

# Paradigm of Russian Theocracy as Commemoration and Religious Ideal

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## Abstract

**Background/Objectives:** The study considers religious and philosophical thought and the concept of theocracy that have been developed in Russian culture for over ten centuries by Church hierarchs, philosophers and public persons. **Methods:** The author makes an attempt not only to identify the evolutionary vector of Russian theoretical thinking but also to characterize its initial worldview foundations and the historical preconditions for its formation. **Findings:** Given the fact that during the whole period of development of philosophy in Russia theocratic intuitions have never occupied central positions in the worldview search in Russian society (as compared to, for example, the subjects of philosophy of history, philosophy and anthropology, ethics and aesthetics), it is still interesting to determine the specific features that make Russian ideal of theocracy original and unique. **Applications/Improvements:** Dogmatic and historic factors that established in Russian consciousness the idea of “symphony” of state and church powers make it possible to consider theocratic concept as constructive form of commemoration.

**Keywords:** Commemoration, Church, Politics, Russian Philosophy, State, Theocracy

## 1. Introduction

Today geopolitical events challenge Russia with “the task with many unknown variables”: On the one hand, it is necessary to preserve and to improve the forms of international interaction and cooperation to avoid isolationism. On the other hand, under the conditions of the intensified processes of globalization that entail the elimination of ethnic differences, the loss of national traditions and the devaluation of national identity, the problem of maintaining and strengthening national self-comprehension acquires special importance. But how these two trends that appear to be incompatible should be united? Undoubtedly, one of the preconditions for preserving one’s own political, social and cultural traditions is represented by reinforcing the foundations of the state power. However, this cannot be done without referring to those social institutions that have been initially called upon to perform the functions of generating and maintaining the culture. Over the long history of Russia one of such social institutions was represented by the church that used not only to satisfy

the spiritual and moral needs of the society from century to century but also used to solve the issues of social and political spheres. Political history of Rus and of Russia up to the 20<sup>th</sup> century has been directly associated with the activities of the Orthodox Church. It will be remembered that the image of Russian Tsar, Russian ruler that has been created within the national consciousness is not just the image of a political leader who preserves the traditions of succession in power, but mostly an image of the Lord’s Anointed whose power is consecrated by Divine Grace and thus is supremely legitimate.

The current importance of the subject of this study is by no means exhausted by culturological grounds. Another condition that highlights the importance of the abovementioned problem is the fact that there are a great number of states on the political map of the world that feature the elements of theocratic governments. So, why theocratic ideals look so inviting in the modern world? What is the key to their success and what are the disadvantages? What theoretical meaning is attached to the notion of “theocracy”? The abovementioned arguments laid the foundations for setting the problems

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of this study and for determining its strategic objective: To analyze theocratic constructions of Russian theologians, thinkers and public persons as constructive forms of mythologizing social memory.

The objects under investigation include the theocratic concepts of Metropolitan Hilarion of Kiev, of Philotheus, monk of Yelizarov Convent, of hegumen Joseph Volotsky, of Patriarch Nikon of Moscow, of Minister of National Education count Sergey Semionovich Uvarov, of religious philosopher Vladimir Sergeyevich Solovyov. The principal parameters for comparing the abovementioned theories were represented by two criteria: The degree of the dependence on the Christian creedal formulations and the degree of freedom of the worldview thinking. The authors believe that it is exactly the correlation between these parameters that would represent the specifics of that or another concept.

## 2. Method

The logic of this study is strictly subject to the principle of historicism which makes it possible to discover the evolutionary aspect in the object of the scientific investigation. Applying the methods of historical and culturological analysis affords linking the problem of theocracy with the specific features of the spiritual culture and with the specifics of the historical process.

The study combines the problem-related discussions with the personality-based approach. Also, within the framework of the investigation the comparative and the systemic analysis have been carried out.

## 3. Literature Review

In different periods and in different contexts the issue of theocracy was studied in the works of<sup>1-26</sup>. Among the modern methods of understanding theocracy the researchers distinguish philosophical, ecclesiastical and political approaches.

General theoretical and philosophical aspects of the ideal of theocracy have been investigated by an outstanding Russian thinker N. A. Berdyayev. Being a philosopher, he treated theocracy at global universal level as the union between humanity and God. Thereat, Berdyayev insisted that theocracy could not represent an embodiment of human efforts only. Theocracy is an objective power of religion, the real power of Grace, and

not a subjective power of man. Moreover, according to the thinker, theocracy should not be identified with clericalism (spiritual power of the clergy)<sup>17</sup>.

