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Transformation of the Orthodox Religiosity in the 1920s–1990s in the Komi Republic

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This article analyses the influence of Soviet religious politics on society's attitude to religion, as well as on the transformation of religious practices taking as an example the Komi Republic. I focus on the Orthodox tradition,[1] as the vast majority of residents of the Komi Republic were Orthodox (Russian Orthodox Church, Old Believers). The article starts with a brief review of theoretical approaches to the study of the religious transformations during the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. The churches' closing in the 1920s – 1930s and their partial reopening in the 1940s – 1950s are used to discuss changes in the manifestation of religiosity in public space. A correlation between gender, age and religious activity is demonstrated. The total control by the state over the church rituals led to a privatization of religious life, which significantly limited both the state and the church control over them. The article also describes how folk religious practices, unrelated to the church, influenced the believers' resistance and adaptation to the political and ideological changes.

Keywords: religious practice, Soviet, post-Soviet, the Komi Republic, the Russian Orthodox Church, Old Believers, baptism

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1 In this article term the Orthodox includes adherents of the Russian Orthodox Church and Old Believers.

INTRODUCTION

Discussions about the place of religion in societies, the relation between the secular and the modern, and approaches to the interpretation of religion are an important part of the contemporary scientific discourse. The USSR and, later, the Russian Federation and other former Soviet Republics have been in the focus of researchers' interest initially as examples of thoroughly secular, if not atheist societies and later as ones where the resurgence of religion had occurred. Today studying of the Soviet and post-Soviet religious situations has its own history: historians and anthropologists have been paying great attention to different aspects of the Soviet state anti-religious policy, to the history and role of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), to the life and religious practices of believers under the Soviet regime and after its fall. The enforcement of the Soviet religious policy on the local level has been one of the main objects of historical research: scientists from the universities and science centres of the European North of Russia did a lot of work in this direction (Grashevskaia, 2005; Molodov, 2006; Bardileva, 2015).[2]

Recent historical and anthropological debate on the Soviet and post-Soviet relations between the state and the religion as well as the peculiarities of religiosity in these periods are conducted within the framework of secularization / de-secularization theory as building and rebuilding of the boundaries between the sacred and the secular (Asad, 2003). Scholars generally agree that the result of the anti-religious policy of the Soviet state was not declining of religiosity but rather a 'domestication' or privatization of the religious life. The term 'domestication' in this context was first used by Tamara Dragadze to explain changes in religious practices during the Soviet period: when churches were destroyed and professional practitioners (priests) were absent, laypeople took control over religious activities and carried out rituals in their homes (Dragadze, 1993: 150–152). One of the results of this domestication was a reduction in knowledge of the Christian doctrine, and a re-interpretation of the church teaching by laity (Dobson, 2015: 91–96; Kormina, 2006: 142). The institutional weakening of the religion has led to significant changes in the mechanism responsible for producing religious authority (Panchenko, 2006: 229–230). On the level of local communities, a reorganisation of religious practices and a rise of new informal social networks managed by local religious leaders have been observed (Panchenko, 2012a).

Since the early 2000s, researchers have been paying increasing attention to the phenomenon of post-Soviet 'religious revival' and to mechanisms responsible for forming and presenting religious identity. Some authors argue that "the empty space left by atheism began to be filled with a different religious alternative" (Siikala, Ulyashev, 2011: 314). Others believe that the turn towards religion has emerged as a strategy of social adaptation, an attempt to overcome the anomie that had developed after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Ipatova, 2008: 415). Zh. Kormina and S. Shtyrkov call into question the previous explanations of the growth of religiosity in the post-Soviet space, they suggest that the religious revival was made possible by the "long

2 For example, Victoria Smolkin reviewed and analysed the European and US Soviet studies devoted to the history of religion and atheism in her book (Smolkin, 2018: 6–9); S. L. Firsov reviewed the main publications (which he selected himself) of Russian historians discussing mainly the fate of the Russian Orthodox Church during the Soviet period (Firsov, 2014: 424–471). Each PhD (candidate) thesis in Russia also contains detailed review and analysis of the published literature.

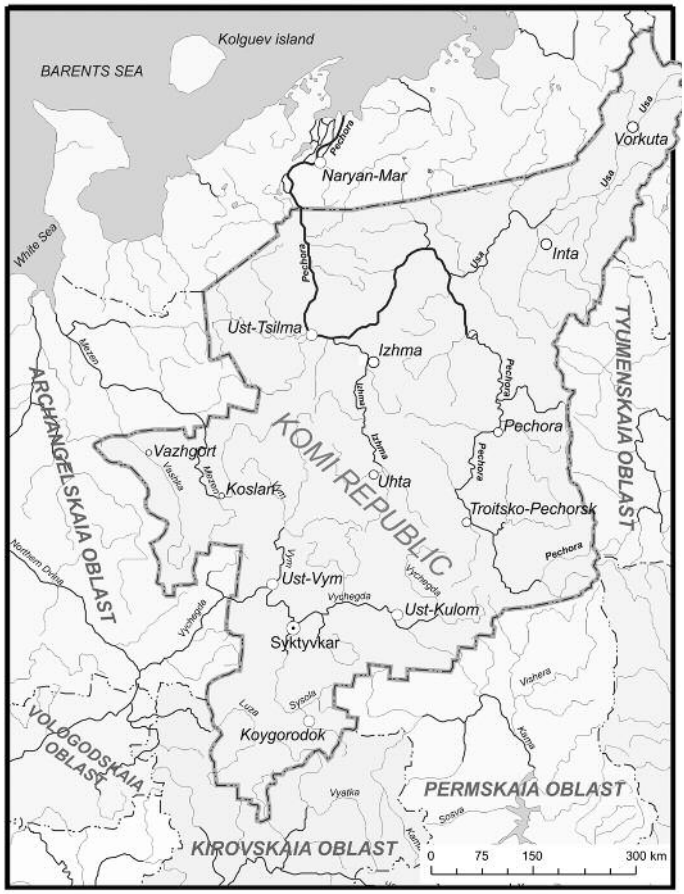
process of legalizing religion in Soviet times through its localization in the sphere of 'culture' " (Kormina, Shtyrkov, 2015: 9). They argue that since the middle of the 1950s, a positive image of religion was introduced into the public space through its 'recoding' into the categories of museum and cultural heritage, and national spiritual memory. The authors' assumption about the religion's 'recoding' has many parallels with the studies in the field of religious identity and its transformations.

In the field of anthropology, the dominant approach to the religious identity in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia is generally based on the constructivist theory, with a special focus on the past (the historical perspective).[3] Sociologists and ethnographers demonstrate how religious identity is constructed through religious institutions, practices and everyday behaviour; they discuss what counts as membership, active or otherwise; analyse changes that occurred under the influence of the social and/or political context. Religious identity, especially the problem of how to measure religiosity and identify believers, traditionally enjoyed special attention in sociological and ethnographic studies of Russian scientists (Dobson, 2015: 88). In the post-Soviet researches of religiosity, the discrepancy between the numbers of those who consider themselves believers and those who actually practice their religious beliefs is always stressed (Filatov, Lunkin, 2005; Ipatova, 2008: 419; Sinelina, 2013). It has been suggested that the religious identity in contemporary Russia is acquiring features of the cultural one (especially among Russian Orthodox), which means that the Orthodox self-identification is based not on the confession of faith, but on the recognition of the Orthodoxy as a cultural tradition that has historical roots in the country (Ryzhova, 2006: 145; Ipatova, 2006: 171). Olga Kazmina suggests that in Russia, faith is deeply incorporated into the ethnic culture, traditions, and historical memory. Using the example of censuses, she tries to demonstrate the role the state played in promoting the interconnection between religion and ethnicity before and after 1917 (Kazmina, 2009: 95–111; Kazmina, 2019). Catharine Wanner argues that this interconnection between religious identity and ethnicity was caused by the 'fetishisation of ethnicity' in the Soviet Union (Wanner, 2012: 471).

