

The Role Of Religious Figures In Conflict Management (The Political Aspect)

By

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Abstract

The paper is devoted to the identification of the role of religious figures in the prevention, settlement and post-conflict peace building. The relevance of this topic is connected with the need of resolving a range of contradictions related to the functional ambiguity of religion.

The same institution can have multiple functions. The same function can be performed differently by different institutions [1, p. 33-34]. The functions of religion are historical in nature. They depend on the needs of people and society.

Religion becomes significant when a person exhausts his own capabilities. When a person feels powerless, he needs hope that there is a way out of this situation. Revenge for the death of a loved one in an armed conflict generates a new round of conflict. Revenge forms a "vicious circle". This circle commonly referred to as a "conflict trap".

Political institutions are not able to lead a person out of the "conflict trap" alone. Moreover, politicians often use the collective memory of conflicts to realize their own interests. Thus, they politicize religion.

The experience of participation of religious figures in conflict resolution in the countries of South-Eastern Europe and in the post-Soviet space shows the need to reconsider the widespread perception of the undesirable presence of the religious factor in peacekeeping. Religious leaders have comparative advantages in conflict prevention and conflict management. Using their moral authority, they emphasize the common humanity of all participants in the conflict and use nonviolent ways of expressing discontent as an alternative to conflict [2, p. xxii].

The author of the present paper comes to the conclusion that conflict-resolving potential of religious figures is high. They can help in predicting and preventing dangerous manifestations of conflicts in society. They are able to form stable axiological, cultural and institutional structures that a person can rely on and trust in the face of risks.

At the end of the paper, the author puts forth a list of the main functions of religious figures. Their manifestation depends on the stage of the conflict, the parties' perception of each other and the context [3].

Keywords: religious figures, conflict, post-conflict peace building, conflict resolution, conflict building, memory, social trauma.

Introduction

Religion is commonly considered as a source of deep disagreements between individuals, groups and nations by major public and political figures. These disagreements trigger antagonism and confrontation. Therefore, many politicians believe that it is necessary to minimize the differences between the conflicting parties. They propose to reduce the presence and influence of the religious factor in diplomatic and peacekeeping initiatives. This position corresponds to the policy of secularization.

Within the process of secularization, religion is removed from domain the socio-political life and is transferred to an individual one, only remaining significant there. A person always turns to religion in difficult times. In the conditions of social and spiritual disunity of society, religion acquires special importance for people.

Religious figures contribute to the formation and strengthening of trust and respect between individuals [4]. They remind the parties to the conflict about the true values of life. Mutual trust and respect between individuals allows us to cooperate, better understand each other and find optimal ways and means of solving conflicts, problems and tasks in everyday life.

In every society there are institutions that contribute to reducing tension in society, but their effectiveness is different. Religion has a significant potential for peacemaking. Religion cultivates its inherent values of forgiveness, patience, mercy, responsibility. These values are important because they can lead to reconciliation.

However, the functional ambiguity of religion (integration and disintegration) confuses politicians. If religion is part of the problem, can it be part of the solution? What is the peacemaking potential of religion and religious figures?

Methods

Within the present paper we mostly rely on structural and functional method, developed by B. Malinovsky [5, p. 136]. This method enabled us to identify a list of functions performed by religious figures in the process of conflict management. The function is understood as the result of the activity or action of a certain subject in the socio-spiritual life of the people and the state. Functionalism proceeds from the premise that every custom, tradition, institution, subject must perform some vital function designed to ensure social stability based on the common interests of community members. The function satisfies several needs. These needs cannot be fully or partially satisfied by another conflict management entity.

The universal principle of functionalism can be defined as follows: "If a social system is to be preserved or maintained in equilibrium, then it must have institutions consisting of subjects X." Accordingly, for effective conflict management, it is important for us to identify the subjects of X, which make up the institution of mediation [6, p.64].

Results And Discussion

If the desired result cannot be achieved by legitimate means, then a crisis situation arises. A good end justifies the means. People are tempted to resort to "any means". But such a course of action is fraught with the threat of the collapse of social ties, the destruction of order, the threat of chaos. Violence begets violence.

