

Institution or Inspiration: Strategies for Using the Concept of Charisma in Russian Thought of the Late 19th to the First Third of the 20th Centuries¹

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Analyzing the emergence and development of the concept of charisma in Russia at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, this article makes an argument about the significance of words that have potential for transforming history. Until about the mid 1880s, the word “charisma” was traditionally rendered as “gift” (*dar*), until translations of the works of some German theologians were published. In order to convey the connotations of the concept of “charisma” present in German theological discourse of the time, translators chose to transliterate this word, and the newly coined term soon became widely spread. The article examines the process of enriching the concept with new meanings, while paying attention to the almost traditional opposition between charisma and office (*dolzhnost'*). We demonstrate how the usage of the concept almost changed on the brink of the All-Russian Church Council of 1917–1918, becoming incorporated into the authority discourse. In the conciliar documents, the patriarch is spoken of exactly in the terms of spiritual authority and charisma. The same terms are used to justify the disobedience of Metropolitan Sergius (Stragorodsky) by a number of hierarchs in the 1930s. We conclude that the concept of charisma had a significant impact on the understanding of church authority both before and after the revolution.

Keywords: charisma, office, power, authority, theology, the Church

In the second half of the 20th century, the term “charisma” took its respective place both in the languages of theology and sociology (Bensman, Givant, 1986; Chernyi, 2020; Borsch, 2021). Its usage is genetically connected with the studies of Protestant scholars of the 19th century, reconstructing the organization of early Christian communities (Freik, 2001). The most prominent author in this context is Rudolf Sohm; his idea of charismatic organization as the essence of the church structure, excluding all the legal elements, greatly influenced the modern meaning of the concept of charisma (Haley, 1980). Sohm's ideas were developed, according to some researchers, in a softer vein by Karl Holl who adapted them to a different research field, namely, to studying the practices of monastic confession (Mühlenberg, 2021).

However, when the concept of charisma enters the Russian context as a part of the said discussion (not forgetting the early-Catholic answers to Protestant criticism) in the second half of the 19th century, its meaning does not remain tied to the initial subject: the beginning of the 20th century sees the development of a distinctive discourse centered

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around the concept, replete with consequences for the Church practice (e.g., Paert, 2014). The aim of this article is to study the development of this discourse by means of analyzing the concept of charisma in one of its historical aspects at a certain period of time².

The generation whose works were crucial for the development of the charisma discourse was chiefly active in the end of the 19th century to the first third of the 20th century³. Though they had different strategies for using “charisma”⁴, they were united by a common context in the period in Russian history marked by the growing interest in the mystical and personal spheres of religion⁵. It is possible that the concept of charisma was brought to attention in the wake of these particular tendencies; at least in the texts we analyze in the article its meaning is always seen as counterpointing that of the concept of “office”, which in the modern period, connotes with rationality and control (Vorontsov, 2021; Lyutko, 2022). That is why we will frequently resort to the concept of “office”, though its analysis is a separate issue requiring special attention which goes beyond the scope of this research.

Introducing the concept of “charisma” in Russia: technical term or Protestant trend

In this part of the article, we will look at the circumstances which helped “charisma” regain its relevance as well as acquire new meanings in the Russian context. It seems that the term “charisma” was reintroduced into the language by N. S. Suvorov (1848–1909), the professor of Canon Law at Moscow University, in the early 1880s. When translating the work of the Protestant theologian J. Köstlin (1826–1902) *Das Wesen der Kirche nach Lehre und Geschichte des Neuen Testaments* (1854), Suvorov borrows the German word *Charisma* (Köstlin, 1882: 118, 130, 136), which had a definite meaning and a long history in German humanities (Baumert, 2001). This is why he chooses to use it in its conventional setting. In Russia, the concept was traditionally rendered using the words meaning gift (*darovanie* / *dar* in the Old Church Slavonic translation of the Epistles and in the Synodal Bible), which obviously did not convey the connotations necessary to express Köstlin’s

2. Until now, there have not been any attempts made to describe the history of the concept of “charisma” in Russia; nonetheless we do not aim at cataloging all the instances of using “charisma” in Russian texts. This is why we are not interested in all the possible renderings of the concept, which, as is commonly known, has a long history (beginning from Apostle Paul and Koine Greek of the New Testament), in the course of which its meaning underwent numerous transformations while being translated into all of the major languages of the Christian world.

3. On the “generation method”, see (Gavrilyuk, 2013).

4. The development of a discourse involves the emergence of different strategies for using it. This is why we are considering discourse in its unity and diversity. In our research, we attempt to show the conflict between these strategies, that is, to explicate the polemic intentions of certain groups based on the history of the concept of “charisma”. In this sense, elements of the analyzed language (or conceptual system) and the agents using it are equally important to us. This allows one to build an intellectual history project as proposed by Q. Skinner and J.G. A. Pocock, a practice, which has become widespread among Russian researchers (Atnashev, Velizhev, 2018).

5. See: Coates, (2010); Manchester, Sdvizhkov, (2019); Mannherz, (2020).

ideas⁶. We shall assume that this semantic change (the change from “gift” to “charisma”) represents a new stage in the interpretation of the concept.

Soon after the publication of the translation, N. S. Suvorov writes (in his Canon Law course) about the transition from the charismatic state of the Church to the “formal ordination of certain officials” (1889: 23–24), in which state charisma is no longer connected with free ministry, but linked to the episcopal office (28). He reinforces this idea of transition from office to charisma by citing J. Döllinger, one of the leaders of the Old Catholic movement, who holds that in the post-apostolic period “the soaring flight of charisma was replaced by the prose of Church life” (24). At this point, Suvorov expresses his thesis using the phrase “special gift” (*osobyj dar*) and gives the Greek word χάρισμα in parentheses (23). The usage of the “special gift” concept was in all probability connected with the ambiguity of the word “charisma”; it was not perceived simply as a technical term, but as also referring to the Protestant conception of Church power. In 1888, I. S. Berdnikov (1839–1915), a professor of the Kazan Theological Academy, strongly opposed using the concept of “charisma” as a Protestant innovation in his Canon Law course. More specifically, he pointed out that Protestants use the adjective “charismatic” when speaking about the “unorganized, amicable order of the Protestant community”, which “excludes all legal organization” (1888: 170). This idea, according to Berdnikov, cannot be extended to the Orthodox teaching on Church order.

