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THE ANTI-CHURCH CAMPAIGN (1958-1964) AND ITS MANIFESTATIONS
ON THE TERRITORY OF THE GLUBOKOE DISTRICT

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In the article we examine the peculiarities of the anti-church campaign from 1958 to 1964 and its manifestations on the territory of the Glubokoye district of the Vitebsk region. The analysis of archival documents and literary sources for the given period of time testifies that the state-confessional relations were characterized with the various degrees of tension and irreconcilability from the government and party organs.

Glubokoye district is an administrative unit which is situated in the north-west of Vitebsk region. The centre of the region is the Glubokoye town. Glubokoye district was formed by the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on January 15, 1940 as an administrative unit of the Vileyka region. It consisted of the town of Glubokoye, the Glubokoye volost and a part of the Zalesie volost of Disna district. On July 2, 1941 Glubokoye was occupied by the German troops and turned into the county centre of the Reichskommissariat Ostland. After the liberation of Glubokoye by the Soviet troops the territory of the Glubokoye district became a unit of Polotsk region according to the new administrative division (September 20, 1944).

In January 1954, the administrative-territorial reform was implemented according to which Glubokoye and Plisa districts became the parts of the Molodechno region. Since January 20, 1960, the district has been a part of the Vitebsk region. In December 1962, the area of Glubokoye district increased at the expense of the territory of the liquidated Plisa district [1].

The activation of church and religious life on the territory of Glubokoye district, which took place during the period of the Great Patriotic War, was replaced with a new wave of the church attack in the '50-60s.

With the rise of Nikita Khrushchev's power who was the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU the situation in the religious environment got sharply aggravated. The party leaders started raising the alarm about the influence of church on the population. It was significant that, in the Decrees of the CPSU Central Committee "On Major Shortcomings in Scientific-Atheistic Propaganda and on Measures to Improve It" and "On Errors in the Conduct of Scientific-Atheistic Propaganda among the Population", which had been adopted back in 1954, aimed at the strengthening and activation of atheistic propaganda and anti-religious actions. In the last above-mentioned decrees not only "facts of abuse of authority and insulting of believers' and clergy's feelings from the direction of individual local workers" were noted, but it also contained the requirement for the party organizations to strengthen the ideological struggle against religious views, the necessity of "work-people's education in the spirit of militant materialism" was emphasized as well [2, p.447].

But the Decree of the CPSU Central Committee of October 4, 1958 "Report by the Agitation and Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the CPSU for Union Republics on Shortcomings in Scientific-Atheistic Propaganda" turned out to be the worst. The party, public organizations and government organs were ordered to launch a total attack on "religious remnants".

It's clear that the surge of the anti-religious campaign started with cloisters. They remained powerful centers of spiritual life, pilgrimage places and sources of faith. In accordance with the Central Committee guidelines and Nikita Khrushchev the Council of Ministers adopted the anti-church decrees "on monasteries in the USSR" and on "taxation of diocesan administrations, as well as incomes of monasteries" on October 16, 1958. From now on, they were forbidden to use wage labor, it was called for the decrease of land-taxes and reduction of the number of cloisters. The building tax and ground-rent, which had been abolished in 1945, were reapplied [3].

On January 28, 1958 the Central Committee of the CPSU adopted the ruling "On Measures to End the Pilgrimage to the So-Called "Holy Places". The District Committees got the guidelines to take the holy places into account and occupy these territories with different kinds of buildings, and to pour diesel fuel over the springs or to fill them up with bleaching powder.

Since 1958 there had been the widespread closure of churches. As a rule, it was forbidden to do maintenance work; then a church building was declared to be in an emergency condition or unfit to use; and it was required to close and demolish it. It is known from the letter of Vitebsk Regional Executive Committee to the Representative of the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church under the Council of Ministers of the USSR Comrade

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A. Kladov (Vitebsk) that 7 churches were closed instead of 6 in 1962. Except listed in the letter, the registered church in the town of Dokshitsy was also closed, according to the Council Meeting Minutes of February 23, 1960 №2, sent on March 3, 1960 of №37. Thus, as of January 1, 1962 65 churches remained active in the region [4].

There is information about the widespread closure of churches in the given period of time in one more note of Vitebsk region "On the Use of the Religious Buildings in Vitebsk Region, Deregistered, Functioning in 1945 – 1979". "In Vitebsk region 47 Orthodox, 25 Catholic and 3 Old Believer active churches were deregistered over 1945 – 1979. All of them were closed due to the fact that the religious societies had ceased their work. The buildings were handed over to the District committees, and the objects of worship were placed in the neighboring active Orthodox and Catholic churches. Currently, no active deregistered Orthodox or Catholic church has religious property.

Out of 75 active removed from a register religious buildings 6 of them were converted to clubs, 2 – to dwellings, 26 – to storehouses, 2 – to gyms, 1 – to an art workshop, 6 wooden buildings were moved to the new places, where clubs and schools are located, and 13 of them were demolished because of disrepair. The buildings of the former 13 Orthodox, 5 Catholic and 1 Old Believer churches are not used because of the accident rate" [5].

The Church of the Transfiguration was closed in the village of Mamai of the Glubokoye district. Its divine service was renewed only in 1992. In 1961 the Church of the Transfiguration was closed in the village of Verkhneye, and the church room was converted to the storehouse. In 1989 the Church of the Transfiguration of the Savior was handed over to believers, and its divine service was renewed. The top of this barbarism was the destruction of the church in the village of Berezvechye of Glubokoe district, one of the most perfect architectural works of Vilna baroque [6].