During the 20th century, the religiosity evolved and changed in complex ways. The impact of the Soviet and post-Soviet state religious policy on the society's attitude towards religion as well as the transformation of religious institutes and practices caused by this policy is difficult to overestimate. The study of these changes is very important for understanding religious processes in contemporary Russia, derived largely from the Soviet experience. In this article I analyse changes in the Orthodox tradition that have taken place during Soviet and early post-Soviet period in the Komi Republic, European Russia's north-east provincial region. I must note that during the Soviet period the economic, social and demographic situation in the Republic changed a lot, but the Orthodox was and still is the largest denomination in this region (*Arena*, 2012: 182). The focus of this research will be on the activities of believers (laypeople), their reaction to the concrete actions of the Soviet authorities, and I also look at how folk religious practices influenced resistance and adaptation to Soviet ideological change.

The article is based on archive materials, ethnographic scientific reports of the 1960s – 1970s, and field materials of the author. Also archival documents of Soviet and Communist

3 Some scientists emphasize direct and immediate connection between ethnicity and religion in primordialist manner. "For many centuries the Russian Orthodoxy formed the basis of the culture; during that time it has become the part of Russian self-conciseness" (Iurenko, 2010: 26).



Map of the Komi Republic, author: V. Karmanov.

party organizations of various levels held in the National Archive of the Komi Republic were used. In the Komi Regional Committee of the CPSU fund there are minutes of the meetings, informational reports from OGPU (Joint State Political Directorate), and different district Committees that contain information about activities of believers. The Komi Regional Executive Committee fund contains materials on the churches closing in the 1920s – 1940s: letters from the clergy and laypeople, minutes of the meetings from different villages. In fund of the Commissioner of the Council on the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church (from 1965 – Council for Religious Affairs) under the Council of Ministers of the Komi ASSR annual reports to the council on religious life in the Republic such as statistic data on religious rites and income of the churches (number of baptisms, confessions, dirges, sold tapers, crosses, etc.), letters from the believers, registration documents for cult buildings, and religious organizations accumulated.

Scientific reports on the results of ethnographic expeditions held in the 1950s and 70s also contain information about the religiosity in the Komi ASSR. In the late 1950s, the fight against religious remnants (religious survivals) and the atheist propaganda became one of the important components of the Soviet state ideology and, to a large extent, a stimulus for the development of sociological and ethnographic research in the field of religion. For Soviet scholars, it was important to explain why religious remnants

had survived in order to contribute to overcoming them. The idea that the ethnographic study of religiosity was necessary for successful anti-religious work was first formulated in the 1930s and reproduced anew in the 1950s–1980s.[4] Books and articles based on the ethnographic and sociological data and focusing on the religious situation in different parts of the country were published regularly. In the 1960s, in line with the state's political trends, the historical-ethnographic studies of religion developed into a new research direction at the Department of History and Ethnography of the Komi branch of the USSR Academy of Sciences. This research direction was led by Iurii Vasil'evich Gagarin, who in 1966 defended his thesis 'Religious survivals in the Komi ASSR and ways to overcome them'. The research utilizing the 'scientific atheist' theory continued till the late 1980s (Gagarin, 1971; Gagarin, 1978; Kotov, Rogachev, 1984; Rogachev, 1986). Scientific reports on the religious situation in the Komi ASSR and the neighbouring areas (Arkhangelsk, Perm, Kirov provinces) include the processed results of opinion polls, fragments of conversations with informants, descriptions of rituals and photos.

Dealing with archive documents the ideological and institutional framework within which authors collected, interpreted and communicated information must be taken into account. Ego-documents and field data make it possible to characterize religious practices that existed during the Soviet period from the position of the believers. Of particular interest are the "Day Notes" ("Dnevnye zapiski") of Ivan Rassykhaev, a Komi peasant from the village of Ust'-Kulom. These diary entries were made from 1902 till 1953. Being a deeply religious person I. Rassykhayev has filled the pages of his diary with descriptions of his participation in the life of the local religious community and his worries and feelings about the changing attitude towards the Church and religion (*Dnevnye zapiski*, 2013).

In this paper I also use the data collected during my own fieldwork in different rural areas of the Komi Republic, inhabited mainly by Komi-Zyryan, performed since 1999. During these trips I collected folklore and ethnographic material with special attention to the religious practice of Komi Old Believers and adherents of ROC. Empirical material was gathered by conducting interviews (with religious leaders of local communities and with ordinary believers), during informal conversations.

Before 1917, religious confession was a decisive factor determining personal rights and obligations. Every person had to affiliate him or herself with a particular denomination (Kazmina, 2019: 199). Despite the socio-economic changes caused by modernization, the Orthodox still played a significant role in the public and private lives of the population of the Russian Empire. The Komi were converted to Russian Orthodoxy by the end of the 14th century. Over the centuries Orthodox Christianity became an integrated part of the worldview and everyday life of the Komi (Leete, Koosa, 2012: 174). At the end of the 19th century, according to the data of the general census of the population of the Russian Empire 1897, from 93 up to 97.3% of population of Komi krai[5] were adherents of ROC and from 0,56 up to 2.6% (in different districts)

4 In 1931 N. M. Matorin wrote: "Ethnographic work played a significant role in formulating correctly the anti-religious propaganda in the outlandish Russian' village and in areas occupied by ethnic minorities" (Matorin, 1931: 2). The same thesis can be found in ethnographers' work of the 1950s. 'The old religious ideology continues to exert a certain influence on some part of the collective farm peasantry… a thorough study of these aspects of everyday life should provide substantial assistance to the Communist party organizations and Soviet institutions in their work on the cultural transformation of the countryside" (*Selo*, 1958: 233).

5 Term 'Komi krai' is used by the historians to mark the area that were to make up the Komi Republic,

were Old Believers (Vishniakova, 2012: 50, 54, 57). The Old Belief was most prevalent in three areas inhabited by the Komi: in Udora (middle reaches of the river Vashka; Vazhgortskaia volost'); on the upper reaches of the river Vychegda (Kerchomskaia volost'), and on the upper Pechora (Pechorskaia and Savinoborskaia volost's). The centre of Russian Old Believers was Ust'-Tsil'mskaja volost'. In these districts the percentage of Old Believers was much bigger (Vlasova, 2010: 21–22; Dronova, 2019: 49). There are many problems with statistic data on that group: Old Believers themselves hid their confessional belonging, representatives of the ROC and secular authorities used different criteria that determined belonging to the denomination; parish priests reported about low number of Old Believers in order to avoid punishment from the ROC authorities (Vishniakova, 2012: 53; Vlasova, 2010: 18–19).