The argument about the usage of the concept of “charisma” resulted in a broader polemic over the Church structure between Suvorov and Berdnikov, in the course of which Berdnikov accused his opponent of building his conception on the basis of Protestant teaching (1902: 389). He supports his accusation by stating that Suvorov draws upon the work of the important Protestant author R. Sohm (1841–1917), and goes on to compare Suvorov’s conception with Sohm’s ideas (390–391)⁷. This connection, however, did not prevent the term from being used, and “charisma” soon lost its negative connotations. The change of terminology in new editions of N. S. Suvorov’s textbook (its author was freely using the concept since 1908) presents a vivid example of this development⁸.

Suvorov’s *Canon Law Handbook*, a considerably expanded version of the “Course”, contains a straightforward division between “official” (*dolzhnostnaja*) organization, based on ecclesiastical office, and free organization, based on extraordinary gifts (1908: 11). Suvorov uses here the concept of “charisma” in an original text and applies it (which is important) to episcopal office:

6. In the Russian language of the 16th — 17th centuries, the use of the word “charisma” is recorded (Vasmer, 1922: 18), but this usage cannot be called widespread, as the dictionaries show, it is the word “gift (*darovanie*)” that is common (Bahilina, 1977: 172).

7. In one of his texts, Suvorov notes the importance of Sohm’s work (Suvorov, 1894: 47).

8. The circle of authors using it will be gradually expanding. This concept will be used by the greatest church historian A. P. Lebedev (1845–1908) in his brochure “*Charismatic Teachers of the Primordial Church of the 1st and 2nd Centuries*”, which later, with changes, was included in his major study “*The Priesthood of the Early Church*” (1905). Lebedev describes the gradual disappearance of apostles, prophets, and teachers, whom he calls a specific “early Christian element”, from the life of the Church in the 2nd century (Lebedev, 1903: 24).

...bishops are in possession of charisma, i. e. the gift of truth, and they, as keepers of Church Tradition, which flows continuously from the Apostles, are to be addressed when seeking the correct interpretation of the Holy Scriptures (14).

This fragment is related to a similar passage from E. Hatch⁹, where the latter criticizes the conception of episcopal power as suggested by Irenaeus of Lyons¹⁰. Suvorov, however, understood episcopal charisma in a positive sense. This is how Suvorov, whether he wanted it or not, connected two different trends in the usage of the concept of “charisma”, while trying, presumably, to build a more academic language.

The opposition of office and charisma did not bear either positive or negative connotations for Suvorov. It seems that he, unlike his opponents, did not regard the concept as solely Protestant. He used the word “charisma” as a specific technical term, having introduced it to the language of Canon Law in Russia. His pupils resorted to the same strategy when using the concept, including one of his most famous followers P. V. Giduljanov (1874–1937)¹¹. In 1905, Giduljanov successfully presented his master’s thesis on a legal status of the metropolitan bishops in the Church of the first three centuries, which served as the foundation for his doctoral thesis on patriarchs in the period of the first four Ecumenical Councils. In these writings, Giduljanov develops Suvorov’s idea that after the demise of the apostles’ charisma passes from apostles to bishops, but then he does not go on to build any kind of conceptual structure around the concept of “charisma”¹². Consequently, these instances allow us to define one of the strategies of usage of the concept of “charisma” in Russia in the late 19th century; it came to be used as *terminus technicus*, adopted from the German academic language.

We observe that as “charisma” enters the language, two tendencies emerge in using it. There are different strategies behind them, based on regarding the concept as purely technical or as solely protestant. This distinction indicates that the newly coined term possessed both positive and negative connotations from the outset. The different meanings proposed for the concept by different authors depended on an intellectual circle the authors belonged to¹³. Suvorov was a university professor, and Giduljanov succeeded him as head of the Canon Law Chair of Moscow University. Berdnikov belonged to the theological academic corporation. In both cases, their discussions did not go beyond the dichotomy of “charisma / office”, and even if they did not deliberately contrast one against the other, the opposition was implied.

9. “... the bishop was conceived as having what Irenaeus calls ‘charisma veritatis’, [...] and round the episcopal office revolved the whole vast system, not only of Christian administration and Christian organization, but also of Christian doctrine” (Hatch, 1881: 97–98).

10. See: Irenaeus. *Adversus omnes haereses* 4. 26. 2. Irenaeus’ phrase “charisma veritatis” was translated from Latin as “the gift of truth (*darovanie istiny*)” (translated by N. I. Sagarda, 1907).

11. See also the handbook A. A. Mirles. See his definition: “What is charisma? Special gifts of truth that descend upon those who believe in Christianity” (Mirles, 1912: 110).

12. Giduljanov, would write “Every bishop is the successor of the apostles, and, as such, possesses Divine charisma” (Giduljanov, 1905: 1); and “Charisma belongs only to bishops and the Holy Spirit speaks only through them” (Giduljanov, 1908: 68).

