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## OPPOSITION OF PEASANTS AND KOMSOMOL MEMBERS IN THE SPIRITUAL SPHERE OF THE RUSSIAN VILLAGE IN THE EARLY 1920-S

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### Abstract

The article is devoted to the analysis of the relationship in the spiritual sphere between Komsomol members and peasant representatives of the older generations, including the generation of the “revolutionary turning point” (born at the turn of the XIX-th - XX-th centuries). The composition of rural Komsomol organizations in the first half of the 1920s is analyzed. The role of young atheists in the evolution of the moral state of peasant “fathers” is studied. The purely forceful methods of overcoming church and religious influence during the so-called “storming of heaven” were clearly facilitated by the psycho-age characteristics of Komsomol members, most of whom, by virtue of adolescence, sought to free themselves from the dependence of their parents in all respects, including from the norms of behavior that constrained the development of independence. It has been shown that the spiritual heritage, which, according to the rules of continuous development, the older generations were called upon to pass on to their successors, was rejected by Komsomol members (as active representatives of the younger generation) in real life. The confrontation between young atheists and adherents of traditional religions significantly influenced the formation of an intergenerational rupture in the Russian village.

**Keywords:** peasants, generations, revolutionary change, fathers, the youth, komsomol, religion, NEP.

### I. INTRODUCTION

In modern science, the conflict of generations is recognized as immanently inherent in all critical periods of history. Applied to the 1920s, the extreme deformation of youth behavioral stereotypes was very accurately noticed by F.N. Kozlov: “In a society that has been knocked out of its usual rut, under the influence of several years of the First World War and the Civil War, an atmosphere of permanent confrontation, a conflict of everyone with everyone, has formed” [33, p. 72]. The greatest cruelty, according to F.N. Kozlov, was intra-family conflicts. Assessing the overall relationship between “fathers” and “children” in the peasant environment after the 1917 revolution, it would be more correct to speak not even of a generational conflict, but of a deep rupture, a generational gap [60]. Even in the “ABC of Communism”, E.A. Preobrazhensky and N.I. Bukharin was urged to reject and mercilessly ridicule the claims of parents trying “by means of home education to imprint their limitations in the psychology of their children” [10, p. 181].



In the 1920s, we see “cases of direct challenge to the convictions of an adult, which in the former peasant consciousness (hierarchy, respect for elders) was almost impossible” [42, p. 39]. The younger generations also rejected the values of the just-matured representatives of the “revolutionary turning point” generation (born at the turn of the 19th – 20th centuries) [81].

Moreover, some communist ideologists saw “excessive corruption” by the old regime even in the adherents of revolutionary changes from among the representatives of the older generations. E.A. Preobrazhensky, in particular, wrote: “The adult generation is too corrupted by capitalism and accustomed to the old. It even seems to me that, for example, the members of the Communist Party, no matter how great the historical role they played during the breaking of the capitalist wall and no matter how great their role will be in the next three or four decades, even they are already deeply corrupted by capitalism and represent themselves as useless material for a purely communist construction. (They will be lucky not to live to see communism and will therefore go down to the grave as revolutionary heroes)” [51, p. 82]. L.D. Trotsky directly called for the creation of a person who would not want “to crawl on his belly before the dark laws of heredity, blind sexual selection” and who would be able “to master feelings, understand instincts, make them transparent, stretch the wires of the will into the underlying and underground, and thereby raise a person to a new biological level, to create a higher socio-biological type, if you like – a superman ..” [72, p. 448]. A.D. Zalkind explained to the youth that, according to proletarian morality, one should “honor only that father who stands on the revolutionary proletarian point of view”. Other fathers, in his opinion, should be re-educated by the children themselves. Moreover, since “the interests of the revolutionary class are more important than the good of the father”, after an unsuccessful struggle with their parents, children have the right to leave them. A.D. Zalkind proclaimed: “There is no self-sufficing “fatherhood” for the class, there is no self-sufficing “veneration” of fathers” [85, p. 75].

In this article, we will try to find out what impact did the situation in the spiritual sphere have on the growth of the generation gap, namely the relationship between believers (in the generation of the “revolutionary turning point” they were in the majority during this period) and young atheists (Y.A. Levada defines this generation as “Stalinist”) [39, P. 42].