Modern researcher in political studies Ye. A. Tyurin<sup>13</sup> in his works analyzes the concept of theocracy from the perspectives of politics. He believes that theocracy can be explained by the originally sacral nature of political power. Hence, all historical and modern forms of theocratic states are regarded by the investigator as the efforts to embody the interactions between man and the order of the universe.

Great contribution to developing the domestic idea of theocracy was made by archpriest Vasiliy Zenkovskiy. He fairly highlighted that “theocratic subject in Christianity was being developed in Russia not in the sense of primacy of spiritual power over secular power, as it was observed in the West, but in the sense of perceiving the sacred mission of the state power. This was not a movement toward caesaropapism: The Church met the state halfway and gave the graceful power of consecration to it”<sup>25</sup>.

Scientific novelty of the study is represented by the fact that the problems are studied from the specific perspectives: There is an attempt not only at identifying the essence of Russian theocratic idea, but also at characterizing the process of its evolution, its origins, its commemorative potential and its degree of dependence on the postulations of the Orthodox theology.

The initial hypothesis is represented by the assumption that the theocratic idea as constructive expression of the fragments of social memory that took its origins in the Russian religious philosophy at the early stages of its development and that was to a certain degree reinforced by the orthodox theology was similarly important for enhancing the authority of the state power and for strengthening the positions of the Orthodox Church.

## 4. Results

Over the whole period of its development the humanity was trying to find such formula of political order that would embody the ideals of justice, common welfare and social and political stability. Thus, at the beginning of history in different corners of the earth emerged the ideas of the sacred mission of the state power that are of current importance even now, as it has already been mentioned in this study.

The notion of “theocracy” can be used in several

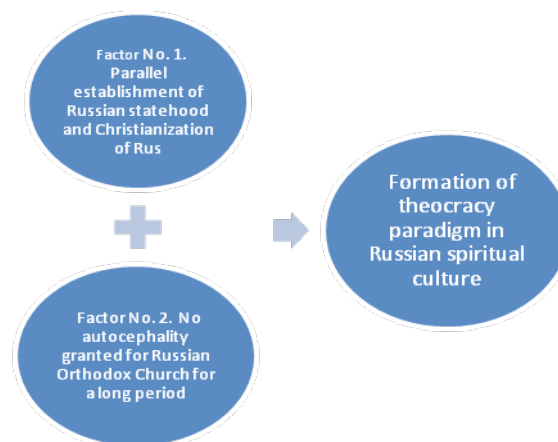
contexts: as a special type of political system and the form of government when the state power is possessed by the clergymen; as a system of philosophical, social and political beliefs that justify the necessity of cooperation, of the “symphony” that should exist between the church and the state<sup>27</sup>. These two ways of interpreting the term “theocracy” are directly related to each other, insofar as the thought determines the existence and, vice versa, insofar as the existence determines the way of thinking.

Real life, living conditions, material activities, historical events and many other things predetermine the functions of our consciousness. In most cases the ideas do not appear in the head of man from nowhere and spontaneously (even provided that the mystic way of cognition is recognized as possible). This judgment equally holds for the idea of theocracy. The fact that theocratic paradigm was formed at the very early stages of Russian spiritual creative thinking can be explained by the specific features of historical development in Russia. The first determining factor to be mentioned is represented by parallel establishment of the foundations of Russian statehood with the Christianization of Rus. We all know well the story about adopting the Orthodox Faith from Byzantium by the Holy Great Prince Vladimir. So, it was exactly the political leader who played the crucial part in making this fateful decision in Russian history. Thus, in Rus the idea of theocracy was present as the principal political and spiritual paradigm from the very beginning (or, at the very least, from the moment of adoption of Christianity)<sup>27</sup>.

Another historic circumstance that predetermined the necessity to form the concept of theocracy in Russian philosophy was the fact that Russian Orthodox Church was deprived of autocephaly for a long time. For a long period Rus used to be a component element of Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. Kiev metropolitan that depended on Constantinople did not have rights to elect its own metropolitans from Russian pontiffs; Greeks used to be appointed metropolitans and many of them did not even speak Russian. Under these conditions the Russian Orthodox Church needed support from the state to gain more independence<sup>24</sup>.