RELIGIOSITY IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE: CLOSING AND REOPENING OF THE CHURCHES

The decree "On Separating the Church from the State and the School from the Church" (January 23, 1918) deprived religious organizations of their status as juridical entities, of any property rights, and removed the Church from government and education. No longer allowed to own property, parishes now had to lease church buildings from the state, which enabled the Soviet authorities to control the activities of religious communities. In the 1920s – 1940s, one of the directions of the Soviet anti-religious policy was the campaign for closing churches (Shkarovskii, 1999: 88–92). In 1917, in the areas that were to make up the Komi Autonomous Region, there were 177 Orthodox churches, 235 chapels, three monasteries (Zherebtsov, Rogachev, 2004: 173). By 1930, their number was significantly reduced: only 131 churches still existed, 84 of them had priests, 19 were closed, and there were no priests in 18.[6]

In the mid-1920s and early 1930s party and state leaders publicly criticized local officials for applying administrative pressure in resolving religious issues, which did not prevent the latter from actively using these methods. In 1924, Komi Provincial Executive Committee (OBIK) decided to close St. Stephen's Cathedral in Ust'-Sysolsk, the main temple of the area. Initially, a significant part of the inhabitants of the town and the nearest settlements spoke out against the removal of the cathedral ("the dark mass of believers opposed"). The most active opponents of the cathedral seizure ("a small group of counter-revolutionaries clergy") were arrested. These arrests made a proper impression on the believers, since, within six months after the closure of the temple, there were no mass protests. At this time, a group of believers sent a statement about the violation of the law to the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee, which issued a resolution to cancel the decision of the OBIK.[7] Despite the resistance of local executive authorities, the cathedral was returned to believers.

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that include Ust'-Sysol'skii uezd and part of the Yarenskii uezd of the Vologodskaya governorate and eastern part of the Mezenskii uezd (from 1891 – Pechorskii) of the Arkhagelskaya governorate, inhabited mainly by Komi-Zyryan (Vishniakova, 2012: 4).

6 National Archive of the Komi Republic (Natsional'nyi arkhiv Respubliki Komi, further NARK), fund (f.) The Komi Republic Committee of the Communist Party (further P.-1), op. 2, d. 832, l. 6. *Information from the lecturer of the Central Council of the League of the Militant Godless, August, 1930.*

7 NARK, f. P-1, op. 1, d. 48, l. 4-7 *Minutes of OBIK bureau meeting, December, 30, 1924.*

In Stalin's article of 1930 and in the resolution of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party that followed it, there were indicated "excesses" in the implementation of religious policies. After this, actions demanding to open churches that were previously closed were held in almost all rural areas of the Komi Region as well as in Syktyvkar, the provincial capital. The number of believers attending churches increased. According to the OGPU, "once made familiar with Stalin's article, the believing masses in the villages quickly created communities, which exceeded half of the votes of the parish strenuously raising the question of returning not only closed churches, but even those chapels, which were occupied and converted to cultural buildings".[8] The instructions "from above" did not lead to significant changes in the local authorities' tactic. The regional party and Soviet officials periodically pointed out errors in the preparation of documents and demanded that the rule of law be respected, but on the local level the situation changed slightly. In 1930 "in the village Myeldin <...> a question about the closure of the church was aired to the public. At the meetings, the question was raised three times, but the results of public voting were negative. Finally, the question was posed as follows: 'Whoever is against the closure of the church, is against the Soviet regime as well, please raise your hands'. Nobody raised a hand for such an offer, but there was general discontent and murmuring".[9]

The minutes of the meetings where decisions were made to seize the church from the community of believers and put it to the disposal of the local administration, for the most part, are all of the same type, and include traditional claims and accusations against the church and clergy (counter-revolutionary activities, the spread of diseases, deceiving people). S. Luehrmann argues that these documents represent "a vision of what public opinion should be, rather than the diversity of views that actually existed" (Luehrmann, 2011: 118). Nevertheless, sometimes they reflect the fears and expectations of believers and people who abandoned religion. Rural activists assured:

> *There will be people among us who would think that, if we take the church, god will send tribulation to people, but take the example of other villages, they have long taken the church away from priests and handed it over to the working people, and god can't send tribulation onto these villages.*[10]

The closure of churches, as well as the removal of crosses and bells, the seizure of church property – all these actions were perceived by believers as a sin, which should

8 *Po oznakomleniiu so stat'ei tov. Stalina, v selakh veruiushchie massy bystro sozdali obshchiny, prevyshaiushchie polovinu golosov prikhoda, usilenno stavia vopros o vozvrashchenii ne tol'ko zakrytykh tserkvei, no dazhe i chasoven ranee zaniatykh i pereoborudovannykh pod kul'tnuzhdy (fakty pochti vo vsekh raionakh)*. NARK, f. P.-1, op. 2, d. 807, l. 56. *Information of the Komi division of OGPU, December, 1930*.

9 *V sele Myldin <…> byl rebrom postavlen vopros pered naseleniem o zakrytii tserkvi. Na otdel'nykh sobraniiakh vopros stavilsia 3 raza, no poluchalis' otritsatel'nye rezul'taty. Nakonets vopros byl postavlen tak: "Kto protiv zakrytiia tserkvi – tot protiv Sovetskoi vlasti, proshu podniat' ruki". Za takoe predlozhenie nikto ne podnial ruku, no bylo obshchee nedovol'stvo i ropot*. NARK, f. P-l, op. 2, d. 804, l. 23. *Information of the Komi division of OGPU, May - June, 1930*.

10 *Naverno, naidutsia sredi nas takie liudi, kotorye budut somnevat'sia, esli vziat' tserkov' bog poshlet skorb' na liudei, no voz'mite primer drugikh sel, oni davno tserkov' otobrali ot popov i peredali v pol'zu trudovogo naroda, i bog na takie sela skorb' ne mozhet naslat'*. NARK, f. The Komi Provincial Executive Committee of Councils (further R-3), op. 1, d. 2240, l. 14ob. *Minutes of meeting of the commune "Vyl olom", January, 1, 1938.*

be punished. The impunity became an argument in the agitation of rural activists. Legends about the destruction of shrines and the punishment of those who committed sacrilege were recorded much later, in the 1990s – 2000s, in almost all regions of Russia. Peasants' expectations of the 1930s, which were formed on the basis of folklore ideas about sin and retribution, partly confirm the assumption that these legends of punishment started to emerge in the 1920s and 1930s; despite the fact that they were not recorded at that time (Moroz, 2014: 194).

Public manifestations of religiosity became markers of a counter-revolutionary, or anti-Soviet position, which allowed the authorities to apply repressive measures. In 1928, the secretary of the regional newspaper Klochkov wrote to an unknown priest: "We live in times like the [first] centuries of Christianity, we have to hide our faith, our belonging to the Church of Christ <...> because of material benefits, because of our official position, and we try not to go to church". The letter was found during a search of the priest's house, and Klochkov was soon removed from his position.[11] Prior to his dismissal a fragment of his letter was published in the regional newspaper; the anonymous author of the note wrote that the Soviet employee Klochkov should know that there is no law that keeps believers from working in Soviet institutions (Todys, 1928: 4). Active participation in the life of religious community, visiting church services could cause social isolation, which deprived the person of his/her livelihood. In the context of the forced conscription to the collective farm, I. Rassykhaev wrote in his diary that in addition to working discipline, he was obliged not to talk about religion, to limit his participation in the life of the church community (not to sing in the choir, not to participate in baptisms and prayers); the collective farm chairman even demanded "never to go to the church" (*Dnevnye zapiski*, 2013: 396).

