



SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP OF THE STATE WITH TRADITIONAL CONFESSIONS AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL IN THE 1990S–2000S: THE EXPERIENCE OF THE REPUBLIC OF MARI EL

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ABSTRACT

Background: The danger of the spread of destructive behavior (involvement in totalitarian sects, drug addiction, alcoholism, crime, etc.) among children and young people in the Republic of Mari El (Russia) in the second half of the 1990s–2000s contributed to the appeal of the authorities of the republic for help in solving this problem to the respected religious confessions in society, which was expressed in the establishment of various forms of social partnership. **Methods:** The study of the directions and features of the social partnership of the authorities with the Russian Orthodox Church and the Mari traditional religion in the field of spiritual and moral education of the younger generation is based on the analysis of archival documents of the State Archive of the Republic of Mari El, as well as materials of the Orthodox newspaper "Mironositsky Bulletin". **Conclusion:** As a result of the research, the authors concluded that the peculiarity of the system of interaction that had been formed at the initiative of the authorities in Mari El in the post-Soviet period to solve these problems is the active role of representatives of the Mari traditional religion in it, along with the Russian Orthodox Church.

Keywords: state policy. Destructive behavior. Spiritual and moral education.



PARCERIA SOCIAL ENTRE O ESTADO E AS CONFISSÕES TRADICIONAIS A NÍVEL REGIONAL NA SEGUNDA METADE DOS ANOS 1990-2000: EXPERIÊNCIA DA REPÚBLICA DE MARI EL

RESUMO

Antecedentes: O perigo da disseminação de comportamentos destrutivos (envolvimento em seitas totalitárias, dependência de drogas, alcoolismo, crime, etc.) entre crianças e jovens na República de Mari El (RME) na segunda metade dos anos 1990-2000 encorajou as autoridades da república a buscar ajuda para resolver este problema às denominações religiosas que gozam de autoridade na sociedade, o que se expressou no estabelecimento de várias formas de parceria social. **Métodos:** A pesquisa de orientações e características de parceria social das autoridades com IOR (Igreja Ortodoxa Russa) e RTM (Religião Tradicional Mari) no campo da educação espiritual e moral da geração mais jovem é baseada na análise de documentos de arquivo do Arquivo Estadual da República de Mari El (AE RME), bem como materiais do jornal ortodoxo "Myronositsky Vestnik". **Conclusão:** Como resultado do estudo, concluímos que uma característica específica do sistema de interação pós-soviético para resolver estes problemas tem sido o papel ativo, juntamente com a Igreja Ortodoxa Russa (IOR), de representantes da religião tradicional Mari (RTM), que se desenvolveu por iniciativa das autoridades em Mari El.

Palavras-chave: Política pública. Comportamento destrutivo. Educação espiritual e moral. Parceria social. Igreja Ortodoxa Russa. Religião tradicional Mari.

1. INTRODUCTION

The policy of "perestroika" eventually led to changes in the attitude of the official authorities to religion and religious denominations in the USSR–Russian Federation. However, along with the revival of Orthodoxy, Islam, Buddhism, etc., foreign cults began to penetrate the country, the activities of which were aimed at destroying the moral foundations of the Russian state and society. To a greater extent, the future generation of Russia (children and youth) was subject to spiritual aggression, which was the most susceptible to destructive ideology due to the lack of sufficient life experience and a stable worldview. To prevent the involvement of the younger generation in totalitarian religious movements, the authorities of most subjects of the Russian Federation involve traditional confessions in solving this problem, which has



determined the moral foundations of Russian society for centuries. The appeal to the spiritual and moral practices of historically established religions in Russia was also conditioned by the need to solve such problems as drug addiction and alcoholism among young people, juvenile delinquency, etc.

Orthodox Christianity and the traditional religion of the Mari people were historically the dominant faiths in the territory of the Mari Territory in pre-revolutionary times. In this regard, it is of particular interest to analyze the involvement of the regional authorities of the Republic of Mari El (RME) of these organizations claiming to be the dominant confessions in the post-Soviet period to cooperate to resolve the above destructive manifestations (Zeleneeva, 2011, pp. 147, 150).

