

# CHRISTIANITY AND THE STATE

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The famous evangelist Billy Graham, in his book *Just As I Am*, relates how, after World War II, America rendered considerable assistance to Japan. One day the American general, Douglas MacArthur, received the following proposition from the Japanese emperor: "If you wish, I will make Japan a Christian nation." General MacArthur thought for two days and then gave this answer: "We cannot accept your proposal. People must come to Christ of their own free will." Today in many countries we hear with increasing frequency the appeals and prayers of some Christian churches that the church should direct its efforts to creating a "Christian lobby" in governments and parliaments, establish Christian political parties, and remove non-believers from public positions. In this connection, the subject of the relationship between church and state and examining the coexistence of these two realms becomes urgent. What did the church's founder, Jesus Christ, have to say about the attitude of his followers to the state? How should the state relate to religion and, in particular, to Christianity? These are not insignificant issues for Christians. How much should Christians be involved in politics, and to what extent are politicians entitled to influence the church today?

At the beginning of the first millennium the earliest Christianity was eschatologically inclined. Christians were waiting for the imminent end of the world and Christ's return. They were not faced with the prospect of a long historical process during which Christ's church would be an effectual force. The earliest Chris-



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tians did not revolt against pagan political power and did not call for social upheaval because they were wholly directed to Christ coming on the clouds, and they had absolutely no need for their own Christian state. Theocracy in the earliest Christians' consciousness already coincided with the coming Kingdom of God. The earliest Christians agreed to give to Caesar what is Caesar's, but the state remained "the world" for them – the kingdom of this world.

During the first three centuries of the new era, through word and deed the Christians emphasized their deeply inherent sense that their faith was absolutely incompatible with the divine cult of the Caesars. The persecutions that multiplied throughout the Empire recalled with ever greater strength the words of the Apostle Peter: "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God" (Ac 4:19). However, when the situation changed at the beginning of the fourth century and the Milan Edict of Toleration was adopted, the essence of which consisted in the words: "*ut denuo sint Christiani*" – "let there be Christians again" – and the emperor Constantine himself began to support them openly, both theologians and pastors of Christ's church had to think about the future co-existence of these two realms.

The new religion of Christ's followers did not fit the traditional interpretations of Aristotle and Cicero to the effect that "man is a political being, and life in the state is his all," or that "the state is an

affair common to the whole people – *res publica*"<sup>1</sup>. Such views required the unquestioning submission of any religion to the interests of the state. Indeed, religious formation itself was considered part of the political system, and religious law – part of public law.

In addition, Christianity was disseminated in an environment where the cult of emperors and kings had long been the official religion. And this cult did not die as Christianity strengthened its position more and more and penetrated the Roman court. Instead, the emperor cult continued indestructible when the empire became Christian. Constantine the Great retained the divine titles of his predecessors, calling himself "*Divous, Numen meum*," etc. His family continued to call itself "*domus divina*" – "the divine family," and the emperor's residence was called "*sacrarium*" – "the sanctuary"<sup>2</sup>.

It should be noted that the government's aspiration to spiritual expansion was completely typical for all pagan public systems. For example, in Egypt the Pharaoh was at once head of state, supreme priest, and a deity in a single person. For Egyptians, divine order was the prototype for secular order, and the Pharaoh was a live copy of the deity. It was the Egyptians' belief that just as the sun illuminated everything by its rays, so the

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<sup>1</sup> 1. Cicero. *Dialogi o gosudarstve – o zakonakh* (*Dialogues on the state – about legislation*), Moscow (1994), 9-10.

<sup>2</sup> N.N. Alekseyev. "Khristianstvo i ideia monarkhii" ("Christianity and the idea of monarchy"), *Put'* (1927): 20-21.

Pharaoh's power should extend over the whole universe. According to an Egyptian papyrus, if the Pharaoh in his "divinity" is similar to Osiris, then in his kindness he is similar to "sea water," which is never exhausted, but carries life, fertility, and abundance to the world<sup>3</sup>. Any insubordination to the monarch-Pharaoh's will was equivalent to sacrilege: "Whoever respects him will live, but the one who pronounces words disagreeable to his majesty and repugnant to him is worthy of death..."<sup>4</sup>.

In the Assyrian-Babylonian and Persian cultures a view of the monarch as the guardian of life took on a messianic interpretation: the monarch was considered the forthcoming savior who would deliver the people from death. Here the monarch's figure was also closely associated with the idea of the correspondence of divine existence to earthly existence, as well as a variety of astrological views, teachings about the cycle of life, the world's rebirth, the evolution of eons, etc. A new ruler was an "eon" who brought a new destiny to the world<sup>5</sup>.

In Sparta the high priests were always kings as well. In Athens, after the destruction of the monarchy, the priest's functions were concentrated in the hands of one of nine magistrates who adopted the title of "the king's *archont*" – "*basilevs*." And, as was indicated ear-

lier, the cult of the emperor-god was retained for long centuries in the Roman Empire as well<sup>6</sup>.

An understanding of the complex prehistory of the relationship between the state and religion answers the question of why those later states referred to as "Christian" retained the completely pagan idea concerning the right of the state to interfere in and absolutely direct all aspects of its subjects' spiritual life.