The concept of theocracy was ardently advocated during the period of patriarch Nikon. Specific theocratic ideals of this primate of the Russian Orthodox Church were revealed during the construction of New Jerusalem Monastery. Nikon wanted his New Jerusalem to be perceived as the new spiritual center of Orthodox world.

According to one of the researchers of church history V. I. Petrushko, theocratic visions of Nikon were “quite far from the Orthodox tradition and rather bore resemblance to some kind of eastern papism”<sup>28</sup>.



**Figure 1.** Historical factors that determine formation of Russian theocratic concept.

It is difficult to tell what exactly has become the determining factor in the process of forming Russian theocratic idea: Historical circumstances of adoption of Christianity by Rus or the struggle of the Russian church for autocephaly. However, in works of father Vasiliy Zenkovskiy we find another interesting aspect of the concept of Russian theocracy: The idea of the interconnectedness of the church and the political powers could make it possible to perceive best the theological paradigm of the Kingdom of God on earth. “The application point of Divine Providence in history is presented by the state power: This makes the whole of the “enigma” of power, of its relations with the sphere of mystery” says father V. Zenkovskiy<sup>5</sup>.

Taking into account the abovementioned factors that affected the establishment of the domestic concept of theocracy the authors of this study shall determine its worldview origins. Russian theocracy is a purely Christian theory and in this regard its roots should be searched for within the Orthodox theology. The ideas and the ideals of the Divine Revelation expressed in the Bible and expostulated in the Church Traditional Scriptures became the ideological foundations of the thought about the unity of state and church powers. And the major biblical idea here is represented by perceiving the whole one and the only God as an unlimited Absolute who, as a consequence of this unlimitedness, possesses the qualities of omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence and all-

accomplishments. Whatever the extent of our acceptance of the absoluteness of God's power, of the absoluteness of the rules dictated by God and the absoluteness of the divine goodness of these rules, that is exactly the extent to which we promote the ideal of implementing these divine rules and these divine power in all forms of human existence including political life.

Another biblical idea that facilitated the formation of the ideal of Christian theocracy is the idea of the Kingdom of God that is especially vividly expressed in the Gospels, but that already had its origins in the Old Testament. The biblical prototype of the Kingdom of God was represented by the Jews, the Chosen People among whom, according to the Bible, the only true theocracy in the whole history was practiced<sup>29</sup>.

The image of the God-Man Jesus Christ in whom two natures have been embodied as the unmixable unity of Personality also helped justify the idea of theocracy. This image can be considered as corresponding to the biblical and patristic teachings on synergy as joint activity, or cooperation between God and man, between the Church and the society. "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them- yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me." (1Corinthians 15:10) writes Paul the Apostle on the cooperation between Grace and his human efforts in the preaching of Christ<sup>30</sup>. This idea of synergy was profoundly explained in the works of the Holy Fathers<sup>31,32</sup>. For example, in the works belonging to venerable John Cassian we find the thought as follows: In salvation everything depends on God and everything depends on us; salvation is the fact of Grace where all of us are completely free (here is a paradox: completely dependent and responsible and completely free)<sup>31</sup>. Therefore, in society the cooperation between the Church and the state should be free without coercion on behalf of any of the parties.

However, given the abovementioned absolute power of God over His creation, the source of both civil and church power is represented by God and by His Divine Providence that corresponds to the whole one Personality of Logos that accepted in Christ the human nature into the unity of its eternal Divine Person. According to the Holy Scriptures, the state is an institution consecrated by God, though any other form of government is regarded by God as a concession, a condescension toward human weakness that failed to bear the highness of theocratic government which required the most high devotion to the will of God

and His law: "The state as an inevitable element of life in the world corrupted with sins, where personality and society need be protected from dangerous manifestations of sin, is blessed by God"<sup>29</sup>. Thus, according to the teachings of the Church, the existence of state is predetermined by the consequences of the fall from grace, by the domination of sin in the world.

Any power is either established through the will of God or is allowed by God; however, even the authority that is not consistent with the will of God and is only tolerated by God due to His respect to the freedom of man, is, nevertheless, directed by the Omnipotent Creator toward the good end. Therefore, Christ says to Pilate: "You would have no authority over Me unless it were given to you from above". (John 19:11), and earlier He said: "So give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's. (Matthew 22:21)<sup>30</sup>.

