

# THE IMPACT OF THE ROLE OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH ON THE POLITICS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Duaa Abass Radhy, University of Baghdad  
Muntasser Majeed Hameed, University of Baghdad

## ABSTRACT

*The research tackles the nature of relationship between the Orthodox Church and the state in the Russian Federation. At the beginning of the nineties of the last century, the church had been performed a different role in its relationship with the state, and it had an effect over the internal and foreign policies for the Russian Federation. In political history of Russia, the church's existence became an evident too much in comparing with the previous historical period, starting with the educational and political system, whether through a symbolic participating roles as what happened in the inauguration ceremony to take over responsibility of the head of state or taking actual roles such as influencing on the process of holding elections directly or indirectly. At the external level, the church's role had emerged as such as in defending for the rights of Russian citizens who residing abroad. Or its role in supporting the state's foreign policies at the time of disrupted regional and international crises or wars. Furthermore, this role in spite of its prominence; but it still faces various social obstacles that represented the cultural character of Russian society alone. Especially, it had also been framed according to the constitutional principle of secularism of the state, in order to separate actually the religion from the state.*

**Keywords:** Orthodox Church, Internal and Foreign Policy, Russian Federation.

## INTRODUCTION

The modern societies have differed in determining the roles of church that should be performed a certain public political roles. Or the roles that related with the church and state in searching about the nature of position for the church official status. If the general trend is to separate between the church and state at different degrees and specific ways, the condition does not abolish the existence of mutual relations that have been adapted by various ways, and that differ according to the historical and cultural contexts for societies and countries alike.

The research in the Russia religious dimensions has effected on the relationship between the religion and state that became more varied from one period into another throughout Russian history. The historical periods for the Orthodox Church directly impacted on the ruling of political elites, while in comparing with other periods, in which there were different tools in the hands of these ruling political elites whose who used this impact factor to pass their policies and interests.

But, at the beginning of the nineties of last twentieth century, the role of the Church in the Russian Federation has acquired specific features in its relationship with the state. It has based on the common interests, and the condition of harmony that began to emerge as a comparative view

about what happened between the Orthodox Church's endeavor to get back and strengthen its position in Russian society consequently or playing a vital political role in public life. Then, the need of state for religious institutions has to be more ability in performing its roles that keep up with the ruling political elites internally and externally alike. Thus, we are going to research with this topic according to four items to discuss and analyze briefly the various aspects that clearly tackled academically, in order to put specific perceptions and conclusions about the subject's research.

## Hypothesis

The hypothesis of research tackled a specific equation that pertaining with the results of the great differences between the roles of religion in society in general, and the political role of the Orthodox Church in the future that would be an important to preserve the public interests of Russia internally and externally.

## METHODOLOGY

The scientific methodology based on the specific approaches that related with systematic method and descriptive method to analyze the nature of Russians today who characterized by a simplified type of religious thinking, and its political role for the Orthodox Church to be more an effective in the political life.

### **First: The Relationship between the Orthodox Church and State in Russian Federation**

The Orthodox Christianity had been prevailed in Russia since the era of the Kievan Rus' principality, specifically at the age of authority of Prince (Vladimir I) in 988. The latter who successfully admitted the Orthodox Christianity to his emirate (Shubin, 2004), and with the attention to expand and develop its authority in his emirate, and the role of the Church had also been differed from one historical period into another else. In the sixteenth century, the Tsars of Russia as such as (Ivan III) adopted the Byzantine religious principle and considered Moscow as the third Rome to be a heirloom to Byzantium and the third capital of the Orthodox faith in the whole of Eurasia region (Sheikh, 1998). Therefore, the relationship between the political authority and Church had been built on the basis of the well-known Byzantine principle as so called (the symphony of authorities) to be considered the realization of the divine and human nature for Christ (Johnson, 2016). This point of view strengthened the power of the Cesar according with the principle of enlightened despotism, which had generally become as a characteristic of the Caesars and Russian rulers.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the growing role of the Orthodox Church collided with the reforms of the Emperor of Russia (Peter the Great in 1721), to modernize Russia by abolishing the position of patriarch and establishing a church board in corporate with the participation of governmental employees, and to determining the functions and roles of churchmen (Dawisha & Parrott, 1994). As a result of the reforms of the Emperor of Russia (Peter the Great), the Church lost its independent role and continued in this way until the end of the Russian Empire and the establishment what so-called the Soviet Union, that dealt with the Church from a point of departure as Marxist hostile to all religions. So, the Orthodox Church was inflicted to oppression and persecution and its activities were completely banned, as well as the