In this sense, the words of Leo III Isaurian, the "Christian" emperor of Byzantium, in a letter to Pope Gregory II, are highly significant: "Understand, oh pope, that I am emperor and priest in one person. My will is the authority!" And Pope Gregory II answered honorably: "Your coarse warrior's mind is quite adequate for administering affairs of state, but it is not adequate for spiritual affairs: just as the pontiff has no right to intervene in palace affairs, so you should not intrude in church affairs. Let each of us keep to the position that the Lord determined for him. Dogma is not the king's business, but the bishops', because we have the mind of Christ (2Co 2:14-17). It is one thing to understand church affairs, and another to understand secular affairs"<sup>7</sup>.

That the growing church in its aversion to the state's religious power would collide with the Ro-

<sup>3</sup> J. Baillet, *Le regime pharaonique*, Paris, t.1. (1912), 10.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 233.

<sup>5</sup> A. Jeremias, *Handbuch der altorientalischen Geisteskultur* (1913), 168-177; p. 171: «Alles irdische Sein und Geschehen entspricht einem himmlischen Sein und Geschehen, wobei alle

Teilerscheinungen voh Grossten bis zum kleinsten als Spiegelbilder von einander aufgefasst werden».

<sup>6</sup> A. Nikolin. *Tserkov' i gosudarstvo (Church and state)*. Sreitin Monastery (1997), 12.

<sup>7</sup> *Deiania vselenskikh soborov (Acts of the ecumenical councils)*. C. IV, St. Petersburg (1996), 328.

man Empire was a foregone conclusion since the moment of the church's creation. Beginning in 324, Constantine began to conduct a church policy that more and more consciously suppressed the principle of tolerance in favor of the assertion: one faith, one emperor. From that moment, right up to the prayer of the church for the emperor and the empire, a powerful and dangerous conviction began to take shape, namely that the unity of the Christian faith and the unity of the empire are mutually determined. The emperor, who still retained the title *Pontifex Maximus* (high priest, pontiff) and continued to be aware of his sacral-legislative power, considered himself "bishop of external affairs" with respect to the church and autocratically interfered wherever he saw a threat to "church unity." The First Ecumenical Council in Nicaea in 325, at which the widely-disseminated Arian doctrine was condemned, marked the zenith of his intra-church influence.

The legislative activity of the emperor represents the "continued conquering" of the church through the transfer of the emperor's Lateran palace to the Roman bishop; through the equalization of church diocesan borders with the empire's partitions between provinces; through the liberation of the priesthood from municipal duties, and the transmission to it of all pagan temples; through the establishment

of a government salary for bishops; through the decree to rest on Sundays. In addition, all the numerous class of Roman officials, who exerted a tremendous influence on the life of the rest of society, hastened to follow the example of their patron, replacing one form of religion with another and cooling the fires of early Christianity until they were lukewarm<sup>8</sup>.

Christianity, for its part, was able to change a few things: legislation establishing kind and reasonable treatment of slaves; the prohibition of divorces; the prohibition of gladiator battles; the abolishment of crucifixion as a punishment.

A prominent church historian of the last century, Vasilii Bolotov states: "The relations of church and state as they were formed during the reign of Constantine are not ideal, of course. The emperor abandoned the position he earlier occupied of the neutrality beneficial for church life, and permitted himself to interfere fairly often in church affairs"<sup>9</sup>. In this way, a long period of captivity to the state (later called Caesaropapism by many theologians), a kind of ideological servitude through the imposition of the unnatural role of "sanctifier," began for Christ's church. This is a turn of events that the earliest Christians did not expect. The pagan state had bowed at last before the spiritual strength of Christianity, but Christianity, in its turn,

<sup>8</sup> Josef Listl, *Gosudarstvo i tserkov v zapadno-tserkovnoj latynskoj traditsij khristianstva* (State and church in the western church Latin tradition of Christianity), Bonn (1999), 3.

<sup>9</sup> V.V. Bolotov, *Lektsii po istorii drevnei tserkvi* (Lectures on ancient church history) V. 3, Reprint ed. Moscow (1994), 51.

fixed its eyes on that which held to the kingdom of this world: power, wealth and earthly glory.

The Russian theologian A. Schmemmann argues in this regard: “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The true tragedy of the Byzantine church is not in the arbitrariness of the emperors, not in sin and stumbling – it consists, first of all, in the fact that the real ‘treasure’ that completely filled its heart and subordinated everything to itself, was the Empire. Violence did not conquer the church, but the temptations of ‘flesh and blood’ charmed the church’s consciousness with an earthly dream and earthly love. Itself poisoned, Byzantium in turn poisoned with its own sin those who received the Christian gospel from it.”<sup>10</sup>

The attempt of the autocrat Constantius (350-361) to establish Arianism as the state religion by using his father Constantine’s principles, evoked a pained protest from the church, which, in a fierce struggle, defended its freedom from state tyranny (Augustine, Athanasius of Alexandria, Pope Liberius, Hilary of Poitiers).

One of the outstanding theologians of the early church, Augustine (354-430), who was a contemporary of the barbarian conquest of the Roman Empire, in his work *The City of God* specified very correctly the essence of these two separate realms: “We find two aspects of the earthly city: one represents the city’s reality, and the other is

a pre-representation of the heavenly city by means of this reality. The heavenly city, as long as it sojourns on earth, calls to the citizens of all nations and gathers a sojourning community from all languages, without regard to all that differs in customs, laws and institutions, by means of which the earthly world is established or supported”<sup>11</sup>.

