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Realization of the State Religious Policy of the Krasnoyarsk Kray in 1954-1964 (on the Example of the Russian Orthodox Church)

Maria V. Redko*

*The Krasnoyarsk State Agrarian University
90 Mira, Krasnoyarsk, 660049 Russia ¹*

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In this paper we deal with the problem of soviet antireligious policy in 1954-1964. Author investigates methods of religious persecutions realization on the example of the Krasnoyarsk kray. The question of influence of the governmental authorities on daily life of the orthodox parishes is also described in the article.

Keywords: The history of religion of XX century, The Russian Orthodox Church, Church and state, the Krasnoyarsk kray.

Point

Times of N. S. Khrushchev went down in the Russian history as a period of «Thaw», years of certain liberalization and democratization of the regime. But in the history of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), the period from 1954-1964 was marked by a new wave of religious persecutions. «Khrushchev's» antireligious campaign was researched in detail by the modern historical science. Here, we can recall the works of A. Gorbatov, I. Maslova, M. Odintsov, D. Pospelovsky, M. Shkarovsky and other historians (Gorbatov, 2008; Maslova, 2001; Odintsov, 1994; Pospelovsky, 1995, Shkarovsky, 2005).

All the researchers stated what the campaign of 1954-1964, which was accompanied by a strong propagandistic pressure, was sought to reduce all the sides of the religious life, to lessening

the quantity of active parishes, to decrease the number of church people and religious rites, being performed, to abolish the church rights and liberties in all possible ways.

This policy was perceptible not only in European Russia, but in regions too. Though, its realization in the country had important distinction in comparison with the Union level. It was rather obvious on the example of the Krasnoyarsk kray, where the efficiency of governmental activity significantly differed from the Union situation.

Example

There were 17 orthodox churches in the Krasnoyarsk kray in the middle of 1950-s: 10 – in towns and 7 – in country. 35 priests served in the Krasnoyarsk's parishes. Thereat, most of them were very old men – 50 years and older.

* Corresponding author E-mail address: story@kgau.ru

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Usually the beginning of the Khrushchev's religious persecutions is connected with July of 1954, when the decree «On the serious shortcomings of the scientific-atheistic propaganda and measures of its improvement» was passed in the plenary session. In this document they reviewed and condemned the previous religious policy: the party leaders suggested returning to the prewar policy of «attack against religious survivals» (Shkarovskiy, 2005: 349-350). The local authorities supported the central government activity. In August, 1954 the Krasnoyarsk's territorial office of CPSU committee passed a resolution «On the intensification of the scientific atheism propaganda among the region population». In the course of the discussion local communists noted that «party organizations had weakened, and in some cases even fully stopped the antireligious propaganda and the struggle against religious survival among some parts of the population» (Grigorenko, 2003: 167).

The activity followed the words, but it should be noted that the campaign of 1954 had hardly had any impact on the Russian Orthodox Church functioning in the USSR and in the krai. Some researchers underline that the period from 1955-1957 became the most favourable time for the Russian Orthodox Church after 1947 (Gorbatov, 2008; Shkarovskiy, 2005). For example, the Nicolskaya church revenues did not decline in 1950-1956: vice versa, it increased from 12 938 rubles in 1950 to 17 532 rubles in 1956.¹ The statistical data show a steady rise of the number of performed religious rites. In 1954, 2 031 people were baptized in the Krasnoyarsk's churches, and in 1955-2 598 people. The wedding ceremony quantity rose too (Grigorenko, 2003).

It seemed more logical to date the beginning of Khrushchev's antireligious campaign by a

later period, and precisely by 1957-1958. In the Krasnoyarsk krai this campaign was conducted by several methods, but the method of administrative pressure and the method of financial control over the church profits were the most effective.