Soviet security authorities had pursued their followers and supporters, until this situation reached into put of the Patriarch in the prison and killed him according to formal instruction of the authorities (Zidane, 2013; Lovotti & Talbot, 2019). During the period of the Communist Party, the authority was keen to employ the religious role of the Church to support the warfare effort, so the position of the Patriarchate was got back, and the churches and religious schools were also reopened in Russia,. In addition to that, the Fatwa houses were reopened in the Islamic regions, and on the contrary, the Moscow Patriarchate presented a large financial donation to the Soviet Red Army, as a way to purchase several of developed weapons (Alemara, 2009).

However, during the rule of the Russian President (Mikhail Gorbachev), there were a radical turning points which occurred at the level of the relationship between the political authority and the church, as his reforms package included a policy of religious tolerance that benefited the church and other religious institutions, and expanding their activities by increasing its roles, especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 (Petrenko, 2012). According to the Russian constitution of 1993, the Russian Federation was a secular state, and it wasn't possible to spread the religion by force. The constitution also prohibits any restriction upon the rights of citizens on the basis of social, racial, national or religious affiliation, it guarantees the freedom of Religious belief for every citizen, and all of that became a new step towards an understanding of defining the role of the Church in society at whole (Federatsii, 1993).

## **Second: The Role of the Orthodox Church at the Internal Level**

The Russian Orthodox Church performed a significant role in supporting of state's policy at the internal situation, besides to that, the increasing of specific role that had a preliminary advantage by preserving the values and shaping the Russian national identity. So, the Orthodox Christianity has also been a major component inside of this identity since its formation throughout a hundred years ago. Thus, the church had gained the trust and respect of the vast majority of the Russian people, and to be as an institution that had ability of consolidating the unity within Russian society, and to fulfillment the formal role as a mediator at the event of any political crisis in Russia (Ćwiek-Karpowicz, 2010).The Church began to perform an active political role as being a source of political legitimacy, and this was an evident on many occasions, as what happened in the attending of the Patriarch at the ceremonies of the former president (Boris Yeltsin) who taking over the authority in 1990. Especially, in the middle of 1992 whenever Yeltsin offered a formal thanks to the Church and the Patriarch for their support in reviving the Russian state and its independence, and the government also granted the Patriarchate additional control over all the Kremlin cathedrals and Saint Basil's Church in Red Square.

Furthermore, the Orthodox Church realized at the beginning of the nineties decade of the last century, where the weakness and fragility of the Russian formal political circles and its instability, and it expanded its relations with social institutions and cultural forums, in order to achieve an unification between the political groups that conflicting in the interest of special targets (Alemara, 2009). All of that, led to the emergence of some Christian political movements that took part in the political process, and the most of outstanding prominent Russian Christian Democratic Movement was established in 1990 under the leadership of (Gleb Yakunin), who called for preserving the unity of the Russian Federation. Thus, the government of Yeltsin took strict and decisive procedures to protect the borders of Russia and its subject's abroad (Dawisha & Parrott, 1994). As a result of this political development, the official leaderships of the Church

also called for inaugurating the dialogue and communication between the Church, and the various political parties. And the Orthodox Church Bishops' Council prohibited the priests to attend or affiliate to these political parties and competing in the elections according to a certain decision that issued in 1997, and this shows the Church's endeavor to show its political neutrality and its desire to retain or preserve their role in the political work, and to stop the division or schism of process within the ecclesiastical board (Alemara, 2009). As for President Vladimir Putin, the church had a distinguished role due to had a good relationship with the church, as Patriarch Alexei II who attended the ceremony of transferring the authority from Yeltsin to Putin, and to be as a symbolic sign of the church's restoration of its spiritual role and the distinguished position that it has lost previously during the former of Soviet Union period. Despite the confirmation of the Russian constitution in (Article 14) on the secularity of the state accordance to the constitution of 1993, as what Medvedev did again during his inauguration as president (2008-2012). So that, this political tradition devoted the Kremlin's role to consolidating the powerful potential church factor (Kremlin Official Website, 2000). Therefore, the president Putin was exerting various efforts to restore the potential powerful of the Russian's state, including strengthening Russian nationalism by achieving internal stability and reviving the glories of the former Russian Empire. Besides to that, gaining the advantage from the great impact of religious institutions on the Russian society, such as using the church and its teachings as a reference point for the new ideology of the Russian Federation that based on the values of conservatism, and this what was confirmed in his annual speech in front of the Federation Council in 2013 (TASS Press Agency, 2013).

