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ANALYSIS OF “THE FUNDAMENTALS OF SOCIAL CONCEPTION OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH”¹

by Fr. Benjamin Novik

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The necessity for a social conception (or doctrine) of the Church follows from the understanding that Christianity for a Christian is, figuratively speaking, not only “a religion for inner use” or a sort of a therapeutic remedy for consolation or a system for self-discipline, but that it is a principle for one’s whole life, including one’s social, cultural, political, economic, ecological, and even bio-ethical aspects.

CORRELATING THE HEAVENLY AND THE EARTHLY

This orientation of a Christian in civic society is possible if the Church has a notion about social duties, about a certain public ideal, understood from an eschatological perspective of salvation. The main difficulty in this question is to combine the earthly and heavenly, to define their proper correlation. The main values of Christianity as a religious teaching is having a transcendental or the beyond character-- raising from the dead, the Final Judgment, the determination of a posthumous destiny in hell or in heaven. A social teaching is possible only if there is an acknowledgement of a significant value of earthly life. In a radical form a question can be put as following: “what is earthly life? Is it just a test, waiting room, or is it a garden, which needs to be tirelessly tilled?” It would be very easy to answer it on the level of an ideal, “it is both this and that as well as the third.”

Religiously apprehended acknowledgment of earthly well-being offers a considerable difficulty for Russian Orthodoxy, in which sanctity was traditionally associated with an original

¹The document was adopted at the Jubilee Bishop’s Council of the Russian Orthodox Church meeting in Moscow in August, 2000.

sense of evangelic poverty. In the epoch of secularization and differentiation from society, the church separated from the state, was assigned a special corner in society, and its interference in public life began to be considered as discourteous and even inadmissible (to a different degree in different countries, of course). They maintain that the church has quite different tasks. Curiously, suddenly many zealots appear defending the purity of church chasubles [clerical vestment]. However, many people excluded religion from their consciousness long ago. The Church itself had to agree to this and many believers did accept such isolationism inwardly, promoted by a dualistic terminology of “spiritual” and “profane.” The Church appeared to be separated not only from the state but also from society. Its prophetic function proved to be weakened, if not lost completely. Under communistic totalitarianism any separation from the paternalistic state did not mean freedom from it, but a factual discrimination. The Church became a social ghetto. In such a situation it was not possible to form a social teaching. There was only one “social conception,” namely the communist, for all people. Church people were commanded just “to sit still, otherwise it’ll be worse.”

Under the condition of freedom for the Church the development of social teaching is quite natural and necessary. The clergy traditionally don’t take part directly in politics but parishioners can participate in politics at any level and continue to be Orthodox Christians. Both of the clergy and laity must know the principles of their relationship and their interaction on personal and institutional levels with all the fullness of the surrounding world. These principles must be developed, adopted at Church councils and recommended to all the members of the Church. This is the purpose of a social doctrine of the Church.

A social doctrine, named “The Principles of Social Conception of the Russian Orthodox Church” (PSC ROC) was adopted at the Bishops Council, meeting in Moscow at the Temple of Christ the Savior, August, 13-16, 2000, with 146 bishops present. The Russian Orthodox Church hierarchy seems to have decided to avoid the use of the terms “teaching” (used by dogmatics) or “doctrine” (used by Roman Catholic Church) having preferred a modest but less euphonious and popular “conception” [conseptsia].

As is known, priests and lay people do not participate in the Bishop’s Council. As metropolitan Kirill reported at the Council, there were 26 participants, who constituted the working group for formulating a social conception, among them, bishops and the other clergy, professors of theological schools, officials of Synodal departments. The development of the

project had a half-obscured character. This group worked for six years. They had decided to avoid using terms such as “teaching” or “doctrine” having preferred the more modest word “conception.”

FUNDAMENTAL THEOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES

Altogether there are sixteen chapters in the document. Here I shall examine only the first five. The first section of the document is entitled “Fundamental Theological Principles.” It is known that there is a close tie between religiosity, world outlook, value orientation, preferences, a person’s behavior not only in personal life but also in society. It is also known that Orthodoxy, bearing on the whole a monastic contemplative character, yet having been a state religion during the greater part of its history, has great problems with the comprehension of a secular society. That is why many Orthodox neophytes often try to leave their secular work (in the “world”) and want to be close to a church or monastery (though today to a lesser degree than under a communism). This can be explained by the fact that Orthodoxy does not have a complete notion of a this-worldly Christian life. For example, there is no Christian understanding of a secular work ethic. The monastic way of living continues to be incommensurably more important than a layperson’s.

