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Rex Eris Si Recte Facias, Si Non Facias Non Eris

Abstract

The problems of formation and development of state institutions and the state as a whole in the Early Modern times has long been the subject of research. In recent decades, there has been a definite turn towards the studies of backstage politics and administration of early modern States, in terms of rather substance than form. At the same time, special attention is paid to specific practices related to improving the mechanisms for the exercise of power and to the specifics of interaction between the society and the state. Church and religious organizations played a significant role in this. The authors consider some of the most important features of the interaction between the government and Church using a case study of the Russian state in the Early Modern times, analyzing the two main directions of this interaction, that is, the confessionalization of the society and the creation of a "tsarist discourse".

Keywords: Bureaucracy, Church, Confessionalization, Ivan the Terrible, Political Regime.

Introduction

The paper title consists of the famous utterance by Archbishop Isidore of Seville, "Rex eris si recte facias, si non facias non eris" meaning "You will be king if you do rightly; if you do not, you will not be" (Barney et al. 2006). This quote is a vivid proof of the requirements that Roman Catholic Church imposed on the kings ruling early in the Middle Ages. Church used all the means necessary to advocate this mode of governance. The above idea of a king's righteous behaviour was displayed by far more people than just St. Isidore of Seville and his

followers. The argument that only those rulers who act in a fair way are worth their titles was widespread in the Middle Ages. It is not fear but reasons of conscience that should make people obey the king, otherwise the latter is more of a tyrant than a sovereign, while resistance to tyranny is almost a duty for any true Christian. These ideas received a fresh impetus in the Early Modern times (Plokhly 2017; Boterbloem 2018; Nowakowska 2018).

Russia was not an exception. Russian scribes pondered on the legitimacy of sovereign power and people's attitude to it, as intensely as

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their European counterparts did. Works by Russian Christian thinkers, among other, were focused on who should be considered a true Orthodox Christian ruler, who deserved that high title, what criteria should be applied, what was the place of justice among all the characteristics distinguishing a righteous king from an unrighteous one, what kind of power might be considered legitimate and what power deserved obedience (Gara 2017).

It was not only the legal heritage of ancient Greece and Rome that Russian Orthodox writers and thinkers used in studying those issues, but East Orthodox Church doctrines as well. Part of ancient Greek and Roman legal heritage had reached Russia via Byzantine. Though Byzantine influence on Russia's cultural traditions, including legal culture, has been a subject of debates for many decades, the very fact of such influence cannot be denied. We agree with Litavrin (1999), the famous Russian scholar studying the Byzantine Empire, who said that "The official state doctrine in Russia, both within the empire itself and in other "Orthodox" states of the south-east of Europe and the Caucasus was based on the East Christian church teaching... Neophytes could not accept the Byzantine religious doctrine partially or in a modified way. They had to acquire it in full" (Sowerby and Hennings 2017).

However, for a number of reasons, this doctrine received significant transformations in Russia with a view to adapting to the reality in which the Russian church functioned. The process resulted in an independent doctrine representing the image of a true Orthodox Christian ruler and his power. It played a crucial role in developing the identity of the Russian statehood in the Early Modern times.

Objectives

In this study, the authors consider some of the most important features of the interaction between the government and Church using a case study of the Russian state in the Early Modern times, analyzing the two main directions of this interaction, that is, the confessionalization of the society and the creation of a "tsarist discourse".

Material And Methods

The study of Orthodox Christian church's influence on the formation of Russia's political system in the Early Modern times is significant, as church did play a vital role in the life of the Russian society at that time. In order to understand the role of Russian Orthodox church in the political system of the Russian state in the "long" XVI century, it is necessary to consider the

specifics of its development in the Early Modern times in general and in Russia in particular (Roudometof 2019).

In the first place, though the Russian state of the Early Modern times is believed to be centralized and consolidated, unlike its Medieval predecessors, the level of its consolidation and the power of Moscow tsar should not be overemphasized. Petrov (2008), a Russian historian, said that in XVI – XVII centuries the state was rather weak institutionally, as compared to the contemporary one. Hence, according to the scholar, "it was not the power of Ivan III or Vasily III over their boyars that was weak, but rather the state. It was weak in enforcing compulsion measures in respect to the population". That was why "the state, being incapable of providing compliance with legal order on its territory (and suffering other failures as well – Note by Authors) mobilized the society to solve the above problems..." (Demeter and Csaplár-Degovics 2018).

The immaturity of what J. Brewer described as "sinews of power" (Brewer 1990) was a common problem for Western Eurasian states in the Early Modern times. Speaking on the "sinews of power", Kollmann (2012) stressed that they included both "new taxes and bureaucratic institutions to administer territory, collect revenues and mobilize human and material resources" and super-structural elements represented by respective "new codifications of the law and new centralized judicial systems", confessional politics and appropriate political ideology which was closely connected with and guided by confessional politics (Brüning 2017). In the time period under study, the political ideology was doomed to be religiously biased, especially in Russia which was still beyond secularization, though the latter was becoming more and more popular in Europe by the end of the "long" XVI century.