First, but not the last, President Putin tried to win the sympathy of the Orthodox Church by allocating (10 billion dollars) for rebuilding the places of worship and financing the religious schools. As a result of this harmony, the political role of the Orthodox Church has increased internally. As a result of all that, the church has issued a formal decree in 2011, that giving the right of permission to nominate clergy men to the elections, in order to protect their interests and positions after they were previously prohibited from exercising this right, and this was a an important political development that gives us a clear view in concerning with the aspirations of the church in Russian political life (Khashayb, 2001). Finally, we said that despite of the constitution's stipulation of the principle of separating religion from the state, but the political authority had been sought to strengthen the role of the Church by consolidating the religious practices as political norms to be followed within the political system, for an example, the blessing of the Church's Patriarch to hold an office as a president, which was included as an unofficial custom to be followed without submission to any constitutional or legal clause or article.

### **Third: The Role of the Orthodox Church at the External Level**

The horizons of cooperation between the state and Church have enlarged at the external level, and this was obviously appeared during the celebration which performed by the Orthodox Church in 2007, on the occasion of the sixth anniversary when the late Patriarch (Alexei II) had been assumed the responsibility of administrating the church. Especially, the Russian Foreign Minister (Sergey Lavrov) emphasized the important role of Church in defending about the rights of Russian citizens who residing abroad and its role in respecting and consolidating the principle of cultural diversity, and the continuation impact of communication and cooperation between the

Church and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In addition to that, the role of the Church in supporting the Orthodox position in Serbia, and exerting prolific diplomatic efforts for the Russian government and the international community to ceasefire the disrupted war there (Dawisha & Parrott, 1994). Furthermore, there were regular interviews that conducted between the Church and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in order to discuss the Russian subjects and matters that existing outside the borders, Specifically, after the Kremlin felt its need to get back supportive attitudes from the Church that concerning with the some foreign issues, As an example the Orthodox minorities situations in region of the Middle East. From this point, came the statements of the head of the Russian Patriarchate's Department for External Relations in the Church (Nikolai Balashwaf) that the Syrian crisis in the Middle East region has increased the role of Russian Church in effecting on the Russian foreign policies (Khashayb, 2001).

So that, the church supported the military intervention in Syria, which had been happened since the 30th of September 2015, then the formal communiqué that came from the Patriarch during two weeks later by about his support for this intervention, justifying that by the failure of the peace process to put an end the conflict in Syria, which necessitated the need to provide military protection for civilians, especially Christian minority that inflicting to the hard danger due to the existence of this minority in the Middle East (Novosti, 2018). Finally, we should recognize the role of the Orthodox Church in supporting the Russian foreign policy, as well as it was very necessary to refer to the targets of the Russian leadership by President Putin in managing the international affairs for the Middle East future from one hand. While the belief of the Russian leadership itself in adopting the necessity of international competitive rules, in order to ensure the strategic political and economic interests of Russia in supporting the system of civilized values, which gave the Orthodox Church an opportunity to have an effect on the conviction of the Russian elites with the specific idea that the Russian state should represents the new pattern of religious and cultural coexistence for the whole world (Curanović, 2013).

#### **Fourth: The Contemporary Problems of the Religious Situation in Russia**

Russia is consider as a multi-religious country, and according to the constitution (of article 28 of secondly) guaranteed exercising freedom of the religion and belief for all peoples. So, there were multi sects or religious groups that live in Russia, and belonging to different beliefs and religions too. But, the majority of Russians are Christians, especially, from the Orthodox, and then Muslims would come secondly, and after all of them came Judaism, Buddhism, Protestantism and others (Sheikh, 1998). Nevertheless, the majority of Russian Christians haven't incentive to attend regularly the religious rituals of the church in a specific seasons itself, and the most of studies have resembled the impact of the economic situation of Russia since the beginning of the nineties of the last twentieth century (Alemara, 2009). Some of a survey studies that performed by the Russia Center for the Study of Opinion on September 12, 2007, holding with the participation of (1600) participants comprised among (153) groups of individuals, and (46) regions, and districts with the other republics of Russia too. According to the results of these studies approved that half of the Russians are believers, and (10%) of them go regularly to the church and exercising all religious rituals, while (43%) go to the church only on holidays, and (31%) believe in the existence of God; but are not interested in the life of the church ceremonies, either the proportion of atheists measured (6%), while proportion of (7%) didn't consideration with the religion (Baran, 2007).The problems of religion in contemporary