The basic needs of people should be met in a way that allows them to maintain balance in society and will not lead to social chaos. How to ensure the conformity of an individual's behavior in the face of failure, the collapse of hope for success? How can we help coping with the anxiety and disorganization caused by the death of a loved one during an armed conflict? Who determines the boundaries beyond which you can not go? What should one do if the criminal has not been punished?

Scientists give different answers to these questions. They are based on political and legal, religious and moral norms, psychological characteristics of the individual and ethno-religious groups. There is also no unified approach in the selection of actors who can take part in conflict management and play the role of mediator.

Proponents of the functional theory note that religious figures may try to work out negative emotions with people so that they are not obsessed with them. The clergy explain to people that they have the right to be angry at the state, which did not punish the criminal who committed evil. But people have no right to radicalize evil, to turn it into uncontrolled aggression. Together they try to transform this hatred into other emotions, to pray to God so that he will guide the guilty person on the right path [2, p.15].

To work out negative emotions, you can contact a psychologist. In the case of armed ethno-confessional conflicts with mass victims, psychologists will be less effective than clergymen. This is due to the problem of forgiveness, social memory, love, reconciliation. Also, if believers begin consulting a psychologist, this indicates that they either ignore the doctrinal teaching they receive in the church or there is no sound teaching and counselling in the church [7, p.62].

Proponents of the conflictological theory of religion believe that religion plays a negative role in the development of society. K. Marx, for example, believes that religious figures cultivate social conformity, help maintain the stability of society. Religious figures, calling for humility, contribute to reducing conflict in society, but do not allow society to move to a new level of development.

According to K. Marx, conflict is necessary [8]. He believes that class struggle will help transform a society and liberate it from both conflict and religion forever. To do this, it is necessary to awaken class consciousness and raise the oppressed to fight against the inequality that religion justifies. This will lead to the transition of society to a new stage of development. At this stage of social development, all conditions will be created to meet the needs of each person. But K. Marx did not take into account the irrational nature of man.

The conflict-free society of K. Marx is an utopia. All social systems are potentially prone to conflicts: however, this does not mean that the conflict should not be resolved. The conflict also has a functional twofold. On the one hand, a conflict can provide intra-group

integration, be a source of cohesion, for example, of a religious group. On the other hand, it can contribute to the destruction of society and the state this group lives in.

However, if we look closely at the dynamics of the conflict, we will see differences in the capabilities of political and religious figures. Political figures can ensure the settlement of the conflict using coercion, force or manipulation. These are some of the most effective political resources for ending the conflict. But the peace achieved this way is always fragile and short-lived, since the original cause of the conflict is not eliminated: one side is just forced to commit actions beneficial to the other side. A sense of injustice can lead the parties to a new outbreak of struggle. The results of the activities of political figures will be visible in the short term. However, the activity of political figures is more effective if the conflict reaches the peak of conflict interaction. This is due to the resources that the state has.

Religious figures at the stage of a conflict situation and at the stage of post-conflict peace-building strive to manage the conflict. Conflict management is a direction that focuses on the development of issues related to reducing the level of hostility in the relations of the parties, transferring the conflict to the search for a joint solution to the problem. They contribute to the transformation of the conflict, replacing violent methods of dispute resolution with nonviolent methods [9]. The results of the activities of religious figures will be visible in the long term only.

Although Stipe Odak's interviews with religious leaders [2] have shown that much depends on the knowledge, desire and position of religious figures themselves. Some religious figures feel confused and insecure, because they are not psychologically ready for personal communication with the parties to the conflict. Other religious figures forget about the socio-political distance and cannot mediate in conflicts. Some religious figures refuse to take part in peace-building because they fear that such participation will constitute a violent "secularization" or "betrayal" of their own traditions. In my opinion, this is due to the fact that there are no generally accepted rules for the participation of religious figures in conflict management.

If we look at the documents regulating the activities of religious figures, we will not immediately understand what religious figures do when there is a conflict in their state. Can religious leaders take part in conflict resolution or should they do so? At the same time, their role and significance in this process are important and diverse, although they differ in content at different stages of the development of the conflict. In order to understand when it is necessary to seek help from religious figures, it is necessary to know what functions they can perform in the context of conflict management. And it is also necessary to abandon the stereotypical attitude to religion.

