

ANDREI HARBATSKI¹

The Phenomenon of Old Belief in the Belarusian Lands

ABSTRACT

In the conditions of modern state social and cultural policy of Belarus, the problem of studying and using the cultural heritage is very actual: the creation of projects and programmes of social and cultural development demands the research of history, heritage and traditions. A noticeable trace in the Belarusian cultural heritage was left by the Old Believers who moved on Belarusian lands in the second half of the 17th century.

The history of the Old Believers on the Belarusian lands before the beginning of the 20th century is widely represented in the monographs of A.A. Gorbatsky: *The Old Believers in Belarus at the End of the 17th – the Beginning of the 20th Centuries*, Brest 1999; *The Old Belief in the Belorussian Lands*, Brest 2004.

There is no monographic literature concerning the history of the Old Belief in Belarus in the 20th century. In the Belarusian scientific magazines there are some articles by T. Dobzhinskaya and T. Hursan devoted to the analysis of the life and activity of Old Believers in Belarus in the 20th century. The articles by T. Dobzhinskaya deal with the history of the Old Belief in Vitebsk region in the first half of the 20th century. T. Hursan in her articles analyzes ethnographic features of Old Believers in Mogilev region.

The aim of this article is to show some peculiarities of the development of the state policy in relation to Old Believers in Belarus in the 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries.

Keywords:

Old Believers, Belarus, social politics, cultural policy, civil rights, legal relations, spiritual foundations, traditions, lifestyle

¹ Faculty of Education, University of Białystok, Poland.
E-MAIL: a.harbatki@uwb.edu.pl ORCID: 0000-0001-5098-0949

METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

The purpose of this study is to reveal the nature, character and tendencies of social, cultural and confessional policies of the Polish and Soviet authorities in relation to the Old Believers, to trace the attitude of the defenders of the old rite to the teaching and education of their children.

The object of the study is social, cultural and confessional life of the Old Believers in the 20th and at the beginning of the 21st centuries on the Polish and Belarusian territories.

The subject of the study is the policy of the Polish and Soviet authorities in relation to the Old Believers, the activities of the Old Believers' structures in the field of preserving their Church, teaching and upbringing.

METHODS OF RESEARCH

The historic and systemic method predetermined the integration consideration of the subject matter of the article, made it possible to reveal the integrity of the research object and to expose the diversity of its structural elements, their interrelations and mutual influence.

Comparative-historical method allowed showing the state and development of education and upbringing of the Old Believers' children.

When analyzing archival documents, the **hermeneutical method** was used, which allowed determining the actual content of various kinds of documents, showing the number of the Old Believer shrines, as well as the legal status of the Old Believers.

The method of interviewing made it possible to find out the assessments and positions of the respondents in relation to the family.

The hermeneutical method used in pedagogical anthropology made it possible to show and understand the nature of man, in particular the Old Believers' nature.

The biographical method made it possible to show the role and development of the individual in the unity with social history.

THE OLD BELIEF ON BELARUSIAN LANDS IN THE PERIOD OF 1921–1939

In Belarusian historiography there is practically no serious research concerning the history of the Old Belief during the so-called interwar period. According to the Riga Peace Treaty of 1921, the part of Belarusian territories on which a large

number of Old Believers lived, went to Poland. The greatest number of Old Believers lived in Braslav, Disna, Postavy, Oshmyany districts. For example, in 1939, 30 out of 52 Old Believers' communities in Poland were on the lands which are situated today within the borders of the Republic of Belarus. The structure of these Old Believers' communities looked as follows: *Borsuchinaya*, the village Borsuchina, Braslav district, the spiritual advisor was F. Voytov, the chairman of the community was I. Mikhaylov; *Buyevskaya*, the village Buyevshchina, Braslav district, the spiritual advisor – S. Nikitin, the chairman of the community – O. Pushkarev; *Bulovishskaya*, the village Bulovishki, Braslav district, the spiritual advisor – P. Kolosov, the chairman of the community – N. Danilov; *Vidzskaya*, the town Vidzy, Braslav district, the spiritual advisor – S. Vabich, the chairman of the community – M. Biryulin; *Voronkovskaya*, the village Voronka, Braslav district, the spiritual advisor – E. Semenov, the chairman of the community – E. Semenov; *Gedeyskaya*, the village Gedeyki, Oshmyany district, the spiritual advisor – I. Zubkov, the chairman of the community – A. Sinitsyn; *Germanovichskaya*, the village Germanovichi, Disna district, the spiritual advisor – I. Alekseev, the chairman of the community – I. Halyavo; *Grigorovskaya*, the village Grigorovk, Braslav district, the spiritual advisor – F. Yefimov, the chairman of the community – I. Ivanov; *Davedinskaya*, the village Davediny, Braslav district, the spiritual advisor – S. Ulyanov, the chairman of the community – G. Ivanov; *Druyskaya*, the town Druya, Braslav district, the spiritual advisor – A. Alekseev, the chairman of the community – M. Kirilov; *Erzovskaya*, the village Erzovka, Braslav district, the spiritual advisor – I. Kondratyev, the chairman of the community – V. Rotchenkov; *Zakharovskaya*, the village Zakharovka, Postavy district, the spiritual advisor – E. Bespolenov, the chairman of the community – P. Artamonov; *Zalesskaya*, the village Zalesye, Disna district, the spiritual advisor – E. Semenov, the chairman of the community – M. Trofimov; *Kirilinskaya*, the village Kirilino, Braslav district, the spiritual advisor – A. Mastyulin, the chairman of the community – A. Mastyulin; *Kublishchinskaya*, the village Kublishchina, Braslav district, the spiritual advisor – P. Kolosov, the chairman of the community – A. Mikhaylov; *Lavnikskaya*, the village Lavniki, Braslav district, the spiritual advisor – P. Strelkov, the chairman of the community – V. Chirkun; *Lastovichskaya*, the village Lastovichi, Disna district, the spiritual advisor – E. Osipov, the chairman of the community – E. Fedotov; *Luchayskaya*, the village Luchay, Postavy district, the spiritual advisor – vacancy, the chairman of the community – A. Lukashenok; *Mateshskaya*, the village Mateshi, Braslav district, the spiritual advisor – I. Zuyev, the chairman of the community – I. Zuyev; *Mikolayunskaya*, the village Mikolayuntsy, Braslav district, the spiritual advisor – E. Parfyonov, the

