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## THE WORD OF THE QUEST EDITOR

### *Russia as a Post-Secular Society*

There are two factors that have changed world as a whole and Russian social and religious thought in particular. They are globalization and the rise of political Islam. Because of the unique religious post-soviet Renaissance, an aroused interest in studies of religion has occurred. After the period of actual restraint of religious liberty, representatives and believers of different confessions are now able to freely and openly demonstrate their belonging to certain religious brands.

The longtime dominance of atheistic ideology in scientific researches has influenced the post-soviet period. During last 20 years the problem of religiosity was considered in the terms of "post-secularity". It must be pointed out that post-secular society is characterized not only by the rise of religiosity but by religion's return to the social sphere and public discourse. According to Peter Berger, the most popular theorist of secularization, "religion is not about to disappear, it exists, evolves and comes back into policy"<sup>1</sup>.

All these processes fully took place in Russia. During the period of post-soviet reforms, Russian social consciousness concerning religion and the evaluation of value-identification basis of Russian culture changed significantly.

According to The European Social Survey (*The European Social Survey, ESS, Round 4 – 2008-2009*) Russian society divides into almost equal parts. 49% of Russian people consider themselves as believers, 48% as atheists. Most believers (87%) are Christians. The second most popular confession is Islam: 11% (6% of all respondents) of believers consider themselves as Muslims. Less than 1% of Russian people are of some other confession<sup>2</sup>. This factor is proved by long-term monitoring of Institute of Sociology of RAN Center "Religion in modern society". Most people in Russia also consider religion identification as socio-cultural one.

Religion is the factor of identity under the conditions of split society like Russia. Different representatives of this society cannot identify themselves with any political and culture-identification ideas, so they find a stable moral guide. That's why 80% of respondents consider themselves as Orthodox Christians, but only half of them believe in God. Moreover, most of them are vague about Orthodox Christianity. It must be added that religion doesn't play a paramount role in the society; it summarizes everyday life practices. At the same time religion along with Supreme Power and Army is on the first place among population according to degree of belief.

Modern Russian society suffers from a variety of trends. On the one hand, religiosity and the number of believers multiply. On the other hand, the processes

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1 An interview with Peter Berger, *The Hedgehog Review*, Spring & Summer 2006, pp. 153-160.

2 Кофанова Е.Н., Мчедлова М.М., Религиозность россиян и европейцев, *Мониторинг общественного мнения*, № 4, Vol. 98, март-апрель 2010, pp. 201-202.

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of secularization have great impact on everyday life; people tend to nonreligious aims and values, with the church by itself playing a small part in daily life. Such tendencies lead to conflict that is reflected in scientific discourse.

More than that, social reality of post-secular society is characterized by new forms of political identification and political subjectivity. This means that religious basis becomes a necessary and sufficient condition for political activities.

Our opinion is very close to most authors' position. They declare that political bias and low effectiveness are the main features of inter-faith dialogue in Russia.

Nicolay Shilov and Tembulat Gyatov in their articles analyze possible forms of this dialogue at regional and national levels. This first article is devoted to detailed analysis of the current relationship between Church and Government in Mordovia, a multinational and multi-religious republic of Povolzhye (Volga region) under the conditions of socio-political situation in the region. One of the interesting things described in this article is the rivalry between different confessions, and the separated theological administrations of Muslims. Another article is connected with possible reasons of religious extremism in Northern Caucasia. Both articles show quite a difference between the situations in different regions of the Russian Federation and more than that, we may see that local authorities face of with rather different difficulties solving the problem of conflict-free and peaceful co-existence of representatives of different confessions. We may also notice different results of regional and national policy due to different socio-cultural circumstances.

Nevertheless, according to our authors' point of view a high level of confidence in the Church shows that activities provided by religious organizations of institutionalized confessions are very important and necessary. More than that, these social, charitable and peace-making activities are highly appreciated. Believers and atheists alike regard Church social power as worth-being. So Church has a great impact on the social climate in Russia. It is not unexpected that different religious organizations achieving some social capital actively appear in public space and even on the political stage. Polina Borisova has written the article "Church and religious organizations participation in public life of Russian Society" devoted to people's attitude to such kind of activities of religious organizations. This article is mostly based on definite sociological researches concerning specific characters of Russians' religious self-identification and analysis of main religious practices.

