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ARMENIAN APOSTOLIC CHURCH AND SPIRITUAL VALUES OF TWO GENERATIONS IN MODERN ARMENIAN SOCIETY

Apostolski Kościół Ormiański i duchowe wartości dwóch pokoleń współczesnego społeczeństwa Armenii

Słowa kluczowe: Apostolski Kościół Ormiański, wiara, chrześcijaństwo, generacja, wartości

Key words: Armenian Apostolic Church, faith, Christianity, generation, value

Streszczenie

Artykuł omawia problem zachowania przekonań religijnych w nowoczesnym społeczeństwie armeńskim. W czasach Armeńskiej Socjalistycznej Republiki Radzieckiej Ormianom udało się zachować wiarę w sferze prywatnej, bez pośrednictwa Apostolskiego Kościoła Ormiańskiego. Dzisiaj Apostolski Kościół Ormiański prowadzi ukierunkowane działania mające na celu odbudowę swojej pozycji. Celem zaprezentowanych badań socjologicznych (przeprowadzonych w latach 2013, 2014) było zbadanie roli i znaczenia Apostolskiego Kościoła Ormiańskiego w społeczeństwie armeńskim, na przykładzie dwóch pokoleń – dzisiejszej młodzieży (18–30 lat) i starszego pokolenia (56–66 lat). Wybór tych dwóch generacji podyktowany był chęcią dostrzeżenia ciągłości postaw religijnych.

Abstract

This article discusses the level of preservation of religious beliefs in modern Armenian society. The Church is carrying out targeted activities to increase its ranks, which it could not do during the Soviet era. The Armenians have always maintained their faith without the mediation of the church.

This article examines the role of the Armenian Apostolic Church in the formation of moral and spiritual values in our society between two generations.

The government used to take care of all social groups and created conditions enabling Armenian society to function within its country, to develop their culture and values, and to refrain from other ideas and values.

Introduction

“Religion is a spiritual formation, a special type personal relationship with the world, conditioned by the idea of otherness (the world beyond the grave) as dominant in relation to the ordinary existence of reality”(Zabiyako, Krasnikova, Elbakyan 2008: 1069). Religion was, and still remains to this day, the focus of universal values which, no doubt, exist regardless of whether a person believes in their divine origin or sees in them the collective wisdom of mankind as a result of his immediate life experience. It should be noted that the attention thinkers pay to this issue is noted at all stages of the development of theoretical knowledge – from the ancient world until today.

The Russian-American sociologist and culturologist P. Sorokin presents his point of view on religion. In his work *Religion as a social phenomenon* Sorokin interpreted religion as a social phenomenon outfit that can be “removed and worn”. Sorokin admitted that faith can be changed, but the problem of religion is not only faith towards some ideas but also emotional attachment to religious beliefs (Sorokin 1992: 1).

J. Fraser saw religion as a force that directs and controls human life. He noted that religion consists of theoretical and practical elements and that such higher powers exist (Fraser 1922: 2).

T. Parsons interprets the essence of religion in terms of the role it plays in the process of social integration and considers it as part of the society; a subsystem, symbolic intermediary, and value-orientated factor, which contributes to religion and to the regulation of social life. R. Merton, radically revising the universal role of religion, believes that there may be institutions within society that can adequately perform the function of unity by an alternative principle. Like a number of structural functionalists, Merton lists not only traditional religions among religious phenomena but also any system of values.

So B. Malinowski viewed religion as a cultural institution and found that a social relationship or an institute ceased to exist if it did not perform a function. In *Magician, Science and Religion*, Malinowski emphasizes the two main functions of religion.

1. In crisis situations it prevents the collapse of the group, pointing out the future prospects for each member.
2. By accepting rituals, a person becomes a full member of the society who is obliged to follow “sacred values and norms”.

At the same time, he shows that religious beliefs are not always imposed on a person, but society is able to organize them in such a way that the individual agrees to follow the rules. Based on specific

ethnographic facts, Malinowski analyzes religion from the point of view of the relationship between science and magic and shows that people turn to religion (magic) when occasional incidents, failures and misfortunes, enter their life and raises its opportunities (Malinowski 1998: 79–90).