Despite the repressions, representatives of the clergy and church boards continued to write letters to various authorities about the illegal actions of the local administration and petitions on the need to preserve the church service, "without which the life of a Christian is unthinkable", until the late 1930s. They especially stressed that administrative measures of pressure against believers are contrary to the Soviet law and that the destruction of church buildings could be considered as harm inflicted on "state property".[12] At the same time, part of the population had supported seizures of church buildings, their re-equipping and use for "cultural needs" (as schools, clubs, etc.). Party members, local activists and youth took part in the destruction of churches ("conversion for cultural needs"): they threw down crosses, destroyed iconostases, and removed icons from the temples. Not only that, they organized riots during church services: shot rifles, crushed glass.[13] According to A. A. Panchenko, the actions of the state in the 1920s and 30s undertaken with the aim of transforming mass religiosity represented probably the only case when the authorities received support within the peasant culture itself through village members of the Young Communist League (Komsomol) (Panchenko, 2012b: 9–10).

Between 1930 and 1934, 23 churches in the Komi AO were officially closed and many others did not work despite not being formally closed; between 1935 and 1938, 72 other

11 *Zhivem my vo vremena, podobnye vekam khristianstva, svoiu veru, svoiu prinadlezhnost' k tserkvi khristovoi skryvat' prikhoditsia <...> iz-za material'nykh vygod, iz-za sluzhebnogo polozheniia my staraemsia ne khodit' v khram*. NARK, f. P-1, op. 2, d. 688, l. 108. *Information of the Komi division of OGPU, November – December, 1928.*

12 NARK, f. R-3, op. 1, d. 2129.*Petitions from believers, May, 1932 – January, 1933.*

13 NARK, f. R-3, d. 2162, l. 3-4. *Letter from believers, September, 8, 1934.*

churches were closed and finally 17 churches were closed between 1939 and 1941 (Rogachev, 2005: 17–19). By January, 1941, the Komi ASSR was one of the 25 areas and republics of the RSFSR (Grashevskaia, 2013: 91) where there were no churches. By that time, there were no churches in the Murmansk province either (Bardileva, 2015: 186), while in the Arkhangelsk province there were three active churches in the city of Arkhangelsk, whereas in most rural areas all the churches were closed (Mikhailov, 2005).

In 1943, after more than two decades of antireligious campaigns, the regime attempted to review its policy aimed at destroying the Russian Orthodox Church as a social institution and to engage in a constructive dialog with the Church for the sake of political security and social mobilization during the war (Chumachenko, 1999: 228). In 1944, the first church was reopened in the Komi ASSR; this was the church in the village of Kochpon, in the proximity of the city of Syktyvkar. Between 1946 and 1951, 21 petitions for the opening of churches were submitted by the local believers. All of them were rejected.[14] In 1946, Leonti, the Bishop of Arkhangelsk and Kholmogorsk[15] expressed his concern about the situation in the Komi ASSR. By that time four churches in the Murmansk region and 23 in the Arkhangelsk region were reopened with his assistance.[16] Between 1953 and 1958, 46 new petitions were lodged: two of them were written by residents of the cities of Ukhta and Vorkuta, the rest were from rural areas of the Republic. Only three petitions were satisfied. In 1956, a church in the village of Yb and a prayer house in Aikino village were opened and in 1958, a prayer house in the city of Ukhta started functioning (but closed again in 1961).[17] It must be stressed that the initiators of the petition were older persons, some of them were formerly active parishioners (members of the church board, church elders) and even clergy. In order to emphasize the need to open a church in the Ust'-Kulomskii district, its former priest wrote to one of the members of the initiative group: "Many still have good sparks, but a spark needs to be blown so that it does not go out".[18]

The archival documents indicate that local authorities strongly opposed reopening churches in the Republic. E. V. Chukicheva, an elderly resident of Aikino, spent three years fighting for reopening of the church in her village. She travelled to Moscow and met the Patriarch there, appealed to the central Soviet authorities, and wrote to the Bishop of Arkhangelsk and Kholmogorsk. She also worked hard on collecting signatures on the petition from her fellow villagers and residents of the district, despite the administrative pressure by the district and republican officials.[19] Finally, thanks to the support from the church top leadership, she managed to achieve the opening of the church.

Besides the traditional wording about the need to open a temple in order to "satisfy religious needs", believers of the late 1950s used some other arguments, which could

14 NARK, f. The Commissioner of Council on the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church(from 1965, the Council for Religious Affairs) under the Council of Ministers of the Komi ASSR(furtherR-1451), op. 1, d. 107, l. 12. *Information on activity of ROC, August, 6, 1951.*

15 Arkhangelsk and Kholmogorsk diocese included Murmansk and Arkhangelsk region and, from 1946, also the Komi ASSR.

16 NARK, f. R-1451, op. 1, d. 106, l. 21. *Letter to the Chairman of the Council on the Affairs of the ROC, 1946.*

17 NARK, f. R-1451, op. 1, d. 10, l. 1-4.*The list of petitions of believers for the opening of churches in the Komi ASSR, 1953 – 1958*

18 *U mnogikh eshche sokhranilis' khoroshie iskry, no tol'ko nastoiashchuiu iskru nado podduvat', chtoby ona ne pogasla*. NARK, f. R-1, op. 4, d. 181, l. 44. Special report, July, 20, 1947.

19 NARK, f. R-1451, op. 1, d.3, l. 34 – 36.*Report on the results of verification of the petition of a group of believers from the Aikino village, October, 11, 1955.*

not be found in earlier documents. Instructive in that regard are petitions for the opening of churches in Okvad (1957) and Ust'-Vym villages (1958). Residents of the village of Okvad proposed transferring church services from the prayer house in Aikino to the preserved church in Okvad:

> *The history of the church dates back a thousand years from the moment of its construction, but it has preserved its architectural merits and it can be justifiably considered as one of the oldest Old-Russian churches in the uninhabited North, like the 'Church-Museum' which reminds us about the introduction of the 'Zyryan' to the Russian people's rich culture <...> We, a group of believers, apply to you and ask you to consider the possibility of <...> moving the prayer house from the village of Aikino to the village of Okvad, namely to the Historical Museum Building, the stone 'Church Vvedenskaja'.*[20]

Similar arguments are given in the petition of believers of Ust'-Vym for reopening the church. In this document, the petitioners drew the authorities' attention to the antiquity and the historical significance of the village, where church services have been held since the beginning of the spread of Orthodoxy among Zyryans, and pointed to the good preservation of the church. They wrote:

> *You can't get around the historical significance of the village Ust'-Vym <...> when it was known as the centre of the Komi (Perm) area during the cultural enlightenment and the spread of the Orthodox faith among our distant ancestors <...> This church, in turn, has historical significance, since it was built on the very spot where, according to legend, the idol-sacrificial birch stood.*[21]

Petitions for the opening of churches demonstrate the importance of places of worship for the local oral tradition and historical memory. The legends about construction of church buildings, about historical figures were an integral part of the local history. In the late 1950s, the large number of abandoned church buildings that retained their former appearance was indicated by the Commissioner as one of the reasons for the increase in the number of petitions.[22] By the logic of the local officials' reasoning, the very fact of their existence provoked believers to take active actions and contributed to the preservation of religiosity. Petitions by believers indicate that these assumptions about the influence of the preserved religious buildings on the religious feelings of the inhabitants were not unfounded. At the same time, these petitions

20 *Istoriia tserkvi naschityvaet tysiacheletie s momenta stroitel'stva, no ona sokhranila svoi arkhitekturnye dostoinstva i po pravu mozhet schitat'sia odnim iz drevneishikh starorusskikh tserkvei na neobitaemom Severe, kak tserkov' 'Muzei' dlia vospominaniia priobshcheniia 'Zyrian' k bogatomu po kul'ture russkomu narodu <...> My gruppa veruiushchikh obrashchaemsia k Vam za sovetom o vozmozhnosti <...> peremeshcheniia Aikinskogo molitvennogo zdaniia v d. Okvad v Muzeinoe Istoricheskoe zdanie kamennuiu 'Vvedenskuiu tserkov".* Ibid, l. 41–42. Letter from believers of the village of Okvad, September, 10, 1957.

