should not be considered in the context of testimonies about personal religiosity of the inhabitants: there is no direct correlation between people's religious beliefs and their adequate religious behaviour and the pro-

Orthodox consensus. In this manner, it becomes clear that the pro-Orthodox consensus exists at the level of a common agreement about the *symbolic* value of Orthodoxy regarding culture, nation and its unity, the state. However, it does not oblige directly either to the belief in God or other dogmatic postulates of Orthodoxy or to the Orthodox way of life (Dubin, 2007)². Owing to this, the prevalent agreement about belonging to Orthodoxy or other traditional religions in Russia has a small specific weight as an indicator of general religiosity of Russian citizens. The discriminatory power of this indicator is low since in surveys a considerable number of atheists and non-believers have a positive stance regarding denomination, most frequently stating they are Orthodox respondents who trust the ROC.

In addition to the symbolic meaning and significance that the pro-Orthodox consensus bears for individuals in modern Russian society, sociology finds its other aspect much more interesting: the aspect and level of consideration based on the relationship of two important social institutions in Russia – the state and ROC. This relationship can be better defined using the term *consolidation* than the term antagonism. For determining the modern phenomenon of the pro-Orthodox consensus, this fact is much more significant and has more serious implications than the unanimous agreement of inhabitants regarding their Orthodox identification. Today we can talk about the mutual interests of these two institutions of Russian society. Having lost the communist ideology after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the state became interested in religion and church considering them to be very important sources of identity. The government identifies itself partly with reference to church and its reliability scrutinized over centuries and by means of its current social and cultural authority. Consequently, the state supports church and its structure heartily both at the level of the central government and at the level of regional governments. On the other hand, church itself needs this support not only for material reasons but also because of the creation of social partnership with the government (Lebedev, 2015). Church invested its spiritual, cultural and nation-building history in this social partnership during the catastrophic economic situation in the country during the 1990s, during the modern global economic crisis and pronounced aggravation of the global political situation which might have serious and immeasurable consequences. Therefore, the issue of denomination in Russia will definitely be socially significant in the future while performing at least three important functions: function of identification, function of national and denominational homogenization and resistance, and function of protecting the culture and identity of Russian society, i.e. Russian civilization.

The impact of the pro-Orthodox consensus on the public opinion in Russia can be specified in the following manner: a) as the trust of society in church, i.e. ROC MP; b) as the prevalence of the positive image of Orthodoxy and church and c) as the prevalence of positive social expectations from religion and church in the Russian public opinion (Lebedev, 2015). In post-Soviet Russian society church is a social institution which is greatly trusted by citizens. This trust has been confirmed in sociological research. Approximately 60 to 70% of the respondents place their trust in church. In the matter, Dubin underlines that even the ROC-related scandals presented in the media have not significantly reduced the rating of church as a spiritual and social institution. Russian citizens place such level of trust only in the president of the state, army and Russian

² Dubin writes that for many believers “faith mainly has... a moral and psychological meaning and does not impose any personal religious obligations; it is not a collective behaviour norm and does not imply personal responsibility or a practical imperative of behaviour”.

Academy of Sciences. This author underlines that this is not a realistic, means-end and rational trust but the value-rational, traditionalist trust directed towards the imaginary hope for a desirable result (Dubin, 2007). Since this is not a realistic but imaginary trust, it is so abstract that neither real and very unpleasant nor compromising happenings related to church and its hierarchy can significantly affect the level of citizens' trust in the ROC (Andreeva & Andreeva, 2013)³.

The pro-Orthodox consensus and general mind-set of people who are returning to Orthodoxy can be viewed in the context of late modernity: as a transition from contra-religious secularity towards the secularity tolerant to religion, both as an ethno-national symbol and in concordance with the IT society, as a mass-media presentation of Orthodox processions and rituals (Lebedev, 2010). However, there is much more to this than the media promotion of church rituals and Christmas ceremonies accompanied by the obligatory presence of the political elite. As Mchedlova (2002) notices, the pro-Orthodox consensus is strengthened by social instability, prolonged moral and social crisis and inexistence of credible and appropriate secular response to the challenges of the crisis. It is also strengthened by the memories of the patriotic activity of the church during the most difficult and crucial periods of Russian history, church's protection of the rights of the poor and miserable, as well as opposition to socially negative phenomena such as the lack of spirituality and cynicism or socially deviant phenomena such as corruption and drug addiction. Therefore, in these circumstances religion and church also have other functions: primarily the function of compensation for the so-called losers of the post-Soviet transition – comforting the poor and helping them overcome their misery. Furthermore, this transition has led to an obvious decline of people's moral values, so a certain number of people find compensation in religion - its views should compensate for the moral decline. Of course, a rather limited group of people sees Orthodoxy as a world view which helps them understand the life situation and serves as the direction towards action, or as the guideline for practical behaviour. Still, one should not conclude wrongly that the pro-Orthodox consensus in Russia has a large-scale and in-depth impact on attitudes and even more significantly, on the practical behaviour of most people. In Russia, the dominant culture is secular culture which is adopted through primary socialization. Although Orthodoxy has a symbolic value in society, religious culture is accepted and then adopted by free choice and it is always dominated by secular culture.

