

RELIGIOUS JUSTIFICATIONS OF COMPLAINTS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIA

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This article analyzes religious justifications used by contemporary Russian citizens in filing complaints addressed to the president of the Russian Federation. The concept of critical capacity postulated by Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot is applied as a frame of analysis. This research permits identification of a connection between the transformation of political (presidential) discourse, which took place in 2000s, and attempts of citizens to justify their claims for justice based on Orthodox foundations. Developing a complaint mechanism promotes the reproduction of a particular way of coping with injustice and also special grammar of argumentation based on practices of appeal of the “weaker citizen” to the “stronger state,” rather than on a dispute between equal actors. In such an approach, all regulatory normative systems involved in aligning justifications are reduced to rhetorical devices, the legitimacy of which is determined by situational political discourse. At the same time, religious rhetoric in complaints contributes to the reproduction of the absolutist model of presidential power and the merging of religiosity with political legitimacy and civic loyalty.

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Formally, contemporary Russia is a constitutional secular democratic state. Major legal reforms, initiated at the end of 1980s, were developed to transform this formula into a fact of life. The model of democratic-capitalist societies, whose principle of legitimacy is the law-based state, was recognized as a benchmark for transformations. The significance of this model is that the executive and the judiciary branches are separated from one another and the practice of law enforcement is considered a general universal form.

Developments of the mid-2000s raise many questions regarding the project of implementing a law-based state in Russia. As the Russian political scientist Grigorii Golosov argues, a consistent strengthening of vertical power, which intensified immediately after Vladimir Putin’s arrival on the political scene, has made the domina-

tion of the executive (presidential) power and the formation of a dominant party regime into the main institutional arrangements of the authoritarian model in Russia in the 2000s (2008:34–35).

In the sphere of problem solving, there have been significant changes marking a step backward toward an authoritarian regime, rather than progress toward the legal ideal. Thus, an alternative way of coping with injustice, such as addressing complaints to figures of authority, including the president of the Russian Federation, has been (re)established in Russia in recent years.

The practice of complaining received strong institutional support in the mid-2000s. Law No. 59-FZ On the Procedure for Consideration of Citizens' Applications in the Russian Federation¹ was adopted in 2006. According to this law, each citizen of the Russian Federation has a right to submit suggestions, appeals, and complaints to state authority or local government representatives, and the range of issues that may be raised in the appeals is not restricted.

While Law No. 59 established complaints as a formal element of the modern national legal system, the bureaucracy that processes these complaints is based outside of the judiciary. Complaints may be submitted to specially designated administrative offices, including those of the president. In the law a complaint is defined as "a citizen's request for the restoration or protection of her violated rights, freedoms, or legitimate interests, or rights, freedoms, or legitimate interests of others" (Article 4.4), and it has much in common with the definition of the lawsuit. The difference between them is that the grounds for filing a lawsuit are limited to violation of the law, while the grounds for complaining may be found in a large variety of circumstances, which are subjectively recognized by the addresser as unjust.

The authors of contemporary complaints use various strategies to justify their claims and make them valid in the eyes of the addressees. Comprehensive study of justifications used in complaints is an ambitious task that can hardly be resolved in one article. My intention is to show and discuss the appearance of religious justifications in complaints addressed to representatives of top-level secular authority, particularly the president. Religious discourse was not used in the complaints of Soviet citizens, which does not mean, of course, that there were no believers in Soviet times. This paper presents results of research on religious justifications in complaints written by contemporary Russian citizens and addressed to Dmitrii Medvedev during his presidency in 2008–2012. By investigating the texts of complaints I reveal the forms and functions of religious justifications and reflect on how the practice of complaining to the president coexists with the principle of the rule of law in contemporary Russian society.

In this article I apply the sociology of critical capacity to an analysis of contemporary Russian complaints. Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot propose a grammar of argumentation which is commonly used in public communication for legitimation

¹ <http://letters.kremlin.ru/acts/2>. The Soviet documents governing the procedure of complaining were repealed (the last one was adopted in 1988, but in fact had remained unchanged since 1968) with the adoption of this law.

of one's claims for justice. This grammar does not include a religious mode of justification, since it is constructed within the framework of a secular state. Nevertheless, Boltanski and Thévenot offer a universal methodological instrument for analysis of critical argumentation.

Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) describe this grammar as a common underlying structure of critical argument, which is constructed in the process of disputes between actors. In the post-Soviet period, the judicial system is developing an adversarial model of justice, which assumes a dispute between formally equal parties. However, the mechanism of complaints to authorities, which is developing in parallel, implies a fundamentally different structure of critical argument, or another grammar. In the majority of cases, interaction between citizens and authorities through complaint does not involve a dispute and is limited to the exchange of regimented texts. Additionally, there is no public or transparent feedback mechanism at the moment, making it impossible to trace how complaints are handled.² However, the public form of feedback from the authorities is usually embodied in success stories when the complaint process helps to restore justice and is widely disseminated and translated through the media.³ These successful public complaints promote the mechanism as well as certain rules of appeal to the authorities. Still, no code or set of rules of complaint drafting has been established.

Complaining to the president is a specific situation that requires specific justifications. The concept of the "situated sense of justice," developed by Boltanski and Thévenot in other works analyzing everyday disputes (Boltanski and Thévenot 2000; Boltanski 2011), seems most appropriate for analyses of contemporary complaints addressed to the president. According to this conception, the types of relevant justifications are restricted by the situation in which the persons are placed (Boltanski and Thévenot 2000:211). Argumentation that is valid in one situation may be not valid in another. Nevertheless, Boltanski and Thévenot relate the situated sense of justice to general moral values existing in a particular society.

The process of construction of generalizations has a special significance in Boltanski and Thévenot's conception. They argue that the continuity of justifications in critical statements is essential, since it has implications for the study of justice in general. In cases of conflict, Boltanski and Thévenot suggest that agreement is achieved through a *rise in generality*. This means that participants reach for overarching values that might be shared by the different parties involved. The proposed mechanism amounts to processes of *generalization* that underlie value attributions more generally, including the level of commonly recognized worth.

² For comparison, the complaints of the Soviet period used to be stored in the archives alongside their responses. Usually, the responses contained notes of a reader, highlighting important categories and codes. For a researcher and a potential complainer, access to such materials facilitated detection of commonly shared categories and justifications.

³ For example, the Russian media extensively covered a case of Gus'-Khrustal'nyi entrepreneurs, who for many years had suffered at the hands of an organized criminal group and decided to make a collective application to the president in 2010. The criminal group was quickly neutralized, and the case was widely discussed in the media (Corrupcia.net 2012).