In Europe of the early Middle Ages, the Catholic understanding of Caesaropapism was defined by Thomas Aquinas, the well-known systematic theologian (1225-1274). Aquinas asserted that the state’s goal is the common welfare of the nation. But if rulers deviate from God’s will and contradict the church’s interests as the sole power on earth representing Christ’s will, then its subjects have the right to resist the ruler’s actions. This particularly concerns those circumstances when the ruler turns into a tyrant and acts contrary to God’s laws and basic morality, intruding into the area of people’s spiritual life<sup>12</sup>.

In the Middle Ages Martin Luther was one of the first to sharply differentiate between “spiritual” and “secular” control of society. The spiritual power of God is realized through God’s Word and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The believer who “walks in the Spirit” has no need for any other guidance for his behavior: he acts completely in accordance with the divine will. Just as a tree has no need for guidance to bear good fruit, so the

<sup>10</sup> S. Nikolayev, “Raskovonrovannye” (“The unfettered”), *Posev*, No.9 (1997), 34.

<sup>11</sup> V.S.Nersesyantz, *Istoriia politicheskikh i pra-*

*vovyykh uchenij (History of political and legal teachings)*, Moscow (1999), 102-105.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 113-15.

true believer has no need for legislative regulations to guide his behavior. Just as a tree bears fruits naturally, so the believer naturally acts morally and responsibly<sup>13</sup>.

Luther recognized that his Augustinian view on the relations of church and state assumed the presence of “mouse droppings among pepper grains and tares among wheat”: in other words, good and evil co-exist both in the church and in the state. That does not mean one cannot distinguish between good and evil. Luther recognizes with a good deal of pragmatism that one cannot isolate one from the other. Good people can be controlled with the help of the Spirit, but evil must be controlled with the help of the sword. Thus, God governs the church by the Holy Spirit through Scripture, excluding all violence and physical coercion of people, but he controls the world with the help of the sword of secular power. It is quite unrealistic to hope that society may be controlled by means of the admonitions of the Sermon on the Mount, and therefore the sword is prescribed to the state to maintain the law because of the consequences and continuing effect of sin on the life of society<sup>14</sup>.

At the same time, regarding the interior organization of the reformed church, Luther emphasized the principle of each community member’s equality, where the leading presbyter is no more than a chairman, because all lordship belongs to Christ. “In the

world,” Luther wrote, “The lords direct everything they wish, and their subjects obey them; but among you Christ speaks, and therefore there should be nothing like that; each one among the believers is a judge for the others and each, in his turn, is subordinated to each of the others”<sup>15</sup>.

The Genevan reformer, John Calvin, supported Luther’s views: “The church does not have the right of the sword to punish and restrain; it has no power to compel; it has neither prisons nor punishments applied by the magistrate. The goal of the church is not the sinner’s punishment against his will, but the obtaining of his voluntary repentance”<sup>16</sup>. In addition, Calvin showed a negative attitude to medieval monarchy, because, in his opinion, all monarchs tended to fall into tyranny. Here it is appropriate and pertinent to address the history of the people of Israel.

### **The theory of the theocratic state in the Old Testament**

It is no accident that theologians of all times have addressed the history of the development of the state-theocratic society of ancient Israel, because it is precisely that nation that the Lord produced in a unique way from one man (Abraham), and saved and multiplied in various circumstances. He directly influenced the election and anointing of Israel’s leaders, established their

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<sup>13</sup> A.E. McGrath, *Bogoslovskaiia mysl’ Reformatsii (The theological thought of the Reformation)*, Odessa (1994), 251-252.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 252-253.

<sup>15</sup> Grisar, *Luther Vol. 1*, Paris (1924), 421.

<sup>16</sup> A.E. McGrath, *Bogoslovskaiia mysl’*, 262-263.

authority, and the observance of the Law by the nation. In the beginning, government was organized as follows: God – the bearer of absolute supreme power and the main legislator of legal, social and moral regulations; mediators between God and the nation (prophets and judges); their representative institutions (such as the thousand-, hundred-, fifty-, ten- officials, appointed by Moses [Ex 18:17-24], the prophetic schools in the time of Elisha [1-2 Ki], or the tribal elders at the time of the judges [Jdg 11:11; 21:16]); the nation.

Such a government may be defined as an *immediate-representative theocracy* (direct government by God). The advantage of this form of government consists of the fact that the nation did not elect the ruler, but God, who knows the heart of his anointed sovereign. Therefore the possibility of power usurpation by a ruler with personal ambition was practically always excluded. For example, Gideon answered the Israelites: “The Israelites said to Gideon, ‘Rule over us — you, your son and your grandson...’ But Gideon told them, ‘I will not rule over you, nor will my son rule over you. The Lord will rule over you.’” (Jdg 8:22-23). But the Israelites were not satisfied by such an answer. As time went by, as Moses predicted shortly before his death (Dt 17:14-20), Israel decided to place a king over itself.

Studying the causes of the rise of the Hebrew nation, we note what one of the main legal theorists of the last century, N.N. Alekseyev, emphasized concerning the ele-

ments of contractual theory in Jewish theocracy: “In Old Testament theocracy, public power was established, in the main, as a result of the ‘social compact,’ the parties of which were Jehovah, his prophets and the nation”<sup>17</sup>.

An outstanding Russian theologian and historian of the church of the nineteenth century, A.P. Lopukhin, went further and even found democratic attributes in such a governing structure: “When considering the political structure of Moses’ state, its similarity to the state management organization of the North American United States involuntarily amazes. The tribes in their administrative independence correspond fully to the states, each of which also represents a democratic republic.” The Senate and House of Representatives, “correspond fully to the two highest groups of representatives in Moses’ state, — the twelve and seventy elders.” Therefore, “After settling in Palestine, the Israelites constitute at first (in the judges’ time) a union republic in which the independence of some tribes was brought to the level of independent states”<sup>18</sup>.