chairman of the community – I. Egorov; *Minkovichskaya*, the village Minkovichi, Braslav district, the spiritual advisor – P. Ryzheshchenko, the chairman of the community – V. Korzhukhov; *Mostishskaya*, the village Mostishche, Oshmyany district, the spiritual advisor – E. Kudryashov, the chairman of the community – N. Stepanov; *Nivnikskaya*, the village Nivniki, Braslav district, the spiritual advisor – K. Smertyev, the chairman of the community – K. Smertyev; *Novo-Slobodskaya*, the village Novoya Sloboda, Oshmyany district, the spiritual advisor – V. Sobolev, the chairman of the community – E. Gavrilenko; *Ostrovishskaya*, the village Ostrovishki, Braslav district, the spiritual advisor – S. Skachkov, the chairman of the community – F. Lukjyanov; *Postavskaya*, the town Postavy, the spiritual advisor – vacancy, the chairman of the community – P. Markov; *Rakovskaya*, the village Rakovtsy, Disna district, the spiritual advisor – P. Golubov, the chairman of the community – A. Fedotov; *Rymutskaya*, the village Rymuti, Braslav district, the spiritual advisor – A. Zuyev, the chairman of the community – T. Rybinkov; *Svirskaya*, the locality of Svir, Svetsyany district, the spiritual advisor – S. Petrov, the chairman of the community – O. Kolosov; *Turmontskaya*, the village Turmont, Braslav district, the spiritual advisor – U. Sevestianov, the chairman of the community – A. Ivanov (Old Believers' Church Calendar, 1939, pp. 50–51).

During the interwar period, the Old Believers on Belarusian lands which were a part of Poland, made a religious minority. They were here old residents, their descendants moved on Braslav lands in the second half of the 17th century.

Having the rights provided by the March Constitution, Old Believers started the organization of their own Church. On October 1, 1925, defenders of the old ceremony organized All-Poland Congress in Vilnius, at which they adopted a number of essential resolutions concerning the organization of their religion. The representatives of all 52 communities of Poland took part in the work of the Congress. The resolutions concerning the organization of the Old Belief Church were adopted at that Congress-Synod. First of all, the official name of this religion, namely “the Eastern Old Believers' Church that has no spiritual hierarchy”, was established. The Congress developed the general bases concerning the internal organization of the Church, in other words – approved the internal charter of the canonical order.

The Congress in Vilnius had a character of a local council and as that, was the supreme conciliar power of the Old Believers' Church in Poland. The aim of the Synod was to elect the Supreme Old Believers' Council in Poland, whose duties included the management of the Church affairs in the period between synods, which were to be summoned every 5 years. It was the first legal and official

Old Believers' Synod since the time of breaking conciliar traditions in the life of the Church by Tsar Peter the Great. That event was an important legal action. The elected Supreme Old Believers' Council lawfully represented the Old Belief religion in Poland.

According to the charter worked out at the same Synod, the Spiritual Court for implementation and solution of canonical affairs of the religion was founded. Besides, the Synod drew up an organizational order for the Old Believers' communities, established powers of general meetings and councils of communities and discussed a number of urgent matters in the field of educational and cultural needs of the Old Belief population in Poland (Information Bulletin, 1933, pp. 8–9). The Synod laid the foundation of the organization of the Old Belief religion in Poland.

On March 22, 1928, the Decree of the President about the relation of the State to the Eastern Old Believers' Church that has no spiritual hierarchy was announced. All provisions of the First All-Poland Old Believers' Synod were admitted by the state. The decree guaranteed the Church full freedom of internal self-government, provided guardianship from the state and recognized the internal charter of the Church adopted by the Synod.

As a result of that great legal work, the supreme body of the church management between synods – the Supreme Old Believers' Council in Poland, led by Arseny Pimonov, was founded. On August 29, 1928, the government recognized the charter of the Eastern Old Believers' Church that has no spiritual hierarchy in Poland. In 1928, the Eastern Old Believers' Church for the first time in all the history was recognized by the state and received autonomy. In the 1920s–1930s, the Old Belief in Poland was the most organized and successfully developing society among the Christian Old Believers' Church of the Pomorye in various countries. The Eastern Old Believers' Church in Poland united 48 Pomorye communities (later – 53), and had the same number of temples. In the 1930s in Poland lived more than 50 thousand Old Believers (1,6% of the total number of the population of the country which was 32,1 million inhabitants), and in 1939, according to the data appeared in periodicals – 75–80 thousand.

In 1925, 1930 and 1936, three All-Poland Old Believers' Synods were held in Vilnius. The Synods authoritatively resolved canonical questions, played a huge role in the revival and development of the Eastern Old Believers' Church in Poland. The main result of the decisions made at those synods was organizational and legal registration of the Eastern Old Believers' Church in Poland. That event occurred in the period of 1925–1928. In 1925–1939, the activity of the governing bodies and the Old Believers' communal life was well organized in Poland, which

in many respects was a merit of the Supreme Old Believers' Council in Poland and the Christian Old Believers' Council of the Pomorye, which were elected at those synods and carried out the orders assigned to them by the synods.

In the first years the main objective of the Supreme Old Believers' Council was to settle the legal status of the Old Believers' Church in the country. According to the charter, the Supreme Old Believers' Council managed all the current affairs of the Church, addressed the government on behalf of the Synod and the Church, implemented the resolutions of the All-Poland synods, summoned All-Poland and local synods, and also established the terms of convocation of the Christian Old Believers' Synod of the Pomorye and kept in touch with the governmental bodies. The Supreme Old Believers' Council consisted of the chairman, 14 members and 6 candidates elected at the All-Poland Synods of Old Believers for a five-year term. The city of Vilnius was the residence of the SOBC. In 1925–1930, the activity of the SOBC was financed by old believers' communities (approx. 5% of expenses; in 1930 this collecting of money was cancelled). Besides, annual grants (not less than 15%) were received from the state. There was also some profit from the sale of tutorials, an increase of the cost of registers of births, the forms issued to communities, and so forth (Baranovsky & Potashenko, 2005, pp. 382–384).