The above circumstances determined the choice and relevance of the research topic.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The research topic is insufficiently developed in historical science despite its relevance. Nevertheless, it is possible to single out individual publications that reflect certain aspects related to the issue under consideration in the regional historiography of the RME.

One of the first such works was V.P. Kozlov's Ph.D. thesis "Religious Associations of the Republics of the Middle Volga Region (first half of the 1990s)", where the author, in particular, among the directions of the revival of traditional confessions of Mari El, highlighted the return of religious property of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) by the authorities (Kozlov, 1999). Subsequently, G.S. Zeleneeva (2011), as part of the dissertation study "Interethnic and interfaith relations in the Republic of Mari El at the turn of the 20th-21st centuries," considered the social partnership of law enforcement agencies and the Orthodox community of the republic, which consisted in patriotic education of law enforcement officers, as well as spiritual and moral education of convicted correctional colonies.

The studies of E.V. Chemyshev have become of great help in studying the social partnership of the authorities with the Russian Orthodox Church and the Mari



traditional religion. Thus, his article "The Russian Orthodox Church in the Republic of Mari El in 1988-1997", supplementing the thematically above work of V.P. Kozlov, gives an idea of the government's support for the construction and reconstruction of churches (Chemyshev, 2020). E.V. Chemyshev reveals in detail the post-Soviet restoration of the position of the MTR in the socio-political system of the constituent entity of the Russian Federation under consideration in another scientific publication "Traditional Mari beliefs at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries". Therewith, the author notes the existence of constructive interaction between the authorities and the MTR on issues of national culture and the protection of sacred groves in which prayers were held (Chemyshev, 2021). These areas of the social partnership were also analyzed by A.G. Sukhova (2018).

Along with the studies of E.V. Chemyshev and A.G. Sukhova, the main stages of the post-Soviet revival of the MTR are also considered in the article by N.S. Popov "On the Formation and Development of the Mari Traditional Religion" (2020).

Thematically, the works of A.V. Martynenko (2017), T.D. Nadkin (2017, 2019), L.A. Koroleva and A.A. Korolev (2013), E.N. Efremov (2014, 2017, 2018, 2019), A.V. Isaev (2011), D.V. Vlasenko (2017), etc. are adjacent to our article. The authors, using the example of individual Russian regions, reveal the development of social partnership between the state and religious associations.

Thus, to date, it should be stated that there is no comprehensive scientific research that would reveal the directions and features of the social partnership of the RME with the ROC and the MTR in the field of spiritual and moral education of the younger generation. This article is intended to fill the identified gaps in historical science.

3. METHODS

The purpose of the study was to identify the specifics of the social partnership of the Mari El state authorities with the Russian Orthodox Church and the Mari traditional religion on issues of spiritual and moral education of children and youth in the second half of the 1990s–2000s. Research objectives: to identify the reasons for



the involvement of the authorities of the Mari EI ROC and the MTR in social partnership in the field of spiritual and moral education of children and youth in the specified period; to identify general trends in the organizational and structural revival of the Yoshkar-Ola and Mari diocese and the MTR in the chronological framework of the article; to consider the main directions and mechanisms of the implementation of the social partnership of the Mari authorities with the ROC and the MTR in the field of spiritual and moral education of the younger generation in the second half of the 1990s–2000s.

Achievement of this goal became possible due to the analysis of documents of the State Archives of the Republic of Mari El (SA RME), which are being introduced into scientific circulation for the first time, materials of the newspaper of the Mari Metropolitanate of the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate *Mironositsky Vestnik*, as well as scientific works of Russian researchers (E.V. Chemyshev, G.S. Zeleneeva, etc.).