13. The problem of “corporatism” in theological polemics in Russia has arisen many times (see: Ermilov, 2017).

Growing debates around the concept of “charisma”

Our earlier examples illustrate the peculiar polemics of Russian Canon Law scholars: this was a new discipline in Russia (Shevzov, 2021), and the debate on terminology was an essential part of its development. Soon, though, the concept of “charisma” outgrew this disciplinary field since its content was no longer property of corporative reflection. Charisma became the subject of discussion of a broader body of Russian theologians, and consequently acquired new meanings. In the course of our research, we came to distinguish three major strategies of usage of the concept of “charisma” that are connected with different ways of understanding the opposition between office and charisma.

Charisma as a personality aspect

I. V. Popov (1867–1938), Professor of the Moscow Theological Academy, was apparently the first scholar in Russia to disengage the concept of charisma from the “charisma / office” discourse. In his work *The Religious Ideal of St. Athanasius of Alexandria* (1903–1904), Popov draws upon K. Holl’s book *Enthusiasmus und Bussgewalt beim griechischen Mönchtum*, which described the “revival” of the charismatic gifts of the apostolic period among Byzantine monastics (1898)¹⁴. Following Holl, Popov writes:

When regarding the image of St. Anthony historically, we see in the person of this ascetic a charismatic of previous centuries come to life. ... charismatics served the Church but their service was voluntary and wasn’t restrained by any form. They took this service upon themselves of their own accord and did what they felt they could do for the Church. Despite the anchoritic character of his feat, which apparently left little room for public activities, St. Anthony was also a free minister of the Church, attending to spiritual and bodily needs of the brethren. (1904: 121).

In this quotation, charisma is identified with a voluntary and informal service to the Church. However, Popov goes on to mention that in monasticism, charisma acquired an individualistic character, which distinguishes this context from that of apostolic times when charismatics had served the entire Church and not individuals (122–123).

In his analysis of Athanasius’s *Life of St. Antony*, Popov draws several conclusions important for the understanding of the development of the concept of charisma. He differentiates between two types of charisma, one relating to the fullness of the Church and one to the individual. This idea is further developed in Popov’s *Mystical Justification of Asceticism in the Works of St. Macarius of Egypt* (1905) where he connects charisma to the figure of an ascetic who has attained unity with God, i.e., has reached theosis¹⁵. It means

14. Popov refers to Holl in several of his works (1904: 100, 107, 116, 122). See also Khondzinskiy’s work on Holl’s influence on Popov (2021).

15. “The ultimate goal of asceticism, according to St. Macarius, is the theosis of human nature, which is the result of a substantial communication of the whole man — both body and soul — with God. The moments of the theosis are, firstly, charismas, secondly, the supernatural change of the whole human nature.” (Popov, 1905: 57–58).

that charisma becomes attached to the ascetic and mystical discourse in which charisma is opposed to all things formal.

For many of his contemporaries, Popov's research provided the key to understanding the problematic of charisma in the Church. The concept went on to be used in specialized studies on mysticism and asceticism (Zarin, 1907: 273–287; Minin, 1914: 314). In these texts, we see the semantics of charisma undergo a certain transformation; alongside “asceticism”, which became the keyword of the epoch (Michelson, 2017), they use the concept of “charismatism”, which came to be used both as a designation of a historical epoch and of a human condition. This is how P. Florensky (1882–1937) uses the concept in his *Pillar and Ground of the Truth* (1914):

Asceticism as a historical phenomenon is a direct continuation of charismatism. In essence, ascetics are late charismatics while charismatics are early ascetics. The spirit-bearers are indisputably related to the ascetics (2004: 216)¹⁶.

I. V. Popov's ideas were most consistently developed by his friend and colleague at the Spiritual Academy, S. I. Smirnov (1870–1916) in his work *The Spiritual Father in the Early Eastern Christian Church* (1906). As with Popov, K. Holl becomes one of the central authors for Smirnov (1906: 40)¹⁷.

In Smirnov's texts, we can find such phrases as the “charismatism of Pachomius”, the “charismatism of elders” or the “charismatism of martyrs” (41, 217, 236–237). Smirnov understood the concept, first of all, as an inner spiritual quality, close to theosis, which a person attained through ascetic exercise:

All ascetic struggle... is only a means to purify human nature. ... The deified ascetic becomes God, is bearing God, is bearing the Spirit (θεοφόρος, πνευματοφόρος). He possesses a number of spiritual gifts (τὰ πνευματικά, χαρίσματα) which were abundant in the Ancient Church, the evidence of which we see in the historical accounts of the first three Christian centuries. ... Thus the charismatic phenomena of the first centuries re-emerged in monasticism. (38–39).

Charisma, therefore, is chiefly understood as a spiritual aspect of personality (unrelated to office) and is associated with pastoral care, and the features of the charismatic ascetic are projected onto the elder as a spiritual guide¹⁸.

As with Popov and Smirnov, we see K. Holl's influence in Florensky's *Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, demonstrated by direct references to Holl's works in their texts. In Russia, their works were preceded by a comprehensive polemic review of Holl's *Enthusi-*

16. In connection with Popov's influence on Florensky, see Gavriljuk (2022: 118). See also Coates (2019: 174–207).

17. There was a correspondence between Popov and Smirnov in which the dissertation was discussed: Otdel rukopisei Rossiiskoi gosudarstvennoi biblioteki. F. 280. K. 18. D. 23. L. 17–21; D. 24. L. 34; 42. See also Yachmenik (2022).

18. Smirnov uses the term which means pastoral care exercised by the elders (*starcheskoe pastyrstvo*; 33, 70, 174, 194, 207, 296, 324).

asmus und Bussgewalt containing a detailed rendering of its contents, which was written by Suvorov (1899). This is an important detail since in Russia, the interest in *Enthusiasmus und Bussgewalt* arose before the interest in *Kirchenrecht* by R. Sohm, which was published in Russian only in 1906. It does not mean that academics had not read this text in the original (let us recall the polemics of Berdnikov and Suvorov where his name was mentioned), but the publication of the first part of the first volume of *Kirchenrecht*, carried out by P. Florensky and A. Petrovsky, had symbolic meaning in that it served to emphasize the importance of the text. The idea of the translation arose, apparently, during discussions of the problem of power in the Church during the meetings of a religious revolutionary movement called the “Christian Brotherhood of Struggle” (1905–1908)¹⁹. The translation was consequently published as part of the *Religious and Social Library* series, found by the Brotherhood²⁰.