Thus in the consciousness of many Orthodox there is a strict dualism between the “spiritual” and “secular,” “worldly” and “churchly.” This dualism raises the question: how can salvation, understood in an eschatological sense, be combined with salvation as an improvement of human life here on Earth, with an understanding of Christian responsibility for everything that is going on in this world, with a religious comprehension of what is usually called “earthly well-being?” If the earthly as a whole is not important, then is it worth treating seriously? Too great an allurements for a spiritual escapism appears for the believer, an inward departure from this world, a minimization of relations with it. Very often these two orientations (the “vertical” and “horizontal”) come into severe conflict, which is one of the reasons for a worldwide human drama.

This serious problem cannot be solved in one paragraph with several common phrases about a wishful «participation in a social life», about the inadmissibility of a Manichean disdain of the surrounding world, about God’s love for the world, society, and state, which are “destined for transfiguration and purification on the bases of Divine commandments of love” (1,3). A

theologically motivated conception of Christian responsibility for society is absolutely absent in this document. A call to the “faithful children” to participate in “social life, which must be based on Christian ethical principles” is not enough. The ROC has a quite developed liturgical-ascetic monastic discipline but it does not have a social ethic. That is why, according to modern Orthodox understanding about Christian ethics, participation in social life (“this vanity”) most likely should be minimized, to say nothing of participation of believers in politics, which is considered to be a trivial “dirty matter.” Figuratively speaking, it is much more easy to try to leave a dirty hut, preserving the purity of chasubles, than to start to sweep away the garbage.

Unfortunately the document does not contain a single reference to the works of Russian religious philosophers of the 19th and 20th century, who worked to overcome this Manichean dualism and to comprehend a religious meaning of the earthly well-being of people, to explore which social, political organizations and what form of state are most appropriate to this-worldly life. In the fourth chapter, however, the writers adduce an important thought of the Russian philosopher Vladimir S. Solovyev (without a reference to his name) about the law as a minimum of ethical norms, compulsory for all members of society, and about the main task of law being the prevention of hell on earth. The law must not have a maximalist character, trying to regulate everything, including the establishment of paradise on earth. Only God can control the fullness of everything.

CHURCH AND NATION

In the second section of PSC, entitled “Church and Nation”, after a narration of the Biblical notion of “the chosen people” they draw a non-obtrusive parallel between a hypothetical monoconfessional Orthodox community (like civil or ethnic nation) and the completely faithful people of Israel in the epoch of its providential mission. In this section of the document not enough is said about the politics of the Church in a supposedly national state. Here an organic analogy inevitably comes to mind: a church of the majority can be regarded as the soul of the nation. But what principles of behavior must the church of the majority follow in the multinational and multiconfessional state? Would it adhere to the conception of human rights, for example? A question arises: are such human communities or even nations possible in our time? Can it be the goal of the Orthodox, to whom the PSC appeals, first of all? Certainly, this question is left open. The authors of PSC ought to specify the inevitable problem of differences in thought and belief (human rights) in such complex associations as contemporary Russia. In Russian

history there have already been many dismal experiences of a nationally-religious and state integrism, expressed in a formula by the minister of public education S. S. Uvarov (1838-1849): “Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationality.” They ought to grasp this circumstance somehow, but not just to declare again the ideal of a supposed unity.

Further in the second chapter they define a binary opposition of the universal and national, but they don’t show how the national is connected with the universal. What is the correlation of the frequent collisions of national interests with the principles common to all humankind?

A simple suggested collation of two values (with a conjunction “and”) is evidently not enough. They say that the national principles need to be combined with the universal. Such an approach requires considerable effort in order to understand the universal (because of its abstractedness) which will always then be forced out by the concrete national, which is easy to understand.

Isn’t it for this reason that the expressions “common values to all humankind” and “Christian universalism” are not found a single time in the document? But on the other hand they use a strange neologism “Christian patriotism”. Neither patriarch Germogen, nor archpriest John of Kronshtadt, whose utterances are adduced in the document, used such a term. The phrase, “Love for motherland is a fine thing, but there is something finer - it is love of truth”² was very costly to Chaadaev. He was placed under house arrest. V. S. Solovyov wrote about the same thing, for which he was zealously defamed in the patriotic press. Is it not also a problem now? Has a correct hierarchy of values been restored? It looks as if few believe in such an easy clarity.