The research was based on the principle of historicism and the related comparative-historical method, according to which the development of social partnership of the Mari EI authorities with the ROC and MTR in the field of spiritual and moral education of children and youth were analyzed and compared in the dynamics of their formation in the post-Soviet period. A hermeneutic approach occupies a special place in the methodology of the study, which was used to interpret the content of the texts of written sources of the SA RME.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Foreign destructive religious movements were spreading in Mari EI in the 1990s, the activities of which are still one of the potential threats to Russia's national security. The so-called "non-traditional religions", during the designated period, carried out missionary activities in almost all regions of the republic. Therewith, the "Jehovah's Witnesses", the "Church of the Last Testament", the "White Brotherhood", the "Aleph", the American sect "On the Rock", the "Society of Satan", etc. showed immeasurable activity. In general, with significant financial support, these pseudo-confessions operated on a large scale in Mari EI, acquiring buildings and renting cultural institutions



for prayer meetings, as well as providing foreign training for pastors from among residents (State Archives of the Republic of Mari El, n.d.-a, d. 944a, l. 39).

The State Secretary of the RME, N.N. Gavrilov noted on November 26, 1999, at a meeting on the problems of practical work with religious associations that since the mid-1990s up to 60% of the participants of totalitarian sects in the region by age belonged to the younger generation. According to him, this became possible due to excessive loyalty to the "alienated religious organizations" of the RSFSR Law "On freedom of religion" in force from 1990 to 1997, due to which adherents of religious sects were able to freely distribute literature, hold charitable dinners and concerts in educational institutions (State Archives of the Republic of Mari El, n.d.-c, d. 148, l. 30, 36, 211).

Under the circumstances, both the authorities of Mari El and the two main confessions of the republic – the ROC and the MTR, the teachings of which were also opposed by religious sectarians, were interested in establishing cooperation to counteract the spread of the influence of the corresponding destructive trends among children and youth through their spiritual and moral education.

The ROC in Mari El has been represented by the Diocese of Yoshkar-Ola and Mari since June 11, 1993. If the republican diocese included only 30 parishes from the moment of its formation, then their number had increased to 75 by January 1, 2000, and continued to grow. The organizational and structural revival of the ROC of Mari El also consisted in the construction of new and restoration of buildings of former churches, which were transferred by the authorities of the Yoshkar-Ola and Mari dioceses. For example, by the mid-2000s, 34 religious sites of the diocese were being reconstructed in the regions of the republic, including with the support of local authorities, 7 temples were built, 6 churches were being completed (State Archives of the Republic of Mari El, n.d.-c, d. 300, l. 4; d. 853, l. 118; d. 1201, l. 187).

The positions of the traditional religion of the Mari people were also being actively restored. The role of the consolidating link in the revival of the MTR was played by the Mari religious center "Oshmariy-Chimariy", created on September 30, 1991. Since June 1995, the MTR has become represented by the religious and cultural organization "Sorta", which, without interfering with the issues of the cult practice of



the association "Oshmariy-Chimariy", discussed the doctrinal problems of the development of the Mari religion (State Archives of the Republic of Mari El, n.d.-a, d. 944a, pp. 121-122; Popov, 2020, p. 153-154).

According to E.V. Chemshev (2021, p. 114), the Mari religious center "Oshmariy-Chimariy", having re-registered on February 12, 2007, as the Centralized religious organization "Mari traditional religion of the Republic of Mari El" (CRO MTR RME), united 5 officially operating communities.

Despite the small number of registered associations of the MTR, it was rightfully the second most important and largest Mari El confession. For example, according to the sociological survey "Religious consciousness of the population of the Republic of Mari El" conducted by MARNIIYALI at the end of 2004, 51.1% out of the total number of respondents noted their confessional affiliation to Orthodoxy; 15.4% – to MTR; 6.5% – to Islam and 0.5% – to "other religion". The significance of the MTR was also expressed in not a small number of representatives of its clergy. For example, there were more than 30 karts holding prayers in holy groves in the Novotoryalsky district of the RME in January 1999 (State Archives of the Republic of Mari El, n.d.-c, d. 147, l. 108; d. 1006, l. 143).

The Yoshkar-Ola and Mari Diocese was the initiator of the beginning of the state-confessional social partnership on the spiritual and moral education of children and youth in the republic. At its request, the Ministry of Education of the RME supported the holding of the seminar "The Russian Orthodox Church – upbringing and education of the younger generation" in Volzhsk on October 29, 1996. At the meeting, representatives of the ROC and the state education system expressed concerns about the involvement of young people in the activities of religious sects, which threatened to educate them "in the spirit of kindness, righteous patriotism and mercy". To resolve this problem, as a result of the event, an agreement is reached between the Deputy Minister of Education of the RME A.S.