## II. METHODOLOGY

The research methodology is based on a synthesis of the main approaches of modern social history and is interdisciplinary in nature. The study of the stated problem is carried out on the basis of the approaches of the “new cultural history”, which involves the use of methods of both macro- and microhistorical research. Great attention was paid to a careful comprehension of modern literature on the research topic. First of all, works that showed the role of youth in anti-religious activities [2] and its influence on the public sentiments of the peasantry were studied. T. Shanin’s conclusion that without studying generational history the scientific picture of the past cannot be quite clear was fundamental [63, p. 11]. Generations were considered as communities of contemporaries, formed in certain historical conditions, under the influence of significant historical events, regardless of their chronological age. The author, following M. Mead, connected the destiny of youth with “social bulldozing” clearing the ground for the future society.

The source base for the study was archival and published documents, as well as materials from printed publications of the 1920s [41].

## III. DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

It was during the NEP period that the Komsomol became a prominent political force in the village. In the Program of the Komsomol, its IV All-Russian Congress (September 1921) included the provision: “... the Komsomol is waging an ideological struggle against religious prejudices that stupefy the consciousness of the young generation of working people” [72, p. 68].



The Komsomol Central Committee ordered that all educational work be saturated with political content, not forgetting anti-religious propaganda [19].

The composition of the Komsomol at the beginning of the NEP decreased. Not only the troubles of the Civil War, but also a certain disappointment of young people in Soviet politics, associated with the NEP retreat, had an effect. From October 1918 to October 1920, the union grew from 22,000 to 482,000 people. In October 1921, the organization had 400 thousand members, in October 1922 – 247 thousand members (of which 48% were peasants) and 13 thousand candidates for membership in the Komsomol. By the end of 1922, rural cells of the union accounted for 73.7% of the total number of Komsomol primary organizations. More than 70% of Komsomol members were boys and girls under 20 years old. Komsomol members at that time made up only about 1% of the youth [68, p. 9]. The IV and V congresses of the Komsomol adhered to the line of non-expansion of village cells; increased requirements were established for young men and girls of peasant origin entering the Komsomol. In some places, this led to a reduction in Komsomol work in the village, which was soon recognized as erroneous. In an attempt to achieve the establishment of the Komsomol monopoly in the youth movement, the union took a course to destroy the isolation of the village Komsomol cells from the rest of the peasant youth through their involvement in cultural, educational, physical culture, agriculture and other clubs organizing leisure.



**Komsomol members of the village of Sampur, Tambov province, Yegor Makarov, Alexander Zubkov, and Mikhail Kombarov.**

By 1924, the proportion of Komsomol members among young people had increased, but did not exceed 1.6%. Among young men, 2.8% were Komsomol members, among girls – 0.5%. For every 200 people aged 14-23, there were 3 Komsomol members. Among all young people engaged in agriculture, Komsomol members accounted for 0.9%, and among rural girls – even 0.16% (16 thousand out of 10 million). There was a noticeable increase in the age composition of the Komsomol [68, pp. 10, 17].