Boltanski and Thévenot consider the capacity to distinguish between legitimate arguments and illegitimate ones as a measure of the competence of actors. Arguments can be recognized as legitimate if, when “confronted with criticisms ... they can be used to support universalizable agreements” (Boltanski and Thévenot 2000:214–215). Arguments are illegitimate when they cannot be justified and cannot support agreements that concern the generality of the common good, “even if they can be mobilized by the actors in certain situations to support certain arrangements to the advantage of the parties” (215). Legitimacy is an important element that accompanies the process of rise in generality and largely determines it. In cases of complaint, legitimacy also plays an important role but in a different way, since complaining in and of itself does not imply a dispute.

In applying the sociology of critical capacity to an analysis of religious justifications one more detail has to be discussed. Boltanski and Thévenot suggest a grammar that is based on the idea of moral order. Morality in its true sense should be universal for the whole of society, recognized by all of its members, and should be an effective regulator of individual behavior in terms of social justice and equality. Religion also regulates relations between people, but the moral and social ideal for believers is embodied in the idea of the Creator (Gumnitskii and Zelenova 2012:62). God appears as the creator and guarantor of the moral order in any religious doctrine. In my research I will try to show that the coexistence of these two regulative systems raises tension between religious doctrine and the concept of the law-based state, between moral and legal order, between the guarantor of moral order and the guarantor of legal order.

CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN COMPLAINT AS A SUBJECT OF RESEARCH

Studies of complaints in Russia are limited primarily to research focused on the Soviet and prerevolutionary periods (Kotkin 1995; Fitzpatrick 1996; Markevich 2002; Nérard 2004; Orlova 2004; Bogdanova 2006; Pecherskaya 2012). This corpus of texts establishes methodological foundations for investigating citizens’ appeals addressed to authorities, which nevertheless must be critically reviewed and adapted prior to any analysis of contemporary complaints. All the authors derive their conclusions from materials belonging to different epochs of the Soviet period, when the status of official law and the judiciary was reduced due to Marxist doctrine. In contemporary Russia, the principle of the rule of law is recognized by the Constitution. In such a context the place and function of the mechanism of complaints must be clarified. In this section, I will consider the specificities of contemporary Russian complaints that contain religious rhetoric addressed to the president and operationalize them as a subject of research.

COMPLAINING TO THE PRESIDENT IN THE CONTEXT OF HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE

The practice of complaining is deeply rooted in Russian history. The right to complain was enshrined in the princely charters (*ustavnaia kniazheskaia gramota*) for the first time in the eleventh century (Volkov 1974:12). Through the ages, the mechanism of complaints has been modified, reflecting the rigidity of the political regime and modeling the rela-

tion between citizens and authorities. The Code of Law of 1497 gave a strong impetus for the transformation of the institute of complaints (from fairly elemental appeals to a specific and well-developed structure). The Code of Law stipulated the all-Russian regulations on how to handle public complaints. At the same time, the code forbade submission of appeals and complaints directly to the tsar and the patriarch, except for those warning of state crimes. Nevertheless, all appeals were to be addressed to the tsar formally. Subsequently, an administrative staff responsible for receiving and handling public complaints was established under Peter the Great (Solov'ev 1997:39).

A new complaint mechanism was established in the first days of Soviet power. The bureaucracy was developed from scratch but strongly resembled the tsarist multilevel complaint mechanism structurally. Each of the seven Soviet political leaders made some contribution to the development of the complaint mechanism. Vladimir Lenin paid close attention to work with letters and directly with people at all stages of his political career. A number of normative documents regulating the handling of appeals of workers and peasants were issued during the early years of Soviet power.⁴ Consequently, a complex administrative machinery for handling public complaints was established and developed in Soviet Russia. It was represented by the structures of executive and Communist Party committees, departmental organizations, and "popular forces": people's deputies, activists, and celebrities.

The complaint mechanism was widely used throughout the entirety of the Soviet period. In the 1960s and 1970s, it attained its highest level of use. As Stephen White documents, Communist Party organizations received more than 500,000 appeals annually during the 1970s. The stream of letters to the central press reached sixty to seventy million per year (White 1990:202–207). Another analysis estimates that in 1966–1967 the newspaper *Komsomol'skaia pravda* received 900–1,000 letters daily, or 300,000 annually (Grushin 2003:178).

During the period of dramatic social transformation in the 1990s, the intensity of the work of the complaint mechanism became significantly reduced. Normative documents of the Soviet period regulating its work were not annulled and maintained validity in Russia into the mid-2000s. The adoption of the 2006 law provided new impetus for improving the work with citizens' appeals at all levels of executive authority.⁵ Currently, approximately 30 different laws regulate the procedures for handling complaints of citizens.⁶ Departments receiving and handling the applications were established at all levels of government, including the office of the president of the Russian Federation.⁷

⁴ See the Resolution On Strict Compliance of Laws (O tochnom sobliudenii zakonov), November 6–9, 1918; the Decree of the Central Executive Committee of April 12, 1919, that called for control over the organization of work of all the agencies receiving all sorts of complaints and applications; the Provision of the Central Executive Committee of February 7, 1920, On the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection (O raboche-krest'ianskoi inspektsii).

⁵ Law No. 59-FZ On the Procedure for Consideration of Citizens' Applications in the Russian Federation of February 5, 2006.

⁶ The list of acts is available at <http://letters.kremlin.ru/acts>.

⁷ See the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation No. 201 On Administrative Office of the President of the RF on Work with Applications of Citizens and Organizations of February 17, 2010.

In the late 2000s, two branches of community liaison offices were created to receive citizens' complaints. In 2008, when Putin resigned as president, a network of community liaison offices of the chairman of the United Russia Party and the prime minister was established (Putin occupied both positions). In late 2010, another network of community liaison offices of the president of the Russian Federation was opened to the public. Offices of both networks were established in all 83 regions of Russia. The community liaison offices in each region claim personal supervision of the president and prime minister in their work with citizens' appeals.

As a result of the President's Decree No. Pr-494 of February 24, 2012, a united automated framework for "Applications of Citizens" was developed in Russia. It was aimed to connect the Administrative Office of the President with federal executive bodies, authorities of Russia's federal subjects, and other government agencies and organizations and to optimize their work with citizens' applications.⁸

Thus, Russia today has a well-developed network of agencies that receive and handle citizens' applications and complaints on the municipal, local, and higher levels of government. In many senses, the bureaucracy emulates the traditional Russian administrative mechanism for handling citizens' applications and complaints. Nevertheless, today's mechanism has certain distinctive features. The administrative apparatus receiving and processing complaints is strongly centralized.

During the Soviet period, direct applications to the head of the state were not forbidden, but complaining to Joseph Stalin or Leonid Brezhnev was never a mass phenomenon. François-Xavier Nérard, a researcher of denunciations in the Stalin era, conducted scrupulous analysis of archival materials, including applications and responses. Writing about the 1930s, Nérard (2004) highlights three structures that received and processed complaints on an all-union level.⁹ Personal responsibility of the head of the state for work with complaints was never proclaimed during the Soviet period.