Affected religious intentions in policy, even under the conditions of ideological frameworks, conclude that there are contradictory religious factors at work. Valentina Slobozhnikova analyzes how the use of religious meanings and concepts in political construction has evolved. She depicts the religious factor involvement in ideological and programme documents of political parties. She also gives a long-term outlook to newly established political parties identifying themselves with some religious confession. The author emphasizes that state-

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ments of religious leaders are considered by the society as the truth. So this fact is used to influence public moods and dominant assessments of collective consciousness.

It is important to note that in modern Russian society religion plays the role of basis for cultural-civilizational identification and of cultural tradition contradictory to definite dogmatic postulates of different religious confessions. Moreover, attempts to impose some religious practices even by the means of educational institutes are rejected by the people. The article of Sergey Lebedev is devoted to analyzing such conflict in the educational sphere. This article is concerned with new ways of religion's study at school. For example, we may see the introduction of new school courses "Bases of Religion" and "Bases of Orthodox Christianity". It must be pointed out that the government uses Church as the source of additional legitimation, so sometimes it is not ready for protests from the civil society demonstrating for secularization.

Zhan Toshchenko, associate of RAN, shows in his article wide study of interactions between church and government in modern societies, both Western and traditional. He points out how church explores different forms of participation in Russia as well as in other countries. The author emphasizes that unbelievers fairly reject church participation in social life due to the fact that definite political forms of interfaith dialogues, its opportunities and results focused on socio-political stability in Russia go beyond all bounds. So we want to remember about the open letter from July 22, 2007. This letter was composed by ten famous Russian scientists and academicians to V.V. Putin because they were concerned about increasing clericalization among Russian society and the active role of the Church in all spheres of social life.

That's why his position is similar to the position of other authors. They all claim that close interaction between Church and Government is rather dangerous for a multinational and multi-religious society such as Russia. It may lead to heterogeneous manifestations of religious solidarity.

At the same time Russian reality shows that finding no legitimate way to integrate into the political system of the secular state, religion becomes radicalized and seeks not just participation in the power and fullness of political power.

Due to its multi-religious structure Russian society lets different confessions interact effectively. But it may also be the reason for different complex conflicts. That is why state policy must minimize all existing risks.

Political scientist Alexey Chernyshov in point of this situation evaluates modern processes of interactions between Government and Church. The author points out that Government uses the religious factor for its self-preservation. Such self-preservation can be seen in the manipulation of collective consciousness preparing the ground for contradictions between believers. Thus, on the one hand, government decreases the effectiveness of any protest and, on the other hand, turns any protest to its advantage. Moreover, according to the au-

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thor's opinion religious conciseness is of paramount importance because on one side it arouses opposition among consumer society and on other side it invisibly consolidates this society. The author provides vivid examples of how the process happens.

Books chosen to be reviewed in this edition are rather sociological than politological. The first review written by Elena Irsetskaya is devoted to the book by Alexandre Shchipkov *"The Religious Dimension of Journalism"* about religious discourse in the public sphere. The second review by Anna Goloseyeva is devoted to the research of Elena Ostrovskaya "Buddhist Communities of Saint-Petersburg" which employs the sociological approach to studying Buddhist communities of Saint-Petersburg. Both of these books can extend our imaginations of complicated and diverse religious life and practices in Russia.

Overall, a noteworthy detail is that modern Russian society considers correlation between religious and other forms of identity (group, ethnic, confessional, and international) and relation between depth and character of religious views among believers of different confessional traditions and ethical standards as of high importance. That's why specific activities of religious organizations, along with interactions between the Government and religious institutes, are interpreted by the society under the conditions of existing collective conciseness sets and social perceptions.

The right of religion to be in public sphere and participate in public discussions is still under question.

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