

Anti-War Movement Beginning to Emerge among Russian Orthodox Faithful, Filatov Says

Opinion

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“If one compares the statements of Metropolitan Kirill of 20 years ago and now, then it is possible to see that in his patriotic and statist ideology, the militarist component has weakened.” Our society in general did not take note of the most important case when the Russian Orthodox Church did not support the unification of Crimea to Russia and with regard to the conflict in south-east Ukraine consistently has called for reaching an accord” rather than supporting views of patriotic circles it is traditionally been close to.

By Paul Goble* for “Window on Eurasia” Oct 21 – Earlier this week individuals appeared before the headquarters of the Russian General Staff carrying posters that clearly indicated they were acting on the basis of religious convictions (sova-center.ru/religion/news/authorities/elections/2016/10/d35654/, portal-credo.ru/site/?act=news&id=122515 <http://www.svoboda.org/a/28059348.html> and facebook.com/gradustv77/?pnref=story). Among them were: “What does Christ Teach? Under the guise of tradition and spirituality we are offered war, war and more war.” “Covering himself with Orthodoxy, Putin sows hatred and war.” “Blessed are the Peacemakers.” “If you want peace, prepare for peace.” And “We stand for peace, but we are preparing for war.” The appearance of these anti-war Christians attracted relatively little attention in Moscow or the West, but that is a mistake, Sergey Filatov of the Moscow Institute of Oriental Studies suggests, because they are part of the spread of genuine and potentially powerful anti-war sentiments among the faithful (sova-center.ru/religion/publications/2016/10/d35675/). The hierarchy of the Moscow Patriarchate and the traditions of Russian Orthodoxy more generally are so associated with Caesaro-Papism and support for authoritarian governments, their force structures and army. But that is now the only trend of opinion within the church especially at the parish level, Filatov says. Over the last 25 years, he says, “militarist attitudes and support for military victories ... is slowly but consistently weakening” within the church, especially at the lower levels but also among some of the hierarchs as well. “Among the laity, there exists not only a politically liberal pacifist minority, but also anti-war ‘evangelical’ attitudes among believers whom you wouldn’t call liberals with regard to other issues.” What is surprising is not that “Orthodox pacifists have appeared but rather than they have appeared only now.” Among Christians around the world there has been a slow and sometimes not so slow shift to anti-war positions among many denominations, Filatov says. Roman Catholics have been among the leaders of this in the West as can be seen from the pope’s calls to both sides in the Ukrainian conflict to reach an agreement, calls that have outraged some Ukrainian patriots. “In Russian Orthodoxy,” the orientalist continues, such “anti-war attitudes are only now being born.” But they have not come out of nowhere or only from abroad. “If one compares the statements of

Metropolitan Kirill of 20 years ago and now, then it is possible to see that in his patriotic and statist ideology, the militarist component has weakened.” “Our society in general did not take note of the most important case when the Russian Orthodox Church did not support the unification of Crimea to Russia and with regard to the conflict in south-east Ukraine consistently has called for reaching an accord” rather than supporting views of patriotic circles it is traditionally been close to. “This position has many causes, but whatever they were, this position for the Russian Orthodox Church is unique and it represents a most important precedent for the future,” Filatov argues. The church may remain very conservative on many moral issues but on war, it is increasingly going to be against militarism. That represents a change, and one with enormous consequences for relations between the Kremlin and the Moscow Patriarchate and thus for Russian society and the country’s political system as a whole.

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The commentary above is from Paul Goble’s “Window on Eurasia” series and appears here with the author’s permission. Contact Goble at: paul.goble@gmail.com