In comparison, nowadays the opportunity to send direct applications to the president and prime minister is available, legitimized, and widely used. Personal involvement of the president and prime minister in the processing of complaints is built into the contemporary mechanism of complaint. All agencies of the executive and governing party branches receiving and processing complaints are structured hierarchically and supervised directly or indirectly by the president and prime minister (simultaneously the head of the ruling party). Bureaucratic structures providing complaints to the president and prime minister are constructed in a similar way. They are interchangeable, which demonstrates the significance of both the president and prime minister as the addressees of citizens' complaints.

⁸ A summary of main features of this initiative can be found on the website of the company that developed it, Elektronnyye ofisnye sistemy (EOS) (http://www.eos.ru/eos_products/solution/gosudarstvennyy_sektor/as_obgr/).

⁹ The structures were Workers and Peasants' Inspectorate (Rabkrin), All-Union Communist Party Bolsheviks (VKPB), and mass media. A large number of personal applications were sent to Mikhail Kalinin, who held the position of the head of the Central Executive Committee in 1930s (Nérard 2004). The structures and personalities working at the all-union level usually executed a coordinating role by directing people's applications to the regional or local levels.

WHAT IS A COMPLAINT?

While investigating letters or applications addressed to authorities, researchers often face the problem of classification. Galina Orlova divides applications addressed to the authorities based on genre specificities (2004:134). Historian Sheila Fitzpatrick suggests another approach, based on the addressers of appeals (2001:288–290). The classifications are diverse, but frequently researchers designate complaints as a separate genre in juxtaposition with such genres as a claim, suggestion, denunciation, or petition. Based on previous research, I highlight three features that help to distinguish complaints amongst the overall set of letters addressed to the authorities. These three features contribute to a better understanding of the genre of complaint.

Firstly, a complaint contains a request for protection from injustice. Under the conditions of Soviet authoritarianism, the mechanism of complaints played an important role in the void created by limited possibilities for public debates and complicated and imperfect legal procedures. Fitzpatrick argues that complaints in Soviet society functioned as a substitute for rights protection (1996:683–864). Nérard (2004) likewise declares that the main stimulus of letter writing for citizens was the necessity to prove their rights. Secondly, the genre of complaint presupposes asymmetry between the status of an addressee and an addresser. That is why the defining of statuses has such an important place within the text of a complaint. The addressee is always represented as more powerful and strong in comparison with the addresser. This feature of the complaint also implicitly conveys the loyalty of the complainer and her consent to seek justice in the context of the mechanisms offered by the state. Thirdly, a complaint implies a response. Unlike, for instance, an anonymous denunciation, a complaint has a signature and address for correspondence.

Complaints have retained their genre characteristics over the decades. Three features that have been identified primarily from research on Soviet complaints are still applicable for contemporary complaints. I used these features to select texts for empirical research, the results of which are presented in this article.

ORTHODOX RELIGION AND POLITICAL LANGUAGE

In contrast to a lawsuit, a complaint initially does not have sufficient normative code for universalizing justifications. To substantiate the request, a complainer must find proof of injustice and explain why intervention by the authorities is necessary. While studying complaints from different periods of Russian history, many researchers note the relationship between the commonly used cliché and political language. Stephen Kotkin's book *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* offers a suitable illustration. In the chapter "Speaking Bolshevik," he shows how the official language and rules of communicating with authority were transformed by the influence of Bolshevik discourse. As the Bolshevik regime grew stronger, official rhetoric penetrated into everyday language as well as into people's everyday ways of speaking about themselves (Kotkin 1995:217). Many people believed in the socialist cause, but even those who did not were required to learn the state language in order to interact within Soviet society.

Researchers of complaints submitted to executive and Communist Party committees and editorial offices of newspapers in the late Soviet period (1960s–1970s) note the penetration of the language of official Soviet ideology into the texts of complaints (Bogdanova 2006; Pecherskaya 2012). Analyses of these texts reveal that the authors of complaints justified the criticism they produced through principles such as those espoused in the “Moral Code of the Builders of Communism” of the 1961 USSR Communist Party Program. The Code contains a set of qualities, describing an ideal model of the “Soviet person.” In the Soviet context, the principle of writing complaints (to authorities) in the language of power holds true (Kozlova and Sandomirskaia 1996:24).

Since the official system of Soviet ideology has been destroyed, the language of communication between citizens and authorities has changed; the new language has to be based on new common values. Many Russian researchers argue that attempts to formulate a new postsocialist Russian ideology have been unsuccessful (Zvereva 2007; Morozov 2008; Zudin 2008; Panarin 2012). Since the first postsocialist years, a special role among other consolidating ideas has been assigned to Orthodox doctrine. The growing number of people who identify themselves as Orthodox Christians since the early 1990s has been interpreted by researchers as meaning that many Russians believe Orthodoxy and the Orthodox Church to be a symbol of the “greater whole” and collective “we” (the “country” or “nation”) (Dubin 2013:32). At this moment, researchers offer highly controversial evaluations regarding the status of religiosity in postsocialist Russia, finding a dramatic gap between the small number of Orthodox practitioners and those who identify themselves as Orthodox believers, representing the greater part of contemporary Russian society.¹⁰ It was expected that the majority of the population, identifying themselves in some ways with Orthodox doctrine, would support Orthodoxy as a consolidating idea, without taking into account how far they really share the values of Christianity. Thus, initially the existence of Orthodoxy as a universal value in Russian society was not taken for granted.

Contemporary political discourse affirms the doctrine of Orthodox Christianity as an important pillar of universal values. On February 1, 2007, President Vladimir Putin emphasized its significance during a press conference: “Traditional faiths of

¹⁰ The number of adherents of Orthodoxy varies in different sociological sources. According to research conducted between 2009 and 2012 by one of the major sociological services in Russia, the Levada Center, approximately 70 percent of the population identifies as Orthodox believers. However, this attempt to count people who identify with Orthodoxy was subjected to serious criticism based on the fact that these surveys were conducted during the period of strengthening of the propaganda of Orthodoxy. The number of those who identify with the Orthodox faith differs significantly from the number of the so-called Orthodox “practitioners” who follow Orthodox traditions and visit churches on a regular basis. According to surveys, the number of the latter is about 7 percent of the total Russian population. As the data from surveys are constantly criticized, some researchers prefer using data from annual research conducted by the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) that calculates the number of church visitors during the Christmas and Easter holidays (Mitrokhin 2013:6). The MIA research reports about 2 to 4 percent of the population visiting churches, and this figure has remained stable over the last 3 years (Sova 2014).

the Russian Federation and the Russian nuclear shield are those components that strengthen the Russian statehood and create the necessary conditions for ensuring internal and external security of the country" (Prezident Rossii 2007).