There is no doubt that the political ideas of the Old Testament were a tremendous driving force both for America’s first immigrants and for Europe as a whole; but, if we attentively read the parable of Jotham (Jdg 9:6-15), we may note

<sup>17</sup> N.N. Alekseyev, “Ideia ‘zemnogo grada’ v khristianskom verouchenii” (“The idea of the ‘earthly city’ in Christian teaching”), *Put’*, No.5 (1926), 19.

<sup>18</sup> A.P. Lopukhin, *Zakonodatel’stvo Moiseia (The Mosaic Law)* St. Petersburg (1882), 233.

that one should look for the origin of the kingdom in the nation's falling away from God. In the establishment of an Israelite kingdom lay the tragedy of apostasy: the nation desired its own organizational structure, rejecting the existing God-given rule of his direct representatives: the prophets, judges and anointed ones. God personally declared to Samuel: "It is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king" (1Sa 8:7). Then Samuel told the people all the unfavorable consequences of the new king: "When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, and the Lord will not answer you in that day" (1Sa 8:18).

The request for the establishment of a kingdom is itself the well-known sin of self-will, the arrangement of life beyond the sphere of jurisdiction of the divine-human covenant between Jehovah and his people: "The people all said to Samuel, 'Pray to the Lord your God for your servants so that we will not die, for we have added to all our other sins the evil of asking for a king'" (1Sa 12:19).

Therefore, the kingdom is not something excellent given by God; instead, since that time, the kingdom and the state are the political and territorial organizational system of a society full of serious defects of which the people themselves are aware. It is a human self-organization. More or less successful states do exist. But in any case, the state's imperfection is conditioned by the imperfection of the people themselves.

## Caesaropapism in Rus'

Christianity came to Rus' as an official religion at the close of the tenth century from Byzantium, where Caesaropapism was by that time firmly established. The Moscow monarchy was built in this Oriental style. The theological grounds for the "church's capture by the state" was given by a well-known church figure of the epoch of Ivan III and Vasiliy III – Josef Volotsky (Sanin). According to this doctrine of tsars and princes, "God made a place for him on his throne," and therefore "the tsar is similar to all people by his nature, but he is similar to God most high by his power." Volotsky claimed that, "The tsar is Christ's first avenger against the heretic," directly referring at the same time to the example of the Inquisition of the "Spanish king." God handed over to the tsar's power and care, "the church and the monastery, as well as all of Orthodox Christianity." In this sense, the tsar acquires the character of a pontiff and God's deputy. "The tsar's court is not accountable to anyone – the state has primacy over the church"<sup>19</sup>.

Besides that, the followers of this doctrine – the Josephites – taught that divine honor must be granted not only to the living tsar, but also to his images: "When the tsar's image is carried into the towns, then not only ordinary farmers and craftsmen, but also warriors, town elders, honest officials, and gover-

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<sup>19</sup> I. Dyakonov, *Vlast' moskovskih gosudarej (The power of the Muscovite rulers)*, Moscow (1915), 157-163.



nors as well, must meet it with great honor and bow to the tsar's image as to the tsar himself"<sup>20</sup>.

Tsar Ivan the Terrible developed these ideas, specifying that the structure of the earthly state is a copy of the heavenly state, and the earthly tsar is like God's deputy on earth. According to his teaching, the tsar is not put there by the people "as the headman of a district." "We are the submissive Ivan by God's mercy, and not by the rebellious people's desire," wrote the Moscow Prince Ivan the Terrible about himself at the beginning of his official letters and documents. Ivan the Terrible considered the objection that secular authorities may be poor, distorted copies of heaven as analogous to the Manichaeism heresy, which taught that Christ is master of the heavens, but the earth is governed by people at their own discretion. Ivan the Terrible taught that "the banner of victory and the true cross" were given by Jesus Christ first to Constantine, the first Christian emperor, then to other Byzantine emperors, until "the spark of piety went to Rus"<sup>21</sup>.

It is interesting to note that, besides the natural state function of "encouraging the good and punishing the wicked," Ivan the Terrible ascribes to the person of the tsar certain representative spiritual authority. "I believe," he said, "That I, as a servant, have to give an account for any sin of those who are under

my authority, whether intentional or unintentional, in order not to sin by negligence." Similar views of the tsar were determined by the theology of that time, according to which the tsar became as though a sacrifice for the people's sins, repeating in his being the Savior's sacrifice<sup>22</sup>.

Later on, the political teaching of Ivan the Terrible was fully adopted by theorists of the Russian Orthodox monarchy up to the present time. Thus, L.A. Tikhomirov restated his teaching in his own words and declared the political conception of Ivan the Terrible "an ideal, following from a purely Orthodox understanding of life"<sup>23</sup>. L.A. Tikhomirov, in his quest to substantiate the statehood of a Christian monarchy, even put forward the thought that Roman Caesarism had a correct sense of the essence of monarchic power when it "tried to attribute personal divinity to the emperors"<sup>24</sup>.

