

# The influence of state-confessional policies on the activities of religious communities in Western Siberia in the 1970s and early 1980s

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**Abstract.** The article is devoted to the study of the activities and position of religious organizations in the Novosibirsk region in the 1970s and early 1980s. In the period under review, there are changes in the state-confessional policy in the USSR in general and in the Novosibirsk region in particular. At this stage, the process of registration of organizations of the Russian Orthodox Church, Gospel Christian Baptists (adherents of the All-Union Council), Catholic, Lutheran communities was occurring. These registrations of Protestant communities were the first ones after the mass transfer of “sectarian” religious communities throughout the USSR to an illegal situation. In addition, the authorities tried to subordinate to control those religious organizations (the GCB Council of the Churches) which did not agree to register, allowing them to hold services in the same place and at the same time. The article shows the features of the situation with the Christian and Muslim communities, focusing on the registration process, economic, demographic changes within communities. The author argues that during the period under study, there was a change in the state-confessional policy with respect to religious organizations, the process of registering communities was resumed, property for the administration of religious cults was allowed to be acquired.

**Keywords:** religious organizations, state-confessional policy, communities, Russian Orthodox Church

## 1. Introduction

The history of relations between the Soviet state and religious organizations is one of the topical issues in the Russian historical science. The study of the historical experience of the relations existing between the communist regime and Christian, Muslim, Jewish communities will contribute to the creation of a more perfect model of interaction between the state and confessions. In this regard, it is important for us to consider the changes that have occurred in the system of state-confessional relations in the Novosibirsk region in the 1970s and early 1980s. At the turn of the 1960-1970s, an important turn occurred in the policy of the authorities who moved from strict administration to the liberalization of state-confessional relations. Since the late 1960s, the process of renewing the registration of religious organizations had been noticeable. According to M. I. Odintsov, the end of the 60s of the XX century was very positive in the life of the Church. He notes, “At the end of the 60s, the registration of religious associations was resumed. At first, the registration of Protestant societies was resumed; it occurred in the second half of the 1970s for the Old Believers, Catholic, Lutheran, and Muslim societies, and after a twenty-year hiatus, in 1972, for the Orthodox Church” [1, p. 25]. In

1977, the new Constitution of the USSR was adopted, and the Constitution of the RSFSR was adopted in 1979. It was noted that a “developed socialist society” was built in the country. The Article 52 of the 1977 Constitution enshrined the rights of religious freedom [2, p. 333]. Since the beginning of 1970, in the Novosibirsk region, not only the organizations of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists but also the communities of the Russian Orthodox Church, previously deprived of registration, the Seventh Day Adventist Society, the Catholic community began their transfer to the legal status.

## **2. Materials and Methods**

Archival materials and legal documents make it possible to most objectively analyze the situation of religious communities in the region of Western Siberia in the context of the state-confessional policy of the USSR in the 1970s and early 1980s. Archival sources are represented by business correspondence authorized by the Council for Religious Affairs in the Novosibirsk Region with Councils, district committees, city committees and religious associations; statistical data; administrative materials; legislative regulatory acts of state and party bodies. In preparing the article, first of all, the materials of the State Archive of the Novosibirsk Region were used. The work is based on the methodological principles of historicism, which allows us to consider the process of regulating the status of religious communities in various spheres of society. The article used comparative historical and systemic principles, as well as a retrospective method. The comparative historical principle helped to analyze the situation of various religious organizations in the period under study. The historical-systemic principle allowed generalizing the position of religious organizations in the period under study in the Novosibirsk region. Also, the historical-systemic principle allowed to recreate a single system, which the Soviet leadership adhered to in relation to religion. The study was conducted using a retrospective method, which allowed to create a holistic vision of the past. With its help, the tendencies in the development of relations were revealed both within various religious communities of the Novosibirsk Region, and when they interact with the state authorities.

## **3. Results**

In 1972, 22 religious organizations were registered in the Novosibirsk region. These include 3 Orthodox communities, 1 Lutheran, 1 Old Believer church (belokrinitsky consent), 1 Muslim community, 1 Judean community, 12 communities of All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists, and 3 communities of the Mennonites [3, p. 4]. In 1973, another religious society of the Russian Orthodox Church was registered in the village of Kolyvan [4, p. 1].

An important issue in studying the status of religious organizations is the study of its clergy, focusing on the size, age composition, and level of education. It should be noted that the Soviet state “regulated” the number and composition of the clergy through restrictive measures against religious schools. By the middle of the 20th century, as a result of social transformations, the number of Orthodox clergy decreased in almost five times: at the beginning of the twentieth century, there were up to 51 thousand priests, there were a total of 10,543 registered clergymen and by 1989 [5, p. 34].

