

“THE RELIGIOUS DIMENSION OF JOURNALISM”

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Religion is one of the most discussed phenomena of modern scholarly disputes. It is actively analyzed by almost all socio-human sciences. A wide range of analyses of different problems is used by religious sociology and political science. Religion is considered as a socio-historical phenomenon. The social and political role of religion, ethno-confessional relationships, process of secularization, religious trends in modern society in country and regions, level and degree of religiosity and atheism – all these factors are deeply studied.

Both scientific discourse and different journalistic texts are devoted to processes of modern mass conciseness and dynamics of Russians' public opinion about God, belief and Church. So religious polemics are frequently characterized by political by political implication, with arguments defined by the political and religious worldview of the particular author or the whole publisher.

Nevertheless, journalists and speakers must adequately appreciate and publish Church's opinion independently of their own political views and social groups.

“The Religious Dimension of Journalism” is the example of an attempt to determine sociological approaches to analysis of religious mass media publications and materials devoted to religious themes. Aleksandr Shchipkov is the author of this book. He is popular Russian political expert, a sociologist of religion, publicist, and expert in the sphere of church and state politics, and Director of the Moscow Center for Social Research. Aleksandr tries to analyze how religious problems are reflected in journalistic conclusions and comments. Due to his characterization of the condition and nature of modern religious and political discussion, modern church journalism should be considered as the reflection of a vision of God and politics in mass conciseness. Moreover, the author emphasizes that belief and religiosity plays important role in the social life. According to Z. Freud's works A.V. Shchipkov points out: “...as is well known, Grandfather Freud concludes that religious basis is necessary and vital for society, Traditional Christianity unites people and has sublimating potential” (p. 30).

A. V. Shchipkov states that the author's confession and the level of his religiosity are really important features. “Sometimes you face with not young journalists with wealth life experience who share their opinion about Church and religious

processes. Level of their belief devotion, infantile or adolescent, is evident", - A.V. Shchipkov tells. He offers to define "Orthodoxy" not only by the theme and the context of particular article, film, or document but by "moral condition and worldview position of the author" (p. 27).

The problem of possibility to criticize the Church within reasonable limits is one of the most vital theme of "The Religious Dimension of Journalism". It is difficult to disagree with the author: "We can criticize church bishops for their civil, temporal affairs, but we cannot criticize the Church for its interchurch life. As for the social questions like manners, morals, social fairness it can be discussed by both believers and people with a secular position. It is

'nobody's territory', neutral zone" (p. 61).

The author is talking about how an Orthodox journalist understands himself, his inner world and his personal role in the information society. Thus, A.V. Shchipkov points out: "...I remind you that journalism involves not only freedom of the word but responsibility before God..." (p. 26).

The book by itself is the collection of articles. It is written in the manner of a polemic: every single article starts and ends with comments that are the beginning of further discussion. Articles are composed in the certain order.

The first part of the book is connected with personal autobiographic memories of the author. Shchipkov describes situations when he was a participant of closed intellectual dissident groups during Soviet time.

The second part is very polemical. Despite this, two texts are devoted to Vladimir Medinskiy (current Minister of Culture) and Maksim Kantor (famous writer, artist, publicist). The author has collected all polemical articles, which are devoted to modern actual religious social themes, and also texts, which reflect the author's attitude to different opinions of journalists and famous people: Dmitry Bykov, Aleksandr Arhangelsky, Andrey Kuraev, Ivan Ohlobistin and others. A.V. Shchipkov says that nowadays journalists influence public opinion concerning the modern condition of religion and belief and special aspects of development and transformations happened in this sphere as the result of change from socialistic social structure to capitalistic. The author writes in his book: "Aleksandr Arhangelsky is a striking publicist, social activist, and writer. The authority of Arhangelsky has been strengthened. Nowadays he has a vivid influence on leading church journalists, who form certain image of Church among the enlightened political class" (p. 32).

A.V. Shchipkov notes that the film "The Heat" ("Zhara") incorrectly reflects the pitiful condition of believers and Christian religion during the soviet period. "The tone of the cinema and all the participants unconsciously stresses that Christianity is the religion of sad people, religion of sorrow and despondency". The author by himself writes that for him and his family "...recognition of Jesus was an enthusiastic bright event in the period of 70-s" (p.32). So we may conclude that incorrect ideological representation of soviet religious process is formed

and perceived by modern society.

The second part of the book "Religious journalism" is also devoted to such vital problems of perception and performance of Orthodox Christianity as: conversion of calendar initiated by the Government; offer to change the date of the Christmas; transformation of sacerdotal rite to political capital and so on.

The last part of the book has a professional character. The author composes the articles devoted to an understanding of journalist profession. He analyzes the crisis of modern informational space, special aspects of polemic between "orthodox liberal" and "orthodox conservators"; he also describes and determines the main aims of an Orthodox journalist. It is interesting to note that the author uses data from the sociological center ZIRKON.

A.V. Shchipkov notices that under the conditions of modern value crisis the mass media has the strongest impact on the transformation of moral conciseness. The modern Russian system of values and traditions is mostly formed by the means of mass media. Talking about the Russian moral condition the author points out: "...Our Russian mass media and especially Russian television are the map and guide to mystique Russian soul" (p. 51). Television has a negative influence, especially on young generation. It is a rather tricky situation when television is opposite to Russian moral culture. A.V. Shchipkov says: "Along with the development of information technologies Russia enters the age of informational barbarity" (p. 52). We see the attempts to convince people that television precisely reflects the situation in country. Along with this fact the mass media try to dilute right and wrong values. "Our television constantly talks about divergence from a norm, different kinds of pathologies... We are persuaded that there is no standard. There is only pathology. Russia by itself is pathology. Look at yourselves! You are freaks!" (p. 53). Sergey tried to change this situation when in 2007 he brought a bill about creation of a Television Community Council of Russian Federation. This bill was supported by representatives of all numerous confessions but it was blocked by the government.

This book ends with the description of the author's personal journalistic practice, specific characters of journalist's activity, interesting observations and people that the author interacted with. A.V. Shchipkov concludes that religious journalism is formally the same as actual journalism. At the same time he adds: "... the depth of your thought and the result of journalistic activity are proportional to your personal religious experience... It is almost impossible to talk about religion without any personal religious experience" (p. 84).

As a whole the work of A.V. Shchipkov is a very thoughtful analysis of different aspects of journalistic activity in modern Russian society. The author, using his own life and professional experience, deeply analyzes the influence of journalist's religiosity on his reflection of socio-political process. Due to his analysis of certain personal situations and life examples the author shows how journalists misrepresent the current situation and influence Russian public conciseness.

Nevertheless, some points and conclusions of the book have a polemical nature. You may have the impression that the author too dramatically describes so called "informational attack on Church". All this may lead to consolidating people's aggression upon some enemy without any independent apprehension of interchurch life. So we face a situation where all problems are from without. Moreover, reading the book "the Religious Dimension of Journalism" you pay attention that the Church freely criticizes the Government. On the one hand, the Church by itself is independent from anyone and anything, so it may criticize all public authorities with unworthy activities. On the other hand, the Church must be rather powerful and affluent to impact the Government. So Church must provide itself with good facilities and resources. It is not bad when someone in government considers the Church as social resource. That's why it is really impossible when some professional politician being really Orthodox Christian will absolutely agree with Church. In reality, government considers Orthodox Christianity as ideological resource.

In sum, it must be pointed the book "the Religious Dimension of Journalism" may be considered as actual analysis in the sphere of Russian religious history and sociology of religion due to its vivid examples, analyses of different social aspects, references to famous people of modern Russian reality.

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