Therefore, it is no wonder that the "Josephism" that remained for long centuries the official doctrine of the Moscow autocracy, caused tremendous harm to the church. For, when one attempts to make Caesar's realm a sacred one with the help of Christianity, when one sees in it a reflection of the Kingdom of God on earth, then that is already the heresy of human-divinity, of making divine what is relative and transient, of rendering unto Caesar what is God's, and turning, then, into direct idolatry.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 177-181.

<sup>21</sup> N. Ustryalov, *Skazaniia kniazia Kurbskogo (The legends of Prince Kurbskij)*, second edition (1842), 156.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>23</sup> L.A. Tikhomirov, *Edinolichnaia vlast', kak printsip gosudarstvennogo stroitel'stva (Personal authority as a principle of state organization)*, Moscow (1897), 56.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 48.

It is interesting to note that the Russian autocrats themselves realized the unnatural character of organized relations between state and church under which the Orthodox Church, securing its leadership and primacy, was transformed, in fact, into one of the departments of the state. Under the tendency to increased absolutism in Europe, the threat of the church's complete dependence on the state became all too real.

Peter I, the great reformer of Russia, keeping in mind the reforms of Patriarch Nikon, as well as his deposition and prosecution, understood well that an independent patriarch can become a serious barrier on the path of reform he carried out. Thus, already during his first trip abroad (1697-1698) he held a two-hour conversation on the subject of the church with Crown Princess Anne of England, and discussed church matters with the Archbishop of Canterbury as well as other Anglican bishops. The Archbishops of Canterbury and York appointed special theologian-consultants for Peter the Great. But most of all the Russian tsar admired the admonishments of William of Orange, who, using the examples of Holland and England, advised Peter the Great to become head of the church himself in order to have complete monarchic authority at his disposal<sup>25</sup>.

Peter's main associate in spiritual matters was Bishop Feofan

Prokopovitch, who, in his letter to abbot Markel Radysheskiy substantiated the new claims of the autocrat Peter as follows: "In the book about the emperor-pontiff, it is clearly shown that the tsar is judge and sovereign of all clerical ranks, and these, every rank, and the patriarch himself, are subject and under the jurisdiction of the tsar, just as any other subject. And this will be like pricks or like dust in the eyes to those who crave spiritual power or wish to be patriarch"<sup>26</sup>.

A short time after he returned to Russia, Peter I issued the first signed decree of December 16, 1700, on the beginning of church reform and the abolition of the institution of patriarch: "The patriarchate is declared not to be...". The church reform itself was completed only in 1720 by issuing a special legislative act – the Ecclesiastical Order – compiled by Bishop Feofan Prokopovitch, and corrected by Peter I personally. In connection with the abolishment of the patriarchate, a special Ecclesiastical Collegium was established to fulfill the function of church authority undertaken by the state, which was, however, soon renamed the Most Holy Synod, at the head of which was the chief public prosecutor, a state official appointed by the emperor's authority and absolutely unrelated to the church. Adopting the Ecclesiastical Order, state power intruded directly into an area of canon law, interfering in the internal affairs of the church<sup>27</sup>.

<sup>25</sup> A. Nikolin, *Tserkov' i gosudarstvo*, 208.

<sup>26</sup> A.V. Kartashev, *Ocherki po istorii russkoj tserkvi (Studies on the history of the Russian church)*, V.2. Moscow (1991) 322.

<sup>27</sup> N. Tal'berg, *Istoriia russkoj tserkvi (A history of the Russian church)*, Vol. 2, Jordanville, NY (1959), 532-533.

The illusion of a kind Christian state and a God-anointed tsar, just as in Rome, Byzantium and England, was confronted again with the despotism of a secular Caesar. The extent of the spiritual humiliation of the church may be illustrated by the fact that even the sermons and precepts to the priesthood and people imposed earlier as a duty of the bishop, now had to be compiled in the Ecclesiastical Collegium, "since not every bishop is able to compile a pure word"<sup>28</sup>. This, of course, was coarse censorship and neglect of the fulfillment of their holy orders on the part of the clergy.

Since then, the new order of church management was always recognized by the majority of Orthodox clergy as shameful and burdensome. Georgiy Florovskiy wrote about this as follows: "This actual 'Caesaropapism' was never assimilated, adopted or recognized by the church's consciousness or conscience itself, although individual church people and church figures yielded to it, and were quite often even inspired by it"<sup>29</sup>.

There were quite a lot of examples of such "inspirations" and of theological apologetics for the state and church duumvirate under the conditions of complete state support for Orthodox educational institutions. This, for example, is what Archbishop Innokentiy of

Kherson wrote: "What is a pious tsar to a pious realm? He is God's servant, the messenger and acolyte of the Heavenly Father, the living instrument of God's providence, the executor of God's intentions for the people"<sup>30</sup>.

A more picturesque description of the tsar was written by A. Petrov, a well-known monarchist: "Anything that the God-lighted sun is for nature, the God-given tsar is for his realm. If the light of the tsar's eye shines – tears are dried, sighs are satisfied, laborers are encouraged, and courage is renewed. The tsar's generous right hand opens, and disasters are lightened. The tsar's word is issued, and everything is put into well-disposed order, everything is stimulated to activity"<sup>31</sup>.

A well-known commentator, Prince Grigoriy Trubetskoy wrote in defense of the ideals of the monarchy: "The tsar's authority takes on the character of sacred service, and its bearer becomes God's anointed sovereign. In the course of obligation, the monarch expresses the people's conscience in the historical succession of its development; the tsar's authority is the living link between the previous and future generations, rising above transient fervors, parties and classes. That is why the tsar's person as God's anointed sovereign is surrounded by an aura in the people's eyes"<sup>32</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> A.S. Pavlov, *Kurs tserkovnogo prava (A course in church law)*, Moscow (1892), 506-506.