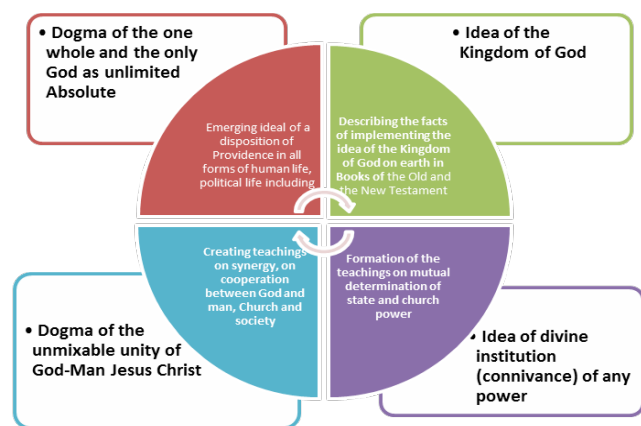
Expounding on the Gospel teachings of Christ and on His attitude toward power, Paul the Apostle taught as follows: "Everyone must submit to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and those that exist are instituted by God. So then, the one who resists the authority is opposing God's command, and those who oppose it will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad one. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have its approval. For government is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, because it does not carry the sword for no reason: for government is God's servant, an avenger that brings wrath on the one who does wrong. Therefore, you must submit, not only because of wrath, but also because of your conscience. And for this reason you pay taxes, since the authorities are God's public servants, continually attending to these tasks. Pay your obligations to everyone: Taxes to those you owe taxes, tolls to those you owe tolls and respect to those you owe respect, and honor to those you owe honor." (Romans 13:1-7)<sup>30</sup>. In addition Peter the Apostle said: "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: Whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil-doers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: As free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God." (1 Peter 2:13-16)<sup>30</sup>.

In "Foundations of social concept of Russian Orthodox



Church” the church is defined as “God-Man body”<sup>29</sup>. In this respect the state as a political institution created by society, by people with the purposes of arranging secular life (for example, for the purposes of security and for coordinating different personal interests) cannot help being connected with the Church. Thereat, modern Russian Orthodox Church that accepts all postulations of the Holy Scriptures including those discussing the ideals of theocracy insists on the differences in the natures of church and state and on their parallel purposes: “The Church is established by God Himself, Our Lord Jesus Christ; whereas the divine institution of the state power reveals itself indirectly in the process of history. The purpose of the Church is the eternal salvation of people; whereas the purpose of the state is to secure their earthly wellbeing”<sup>29</sup>.

Given the fact that it was the Christian worldview that predetermined the spiritual intuitions of Russian people over the centuries, it seems reasonable to assume that the creedal formulations gave start to Russian free thinking in general and to the theocratic studies as its components. Thereat, it should be noted that theocratic motives never prevailed in domestic philosophical tradition. However, at all stages of development of Russian philosophy they have been present and have been revealing themselves in quite ascertaining manner.



**Figure 2.** Theological foundations of theocratic paradigm that was formed in Christian cultural space.

## 5. Discussion

The first Russian concepts of theocracy had been formed in Russia long before the domestic philosophical tradition emerged. The major specific feature of the concept of

theocracy in that period was represented by its lower priority as compared to the most important theological subjects. However, irrespective of this fact, the idea of the unity between the church and the state is easily perceived on the pages of the Old Russian treatises. Thus, in “Sermon on Law and Grace” of Metropolitan Hilarion we find the relevant subjects in his judgments about the special historical missions of Rus and of Holy Prince Vladimir in spiritual and political establishments of the society. Through the light of Christian truth and in accordance with Divine Providence, special fate is ordained for Russian people and Russian state: “So, being former alien, now we are called the God’s people; being the former enemies, now we are called His sons”<sup>33</sup>. The very idea of the divine determinism of the political development set forth in the treatise implies the natural necessity of the involvement of the church in the affairs of the state.

For the purposes of reconstructing the theocratic idea, the third part of “Sermon” that eulogizes Prince Vladimir is of particular importance: “Rome with voices panegyric, praises Peter and Paul through whom they came to believe in Jesus Christ the Son of God; Asia, Ephesus and Patmos praise John the Theologian; India praises Thomas; Egypt, Mark. All lands, cities and men honor and glorify their teacher who brought them the Orthodox Faith. Thus let us, through our own strength, humbly praise our teacher and mentor, the great Kagan of our land Vladimir, the grandson of Igor of yore and son of glorious Sviatoslav, who ruled in their day with courage and valor, becoming famed in many lands for their victories and fortitude. And they did not reign in a poor and unknown land, but in Russia, which is known and celebrated by all to the ends of the earth”<sup>33</sup>.