While working on the translation, Florensky was writing one of his early theological texts *The Concept of the Church in Sacred Scripture* (1906), which explains his interest in R. Sohm. In this work, Florensky placed “charismatics” in a separate group, distinctive from both clerics and laity, whose aim was to “purify the consciousness of the Church” and to invoke other groups to follow “the voice of free conscience” (2018: 326).

These ideas were later developed by Sergei Bulgakov (1871–1944), who was under the intellectual influence of Florensky at this period of time. In his work *On early Christianity* (1909)²¹, he maintained that the early Church organization had been “neither aristocratic nor democratic, but *charismatic*”, and this is why it hadn’t included the “secular office of bishops and presbyters” (104) at its early stages. It had been charismatics who conveyed religious experience (Ibid.)²².

The same idea was represented in the *History of Religion* textbook (1909), written by the same former Brotherhood members Elchaninov, Ern, and Florensky, and joined by Bulgakov. In the chapter on Christianity, we see the Church administration characterized, using Sohm’s theory, as charismatic power. It is exercised through people, who

are not chosen by certain people or elected by a majority of votes, but are marked by the gifts of God, by the so-called charisma, the presence of which in the person is acknowledged unanimously by the community (Istorija religii, 1909: 138).

We see that the discourse on charisma was not developed entirely by academics, but also by religious philosophers who focused their attention on the aspect of charisma related to freedom and personal religious experience.

19. Its main participants, besides Florensky, were V. P. Svetsitsky, A. V. Elchaninov, and V. F. Ern. On the Brotherhood, see Chertkov (2017).

20. For the context of the translators’ work, see Ivanova (2004: 580–582).

21. The text is a report made in 1908. Later, the article was included in Bulgakov’s book *Two Cities* (1911).

22. Apparently, the concept of charisma falls here into the broader context of the development of the concept of religious experience in Russia (Antonov, 2007), and it may also fall within Weber’s sphere of influence (Teslya, 2019).

Charisma as controlled by office

The popularity of charisma, understood as a personality aspect opposed to the office, apparently provoked various attempts to overcome the opposition of “charisma / office” among those, who disliked both Holl’s and Sohm’s conceptions.

S. I. Smirnov’s understanding of charisma as a spiritual gift of an ascetic, as “charismaticism”, drew a crushing critical response from P. V. Giduljanov. In particular, Giduljanov criticizes Smirnov’s statement that the source of power of a spiritual father lies in his charisma (Giduljanov, 1907: 417–418). According to Giduljanov, it wasn’t personal charisma which played a key role in monastic confession, but the will of an official;

Charisma is a gift of God, whereas in this case the issue was irrefutably decided either by the office or by the will of a father superior, who appointed the elder whom he approved of, spiritual father of the monastery (436–437)²³.

It seems that Giduljanov disapproved of Smirnov’s positioning charisma as a gift independent from hierarchical rank, an assumption Giduljanov considered based upon Holl’s ideas. According to Giduljanov, charismatic individuals in a monastery were controlled by the Father Superior, i.e., an office-bearer.

Another important milestone in the discussion of the “charisma / office” opposition was N. A. Zaozersky’s critical review (1909–1911) on the book by R. Sohm (for details, see Shevzov, 2021: 235–236). It seems that in this text, Zaozersky (1851–1919) did not only argue with Sohm but also spoke out against the thinkers who held a similar opinion.

In an earlier work, Zaozersky stated that the instances of charismatic life in the early Christian communities interfered with the Church order, which made it necessary to establish offices which would exercise authority over the charismatic individuals (1891: 63). This chain of reasoning did not imply the denial of charisma as such since it was viewed rather as a natural part of the Church order, complementing its legal structure. This is why in his review, Zaozersky spoke out against opposing the free and the legal organisation of the Church, as done by Sohm. He accordingly calls Sohm’s ideas “the theory of illegal Church” (playing on the semantics of the Russian word “bespravnaya”) (1911: 7). He suggests another model instead:

Charismatics have never been hierarchs by virtue of their gifts; they became hierarchs only when the Church congregation, led by the hierarchs, chose to ordain or lay hands on them. If the twelve apostles — who were chosen directly by the Lord and received from Him the fullness of Church power — hadn’t existed, there would have been no charismatics. ... Then, as well as later, they appeared as a special, con-

23. Here is another phrasing of this opposition he disapproved of as well: “This approach to the power of the keys as a separate gift of the Holy Spirit, independent of hierarchical rank, resulted in the assimilation of the gift by the monastics, who were viewed as the epigones of ancient charismatics and martyrs” (Ibid.: 435). Also refer to an unpublished Smirnov’s answer to this criticism, which explains the author’s understanding of “monastic charismaticism” (Otdel rukopisei Rossiiskoi gosudarstvennoi biblioteki. F. 280. K. 9. D. 2. L. 5).

tingent instrument of the Divine Providence over the Church: the hierarchy, again, is a constant, necessary institution (76–77).

Zaozersky describes the office-bearers as leaders of the Church, who control charismatic ministries. Church power is a category used to define the hierarchical order in the Church: bishops, as the successors of the apostles, receive it when ordained. It is this which distinguishes the bearers of charisma from the hierarchs.