<sup>29</sup> Archpriest Georgiy Florovskiy, *Puti russkogo bogomyслиia (Russian ways of thinking about God)*, Vilnius (1991), 89.

<sup>30</sup> Archbishop Ignatij Brianchaninov of Voronezh and Zadonskij, *Tainstva edinoj, sviatoj, sobornoj i apostol'skoj tserkvi (Sacraments of*

*the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church)*, St. Petersburg (1863) 24-25.

<sup>31</sup> A. Petrov, "Pis'mo monarchista v redaktsiiu zhurnala *Put'*" ("The letter of a monarchist to the editors of the journal *Put'*") *Put'*, No.3 (1926), 105.

<sup>32</sup> G.Trubetskoy, "Spor o monarchii" ("The dispute on the monarchy"), *Put'*, No.4 (1926), 109-110.

In opposition to this, a group of outstanding Russian theologians (I. Aksakov, N. Alexeev, N. Berdyayev, S. Frank, V. Solovyev, V. Speranskiy and others) entered into debate with the religious and mystical interpretation of the autocratic monarchy, noting that neither in Holy Scripture, nor in classical patristics, is there any serious substantiation for the office of tsar by the New Testament church, or for the recognition of anointing as a special kind of sacrament.

Nikolay Berdyayev, the Orthodox theologian and commentator wrote on this subject in 1926 in his famous "An Answer to a Monarchist's Letter": "The recognition of an ecclesiastical and dogmatic significance of an autocratic monarchy and the peculiar sacramental nature of the tsar's anointing seem to me genuine heresy for which we will be cruelly punished... The Christian religion refutes absolute state power on principle. The state has, in its essence, a pagan and Old Testament nature and, as such, it has obtained consecration and justification in Christianity. And a New Testament, Christian state is conditional symbolism, which has turned into a lie and become impossible".

The author of letter states that the Orthodox church cannot be indifferent to the accomplishment of God's righteousness in the life of society and the state. He is correct. But the problem is that the autocratic monarchy did very little for the accomplishment of Christian social righteousness. Still less was righteousness accomplished in Orthodox, autocratic Byzantium. But

in Orthodox, autocratic Russia, God's righteousness in state and public life did not fare much better. The state never really became Christian; it was founded on pagan principles. The transformation of life did not take place. Everything was limited by conventional and symbolic consecration of life. Society actually was not founded on the grounds of Christian love, and the state could not be founded on those grounds at all. An impassable precipice was retained between the path of personal salvation and the path of public and cultural establishment and transfiguration"<sup>33</sup>.

When, at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, the prevailing Orthodox Church initiated, with the state's help, a number of "militant missionary" programs directed against the heterodox; implicitly and approvingly looked on Jewish massacres; and deported whole villages of Molokans, Baptists, Evangelicals, and others; Vladimir Solovyev, the Russian philosopher and commentator, addressed his prophetic denunciation to Emperor Nicholas II, the unique content of which, unknown to many Russian people, is reproduced here:

"Christ said: 'I am the door.' Is it permissible for Christians to push some through this door by force, and not to permit others to leave it, also by force? It is said: 'The one who comes to me I shall not cast out,' but nothing is said about those brought in by force. And why is

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<sup>33</sup> N.A. Berdyayev, "Otvét na pis'mo monarkhista" ("An answer to the monarchist's letter"), *Put'*, No.3 (1926): 109-110;

there compulsion here; what for is this exterior, artificial barrier, this threefold ring of criminal laws, acts of administrative oppression, prohibitive censorship? However painful and offensive these fetters are for those who suffer them – for various dissenters, sectarians and adherents of other faiths – the situation is incomparably more painful and offensive for the ruling church itself: indeed, it is deadly. Serfdom, the enslavement of peasants, corrupted the landowners. The enslavement of the people to Orthodoxy deprives the Russian church of moral force, it undermines its intrinsic viability.

“Is it possible for God’s church to live on earth without the spiritual struggle for truth, and is spiritual struggle possible for a church so strongly guarded with material weapons? How successfully can one convince those who are mistaken of the truth in whose name they are already in prison or in exile? The church’s weapon is the word, but is it possible righteously to condemn the one whose mouth is gagged? Is it possible to struggle faithfully against enemies whose hands are tightly bound? The people are already emerging from their spiritual childhood, and the unworthy defense of the truth is a much greater temptation than the free preaching of delusion in their eyes.

“Far from the worst among the Orthodox people may argue (and argue already) as follows: of two religious societies, which more closely corresponds to Christ’s spirit and the gospel’s commandments: the persecutor or the persecuted? Be-

cause although not all of those who are persecuted suffer for the truth, all the persecutors compel the highest truth in themselves to suffer. An Orthodox Christian should not deny the fact that Christ in the Gospel said to His followers time and again: “You will be persecuted in My name;” but He never said: “You will persecute others in My name”<sup>34</sup>.