American sociologist and theologian of the Evangelical Church P. Berger and German researcher T. Luckmann also provide a phenomenological interpretation of religion. Analyzing the essence of religion from the point of view of phenomenological sociology, the focus is on the study of “everyday knowledge” used in everyday life. “Religion is a feeling of holiness standing beyond everyday life”, concludes Berger. Berger sees religion as a basis for human understanding, adjustment, harmony and sense of stability – as a basis for the meaning of life. Luckmann makes the central concept of religion a “focal point” which interprets it as a process of building a “sense universe” (the universe) which goes beyond the bounds of human biology. Luckmann distinguished “specific” and “non-specific”, “visible” and “invisible” forms of religion. The first is the church form of religion, and the second is the universal social form. “Invisible Religion”, unlike church belief, is preached by the clergy, is spread throughout society. From this point of view, every public and individual act towards making life meaningful is seen as a manifestation of religious affiliation and proof of the existence of religion (“Etchmiadzin” 1997, V11–12: 37)..

The Armenian Apostolic Church – Past and Present

Christianity in Armenia was adopted as a state religion in 301. The fact of the adoption of Christianity in Armenia has been differently evaluated by historians, public and political figures. Some researchers are of the opinion that Christianity will save the Armenian people and in order to support their opinions they present the following viewpoints. In the absence of the State, the church became the anchor for our people; Armenians found their way among historical nations through Christianity: the church, maintaining its identity and independence, saved the Armenian people, and counteracted external aggression and the danger of assimilation. After Christianity was spread among Armenians, monasteries, with their monks and monastic schools, became the source of literacy.

As we know, the Armenian Apostolic Church is one of the most important institutions in the Armenian national value system. Thanks to

the church, for centuries moral values such as faith, religion and way of life, were distributed and preserved. Christianity acts as a system of values and form of moral norms, a mode of life. For centuries our people lived by these principles and norms. The Church is not only a spiritual institution but an institution which promotes the preservation of national identity. While preserving the traditional and the fundamental, the Armenian church has always been considered modern and relevant, enlightening its people with advanced ideas. And it is no accident that practically at all times schools and universities operated under the supervision of churches and, in addition to spiritual values, the basics of literacy and secular knowledge were taught (Haroyan2005: 52–53).

To this day, the Armenian Apostolic Church continues its enlightenment activity, establishing new seminaries and spiritual educational centers. The greatest role of the Armenian Apostolic Church is to spread and preach morality and moral values and the foundations of Christianity in society.

The main function of the Armenian Apostolic Church was the propaganda of moral principles and Christianity, its penetration into society. The role of the Armenian Apostolic Church is also important in the issue of the unity and consolidation of state, church and people. Today, the church is trying to solve the challenges faced.

As the result of both a secondary sociological survey, as well as in the result of our expert research, carried out among young Armenians over the last few years, it is shown that there are changes in attitude towards religion and the church, and we can mention that currently young Armenians do not often attend Church, the number of sectarian organizations and the number of those enrolled in them has increased, and one can also notice decreased confidence in the work of the clergy. It is important to study the level of implementation of the functions of the Armenian Apostolic Church, the role and significance of the church in the life of young people, and the framework of cooperation between church, state and society.

Methodological Assumptions of the Research

The purpose of the sociological research is to examine the role and significance of the Armenian Apostolic Church in the formation of moral and spiritual values in our society between two generations – today's youth (18 to 30 years) and the older generation (56 to 66 years), to provide a comparative analysis and assessment of the data.