The abovementioned abstract is of great importance for the subject matter of this study as several aspects draw the attention of the researchers simultaneously.

On the one hand, Prince Vladimir is characteristically mentioned here as the baptizer of Rus. Thereat, the author does not just pay homage to the Prince who established Christianity as the official religion of Rus. For Metropolitan Hilarion it was important that Vladimir the Baptizer should be remembered as the Holy Great Prince Vladimir, Equal to the Apostles in as much as it is exactly through the apostles that the Grace of Christ was propagated all over the world (besides, later Vladimir would be canonized as being equiapostolic). For Russian church it was important to prove that Divine Grace did

not leave Rus unnoticed. By contrast to Europe, Asia and Africa that obtained Christianity through the Holy Apostles and through Jesus Christ Himself, the destiny of Russia from this spiritual perspective was not flawless (though “to be on the safe side” there was a story about the mission of Andrew the Apostle who preached Christianity, by lot, in the territories adjacent to the territory of then Rus)<sup>27</sup>.

Under the current conditions the author of “Sermon” characterizes the deed of the Holy Prince as a feat of the Apostle, thereat not hiding but highlighting the status of Vladimir as a political leader. Thus, quite naturally, the pages of the treaties give birth to one of the first variants of Russian theocracy. In the image of the Holy Great Prince Vladimir, Equal to the Apostles described in “Sermon on Law and Grace” we observe the unity of secular and spiritual power<sup>27</sup>.

Given the above, it becomes clear why the author of “Sermon” describes Prince Vladimir with reference to his relatives and predecessors such as Prince Igor and Prince Sviatoslav. It seems rather inappropriate that the hierarchy of the Orthodox Church should turn to the political authorities of the pagan Princes, and it is even more so when the tragic destinies of Russian Christians during the reign of Prince Sviatoslav, the father of the Holy Great Prince Vladimir are remembered. It seems that the risks associated with the eulogy (and what we see here is the eulogy of the “glorious, virile and courageous” Princes), according to the ideas of the primate of Russian Church, would have been covered and redeemed many times by the benefits that would be brought about by the established mightiness and supremacy of the power of the Prince. After all, under the conditions of theocracy the strength of the spiritual power is directly proportional to the strength of the political power<sup>27</sup>.

Even more popular Old Russian variation of theocratic thinking is represented by the concept that is called in research studies “Moscow, the Third Rome”. It has been formed over several decades since the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> until the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Here the idea implies not just the succession of political and state power from Roman Empire through Byzantine Constantinople to the young Moscow state. Apart from this, the theory implies that Russian people inherited from their predecessors, Romans and Byzantians, not only the state power but also some certain fundamental potential, the special status of God’s people<sup>27</sup>.

But, in as much as for the thinkers of the 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup>

centuries the definitions of such universal interrelations between the epochs and the cultures were impossible without referring to the providential perception of history, the arguments for the concept were found by its developer (according to one of the versions, Philotheus, monk of Yelizarov Convent) in no other source than in the texts of the Holy Scriptures, thus providing another attribute to its theocratic nature. Here, the foundations were represented by the story from the Old Testament about the precognitive dream of Daniel the Prophet where he dreamed about three beasts who embodied three powerful states and then he saw the fourth one: “There will be on earth the fourth kingdom that would differ from all other kingdoms and that would devour all the earth, would trample and crush it”<sup>30</sup>. The symbolic context of these judgments is obvious, namely, every state exists and flourishes solely due to the Divine Providence and Divine Grace<sup>27</sup>.

Proceeding with the discussion about the history of Russian religious and philosophical thought we find the lines as follows: “Civil laws are similar to the scriptures of the prophets, apostles and the holy fathers”<sup>34,35</sup>. These lines belong to the pen of an outstanding hierarch Joseph Volotskiy who purposefully advocated the thought about the necessity to strengthen the union between the church and the state. This union is beneficial to both parties: the church can strengthen the political power with spiritual tenets; the state can assist in fighting heresies<sup>27</sup>.