The state's institutional weakness resulting from immaturity and imperfection of the state institutions required that governing should involve social structures and institutions which had the resources, the opportunities, the will and desire to participate in the process. Failing their support, the government potential of the early modern state was insufficient. On the contrary, Church enjoyed an advantage in this case. Apart from traditionally governing large territories and their population as an autonomy, it shaped the system of values and senses, including ideological ones (Stoeckl et al. 2017; White 2019; Adriana, & Holanda, 2016; Niranjana, 2016).

The significance of the ideology factor increased especially due to the special role that Orthodox Christianity and Orthodox Church played in the life of the Russian state and society. According to Sokolov (2003), a Russian

Byzantinist, "Apart from being a quite strong unifier for Byzantine population, Orthodox Christianity was pretty much a major nationality in the Byzantine state and the main environment of people's life...".

These words can be applied to Early Modern Russia, which was noted by Kamensky (1999). He claimed that Orthodox Christianity was "a major condition of and an ideological basis for establishing a new statehood" for the Russian people of the Early Modern times, being a means of national self-identity and a spiritual basis of culture and ideology at the same time. According to Kamensky (1999), it "ensured the unity of the Russian people and played a role similar to that which Judaism played for the Jews of the Diaspora for many centuries". To be Russian, to be a bona fide subject of the Russian tsar meant to be an Orthodox Christian in the first place. (In this respect, the "cujus regio, eius religio" principle was implemented in Russia earlier than in Western Europe).

Another important aspect is usually omitted in reflections on the essence of Early Modern Russia's political regime. Foreign observers who confirmed the unlimited power of Moscow sovereigns took their political statements at face value, never wondering whether those statements meet the realia. At the same time, we will not exaggerate if we say that the political system in Muscovy in the Early Modern times was much more traditional than that in Western Europe, which is why the Russian political tradition was non-written, remaining extremely sustainable. Speaking on the substance and form, as foreigners had no access to Russia's backstage politics, they had no idea of what its substance was like. Its substance, or content, was defined by the Law of the Lord rather than by laws made by people. Even for a tsar it was extremely difficult to break the former. Russian sovereigns who had been brought up with those values understood it very well, while foreigners did not.

Thus, Church could always resort to its unquestionable authority, adding validity to the secular authorities, while the latter lacked legitimacy. In fact, it entailed some negative trends, when the state willing to acquire full external and internal independence carried out church secularization in the "long" XVI century, to transform it into a state institution. The fact that church was independent on secular power and fell within the jurisdiction of Rome or Constantinople was a threat to Russia's external and internal state sovereignty.

Results

Let us discuss the preliminary results. In the Early Modern times, the Russian state lacked mature institutions and appropriate

administrative resources. In order to govern its territory, it had to use the social structures and institutions which were under its control and which were ready to cooperate and to provide the lacking "sinews of power". Church was among those institutions, as it represented a force having an ideological, political, economic and cultural influence.

The cooperation between Church and the state in the Early Modern times was multilateral. As tradition required, the supreme power put up with the special legal status and wide immunity enjoyed by Church. The latter continued to rule the territories and population falling within its jurisdiction, based on its legal frameworks. This enabled the state to save the resources and effort of its bureaucratic apparatus, which was little at that time.

However, this was only a minor part of the problem. A more important thing in terms of politics and administration was that Church used its authority to render support to the state in its attempt to consolidate the society. Two aspects should be noted here. The first aspect concerns the society confessionalization policy and the second one refers to the supreme power legitimization.

Let us address the issue of the society confessionalization first. Kollmann (2012) described this process as follows: during the "long" XVI century, confessionalization in Europe was expressed by "movements in Catholicism and Protestant denominations to define the faith and discipline members" and "complemented states' efforts to consolidate society around state and church". In Early Modern Russia, confessionalization policy consisted in the stage-by-stage "centralization" inside "the community of the faithful" undertaken by Church and Moscow archdiocese. This centralization was conducted stepwise. At the first stage, during the reign of Ivan III, two crucial problems were solved after hot intra-church debates which involved secular power as well. To begin with, the Judaizers' heresy was destroyed in late XV century. According to Alekseev (2012), "Insisting on death sentence and imprisonment for heretics, archbishop Gennady and Joseph Volotsky sought to prevent the catastrophic religious and cultural dissent in the Russian state which was single still weakly unified". Having achieved heresies to be condemned, they managed to preserve the unity of the Russian society.

Another important issue was solved following the destruction of the Judaizers' movement (in fact, it was not destroyed completely, as bits and pieces of those debates will haunt us for at least another fifty years). The formal essence of this issue was whether Church had the right to own real estate, while implicitly it was focused on what development path Church would take and how its relations with the state

would progress. It concerned the famous debate between the Non-possessors and Josephites.