21 *Nel'zia oboiti nezatronutym po adresu Ust'-Vyma ego istoricheskoi znachimosti <...> kogda on schitalsia tsentrom v tselom Komi (Permskogo) kraia, vo vremia kul'turnogo prosveshcheniia i rasprostraneniia pravoslavnoi very, sredi nashikh otdalennykh predkov <...> Tserkov' eta v svoiu ochered' imeet istoricheskoe znachenie, tak kak ona postroena na tom samom meste, gde po predaniiu, u nashikh dalekikh predkov stoiala idolozhertvennaia bereza.* Ibid, l. 46 – 48. Letter from believers of the village of Ust-Vym, April, 8, 1958.

22 NARK, f. R-1451, op. 1, d. 10, l. 26. *Information on the status and activities of religious groups on the territory of the Komi ASSR, 1959.*

represented an attempt of the believers to build up a communication with the authorities in a language that was understandable and acceptable to Soviet officials. This involved re-coding religious symbols by the means of the Soviet secular language and, therefore, talking about a church as an historical monument and a symbol of the "friendship of people", or as a museum. To some extent, these letters reflect the process of hidden rehabilitation of religion in the Soviet society, which started in the late 1950s. Religion in the form of artefacts (church buildings, architectural monastery complexes, and works of church art) gradually returned to the Soviet public sphere. Religious meanings were transcoded by representatives of the intellectual and artistic elite into aesthetic and cultural ones (Kormina, Shtyrkov, 2015: 14). It can be assumed that this vector of development was established to some extent as early as the 1920s and 1930s, when, for the first time in Russian history, religious objects were viewed as a part of the ethnic or cultural heritage. In the Komi AO, officials were instructed to relocate documents from closed churches to archives and libraries. In some areas, officials also compiled lists of churches, which could be attributed as architectural monuments.[23] No such monuments were registered in the Komi AO till the mid-1960s. However, in Arkhangelsk, there were 15 monuments registered with the Museum Affairs Department of the Glavnauka (Main Scientific Administration) as early as in 1928 (Mikhailov, 2005).

Most of the petitions for opening churches came from rural areas of the Republic. Among the settlements that received city status in 1943 – 1955, petitions were produced by the cities of Vorkuta and Ukhta, where there were no churches before. In their petition, the residents of Vorkuta highlighted a number of difficulties that hinder the opening of the church. One of them was the inability to apply since a significant number of inhabitants were former prisoners and did not have the right to do this. The petitioners noted also that those inhabitants of the city who do not have criminal records came from different parts of the USSR to work in the city temporarily, they didn't plan to stay in Vorkuta and so they are not interested in opening of the church. The petitioners argued however that construction of a temple would help to consolidate the population in the north, unite disparate groups of the Orthodox believers in the framework of the Russian Orthodox Church, whose activity was approved by Soviet legislation.[24] In this case petitioners stressed not cultural or historic meaning, but the mission the ROC can play in territory development and its loyalty to the Soviet regime.

In the 1960s and 80s, no new Orthodox churches were opened in the Komi ASSR, despite believers periodically raising this question. The situation was similar throughout the European North of Russia. For example, in the Arkhangelsk province, new churches did not open until 1988, and moreover, in the 1960s and the 1980s 8 out of 24 existing Orthodox parishes were closed (Molodov, 2006: 17). Those churches that were allowed to function in that period were closely monitored by the authorities, who collected information not only on people baptised and confessed, but also on those who regularly attended services. In 1965, a special information report on religiosity of the inhabitants of Syktyvkar and its environs was produced by the Commissioner on the basis of the list of registration of people who carry out religious rituals (see later about mandatory

23 NARK, f. P-1, op. 2, d. 832, l. 7. *Information from the lecturer, August, 1930*; f. R-3, op. 1, d. 2129, l. 57. *Letter to the executive committee, May, 8, 1932.*

24 NARK, f. R-1451, op. 1, d. 5, l. 2 – 5. *Letter from the believers of Vorkuta, April,8, 1956.*

passport registration) from the already mentioned church in Kochpon.[25] The practical significance of the information on the number of people who lived on a particular street and visited the temple is not entirely clear, but it demonstrates that attending a church service was not perceived as a private affair by the Soviet authorities.

Three churches of the Komi ASSR were regularly attended by older people, usually retirees. According to official reports, their number did not change much. On weekdays, the number of parishioners was small, ranging from 35–50 in Yb and Aikino to approximately 150 in Kochpon. A significantly larger number of believers visited churches on holidays – up to 1900 persons in the Kochpon church.[26] In 1978 Yu. Gagarin wrote that the vast majority of "religious people" of Komi ASSR comprised people over 50 years, and women constituted more than 85% of this group (Gagarin, 1978: 300). The ethno-sociological study of the village of Yb performed in 1987 revealed that the presence of the functioning ROC church in the village had a significant impact on the religiosity of older people. Once retired, the villagers began to attend church services (something they usually had not done regularly before retirement), while young people almost never visited the temple.[27] The similar situation had formed in Old Believers communities before revolution. Traditionally, people of working age (younger generations) formed a separate group here – *mirskie* ("those of the world"). They were involved in active social and economic interactions outside the religious community, remaining religiously non-observant. Later in life they re-enter the community of active religious participants (*istye* – "true", *vernye* – "faithful" or Old Believer) and begin to carry out all the religious injunctions (Vlasova, 2010: 50–56; Dronova, 2019: 72, 101–102). This deferred ritual practice of youth can be considered as one of the mechanisms of Old Believers' adaptation to the social and political realities of tsarist and Soviet Russia (Rogers, 2009: 159–162).

Despite all its shortcomings, the democratization of the Soviet regime, which began at the turn of the 1980s and the 1990s, has led to significant changes in the religious sphere. Between 1985 and 1990, different groups of believers from cities (Ukhta, Syktyvkar, Pechora, Vorkuta) and rural districts of the Komi ASSR applied to the Commissioner for registration of their religious communities as well as for opening prayer houses and reopening churches. Almost all these petitions received positive decisions.[28] Throughout the 1990s, the initiative to renovate (often the word "rebuild" would be more appropriate) church buildings in the rural areas of the Republic and to give them away to the communities of believers usually came from local residents, or rather, from a person who was ready to organize and conduct such work. In rural areas laypeople especially women, played an important role in restoration of the churches. The newspaper "Vera (Eskom)" popular in the Komi Republic periodically published articles telling about these people and their "spiritual achievement". Local people were donating money and actively engaged in this renovation effort; were returning icons and church equipment that was hidden after church closings (Suvorov, 1999; Suvorov, 2010; Sizov, 2006; Koosa, Leete, 2011: 52–54).