The archival documents of the given period of time clearly represent the hardball of the party leadership aimed at the strengthening of the struggle against religion and the control over the clergy's actions. The Executive Committee of the Vitebsk Regional (Rural) Council of Workers' Deputies examined the application of the Glubokoye and Orsha District Executive Committees "On the Deregistration of the Religious Society at Popovshchina Farm of the Glubokoye District and on the Removal of the Prayer Building from the Religious Society in the Village of Baran of Orsha District". On August 17, 1963 the decision №371 was adopted in order to remove from a register the religious society and the church at Popovshchina Farm of Glubokoye District. In addition it was stated in the decision to hand the church building over to "For the Motherland" Collective Farm for the reequipment and use as a club. It was also stated to deregister the church in the village of Baran of Orsha District and hand the church building over to "Avangard" Collective Farm for the reequipment and use as a club, and to leave the society of believers the right to rent another room for prayer purposes [7].

The increasingly strict requirements started to be applied to the clergy. The active ones were deregistered or threatened with the application of article 139 of the BSSR Criminal Code of 1960, which provided for "a punishment of up to one year of correctional labor or fine of 50 rubles for infringing laws regarding the separation of church from State". The punishment was applied for non-payment of debts, for holding a service in the open air or in cemeteries, for participating in funeral processions, house blessing, baptizing children or reading the burial service over the deceased at home. In 1964 only in the Vitebsk region 4 priests, 1 deacon and 4 presidents of the Councils of Churches were deregistered [8, p. 207].

Strict control was established over the activities of churches and priests: "...Along with some strengthening of control over the activities of the clergy, control on the activities of churches began to be established too..." The Secretary of the Plisa District Party Committee in his letter: "The Plisa District Committee of the Communist Party of Belarus informs that in the district, in order to study the activities of churches more fully, monitoring over their service during the major religious holidays was organized. For this purpose 1-2 people from the number of the party assets were assigned to each church. In 1962 two observations were organized: on January 7 (Christmas) and on April 29 (Easter)" [8, p. 178-179].

Significant changes occurred in the status and organization of the parishes. Management of the parishes was transferred to the Executive committees, which had to solve all financial and housekeeping issues. Thus, the priests were deprived of all their power and turned from the parish leaders into the hired employees, who could be fired or removed from service in case of the parishioners' discontent with the execution of priestly functions. So, the Report of the Commissioner of the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church of Vitebsk region A. Kladov had the following information: "The President of Plisa District Executive Committee sent a letter, which informed that the priest of the Bloshniki church had arranged money collecting at believers' homes allegedly in order to pay church taxes, and also that the income accounting book, registration book of occasional religious rites and the keys to the church were at the priest's. I called the priest and the Church Council on this issue. I raised the question of this priest's expulsion out of the staff" [8, p. 178].

The authorities intended to take tough measures even against believing parents. At the XIV Congress of the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League (April 1962) the state declared to them that "freedom of conscience doesn't extend to children, and no parent has a right to cripple their child spiritually". And the main organ of the USSR lawyers brought the legal basis for these treats: the state could deprive parents of custodial rights because they were granted by the state itself [3].

On the basis of the above-mentioned decrees the Party Committees of all levels were developing measures for their realization. They provided for the specific directions and forms of work to strengthen *scientific-atheistic propaganda*. Meetings and seminars were being held, the composition of the lecturer groups and lecture topics were being updated. At the Bureau meetings of the Regional Committees, City Committees and District Party Committees the reports of the work on the implementation of the planned measures were being heard. It should be mentioned that until the end of the 1950s the main attention was focused on the atheistic orientation in the ideological and educational work. On September 6, 1963 the Executive Committee of the Vitebsk Regional (Rural) Council of Workers' Deputies adopted the decision №407 "On Measures to Strengthen Control over the Implementation of the Cult Legislation and to Improve the Scientific-Atheistic Work among the Population". The issue on the strengthening of control over the implementation of the cult legislation was examined in the given decision [9].

At the same time, despite the lively work of the party organs in the sphere of antireligious struggle, the insufficiency and formalism in the conducting of the antireligious work were noted in these documents. The condition of *scientific-atheistic propaganda* wasn't valued at the results of the impact, but at the number of lectures, which had been given, and they didn't always reach the category of citizens, which they were meant for. The Communists and Komsomols took part in religious rites. Moreover, as the Commissioner of the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church of the Vitebsk region under the Council of Ministers of the USSR noted, in the majority of the City Committees and District Party Committees the decision of the Vitebsk Regional Committee of the Communist Party of Belarus hadn't been implemented, and the actions to execute the resolution of the Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Belarus "On Measures to Eliminate the Clergy's Violations of the Soviet Cult Legislation" hadn't been developed. It is also noteworthy that the criticism towards the party organs was related to the fact that they hadn't been conducting the proper work on the selection of the members of the Church Councils (in order that they would not fall under the influence of the clergy and would inform the local authorities about priests' actions violating the cult legislation). It was marked as a shortcoming in the work of the Party Committees that they hadn't been using the opportunity to identify the Communists' participation in rites through the registration information of them [8, p. 184, 212].

On November 10, 1964, that is a month after Khrushchev's resignation, the Central Committee of the CPSU adopted a resolution "On Errors in the Conduct of Scientific-Atheistic Propaganda among the Population", which condemned the actions accompanied by the insult of believers' feelings.

The given policy continued almost until the very end of the Soviet regime, only in the 1970s – 1980s the authorities were acting more carefully, "semi-conspiratorially", didn't make public the appropriate decisions of the Central Committee of the CPSU, so as not to provoke protests in the West and inside the country. In the territory of the Glubokoye District the anti-church campaign of 1958 – 1964 left an indelible mark both on the religious buildings and in the believers' hearts.

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