As for the life of Old Believers in 1921–1939 in Gomel, Mogilev and Minsk areas, it was impossible to find such data.

CHANGE OF THE OLD BELIEVERS' THINKING: CULTURE, EDUCATION AND UPBRINGING

Most scholars agree that the confessional foundations of the “old faith” in the appropriate social and cultural conditions provided the Old Believers with the formation of ideas and attitudes conducive to the development of their economy, culture and the preservation of the family. There was always another important component of the Old Believers' phenomenon. It was a tradition. Traditions allowed the defenders of the old rite to pass the strength and peculiarities of their faith and culture from generation to generation, to survive in the environment of different social groups for a long time. The Old Believers gradually formed their “picture of the world” which was supplemented and passed from generation to generation.

During the period from 1921 to 1939 on the territory of Poland, confessional-ethical factors were formed which contributed to the development of the Old Believers' culture. The key component that significantly influenced the cultural functions of the Old Believers' communities was a new way of thinking, which

included one very important question: How to use the law of the Polish State and the possibilities of the Supreme Old Believer Council effectively to preserve their culture and organize efficient children's education?

In the Old Believer thinking, thanks to the ability to understand the “picture of the world” and supplement it, a fundamental difference in the perception of labour and in the evaluation of its culture appeared, which was vividly demonstrated at the All-Polish Congress of the Old Believers on October 1, 1925 in Vilnius.

The organization of the education of the Old Believers' children underwent serious changes for a short period of time. From the second half of the 1920s, during a decade, a network of government schools was established and expanded regularly, including dozens of schools on the present territories of Braslav, Sharkovshchina, and Polotsk districts (now part of the Republic of Belarus), where the Law of God was taught to the Old Believers' children. The Supreme Old Believer Council organized the work on establishing homogeneity in the organization of the educational process and teaching of the Law of God to the Old Believers' children in public schools. These actions brought positive results. So in 1936, the Law of God was taught in more than 200 schools (two hours a week). The number of teachers who taught the Law of God increased step-by-step. There were 43 in 1928 and 68 teachers in 1930, respectively.

In the 1929–1930 academic year, 4375 children of the Old Believers' were enrolled in public schools. The post of the district school inspector was introduced to make the work of schools more efficient. O. Andreev took up a position. After carrying out a number of inspections and assessing the level of teaching of the Law of God, a decision was made to upgrade the skills of the teachers. The Supreme Old Believer Council organized the first pedagogical courses in the summer of 1930, then the second and the third ones in 1932 and in 1936, respectively for the teachers of the Law of God and to train new teachers. The methods of teaching children the Law of God, reading and mathematics were taught at the courses.

The Old Believers also took care of the educational literature. So, to organize religious education more effectively, the textbooks “Fundamentals of the Concept of the Faith of Christ”, “Concise Catechism”, “ABC for Teaching Children Church Slavonic Language” were published. Children from poor families were given textbooks free of charge.

The first Old Believer printing organ was “The Bulletin of the Supreme Old Believer Council in Poland”. During the period from 1925 to 1939, 12 volumes of the journal were published (18 issues, as some of them were doubled). In 1936–1939, four separate Calendars of the Supreme Old Believer Council in Poland (editor I.F. Romanov) were published (Baranovsky & Potashenko, 2005, pp. 383–384).

A great deal of work on the education and upbringing of the Old Believers' children was carried out directly within the communities themselves. The spiritual advisor was responsible for the organization of teaching the children in his community. The level of education, first of all, depended on the level of education of the spiritual advisor himself. The Supreme Old Believer Council provided great methodical help to the communities. Besides methodological help, the leadership of the Supreme Old Believer Council tried to provide financial assistance to the communities. The Polish government also provided financial assistance to the communities. Among the questions considered by the Supreme Old Believer Council were: organization of various types of evening courses for young people; conducting religious, cultural and educational work; publication of teaching aids for youth and the supervision of the upbringing of the younger generation in the spirit of faith, covenants of antiquity and sacred paternal traditions; pedagogical training of Old Believer advisors.

So, on July 3, 1930, the first courses of pedagogical training of Old Believer advisors under the supervision of the Supreme Old Believer Council in Poland were opened in the building of the Old Believers' Public School in Vilnius. The permission to conduct those courses was obtained from the Ministry of Religious Confessions and Public Education. 39 people attended the courses. The pedagogical management of the courses was carried out by the chairman of the Supreme Old Believer Council B.A. Pimonov. 150 hours were given for lectures. Classes were conducted during 30 academic days, 5 lectures a day. The curriculum of the courses included the following subjects: teaching of the Law of God – 78 hours; pedagogy and methodology – 30 hours; church service (liturgy) – 15 hours; Slavonic and Russian – 21 hours; Polish – 15 hours; laws, school and the public – 9 hours; history of Poland – 12 hours; church singing – 30 hours.

The attendees of the courses were provided with material support. Each attendee was provided with residence, meals, various literature and writing materials free of charge. In addition, they had the opportunity to wash clothes free of charge and each received 10 zł for hygiene (*Information Bulletin*, 1930, pp. 17–18).

The Supreme Old Believer Council in Poland paid much attention to the work with young people. A certain methodical and financial help in this direction was provided by the Ministry of Religious Confessions and Public Education of Poland. The Christian consciousness of the Old Believers, brought up on Holy Scripture, patristic heritage and church history, creatively reinterpreted the notion of youth, the formation of “hypostasis” or “personality” in the new economic, social and cultural conditions. The doctrine of “personality” is the most important part in the spiritual heritage of the Old Believers. Spiritual leaders of the Old Believers acted

on the premise that only through love, mercy, faith, compassion, elevation above the earthly and the outward Man comes close to God and becomes a personality. It was this approach to the formation of personality that was included in the new “picture of the world” by the leadership of the Supreme Old Believer Council in Poland. The peculiarities of the new “picture of the world” were constantly spoken about by the Old Believers’ spiritual teachers in their sermons.