In this way we can speak of continuity from the religious aspect. The results are based on two sociological surveys (2013 and 2014). A pilot study was initially conducted, as a result of which the instruments for the sociological research were refined and finalized. At the second stage, data were collected and processed using quantitative and qualitative analysis methods. In the first qualitative research (2013), 198 residents of Yerevan took part, and in the second (2014) 205 students from the National Polytechnic University of Armenia and the Kh. Abovian Armenian State Pedagogical University took part. Representatives of students aged from 18 to 30 and representatives of the older generation aged 55 to 65 participated in the survey. Statistical representativeness was provided by gender, taking into account equal opportunities for each participant to be selected. The aim of this sociological research was to find out whether the majority of respondents (particularly among the older generation) did not show religiosity openly as reflected in their church attendance. Active propaganda from the Armenian Church, in particular speeches given by priests on television and radio on various occasions, have led to the fact that, for many Armenians, attending church at least once a month has become a norm, and this is reflected in the survey of 2016–2018. A sociological study was carried out in 2016 in the Republic of Armenia,. During the survey, the urban population was interviewed. The total sample of the survey was 250 residents of Yerevan aged, from 18 to 66 (33.5% of the total population). The sample is random, quota and proportional. Quotas were distributed according to age and sex. Among the respondents from 18 to 30 (57.2% of the total number of respondents) 45.3% were men and 54.7% were women; from 55 to 66 (42.7% of the total number of respondents), men accounted for 57.5%, and women for 42.5%. The sampling error does not exceed 5%. Among the qualitative methods a typological choice was selected to conduct deeper research.. The young people were typed according to gender – male/female, according to the professional orientation – humanitarian/non-humanitarian, according to place of residence – village, town, according to educational degree – bachelor/master. In the course of in-depth interviews, 32 respondents were selected. Based on the above, studies were conducted in 2016 in Yerevan and in 2018 at the Kh. Abovyan Armenian State Pedagogical University to understand the attitude of young people and students to the Armenian Apostolic Church.

The results of the research show that every year the role of the Armenian Apostolic Church is increasing in the ordinary life of the Armenian people, especially in the lives of young people. The positive contri-

bution of the Armenian Apostolic Church is as follows: 43.1% of respondents believe that the Church contributes to national and spiritual cultural values; 26.5% to the preservation of national consciousness; 15.6% – to the suggestion of faith in the fulfillment of the covenants of the Lord; 14.4% – to the formation of a moral image. Young people happily take part in religious festivals such as Christmas, Easter, and the Transfiguration of Jesus Christ (Vardavar), each of which is unique in the socialization of youth and the formation of their spiritual culture.

At the same time, 37.4% of young people found it difficult to answer the question concerning the role of religion. This percentage is explained by the fact that in the Soviet years the church and its services were often deprived of authority. It is worth noting that in the lives of both the old Armenian patriarchal family and the Soviet nuclear family, we can see the strict execution of a religious fast. Thus, the church took care of protecting children from the habit of overeating and from poverty. In addition to preserving the sacrament of fasting in Armenian families, the baptism of a child takes an important place among the rituals.

Based on the results of the sociological surveys, we can talk about continuity in the religious aspect: for example, 85% of respondents answered that members of their families are followers of the Armenian Apostolic Church, and they follow the traditions and customs prescribed by the church with joy and respect. Families of 15% of the respondents, because of responsibilities at home and at work do not find time to visit the church.

It is also noted that in Armenia there are still many traditional families whose members do not consider it necessary to show respect for each other. Representatives of 3–4 generations living in the same house may not show respect for each other. Thus, only 189 respondents out of 205 answered the question of what kind of relationship they have with their grandfathers and grandmothers. 155 out of 189 students are in good relations with the representatives of older generations, which indicates that the Armenian family still has such positive emotional manifestations as respect, closeness and warmth. Poor and misunderstanding relations with grandfathers and grandmothers were reported by 8 respondents, and 26 of the respondents did not have grandparents. Regarding the relationship with the parents, 142 of the 205 respondents noted that they got on well with their parents, 45 students rated the relationship with their parents as average, and 18 respondents had poor relationships with their parents.

The results indicate that the representatives of the two specified age groups, regardless of their employment (in particular, the older

generation) do not show open religiosity, which was reflected in their lack of church attendance, but the active propaganda work and purposeful activities of the Armenian Apostolic Church is influencing the activation and increase in the number of believers, as well as the dissemination of spiritual values among the two generations.

Results for the three values of priority were as follows:

Each participant was given a choice of three possible answers.