Summary

Religious figures play a special role in preventing the development of violent conflicts and building peace. All the variety of possibilities of religious figures is reflected in their functions. In this part of the article, I will summarize and list all the functions of religious figures that they perform at the stage of the origin and development of a conflict situation, as well as at the stage of post-conflict peace-building.

Ideological function. Religious figures form people's ideas about the world and its structure, about a person, about society, about the principles of relationship with the outside

world and a person's place in it. They form a person's worldview. Religious figures answer believers' questions about the meaning of existence, the cause of human suffering and the essence of death. They build a religious system of values, showing the basic foundations of human life and activity.

Educational function. Religious figures can form moral, ethic and cultural values in a person. The presence of religious knowledge contributes to the formation of important personal qualities in a person (orientation to kindness, compassion).

Adaptive function. Religious leaders can help people adapt to a new environment. They provide a link between immigrants and their cultural past. Religious figures help preserving the Mother tongue, familiar rituals and creeds.

Compensatory function. Interaction with religious figures leads to consolation and maintenance of mental balance. They help relatives and victims of the conflict to come to terms with the inevitable. **Protective function.** Religious figures cannot rid society of the negative phenomena generated by the socio-economic and political system. But they can protect the value system from the penetration of false and untested, vicious and politically adventurous, primitive, radicalistic influences into it. **The function of social control.** To help prevent the incitement of nonviolent conflicts, religious leaders can effectively respond to the excesses of their co-religionists. They can make sure that their faith is never used to justify aggression or violence. If people of their faith encourage intolerance, hostility or violence, they can warn them against mistakes and take measures to prevent the harm they cause. If conversations and instructions do not help, then it is necessary to find channels and bring the brewing problem to the competent authorities. The protective function and the function of social control are closely related to each other.

Socio-critical function. The basis and essence of the work of a religious figure is the discovery and disclosure of contradictions, inconsistencies between the accepted system of concepts and values and the content that is introduced into them by a new stage in the development of world history.

The communicative function. Priests respond to the changing needs of parishioners and potential parishioners by including in their activities more and more new forms and ways of communicating with people.

Spiritual counseling is one of the main forms of communication. It is a direct conversation between a clergyman and a person, extra-liturgical conversations with people, personal communication outside confession. The conversation may concern personal spiritual life, general theological issues, problems in life and ways to solve them. The result of counseling is changes in the lives of those who took part in the conversation and listened to the speech [10]. Religious figures need communication skills, the ability to speak publicly, psychological and psychotherapeutic skills. It is not even the advice that the priest can give that is important, but the opportunity for a person to speak out.

Integrative function. This function is one of the most important in conflict management. Religious figures always strive to maintain a stable situation in society, to maintain peace. They unite both social groups and political forces of the state.

Some political leaders do not know the full scope of functions that religious figures can perform in the event of a conflict. Other political figures are dominated by stereotypes. Some political leaders are afraid to use religion, while others, on the contrary, use it as a tool to realize their goals in the political game. As a result, extremes arise in the relations between political and religious figures. A measure is needed in everything, especially in the ethno-religious sphere.

Conclusions

Traditionally, political actors dominate in the settlement of ethno-religious conflicts. This is due to the fact that they have the power resources to influence the conflicting parties, they can regulate relations between the conflicting parties through a regulatory mechanism. However, all attempts of politicians to resolve conflicts have temporary success. There is only a temporary decrease in tension in relations between the parties. The current situation is thought-provoking. The mistake of the political leaders was to refuse the help of religious figures and exclude them from peacekeeping activities. The clergy are important factors in maintaining social peace and harmony. Religious figures resolve various practical issues, restore harmony in the family [11]. They are the fastest to see the widening cracks in the social structure of society, have a high degree of susceptibility to various forms of injustice. Religious figures are among the first to notice the origin of the conflict. But in the conditions of secularization, their voice remains unheard.

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Дополнительная информация:

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Краткая биография каждого автора (4-5 предложений) в конце статьи

Силаева Зоя Владимировна

Сфера научных интересов: религия и политика, религиозные и этноконфессиональные конфликты, государственно-конфессиональные отношения, религиоведческая экспертиза и т.д. Окончила Казанский государственный университет (2009), защитила кандидатскую диссертацию по теме: «Институционализация «спорных государств» в условиях политической трансформации постсоциалистических европейских стран (2012). Научно-педагогический стаж – 12 лет.