In 1973, in the Novosibirsk region, 15 Orthodox clergymen were registered (1 bishop, 8 priests, and 6 deacons). Education shows that only 1 clergyman had a higher education, 10 people had a secondary education, 4 people had an elementary education; 2 priests were with a spiritual higher education, 8 with a spiritual secondary education, 1 finished a spiritual primary schools, 1 clergyman was a Candidate of Theology [6, p. 7]. By the beginning of 1974, in the region, the number of registered clergy increased to 18 people [7, p. 4]. In 1977, there were already 20 officially functioning clergymen. The age composition was as follows: 13 people from 30 to 50 years, 2 people from 50 to 60 years, 3 people from 70 to 85 years, 2 people from 20 to 30 years. [7, p. 8]. A total of 20 clergymen were with secondary secular education, 2 with higher secular, 5 with spiritual higher, 7 with spiritual secondary, and 8 with spiritual primary. These data indicate a significant increase in the level of education of clergy [7, p. 9].

According to researcher M. I. Odintsov, in the USSR by the mid-1980s, the general education level of the clergy increased. In particular, half of them had secondary secular education, the number of those with higher secular education grew. In the 1980s, more than half of the clergy had a secondary and higher theological education [8, p. 29].

In September 1978, a collective letter from the believers arrived at the Council for Religious Affairs devoted to the registration of an Orthodox society in the city of Barabinsk and the transfer of the religious building to the community. Due to the fact that the petition of the faithful was not satisfied, a similar letter was written in March 1979 [9, p. 9]. Only in November 1980, the community received official registration. In 1982, the registered organization was allowed to purchase a house [9, p. 36].

It should be noted that in the period under study, there was an increase in income of the Russian Orthodox Church. So in 1976, revenues amounted to 35 thousand rubles, reaching 41,242 in 1977, 54,900 in 1979, 54,100 in 1980, and 21,000 for 6 months of 1982. The church received the greatest part of the income from selling the objects of worship [9, p. 23]. Also, there was a growth of believers in the Novosibirsk region. For instance, 1,495 people were the members of Orthodox communities in 1979, then their number was 2,286 in 1980, reaching 2,339 people by 1981.

In the period under study, on the territory of Novosibirsk, the 1st community of the Old Believers (Belokrinsky Consent) legally acted. And there was 1 unregistered community of the Old Believers (Bespopovtsy). In 1974, 511 people were in a registered community [6, p. 17]. In the Old Believer church, 2 people (a priest and a deacon) with secondary and elementary education were registered [6, p. 23]. In the region, some Old Believers acted in the Iskitim, Maslyaninsky, Toguchinsky, and some other areas. In 1973, 28 baptisms, 6 weddings, 7 funerals, 89 correspondence were performed in a registered community. During the study period, there was an increase in community income by 2 times. In 1971, the community income was 23,163 rubles; 26,236 rubles in 1972 [6, p.17], 32,283 rubles in 1975, and already 49,551 rubles in 1979 [10, p. 5]. The Old Believers received most of the profits from the sale of candles. In 1973, the candlestick incomes accounted for 56% of all profits, incomes from donations constituted 11%, incomes from the fulfillment of requirements were 30%. [6, p.17].

In 1979, despite the increase in income during the analyzed period, there was a decrease in baptisms in the Novosibirsk Old Believers community. Only 7 people were baptized, there were also 123 prayers, 464 *obednyas*, 9 weddings, 12 full-time burials, 124 absentees, 63 memorial services [10, L. 5].

In the Novosibirsk region, one Muslim community legally acted. The community was located in the city of Novosibirsk, and it was registered in 1943. In 1978, the number of the community was 700 people. In the Muslim community, 1 mullah with secondary religious education legally acted [6, L.7]. It should be noted that on the days of religious holidays, a large number of Muslim believers gathered in the mosque. During 1976-1978, on the days of the Ramadan holiday, incomes, as well as the amount of funds raised for the holiday, increased markedly [11, p. 5].

On the territory of the Novosibirsk region, 1 registered Jewish community acted. The income of the community was 2923 rubles in 1972 and 3403 rubles in 1973. The community was not numerous. During the days of worship, about 50 people gathered, and there were about 300 people in the days of religious holidays. The Commissioner of the Council for Religious Affairs for the Novosibirsk region was concerned about the communication existing between the community and a number of foreign citizens. For instance, in October 1974, 2 young tourists from the United States visited the community. On the eve of the New Year, the community received congratulatory letters from the USA [10, p. 22].

During the study period, only 1 registered Lutheran community operated and 5 were in an illegal situation in the Novosibirsk region. 1 pastor with primary education was registered in the community [10, p. 23]. Small Lutheran groups of 3-10 people were also in the village of Oktyabrsky (Karasuk district) and the village of Krasny Yar (Ordynsky district). It should be noted that since 1970, an impressive decline in the number of Lutherans occurred. Therefore, 440 people were in the community by the beginning of 1970, and 270 believers remained by 1974. The reduction in the number of

Lutherans was mainly due to the collapse of rural associations, as well as due to emigration to the Federal Republic of Germany [12, p. 23]. The highest number was in the Novosibirsk registered community, comprising of 210 people (16% men, 84% women) [10, p. 36]. Also, local authorities revealed new communities in 1979. The Commissioner for Religious Affairs in the Information on the number of religious societies operating in the Novosibirsk region, which had the believers of German nationality as members, mentioned that there were pronounced emigration attitudes in many communities. Thus, one registered community acted in 1979 in the region, and 7 communities were registered with a total of about 380 people. In addition, it should be noted that the Seventh Day Adventist community was registered in 1977.