25 NARK, f. R-1451, op. 1, d. 20, l. 29 – 30. *Information on the number of the Orthodox believers of the city of Syktyvkar, October, 15, 1965.*

26 NARK, f. R-1451, op. 1, d. 20, l. 53. *Information on the activities of Orthodox churches in the Komi ASSR, 1966*; d. 51, l. 36. *Information on activities of the religious organizations in the Komi ASSR, 1975*; d. 65, l. 35. *Statistic data on the activities of the Orthodox organizations, 1980.*

27 NARK, f. R-1451, op. 1, d. 122, l. 55. *Report of the Commissioner of the Council for Religious Affairs, 1988.*

28 Ibid, l. 99, 103, 124-126.

In the beginning of 1990s official state registration were received by Old Believers' communities in Ust'-Tsilma (1991) and Syktyvkar (1990). Their members had initiated building of prayer houses. As one of the leaders of the Old Believers' community in Ust'-Tsilma noted: *We were afraid that a Nikonian church* [ROC] *would be built on the holy Ust'-Ttsilma' land, and the Old Belief would be desecrated.*[29]

The renovations or construction of the churches in the cities were carried out by the republic and local administrations. In 1996, the construction of the huge St. Stephan's Cathedral was started in Syktyvkar by the initiative of the Republican authorities including the head of the Republic, Yu. Spiridonov, personally. The construction was financed by charitable funds created with the support by the Komi Republic leadership.

In 1989, a conflict erupted as a response to the decision by the authorities to return the building of the Ascension (Svjato-Voznesenskaja) Church back to the believers. The reason was that the building belonged to the Museum. Surveys had shown that the majority of Syktyvkar residents supported the idea of returning the temple to the believers. At the same time, 'cultural workers' published an appeal to the "general public" to protect the "national culture" and save the museum's exposition from destruction. An active discussion was held in the media between supporters and opponents of the return of the church. In 1991, the building was finally transferred to the believers, while the museum was given another building (Matsuk, 2017: 82–94).

Despite the increased number of temples, the number of people who regularly attended churches in the early 2000s remained insignificant. In rural areas this group, as it had been in the past, consisted mainly of older and middle-aged women. An elderly believer described the situation in her own family as following:

> *Nobody goes* [to the church]: *neither children, nor grandchildren, nor daughters-in-law, nor son-in-law. They say: "Mom, now you pray for us, and later we will pray". So, I pray for everyone. They also resent being pulled to the temple by me.*[30]

The clergy also talked about the small number of active parishioners and regretted that there was no significant growth in number of laypeople who regularly visited church services. They pointed out that this problem was most relevant for rural parishes (*Skol'ko nas*, 2002). The number of people in the church increased significantly on major church and local holidays. But many of them came not to attend the church service, but rather only to light candles for the health or repose of their relatives and friends and to get some "holy water". Sociological surveys made in the Arkhangelsk province revealed that only 3.1% of the respondents regularly attended church services, while 56% of the respondents considered taking part in worship services optional for the Orthodox believers (Kil'diashova, Sibirtseva, Rychkova, 2017: 180)

29 *My boialis', chto na sviatoi ust'-tsilemskoi zemle budet postroena nikonianskaia tserkov' i staroverie budet porugano* (Dronova, 2019: 91).

30 *Nikto ne khodit: ni deti, ni vnuki, ni snokhi, ni ziat'ia. Govoriat: "Mama, poka ty za nas molis', a my potom budem molit'sia". Vot ia za vsekh i molius'. Eshche vozmushchaiutsia, chto ia ikh tianu v khram* (Suvorov, 1999).

THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM: DOMESTIFICATION OF THE RELIGIOUS LIFE

In the early 20th century, baptism occupied the first place among the Sacraments of the Orthodox believers and played an important role in establishing political, ethnic and socio-religious affiliations of a person (Bernshtam, 2000: 107, 113). The right to baptise belonged to the parish priest, but in exceptional cases a layperson could also commit it.

The decree "On Civil Marriage, Children, and on the Registration of Acts of Civil Status" (December 18, 1917) took the responsibilities of registering births, marriages, deaths, and divorces away from religious institutions and handed them over to the office for the registration of acts of civil status (Zapis' aktov grazhdanskogo sostoianiia, or ZAGS). Church ceremonies were permitted only after the birth, marriage or death was registered at ZAGS. In the Komi AO, local authorities reported that people were "sympathetic" to such registration, and that there were no refusals to register (Vlasova, 2018: 51).

Until the early 1930s, despite the significant difficulties, peasants baptised children, married and attended services in churches. In his diary, Ivan Rassykhayev mentioned that in 1927 and in 1928 he became a godfather for several children. He noted that these children were registered both in the volost executive committee (*volispolkom*) and in the church (*Dnevnye zapisk*i, 2013: 386). All the way till the late 1930s, believers had the opportunity to baptise children in churches almost everywhere in the Komi AO.

> *I was seven years old when my mother brought me to a church to be baptised. There was a godmother. In the past certainly everyone wore a cross. Soon after that the church was closed*[31] (female, born 1931, Ust'-Kulomskii district).
>
> *They baptised in a bathtub.*[32] *In the church there were baths, coloured, and they bathed children in them. The church was ruined, and someone took away the bathtub*[33] (female, born 1915, Udorskii district).

In March 1941, the report by the Council of the League of the Militant Godless of the Komi ASSR indicated that there were neither functioning churches nor "official priests" in Komi, but instead appeared 'peredvizhniki priests'.[34] In the summer of 1940 in the Ust'-Tsilma district there were four such "priests", in almost all districts of the Komi there were people, who carried out rituals and services in houses of believers. The role of priest was played by nuns, peasants, former priests.[35] After the destruction of churches and the disappearance of clergy in many villages, those laypeople, who knew church services well, started to lead religious communities. Among other things, they began to fulfil the "necessary" rituals and to baptise children.

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31 *Mne bylo sem' let, kogda mama menia privela v tserkov' krestit'. Krestnaia byla. Moia krestnaia umerla uzhe. Ran'she-to, konechno, vsem krest veshali. Posle etogo srazu tserkov' i zakryli.* Recorded in July, 2001.

32 The informant uses the word 'bathtub' referring to a font. It can be explained by the fact that in Soviet times, when children were baptized at home, and bathtubs were used. Such bathtubs must be 'clean', i.e. new or not used for domestic needs.

33 *Krestili v vanne, v tserkvi byli vanny, krashennye, v nikh i kupali. Gde-to oni byli. Tserkov' razorili, a vanny kto-to pribral, narod khoroshii.* Recorded in June, 1999.

34 The author of the document uses the term 'priest' in regard to Old Believers and ROC laypeople who conducted religious rituals.

35 NARK, f. The Council of the League of the Militant Godless (further R-604), op. 1, d. 24, l. 41. *Report of the Republic' Council of the League of the Militant Godless, March, 1941.*

Grandmothers baptised: "In the Name of the Father …", there were many of them, we had eight <…> We had a weak faith here, when they broke the chapel, we shouted: "Down with [the church]!" Our faith was weak, we were obedient[36] (female, born 1924, Ust'-Kulomskii district).

After the church was closed and the priest had gone, grandmothers began to baptise and lead the funeral services. There was no font. In the bathtub, I don't know what had happened to the font from the church[37] (female, born 1923, Ust'-Kulomskii district).

Whenever possible, believers travelled to other places, where churches still functioned, in order to baptise their children. For example, in 1939 collective farmers from Komi villages baptised their children in Veliky Ustyug and in churches of the Kirov province.[38] There are no statistics on the number of baptised people for the 1920s and the 1940s. Archive data and field materials allow suggesting that the closure of the churches in the late 1930s led to the spread of the practice of home baptism. In Old Believers' villages (both Komi-Zyryan and Russian) children, as before, were baptised at home.