However, at the end of the section there is a warning against the idolatry of the state, xenophobia, and aggressive nationalism. Thus a certain balance between the extreme terms has been observed.

CHURCH AND STATE

The third chapter is entitled “Church and State”. It contains historical information about the development of interaction between the church and the state. Attempts to understand the state from the religious point of view were made. It is not surprising that this chapter is written in a spirit of balance and careful evaluation. In addition to the inner methodological difficulties of a

2P. Chaadaev, *Works*, Moscow, 1989, p.140. (in Russian).

combination of the absolute and the relative in the social-political sphere, it is also influenced by the fact that Orthodoxy exists not only in Russia, but in many other countries. In some countries it is a state religion, and in others it is separated from the state. That is why, in spite of the fact that the high Orthodox hierarchs repeatedly spoke of a principle of separating of church from state as a guarantee of church freedom and non-interference of church and state into the affairs of each other, in the PSC this idea was affirmed as normative. It is understandable.

From the point of view of the Church, its separation from the state is not an end in itself. The main thing is the independence of the church. It is known that under the illegal totalitarian regimes, separation from the state did not mean freedom for the Church but a rigorous discrimination, as it was for example under the communist regime in Russia. There is also a psychological reason for the failure to mention separation: the ROC, in spite of all the historical shocks, continues to feel itself the state church (even if only potentially so), it does not want to “burn bridges” connecting it with the state over the centuries. Besides, for the ROC the collectivistic Russian complex (a secular analogue of the Orthodox theme of *sobornost* - togetherness) is much closer to their thinking than is western liberal individualism. In Russia, state and society were identified to a great degree. Strictly speaking, in communist Russia a civil society never came to be, and it almost does not exist now. There is only the settled population biologically related. It is not accidental that a section on “Church and Society” is absent in PSC. The authors of the PSC did not manage to say anything about a Christian understanding of society, it failed to say something about the most important item that should be in a social doctrine.

This is even stranger since in the final document of an officially sponsored scientific theological conference “Church Mission. Freedom of Conscience. Civil Society” (July 14-17, 2000, Belgorod, Russia), which took place not only with the blessing of Patriarch Alexis II but also with the approval of the Holy Synod, it was affirmed that “a task of the Church and its mission is to promote the formation and development of civil society by finding its historically proper place”. And it is seen from the document that the term “civil society” is understood in its generally accepted sense, and not in some special, limited sense.

It is interesting to mention that the Constitution of the Russian Federation also does not say anything about a civil society based on pluralism and tolerance. It can be supposed that the authors of the PSC decided not to go ahead of the Constitution of the Russian Federation. But it

is more probable that the ROC simply does not have a theologically formulated conception of civil society. By the way, the state also does not have one. For all that, the term “a state of law” is found in the Constitution. A modern understanding of society and state is impossible without the corresponding notions of “a state of law” and “civil society”. In the PSC “the state of law” is not used a single time, and the second one, “civil society” is mentioned once and then only in the enumeration order at the end of the document.

A theological conception of “human rights” is also absent in the document. Probably that is due to the wrong idea that “human rights” is not a “spiritual matter,” but a secular one. Very simply and habitually the question is transferred to a moralistic plane, that is, law is basically confused with morality.

The absence of the modern term “solidarity” is not accidentally absent from the document. Instead of that they suggest “collaboration” and the archaically sounding (in Russian) term “co-working”. These two notions seem to concern the Church, the state, politicians and culture, but not society as a whole. A trivial indication of the fact that a society consists of very different associations only (sociological nominalism - atomism), does not eliminate the problem of a theological understanding of society as a whole. The Catholic Church gets out of this difficult situation by introducing the expression: “people of good will” and “common good”. Absence of these terms in the PSC is not accidental either.

On the whole, the totality of statements in the PSC allow us to draw the conclusion that cooperation with those forces, that do not contradict Christianity is acceptable (though the term “universal ethical values” is also absent). The above-mentioned terminology, which is characteristic for Catholic social doctrine, is missing. Is it possible to manage without it? The absence of generally accepted terminology in the document is clear: Orthodoxy has not yet developed a theological interpretation of it.. The authors of the PSC preferred to use only that terminology, with which they felt familiar.