An example of specific actions aimed at the formation of personality was the organization of evening courses of church reading and singing in the communities. It was a good opportunity to reach every child, to help them acquire their “hypostasis”. In 1930, the second All-Polish Council considered the question of the organization of evening courses for the practical training of school-age children and individuals who wanted to teach the Law of God in government schools in Poland and to teach the church service and liturgical singing to the younger generation. The Council took an important and timely decision and delegated the rights to organize those courses to the local councils of the Old Believer communities. The resolution stated that the local councils at their own expense would organize evening courses to teach children the Law of God, church singing and liturgical reading (Information Bulletin, 1931, pp. 1–2).

On August 19–20, 1936, in Vilnius, the All-Polish Congress of Old Believer Teachers was held. That was a very significant event in the religious and educational life of the Old Believers of Poland. The congress summed up the results of the work for the period of 1925–1935. The leadership of the Supreme Old Believer Council in Poland and the Old Believer teachers had a lot to be proud of: an effective teaching of the Law of God had been organized for the children of the Old Believers in government schools; two courses on pedagogical preparation of Old Believers’ teachers had been held; countrywide evening courses of church reading and singing in the communities had been organized (Baranovsky & Potashenko, 2005, pp. 91–92).

THE OLD BELIEF ON BELARUSIAN LANDS FROM THE 1950S TO THE BEGINNING OF THE 21ST CENTURY

On September 17, 1939, the USSR, following Nazi Germany, attacked Poland. By September 25, a significant Polish territory was already occupied. The lands of Braslav, Disna, Postavy, Oshmyansky and partially Sventsyan districts have moved to the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (hereinafter: BSSR). The Old Believers who had lived on those lands joined the system of legal relations exist-

ing in BSSR. In December 1939 – January 1940, a new administrative-territorial division was introduced in Western BSSR. In the western regions the Soviet atheistic system started working.

At the same time, with actions for expansion of a social base of the new power, the repressive device of Stalin's dictatorship strenuously "exposed enemies of the people", "eradicated" bourgeois and religious remnants and dissent among the population. Shortly after the entry of the units of the Red Army on the territory of Western Belarus, political repressions began. The Old Believers appeared to be in the lists of the most unreliable.

As for the period of 1939–1960, materials, especially archival, concerning the history of the Old Belief on Belarusian lands, are very few. In available archival documents Old Believers are called sectarians, sometimes it is difficult to understand about whom it is said. After World War II there was an improvement and sorting of the archival system, changes were made into the reporting in BSSR. Only from the beginning of the 1960s in the reports of the authorized representatives for religion there was a column about Old Believers. In the reports there are only statistics: the number of churches or prayer houses; the number of believers, the number of occasional religious rites; the surnames of spiritual advisors and sometimes the names of holidays in church on which a large number of parishioners were present. As for the description of features of the church service of Old Believers, the internal structure of their churches or prayer houses, it was done by orthodox priests in their reports in 1946–1950. Ethnographic materials or other sorts of research are absent.

The events which took place in 1939 and in the following years were a shock for the Old Believers of the former western areas. Suddenly they lost everything, and the main thing – the organizational system which had been guaranteed by the Constitution of Poland.

Having found themselves in the system of new legal relations, Old Believers tried to keep their spiritual foundations, traditions and way of life. Their spiritual life was passing under the conditions of introduction of atheism in the society. Making a certain part of the population, and in certain areas the number of Old Believers reached 50%, the Old Belief was included in all social and economic, political and cultural processes which were taking place in the Belarusian Society.

What was the policy of the Soviet power in relation to the Old Belief on Belarusian lands? The confessional policy of the Belarusian authorities from the moment of the formation of the USSR was in the course of the general party policy of the young state. A started atheistic propaganda was initially directed against churches of different confessions, as well as against different church structures.

In the late 20s and the beginning of the 30s, there was a transition from atheistic propaganda to administrative and even repressive measures of struggle against religion. Arrests of active priests were made, heavy taxes and rates of obligatory insurance on buildings and cult subjects were established. As for the youth, there was a uniform party instruction – they were not allowed to enter any religious buildings or present at any religious events.

The Old Believers living on Belarusian lands were not involved, as, for example, the Old Believers of the central regions of the Russian Empire, in the revolutionary movement. But, as it was noted above, the Old Believers of the western Belarusian territories till 1939 were under the jurisdiction of Poland, and that fact resulted in a “special” attitude towards them. The Party and Soviet bodies in Belarus paid the greatest attention to the struggle against the Orthodox Church, but they did not disregard the Old Belief either.

During the construction of the Soviet society, the Old Believers of the western and eastern areas of BSSR had to organize their life under new conditions. There were essential changes in social and economic, political and cultural spheres in Belarus. Under those conditions the Old Believers were involved in the processes of the society’s development, and the youth began to move to industrial centers.

Defenders of the old ceremony had to carry out the activity according to the rules of law resulting from the resolution of the Council of People’s Commissars from April 8, 1929, “About Religious Associations”, as well as the laws and administrative resolutions adopted the same year. Besides, the Party resolutions had an important role. The questions of registration of church associations and the fight of parishioners against the authorities concerning the closing prayer houses were the main ones.

As for the eastern part of BSSR, a large number of Old Believers was in Bobruisk area. So, in 1946 about 50 families of Old Believers lived in Klichev district, in the villages Nesyaty, Orekhovka, Budnevo, Batsevichi. In Kirovsk district, in the villages Morkhovichi, Lyubonichi there were about 40 families. The deputy authorized representative of the Council for the affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church in the BSSR. F. Kalachev in his report characterized the Old Believers of the mentioned areas as follows: “These sectarians don’t recognize the church and priests, they say that it is not the real church of the patriarch. Big fanaticism is observed in the believers of this sect, they are afraid and avoid everything Soviet, they are even afraid to touch instructions from village councils and district executive committees with their hands” (National Archives, Fund 951. – Note 1. – File 4. – List 42).