Solovyev’s letter does not only substantiate all the malignancy and danger of the church’s position, grasping the “material sword,” but it shows the impossibility of the “governmentalization” of specific church traditions and any specific type of church organization, because the craving for secular power inevitably ended for the church with its cry of humiliation and its enslavement to the state. The problems broached in this letter bring to mind the fact that it was always difficult for sinful man to hold onto the heavenly truth about freedom. Unenlightened Christian consciousness has always been enticed by this freedom and has fallen into the way of the forcible organization of good. But terror in the name of God is not less disgusting than terror in the name of the Devil. The tortures of the Catholic Inquisition are no less terrible than the executions of the Bolshevik Cheka. The religious and metaphysical roots of these errors lie in a lack of understanding of the fact that everything is permitted in the name of the Devil,

<sup>34</sup> This letter, unique in its content, was first published in the journal *Nachala*, 1921. The citation is according to V. Speranskiy, “Chetvert’ veka nazad (Pamiati Vladimira Solov’eva)” (“A quarter of a century ago: In memory of Vladimir Solovyev”), *Put’*, No.2 (1926), 81-82.

but not everything is permitted in the name of God.

Solovyev was prophetically right concerning the fact that the persecution and the prosecution of “heretics” by the ruling church gave birth to the future cruelty of atheists who later would destroy and defile the church. In this connection, referring to the spiritual prerequisites of revolution, the same N. Berdyayev wrote: “During two hundred years of the synodal system of Peter’s period, the Orthodox Church arrived at a condition Dostoevsky called ‘paralysis;’ insincerity, self-interest and conditional character triumphed; the most creative and valuable elements of society left the church, and Orthodoxy acquired a formally imperial style. There were individual Orthodoxy luminaries – Saint Serafim, Optina’s elders – but in general Orthodoxy experienced a period of decline. ‘Sobornost’ [community] existed only in the writings of the Slavophiles. The revolution was necessary in order for a synod to be convened and the patriarch to be elected. There was no parish life. In this connection, paradoxically enough, the revolution’s services are great”<sup>35</sup>.

Maybe that is the reason that in the appeal of Patriarch Tikhon of June, 18, 1923, the note of suffering sounded in the conclusion that, “the Russian Orthodox Church is indifferent to politics and desires to be neither “white,’ nor ‘red.’ It

must be and will be the one, catholic and apostolic Church, and any efforts of anybody to fling the Church into political struggle, whoever they may be, must be rejected and condemned”<sup>36</sup>.

The Russian Orthodox Church had to have years of struggle and two centuries of humiliation and slavery in order to return to the evangelical understanding of the fact that “what is God’s” must never be the property of Caesar’s, and vice versa.

Remembering the tragic lessons of the past, many Western theologians defined the political engagement of the church as “the fourth temptation of Jesus Christ.” Truly, the church in the West is influential and has an effect on all spheres of social life, not through direct representation in political parties and coalitions, but as a main binding element in the structure of civil society, which is able to build an equitable dialogue and proper mutual relations with the state. In the U.S.A., it was not a Christian state that created a strong church, but a strong church and a Christian sense of justice that determined the Christian face of America.

At the same time, from the point of view of the last elections in Ukraine, it may be said that many of our political and Christian figures were again motivated by the same Utopian and even destructive idea of a consonance of state and church power. Thus, in a collection

<sup>35</sup> N.A. Berdyayev. “Otvét na pis’mo monarkhista”, 108.

<sup>36</sup> *Akty sviatejshego patriarkha Tikhona i pozdnejshie dokumenty o preemstve vysshei*

*tserkovnoj vlasti 1917-1943, (Acts of the Most Holy Patriarch Tikhon and the most recent documents on the succession of the highest church authority 1917-1943), Moscow (1994), 287.*

of documents of the All-Ukrainian Association of Christians (UAC) it was stated, "The UAC has determined the construction of a Christian state to be its principal goal"<sup>37</sup>. History has taught us nothing at all. Today it is necessary to have the strong spiritual delusion of expecting that when we have achieved secular power, we will be able to apply the power of God's Kingdom in full measure. Jesus, in his time, rejected all the glory of earthly realms (Mt 4:8-10) and withdrew from people who wished to make him king (Jn 6:15); we are not higher than our Lord. If need be, God can accomplish his will through an unbelieving ruler as well. Note what God says about Cyrus: "This is what the Lord says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of... I will strengthen you, though you have not acknowledged me" (Isa 45:1-5). King Cyrus, a pagan, who did not know God at all, is declared an anointed sovereign, and, as it says in 2Ch 36:22, "the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm" to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. A deep demarcation between the spiritual and material realms has been retained since the times of ancient Israel to the present day, and God will not change it. That is why all the discussions about a Christian president, government or parliament are unavailing and without biblical grounds. Any effort to combine the church and sec-

ular power since the time of Constantine the Great (the Catholic Church and the Holy Roman Empire, the Russian Orthodox Church and the Moscow autocracy, Henry VIII and the Anglican Church, John Calvin and his despotic reign in Geneva) has suffered defeat and led to the severest spiritual depression of the church.

Nicolay Berdyayev wrote in this regard: "A human spirit is worth more than all the world's realms. In the Gospel Christ himself drew a fundamental distinction between the Kingdom of God and Caesar's realm and assigned to Caesar a subordinate and limited sphere. The state is not the bearer of absolute good, or an absolute spirit, and it may become inimical to absolute good and an absolute spirit. The ancient prophets and St. Augustine rose against the evil of the City of Man. The truth limiting the state's absolutism is sealed by the blood of Christian martyrs. The state must and can confine the manifestation of evil in the world, suppress the disclosure of an evil will of a known kind. But the state, by its very nature, is absolutely powerless to have victory over evil and a problem of this kind is not its concern. It is the church and only the church that is able to struggle against the intrinsic source of evil and to be victorious over it..."