Importantly, the document does not avoid confronting those situations when a state exceeds its powers and comes into a direct conflict with the values that are held by the Church. History contains vivid examples of this (e.g. national-socialism in Germany, communism in Russia), but the document does not contain corresponding references. (This seems to be due to political correctness: to affect nobody and to offend nobody.) In this case the Church reserves the right to protest, appealing to the world community, calling for civil disobedience (3,5).

Some non-religious or secular people accuse the Church of “clericalism” or of absolutist claims. Namely they feel that the Church claims for herself excessive responsibilities. But it is important to remember that there are situations when a state violates legal and humane norms of treating people, which is absolutely unacceptable. In such extreme cases a state exceeds its legitimate power. A state must not violate human values. Otherwise not only the Church but all the humanistically oriented organizations must call for civil disobedience. It is difficult to imagine that the ROC, having been a state Church for many centuries, will ever dare to make such calls in the foreseeable future. Nevertheless this point of doctrine seems to be an important step to overcome an archaic Byzantine symphony of Church and state, by transferring to a more modern model of Church-state relations, founded on a contractual basis.

Unfortunately in the PSC, although the expression “Christian patriotism” appears, “Christian humanism” does not. The notion, by the way, was elaborated in Russian religious philosophy. On the whole, the PSC manifests an important intent of the de-sacralization of the state, in spite of showing a certain regret for the loss of the “religiously superior form of the state organization,” that is the monarchy.

FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE PRINCIPLE DENIED

The biggest contradiction of the third chapter and the entire PSC is the denial of the principle of freedom of conscience, which is regarded as a sign of “disintegration of a system of spiritual values, loss of an eagerness for Salvation in most parts of society,” a “mass apostasy, real indifference to the church’s mission and victory over sin” (3,6). The only benefit of the principle of freedom of conscience the authors of PSC saw is in that it allows the church to have a legal status in the unfavorable secular conditions of the non-religious world. Thus, freedom of conscience is admitted in a utilitarian way only for themselves but not for others. One would think how much has been written about the freedom of conscience, about this “condition sine qua non” of real religious faith, to say nothing about a legal democratic state, declared, by the way, in article 1 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation. But once more voices resound against this supreme principle of tolerance and humanity.

It is expected that the ROC (the Moscow Patriarchate) confesses Orthodox Christianity, the same Christianity where freedom of conscience is deeply rooted. Or does the Gospel imply another kind of freedom, not a freedom of conscience? But the holy fathers and authoritative

Christian authors (Athanasius, Hilary of Poitiers, Lactantius) understood freedom of conscience exactly in this sense, the way it was understood in the western liberal tradition later.

As is known, there are various types of liberalism. Abuses of economic liberalism are well known, which does not differ much from the "natural selection" (egoism), when the strongest and the most impudent wins. But it is also well known that high religious truth can only be accepted freely. There must be respect for the free choice by a person with regard to world outlook. Otherwise, together with the abuses of liberalism, one would throw away an elementary respect for human freedom, the source of which is God.

During the bigger part of its history Orthodoxy existed under the conditions of an empire, wherein it was a state religion and had definite privileges. From this, the necessity to fight against all possible heretics followed almost automatically. It was a fight not only by means of persuasion, but with the help of state compulsion. After the acceptance of Christianity as the state religion, Orthodox Christians turned from being the persecuted into becoming the persecutors. "Heretics" were victimized, their rights were violated, and so on. It is enough to recall the destiny of the Old Believers and Russian Protestants in the Russian empire, as well as repressions against Russians who had accepted Catholicism. In spite of the horrible Bolshevik terror, followed by many years of semi-legal existence and a not quite clear "spiritual revival" during "perestroika," the ROC psychologically remains in the imperial past, when it had a monopoly in the religious sphere, and when "a Russian had to be Orthodox". The canonization of the last emperor, by the way, will promote a monarchical type of political consciousness and ethnic religiosity, not corresponding to a modern notion of freedom of belief, sealed in the international documents formally recognized by Russia.