As it was already noted, the question of registration of prayer houses was one of the main for Old Believers. In the 1950s, the community of Nazarovska,

Bobruisk district, actively worked. Its membership was 200 people in 1957, it united inhabitants of the villages Nazarovka, Kurlyanchiki and the suburbs of the city of Bobruisk. Afanasiy Semenov was elected the chairman of the community. On January 23, 1957, the Old Believers of the community addressed the regional executive committee of Mogilev and asked to register the prayer house which they had constructed on the cemetery territory. The statement explained that the former prayer house and the subjects which were in it had burned down during the war. The last sentence of the statement read: “We, all, are workers and collective farmers and we can’t live without the church and our spiritual advisor”. The church structure of the community was specified in the supplement to the statement: N. Ivanov, year of birth – 1903, the chairman of the board, 176, Kombinatskaya St., a worker; I. Nazarov, 1901, a worker; I. Parfyonov, 1890, a worker; I. Petrov, 1889, a worker; A. Ivanov, 1872, a worker; G. Maslov, 1885, dependant; G. Detkov, 1875, a pensioner; S. Kurlyanchik, 1887, a worker; A. Polozov, 1888, a worker; A. Evstratov, 1895, a worker; N. Vorobyov, 1914, a worker, the chairman of the auditing committee; D. Maksimov, 1886, a worker; S. Karpov, 1876, a worker; M. Krutov, 1909, a worker; K. Chernov, 1880, a worker, the prior of the church; A. Kurlyanchik, 1900, a worker; E. Zuyko, 1908, dependant; A. Kurlyanchik, 1899, a worker; I. Chernova, 1917, a worker; E. Kurlyanchik, 1906, dependant (Mogilev, Fund 2336. – Note 1. – File 11. – Lists 1–8).

From 1960 the information about Old Believers appeared in the reports of the authorized representatives of the Council for the affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church. In the mentioned year, in Mogilev area, 6 Old Believers’ prayer houses were registered: one prayer house of the Old Believers of Belaya Krinitisa religious grouping, two prayer houses with the priests who had left the Orthodox Church and moved from place to place without registration and three prayer houses where there were no priests, but there were spiritual advisors. Five prayer houses were located in nationalized buildings and one – in a private house. These parishes were under the supervision of 6 spiritual advisors, two of them were engaged in factory production. Till 1914 there was one spiritual instructor who was ordained for ministry, after 1917 – 5, all of them were older than 60. One spiritual advisor had a secondary religious education, and the others had the general elementary education (National Archives, Fund 952. – Note 3. – File 22. – List 4).

In 1965 in Minsk region, 3 Old Believers’ prayer houses were registered, 3 spiritual advisors conducted services in them. (In comparison, in 1940 in this area – 7 Old Believers’ communities were active).

In Gomel region, 3 Old Believers’ prayer houses were registered. In Vitebsk area, 16 prayer houses of Old Believers were registered, 15 of them were wooden

and one was made of stone. There was a spiritual advisor in each house. Prayer meetings in the Old Believers' communities of the area were held regularly, about 3,380 people were present at them. In the first quarter of 1965 in Vitebsk area, 15 rituals of christening, one wedding and 63 burials with the assistance of the spiritual advisor were made (National Archives, Note 3. – File 41. Lists 33, 40, 134, 175, 177, 213).

In Gomel region the Old Believers of Belaya Krinitsa religious grouping were notable for their activity. F. Bogatyryov, born in 1891, was the priest in church, the deacon was V. Kazachenko, born in 1934. On prophet Elijah's Day bishop Iosaf (J. Karpov) used to arrive here from Klinttsy. The City Council allowed the community to use a standard wooden church at 44, Komisarov St., which is an architectural and cultural monument of the 18th century. At Easter and on the patron saint's day of Elijah about a thousand people were present at church services, 500–600 people visited church on Twelve Great Feasts, on ordinary days their number was about 100–150. Parishioners of middle and senior ages participated in church services, children were not allowed to go to church, such was the requirement of the Soviet and party bodies. Old Believers from the city of Gomel, Novo-Belitsa and Gomel, Dobrush, Vetkovka and other regions were present at church services.

One of the activities of the clergy of the church was to solemnize. In 1964, they baptized 70 children; gave the nuptial benediction to 2 couples; organized 13 burials and 27 memorial services, 9 anointing of the sick, 93 liturgies, 24 public prayers, 220 confessions and 110 communions. 3,041 roubles and 61 kopeks was collected from the sale of religious utensils and occasional religious rites in 1963, in 1964 – 3,363 roubles and 91 kopeks (National Archives, Fund 952. – Note 4. – File 45. – List 40).

Despite a rigid control from the law enforcement agencies, the Old Believers avoided obligatory registration of the churches or prayer houses. In 1964, on the territory of Gomel region 4 Old Believers' communities operated unregistered. The authorized representative of the Council for the affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church in Gomel region described that fact as follows: "The religious doctrine of Old Believers has an anti-state, fanatic character". The same year four communities were crossed off the register, because of the end of the activity: three in Dobrush and one in Zhlobin districts (National Archives, Fund 952. – Note 4. – File 45. – List 40).

The Old Believers of Vitebsk area did not stop divine services either. As it was already noted, in 1965, 16 associations of the Old Believers were registered in the area. All communities of Old Believers had their own prayer houses. In October 1964, Polotsk community found a building for ministering church services and elected the spiritual advisor. All prayer houses in 1964 conducted 188 christenings, 136 burials and one wedding.

In the western region of Vitebsk area there were 13 communities. In the report of the authorized representative of the Council for the affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church in Vitebsk area, it is said that all of them belonged to the communities 1) with the priests who had left the Orthodox Church and moved from place to place without registration, 2) those who followed the traditions of the Old Believers of the Pomorye, and 3) some of them called themselves after the name of their spiritual advisor Fedoseev. They, unlike Old Believers without a priest of the Pomorye living in the eastern part of the area, had a wedding ceremony.