Matveev and the Bishop, the head of the Yoshkar-Ola, and Mari Dioceses, John, on the development of joint cooperation in the spiritual education of the young generation (Mironositsky Bulletin, 1996).



In the context of the indicated interaction of the Ministry of Education of the RME and the local diocese, the President of the RME, V.A. Kislitsyn, met with the rectors of 32 parishes of the Yoshkar-Ola and Mari Diocese on August 24, 1997, in the Government House (Yoshkar-Ola). During the discussion of the revival of Orthodoxy in the Republic, representatives of the ROC drew the attention of the President of the RME to the active missionary work of totalitarian sects (especially the "Church of Christ") aimed at attracting children and youth to their adherents. Considering this, the church hierarchs of Yoshkar-Ola and Mari dioceses, asked the President of the RME to provide "wide access to the priests of the ROC in cultural and educational institutions" of the region (State Archives of the Republic of Mari El, n.d.-a, d. 944a, l. 7).

The result of this event was the organization by the Ministry of Education of the RME and the missionary department of the Yoshkar-Ola and Mari diocese since the late 1990s of regular extra-curricular meetings of the spiritual and moral orientation of Orthodox clergy with minors in kindergartens, schools, and correctional colonies; young people in educational institutions of all levels (State Archives of the Republic of Mari El, n.d.-c, d. 1006, l. 38, 52).

Also, with the support of the youth department of the Yoshkar-Ola city administration, the missionary department of the republican diocese organized a camp for adolescents with deviant behavior in the summer of 1998 at the Bogoroditsa-Sergieva pustyn, located near the village of Kilemary (Mironositsky Bulletin, 1998).

To prepare priests for such work, a two-day seminar "Methods of organizing spiritual and moral education in Sunday school and other educational institutions" was organized in February 1999 at the Socio-Political Center under the Government of the RME (State Archives of the Republic of Mari El, n.d.-b, d. 149, l. 121).

Soon, at a meeting of the President of the RME with representatives of religious associations, held on March 1, 1999, the MTR was involved in the discussion of the considered social partnership, which was represented by the head of the Cathedral Council of the Mari religious center "Oshmariy-Chimariy" S.A. Milyutin. Speaking to the audience, he shared the concern of Bishop John of Yoshkar-Ola and Mari associated with the next round of spiritual expansion of children and youth of the republic, which



was undertaken by Jehovah's Witnesses and Satanists. Taking this into account, S.A. Milyutin asked the President of the RME to intensify the cooperation of the authorities with the traditional confessions of the republic in spiritual and moral education and upbringing of the younger generation. According to him, the need for this was due not only to the spread of radical religious structures in the region (including Islamic ones), but also to the presence of problems of smoking, alcohol, and narcotic drugs among young people (State Archives of the Republic of Mari El, n.d.-c, d. 147, l. 46-49).

Further interaction of the authorities with the ROC and the MTR to discuss problems and implement measures in the field of spiritual and moral education of children and youth continued at the "working platforms" of scientific and practical conferences and the Council for Interaction with Religious Associations under the President of the RME (State Archives of the Republic of Mari El, n.d.-c, L. 28, 208).

For example, based on the results of the second conference on "Christian education and Russian culture", held on May 24-25, 1999, to promote Orthodox education and upbringing of the younger generation, the Government of RME supported the request of the local diocese of the opening of the Orthodox gymnasium of a name of St. Sergius of Radonezh in the city of Yoshkar-Ola in 2000 (Mironositsky Bulletin, 1999; State Archives of the Republic of Mari El, n.d.-c, d. 428, p. 9).

At the beginning of the 2000s, at the meetings of the Council for Interaction with Religious Associations under the President of the RME, decisions were made to conclude several cooperation agreements in the field of spiritual and moral education of children and youth (State Archives of the Republic of Mari El, n.d.-a, d. 944a, l. 133).

