

Research Article

Parish Budget: The Economic Basis for the Activities of Confessional Communities in the 18th and Early 20th Centuries

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Abstract. This article discusses the main patterns in the formation of church property and the provision of the parish clergy with the means of subsistence. It is revealed that the natural and consistent evolution of property relations between the clergy and the laity over more than two centuries did not lead to significant changes. The emergence of parish trusteeships, called upon to place the spending of church funds under the joint control of the clergy and the laity, essentially led to the consolidation of the previously established norms of relations between the priest and parishioners in property matters.

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1. Introduction

Compliance with church requirements, divine services, missionary activity, and other duties of the parish clergy and laity are associated with many material issues that have to be addressed on an everyday basis. The subject of this article is the parish budget as a form of collecting and spending funds for the functioning of the parish community [1].

2. Methods

Forensic cases give an idea of the nature of property conflicts. They throw light upon some aspects of the management of church property (for example, the permanent location of keys to the church), give information about how often economic considerations, i.e. the exorbitant demands of the clergy prevented the peasants from performing church sacraments. Significant sources are the inventories of the property of parish churches, data on the possibilities of providing for the clergy contained in the clergy lists and extracts from the clerical documents of spiritual consistories drawn up when filling church vacancies [3].

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In the process of research, unconditional priority was given to the combination of comparative-historical and historical-genetic methods. The first one enables identifying the main patterns of legal regulation of the life of a parish during certain significant periods. The historical-comparative method plays an important role in the analysis of quantitative data. It was used here to trace both synchronous (in different parishes) and diachronic (in different historical periods in comparable territories) processes expressed in quantitative indicators. The historical-genetic method in this case involves a detailed analysis of the evolution of individual documents created both in the parish and in church agencies and secular authorities that control various aspects of religious life. It also helps the researcher to identify the origins of some of the phenomena in church history.

3. Results

The economic life of the parish was equally subject to church law and customs prevailing in the parish milieu. On the one hand, the legislation established the general framework for the life of the parish related to the provision of the church and clergy with the necessary resources. On the other hand, parish traditions determined the appropriate reasons and methods for making gifts from parishioners to the treasury of the temple, for replenishing the property of the temple and maintaining the church in good condition [5]. By the end of the 19th century, parishioners' donations totaled substantial sums. In 1895, the Olonets diocese received 55,846 rubles from donors. This impressive figure was made up of donations for the construction of churches, income from estates and other types of offerings from believers. A certain part of the funds was intended "for the dissemination of Orthodoxy among pagans", "restoration of Orthodoxy in the Caucasus", and for "improving the life of Orthodox Christians in Palestine", but most of the funds were channeled to the needs of parish churches [6]. To control the finances of the church, parish trusteeships were created throughout the Russian Empire. The duties of the trustees were to meet the needs of the parish church, to raise funds for the repair and construction of church buildings, to establish schools, hospitals, almshouses and other charitable institutions, to ensure that the parish clergy actually used all the types of allowances provided to them by the parish. In all matters (primarily in financial matters), the trusteeship was accountable to parishioners.

Financial issues constantly became the subject of controversies between the clergy and parishioners. Discussions of the material aspects of the relationship between the clergy and parishioners could lead to difficult situations, which sometimes developed

into open conflicts between the parties. Priests complained about the stinginess of the parishioners and nagging when tributes were being collected. In lean years, serious problems arose when collecting tributes: "many peasants do not hand in tribute in full, and if they do, it is with great trouble and displeasure." The clergy, on the other hand, argued that "the poverty and scarcity of the means of the clergy makes them treasure both a piece of bread and a penny." Peasants "often expressed dissatisfaction with money-grubbing and extortion openly and in a form very unpleasant for the priest." [4].

Subjective assessments and comparisons with the income of others were displeasing. The Petrozavodsk Dean mentioned in his report that the money that the rector of the church receives from the state is so meager that "not only young mentors receive more than an honored priest, but also rangers, police officers, and even forest guards." Judging by publications in the diocesan press, salary from the state has become an important aid in raising the standard of living of the parish clergy. Yet, even together with other incomes, it could not solve all the pressing problems. At the beginning of the twentieth century, priests and other members of the clergy consistently complained about the inadequacy of state salaries, pointing out the poor financial situation and constant "reproaches from the parishioners when receiving payment for corrections." [2]

4. Conclusions

Payments for services, church land, and other sources of income were the reward for all the misfortunes that fell to the lot of the seekers of vacancies in the clergy. But even here the applicant himself, as well as the church and secular authorities, faced serious difficulties. Funding from the state could not fully satisfy the needs of the clergy. They had to rely on the good will of the parishioners in keeping the traditions that have formed among believers in the first centuries of Orthodoxy in the Karelian land. Monetary and in-kind allowances from parishioners, land lots, and, to a large extent, payment for services – all the benefits were provided at the parishioners' discretion. Payments were, in fact, a demonstration of respect (or hostility) towards certain representatives of the clergy.

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