In prayer houses Old Believers made memorial services: the fortieth, annual, universal and general memorial service. The general memorial service was observed three times a year in parental weeks. Each believer had a commemoration book. In some books, 200–300 names were registered in a family tree, all these names were mentioned during the memorial service. In Vitebsk prayer house usual notebooks were used to enter the names of the dead. One of the choristers in red and black ink separately in the ancient Slavic language wrote down the names of the dead men, women and children.

The Old Believers of Vitebsk region took an active part in divine services and solution of organizational questions. So, about 3,700 people took part in service at Easter in 1965 in the prayer house of Vitebsk, in 1963 – about 4,000. On Twelve Great Feasts in this church about 800 people participated in services, and on Saturdays and Sundays – up to 100 (National Archives, Fund 952. – Note 4. – File 45. – Lists 85–86).

In the city of Vitebsk the Old Believers of Belaya Krinitsa religious grouping lived. They had no temple of their own, and all their attempts to get it came to an end without any results. From time to time – in 1962, 1965 – they addressed the Council for the affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church in Vitebsk area with a request to allow the arrival of the priest for solemnization. Their request was turned down for the reason that they had no temple, and the instruction forbade conducting solemnization in the houses of believers. K. Morozov, K. Morozova, U. Ivanov, Tsvetkov, Orekhova were among active believers. About 100 Old Believers of Belaya Krinitsa religious grouping lived in Vitebsk in 1965 (National Archives, Fund 952. – Note 3. – File 41. – List 214).

Six registered Old Believers' communities worked in Mogilev area in 1965: 5 – in Bobruisk district, and one – in Kirovsk district. 9 priests lived in the area, 6 were registered and 3 – unregistered. In Bobruisk the community was registered at 162 Naberezhnaya St. The spiritual advisor was P. Maslov, born in 1884. On holidays the church was visited by up to 150 people.

The community in the village of Ugly, Provдино village council, Bobruisk district was considered to be numerous. It was registered in March 1948. In 1965 its membership was more than 400 believers. Church services were made in a shabby prayer house. E. Kozlov, born in 1878, was the spiritual advisor.

The community of the village Bogushevka located on the territory of Gorbatsevichy village council, Bobruisk district, was notable for its activity. The community had a wooden prayer house. The role of the spiritual advisor was played by Z. Voytov, born in 1885. He graduated from Riga religious school in 1912. Z. Voytov strictly observed the church Charter, his church services were characterized by a consecutive set of sacred ceremonies and actions, which always attracted a large number of believers. The prayer house was visited by parishioners from ten nearby villages. On holidays about 120 people took part in divine services.

The community of the village 3rd Bogushevichi, Osovsk village council, Bobruisk district also had a wooden prayer house. G. Alekseev, born in 1895, served as a spiritual advisor here. The community united only the believers of that village.

The community of the village Turovskaya Sloboda of Bobruisk district also had their own prayer house which needed complete rebuilding. V. Fedulov, born in 1873, was the spiritual advisor in the community. The community in the village Kapustino of Kirovsk district also had a shabby prayer house. The parishioners elected K. Chistobayev, born in 1882, their spiritual advisor.

In 1965, the Old Believers' communities in the city of Bobruisk and of the village Podleshchenka of Kirovsk district were crossed off the register. The mentioned communities refused to register, which resulted in corresponding actions from the side of supervising authorities (National Archives, Fund 952. – Note 3. – File 41. – List 112; Note 4. – File 45. – Lists 196–197).

The number of registered Old Believers' communities decreased with every coming year. So, in 1969 in Vitebsk region there were 14 registered communities. They all had prayer houses. 13 prayer houses were passed on to Old Believers by local authorities to be used free of charge, one prayer house was located in a leased building. 14 spiritual advisors were registered, each of them was above 60 years old. In Gomel region there was one church of Old Believers with a priest belonging to Belaya Krinitza religious grouping, in Grodno region there was one prayer house of Old Believers without a priest. The Old Believers of Minsk region managed to keep their prayer houses, and they registered three of them, the same number as in 1965. The Old Believers of Mogilev region had also kept all their prayer houses by 1969, and six were registered that year (National Archives, Fund 136. – Note 1. – File 14. – Lists 6, 11, 16, 22, 27).

There were 24 registered and one unregistered Old Believers' communities in the republic in 1975. 23 communities were Old Believers' communities without a priest and one community in Gomel was of Belaya Krinitza religious grouping with a priest. An unregistered community of Old Believers without a priest was in force in the village Negovlya of Kirovsk district, Mogilev region. S. Ivanov was their spiritual advisor. All registered communities had their religious buildings and spiritual advisors.

As regards the number of Old Believers, Vitebsk area had still been the most representative by the middle of the 70s. In 1975, the Old Believers of the area had the same 14 prayer houses in Vitebsk, Polotsk, Bulavishki, Vidzy, Kirilino, Mishkovichi, Lastovichi, Kublishchino, Nivniki, Apidamy, Kuklyany, Voronkovo, Germinovichy, Rakovo. In the 70s the party and Soviet bodies carried out wide actions to raise money for the Peace Fund. Old Believers did not stand aside either. So, in 1974 the Old Believers of Vitebsk region placed 1,005 roubles to the Peace Fund's account, in 1975 – 1,210 roubles. In 1974 they placed 668 roubles on the account of restoration of historical and architectural monuments, in 1975 – 455 roubles. The Old Believers of Gomel, Grodno and Minsk regions managed to keep their prayer houses and their number remained the same (National Archives, Fund 136. – Note 1. – File 37. – Lists 48, 50, 77, 89, 90, 97, 118, 137, 158).

In Mogilev region in 1975 there were 6 Old Believers' communities, one of them was not registered. The Old Believers of the village Negovlya, Kirovsk district, refused to register their community. Their spiritual advisor S. Ivanov organized prayer meetings in the houses of the brothers in faith, visited other villages to solemnize, which was violation of existing legislation at that time and made provision for different types of punishment. Starting in 1970 the representatives of local authorities had talks with S. Ivanov about their integration with the Old Believers of the village Kapustino. When in 1975 it became clear that S. Ivanov would not agree on integration, the authorities warned him about administrative responsibility. After such tough pressure the spiritual advisor agreed to unite on conditions that he would be at the head of the united Old Believers. Thus, in 1975 the Old Believers of the villages Negovlya and Kapustino were united in one prayer house in Kapustino, which was headed by S. Ivanov (National Archives, Fund 136. – Note 1. – File 39. – List 46).