Zaozersky doesn't deny the existence of charisma, it was the absolutisation of this element of the life of the Church that he opposed. That is why he excludes charisma from the sphere of the necessary organization and includes it into the sphere of the contingent. His idea, apparently, was that the Church as an institution cannot live without hierarchy, just as any other institution cannot live without a legal framework (34). For this reason, he believes Sohm's rendition of the conception of the charismatic organization of the Church as damaging to the Church structure.

The critical reactions of Giduljanov and Zaozersky contributed to the development of the charisma discourse, and caused the opposition between "charisma" and "office" to evolve even further.

Office as charisma

The authors we are going to review in this paragraph did not criticize their predecessors directly, but it is highly probable that their critical response was triggered by the transformation of the charisma discourse; consequently, they suggested a new meaning for the term. Their main points are summarized below.

V. N. Myshcyn (1866–1936) in his doctoral thesis on the *Structure of the Christian Church in the First Two Centuries* (1909) remarked, that using the concept of "charisma" didn't help describe Church structure:

The difference [between the apostles and the bishops — V. Ya.] ... is not that the first ministry was charismatic, and the second wasn't. This relatively widespread notion would not have been in keeping with the spirit of the early Church and the way it is represented in the primary sources. The latter consider administration a ministry as full of grace as preaching. There exists a charisma of apostleship, of prophecy and of teaching, as well as a charisma of administration, of presiding, of serving tables and so on. (157).

In Myshcyn's conception, all forms of Christian ministry, including the legal ones, are charismatic. This allows him to speak of charisma and office as coinciding in the person of the clergyman: "The charisma of administration for him [for the ap. Paul — V. Ya.] coincides with the bearers of administrative functions" (60). On these grounds, Myshcyn criticizes the idea that the community should test the bearer of the charisma²⁴. He infers

24. Myshcyn here is plainly critical of R. Sohm's idea, which was further developed in both in Catholic and Orthodox theologies (Köhler, 1998).

that the community is, on the contrary, in no position to acknowledge the leader, but obeys the authoritative body because it possesses the gift of grace (160).

We find a similar approach in the magisterial thesis of M. Fivejsky (1856–1919), *Spiritual Gifts in the Early Christian Church* (1907), where he analyzes the idea of charismata in the corpus of Paul's epistles. Fivejsky largely based his reflections on J. Englmann (1817–1879), a Catholic author of the second half of the 19th century, who played a key role in this field²⁵. Following him, Fivejsky defines charisma as every form of Christian state²⁶. Church offices, accordingly, have nothing to do with the bureaucratic system, but are themselves “the ministries devoid of official character, or rather the powers that govern and administer the Christian society” (1907: 67).

He eliminates the opposition between charisma and office by reinterpreting the concept of office as a category which excludes bureaucratic connotations. Charisma, in his view, includes all forms of Christian ministry and underlies all offices, while being opposed to everything formal (or official), beginning with power and hierarchy:

The word “hierarchy” is used neither in the New Testament nor in the writings of the apostolic fathers. ... the people who worked for the good of the Church of the Apostolic Age were characterized not by ἐξουσία (power), but by διακονία (ministry) (68).

Charismatic ministry, expressed in church offices, excludes both official and bureaucratic interaction, as well as hierarchical patterns built on power. We see here another step in the transformation of the charisma discourse; it broadens to include the sphere of the unofficial.

The works of Myshcyn and Fivejsky are not the only texts reflecting the change in the charisma discourse. In 1916, Giduljanov published a leaflet called *The Essence and Legal Nature of Church Rule*. This text marked a new step in his understanding of the charismatic.

The key to Giduljanov's ideas lies in his understanding of the Church structure as a charismatic organization. He writes that “Because of the generous distribution of the gifts of grace the organization of the Church is charismatic” (1916: 15–16). We see two problems in connection with this statement. Firstly, if every believer is a holder of charisma, i.e., has a charismatic calling to any activity in the Church, it means that charismatic organization is by nature a community of people, who freely obey the will of God (14). This “voluntary obedience” acquires at a certain stage a characteristic meaning of “power,

25. His basic ideas figured in the “Charismata” article of the *Old Catholic Encyclopedia* of 1913. On the import of this text and on further development of the topic in Catholic theology, see Reshchikova (2022).

26. “Any form in which Christian religious life somehow or other manifested itself was a charisma, a gift of God, following directly from the work of the Holy Spirit on the human soul” (Fivejsky, 1907: 11). He constructs the interrelation of office and charisma along the same lines: “The powers had already appeared and started to operate even before the office was defined and received a corresponding name. Their source is charisma; the form of their expression is ministry” (67).

which comes from a feeling of dependence of the believers on the will of God which rules the Church” (37).

The introduction of the topic of Church power leads to a second problem. The free charismatic organization also includes people who “possess a more powerful charisma” and consequently occupy a higher position in the Church (14). Giduljanov however, doesn’t go on to interpret this figure simply as a governing body and defines it as a teaching authority. He writes:

Only the person who possesses the gift of teaching can give definitions regarding the structure of ecclesia (ordination), permission to accept a person into community, taking disciplinary action, since only the word of God, and not some decision of a communal meeting as such, is called upon to give answer to all these questions (17).

The absolute power, which is based on the charisma of teaching, extends not only to the lay members of the community, but to the official hierarchy as well. The source of this power is the word of God, conferred to the charismatic by virtue of His gift.

Then, Giduljanov states that the most representative bearer of the gift of teaching is the prophet. However, he existed only for a short period of time in his pure form (21). His place in history was taken by the bishop, who possesses charisma due to his Church office:

With the disappearance of the true prophets, the only true prophecy that remains is the episcopal ecstasy, which is based on his office. ... After this gift ceased to manifest itself in the natural course of things, the only prophecy that remained was the one that was based on office, flowing from the grace of ordination: the prophetic gift of the bishop (23–24).