G.E. Zinoviev rightly remarked: “190-200 thousand in the village for our entire vast Union of Socialist Republics, this is a drop in the ocean” [88, Pp. 5-6]. Nevertheless, although the Komsomol organizations in the village were still few in number, the rural Komsomol represented “for many adults the hated force of peasant politics, which, as a rule, was heard and seen better than the rural activists of the Communist Party” [76, 67]. However, even in the middle of the decade, there were reports fixing the real inaction of both the Communists and Komsomol members. So, in 1925, in the Ershichsky volost of the Smolensk province, one Party cell and 3 Komsomol cells functioned. But as village correspondent Makarov wrote in *Krestyanskaya Gazeta*: “Peasants know very little about these cells. Because the cells never maintain contact with the peasantry, and peasants think negatively about these cells” [34, p. 122]. According to the logic of G.E. Zinoviev, the Komsomol “can and should be a reservoir for the Party recruiting a broader working element”. In addition, it was reasonably emphasized: “The difference in the generation, especially among the peasantry, plays an enormous role”. G.E. Zinoviev drew attention to “the colossal difference between the young generation of peasants, who grew up in an atmosphere of 7 years of revolution, and the old peasants, who grew up in an atmosphere of tsarism” [88, p. 11-12]. A little later L.B. Kamenev spoke about the younger generation as “walking under our flag”: “It is the only one that can raise and create a new psychology” [24, p. 116]. In 1924 A.M. Bolshakov singled out “three generations of the village on the Leninist path”: communists – 173.5 thousand people, Komsomol members – 280 thousand people, pioneers – 200 thousand people [9, p. 103]. In 1924 Party leaders called the growth of the Komsomol organization in the village up to 2 million (“If not Komsomol members, then members of various clubs of rural youth under the Komsomol”) as a task that they could solve in a year [24, p. 19]. In reality, the number of peasants in the Komsomol by the beginning of 1925 had grown to 800,000. At that time, more than 10 million rural residents were of Komsomol age (16-23) [89, p. 2]. The number of rural Komsomol cells in July 1925 was 2.43 times higher than the number of Party cells (36,300 versus 14,957) [89, p. 8-9]. In the RSFSR, by March 1, 1924, there were 10,288 village cells of the Komsomol, by January 1925 – 18,893 [35, p. 39].



**Good Komsomols forward! (A million good Komsomol members in the village).**

**Journal of Peasant Youth. 1925. № 7.**





The policy of artificially delaying the growth of the Komsomol at the expense of peasant youth was officially characterized as politically dangerous. The union came to the conclusion that if the doors were closed to the broad masses of rural youth, they would fall under religious influence. The appearance of various alternative associations of peasant youth also caused concern. One of the best experts on the NEP village A.M. Bolshakov believed that it was the Komsomol members that could play a big role in its life, since the communists are often “not local people, they are aliens and ... busy with their service”. Komsomol members usually “do not live together in the village, but, on the contrary, they scatter throughout the volost and work on peasant farms together with their fellow villagers” [8, p. 331]. In contrast to the first years of Soviet power, when the Komsomol itself included representatives of the “revolutionary turning point” generation (born at the turn of the century), during the years of NEP and in Komsomol organizations, the activity of the new generation, “the children of the revolution” became the defining style of youth organizations. The anti-religious propaganda of the first years of the NEP was focused on the illiterate or semi-literate segments of the population, therefore it had a clearly simplified character. In this respect, the sections of the campaign brochure by N.I. Bukharin are indicative: “The word “God” comes from the word “rich”, “Faith in God is faith in slavery” [11, pp. 2, 4]. The Komsomol propaganda compared pectoral crosses with “chains of slavery”. In the Ardatovskiy district of the Simbirsk province, the Komsomol members “proved” the implausibility of the “afterlife” by publicly inviting the priests “to go to the vaunted kingdom of heaven” [86, p. 50]. The ethnographer V.G. Tan-Bogoraz admitted that in the eyes of the people “a hostile attitude towards the church, priests and religious prejudices was the main commandment of communism” [67, p. 18]. Moreover, in youth propaganda, the negative “senior” characters, not only in “instructive” stories and notes, but also in the “Letters from Readers” section, were often presented as close relatives. Materials on anti-religious topics from abroad were often accompanied by a conclusion about the desire of the world counter-revolution “to capture a new generation in its networks”.

Komsomol subbotniks had a constructive meaning in the first place. It is no coincidence that rural Komsomol members remembered them with pride. But at the same time, peasants could not help but be annoyed by the demonstrative disrespect of young people for religious holidays.



D.S. Moor (Orlov). Illustration for N. Gorlov's poem “The Feast of the Rich / Our Holiday”. 1921.