As a result of active atheistic propaganda in the 70s–80s the number of registered communities and religious buildings of all denominations in the republic considerably decreased. That process also touched upon Old Believers. By 1980 the number of registered Old Believers' prayer houses had decreased. Only in Vitebsk region their number remained the same. The Old Believers of this area

were more solid; they continued the traditions of the times of the existence of the Supreme Old Believers' Council and they were still strong, so both the party and the Soviet power had to take it into consideration. By 1980 one prayer house had been crossed off the register in Grodno region. Mogilev region had also lost one and now only five prayer houses were there. Still one remained in Gomel region and three – in Minsk region (National Archives, Fund 136. – Note 1. – File 59. – Lists 38, 47, 59, 62, 65, 69).

On modern Belarusian lands most part of Old Believers, who belong to the community with a priest, lives in Vetka, Dobrush, Gomel districts and in the city Gomel, Gomel region. The Old Believers of Gomel region have one registered church in Gomel. It is called the Russian Orthodox Old Believers' church. The parishioners accept the hierarchy of Belaya Krinitsa religious grouping.

Most Old Believers who belong to the community without a priest live in Vitebsk, Mogilev and Minsk areas. Till the end of the 20th century they did not have their center of government. On October 11, 1998, the Congress of spiritual advisors of Pomorye communities of Belarus took place. The Central Council was elected at the Congress, G. Karpov was elected the chairman of the Central Council. The charter was worked out. The decision to summon the Synod of the Christian Old Believers of the Pomorye was made. The First All-Belarusian Synod of the Christian Old Believers of the Pomorye was held in Polotsk on August 28, 1998. On December 28, 1999, the Second All-Belarusian Synod of the Christian Old Believers of the Pomorye elected P. Orlov the chairman of the Central Council. Since 2000, the magazine for family reading “Blagovest” has been published. The Sixth Synod of the Christian Old Believers of the Pomorye took place on November 27, 2006. Since April 2007, there have been three issues of the Information Bulletin of the Central Council of the Christian Old Believers of the Pomorye.

At present there are 37 communities of the Christian Old Believers of the Pomorye in Belarus: 19 communities – in Vitebsk, 8 – in Mogilev, 6 – in Minsk, 3 – in Gomel regions, and one in the city of Grodno.

TO SAVE ONESELF AND FAMILY, TO SAVE THE CHURCH

In this section, we will use the materials of ethnographic expeditions, conducted under my leadership in 1997–2004, to the places where the Old Believers live. The defenders of the old rite, as the most conservative in everyday rituals and doctrinal issues, were able to fully bring to our time morals and manners, cultural and educational traditions of the past. Examination and analysis of religious

and dogmatic features of the Old Believers who lived on Belarusian lands in the second half of the 20th and at the beginning of the 21st century allowed making new discoveries, learning about new processes taking place in this ethno-cultural space. Furthermore, new opportunities appeared to study the initial disposition, the foundation on which the basic phenomena and traditions originated, grew and formed in the Old Believer environment. As a result of those expeditions, it was possible to gather the richest material concerning the attitude of the Old Believers to the faith, the Church, work, family and upbringing.

After the Second World War and the establishment of Soviet power on the Belarusian lands (the author refers to the current borders of the Republic of Belarus), the Old Believers began to develop a new understanding of the “picture of the world”. As already noted above, the Soviet authorities fought actively against religion, making the whole society atheistic. Most of the Old Believer temples were closed. The main task of the Old Believers in the “new picture” of the world was conscious comprehension of the ways to save the Church and their own souls. Due to the fact that there was nowhere to pray together, every Old Believer’s house became a church, and the head of the family became a spiritual advisor. Each house had its own “prayer room”, it was always the largest and the brightest room. In the right corner, as a rule, three icons were placed: of Jesus Christ, Our Lady, and Nicholas the Wonderworker. As for the icon of Our Lady, in most cases, it was the icon of the Kazan Mother of God. The defenders of the old rite were forced to recreate a new model of church organization. Though they were afraid to be arrested and convicted, they continued to maintain their faith.

A vivid example of such a ministry is the life and work of the spiritual mentor Mikhail Georgievich Solovyov in the district of Sharkovshchina of Vitebsk region. We met Mikhail Solovyov during our expedition in 1998, when he was 98 years old. In 1942 he became a spiritual mentor in Sharkovshchina. From his uncle, Michael Solovyov, he took over an important ability to rewrite books. We held rewritten in Church Slavonic books in hands and could not at first distinguish them from the original. He wrote a lot of plain chants. He composed the “Church Calendar” for each year, pointed out all the church holidays and colorfully decorated it. Michael Solovyov had a talent of a teacher. In his nature there was always love to people, ability to give advice and help. He taught the children the word of God. Besides, he taught them to write and read texts written in Church Slavonic, and to sing the plain chants. Mikhail Solovyov’s daughter, Ariadna, was preparing tea for us, and he, looking through the album with photographs of the graduates of the Old Believer School in Vilno (now Vilnius), remarked with sadness: “Only I remain alive” (Gorbatsky, 2000, pp. 154–157).

The Old Believers who lived in the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic and did not have a single governing body acted on the premise that each church they created was a congregation of believers who were related, united by faith, the law of God, where God's grace abides. The so-called Old Believer "home" Church entered the "picture of the world" as a new one, different from the traditional Churches.

In the new "picture of the world" of the Old Believers, the role of the family was further strengthened. Now the family became a Church, a school and a home. The defenders of the old rite acted on the premise that according to the general Christian doctrine, individual salvation, which is the main goal of Christianity, is impossible without the Church.