In the 2013 presidential address to the Federal Assembly, Putin emphasized the priority of traditional values, including religious norms, in state regulation and development (Prezident Rossii 2013). A week later, during his annual teleconference, the president again called attention to the importance of traditional and religious values in Russian society.¹¹

As such, religious rhetoric penetrates contemporary Russian political and presidential discourse, both explicitly and implicitly. The specificity of the president's discourse raises differences between particular groups in the society, since it is especially focused on "believers." Religious rhetoric turns into an element of political language, and, consequently, it may be used as a legitimate common code for the justification of claims. Moreover, contemporary presidential discourse emphasizes the division between the Orthodox believers and nonbelievers, which means also that religious rhetoric used in complaints may be used as affirmations of political loyalty.

ONLINE COMPLAINTS RESOURCES: MATERIALS AND METHODS OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

Many resources for submitting complaints, including those addressed to the president, are available online. In my opinion, the most important of these resources are the following: the website of the Administrative Office of the President of the Russian Federation on work with applications of citizens and organizations,¹² where Russian citizens can submit their applications directly to the president; Goskontrol'.ru, the website of the bureau for oversight of the state authorities of the Russian Federation;¹³ the website of present Prime Minister Dmitrii Medvedev,¹⁴ launched in 2008 at the very beginning of his presidency; and the similar website of President Vladimir Putin,¹⁵ launched in 2012. Complaints uploaded on any of these online resources have the same official legal status.

For analysis, I used the texts of complaints which were available online in one of the resources created to submit such appeals to Dmitrii Medvedev (<http://medvedevu.ru>) during his presidency, from 2008 to 2012. The main addressee of citizens' complaints is the president. However, the division of complaints addressed to Medvedev and Putin is not always clear, since they are in many ways united as a single phenomenon in public opinion. This is reflected

¹¹ This extract from the December 19, 2013, press conference of the Russian president is available on Youtube. Retrieved March 22, 2014 (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Q2MqLo5yX4).

¹² <http://letters.kremlin.ru>.

¹³ <http://goscontrol.ru>.

¹⁴ <http://medvedevu.ru>.

¹⁵ <http://moskva-prezidentu.ru>.

in the texts submitted. Frequently, people address their complaints to both leaders at once.¹⁶

It is rather difficult to estimate the total number of complaints filed, as there are no general statistics combining different segments of the complaint mechanism in Russia. The Administrative Office of the President of the Russian Federation, working with appeals from citizens and organizations, was established in 2009. This office gathers statistics on applications sent through different agencies and Internet resources and accounts only for submissions addressed to the president. According to the statistics collected by this office, the largest number of complaints in the period of the Medvedev's presidency—962,034¹⁷—was received in 2011 (Prezident Rossii, n.d.).

I have chosen material available from one Internet resource providing complaints to Dmitrii Medvedev for three main reasons. Firstly, this website represents the complaints mechanism to the fullest extent possible, as compared with other websites. The site Medvedevu.ru contains all texts of applications published over the lifetime of the resource since 2008, the number of which in February 2014 stood at 17,565 submissions.¹⁸ Secondly, the site provides visitors with an opportunity to comment on published material. Some of the submitted complaint forms are accompanied with the comments. This provides additional research material. Thirdly, the complaints submitted through this site are included in the overall statistics of complaints addressed to the president for the period between 2008–2012.

The site not only contains complaints' texts, but also includes a forum where users discuss the complaint process and authorities' responses. However, a feedback channel (i.e., responses to complaints) is not available to the general public. This presents a significant limitation in studying the mechanism, but this restriction is a common feature of the contemporary complaint apparatus—no other resource offers access to the authorities' responses.

The process of selecting texts for detailed analysis revealed that religious argumentation appeared systematically in the body of complaints. Religious argumentation is not the only strategy of justification of criticism in these complaints. In general, the array of texts presents religious justifications along with references to

¹⁶ Some other Internet resources give one reason to suppose that Medvedev is construed by the public as a force apart from state politics. In particular, sexual minority groups that were marginalized by recently adopted laws in Russia find reasons to send their complaints to Medvedev asking for help and protection (see, e.g., <http://www.gay.ru/society/legislation/law/russia/zdravstvuyte-dmitriy.html>).

¹⁷ In order to estimate the popularity of a complaint mechanism, we can compare data tracking the numbers of court appeals. For instance, in 2011, the courts of general jurisdiction in civil cases received 12,686,552 appeals and there were 9,168,007 appeals filed in magistrate courts and 3,435,740 appeals in federal courts. In criminal cases, the courts received 989,231 appeals, of which 452,142 were filed in magistrate courts and 525,713 in federal courts (Sudebnyi departament, n.d.). Ombudsmen in Russia received approximately 30,000 phone calls in 2010 (Gilligan 2010:579). In 2012 the number of appeals dramatically increased to 52,000 calls (Doklad o deiatel'nosti 2013).

¹⁸ <http://medvedevu.ru>, retrieved February 8, 2014.

legislative norms, moral norms, and traditional family values. It is hardly possible to determine exactly the proportion of texts containing religious justification amongst the rest of the complaints. This would require careful reading of all the texts available on the website, even though some of them cannot truly be considered complaints.¹⁹ Difficulties in counting complaints on the website are associated with the fact that the same complaint can often be published two or more times on the site. According to my rough estimate, approximately 5 percent of all the complaints published on the site contain religious justifications.

I used a keyword search to pick out texts with religious reasoning from amongst the general array of texts. The list of keywords was highlighted during initial scanning and viewing of texts and subsequently updated during analysis. As a result, I picked out such keywords as "religion," "God," "divine," "devil," "Orthodox," "prayer," "pray," "Jesus," "Christ," and "Bible."²⁰ Then I excluded all complaints containing simple common figures of speech, such as "oh my God" (*o gospodi*), "thank God" (*slava bogu*), and the like. As a result, a database was formed of texts containing religious justifications of problems, claims, or statuses of complainers, an offender or an addressee. Approximately 100 complaints' texts were analyzed after a multistage selection.

Working with empirical materials, I used the method of qualitative interpretative analysis of texts combined with elements of socio-cognitive discourse analysis of Teun van Dijk (1993), who argues that each fact of language use makes a small contribution to the process of reproduction or transformation of society and culture, including power relations. During my analyses of complaints I used the technique of picking out macro- and microstructures of texts suggested by Van Dijk. Text structure and rhetoric were analyzed, with special attention paid to religious arguments and proofs. I employed discourse analysis to identify and formulate outcomes regarding hierarchical structures and legitimate bases of justice.

