

Orthodox clergyman exposes Dvorkin’s book “Sects Studies. Totalitarian sects”

The book “Sects Studies. Totalitarian sects” was written by anticultist Alexander Dvorkin and published in 2000. It is his main book where he defined what “totalitarian sect” is. The book was criticized by religious scholars, lawyers and human rights activists. There are [scientific examinations](#) that recognized the book groundless.

However, Dvorkin popularized the term “totalitarian sect” in Russia and it is broadly used against not only religious organizations, but also commercial, social, medical and political. It would not be exaggeration to say that no one, except Dvorkin himself and few of his fellows, knows how come that all those organizations were declared “totalitarian sects” and what criteria were used.

The recent events when Dvorkin and other anticultists of the RACRSR¹ [attacked successful Orthodox parish](#) and declared it totalitarian sect, prompted Konstantin Seleznev, deacon² of the Russian Orthodox Church, to publish his opinion on the book and the term “totalitarian sect”.



Deacon Konstantin Seleznev | Photo: [VK.com](#)

Deacon Konstantin serves in one of the Orthodox churches in St. Petersburg, and in 2016 he spoke in support of the monk³, against whom a campaign was launched on charges of sectarianism.

1 RACRSR – Russian Association of Centers for Study Religions and Sects, founded by Alexander Dvorkin in 2006. It unites about 15 people from Russia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan. It is not a legal entity.

2 Deacon, in the Russian Orthodox Church, is a person who ministers at the first, inferior priesthood degree.

3 Monk Yokim Parr — a known monk, was in the staff of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, for a long time was the abbot of one of the monasteries in the United States. September 22, 2016 by decree of the administrator of the ROC’s Patriarchal parishes in the US, Bishop John (Roshchin) is banned in the priesthood, which was accompanied by an attack on him by Dvorkin and Co., who accused him of sectarianism.

Then the deacon Konstantin wondered why “a structure designed to fight external enemies begins to seek and destroy the “enemies” inside the Church.” And when, a year and a half later, the story with anticultists attacks was repeated against father Vladimir Golovin⁴ and his parish, deacon Konstantin shared his views on how grounded and honest Dvorkin's criteria are in declaring totalitarian sect.

Deacon began with the following story from his life:

“I'll start with the story that happened to me a long time ago, somewhere in the early 2000s. Then I had a kind friend who turned from the charismatic church to the bosom of our Orthodox Church, and we were all very happy, and, as best we could, tried to help him. In particular, I gave him to read the book “Sects Studies” written by prof. A.L. Dvorkin. Over time, when he returned the book to me, I asked him what he thought about this textbook. He said that he liked the book, and added: “But it's not fair.” “How so?” – I was surprised. And he answered me: “The fact is that if we apply these principles to sects and different groups, which we in principle know a priori about, that they are bad, then everything turns out well and smoothly, but to be honest, then we will see that the application of the same criteria, applied according to a formal principle, to the Orthodox Church itself will reveal such groups in it. For example, monasteries, at least some of them, looked through the prism of the views of an anticultist, obviously, will not pass such a check, and will be classified as sects. After all, in your monasteries unconditional obedience, work without payment of labor, absolute power of the hegumen⁵ is accepted, and in many of them there are large financial flows.”

I must admit that I was still puzzled by my friend's answer, because I had to agree with his arguments, and I did not find a way to answer him. But it did not alienate him from the Church, and in time we simply forgot both that conversation and the book. I remember, then, I assumed that sooner or later the sectarians themselves would read this book and take the principles outlined in it into use; and then they already attack our Church, exposing us with our own criteria and approach. As it turned out, I was wrong – not sectarians, but the Orthodox themselves made this revolution.”

Further, Father Konstantine took from the book “Sects Studies. Totalitarian sects” FOUR ATTRIBUTES OF TOTALITARIAN SECT and checked whether they are really applicable to the Orthodox Church itself. Here's what he writes:

“**Gurism** is the presence of a charismatic leader, to whom all are, to one degree or another, unconditionally subordinate.

⁴ Vladimir Golovin is a famous priest of the ROC from the provincial city of Bolgar (Republic of Tatarstan). His sermons are very popular on the Internet, and the temple where he serves is a place of pilgrimage from all over Russia. In January 2018, anticultists Alexander Novopashin and Alexander Dvorkin announced his parish as a totalitarian sect, and Golovin himself as a “guru” and the head of the “grouping”. The charges brought against him do not exceed what can be found in any other parish of the ROC, and a number of experts with whom we talked agree that the reason for the attack is the increased popularity of the priest, which someone at the top of the ROC perceived as a threat. An overview of this story is [here](#) (in Russian).