Owing to this, not only Russian society but also researchers are faced with the complexity of the newly-emerged social and religious situation. Sociological studies have shown that non-religious respondents and even self-identified atheists completely support the attitudes and activities of religious groups and organizations. What is more, this is not the attitude of peripheral and marginal social groups but it becomes far-reaching, almost mainstream with its consistent manifestation at micro, meso and macro levels of social life (Uzlaner, 2020). Some of the leading researchers in Russia have classified this fact as a paradox. For instance, analyzing the contradictions in the Russian religious situation at the beginning of the 21st century, Zhan Toshchenko highlights the following set of contradictions: first, the discrepancy between understanding the Russian religious

³ Indeed there are authors who interpret the difference between the respondents' massive denominational and religious orientation (approximately 80%) and the respondents' trust in the ROC as a social institution (approximately 60%) or Patriarch Kirill as its head as a difficulty for talking unquestionably about the pro-Orthodox consensus. "In social life, this means the impossibility and non-acceptance of the ROC hegemony in society. The causes could be found in the prevalence of non-religious world view and not very strong religiosity of Russians".

renaissance on the one hand and the uncertain change of the actual level of the inhabitants' religiosity on the other hand; second, the contradiction between the external demonstration of religiosity and the consistent secular collective consciousness of the inhabitants. There is another contradiction: the disagreement between different perceptions and interpretations of the "level of religiosity", objective state of affairs and degree of religiosity of Russian people (Toshchenko, 2008). The inner incoherence of beliefs and ritual behaviour was noticed by researchers Furman and Kaariainen in the 1990s while they were studying the pro-Orthodox consensus. Namely, they recognized the contradiction in the consensus about Orthodoxy: on the one hand, Orthodoxy had the ultimate value and significance for the collective identity and on the other hand sociological indicators showed much lower levels of dogmatic beliefs and particularly low intensity of relatively regular religious ritual practices.

Mchedlova (2012) understands Russian socio-religious reality in a somewhat different manner and concludes that "institutionalized religious organizations in Russia spread their influence on the non-religious part of the inhabitants to a certain degree". Her thinking is an important step towards the theoretical overcoming of the mentioned contradictions by positioning the religious situation in Russia in a different logical perspective. What Mchedlova suggests is the separation of two levels of evaluating the religious situation: the direct level – representing the immediate religious beliefs and institutional involvement of people in the corresponding religious organization and the indirect level implying the so-called cultural identity – influence of religion on people and social relationships. The latter is particularly related to the political influence by means of the "soft power" method (Nye, 2021).

Therefore, an individual's attitude towards religion, which used to be only related to the dilemma of being or not being included in the religious life of a particular religious group, now becomes more complex and involves at least two levels:

- the "first-rank" relationship with religion, or the direct relationship when the individual accepts or does not accept a particular religious system. Charles Taylor states that in traditional society this relationship with religion was not characterized by self-consciousness and was typically based on accepting the ancestors' beliefs as a significant or the most significant component of one's identity. In modern society this relationship is problematic and reflexive: it is based on the personal *choice* of the religious or non-religious position (Taylor, 2007), i.e. (not) belonging to a denomination, or a certain degree of rejection and non-acceptance of religion (indifference, agnosticism, atheism);

- the second level can be named the "second-rank" relationship with religion or indirect relationship. It involves the evaluation of religion without personal acceptance. It includes interpreting and "assigning values" to a series of significant social markers which an individual usually places into the religious sphere, based on his/her everyday life. These markers involve social actions of religious organizations (groups, leaders or common believers) such as charitable or even terrorist acts and religious symbols and (artistic) artefacts. They also include public declarations of "significant others" - referential religion members (such as the opinion of a religious leader or dignitary related to demographic problems, social justice problems, etc). In addition, these can include (positive) attitudes of the critical cultural elite towards a denomination. The "second-rate" relationship with religion differs essentially from the "first-rank" relationship with religion primarily in its content and functional direction. In its nature, it is not related to religious practices, belonging and immediate religious experience. It represents a sum of socially significant manifestations, of what is usually labelled and united by the concept

of “religion” and its derivatives in one’s mind. In a more abstract sense, it is something which does not imply direct correlation with the original religious reality but with a specific idea and perception of the religious social phenomenon which is related to man through its numerous variations and in a number of manners. At the same time, this relationship is significantly or even predominantly and indirectly related to the activity of the media (Grishaeva & Shumkova, 2020).