RELIGIOUS JUSTIFICATIONS IN CITIZENS' COMPLAINTS

The Internet resource Medvedevu.ru contains a wide variety of texts in terms of structure, genre, and purpose. The selection of submissions available on the website includes texts composed as legal actions, as well as messages containing sharp critiques of state governance or demanding specific social and political transformations. However, the submitted complaints containing religious justifications tend to have certain common structural and genre features.

Discourse analysis allowed for distinguishing the main elements of the macrostructure of complaints, which usually contain an address (nomination of the ad-

¹⁹ See the description of genre features of a complaint in the section of this article "What Is a Complaint?"

²⁰ I admit that this set of keywords did not allow to find texts that contain links to other religions such as Islam. I am not saying that the general body of texts available on the website does not contain justifications based on the norms of other religious doctrines. However, this research was intended solely to examine justifications based on Orthodox doctrine.

dressee), description of a problem, representation of the complainer, representation of a perpetrator, and a signature.²¹ Complaints' authors may implement religious rhetoric in various ways and to varying degrees. Complaints' texts may even be styled entirely as a prayer, and, in such cases, this style may influence the macrostructure of the text. Complaints' authors attempt to simulate Church Slavonic language, emulating the typical structure of Orthodox prayer, which contains an invocation (*prizyvanie*), requests (*prosheniia*), and glorification (*slavoslovie*) (*Bibleiskaia entsiklopediia* 2005). An ordinary problem can be described in rhetoric as, for instance, "The cry of the orphan who has many children" ("*Vopl' mnogodetnogo siroty*").²² This complaint addresses the problem of receiving the state award for parents with many children, "Parental Glory," and a one-time allowance for a newborn child. The officials who, according to the author, are responsible for this situation are given the epithet "the evil godless" (*liutye bezbozhniki*). The addressee is also represented in the appropriate rhetoric: "Dear Mr. President, Dear Dmitrii Anatol'evich! O Lord Jesus Christ, our God!" And the complainer herself is characterized in the text through such Orthodox virtues as faithfulness, humility, and infinite obedience to a higher power: "Your faithful servant, in grief and sorrow, day and night crying to Thee."

Religious rhetoric can also be included in complaints' texts in the form of a particular argument supporting the author's point or appearing unexpectedly at the very end of the complaint by way of postscript. For example, one complaint in which the author references the consolidated mission of Christianity:

we Orthodox Christians, servants of God, sent to the Earth with a great mission: to preserve the natural resources, to live in peace, love, and work tirelessly for the good of the Motherland.²³

Complainers may also use direct Bible quotations in both formulation of and to strengthen an argument. For example, one author applies to the president and requests an equitable and tolerant attitude towards the President of Belarus Aleksandr Lukashenko:

The Bible says, "A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity" (Prov. 17:17). Incidentally, Lukashenko actually confirmed this truth last summer when your forests were burning.²⁴

Another author requests assistance in obtaining compensation for a car crashed in an accident. The author includes a detail that seemingly has very little in common

²¹ The signature of a complainer may not be visible in the text of a complaint, but anybody submitting her application through the website Medvedevu.ru has to fill out the registration form, which includes a name and address for correspondence.

²² "Vopl' mnogodetnogo siroty," Medvedevu.ru, July 1, 2010.

²³ "Liudi, opomnites'!" Medvedevu.ru, April 12, 2011.

²⁴ "Otkrytoe pis'mo prezidentu," Medvedevu.ru, October 10, 2010.

with the subject of complaint. Nevertheless, the author considers it necessary to declare: "The accident happened when we went to the holy place."²⁵

The macrostructure of the texts retains the structure of earlier Soviet and pre-Soviet forms of complaints. However, the usage of religious rhetoric affects the elements of the macrostructure in different ways. The means of using religious rhetoric in the complaints are not unified. The authors simultaneously use direct quotations from the Bible, links to the original religious issues, and their own ideas about religious norms.

STATUS JUSTIFICATION OF THE COMPLAINER AND THE PERPETRATOR

In the next two sections I will present the results of analysis of the microstructure of texts and consider how complainers justify the statuses of those frequently mentioned in the complaints: the complainer herself, those defined as an offender, and the addressee.

Complaints' authors often justify their requests for assistance by stating a socially approved status: a mother, a veteran, a Hero of Labor, and so on. Including herself in the category of believers may also be used as a positive feature of a complainer. For example, in the following quote, the author is unemployed and asks the president for assistance:

Please, help me to find a job in the oil and gas industry. I am not afraid of work. I respect labor. I live by the honest Orthodox faith of our ancestors. I am a responsible person and will not disgrace my relatives.²⁶

Statement of correlations between lifestyle and Orthodox doctrine is also intended to strengthen positive characteristics of the complainer in the eyes of the addressee.

Socially censured statuses can be compensated by means of religious justification. In one complaint, a convicted former drug addict asks the president to defend his rights, drawing attention to the fact that God and the church helped him to rid himself of dependence:

Since the trial, I stopped using drugs, underwent treatment, and regularly visited the penal inspection. In July 2007 I went into rehab at a farmstead Konevets Monastery in the village Sapernoie, Priozerskii district of Leningrad region with the priest Sergius (Belkov). May God protect this bright person and everyone who works in this center! Here I, probably for the first time in my life, realized the meaning of life, learned to live in sobriety, and accepted the Lord in my heart.²⁷

In this quote, the author tries to justify his errors through religious self-improvement. In the text he portrays himself as a person who is perfectly assimilated

²⁵ "Pomogite dobit'sia spravedlivosti!" Medvedevu.ru, May 23, 2011.

²⁶ "Net vykhoda, zato bol'shoi vkhod," Medvedevu.ru, February 4, 2011.

²⁷ "S nadezhdoi na smiagchenie prigovora," Medvedevu.ru, November 30, 2009.

into a Christian community and believes in God. Repentance and healing through prayer can be considered common goods in terms of religious doctrine but may come into conflict with ideas of healing and health in the context of a secular society.

Finally, the status of the perpetrator may be accompanied by characteristics seen as negative from a believer's viewpoint:

[The] head of the administration built for himself a tourist complex, vacations at resorts, visits casinos, and leads an immoral lifestyle. There is no God in his heart, and if there is no God, then the devil takes his place. It hurts to see how the city is dying, hurt by the powerlessness that nothing cannot change.²⁸

The statuses of groups in need of social care—people with disabilities, mothers of many children, pensioners—traditionally appear in complaints. They are also often accompanied by religious justifications:

Now she is sick, living in a very run-down house. Her small pension is barely enough for medication. Being the widow of a veteran of World War II, she has no chance to receive a pension for her deceased husband (as a participant of the Great Patriotic War), as there are no documents confirming the marriage.... Dmitrii Anato'evich! Only you can help solve this problem and restore the divine justice, which means recognizing Trashkina Mariia Gavrilovna as the widow of a veteran of World War II.²⁹

Solving a problem in the usual bureaucratic way can be difficult or even impossible for the elderly: it is difficult to understand the laws and regulations governing this field, it is complicated to collect all the necessary documents and visit all the necessary offices. They may not have sufficient legal grounds to advocate for their rights in court (most likely the situation in cases such as the above). Sending a complaint directly to the president may offer a more optimal, easy, or the only available way of requesting help.

