

Religious Factor in Electoral Campaigns: Periodical Press Discourse

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► Interdisciplinary investigation of interdisciplinary topics

Why religion?

There are claims that with the development of social and economic structures there will be no place for religion. It will remain as one's private identification but will never play an active role in any other sphere except one's emotional world. Nevertheless, there are great debates about the role of religion in modern/post-modern society: scholars think of the secularization, deprivatization, modernization of religion etc. To my mind, these controversial approaches have to be proved by more historical evidence among which source study is the most important one especially when historian operates with the contemporary for him data.

Why electoral campaigns?

They are emotional and important part of political life when society through voters and campaigns of political parties shows its preferences more clearly.

Why periodical press?

It is an essential part of the communicative process which is basic in contemporary world; it is one of the creators of discourse reality and plays an active role in electoral processes. From the very beginning of its appearance periodical press has close connection to all political institutions, works as a social expert and forms political culture. In other words, press is not only a channel of information for scholars, but the way for electoral propaganda and one of the aims politicians struggle for.

► Main sources

Three types of the central periodical press are taken into consideration: official state, independent political, party and the religious press of the main Ukrainian confessions – the Ukrainian Orthodox church of the Moscow Patriarchate, the Ukrainian Orthodox church of the Kyiv Patriarchate, the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox church, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic church. Eight electoral campaigns are presented: the Presidential of 1991, 1994, 1999, 2004 and the Parliamentary of 1994, 1998, 2002, 2006.

► Preliminary conclusions

The religious-political interaction is present in independent Ukraine where both sides of the interplay are very active in their religious and political rhetoric appropriately: politicians continue to use religious slogans, symbols etc. in their electoral appeals and other activities in order to improve their electoral results, and church hierarchs take part in the political events due to their wish to possess the more privileged position in the society.

What is **religious factor** of the Ukrainian electoral campaigns?

- The activities of the Christian – Democratic parties;
- The variety of the religious slogans in the party electoral programs from very general like “for the Christian values” to very specific like “for eparchial trials for Christians”;
- Placing of clergymen in nomination by the political parties and their blocs;
- The activities of the Parliamentary groups as following “For the United Ukrainian Orthodox church” etc.;

- The debates on the new Law of Ukraine “On the freedom of conscience and religious organizations”;
- Financial, legislative and other types of the practical help of the political parties to the Churches;
- Facts of agitation at the churches;
- Electoral appeals of the Ukrainian churches;
- Pseudo religious rhetoric and symbols used during electoral propaganda.

The periodical press discussed outlines not only the facts of this process, various types of analysis given by journalists, but also the reality vision by the different sides of the interplay from their own and alien perspectives – how different identities are struggling for political and cultural space. Combination of all views gives us the general image on how religious factor is functioning in the Ukrainian political life that is useful in order to debate about the role of religion nowadays and its conceptional interpretations.

In addition, through the analysis of the periodical press it possible to investigate the context of existence and change of the religious rhetoric – for example, *the dimension of causes* as following:

- the historical tradition when religious-political interaction occurred only because one or another side needed mostly some extra-support in order to solve internal problems;
- the current Ukrainian mindset (by sociological data presented in press mostly), which is characterized by religious self-identification and a non-traditional approach to church cult;
- the current circumstances in Ukrainian society and politics: the Orthodox split, the rapid growth of the Protestant churches with no tradition in Ukraine, internal political crisis when political elite is looking for some sources for its legitimization;

- the political activity of Ukrainian churches caused by the split mentioned, the new democratic situation when “the religious market” appeared and the historical churches (mostly without the tradition of missionaries) have to compete with active new-comers.

The religious rhetoric in the electoral campaigns as a part of the more general issue of the role of religion in Ukrainian society presents the evidence that does not support the ideas of “deprivatization of religion” and “religious revival” because the majority of the Ukrainian population has religious self-identification with one of the historical churches in Ukraine but they are not involved in church activities. This feature of the Ukrainian mindset has an impact on the construction of the religious rhetoric that becomes more and more general and does not touch real religious problems (exceptions are the campaigns of 2004 and 2006 with their strong interest in the Orthodox split but it remains on the level of appeals). Even the church hierarchy trying to achieve secular power through elections does not pay much attention to the particular religious issues in its propaganda mostly. To my mind, this process described has to be named “*the symbolization of religion*” as a method of power functioning in modern society if we use the Foucaulian definitions.