"All the reactionary and revolutionary inquisitors, beginning with Torquemada and continuing to Robespierre and Dzerzhinsky, considered themselves the bearers of absolute good, and, quite often, the bearers of love. They murdered al-

<sup>37</sup> *Vseukrains'ke ob'ednannia khristiian. Zbirnik dokumentiv. Ch. II. (All-Ukrainian Association of Christians. Compendium of documents. Vol. II)*, Kiev (2002), 5.

ways in the name of good and love. These are the most dangerous people. Dostoyevsky brilliantly revealed the spirit of such people.

“In reality, both the Christian faith and any healthy ethic must recognize not only the freedom of good, but a certain freedom of evil as well. The denial of evil’s freedom makes coercion a good. The absolute nightmare of Communism lies in the fact that it wishes the compulsory organization of good, it wants to compel virtue. But God permitted freedom to evil, and by means of this determined all the world’s process. He put into it the sense of the world. People do not think enough about God’s endless tolerance of evil and evil people. This tolerance is only the other side of God’s love of freedom. The church sets infinite value on the individual human soul and its eternal fate. A person is God’s idea, God’s conception, and the denial of a person is resistance to God”<sup>38</sup>.

Thus, we may conclude that in mixing the state and the church the great mistake of absolutizing relative things is made. The state is a subordinate and limited tool in the work of establishing God’s Kingdom. The idea of the state itself is based, both historically and theologically, on the fact of man’s deviation from God and an attempt to elevate his own temporary realm. That is why one of the greatest acts of Christianity in history was the restriction of state absolutism, the opposition of the human spirit’s

eternal nature to the absolute pretensions of the earthly kingdom and Caesar. Christianity, as the experience of freedom, teaches us that the final realization of good’s ideals implies the interaction of freedom and God’s grace. In the forced organization of good by the state, the ontological sense of freedom is denied. The state is not the executing organ of Absolute Good acting on God’s behalf. Moreover, it is the state that has too often used the cross to justify its retributive sword!

At the same time, we see that Christianity did not enter this world as a revolutionary social force calling for the forced modification of the foundations of public and social life. On the contrary, it entered this world as the good news of salvation and the reconciliation of all who wish to accept the Kingdom of God, which is not of this world. Christianity clearly pointed out its political apathy, calling every Christian to be obedient to the authorities because all authorities that exist have been established by God (Ro 13:1), and to pray for kings and all those in authority (1Ti 2:1-3). And if we consider Christ’s words: “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s” (Mt 22:21; Mk 12:17; Lk 20:25), as well as “My kingdom is not of this world” (Jn 18:36), we will understand that from the beginning Jesus gave his church a clear reference point: His kingdom and Caesar’s kingdom, i.e., the state, are two non-intersecting planes. A church member living in a state is loyal to it, presenting himself as an example of civic honesty and

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<sup>38</sup> N.A. Berdyaev, “Koshmar zlogo dobra” (“Nightmare of the evil of good”) *Put’*, No.4 (1926), 82-83.



obedience to the law, but at the same time belonging spiritually to the Kingdom of Christ.

In other words, the sphere of an individual's religious life is sovereign with respect to the state. This state of affairs results from evidence obvious to the Christian, that Christianity is an inspiration of God in history, and his theocracy and eternal dominion already suppose the finiteness and limitation of any personal authority or state structure. And however good the state may be in its social order, no matter how it protects the legal rights of its citizens, it will never go beyond the bounds of historical limitation drawn for it, while the Kingdom of God exceeds them as the heir of eternity. That is why the church cannot bind to its sphere of evangelization and teaching any specific structure, any specific state on whose territory it has, according to Augustine, a temporary refuge. Christianity has proved its universality and viability in any social and political system, and thus a pivotal Christian priority must not be participation in political action for the construction of just another "-ism" but preaching and the establishment of God's Kingdom within human souls.

Today we are taking part in many events predicted by Bible. As the Russian theologian E.N. Trubetskoy wrote early in the twentieth century, "Before our eyes, an apocalyptic vision of the beast coming up from the abyss is vested in flesh and blood; the prevailing tendency in modern life is expressed in the conversion of human com-

munity into a perfected beast that tramples on every law, whether divine or human; the dizzying progress of modern technology on the one hand, and the dizzying degradation of the individual and society as a whole on the other, lead to this result"<sup>39</sup>.

Of course, the temptation of religious autocracy is great. How wonderful to see the realization of God's Kingdom in the realm of Caesar! Even if we lost out a little in quality, how we would benefit in quantity! If only we could find a sincerely believing politician of universal scope, who would unite all the brightest forces of Christianity (at least in our country) and would lead them to fight against illness, social injustice, poverty, religious ignorance! Millions would follow him!

And the hour already draws near when an extremely gifted politician, the most famous Caesar, whose fullness of wisdom and crown of beauty will enter the scene of our latest history. He will solve the most complicated international and state problems, unite many realms, and become the desired one of many religions. It is during his rule that the realization of Caesaropapist ideals – the confluence of political and religious authority in one person – will take place. And then, when God's Kingdom seems so realizable and tangible here on earth, will we have sufficient wisdom and spiritual strength not to give to Caesar what is God's, and to set the crown of Christ, the Messiah, on the Antichrist's head?

<sup>39</sup> E.N. Trubetskoy, *Izbrannoe (Selected works)*, Moscow (1994), 257-258.

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