Russia are not pertaining with Christians; but in the condition of conflict that happened between Muslims and the Eastern Orthodox Church due to the sectarian or religious differences. At the present time, the violent conflicts which happened between Muslims and Christians in various regions of the world are increasing the levels of exercising an intensive or extreme violence, so the contradictions and conflicts between different beliefs and religious sects have become an important cause to disrupt or trigger ethnic conflicts. At the same time, religion has become an effective way to the separatists, in order to achieve their political objectives. In the region of Chechnya, for an example, used Islam as a tool in the hands of separatist leaders those who are busy in guiding Muslims against the Eastern Orthodox Church, by exploiting all of that to separate the North Caucasus regions from Russia, for establishing an Islamic state.

According to the what has been researched, the increasing of an ethnic problems, especially by the activities of extremists groups, that made a direct threat to the security and stability of Russia, and the different disturbances which happened in the society preventing the people from living within a normal and stabilized security and peace situations alike.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Russia is considered as multi-religious country; but the majority of its population adopts the Orthodox Christianity, which was subjected to suppression during the Tsarist's period and this situation continued until collapsing the former Soviet Union in 1991. At another next period, the church sought to revive its role in the public life of Russia, specifically, during the period of the president Vladimir Putin, who received a great support from the Church's Patriarch (Kirill II). The support of the Orthodox Church has been increasing its political role internally and externally during this an important political period.

## CONCLUSION

The political role of the Orthodox church appeared by the possibility of nominating clergymen and clerics for assuming political positions, as well as taking attitudes to support the issues of Christian minorities at the foreign policy, especially in a region of the Middle East; because Russia always feels its responsibility for protecting the Christians minorities abroad as a factor or part of its historical role, as well as its role in protecting Russia at the external and internal level alike.

## REFERENCES

- Alemara, L.M. (2009). *Russian strategy after the cold war and its implications for the Arab region*. Center for Arab Unity Studies, Beirut.
- Baran, E.B. (2007). Contested victims: Jehovah's witnesses and the Russian orthodox church, 1990–2004. *Religion, State & Society*, 35(3), 261-278.
- Curanović, A. (2013). *Religion in Russia's foreign policy*.
- Ćwiek-Karpowicz, J. (2010). Role of the orthodox church in Russian foreign policy. *The Polish Institute of International Affairs Bulletin*, 109, 185.
- Dawisha, K., & Parrott, B. (1994). *Russia and the new states of Eurasia: The politics of upheaval*. Cambridge University Press.
- Federatsii, K.R. (1993). *Constitution of the Russian Federation (1993)*. Amended on, 30, 2008.
- Johnson, M.R. (2016). The symphony of authorities in Russian political thought: The spirit, the crown and chalcedon. *Russian Journal, The Russian Orthodox Medievalist*, 1.

- Khashayb, J. (2001). *Prospects for democratic transition in Russia*. Prospects for democratic transition in Russia. Kremlin Official Website. (2000). *The inauguration of holding authority by Vladimir Putin as President of Russia*.
- Lovotti, C., & Talbot, V. (2019). *The role of Russia in the Middle East and North Africa region. Strategy or Opportunism?*
- Novosti, R. (2018). *Russia is fighting for the interests of the Orthodox in Syria, said Yarovaya*.
- Petrenko, G. (2012). Influence of the Russian orthodox church on Russia's foreign policy. In *4<sup>th</sup> ECPR Graduate Student Conference Jacobs University Bremen* (pp. 4-6).
- Sheikh, N. (1998). The decision-making in Russia and Russian-Arab relations. *The Center for Arab Unity Studies, Beirut-Lebanon*.
- Shubin, D.H. (2004). *A history of Russian Christianity*. The Synodal Era and the Sectarians.
- TASS Press Agency. (2013). *Vladimir Putin: The Church is one of the foundations of Russian nationalism and the multinational state*.
- Zidane, N. (2013). The role of Russia in the Middle East and North Africa from Peter the great to Vladimir Putin. *Beirut, Arab Science House, Publishers*.

**Received:** 08-Dec-2022, Manuscript No. JLERI-22-12984; **Editor assigned:** 10-Dec-2022, PreQC No. JLERI-22-12984(PQ); **Reviewed:** 22-Dec-2022, QC No. JLERI-22-12984; **Revised:** 28-Dec-2022, Manuscript No. JLERI-22-12984(R); **Published:** 04-Jan-2023