In November of 1958 the Council of Ministers of the USSR passed a resolution «On the tax load of diocesan government enterprises' profits as well as monasteries' profits». In this document the candles price in candle workshops was increased almost twentyfold, but it was banned to increase candles price in the temples. Of course, the income tax grew too. All it considerably worsened the financial position of the orthodox parishes. When the resolution came into effect, the candles profit only in the Krasnoyarsk Pokrovskaya church dropped from 84 857 rubles in 1957 to 76 684 rubles in 1959, i.e. by 9.6 %. The aggregate profit of ROC in the Krasnoyarsk krai decreased from 384 953 to 340 804 rubles at this period.²

If we speak about the administrative pressure we should recognize as successful were the actions of the local authorities in the orthodox temples number reduction. During 1958-1964 five of sixteen functioning parishes were closed. Moreover, the authorities tried to make outward manifestation of the orthodox churches religious activity less visible. In March 1961, in the meeting of the CPSU CC, they developed an instruction concerning the religious law application. According to this document religious societies were prohibited to organize children, female, prayerful, theological and other meetings, to organize pilgrimages, excursions, and to arrange libraries, to provide charitable and medicinal help. The clergy was deprived of the right to go to the neighbouring settlements, to serve occasional religious rites in citizens' homes, and from time to time just to visit laypeople's houses.

¹ KKAAA. F.R. 2384, inventory 1, file 67, p. 48. All the sums are given in respect to the currency reforms in 1947 and 1961.

² KKAAA. F.R. 2384, inventory 1, file 67, p. 42, 48, 49, 58, 59, 64

As a peculiar local manifestation of this policy we can recall activities of the Krasnoyarsk authorities concerning the removal of the parochial communes from the buildings in the center of the city to the churches in the skirts. For example, in 1958-1964, the church buildings of the Krasnoyarsk Pokrovskaya Church and the Kansk Spasskiy cathedral (which had been right in the centres of big cities) were confiscated and passed to the possession of the local authorities. The local authorities ordered the church people and the priests to move public worship in the temples at the cemeteries. Thereat, the parish of the Troizkaya church had a separate building at the urban cemetery to use, while the church members of the Spasskiy cathedral had to build a new temple on their own means. Similar attempts were undertaken in respect of the Minusinsk Spasskiy cathedral and the Yeniseisk Uspenskaya church (Gorbatov, 2008; Firsankova, 2006; Fast, 1994). It would not be a mistake to assert that in this period the orthodox society was not the only object of religious persecutions, but church buildings were as well. On one hand, standing right in the center of the city, a temple accused just by its look the regional authorities of their «fault» in the ideological field. On the other hand, there is no denying that a beautiful and a well-attended church, situated in a popular place, attracted an attention and a wish to come in even of irreligious and indifferent people.

This conclusion is indirectly proved by such a fact: in March, 1961, the Krasnoyarsk Pokrovskaya Church parish was confiscated the St. Paraskeva Pjatniza chapel and its building was passed to the municipal department of culture. This stone building was constructed in 1805 on the Karaulnaya hill, and that is why it has the best overview over the city centre. According to the documents of the Troizkiy parish executing agency (ex-parish of the Pokrovskaya church) the church itself refused from the chapel, because it

had not used it, but had used to pay extra taxes for it in the amount of 36 rubles annually. But if one takes into account that only in 1961 the Troizkiy parish spent 28 756 rubles to upkeep the priests, then the official version raises doubts.¹

In 1958-1964, on the territory of the Krasnoyarsk kray, the number of destroying and inoperative temples increased dramatically. As a rule, they were churches being empty for a long time. From our point of view, coming out with an initiative of temples destruction, the local authorities pursued not only a practical objective, but the goal to join the all-USSR antireligious campaign too.² Thus, for example, in 1958, when there was raised a question of the Krasnoyarsk Voskresenskiy cathedral restoration, the executive committee of the Town Council preferred to demolish the temple. The church building, which had been constructed in 1795, was announced to be not valuable as a «historic architectural monument» – and all this in spite of all the protests of the local intelligentsia.³

And meanwhile, the antireligious campaign gained momentum. In 1962, rigid control over the church rituals serving was put into operation. Now, the information about occasional religious rites was put down in special books containing names, addresses, and passport data of all the participants of the ceremony. This innovation adversely affected the «official» church life of the Krasnoyarsk kray in a most radical way. The number of served and registered church rites decreased dramatically: the number of christening went down from 9 098 in 1958 to 3 887 in 1964, the number of wedding ceremonies – from 98 to 41 respectively. The church attendance in high religious holidays reduced too. In 1962, at

¹ KKAAA. F.R. 2244, inventory 1, file 78, p. 28; F.R. 2384, inventory 1, file 67, p. 55.

² KKAAA. F.R. 2384, inventory 1, file 90, p. 8, 12, 14, 17, 20-21, 26-30.