Giduljanov makes an important step in the development of the charisma discourse by introducing the figure of a prophet as an ideal type of charismatic power. However, he does more than project this type on to the early Christian charismatics; he extends it to the episcopate, which he defines as possessing the prophetic gift, having received it not in a “natural way”, but through ordination.

At this stage of development, we see several strategies of using the concept of charisma, the choice of which depended on the interests of different researcher groups. The first group, represented by I. V. Popov, S. I. Smirnov, and P. Florensky, understood charisma as a personality aspect, while the other two (in many aspects similar) groups (V. N. Myshcyn, M. Fivejsky, N. A. Zaozersky, P. V. Giduljanov, et al.) insisted either on an unconditional connection between charisma and office by virtue of ordination, or on a model in which charisma as an element of the Church life remained under the control of the office-bearers.

These authors already perceive “charisma” as a conventional term. In their texts, we see the presence of a key figure which, in the corresponding theory, is the bearer of cha-

risma. The elder represents an ideal type of charismatic power-bearer for the first group, while the second group chooses the figure of the prophet. It appears that the figure of the prophet allows them to interpret charisma as a teaching function, and thus to connect the charismatic teachers of the Apostolic Age with the succeeding bishops as bearers of the church office²⁷.

The projection of “charisma” onto the Church practice

The works dating to pre-revolutionary years mark yet another stage in the development of the charisma discourse in Russia: the authors of these texts make statements referring to Church practice. The texts were published following discussions of Church reform which made it clear that “charisma” was applicable. For instance, in the preface to his book, Fivejsky refers to the discussions in the Pre-Council Commission (1906), when stating that we need to “reform and reorganize our Church on a new basis” (1907: 4)²⁸. By this, he means the necessity to revive charisma (“the new basis”) as a specific feature of the ancient Church.

“Charisma” in the discussions of the Church reform

We see the concept of “charisma” used in several documents connected with the Church reform of the early 20th century, i.e., the protocols of the Pre-Council Commission (Predsobornoe prisutstvie. Vol. 2, 2014: 862) and the “Commentary of the Diocesan Bishops on the Question of Church Reform” (1905) (Polunov, Solov’ev. Vol. 2, 2004: 997). These sources, on the one hand, are not sufficiently representative since they only contain examples of technical usage of the concept. On the other hand, they belong to the range of documents directly relevant to Church reform. This allows us to interpret the discussion around the reform as a search for a person who could be thought of as a bearer of charisma. The implicit presence of this tendency is easy to track in the documents of the All-Russian Church Council of 1917–1918²⁹.

The council, as demonstrated by recent research, reconsidered the model of the conciliar Church government (Destivelle, 2006). However, the contemporary theological thought in Russia did not reduce itself to the juxtaposition of corporate and individual leadership within the Church, but also meant to reinterpret the phenomenon of Church power as such. “Charisma” was part of that same context, although it did not play a leading role in the conciliar discussions.

One of the most intriguing statements concerning charisma was made by Archbishop Mitrofan (Krasnopolsky, 1869–1919), who brought the issue of restoring the patriarchate

27. This is not the only example in Russian history when the figure of the prophet is connected with charisma (not to mention Western thought, especially M. Weber), see Yachmenik, Makarova (2022).

28. See the controversy between Suvorov and Zaozersky over charismatic organization as a model for modern church life (Predsobornoe prisutstvie. Vol. 1, 2014: 28–29).

29. One of the examples concerning the use of the concept of “charisma” at the All-Russian Council was studied in this article Yachmenik (2021).

in the Russian Church to the attention of the Council, and provided a rationale for it. He declared that the prospective patriarch was not going to be an “autarch”, but a “charismatic person” (Kolcherin, Mramornov, 2015: 485). An interesting detail is that in the typescript of this speech the patriarch is described as “having received the gift of grace” (*oblagodatstvovannyj*), which is crossed-out by hand and replaced by an adjective derived from the word charisma. The question of whether this is a relevant example of the textological problem remains unanswered. In any case, other examples of charisma-usage from the protocols demonstrate that it was used to juxtapose the individual and the collective (which reminds us of the ideas of I. V. Popov, one of the participants of the Council). Soon after the speech of Archbishop Mitrofan, N. N. Fioletov (1891–1943) observed that individual leadership had formed historically and there was no Church teaching on a first hierarch’s charisma:

All bishops are equal in what concerns their grace-given powers. The privilege of the Roman Cathedra is not based on charisma, not based on the gifts of grace, but has developed historically (534).

Fioletov mentions the Roman Cathedra because of an idea popular with some of the participants of the Council who regarded patriarchate as a “Russian papacy” which would be inevitable if the Church restored the rank of the patriarch (Suvorov, 2020: 123–149). Based on these examples we infer that the patriarch is primarily understood not as an individual leader, but as a rank-bearer who equals his fellow-bishops in the possession of charisma. Another author resorting to a similar pattern of usage is S. Bulgakov, who wrote in 1922:

... the Church power is personal by nature, it is charisma itself, and charisma is not given to collegiums or consistories. Charisma requires a personal bearer. *The crisis of the Church power in Orthodoxy* — and I continue insisting on it — is caused by the absence of a personal bearer of this power (2019: 73)³⁰.

Here and in some other parts of his work *At the Walls of Chersonese*, Bulgakov is critical of Fioletov’s speech declaring that the patriarch has no special charisma³¹. Bulgakov understands charisma as a personality aspect not in the sense of its being related to the personal qualities of an individual, but in the sense of its coming to manifest itself only in individual leadership³². Nevertheless, this text allows us to document another instance of using charisma in the context of the opposition of the individual and the collective in connection with the patriarch. This opposition gained significance in the post-revolutionary years in connection with the new status of the Church in the state.

