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Patriarch Nikon and the Outset of the Schism in the Russian Orthodox Church in mid-17th Century

Abstract

The paper deals with the activities of the Orthodox hierarch Nikon as bishop of Veliky Novgorod (1649–1652) and Moscow patriarch. The authors investigate early years of his patriarchy when he made preparations for his reform of the Russian Orthodox Church. The paper studies the relationship between the patriarch and bishops, the nature of reformation and the secular clergy and monks' reaction to it. Authentic Nikon's charters found in the archive of the Tikhvin monastery point to confidential relationship between bishop Nikon and the monastery abbot Pimen. Nikon was interested in the priory life and controlled its economic and social aspects. Moreover, he made the monastery a center of his eparchy in order to oversee religious life and morality of his congregation. Thus, in late 1651 or in early 1652 he banned polyphonic singing in churches and prescribed careful observance of the Lent. Even after his becoming patriarch, he continued to keep a close eye on the life of the Tikhvin and other monasteries. This follows from the preserved correspondence between Nikon and the archbishop of Vologda Markel in 1653–1658. The authors contend that resistance of local clergy to the reform was mostly passive: they continued to use old "pre-Nikon" books for liturgy. Also, the authors have established that in the early days of the reform in some churches there were two priests: one ministered in the old way, the other adhered to the new practice. Monasteries were sometimes centers of opposition. Therefore, the church authorities sent out didactic literature to fight opposition. It is noteworthy that in late 1660s monks and priests could not follow the new practice due to absence of new liturgical books and objects, for instance, stamps with four-pointed crosses for prosphora.

Keywords

Historical sources, documents of the Russian monasteries of the 17th century, Schism of Russian Orthodox church, Patriarch Nikon, Vologda, Tikhvin monastery.

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