*The kingdom of heaven is for you,  
The kingdom of the earth – for us...  
May they heavenly pears  
They will collect on the clouds ...  
Listen, you who have ears:  
God on earth is Work!  
N. Gorlov*

Since 1921 public trials of clerics and religion began to be widely used in anti-religious work [83]. Moreover, real clergy sometimes acted in such a way that the anti-religious effect of the event was sharply reduced. Therefore, more and more propagandists began to use staging courts [49]. A clear conviction in such trials was usually accompanied by the symbolic burning of religious symbols. To get more attention, some of the dramatizations ended with fights and fistfights, which the priests playing usually “lost”. Approximately 1,500 people attended these events in a number of places [52]. The Komsomol considered the occupation of religious buildings under their institutions as the restoration of social justice, the return to the workers of the property acquired by fraud [52]. In the village of Verkhneye Tolucheevo, Voronezh province, the opening day of the club in the church building turned into a traditional godless holiday for the whole village [78, p. 202]. But this was the exception to the rule. Usually confiscation aspirations contributed to the growth of anti-Komsomol sentiments among believers [59]. Since many peasants personified the activity of the Komsomol with “godlessness”, the reaction of the village to the “girlishing” of the Komsomol was sharply negative. The peasants often said, not letting the girls into the Komsomol: “What will she learn from you, only to be rude and outrage over God”. M. Rakhmanin from the village of Yuroma, Arkhangelsk province, recalled how in the early 1920s an elderly woman threw herself on her knees at his feet: “For God’s sake, write out my girl from the union” [25, p. 47]. In the village of Oralovo, Tomsk province, a father burst into a meeting of peasant delegates shouting: “I will kill my daughter” [47, p. 13]. The divorce of young peasants with women actively participating in social work became a common occurrence. And often its initiators were older relatives.



“We’d better sign up for the Youth Union!” 1923. The author of the poster is unknown.



A village correspondent from the village of Bykovo, North Dvina District, wrote to Krestyanskaya Gazeta: "Some girls would go to meetings, etc., but their parents won't let them go, and in the village a girl won't go to a meeting alone, she needs a friend. If we give an example, then our parents in their village do not let the girl go to the performance [34, p. 187]. Another rural correspondent wrote: "Young people are still adapting to the new order, but it is difficult. Old people interfere, and if you think freely, especially in religion, then it is better to remain silent" [34, p. 185].

It is not surprising that work among girls was one of the weakest points in the activities of the rural Komsomol. And in the middle of the decade, for every hundred rural Komsomol members there were no more than a dozen girls, mostly teachers, housewives, and clerks. Sometimes girls went to meetings in whole groups, even joined the Komsomol and carried out public assignments, but at home they hid that they were Komsomol members. In the 1920s girls traditionally constituted a minority in the Union, and among those who left – an absolute majority.

Peasants often characterized Komsomol members as antichrists [56]. "Servants of religious cults, who then had a great influence on the population, persistently inspired their parents that the Komsomol was a godless organization, that all those joining the Komsomol would be brought into a "community", where everyone would sleep under one common blanket," recalled A.M. Gendon about his youth in the Yenisei province. According to him, "young people hid their membership in the Komsomol or were forced to break up with their families" [17, p. 4-5]. Judging by the memoirs of Komsomol members in the 1920s, the Orthodox village did not understand and did not accept them [84, p. 26]. Often, Komsomol members reported to various authorities about peasant dissatisfaction with their behavior, passing it off as manifestations of anti-Soviet sentiments.

Special services also noted cases of special incitement of young people in order to deepen intergenerational conflicts. For example, in the village of Rubenki, Aleksandrovsky volost, Sudogodsky district, Vladimir province, local kulaks allegedly tried to persuade Komsomol members to take away the house from the priest for the House of the Peasant in order to set adult peasants against the youth. One of the "instigators" at the same time said: "Young people, stay away from the Party, strengthen yourself around the peasantry and defend their interests" [1, p. 238].

It was the young activists who at times demonstrated defiantly barbarous treatment of Orthodox shrines, participating in the seizure of church valuables. Many villagers took this with indignation, but intimidated by punitive measures, as a rule, they did not actively resist the robbery.

The participation of young people in the campaign of opening and "exposing" the holy relics influenced the public sentiments of peasants even more negatively. The "examination" of relics were supported by photo reports of a "revealing" nature [80]. Telling that it was not possible to find completely incorruptible remains, the correspondents did not take into account that the church allowed fragmentary preservation of the relics of saints. The mocking photos and articles actually provoked anger towards those who put the relics on public display without any vestments.