The first of them was the agreement of the Federal Prison Service's republic of Marii-El branch with the Yoshkar-Ola diocesan Administration, which entered into force on March 3, 2000. Due to it, the clergy of the Russian Orthodox Church regularly conducted classes with convicts on the study of Orthodox Christianity in the 2000s, in all correctional institutions of the republic, including the Novotroitsk educational colony for minors (State Archives of the Republic of Mari El, n.d.-c, d. 1006, l. 197).

On March 26, 2001, a corresponding agreement was signed between the Ministry of Education of the RME and the local diocese, providing for the introduction of cultural courses in kindergartens and schools of the Republic to study the basics of



Orthodoxy. As part of the implementation of the agreement in 2004, I.N. Zauzolkova, the teacher of the preschool institution in Kozmodemyansk "Kapelka", and the rector of the local Holy Trinity Church developed a "Rejoice" brochure, which was subsequently used in almost all kindergartens of the republic for spiritual and moral education minors (State Archives of the Republic of Mari El, n.d.-c, l. 38, 155). Various courses of Orthodox orientation had been taught in general education institutions of the RME in 2002-2009. For example, in the 2005-2006 academic year, in 5 schools of the republic, students in grades 1-4 (258 students) studied the elective "Foundations of Orthodox culture"; a combined group of 20 pupils of 4-7 grades of 3 schools mastered the elective "Fundamentals of Orthodoxy"; finally, in one educational institution, 15 schoolchildren of grades 3-8 took part in the work of the "Orthodox Path" circle (State Archives of the Republic of Mari El, n.d.-c, d. 1201, p. 147-150).

In addition, the active cooperation agreement between the Ministry of education of the Russian Federation and Yoshkar-Ola and Mari diocese in the second half of the 2000s, Television Studio "Republic" STRBC "Mari El" has held regular television programs on the following topics: "Morality and patriotism", "the Spiritual and moral education in preschool educational institutions", where the formation of the morality of the child, the role of family and Christian education were discussed (State Archives of the Republic of Mari El, n.d.-c, l. 151).

As for the MTR, its representative, Supreme Kart, the head of the Mari religious association "Oshmariy-Chimariy" A.I. Tanygin, was involved in the discussion of the concept of spiritual and moral education of children and youth developed by the Ministry of Education of the RME in the early 2000s. Such issues were the subject of discussions not only at meetings of the Council for Interaction with Religious Associations under the President of the RME, but also at scientific and practical conferences. The most significant of them were the "Social Concept of the Mari Traditional Religion" (December 6-7, 2002) and "Christian Enlightenment and Russian Culture" conferences (May 15, 2003) (State Archives of the Republic of Mari El, n.d.-c, 693, l. 14; Mironositsky Bulletin, 2003).

Ultimately, the "Concept of spiritual and moral education of children and youth of the Republic of Mari El" approved by the decision of the board of the Ministry of



Education of the RME No. 6/3 of June 22, 2004, provided for the inclusion of the spiritual and moral foundations of the MTR in the development of educational projects and courses along with the use of the doctrine of the ROC. As a result, social projects implemented by preschool and general education institutions in cooperation with the ROC and MTR in 2004-2009 were "Family and school" (Orshansky district), "Spiritual and moral education" (Kilemarsky district), "Interaction of family and school on the spiritual and moral education of children" (Yoshkar-Ola), "Spiritual and moral education of children and youth in a single educational space" (Kozmodemyansk), "Introducing a child to the spiritual and moral world" (Kuzhensky district), etc. In the second half of the 2000s, implementing the designated concept, religious disciplines of a spiritual and moral orientation were studied on an optional basis in schools of the republic (from grades 1 to 9) ("Origins", "Lessons of Good", "Mercy", "Rainbow", "Shiy ongyr" and others), developed taking into account the cultural characteristics of Orthodoxy and the MTR (State Archives of the Republic of Mari El, n.d.-c, file 1201, l. 148, 154, 157).