Thus, in the space of domestic spiritual culture of the early period the theocratic idea has laid deep foundations. During that period the theocratic paradigm was being created by the Church personified by its ministers. Domestic theocratic concept found a new lease of life in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The major specific feature of that period was represented by the fact that this concept was reproduced not only by the Church and the clergy, but by philosophical and political logos. In the first part of the century in the report of Minister of National Education count S.S. Uvarov “On some general foundations that could serve as guidelines for the Ministry of National Education” the universal principle of social existence was declared to be represented by the formula that was purely theocratic in its essence: the three principal pillars without which Russia can never flourish, become stronger and live were as follows: Orthodox Faith; Absolutism; National Spirit.

In the second part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the efforts of philosopher Vladimir Solovyov created the theocratic

theory that was now directly connected not with the Orthodox creedal postulations, but with the basic ideas of his general philosophical concepts (the paradigm of unitotality, the concept of “God-Mankind” etc). In his book “Russia and the Universal Church” the thinker defined the theocratic formula precisely: “The Universal Church (in the wide sense of the word) is revealed as a three party union of God-Mankind: We have the union of the clergy, where the divine origins, unconditional and unchangeable, prevail and create the Church in the proper sense of the word: The Temple of God; we have the unity of kingdom where human origins prevail and create the Christian state (Church as the living body of God); and, finally, we have the union of prophecy where the divine and the human should penetrate into each other in free and mutual combination generating the perfect Christian society”<sup>1</sup>. Thus, according to Solovyov, no perfect development of the state can be thought of without the Church.

At the same time, a number of important functions of the church are realized by means of this theocratic union. First, assistance is performed to social unity. Second, theocratic unity can be regarded as the real emanation of the religious truth: “Christianity is not an abstract theory; Christianity needs be implemented in reality and realized in full”<sup>4</sup>.

Co-existing in parallel with civil society and the state, the church cannot stand apart and be separated from these institutions. On the contrary, according to V. S. Solovyov, it should affect them with its spiritual power; it should attract the state and the society gradually assimilating them, introducing the ideas of love and concordance into all spheres of human life. The function of the spiritual influence on the society is to be practically realized through the activities of the clergy (church hierarchy): “This hierarchy is specifically meant to serve the spiritual unity of the human society making use of its authority and influence, introducing the idea of love that is intrinsic to church into the civil life and into the affairs of the state, and not by the words of prayers only, but by the deeds that would ensure that *the name of God is blessed* by the people, that *the Kingdom of God comes* into the world and that *the will of God is done* not only in heaven *but on earth*”<sup>5</sup>.

Thereat, the interaction between Church and state, according to V. S. Solovyov, is the mutual freedom, “however, not the negative freedom of indifference, but the positive freedom of consistent interaction in serving

one and the same purpose: Creating the true community on earth”<sup>3</sup>.



Figure 3. Role of social institutions in forming domestic theocratic concept.

## 6. Conclusion

Summing up the above it has to be noted that Russian theocratic concept can be perceived as a comprehensive variant of commemoration of the holy history described in the Bible and simultaneously as the form of transformation and embodiment of historic memory of Russian ethnos. It is especially worthwhile highlighting that what is meant here is exactly commemoration (in the sense of personification of the modified historical forms in new modern environment) and not restoration of the old things. Theocratic teachings that have been formed in the space of Russian philosophy made it possible to solve a number of important problems of the state and of the Orthodox Church. Thanks to the theocratic idea the state was in position to render legitimacy to its power by establishing the thought about the sacral nature of the crown of the Tsar and thus ensuring the continuous dialog with the citizens that, from the perspectives of the church as a social institution, used to be laity, congregation, “atoms” of the one living body of the Church of Christ. Besides, under some certain historical circumstances, the Russian Orthodox Church often used to perform quite another, mundane missions, namely, it acted as an intermediary during the political talks, as a subject of economic relations, etc. At the same time, the paradigm of theocracy was important for the Church in terms of the opportunities it provided for implementing at least some separate elements of the Christian concept of the Kingdom of God on earth. Through the ideas that are included flawlessly into the concept of theocracy it was possible to prove that the truth of the Holy Scriptures is real for the mortal life. However, notwithstanding

all evident advantages of the theocratic theory (either implemented or not), it has to be noted that it is still an ideal unattainable by far in either politics or religion.

## 7. Acknowledgements

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