From 1945, information on religious rituals in churches was collected by the Commissioner of the Council for the ROC. The information report on the activities of religious associations compiled in 1959 notes that between 1948 and 1958, the number of baptisms in churches of ROC rose fivefold, the number of church weddings experienced an 11 times increase and the number of funeral services doubled.[39] In 1957 about 3000 people were baptised, but in the subsequent years the number of baptisms gradually decreased (Table 1).

Tab. 1. Number of baptised in the ROC churches in the Komi ASSR[40]

	1957	**1961**	**1962**	**1963**	**1964**	**1969**	**1972**	**1976**	**1980**	**1984**
number of people	2814	1437	437	636	467	417	399	337	503	558

A drastic reduction in the number of baptisms occurred in 1962 with the implementation of mandatory passport registration for persons who carry out church rituals in ROC. Personal data (name, registered place of residence and the place of work) were entered into special receipts that were available to inspectors. From 1962, all religious rituals (baptisms, funeral services, weddings, etc.) carried out for fixed prices could be performed only by clergy and only after a receipt presentation. A written consent of both parents became necessary to baptise a child. This system caused

36 *Svoi babushki krestili "Vo imia Ottsa", mnogo takikh bylo, u nas 8 bylo <…> U nas zdes' vera byla slaboi, chasovniu slomali, krichali: "Doloi!" Slabaia u nas vera, poslushnye byli.* Recorded in July, 2001.

37 *Posle togo kak tserkov' zakryli i popa ne stalo, stali krestit' i otpevat' babushki. Kupeli ne bylo. V tazu, kupel' iz tserkvi kuda-to delas'.* Recorded in July, 2001.

38 Ibid, l. 41ob.

39 NARK, f. R-1451, op. 1, d. 10, l. 22. *Information on the status and activities of religious organizations and clergy in the Komi ASSR,1959.*

40 NARK, f. R–1451. op. 1. d. 10. l. 21, 40, (1957); d. 20, l. 15-16 (1961-1964); d. 35, l. 198 – 210 (1969); d. 42. Л. 1 - 8 (1972); d. 52, l. 1 -6 (1976); d. 66, l. 57–63 (1980); d. 77, l. 51-52 (1984). *Cash and statistical reports of religious associations in the Komi ASSR.*

believers' disapproval, and in the Commissioner opinion, reduced number of church religious rituals.[41] Information on people who took part in church ceremonies could be sent to their employers and to public organizations to pay attention and take possible disciplinary measures.

Most of those people who were baptised in churches of Komi ASSR (from 60 to 88%) were children under 7 years. According to the reports of Commissioner only about 2% of all new born children were baptized in churches (Vlasova, 2018: 52). That was particularly low when compared to the central part of Russia: in Kirov, Yaroslavl, Ivanovo, Ryazan regions more than 60% of all new born children were baptised in the mid-1960s.[42]

From the mid-1960s, about 80% of those baptised in the Komi ASSR were from Syktyvkar (Vlasova, 2018: 50, 53). This looks quite natural, because all the three churches that functioned in the Republic were located in the immediate vicinity of the city. The small number of churches, their location in villages within just one area, as well as the control by the state over church rituals, gave rise to serious difficulties for believers' opportunity to attend churches. As a rule, those people who resided in the Republic but who were baptised in other areas of the USSR were not included in the republican statistic. The statistics over three years (Tab. 2) demonstrates rather considerable figures for the Komi ASSR. This data also correlates with the numbers of baptised residents of Vorkuta, Inta, Pechora, Usinsk and Ukhta districts (1974 – 197, 1975 – 151, 1976 – 99). Many inhabitants of these districts came to the Komi ASSR from other parts of the USSR and we can suggest that they could go to their homelands to baptise their children.

Tab. 2 Number of baptised in the Komi ASSR and outside[43]

	1974	1975	1976
Komi ASSR	348	390	358
Outside	211	151	88

According to the reports from ROC churches, the number of baptisms in rural areas was minimal, but even representatives of the state authorities had understood, that the statistic was far from reality. In 1975 the Acting Commissioner wrote that it's impossible to count a number of baptisms in Izhemkii, Ust'-Kulomski, Ust'-Tsilemski, and Troicko-Pechorskii districts, where rituals were carried out by elders.[44] Information on the number of baptisms in the Ust'-Tsilemskii district of the Komi ASSR is given in the scientific report of 1972 (Tab. 3).[45] During this survey data was collected with the use of questionnaire, where was a question about a person's attitude to religion (believer or not), and there were questions about the informant's participation in religious activities.

41 NARK, f. R-1451, op. 1, d. 14, l. 91–92. *Information on the status and activities of religious organizations and clergy in the Komi ASSR,1963.*

42 NARK, f. R-1451, op. 1, d. 103, l. 2. *Information letter, February, 1962.*

43 NARK, f. R-1451, op.1, d.51, l. 38. *Summarized data on the Orthodox rituals performed by the inhabitants of cities and districts of the Komi ASSR, from 1971 to 1976*; f. R-1451, op.1 d.118, l. 45. *Information report, 1976.*

44 NARK, f. R-1451, op. 1, d. 51, l. 38. *Aggregated data on the Orthodox rituals*

45 Iu. Gagarin identified three categories of believers: believer, 'wavering' (*kolebliushchiesia* – people who can't exactly say if they believe or not), non-believer. In some of his published works, he also differentiated between 'faithful' and 'traditional believers' (those for whom religion is not important in everyday life, but who take part in some rituals considering them a part of the tradition) (Gagarin, 1974: 10; Gagarin, 1978: 305–307).

Tab 3. Baptised children who were born in 1962 – 1972 in Ust'-Tsilemskii district[46]

Families	Total	Replied	Have children	Children are not baptized	Part of the children baptized	All children baptized
Unbelievers	82	74	51	20	14	17
Unbelievers and 'wavering'	40	39	23	5	7	11
ROC believers	9	9	2			2
Old Believers	123	106	22	4	1	17
ROC and Old Believers in the same family	1	1	1			1
Total	255	229	99	29	22	75

According to this data, more than half of the children were baptised by local old women (*babushki*), and a significant part of the baptised were in families consisting of 'non-believers' and 'wavering'. Unfortunately, the report does not indicate whether people who considered themselves non-believers were baptised. The researcher wrote that "young and non-believing parents agree to baptise children under the influence of relatives and the village public opinion". One of the informants said: "We are not the first; we are not the last who baptised a child. If old women read prayers over a child there is nothing terrible". Another one replied that older women refused to babysit an unbaptised child. "I did not argue with them. My husband and I left home, and the old women baptised the child".[47] The high percentage of baptised children in this villages resulted from the Old Belief influence. In the 1960s and 1980s, the Old Believers' communities were able to preserve all aspects their religious life: communal worship, funeral services, sacraments of baptism and confession (Chuv'iurov, 1998; Vlasova, 2010: 83–107, 132–155; Dronova, 2019).

According to my field data and a number of published researches (Sharapov, 2001; Il'ina, Uliashev, 2009: 162) in almost all rural areas baptisms at home without the participation of the priest became normal practice.

> *I baptized* [babies], *babushka Anna Vasilievna taught me <...> She baptised, I watched. Baptised* [baby] *after 2-3 months <...> Previously crosses were brought from the city. A new deep bath is needed. Water must be taken from the river. You read a prayer, with a prayer you baptise, with a prayer you purify*[48] (female, born 1931, Ust'-Kulomskii district).

Women, who performed rituals, were more oriented on the oral tradition and existing practices, except the Old Believers' communities, where liturgical books were still used. At the beginning of the 1980s researchers noted that the Orthodox believers "understand baptism as an ethnic but not a religious rite" (Rogachev, Shabaev, Denisenko, 1982: 28).