An important factor in preserving their altered Church among the Old Believers was the fact that they had had centuries of experience in surviving and preserving their faith in the conditions of persecution and recurrent repressions. Because of this they managed to preserve religious life in their families. The family became the only center of religious education of children. One of our respondents described the family and the roles of a husband and a wife in it as follows:

The father was always the head of the family. It was a rule. The man's mission was farming, special attention was paid to the livestock. The woman also worked hard, especially during the harvest period. The father was more concerned with the upbringing of the children, he controlled the children's visits to the prayer room. The spiritual role of women in the upbringing was also important. She was busier with daughters, and the father – with sons. Despite such a division in education, both daughters and sons obeyed both mother and father. Punishment could follow disobedience (written from the words by Solovyov Ivan Emelianovich, born in 1942, the village of Zalesye, Braslav district of Vitebsk region, July 14, 2003).

Our second respondent answered the question about the importance of the family and the role of a husband and a wife in it as follows:

I am a supporter of a strong family and I am against polygamy. The priest especially must observe all family norms. The family, like the state, must be strong. I am glad that now the older generation takes their children and grandchildren to the temple, takes care of their upbringing. That common practice should be carefully preserved and multiplied. Religion has not done harm anyone. The Soviet government did not understand that (written from the words by Orlov Peter Alexandrovich, spiritual advisor, born in 1938, the city of Polotsk, July 16, 2003).

Another important task of the family was the teaching of their children the Law of God, the history of the Old Believer Church, reading in the Church Slavonic language, singing and reading plain chants. The problem was that all subjects

somehow connected with belief in God, or any kind of Church history, were excluded from the curricula of the Soviet school. In this situation, the Old Believers themselves had to teach these subjects in their “family schools”.

A good example of the organization of such “family schools” was the work of Fedor Grigorievich Shklyarov (1925–1988) in Vetka district of Gomel region. He himself was from the Old Believers, for a long time he worked as a school teacher. In due time, Vetka was the center of the whole Old Believer movement and the traditions of the Old Believers were always observed and respected there. Together with his followers, Fedor Shklyarov collected unique items of the Old Believer cult and life. These were the icons and gospels of the period before St. Nikon, icons written on the Vetka, household items of the defenders of the old rite. At first he kept all these unique exhibits at home and used when teaching children in his “family school”. Representatives of the Soviet power knew about this, they tried several times to forbid Fedor Shklyarov to continue his activities that were not approved by the authorities. Fedor Shklyarov collected artifacts with the help of which it was possible to spread religious values and faith in God and it was a problem for the authorities. This situation was unacceptable for the Bolshevik atheist ideology and the authorities understood it perfectly. The collection gathered by Fedor Shklyarov in the 1960s–1970s was of great interest among journalists, well-known representatives of culture and scientists. So in 1978, the authorities had to open the Vetka Museum of Folk Art. The first director of this museum was Fedor Shklyarov. In fact, it was a classical museum of the Old Believers. Fedor Shklyarov could only dream about it.

The opening of the Vetka Museum of Folk Art became a great success for all Old Believers. Everyone understood that it was a museum of the Old Believers, but nobody wanted to admit it. In fact, the museum has become an official great school for the Old Believers and a good opportunity to form a new “picture of the world” for both the Old Believer youth and the young people representing other confessions.

At the beginning of the 21st century the historical truth triumphed. In February 2011, the museum was named after Fedor Shklyarov, and on December 10, 2012, the museum received the deserved name – the Vetka Museum of the Old Belief and Belarusian Traditions named after Fedor Shklyarov.

CONCLUSIONS

1. In Poland the Old Believers alongside with other citizens enjoyed all the rights. They formed the Supreme Old Believer Council, which ruled all their life. They established the spiritual and socio-cultural life of their communi-

- ties. Experience, energy and fortitude obtained by the defenders of the old rite while in the Polish state, helped them later, while in the BSSR, to assert their rights with the representatives of the party and state structures and atheists.
2. During the period of the Old Believers' residence in Poland, a new way of thinking became a key component that had a significant impact on their social, cultural and confessional functions. The policy of the Polish authorities in relation to the defenders of the old rite made it possible to form a new "picture of the world" in the Old Believers' thinking, in which the main components were faith, the Church, the family and the care for children.
 3. Thanks to the competent policy of the Polish government and the active work of the Supreme Old Believer Council, it was possible to organize the teaching of Old Believer children in accordance with the traditions and the desire of parents, and this, in turn, had a strong educational effect.
 4. Despite the active atheistic propaganda carried out almost throughout the entire 20th century, the Old Believers in the BSSR managed to (partially) preserve their shrines as well as their own identity. This, in turn, allowed the Old Believers to elect their Central Council in 1998 and to establish the church and out-of-church activities.
 5. Finding themselves in the BSSR, the Old Believers had to think about the ways how to save the Church and their own souls once again. The main binding force, which fulfilled educational functions in the traditions of their grandfathers and great-grandfathers, was the family in which separate cultic actions began to be performed. The family became the school and the Church – a "small prayer house". In the educational plan, a prominent role was played by the leaders of the Old Believers, who were not indifferent to the fate of the children of their brothers in faith.

References

- Baranovsky, V., & Potashenko, G. (2005). *Old Belief in the Baltic States and Poland: A Concise Historical and Biographic Dictionary*. Vilnius: Publishing House Aidai.
- Gorbatsky, A.A. (2000). To the Pedigree of Sharkovshchina Old Believers of Solovyovs in Belarus (Based on the Materials of the Expedition). In: O.P. Ershova, V.I. Osipov, & E.I. Sokolova (Eds.), *Old Believers: History, Culture, Modernity*. Moscow: Publishing Printer.
- Information Bulletin of the Supreme Old Believers' Council in Poland. № 3. – Vilnius, 1930.
- Information Bulletin of the Supreme Old Believers' Council in Poland. № 1. – Vilnius, 1931.
- Information Bulletin of the Supreme Old Believers' Council in Poland. № 1–3. – Vilnius, 1933. Mogilev State Archives of Belarus.
- National Archives of the Republic of Belarus.
- Old Believers' Church Calendar for 1939. Publication of the Old Believers' Council in Poland. Vilnius, 1939.