In 1970, there were 150 believers in Catholic communities, but only 42 of them remained by mid-1975. Some believers emigrated to the Federal Republic of Germany (21 people), some left for the cities of Central Asia and other parts of the country, some stopped attending prayer meetings [12, p. 5]. The believers of Novosibirsk raised the issue of registration, but many activists left the region, in connection with which the religious community was not registered [10, p. 37]. In 1978, local authorities registered a group of believing Catholics in Novosibirsk that consisted of 16 people [13, p.11]. Only on August 9, 1982, the Catholic community of Novosibirsk received registration and consent to purchase the building for prayer purposes. By 1983, the number of members has increased significantly, reaching 240 people. During the year, 30 celebrations and 16 weddings were performed [14, p. 21].

#### **4. Discussion**

In the Novosibirsk region, the religious organization All-Union Council of Evangelical Christian Baptists had the largest number of registered communities. A similar situation existed in the Altai Region. There were 7 registered organizations and two branches of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christian Baptists in 1977 [15, p. 38]. In 1973, there were 12 registered communities of Evangelical Christian Baptists in the Novosibirsk region. It should be noted that in 1973, the Association of Evangelical Christian Baptists was registered in the village of Rozhdestvenka. By the beginning of 1974, more than 1,700 believers were counted in the communities. The vast majority among the believers were women (81%), and men accounted for 19%. According to the social status, the believers were divided in the following ratio: workers (26%), employees (3%), collective farmers (1%), pensioners (29%), housewives (41%) [9, p. 23]. By nationality, the majority were the Russians (78%), but there were also than the Germans (15%), Ukrainians (4%), and the rest constituted only 3%. The Novosibirsk community was the largest one, reaching 1,300 people. On August 16, 1976, another community of Evangelical Christian Baptists was registered in the village of Kozhurla, Ubinsky District [16, p. 8]. This community existed since 1935. There were 20 people in it by 1976 [16, p. 8]. In addition, 3 Mennonite communities acted legally on the territory of the Novosibirsk region. The Novosibirsk community was the most numerous one. In 1974, it included 120 believers. Women prevailed in it (77%), and men made up 23%. In 1973, the registered community of church Mennonites broke up due to the death of the leader in the town of Berdsk. The Commissioner refrained from raising the question of withdrawing from the registration of this group. By the end of 1970, the community of the city of Berdsk resumed its activities [6, p. 33].

In 1978, 127 people were in the community of Novosibirsk, 8 people in the registered community of Berdsk; 53 people in the registered community of the village of Neudachino, Tatarsky District. All listed communities consisted of the Germans [13, p. 9].

In 1973, 180-190 people were in 2 communities and 2 groups of the Union of Churches of Evangelical Christian Baptists. In 1973, 18 members of the Council of Churches were brought to administrative responsibility. The Commissioner of the Council for Religious Affairs in the Novosibirsk region concluded from the analysis of sermons that the believers were "in hostile positions" [6, p. 30]. In 1981, there was a revitalization of the Union of Churches of Evangelical Christian Baptists. Thus, 210 people gathered at the worship service of the Novosibirsk community of the Union of Churches of Evangelical Christian Baptists on the feast of the Trinity, including about 45

schoolchildren and 60 young people. At the indicated time, about 190 believers consisted in the Novosibirsk community [17, p. 19]. The youth made up 30% of the church believers, many of them had secondary technical education. The Novosibirsk community of the Council of Churches held prayer meetings in the believers' houses. The Commissioner for Religious Affairs noted that the believers of the Novosibirsk and Barnaul communities sought to increase activity among the believers living in different areas of Siberia. Registration of all religious associations operating within the framework of the law contributed to the isolation of the majority of believers from the influence of the Union of Churches of Evangelical Christian Baptists [17, p. 20].

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, it should be noted that in the period under review, there is a change in the state policy regarding religious organizations. The legalization of the activities of communities of different faiths began in the mid-1970s. Thus, during the analyzed period, the following communities were registered: 2 Orthodox, 1 Catholic, 2 Evangelical Christian Baptists communities, and 1 Seventh Day Adventists community. At the beginning of the 1980s, 28 religious organizations legally operated in the Novosibirsk region. Data on the registration of Protestant communities were the first after the mass transfer of "sectarian" religious communities throughout the USSR to the illegal situation. Despite the legalization of some organizations' activities, there were also religious communities that had a negative attitude towards any official registration. For example, communities of the Council of Churches of the Evangelical Christian Baptists, Pentecostals. It should be noted that during the analyzed period, incomes increased markedly in the Orthodox churches, as well as in the Old Believers, Muslim, and Judaic communities. In addition, the increase in the number and level of education of the priests occurs in the communities of the Russian Orthodox Church.

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