30. Bulgakov’s italics.

31. He writes: “Orthodox theologians insist that the Patriarch is a bishop who does not have any special charisma” (68). Cf. with Fioletov’s theses (Kolcherin, Mramornov, 2015: 534).

32. These thoughts, apparently, reflect Bulgakov’s desire to convert to Catholicism, but later he reconsidered these ideas (Borsch, 2008: 75–80).

This demonstrates how charisma is used within the problematics of the contemplated scheme of the Church government. As a strategy, this concept allows for the presenting the figure of the patriarch as a personal power, which at the same time, cannot be reduced to monarchical rule.

“Charisma” in the discussion regarding the legalization of the Church in the Soviet Union

The next case of usage of the charisma concept is found in the polemic texts, written as a reaction to the Declaration of Metropolitan Sergius (Stragorodsky, 1867–1944) issued in July 1927, where he professed the loyalty of the Russian Church to the Soviet Union. We see the concept in the collection of articles called *The Metropolitan Sergiy’s Dossier* (1929), which criticize Metropolitan Sergius’ Church-politics. It includes a text by Bishop Pavel (Kratirov, 1871–1932) “A letter of a bishop who ‘departed’ to a bishop who ‘did not depart’” (1927), where we see a specific interpretation of the concept of “charisma”:

The episcopal ministry in the Church of Christ, after the extraordinary ministries of the Apostolic Age ceased to exist, combines all ministries including the prophetic one. The bishop, like the charismatic-prophet, should rightly handle the Word of Truth, he should, with the help of grace, look, praying, through the darkness which surrounds the Church of God at the historical setting³³.

At this stage, the position of a “bishop who departed” means a total rejection of the participation of the state in the organization of Church life; in other words, Bishop Pavel disapproves of the project of the legalization of the Church.

Patriarch Sergius (Stragorodsky) conversely, in his article titled *Does Christ have a vicar in the Church?* (published posthumously), appears to respond directly to the concept of the “charismatic prophet”. Though the article belongs to the field of comparative theology, it is not difficult to interpret some of its fragments as an evaluation of the difficulties the author encountered in his life. Thus, Patriarch Sergius writes:

And like He sent His prophets and judges to ancient Israel, thus in trying times He sends exceptionally gifted people, as if prophets, strong in spirit and faith, to help the Church. Not having an official rank, these people come forward from the crowd and become the leaders of others. This leadership isn’t official and doesn’t constitute a Church office and doesn’t always stay within the framework of the official. As with any prophecy, this is a personal feat of these people, a matter of their private initiative and zeal for the Lord and the Church. Being temporal and in a way accidental, this feat doesn’t mean they have a right to rule the Church or to occupy an episcopal seat. (1947: 70).

While not using the concept of charisma, Patriarch Sergius speaks of the prophets as of the people “possessing extraordinary gifts of grace” (a formula which is close in meaning to charisma), and admits that they have played an important role in Church history.

33. Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii. F. 5991. Op. 1. D. 1. L. 74 rev.

At the same time, he observes that they are not authorized to rule the Church. In these words we see a certain kind of response; this is how a bearer and a defender of Church office reacts to the discourse on informal charisma.

These examples seem to be genetically connected with the charisma discourse which was developing before the Revolution. The text of Metropolitan Pavel (Kratirov) describes a direct connection between charisma and prophecy in the person of a bishop (the “charismatic-bishop”) which was present in the pre-revolutionary texts, but the document of 1927 has a different emphasis. While P. V. Giduljanov derived the prophetic function of episcopal charisma from the fact of the ordination, for Kratirov, the performing of this function was possible only when the bearer of the office did what was right and had God’s help³⁴. We find Patriarch Sergius apparently appealing to a different aspect of pre-revolutionary discussions. He differentiates between prophecy as a personal initiative which does not function as Church power, and office as an authoritative function in the Church. This scheme seems to be close to the ideas of N. A. Zaozersky, who described charisma in the terms of constant control and viewed charisma as an extraordinary phenomenon in the life of the Church.

The presence of the concept of charisma in the polemics around the 1927 Declaration allows us to single out a new strategy of its usage, that of the performative strategy. This makes this case different from that of pre-revolutionary texts where charisma figures as part of the discussion on what should be or on *how* it was in the course of history. The intention of the authors who engaged in the polemics of the first decades after the revolution have a direct practical relation to the contemporary situation in the Church, because these polemics revolved around the question of the normativity of Church organization. This example of the usage of the opposition of charisma and office culminates our conceptual history research. The generation of thinkers we considered leave the intellectual field: some of them (e.g., S. Bulgakov) migrate and further develop their ideas in a different context, but the majority perish.

Conclusion

In Russia, the concept of “charisma” was introduced in the late 19th century. It was used initially in translated literature, which provoked discussion among Russian academics. We were able to uncover two focal points in the usage of charisma at this time; one group used it as a relevant academic term (Suvorov), while another group understood it as an alien concept unfit to be used within the framework of Orthodox theology (Berdnikov). In the first case, the authors used it as a Western theological term, the contents of which were not as yet clearly defined in Russia. Suvorov extends the term both to the Apostolic Church, which he maintains to be free from legal control, and to the office of the bishop. In the second case, which is represented chiefly by Berdnikov, we see a critical strategy,

34. Kratirov’s concept seems to be close to the ideas of M. A. Novoselov about the authority of the bishop, who, most likely, included his text in the collection (Kosik, 2013: 176–177). See Novoselov’s views (Ermilov, Paromov, 2019).

which implied that by introducing a term alien to Orthodox theology, their opponents accepted an alien understanding of Church power. By means of this argument, the concept of charisma enters the Russian language carrying both positive and negative connotations.

After a dialectic reception, the concept becomes more widespread and its usage more conventional. This process takes place in the pre-revolutionary years; there various researcher groups emerge, suggesting their own understanding of the concept of charisma. We identified three strategies of its usage at this stage.