In the first response 42.0% of the respondents emphasized the importance of the family. This is clear testimony to the fact that in Armenian society generally as well as among the young, the family continues to occupy a leading and important place. Love, faith, and human relationships had lower percentages

For the second answer we see that 30.5% of the respondents chose love. Taking into account the fact that the respondents are young, this is rather natural. Other versions of the survey, in which faith, homeland and human relationships are most relevant, are also remarkable. Career was also highlighted.

In the third case, the most common answer was friendship (27.5%). Everyone is a part of society and everyone in this social relationship seeks and finds people sharing the same ideas. The importance of friendship also speaks about the healthy condition of Armenian society itself.

In summary, it is possible to rank the importance of the presented values for young people and to show that the family, love and friendship are in first place. It is also evident that each of the values faith, homeland, human relations and career received a similar percentage. The results of the survey suggest that the State should pay particular attention to the spiritual and cultural upbringing of young people (among the priorities approved by the protocol decision N 6 of February 2, 2006 of the Government of the Republic of Armenia *Strategies of the State Youth Policy of the Republic of Armenia for 2006–2007* also noted the importance of spiritual, cultural and patriotic education: “The state considers the spiritual and physical development of youth as an important part of national development and great social value” (see: *The Strategy of the State Youth Policy of the Republic of Armenia for 2006–2007*, Chapter 1, item 1.3). It is clear that one of the most important pillars of development for any society is the proper education of the young and the improvement of its spiritual-cultural value system.

The next important issue under discussion is whether religious life is important to the respondents. This issue highlights young people’s religious beliefs and how important religious life is for them.

The results show that 62.2% of respondents unambiguously attach importance to religious life, and 21.8% consider it more important, and that these two indicators are very close to one another; that is, religious life is important for the overwhelming majority. We can therefore conclude that the overwhelming majority of Armenian young people value the role of religion in their lives. For 11.2% of the respondents, religious life is not so important, which is natural because at all times religious life has not been so important for a particular group of people, which can be explained by the individual's ideas, imagination, lifestyle and circumstances. 4.3% of the respondents do not consider religious life at all, and if we discuss the last two answers together, we see that only 15.5% of the respondents did not value religious life. Analysis of the answers of this group, must take into account a number of important factors, such as the historical period, prevailing morals, and personal and public relations,.

The next subject of the study is a logical continuation of the preceding topic and aims to reveal the three essential elements of a person's religious life.

The young people were offered three variants of the answer, and 80.7% considered "belief in God" to be the most important element of religious life, for 10.0% "church attendance" was important, for 6.3% "prayer" and for 3.0% "faith". These answers clearly show the high level of faith in God among young people. It is also remarkable that the "faith" answer was mentioned as a separate phenomenon. The second highest indicator is church attendance; this is possibly due to changes in public perception and the high position of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

In summary, one can conclude that the three most important elements of religious life are belief in God, praying, religious holidays and celebrations. The other elements were less frequently chosen by the respondents and are in almost equal positions.

Answers to the question of faith showed that the greatest preference among representatives of the two generations (65.6%) is given to Christianity and the respondents are fully aware of the fact that for centuries the Armenian Apostolic Church played a decisive role in the formation and self-preservation of the Armenian people. Responding to the statement "Faith is the most important component of my life," 20.4% of respondents stated that they are in a state of uncertainty and only 14.0% have firmly identified themselves as non-believers. It is curious that among the young believers only 43.4% are believers in the traditional sense of the word: they regularly attend church and carry out religious duties. The rest are mostly modernized believers, since they declare that

their faith is their own business. And, despite the fact that today the number of sects and sectarian organizations which preach ideas different from the Armenian Apostolic Church is growing in Armenia, the Armenian church, family and state have a firm faith and they invariably realize Christian ideas with the help of celebrations and rituals.

In the course of the study it was also important to clarify how often the respondents went to church. Answers in percentage terms show that in Armenian society almost an absolute majority of young people, in contrast to the older generation, consider themselves followers of Christianity (46.2% young people, 19.4% older generation). This fact also determines the frequency of visits to church and religious centers by young people.