Another reason that the bishops did not accept the principle of freedom of conscience is a historical circumstance: freedom of conscience was fought for not by the major Christian churches but also by the religious minorities (sects), as well as by people who did not belong to any church at all - in general by all kinds of "non-ours" [ne nashyi]. The principle of freedom of conscience triumphed in Europe during the epoch of secularization. This is how V. S. Solovyov (1853-1900) understood this point:

"One cannot deny the fact that social progress happened in the spirit of love and justice, that is in the spirit of Christ. Elimination of tortures and cruel executions, cessation of persecutions of heretics and adherents of a different faith at least in the west, abolition of feudal slavery and serfdom – if all these Christian

reorganizations have been made by non-believers, then so much the worse for believers.”³

Certainly, it is through the fault of Christians that the Christian principle of freedom of conscience appeared to be restored by non-Christians or by Christians who broke off from the Church. Christians must repent and confess their sin in this sphere, rather than persist in the ambitions for domination by the Church. The Catholic Church has already done so at the Second Vatican Council, having adopted “The Declaration of Religious Freedom” (Dec.7,1965), where the principles of freedom of conscience and religion are recognized quite clearly and definitely. Really, no one on earth should dare to deprive people of God’s gift - freedom.

Strictly speaking the PSC does not so much deny freedom of conscience in itself but denies freedom of conscience as a legally registered constitutional principle. We ought to pay tribute to the Bishops Council fathers’ courage for having ventured to undermine not only the foundations of the constitutional system of Russia (see art. 28, Constitution of Russian Federation), but also of international rights. Did they know what they were doing?

Metropolitan Kirill declared in public that western liberalism is alien to Russia, having forgotten that the Russian legal system is based on the same principles as that of western legal liberalism: confrontation during court proceedings, checks and balances, presumption of innocence, and inalienability of human rights. Metropolitan Kirill basically confuses legal liberalism with psychological egoism. I would remind us again that the original sense of liberalism is a deliberate culture of respect for the freedom of personality. It is true that the question gets complicated by non-religious humanism, which has often been a motivation of liberalism.

But what is actually being suggested? If not to execute the apostates as in some Islamic countries, then do they intend to deprive “heretics” and all kind of dissidents of their legal rights, as it used to be done in the Russian Empire? It turned out that the council’s fathers looked toward the like-minded Roman Pope Pius IX, about whom F. T’utchev said in a poem “Encyclica” (1864): “A fateful word will ruin him, belief in freedom is delirium”.

³ Vladimir .S. Solovyov, “About the Decay of a Medieval World Outlook” in *Works*, Vol. 2 , Moscow,1988, p.349 (in Russian).

At the same time the other chapters of PSC contain theological speculations about the human being as created in the image and likeness of God, about humans being endowed with dignity, which sometimes need a serious legal defense.

Different chapters of the PSC were obviously written by different authors and they appeared to be conceptually irreconcilable. Denial of human rights in the third chapter can be understood in connection with a protest against an excessive anthropocentrism, expressed in 16,4: “The Church can not positively accept a world-order organization, under which a human person damaged with sin is placed in the center”. The authors of the third chapter have been frightened for some reason by human rights as a potential source of anarchy. It is the law which sets limits to an infinite self-will of man; it stands on guard for the minimum ethical level necessary for common life; that is why anarchy must not arise. The document demonstrates unintentionally how the very conception of human rights as a juridical theoretical foundation for the legal defense of the weak first of all, has not been recognized in Russian society till now. Such disregard of human rights contrasts in a strange way with the statements of the PSC that “The church always defends the mute and helpless” (6,6). Juridical acknowledgment of human rights does provide the mechanisms for this defense.

MONARCHICAL FORM OF GOVERNMENT MORE RELIGIOUSLY ROOTED

The question about a form of state organization compatible with Orthodoxy is one of the most important ones. The Orthodox Church existed under the monarchy during most of its history. A model of church-state relations was prescribed by the 6th Novella of the emperor Justinian (6th century) and in its ultimately ideal form was defined as a “symphony” of Church and state. In the west the church was often in confrontation with a state, a situation which promoted the development of a political culture of balance and compromise. In the East the Church often merged with a state, which led to Caesaro-Papism. Instead of the symphony a certain church-state symbiosis appeared, which was regarded by citizens as a representation of God on earth. An unwritten dogma was formulated: “The Orthodox must be a monarchist”. A political theology is simple here: one tsar on the earth must correspond to one God in heaven.