Firstly, we singled out an understanding of charisma as an aspect of personality. On the one hand, the concept is placed in the ascetic discourse (Popov). At this level, charisma (which becomes “charismatism”) is connected with the person of an ascetic, who by virtue of his ascetic practices, reaches theosis (Popov, Florensky). The concept of charisma comes to be used in the field of pastoral care; this is why Smirnov draws an analogy between the images of a charismatic ascetic and an elder acting as a spiritual father. Apparently, this strategy is based upon K. Holl’s ideas, which Russian authors tried to apply in the Russian context. On the other hand (and this tendency appears to be connected with the ideas of R. Sohm), charisma is found in Russian religious philosophers’ discourse in a sphere which is connected with the concept of religious experience (Bulgakov). Here, the realm of the personal and the realm of freedom become the key aspects of charisma.

Secondly, we marked out several authors who made arguments against the paradigm of Holl / Sohm as a separate polemic group. An alternative interpretation of Holl’s conception was suggested by Giduljanov, who stated that it was not ascetic charismatism that was instrumental to the development of pastoral power of spiritual fathers, but a specific monastic order based on the will of an official. Sohm was criticized by Zaozersky who asserted the necessity of the legal element in the Church organization which would control the extraordinary charismatic phenomena through office-bearers. This model did not doubt the existence of charisma as a phenomenon, but viewed it as an exceptional occurrence in the life of the Church.

Thirdly, there exists a number of authors who differ in their strategy of using “charisma” from both already-mentioned groups. In their case, office is re-interpreted as charisma in order to partly eliminate the dichotomy of “charisma / office”. Their main argument was that the opposition does not reflect the structure of the Ancient Church (Myshcyn), where Church office was one of the ways charisma manifested itself (Fivejsky, Giduljanov). Nevertheless, they viewed charisma as a phenomenon related to the field of the informal / unofficial and opposed to bureaucratism (Fivejsky, Giduljanov). The ideas formed within the group gave rise to the conception that the ideal type of charismatic power is represented by the prophet, whose teaching role is inherited by the bishop (Giduljanov), the latter being opposed to the ascetic as the bearer of personal charisma.

Different connotations of the concept of “charisma” and various intentions behind its usage strategies formed a unique discourse on charisma in the pre-revolutionary years. Theoretical debates of the time, apparently, answered to the practical challenges faced

by the Church, and which were discussed in the context of Church reform. Thus, the concept of charisma gradually became a kind of a performative act. We can hardly speak of the influence of a certain group in this case; it is more likely that practical discussions involved using the whole range of available ideas. When viewing the arguments in favor of the restoration of the patriarchate, we see the concept of charisma identified with office (episcopal charisma). However, when speaking of the future patriarch as a “charismatic person”, the participants of the Council implied his personal charismatic power. Presumably, we see here the development of Popov’s idea of individual and universal (Church) charismata, which use the pastoral function of spiritual gifts in diverse ways.

Finally, we see the concept in the context of discussions around the 1927 Declaration of loyalty of the Church toward the Soviet government. Metropolitan Pavel (Kratirov) criticizes Metropolitan Sergius using the conception of the charismatic power of the prophet. According to Metropolitan Pavel, officials should succeed prophets not only in terms of ordination, but also liken their lives to those of the prophets. In other words, according to his conception, charisma legitimizes office, not vice versa. Apparently, when answering this discourse, Metropolitan Sergius (Stragorodsky), who became Patriarch as a result of his Church politics, used a different strategy. In his understanding, the interpretation of the opposition between “charisma” and “office” depended on the meaning of office, perceived as an official position in a religious corporation, with the task of controlling personal charismatic initiative.

The fact that charisma figures in the polemics between Metropolitan Pavel and Metropolitan Sergius allows us to view this complex setup against the background of pre-revolutionary discussions. In this context, “charisma” becomes a performative act used in polemics between the bishops on how to organize the life of the contemporary Church.

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Стратегии использования понятия харизмы в русской мысли конца XIX — первой трети XX вв.

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В статье анализируется возникновение и развитие понятия харизмы в России конца XIX — первой трети XX вв. Это слово в русском языке активно начинают использовать в начале 1880-х годов, когда выходят переводные сочинения немецких теологов. Если ранее библейское слово *charisma* бытовало как «дар» или «дарование», то в конце XIX века предпочитают транслитерацию этого слова, чтобы передать новые коннотации понятия «харизма». В статье показано, как понятие обретает новые смыслы, при этом обращается внимание на почти традиционное противопоставление харизмы и должности. Выявлено три варианта этой оппозиции в текстах, описывающих церковную организацию: во-первых, харизма, понятая как личностное начало, будет противопоставлена «должности» как началу обезличенному; во-вторых, в соответствии с альтернативной стратегией употребления этой оппозиции, «должность» предстает как инстанция, контролирующая «харизму»; в-третьих, встречаются концепции, в которых снимается противопоставление «харизма / должность» благодаря их отождествлению. В статье показано, как в контексте подготовки Всероссийского собора 1917–1918 годов изменяется употребление этого понятия, когда оно обретает практическую значимость. В документах собора о должности патриарха говорится именно в терминах духовного авторитета и харизмы. Это же понятие используется для критики церковной политики митрополита Сергия (Страгородского) со стороны ряда непоминающих его иерархов в 1930-е годы. Вывод статьи заключается в том, что вхождение понятия харизмы в теологию оказало значительное влияние на понимание церковной власти как до революции, так и после нее, — что, в целом, иллюстрирует аргумент о значении силы слов, обладающих трансформирующим для истории потенциалом.

Ключевые слова: харизма, должность, власть, авторитет, теология, Церковь.