The motif of divine justice also appears in complaints. This category serves as a sensitive switch that "turns on" the religious rhetoric and recalibrates the meaning of all that was said earlier in the complaint. It turns a request for legal service into something a person deserves as reward for her suffering. Living in a dilapidated house, receiving a small pension, coping with sickness or the death of her husband—all these circumstances are portrayed not as difficult life situations but as a kind of suffering for which, according to Orthodox doctrine, one should be rewarded. The president is depicted as the one capable of delivering divine justice and once again transferred from the secular hierarchy to the spiritual hierarchy. It is noteworthy that the author finds this technique appropriate and capable of attracting the addressee's attention and substantiating a request's legitimacy in the eyes of authorities.

²⁸ "Mer goroda razvalil i prodal vse, chto mozhno! Seichas vnov' ballotiruetsia," Medvedevu.ru, January 19, 2011.

²⁹ "Ot vdovy veterana Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny," Medvedevu.ru, April 25, 2010.

Presentation of statuses is a very significant and multifunctional element of complaints. Many details, which are unified in lawsuits due to the references on legislation, need particular justifications in the complaints. The status of a complainer appears in the complaints as a set of flexible characteristics. The complainer has to present these in the correct manner to guarantee assistance from the office of the president. Usage of religious rhetoric permits complainants to emphasize the gap between addresser and addressee and, at the same time, to support a common model of patriarchal power. Religiosity as a component of the status of a complainer implies generalization of the virtues of a true Christian. On the other hand, the negative characteristics of an offender may be reinforced through references to her godlessness or atheism. The image of a believer attracts the addressee's attention and substantiates a request's legitimacy in the eyes of the authorities. It also emphasizes the loyalty of the complainant to the existing model of the relationship between citizens and the authority. The protection of a believer appears as legitimate regardless of whether there are legal grounds for their case.

JUSTIFICATION OF THE PRESIDENT'S STATUS: SECULAR POWER VS. DIVINE AUTHORITY

Religious justifications are also used to define the addressee's status (in the case of my research, the president). Appeals to the president accompanied by religious rhetoric almost always actualize monarchical discourse and the concept of the ruler as God's anointed. Notions of authority as God's gift and the implied role of a ruler as mediator between God and the people also support this discourse.

The president's relation to the spiritual hierarchy can be justified through a divine blessing:

After moving to the Russian Federation, we felt a strong support in our life from the former President Vladimir Putin and his coworkers. At that time, we were convinced that without a blessing from God such a person could hardly bring any changes into the country and the world as a whole.... A simple wisdom in the government of the state can be obtained only from GOD! Without blood, without greed, and without deceit.³⁰

By way of Christian values of truth and divine election of authority, the complaints' authors prove their trust in the president, the cogency of the president's actions, and their loyalty to him:

So, I urge you to live in accordance with God's standards, to strive to fulfill His laws.... I've been praying for you, president, pray that you may know the truth, and the truth will make you free. Free in the full sense of the word. To make it so, as it is written: "In the light of the King—life, and his favor—as a cloud of the latter rain" (Prov. 16:15).³¹

³⁰ "Materinskii kapital," Medvedevu.ru, August 5, 2008.

³¹ "Otkrytoe pis'mo prezidentu," Medvedevu.ru, October 10, 2010.

The ratio of spiritual and secular power appears as a complicated schema in complaints. The following quote contains a variety of statements about the intricacies involved in the paradoxical coexistence of different regulative systems:

You, PRESIDENTS, are the guarantees of the COMMANDMENTS OF GOD TO THE PEOPLE!³²

The president is the head of the secular state, which, according to the Constitution, shall be governed by the law and recognize the rule of law. Religious norms are relevant to believers.

In the complaint text, the president is transformed into the religious ideal of mentor, teacher, and preacher:

You may have heard the words of our president that we ought all to read the Bible and live by it. In essence, this is a call to hope in God. If the showers were just accidentally in the midst of a dramatic heat wave in post-Soviet countries? So the Lord has blessed us. And a decent crop was harvested.³³

The president is represented in the complaint as the “last hope.” He is contrasted with all other government agencies: the judicial system, officials, and previous addressees of complaints. In accordance with the canons of a complaint, he is never portrayed as a perpetrator and usually is not responsible for a problem’s emergence. Often, complaints’ authors portray God’s judgment as the ultimate measure of justice. They use phrases like: “God will judge them” or “Everyone will go through God’s judgment.”

The president is characterized in the complaint as part of a spiritual hierarchy, an equal with God or second only to God. The tension between secular and divine justice embodied in the figure of the president is quite eloquent and multifunctional. Firstly, it may be used as a means of strengthening the president’s power. Someone to whom the request to provide God’s justice is addressed, in the eyes of believers, has really unlimited power. Secondly, the search for a provider of divine justice may be used to compensate for weak institutions that are incapable of resolving a problem—as a reaction to the crisis of the court system. Finally, presenting the president as equal (or almost equal) to God may be considered an attempt to generalize the president’s authority as a universal value.

RELIGIOUS JUSTIFICATIONS AS A MEANS OF GENERALIZATION

The problem that serves as the basis for writing a complaint itself requires justification. In a lawsuit, a problem can be justified by specifying a particular legislative item. There is no foundation for classifying problems present in complaints. Each problematic situation appears, in the complaints, as unique. The justification of the problem or request in a complaint requires significantly more effort, and here reli-

³² Untitled, Medvedevu.ru, February 9, 2010.

³³ “Otkrytoe pis’mo prezidentu,” Medvedevu.ru, October 10, 2010.

gious rhetoric finds its purpose. Accordingly, religious argumentation is used most often in complaints that contain a plea to resolve pressing practical problems. A very clear example of this tendency can be seen in a complaint devoted to the deplorable environmental situation in the Russian city of Taganrog:

Let every breath praise the Lord! So the Orthodox praise God in the churches in the hymns! So they express their gratitude for the world, created by the Lord!

But, if the Orthodox themselves do not pay attention to what they have to breathe, no one will sing praises to our Lord very soon. At least in the city of Taganrog. It is no secret that the air is mortally dangerous in the places where pipes of metallurgical plants rise and smoke.³⁴

The author of the complaint refers to the general need for fresh air, which is a common good for all the inhabitants of the city. Moreover, she finds it important to justify the claim through the generalization of saving the people as God's flock.