³ KKAAA. F.R. 2244, inventory 1, file 14, p. 19-27, 77-78, 106-107, 193; file 78, p. 28

Eastertide two Krasnoyarsk churches were visited by 2 400, but in 1964 at Eastertide this number was twice fewer, down to 1 100 people.¹

Thus the Russian Orthodox Church suffered great losses in the course of the Khrushchev's religious persecutions. But religious life of the Krasnoyarsk kray didn't die down. Notwithstanding a certain decrease in 1959-1960, the church revenues remained steady: in the kray they made up 327 583 rubles in 1960, and 383 997 rubles in 1965. To a large extent, it depended on the growth of the revenues from the served church rituals: they brought 52 639 rubles in 1962 and 78 321 rubles in 1964. In comparison with the orthodox society of European Russia, the Krasnoyarsk churches didn't cut down the living expenses for clergy, choristers and church workers.²

Change of the registered rituals number didn't make it possible to judge concerning the reduction of the church organism. In this regard, burial service statistical data are more illustrative. Since 1961 to 1964 the number of last rites in Krasnoyarsk churches didn't decrease, but increased from 3 899 to 6 564.³ In addition, some priest held unrecorded, «clandestine» rites along with the registered ones. Even official bodies admitted that the number of christenings was more than it was registered, because rites were often served at home.⁴

It's possible to call a few reasons of the soviet antireligious policy failure in the Krasnoyarsk kray. On one hand, we can connect this situation with the number of churches: there were 15 orthodox parishes for 2 615 thousand inhabitants of the Krasnoyarsk kray in 1959 (Malinin and Ushakov, 1976: 16). On the territory of Siberia, the orthodox churches «were more economically

protected and less dependent on fluctuations of the economic conjuncture, because they possessed larger financial facilities than European parishes» (Gorbatov and Chudnov, 2004: 140).

Moreover, following L. Soskovets, we are to admit a rather strong activity of the church people in their self-assertion (Soskovets, 2003). In the middle of 1940-s, soviet government assumed a comparatively tolerant position in respect of religion which brought to some legitimization of the Orthodox Church in the public conscience. Therefore, ROC destruction was interpreted by the church people as a violation of their rights. From that time, church members took an active part in the conflicts with the local party and the soviet authorities and sometimes they even achieved some reduction of «the antireligious struggle intensity». For example, at the beginning of 1960-s, church members of the Yeniseisk Uspenskaya church addressed to «Moscow» in their appeal against the local authorities. The complaint was obviously heard, as far as the church council had to listen to a lot of reproaches of the town administration on the occasion. «But since then, the actions of the local authorities in respect of the church people were mitigated (Fast, 1994: 105).

Resume

On the example of Krasnoyarsk churches we can see that in spite of the intensity of the antireligious campaign of 1958-1964, it didn't yield the expected result. Seeming reduction of the church incomes and decrease of the number of registered occasional religious rites didn't bring to curtailment of the religious life. On the contrary, it continued and moved into the «clandestine» sphere, which was uncontrollable for the state. So, it's not surprising that after N. S. Khrushchev's resignation, the powers rejected from the policy of tough confrontation with ROC and set a course for watering-down of the religious policy.

¹ KKAAA. F.R. 2384, inventory 1, file 67, p. 45, 48, 66, 67, 73, 78.

² KKAAA. F.R. 2384, inventory 1, file 67, p. 48, 55-57.

³ KKAAA. F.R. 2384, inventory 1, file 67, p. 69.

⁴ KKAAA. F.R. 2384, inventory 1, file 121, p. 2.

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Abbreviations

ККААА – the Krasnoyarsk kray Archival Agency Administration

СРСУ СС – the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union

РОС – the Russian Orthodox Church

СССР – the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

Реализация государственной религиозной политики 1954-1964 гг. в Красноярском крае (на примере Русской православной церкви)

М.В. Редько

*Красноярский государственный аграрный университет
Россия 660049, Красноярск, пр. Мира, 90*

Статья посвящена проблеме осуществления советской антирелигиозной политики в годы правления Н. С. Хрущева. На краевом материале разбираются вопросы влияния государственной власти на повседневную жизнь православных приходов.

Ключевые слова: История религии в XX веке, Русская православная церковь, церковь и государство, Красноярский край.