The Council of the Russian Orthodox Church in 1917-18 canceled the 11th anathema (in defense of monarchism), directed against those, who denied God’s Providence in the ascending Orthodox tsars on the throne, and who denied the descending of the Holy Spirit gifts on them

during the Holy Anointing. But this cancellation did not influence Orthodox consciousness. Many simply do not know about it. Some who do know say, “So what? It happened under the pressure of political circumstances”. As if the Orthodox-monarchical type of consciousness was not formed under the pressure of political circumstances during a long historical period.

In spite of the fact that the decisions of the Bishops Council of the ROC in 1994 are (repeated) in the PSC, about “non-preference of any state system for the church”, in par. 3.7 they nevertheless provided a certain classification of political formations with regard to the degree of their “religious rootedness”. Theocracy (as it was in Israel before the epoch of Kingdoms) takes the first place. Monarchy follows it. All the rest is anyone’s guess. The republican form of government and liberal democracy are not mentioned in PSC - the same absence as in the Bible. It is stated in PSC that there is a certain correspondence between the spiritual level of the people and the type of their state. This is certainly true. (The same can be said about the economy). Evaluation of political systems from a religious point of view is understandable. But the problem is what conclusion to draw now: in favor of a monarchy or a republic? In the PSC the monarchical form of governing is understood as “religiously more rooted.”

The Catholic Church took the way of acknowledgment of democratic values and of human rights just after the horrors of the Second World War. The necessity of supporting human rights followed from it, and Pope John Paul II devoted much of his efforts to this. Having taken a stand of non-involvement, without renouncing the Orthodox monarchical ideal, the ROC absolved itself from the responsibility to defend modern democratic values, namely a state of law and civil society. The problem of a religious understanding of liberal democracy, of respecting human rights, was left open for Orthodoxy.

CHRISTIAN ETHICS AND SECULAR LAW

In the fourth chapter, entitled “Christian Ethics and Secular Law” on p.3 there is a certain nostalgia for juridical rulership of all aspects of life in society, as it was in the ancient (traditional) societies, which did not know individual rights. There are no attempts to examine the really difficult question of the measures and balance between a degree of compulsory regulation of life in society (necessary to establish and keep the social order) and a degree of personal freedom, without which faith and world outlook cannot be realized, since freedom is the essential condition for them.

Speculations about “the healing force of human suffering”, or about the “voluntary suffering of the innocent for the sins of criminals represents the supreme form of atonement,” having its ultimate in the Lord’s sacrifice, “who assumed the sin of the world” would be more appropriate in a course on asceticism, than in the PSC. It is not clear how “damage inflicted on the integrity of the Divine law and order can be made up through the suffering of criminals” (4,2) by which they mean the sacrificial compensation made by the criminal. This explanation is too mystical for a social teaching. Besides it is admissible to accept suffering for oneself but not of others. It would be more convincing to mention the principle of equal compensation and the necessity of elementary indemnity for a victim from the criminal.

On par 4.9 a sanction for civil disobedience under definite circumstances is given to the Orthodox Christian. But the preliminary condition for such an action being a call of the High Hierarchy (for some strange reason this word always appears in the PSC with a capital letter) to the flock for civil disobedience is not mentioned. Logically though, it does follow from the previous theological speculations of the PSC. But does it also mean the right for a personal initiative, for disagreement with a ruling regime, for dissidence--that would be a radical step towards the acknowledgment of human rights. It is doubtful that the doctrine’s authors intended that.

CHURCH AND POLITICS

In the fifth chapter “Church and Politics” there are speculations of a technological order about the possibility for laymen to participate in politics, but no political preferences are uttered. For example, they do not oppose totalitarian regimes, as was done in the social doctrine of the Catholic Church. Such caution is explained by a disinclination to cause a split among the laity on political grounds, though sympathy by a part of the clergy for the communists should arouse the anxiety of the ROC leaders. An important moment of this chapter is the statement that the political organizations of the lay people do not need a blessing from the high Orthodox authority. Really it is impossible for the ROC to ban all Orthodox lay congregations to be involved in politics. The ROC aspires to the status of the national church of the majority of Russian people. That would mean to surrender all politics to non-Orthodox people. On the other hand, the ROC does not want to assume responsibility for the congregations’ political activity, and that is a reason for the high Orthodox authority’s refusal to bless such organizations.

This first ROC social teaching experience is called “Principles.” One can hope that the social conception will receive further corrections and development and then grow into a real social teaching.