Some authors of complaints try to justify private problems by appealing to the norms of Orthodox doctrine, while using certain vital goods to increase generality. Such a strategy is used in another complaint, in which the author is subject to an unfavorable tax increase. This complaint pertains to a Saratov Oblast decree, the adoption of which caused the tax on private land plots to increase significantly.

I find it necessary to cancel this tax. Since in such areas people grow produce for their own needs, thereby ensuring the health and prosperity of the family. Nowadays, orchards and gardens ... are the only available source of healthy products.... Often gardeners are retirees and grandparents trying to support their children and grandchildren, who are forced to live in the city. So, increasing the value of land and taxes is antistate policies designed to undermine the health of Russians.

I have a big request. Consider, please, the possibility of the complete abolition of the tax on land in suburban areas. After all, this piece of land is a small motherland to each Russian citizen, and the right to have it is given by nature, by birth of their ancestors in this land.... But if you remember the Bible, God the father created his son in a garden. And probably thanks to the garden and the love invested in it, the son has grown up and retained generations up to the present days.³⁵

The author uses multiple strategies to increase generality in the complaint, appealing to such common values as health, family, respect toward elders and previous generations, patriotism and the value of the motherland, saving the state. Among others, the author proves the validity of his claim by referring to the Bible.

The problem of possible removal of children from their mother's custody is laid out in another complaint:

³⁴ "Kazhdoe dykhanie, da khvalit Gospoda!" Medvedevu.ru, June 25, 2010.

³⁵ "Esl'i my ne otmenim nalog na zemliu, to vnuki uzhe budut platit' za vremia i vozdukh," Medvedevu.ru, February 3, 2010.

During the trial the grandmother and ex-husband (who did not live with the children in the last eight years, and whose moral and spiritual values are questionable, but who has his own place and a stable income) will fight for the children. They will vent their anger, and I will be deprived of my maternal rights. But after that the children will live with their grandmother, who hates her own daughter for her Christian worldview. I am not a religious fanatic. I have a lot of positive characteristics, which I can prove in the trial. I have a stable income, I also draw and restore icons, I earn money regularly. But the lawyer said that I have few chances if I do not have my own place.³⁶

The author of the complaint uses her piousness as the main recourse for justifying the problem, her own position, and her claim. Piety gives her the right to see and evaluate the situation from a perspective of divine justice. God's justice differs from secular justice. The status of believer allows the author to demonstrate the unfairness of secular norms.

The author accurately describes her own status: she is a true believer (she draws icons) but not a religious zealot. Such a status, in her mind, must characterize her as a good mother, contrary to the opinion of the court. Piety justifies her social imperfections, for instance, her lack of accommodations. From her perspective, she is a victim and this fact should strengthen her claim for help. The complainer assumes that the recipient shares her position and recognizes the general value of religiosity and mother's love.

Another complainer discusses problems of inefficiency in the judicial system in an even more peremptory fashion:

Secular judges, policemen, different officials have replaced God. The courts send the applications back years after year, cover for thieves, hooligans, and other violators of your laws.... Do we really need the judges who hinder righteous judgment and cover for the criminals. Do you smell the hellfire?³⁷

In the complaint, the author clearly distinguishes between secular norms and divine norms, contrasting the judgment of God and that of the secular court system. By referencing "*your laws*," she stresses a distinction between herself as a believer and the addressee, recognizing the responsibility of the addressee for secular forms of regulation. The author opposes secular justice in principle, seeing common good only in divine justice. The activity of secular trials is shown as dishonest, unfair, and inefficient. In contrast, God is portrayed as the guarantor of true justice. The addresser appears strong due to the deep conviction of her faith. The figure of the president is separated from divine justice. Nevertheless, the addresser appeals to the president, recognizing his ability to influence the situation—in particular, to eliminate "vicious" secular justice.

³⁶ "Materinskii krik o pomoshchi," Medvedevu.ru, November 12, 2010.

³⁷ "Merzost' na sviatom meste," Medvedevu.ru, August 6, 2010.

In the complaint, the author generalizes profound faith and God's justice. The president is excluded from this system of divine regulations, but the author still deems the generalizations relevant for legitimizing the request in the eyes of the addressee.

Religious views legitimize intervention in resonant cases. For example, an amnesty request on behalf of convinced businessmen Mikhail Khodorkovskii and Platon Lebedev uses abundant religious rhetoric and calls for observance of the Ten Commandments:

The Bible says: "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord" (Ps. 32:17). In these days before Christmas, when the Christian tradition provides charity not only to neighbors but even to enemies, I ask you to show Christian charity and pardon Mikhail Khodorkovskii and Platon Lebedev by your power, given to you by God and the Russian people. I am far from politics and do not know all the circumstances of their cases, but I would ask you not for fairness to them but for mercy.³⁸

The author bases her request entirely on points of Orthodox religion, quoting the Bible and invoking the virtue of Christian charity. In this quote, she compares justice to the virtue of mercy and prioritizes religious generalization.

Another example—a protest against weapon legalization is justified through religious argument:

Dmitrii Anatol'evich! Firearms are a device that is designed to kill people. The legalization of free access to these devices means nothing but the legalization of murder. And what does one of the basic precepts say? Thou shalt not kill, that is, do not strive to murder. Our country will slide back into atheism, which was in place before and after 1917.³⁹

In this text the author refers to God's commandments concerning the value of human life and, in this, he comes very close to finding a common good. Some of the commandments, for example "Thou shalt not kill," are already embedded in legislation. Nevertheless, the author emphasizes the role of religion, regarding atheism as mischief. Thus, the author attempts to generalize religion, faith, and the value of human life.

In another complaint, the author also tries to justify her opinion about a resonant social problem through religious bases:

In Western countries same-sex marriages and gay parades are allowed. This is not the case in the Russian Federation, thank God, and we would like to think it will remain like that. This is one of the few advantages of living in our country. It is said in the Divine Scriptures that the Lord sometimes creates man and wom-

³⁸ "Pros'ba o pomilovanii," Medvedevu.ru, December 30, 2010.

³⁹ "O legalizatsii prodazhi ognestrel'nogo oruzhiia," Medvedevu.ru, July 25, 2012.

an in one as for example in transvestites.⁴⁰ Sodomy and lesbianism are unambiguously condemned as one of the nasty vices, leading man to an animal state.... The law about responsibility for any form of propaganda of sodomy, lesbianism, and other sexual perversions necessarily has to be adopted as soon as possible.⁴¹

The author sees a problem in the freedom of sexual minorities and justifies her opinion based on religious texts: Divine Scriptures and religious views on sinfulness and human nature. However, the solution she suggests is set in the sphere of legislation. Religious justifications are used to substantiate her position and to distinguish between what is good and what is evil. In this respect the author implements religious justification to support a position of traditional morality.