Before moving on to the next question about how much the respondents trusted the Armenian Apostolic Church, it is important to refer to data from another study which are directly related to the role and significance of the Armenian Apostolic Church. In particular, the National Youth Report of Armenia noted: if the religious and secular alignment of Armenians plays an important role in the number of problems of national unity, then the Armenian Apostolic Church, with its tactics and strategy, plays an important role in this and similar issues.

On this basis, it seemed to us important to find out the opinion of the respondents on the question of the authority of the Armenian Apostolic Church among young people, and on what is the nature of Armenians' consciousness on the issue of secular divergences in the context of intra-national unity.

Among national and state institutions, the Armenian Apostolic Church has the highest percentage of confidence in the opinion of Armenian young people—(90.9%). In the past 15 years, such a high level of trust has not been observed in relation to any state and political institution in Armenia. In addition, 93.2% of Armenian young people consider themselves followers of the Armenian Apostolic Church, and 0.9% consider themselves atheists. 4.1% of the respondents believe in God, but do not consider themselves adherents of any religion and do not attend any church.

The survey showed how much the respondents trust the Armenian Apostolic Church: 68.9% of respondents do trust, 21.1% are more likely to trust. Comparing these indicators, we noted that 90.0% of respondents trust the church, which indicates the increased role of the Armenian Apostolic Church among young people.

The overwhelming majority of young people consider themselves adherents of the Armenian Apostolic Church, which is evident from the re-

sults of our survey. So, most of the respondents, answering the question “How often do you attend church?”, answered that they attend often. This once again confirms the growing authority of the church among young people. At the same time, it is important to note that frequent church attendance by young people is to a great extent caused not by the developed religious consciousness, which is connected with the preaching activity of the Armenian Apostolic Church, but more manifested as a dogmatic component of national identity. It should also be noted that a visit to the church several times a week (10.3%) or the rate of church attendance at church festivals (31.5%) indicates a fairly high level of involvement in church life. In fact, only a small percentage of the respondents (3.3%) do not participate in church life, and these are a group of people with atheistic views, and a large percentage (39.9%) of the respondents gave an answer “not sure” as a result of not being involved in the church life, but it doesn’t mean that they don’t believe in God.”

Conclusions

Having studied the peculiarities, role and significance of the Armenian Apostolic Church in the formation of spiritual and moral values in modern Armenian society, between two generations – today’s youth (from 18 to 30) and representatives of the older generation (from 56 to 66), we come to the following conclusions:

1. Thanks to the Armenian Apostolic Church, for centuries moral values – faith, religion, way of life – were spread and preserved. And today the church conducts purposeful activities to activate and strengthen community life, within which the number of believing followers is increasing. However, the church now faces the problem of the formation of spiritual values as elements of the national image
2. In the conditions of the democratization of Armenia, when the authorities are legitimate, the church is reinterpreting its role in spreading its influence among the population, actively using the principles of freedom of speech and conscience, approved in the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia
3. It can be argued that, although there is a large number of sectarian organizations functioning in Armenia which question the dogmas of the Armenian Apostolic Church, the faith of the Armenian family, the church and the state is strong enough, and the majority of Armenians invariably follow Christian ideas.

This condition can be regarded as a victory for Christian ideology, which should induce Armenian society to unite and appreciate Armenian culture, to refuse to accept the values of others and not to be influenced by them.

4. One of the most important means of church influence on the moral and psychological state of young people is their education in the spirit of Christian morality in all spheres of public life. The role of the family and the state in satisfying social and cultural needs and harmonizing the moral and psychological state of members of society, and the harmonious moral and psychological state of members of society depends not only on their living conditions. People's traditions and customs have a positive impact on the relationships between people in the church and in the family.
5. Armenian young people are more religious than the older generation, brought up in the spirit of atheism, which in general, in our opinion, contributes to the favorable moral and psychological state of the young representatives of Armenian society.
6. The Armenian Apostolic Church in modern conditions acts as a guarantor of the translation of socio-cultural values and the spiritual connection of generations.

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