Naturally, these perceptions are rarely organized in coherent and consistent systems such as, for instance, the former versions of the Soviet politicized atheist world view (Smolkin, 2018). This is actually a conglomerate of common stereotypical prejudice of various degrees, which can be negative such as “Islamic terrorists”, “asocial sectarians” or rather positive such as “slightly strange Buddhists living upstairs”. What is more, the same religion can be characterized in completely different ways: “I approve of the social help provided by the Russian Orthodox Church; I do not approve of political propaganda and shady economic schemes” (from an interview, 2021).

It should be mentioned that in the last few decades the traditional, mostly typically direct, monolithic relationship with religion, characteristic of believers of different denominations, has been noticeably affected. This state of affairs is related to the increased virtualization of respectable religious communities which influence a large number of modern believers. Therefore, the analysis of the modern religious situation must include the increasing importance of indirect, external relationship of people with religion and church due to the increased number of individuals who are not directly involved in religion and due to the socially relevant “indirect values” of religion (Rutkevich, 2020). Symbolic and cultural capital of global religious traditions is actively used not only by religious organizations and groups representing them but also by different political actors and commercialists of culture as a means for increasing the attraction of their social projects. Also, it seems that a “strong” hypothesis can be set stating that in the medium- or long-term period the indirect value of religion can induce a certain number of people to adopt religion directly as the foundation of their life project.

4. Religious inequalities and Russian society

Religious inequality refers to different social subjects (organizations, groups and individuals) who identify themselves, in one way or another, with religions and denominations having a different range and quality of social capital. In everyday life, people are constantly made aware of this so these inequalities are fixed into stereotypical labels. These labels represent the social map of people’s micro, meso and macro social environment. In this context we should understand the widespread everyday evaluations and stereotypes such as, for example, “cohesion of Muslims”, “financial security of Jews”, “Catholics’ quality of being organized” or “Protestants’ level of education”. These evaluations always refer to a particular group “dictating” the evaluation of all or majority of members of a religion or denomination. Thus, it is automatically supposed that representatives of the Islamic religion, known to an observer belonging to a different denomination, are more united than his/her denominational or secular environment (primary social capital of solidarity) and that Protestants are of higher education (cultural capital), etc. There are certainly exceptions to this but they are considered to prove the rule.

If we generalize in sociological terms, we should underline that different denominational groups in different societies are characterized by different levels of capital as a result of the long-term socio-historical flow. Recognized traditional religions

and denominations which represent the greatest religious communities are marked by the greatest capital resources not only in terms of quantity but also quality. For instance, the decades-long forced systemic secularization in socialist Russia (Soviet Union) and Serbia (Socialist Yugoslavia) could undermine not a single type of capital accumulated over centuries in the Orthodox churches of these countries, though it did make significant damage to all fields. However, changes in the political sphere in the late 1980s and early 1990s enabled the rehabilitation of religion and church and provided them considerable public trust. This finally led to the synergistic increase in the symbolic, social and partly cultural, political and economic impact of the Russian and Serbian Orthodox Church. The most impressive expression of this rehabilitation in Russia has been the appearance of the “pro-Orthodox” consensus in the last twenty years. This capital increase of religion in the traditional, largest and most influential denomination in Russia was pretentiously called “religious revival” for some time.

It should be mentioned that a particularly important factor in the process is the capital structure transformation in postmodern (post-industrial) society. Russian author Ivanov states that, in addition to the institutional inequality typical for industrial societies and based on the clear correlation of status, income, reputation and lifestyle, two additional types of inequalities co-exist in postmodern society and they show the tendency of increasing their impact. Firstly, these are *inequalities on social networks* based on the cultural identity, which discriminate both against those who are members of the network and have certain benefits from their membership and against those who are not part of the network. Secondly, there are *situational inequalities* based on spatial and socio-cultural mobility which provides inclusion in the course of events and the accompanying benefits of the time and place of living (Ivanov, 2016).

The mentioned types of inequalities can be directly correlated with cultural and symbolic types of capital. Considering social network inequalities, when we talk about the macro-social dimension of social relationships we simultaneously talk about the identifications in terms of “friends or enemies” on the basis of the general and widely accepted cultural and symbolic markers. If religion in Russia is taken as an example, this involves the popular ideas from the late 1990s to the mid-2000s – pronounced and symbolic reference to Orthodoxy in the form of self-identification with Orthodoxy and occasional emphasis of loyalty to the state and church symbols and social initiatives (Dubin, 2007).

Situational inequalities seem to be a more complex and less studied phenomenon. It is defined as an essentially situational phenomenon, based on the “trend-related” principle. Its creators make an object valuable in people’s perception, while in the process inequality is not spatial but temporal and divides people into “gainers now” and “gainers later” (Ivanov, 2016). Regarding the sphere of religion, there is the direct and indirect “religious marketing” – real possibility of a religious group to make its symbols and religious practices attractive to the majority or a significant minority of society by establishing the patterns of behaviour and lifestyle (Kargina, 2014).