The problems that arise in complaints are unique. A complainant cannot simply refer to a particular item of legislation to classify her problem. In compiling a complaint the author must justify the problem that forced her appeal, as well as the necessity of intervention by authorities. Research shows that a wide variety of discourses and rhetorical devices may be used to accomplish this goal. Authors use nonreligious rise toward generalities, appealing to the values of family, health, patriotism, respect for the elderly, and traditional lifestyles. However, religious justifications bring forward problems on the level of universal generalization.

References to Orthodox values may also be used to justify and rationalize the subjective viewpoint of the complainant. This strategy bypasses the traditional model of the religious plea for justice, in which the moral and social ideal is embodied in the idea of the Creator and the subjectivity of the supplicant is minimized. In contemporary complaints of Russian citizens addressed to the president, religious justifications appear more like moral judgments, which, according to Boltanski and Thévenot, may be interpreted by the addresser in this or that way depending on the situation.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

This research shows that a sample of letters addressed to the president in contemporary Russia includes texts reproducing the traditional genre of complaint both structurally and functionally. However, the mechanism of complaints in contemporary Russia coexists with the judicial means of solving problems. It not only offers additional means of solving problems to citizens but also illustrates the coexistence of different grammars for coping with injustice in one society. One of them, which is reproduced by the judiciary, is based on a democratic model of justice, which assumes a dispute between equal actors. Compared to judicial procedures, a complaint is distinguished by the purpose of addressing a problem, attracting the attention of the addressee, and affecting subsequent resolution—not reaching an agreement between two actors.

⁴⁰ Apparently, the complainant is referring to hermaphroditism.

⁴¹ "O popytke gei-parada v Pitere," Medvedevu.ru, June 25, 2011.

Complaints' texts reproduce justifications that citizens believe are legitimate in the eyes of the powerful addressee (in my case, the president of the Russian Federation). The processes of generalization and legitimation of critical statements are dominated by the necessity of emphasizing the asymmetry between the addresser and addressee and of demonstrating citizens' loyalty. Common codes which provide mutual understanding between the addresser and addressee are restricted by the values recognized in current political discourse as legitimate.

The appearance of religious justifications in the complaints of Russian citizens may be regarded as a consequence of the transformation of political discourse in the 2000s, namely, the recognition of Russian Orthodoxy as a foundation of national ideals. However, the consolidating function of religious doctrine was not taken for granted initially and later was transformed at the level of presidential discourse, which presented Orthodoxy as a differentiating feature coinciding with political loyalty. The president's discourse divides the society into adherents of Orthodoxy, who can expect protection by the state, and "the others."

Analysis of empirical material shows that the functions of religious justifications in complaints are rather broad. References to religious foundations can be used to justify any element of a complaint: address, substantiation of statuses, or strengthening of problems. Religious justifications significantly expand the potential of a complaint in comparison with the judicial way of coping with injustice. Resorting to religious rhetoric, the authors of complaints try to justify claims that have no legal foundations, as well as to intervene in resonant social and political problems.

Religious rhetoric in complaints adds special features to the normative model of relations between citizens and authorities and produces a specific image of the president. The coexistence of secular and spiritual power in the figure of the president finds detailed explanation in the complaints. The president is positioned in a spiritual authority model as a guide or teacher, following the example of the Lord's Anointed. This technique shows comprehension of the structure and nature of state power as a monarchy. This inversion supports the value of absolute state (presidential) power. Thus, religious rhetoric in the complaints supports the model of absolutist, patrimonial—or rather monarchical—relationships between citizens and president.

The authors of the above complaints use religious justifications not only to rationalize and strengthen their subjective position but also as a way to transcend the uniqueness of their situation. However, religion can hardly be regarded as a foundation for consistent criticism in the sense of Boltanski and Thévenot, who regard critical activity itself as moral activity. Morality as a regulative system permits criticism. In comparison, religion as a regulative system is based on the idea of justice given by God and does not imply the rational critics presupposed by Boltanski and Thévenot. According to my analysis, appeal to religious norms may be combined with justifications based on the discourses of

law or traditionalist morality, including values of family and health, civil loyalty, patriotism, and care of citizens by the patriarchal state. The extent to which this type of “populist” argumentation is widespread suggests that the mechanism of complaint at its core does not generate a request for consistent alignment of critical argument. Reproductions of the cliché of political legitimacy and loyalty are considered more valid.

Analyses of justifications show that different normative systems—law, morality, and religion—are tightly intertwined in the complaints. Complicated relations of hierarchy, interdependence, and interpenetration among the systems arise. The regulative abilities of religious doctrine and legislation may refute or supplement one another.

The specific situation of citizens’ complaints to the president, which is enshrined in legislation, generates resistant forms of justification. Contemporary mechanisms of complaint, like the earlier forms, allow for the solving of legal problems outside of the judicial system. Legitimization of religious justifications in the complaints promotes the penetration of religious norms also into the sphere of legal relations.

The development of the mechanism of complaints and its use as a method of coping with injustice, in many respects, devalues the legal means for resolving disputes and the principle of the rule of law in general. It endows the executive branch, in the person of the president, with the capacity to judge fairness, violating the unique function of the trial. Finally, the recognition of different normative systems and discourses as foundations of legitimate justifications weakens the general universal form of law enforcement.

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РЕЛИГИОЗНЫЕ ОПРАВДАНИЯ ЖАЛОБ, АДРЕСОВАННЫХ ПРЕЗИДЕНТУ, В СОВРЕМЕННОЙ РОССИИ

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Статья посвящена исследованию религиозных оправданий, используемых современными российскими гражданами при составлении жалоб, адресованных президенту Российской Федерации. В качестве аналитической модели используется концепция критической способности Люка Болтански и Лорана Тевено. Анализ текстов жалоб позволяет выявить связь между трансформацией политического (президентского) дискурса, произошедшей в 2000-х годах, и попытками граждан обосновывать притязания на справедливость через религиозные оправдания. Развитие механизма жалоб способствует укреплению особого способа восстановления справедливости, основанного не на споре равных акторов, а на практике обращения более слабого гражданина к более сильному государству. Религиозная риторика в жалобах, легитимность которой определяется ситуативным политическим дискурсом, способствует воспроизводству абсолютистской модели президентской власти и сращиванию религиозности с политической легитимностью и гражданской лояльностью.

Ключевые слова: ситуативное чувство справедливости; современное российское общество; жалобы; социология критической способности; социология оправдания; православие; президент; авторитаризм; легитимность; справедливость