The importance and effectiveness of the projects and disciplines under consideration in the matter of spiritual and moral education and upbringing of children was emphasized by the Supreme Kart, the head of the Mari religious association "Oshmariy-Chimariy" A.I. Tanygin during the republican scientific-practical conference "Education and spiritual culture of the mountain Mari" (State Archives of the Republic of Mari El, n.d.-c, d. 1006, l. 112).

Similar positive assessments were expressed by the Deputy Minister of Education of the RME N.V. Efremova with the head of the Yoshkar-Ola and Mari dioceses, John, following the results of the pedagogical conference "Faith and Education: Society, Family, School in the 21st century" (State Archives of the Republic of Mari El, n.d.-c, d. 1391, l. 247).

Also, since the mid-2000s, in Mari El, the cooperation of the Military Commissariat of the republic with the local diocese and the MTR (represented by the Oshmariy-Chimariy association, and then the MTR RME CRO) on spiritual care and moral education of conscripted youth by the clergy of these confessions has become traditional (State Archives of the Republic of Mari El, n.d.-c, l. 106). In addition, the Yoshkar-Ola and Mari Diocese and the Federal Drug Control Service of the Russian



Federation for the Control of Drug Trafficking in the RME, within the framework of the agreement concluded on October 25, 2005, organized regular spiritual, moral, and educational conversations in 2006-2009, about the dangers of drug addiction and alcoholism with patients of the Republican Narcological Dispensary, among whom there were not a few representatives of the younger generation (State Archives of the Republic of Mari El, n.d.-c, d. 1007, l. 91).

5. CONCLUSION

Thus, the involvement of children and youth in social partnership on issues of spiritual and moral education in the second half of the 1990s – 2000s by the authorities of Mari El, the local ROC and MTR, was due to the following reasons. Firstly, the significant spread of foreign sects in the Republic of Mari El, which involved the younger generation in their activities: secondly, the presence of problems of drug addiction, alcoholism, etc. in the republic in the teenage and youth environment.

Since 1996, the Russian Orthodox Church has been involved in discussing the problems of spiritual and moral education of children and youth by the authorities of the RME. Due to this, since the late 1990s, regular extracurricular educational meetings of Orthodox clergy with minors have been held in institutions subordinate to the Republican Ministry of Education and the Federal Penitentiary Service for the RME. It was these state structures in the early 2000s that formalized contractual relations of social partnership with the Yoshkar-Ola and Mari dioceses, which had significant practical results. Thus, in the framework of this cooperation with the Federal Penitentiary Service for the Russian Orthodox Church in the 2000s, the clergy of the Russian Orthodox Church conducted classes with convicts on the study of Orthodox Christianity in all prisons in the region, including for minors. In turn, various culturological disciplines for the study of the foundations of Orthodoxy were implemented in 2001-2009 in preschool and general educational institutions by the Ministry of Education of the RME and the Yoshkar-Ola and Mari diocese. In the context of these events in the second half of the 2000s, the UFS of the Russian Federation for the control of drug trafficking in the RME, together with the local diocese, regularly



organized meetings with patients of the Republican Narcological Dispensary, at which issues of the dangers of drug addiction and alcoholism were discussed.

The involvement of the MTR authorities in the social partnership under consideration began in 1999. Since the beginning of the 2000s, in particular, representatives of the MTR at conferences and meetings of the Council for Interaction with Religious Associations under the President of the RME have participated in the discussion of the concept of spiritual and moral education of children and youth developed by the Ministry of Education of the RME. As a result, this document, adopted in June 2004, when developing educational projects and courses, in addition to the socio-cultural foundations of Orthodoxy, provided for taking into account the spiritual and moral characteristics of the MTR. Subsequently, such integrated projects and courses were successfully implemented in kindergartens and schools of the republic. Along with this, since the mid-2000s, the clergy of the ROC and the MTR has been involved by the Military Commissariat of the Republic in the spiritual and moral education of conscripts.

In general, we can conclude that in the second half of the 1990s – 2000s, a system of the social partnership of the authorities of the RME with the ROC and the MTR was formed in the field of spiritual and moral education of children and youth. Even though priority was given to the ROC in this cooperation, the directions of the interaction of the republican authorities with the MTR discussed in the article indicate the high role of the latter in the socio-political life of the Mari Republic.

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