In secularized societies, religions are objectively forced to translate their mission into the language of secularized ideas and values so that people who make this secular mainstream can “hear” and understand them. Religions and denominations which can persuade people that they follow the tendencies of commonly important issues have better chances to influence society and take a respectable place in such a social mainstream than those which do not do this. When it comes to the “social network”

inequalities, the focus is on the symbolic aspect of religious capital. In the case of situational inequalities, the centre shifts to the cultural aspect of religious capital.

In contemporary late modern (Giddens) or post-modern (Bauman) societies, there is an increased significance and impact of non-material aspects and components of human capital. Considering the religious sphere, this means that the epicentre of inequalities lies in the symbolic and communicative religious field which is related to the institutional relationships in culture, education, ideology, morality and family. Therefore, religious capital is not only concentrated in the circles of active believers but it is spread widely along an indefinite, broad mass of sympathizers of certain religions and denominations. In this situation it is very important to conduct a timely, high-quality and adequate reflection of the situation, which enables “calculation” and prediction of possibilities and risks of the religious activity. The main subjects using the situation of new religious inequalities are frequently external players. They enlarge their social or political capital by presenting themselves as supporters or opponents of certain religious initiatives, groups or symbols. Thus, the misuse of religion for non-religious purposes becomes a frequent topic. Therefore, the advantage of a specific religion/denomination (in this case Orthodox Christianity) and its representative religious organizations and groups can be considered through the following dimensions (taking into account the short-term, medium-term and long-term perspective):

a) the possibility of direct but mainly indirect support of broad public for socially significant initiatives suggested/approved by the church hierarchy, only because they are “Orthodox” since “the church would not offer anything bad”. This is a direct transformation of the symbolic capital of Orthodoxy into the social capital of the active approval or at least not rejection of such initiatives;

b) the possibility of identification with the denomination or religious organization represented by a socially respectable group of inhabitants with the significant cultural, social and even economic capital;

c) the possibility of creating attractive and promising ideologemes on the basis of denominational values and ideas - the ultimate idea of the “image of the future”, by introducing the elements of creative “structuration” (Giddens) into different spheres of social relations.

Strictly speaking, at the macro-social level, the vitality of a religion/denomination in modern society is determined by reaching this third level or dimension – the long-term perspective of influencing the creation of values, ideas and “image of the future”. The authors believe that this is the perspective from which we should evaluate the content, functions, social effects and possibilities for the development of the post-Soviet pro-Orthodox consensus in Russia, as well as in other Orthodox countries.

5. Conclusion

The problem of religious inequality has become increasingly topical worldwide in the last decades, similarly to the constant tendency of religion revitalization and increased religious competition. Consequently, social reflexivity related to religion is increasing and becoming autonomous. It introduces important correctives into the structure and dynamics of the religious situation. The most important corrective is overcoming the common linear scale of people’s attitudes towards religion and church according to the principle of inclusion or exclusion. Having its various manifestations, the reflexive relationship with religion today is constant and universal, characterizing both the attitudes of believers and opinions of a series of social subjects outside religion.

A typical example of this reflexive or indirect relationship with religion is the Russian pro-Orthodox consensus as a large-scale positive mood of citizens towards the ROC, its symbols and social initiatives in Russian post-Soviet society since the late 1990s. Due to the pro-Orthodox consensus, the Russian Orthodox Church - Moscow Patriarchate has managed to significantly strengthen and improve its position in Russian society despite the high level of secularization. Therefore, the positive attitude of citizens can be regarded as a significant component of religious capital – primarily symbolic and cultural capital which, under favourable conditions, can transform themselves into other types of capital – social, economic or political. Religious reflexivity becomes an independent and significant factor of religious inequality and requires separate and systematic research.

Cultural and symbolic capital of religion, generated by reflexivity, is closely related to the new and active determination of inequality forms. These include inequalities created on social networks and situational inequalities of groups and individuals. The first inequality is based on the self-identification with a particular denomination. The second inequality is related to the successful inclusion of a religion/denomination into the current “trends” and covers much broader public. This public is demanded to show active or passive support for certain questions related directly or indirectly to the specific religion or denomination. Owing to this situation, the main actors of creating or transforming the religious situation are various “users” capable of high-quality strategic and tactical maintenance of religious capital in the changeable social situations. There are three dimensions of using capital which correspond to the short-term, medium-term and long-term demands of religion in society: public support for all social initiatives of a religious group (organization); identification of socially respectable groups with the corresponding religion or denomination and creation of sustainable and socially attractive ideas based on the cultural capital of religion (image of the future).

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