46 bid, l. 252.

47 NA KNT,f. 2, op. 5, d. 98, l. 111. *The results of field studies in the Pinezhskii District of the Arkhangelsk Region, Ust'-Tsilemskii and Izhemskii Districts of the Komi ASSR. Scientific report, 1972 – 1973.*

48 *Ia krestila, nauchila babushka Anna Vasil'evna <…> Ona krestila, ia smotrela. Krestili posle 2-3 mesiatsev <…> Ran'she krestiki brali iz goroda. Nado novuiu glubokuiu vannu. Vodu nado brat' iz reki. Molitvu chitaesh', molitvoi krestish', molitvoi ochishchaesh'.* Recorded in July, 2014.

Between 1985 and 1987 the number of baptisms (of both infants and adults) in ROC churches increased significantly in the Komi ASSR: 479 in 1985, 629 in 1986, 716 people in just ten months of 1987.[49] Their number in the Komi ASSR was quite comparable with that in the Arkhangelsk region: 836 in 1985, 893 in 1986. According to the Commissioner, it was mainly the cancellation of the obligatory passport registration in 1987 that led to the increase of baptisms. In the Arkhangelsk region, the number of baptisms increased two and a half times, in the Vologda region – six times (Molodov, 2015: 96–97), in the Komi ASSR such a sharp jump in number did not occur.

In the 1990s and in the early 2000s, people of different ages were baptised. Elderly people who did not have the opportunity to be baptised in their childhood because there was no church or because their parents were afraid to do so, used the possibility to go through the ritual. Middle-aged people and youth had various motives to be baptised: family tradition, individual spiritual inquiry, or even a tribute to the fashion. From the 1990s a baptised person received a baptism certificate, the unified form of which was approved by the ROC in 2011 (*Zhurnaly*, 2011). Information on the number of baptised may be found in the current archives of churches, but this information is not collected and published officially.

In areas where the practice of home worship service persisted until the 1990s and was widespread, there were some disagreements between the priest and parishioners (Il'ina, Uliashev, 2009: 162–163; Koosa, Leete, 2011: 55–56; Vlasova, Sharapov, 2012: 80). Research identifies two tendencies that resulted from the ROC's attempts to restore its former position in society. First, marginalization of the part of the ROC believers who were closely connected with folk religious practices and didn't always follow the official teaching. Second, appearance of a group of churchgoers, who had become dedicated believers already during post-Soviet period, and championed ROC's official position (Leete, Koosa, 2012: 177).

Curiously, the leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church criticized the "non-canonical" manifestations of popular religiosity during the Soviet period. In 1960, commenting on the situation with "priest-impostors" who baptised people, the Bishop of Vologda and Cherepovets wrote that "at present this evil is difficult to overcome" (Molodov, 2017: 43). The priests insisted on the church baptism, which gave rise to discussion about "baptism by grandmothers". At the end of the 1990s many believers viewed it as "untrue" or "temporary". In the case of baptism these contradictions were quickly resolved, on the one hand, the authority of the ROC clergy in matters of faith did not raise doubts among the local population, on the other, in believers' consciousness baptism still was a sacrament that must be performed by a priest in church. As regards Old Believers, in the 1990s they continued to baptise babies according to the rule of Old Faith (Vlasova, 2010: 88–94; Dronova, 2019: 108–111).

CONCLUSION

The majority of researchers have noted that the specific feature of the Soviet atheistic project was the desire of the state to gain the total control over the spiritual life and religious convictions of the people. Until 1917, the construction of churches, the participation of believers in the work of maintenance and improvement of the temple, the attendance of

49 NARK, f. R-1451, op. 1, d. 122, l. 58. *Data on civil and religious rituals, from 1985 to 1987*.

religious services contributed to the consolidation of parish communities, ensured the stability of religious life, and was one of the ways of communicating with the sacred (Shushval, 2014). For the Soviet state, the control over the use and lease of religious buildings became one of the ways to control the religious communities' activities. The closures of churches, which began in the 1920s, reached its peak during the 1930s and resulted in the critical reduction of the number of working churches in the USSR by the beginning of the 1940s. By 1941, in the Komi ASSR there were no churches. Emphasizing the anti-state (anti-Soviet, counter-revolutionary) nature of religion, the Soviet authorities viewed public manifestations of religiosity as political statements.

The changes in the relations between the state and the church in the early 1940s and the 1950s allowed the believers to hope for the restoration of their church life. In the Komi Republic, Murmansk, Arkhangelsk regions, previously closed churches were reopened; in settlements where there were no churches, prayer houses were opened (Ukhta). Soviet officials of different levels opposed the opening of religious buildings. Their grounds for rejecting the petitions were different: missing or improper documents, falsification of signatures, etc. With the opening of ROC churches, the number of the church rituals performed also increased in the Republic. That was interpreted by the Soviet officials as an increase in the religiosity of the population, which caused concern of the authorities. From the early 1960s, thanks to the implementation of the mandatory passport registration in churches, the state again strengthened control over the religious life of its citizens. Since that time, the number of ceremonies performed in churches of the Komi Republic was sharply reduced and remained insignificant until the second half of the 1980s.

From the 1930s people of the older generation were active participants of church life, while young people took almost no part in it. Describing the religiosity of the population in the 1950s and 1980s, officials and researchers noted that people began to attend the temple after their retirement (in the USSR women retired at the age of 55 and men at the age of 60). The connection between the age of the believer and his/her active participation in the religious life formed during the Soviet period was similar to the age-related stratification of the priest-less Old Believers' communities on the European North of Russia. It is possible to talk about the similarity of a behavioural pattern that emerges as a reaction of the religious community towards the repression by the state. It was observed that older people have always been more religious than the young. This correlation between age and the religious commitment holds for many modern European countries (Davie, 1990: 457). In the Soviet case, one of the main reasons of this religious generation difference was the state control over the people of working age (through employers, public organizations), which grew weaker after their retirement.

The liquidation of churches and the total control by the state over church rituals led to a change in religious practices. During the Soviet period the role of women, who carried out all 'necessary' rituals, baptism among others, increased (both in ROC and Old Believers' communities). Research attributes this phenomenon to the male – female roles in the Komi culture (Il'ina, Uliashev, 2009: 169–160), to a stereotypical view of the Soviet authorities on male leadership as more of a threat to the public order and thus officially repressed more severely (Koosa, Leete, 2011: 52, 57; Koosa, 2017: 23). Almost everywhere through the rural areas of the European North of Russia, religious rites were performed by laypeople without the participation of a priest.

The domestication of religious life significantly limited both state and church control over the rituals. These practices persisted in the post-Soviet time, and they are assessed

in a controversial manner. Journalists and researchers wrote that services, baptisms of children, funerals held by laypeople, although they did not always follow the church rule, made it possible to preserve the religious tradition in the "era of faithlessness". Parish priests criticized local ritual practices as contravening the church canon. Changes in the state religious policy in the 1990s, the growth of public interest towards the Orthodox tradition changed the status of religion, which ceased to be something hidden, limited only to the private sphere. At the same time, in the public space, religion still preserves cultural connotations. In the Komi Republic, the number of ROC churches significantly increased, not only due to the return of church buildings, but also due to the construction of new ones (in cities and workers' settlements). The Republic's society viewed these actions as necessarily positive, linking the increase in the number of temples to "the revival of cultural and spiritual values". At the same time, the religious life of a significant part of the ROC believers is still but little connected to the church.

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