The victory over heretics and a more or less satisfactory resolution of the dispute between the Non-possessors and Josephites brought the first stage of confessionalization in Early Modern Russian society to a close. The second stage was associated with the internal reorganization of Church and “the community of the faithful”, as well as with an attempted “interiorization” of faith. It was connected with the activities of Metropolitan Makary and his disciple and godson Ivan the Terrible.

A major event of that period was the convention of the so-called Stoglav, a great council of Russian bishops held in 1551. Russian historiography traditionally focuses on its political issues and respective economic aspects. Still, we believe another aspect of the council to be even more significant, and that is establishing order and discipline inside church itself and in “the community of the faithful”. The council’s resolutions concerned more than ecclesiastical life. According to Bulanin (1989), “Striving to achieve ecclesiastical decency in Muscovy, in its resolutions [Stoglav] touched upon various aspects of life in the society of that time”. Bulanin (1989) stressed that, in particular, separate articles of that artifact could “provide information on apocrypha which were read in XVI century, on the government’s feeble attempts to systematize education, on pagan rites used by peasantry, as well as on outrages perpetrated by crowds of wandering minstrels and clowns”. It was also the source of the “petty rules for everyday life typical of [Stoglav] (including bans on shaving beards, wearing skullcaps and eating sausage)”. Such prohibitions were aimed at restoring the “good old days” (in a way the reformers saw it – Note by Authors). In this respect, the resolutions of Stoglav are as important as other XVI century artifacts which imposed the rules of life in the Russian society, such as “Domostroy” (a set of household rules, instructions and advice), “Gosudarev razryad” (Sovereign’s series), “Gosudarev rodoslovets” (“Sovereign’s book of the noble families”), Tsar’s Sudebnik (Tsar’s Code of laws), decrees aimed at bringing to order the precedence system and service of boyars’ children, et cetera.

The third stage of confessionalization was connected with the emergence of patriarchate in Russia late in the XVI century which completed the Russian church’s long way to true autocephaly. The Time of Troubles enabled preliminary conclusions to be made concerning the policy conducted by the state in cooperation with Church. The formation of national religion by early XVII century, though not shared by all the population, was an influential aspect for Russia’s “political people”, enabling the country to survive after a severe crisis.

Confessionalization was just one facet of the state’s cooperation with Church. The other one was Church shaping a system of views pertaining to the personality of a truly Orthodox Christian ruler, which may now be described as “tsarist discourse” (Penskoy 2014; Lipich et al. 2018). Compliance with such requirements was a prerequisite for the legitimation of the supreme power. Otherwise, the society had sufficient grounds to refuse obedience to the sovereign, with all that it implied (Safronova et al. 2019). By the middle of XVI century, the doctrine describing the characteristics necessary for an Orthodox Christian tsar had been fully developed and comprehended by Russian scribes and part of the society. According to Mikhailova (2010), both the scribes and the society called the tsar for following the Almighty, achieving prosperity for the Russian state, governing it in a fair way (bold type by the authors) and effectively protecting it from external and internal foes”. The meaning of external enemies requires no explanation. As for internal ones, according to the afore-mentioned Joseph Volotsky, they included heretics who impinged on the souls of Orthodox Christian Tsar’s subjects, as well as highwaymen, robbers and thieves, bribers and corrupt officials, unrighteous judges and other villains (Zimin and Lurye 1959). Possible consequences of a sovereign neglecting his duties may well be demonstrated with the 1547 riot in Moscow which resulted from abuse of power by dignitaries, the court nobility and officials and from the permissiveness on the part of the young tsar (Penskoy 2019).

Conclusion

Let us summarize our findings. There is no doubt that Orthodox Christian church, being a social, political, economic and ideological institution, played a crucial role in the life of Early Modern Russia’s state and society. Consequently, even such powerful tsars as Ivan III and Ivan IV dared not impinge upon the Church foundations despite having some conflicts with it. They knew instinctively that any confrontation would undermine the fundamentals of the Russian statehood. That is why they supported Church and protected it, expecting it would render assistance in their initiatives, in its turn.

Support on the part of Church was even more necessary for the supreme power, especially taking into consideration the state’s weakness at the time, the lack of administrative resources necessary and the internal character of its legitimacy (meaning that the state was the source of its own legitimacy). Church might assist the state in building a more efficient governmental bureaucracy, expecting to retain its privileged position in return. This assistance

pursued two major directions, namely: the confessionalization of the society and the development of the “tsarist discourse”.

Recommendations

In this study, the authors used a case study of the Russian state in the Early Modern times, future works may study different cases, and use different methods for analyzing the two main directions of this interaction and other aspects of such interactions, also the relationship between church and politics throughout different historic periods can be investigated.

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