⁵ Hegumen – The clergy of the abbot of the monastery in the Orthodox Church. From the Greek *hegumenos* – “leading”.

Organization is the creation of some structure, through which this group is supported. Someone is engaged in administration of the organization, someone is cleaning, someone deals with money, someone prepare food: some kind of structural integrity is being created.

Method – this means that the charismatic leader of this group should have some knowledge that is not available to his followers. More precisely, without this knowledge of the leader, his followers can not be saved, so they have to come to the leader to get this knowledge.

Esoteric gap means that at the beginning of one's spiritual path, the members of this group receive some idea or knowledge about the sect and its methods, but then, over time, it changes radically, and for a new knowledge is revealed that was previously hidden from them.

So...

Let's start with the **criterion of gurism**: can it be applied to the false holy elders⁶? Certainly yes! – charismatic leader. And in relation to the true elders? Agree that, in principle, on formal grounds, the same criterion can be applied to them. After all, the true elders are charismatic leaders of those groups, for example, monasteries, which they head or nourish.

Criterion of organization: in principle, on this basis we can choose any monastery of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Criterion of the method: naturally yes! After all, novices come to the monastery for this, because they believe that they can not save themselves, because they do not have enough knowledge and skills for this. They need an elder so that he can teach them, guide them to the true path.

Esoteric gap: and here we find a similar phenomenon in the spiritual life of Orthodox Christians. When a person is just beginning his spiritual path, he thinks about the Faith and about Christ in one way; but when he grows up in the Faith, he discovers that the Christian path is somewhat more complicated than he thought at first. When the soul still gravitates under the burden of original sin, when it is not yet cleansed of passions, but a person sees the beauty of Orthodoxy, he reaches out to it, wants salvation and cleansing from his sins, but the soul, spoiled by passions, is still selfish and wants more for itself, seeking spiritual greed. When a person, having entered the Church, becomes stronger in the spiritual life, he sees that often the Lord leads him to the cross, where the fallen soul does not want to go. And this is the contradiction between the desire of the soul and where Christ leads us for our purification, and this is a semblance of an esoteric gap in Orthodoxy.”

Further, Father Konstantin concludes:

“So, we examined all four criteria for assessing whether a particular religious group is a sect. Obviously, if we apply these formal criteria to a particular parish or monastery, then these

6 To understand who the false holy elder is, the following quotation of monk Alexy will help: “So this is a false father who speaks not of God, but of willfulness, since he insists, is angry, irritated and offended when he is not obeyed.” Basically, those who pretend to be a holy elder, but in fact not.

criteria may fail – provisionally speaking, all parishes and monasteries of the Russian Orthodox Church can meet all these criteria.”

From this it follows that the definition of a “totalitarian sect” is drawn up in such a way that any religious (and not only) organization fits it. But why then did all the parishes and monasteries of the ROC at once not be declared “totalitarian sects”? It turns out that there is one more component of such a charge – a personal opinion (most often – of the author of the book, Dvorkin).

“How can one distinguish sects from healthy parishes and monasteries? Alas, alas, most likely, for this you need **one more criterion: moral-ethical**, or, even worse, **emotional**: “*I thought so! I felt that there was something wrong here!*” Such a criterion by definition will be **subjective**. It is interesting that the esteemed prof. A.L. Dvorkin in one of his speeches quite directly confirms this conjecture.” – deacon Konstantin.

It becomes clear why only individual monasteries and parishes are declared totalitarian sects. Perhaps they were out of favor with someone from the church leadership, or the church decided to distance from them for one reason or another. In his article, deacon Konstantin gives a concrete example when, in the announcement of Orthodox monk Yokim (Parr) in sectarianism, the personal opinion of Alexander Dvorkin was decisive.

“Hence we draw the following conclusion: since practically all parishes and monasteries are suitable to be sects under the formal criteria, an expert evaluation is required for their declare, and at the same time, according to prof. A.L. Dvorkin, this evaluation is subjective.” – deacon Konstantin.

Hence the name that the deacon gave to his article: “Endosectology”. The prefix “endo...” shows the relation to something internal. Full text of the article “Endosectology” by deacon Konstantin Seleznev without our reduction and comments is available in the source (in Russian): <https://vnegda.livejournal.com/3508.html> ([archive copy](#)).

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English: <https://about-dvorkin.ru/en/Alexander-Dvorkin-sects-studies-totalitarian-sect-exposed.html>

Russian: <https://www.about-dvorkin.ru/news.php?id=93312>