Party and Komsomol leaders, as a rule, perceived the NEP as a retreat from socialist gains, which posed a terrible threat to the education of a new person. For example, at the Tambov provincial congress of the Komsomol, it was emphasized: "All these petty-bourgeois "charms" that are now blooming, which are spreading from all sides in our country, primarily act and influence young brains" [12, p. 8]. It was considered especially important to intensify the attack on the church.

From the first years of its existence, the Komsomol actively used lectures and conversations for anti-religious purposes. In particular, at the end of 1922, there was a great interest of peasants in such events in the Smolensk and Ryazan provinces. It was reported from Ryazan that conversations with peasants dragged on for several hours, when up to 50 questions were asked [30, p. 368]. But, as a rule, the speakers lacked both knowledge (not only atheistic, but also general) and lecture skills. Therefore, the following explanation was typical: "I can't prove that there is no God, but they cannot prove that he exists. So why would I believe religion! That's why I reject religion" [26, p. 104].





In the Komsomol itself, any manifestation of religiosity or gentleness towards believers was punishable by exclusion from the Union. Moreover, those who were expelled, as a rule, were humiliated in every possible way. For example, in the newspaper “Chuvashsky Krai” materials about the exclusion from the ranks of the Komsomol were published under the heading “On the black board!”.

In the greeting address of the V All-Russian Komsomol Congress (October 1922) to V.I. Lenin it was stated: “Komsomol Russia will always be ready at your call – “to storm the heaven!” [38, p. 561].



#### Propaganda materials for Komsomol Christmas.

“The Komsomol March” gained popularity among the youth: “Storm the heaven! Storm the heaven, / With fervent laughter showing deceit. / Storm the heaven! Storm the heaven! / Catch God in a steel trap” [79, p. 123]. The most common forms of “storming the heaven” were “Komsomol Christmas” and “Komsomol Easter”. It was with their help that it was planned to “help millions of people drugged by religion to free themselves from this dope” [29]. Moreover, the initiative to hold these events came from the Komsomol. Komsomol members were tasked with “showing the peasant that religion, apart from harm, does not and cannot give anything to the peasant economy” [75]. The newspaper “Pravda” wrote in November 1922: “The Komsomol took the risk of using such methods of anti-religious agitation that we, old people, would perhaps nip in the bud if Komsomol members carelessly turned to us for advice” [69].

In late December – early January, it was recommended to arrange “red Christmas trees” everywhere. Popularity was won by “red carols”: youth walking around the yards with a red star, a portrait of Lenin, with candles and singing revolutionary songs (up to the “Internationale”). At the theatrical anti-religious “worship services” the actions of the clergy were parodied. In many villages public burnings of saint images of saints and clerics were held [16]. In the Kungur district, young people imitated the execution of Christ at all [43, p. 36]. Only in some villages did the Komsomol try to be more careful burning abstract symbols of “evil”. Thus, in the village of Beya, the Komsomol burned “the power of darkness of past centuries”. In the local newspaper, the junker wrote about the event: “God did not punish the bold, because there is no God, never was, and never will be” [15]. Numerous reports from villages indicate that thousands of peasants participated in Komsomol events that were alternative to religious holidays. One can find, for example, indications of how peasants went to demonstrations with their whole families [45]. In the village of Yermakovsky, most of the village youth stayed at anti-religious evenings until three in the morning [21]. But at the same time, a lot of other evidence does not allow us to agree with the propagandists’ statements about the success of the organizers. In the village of Akulov, Tula province, Komsomol members who tried to conduct anti-religious agitation during the procession were beaten. In the Irkutsk province in one of the villages, four participants in an anti-religious evening were seriously wounded by a grenade thrown at a Komsomol club [4]. Reports about the wholesale drunkenness of the peasants and mentions of participation in Soviet holidays only by ardent activists have also been preserved [77]. And yet, there was no mass opposition to the antics of the unbridled youth among peasants.





Most likely, many peasants were kept from openly speaking out against Komsomol members not only by shame for their own apostate curiosity, but also by the danger of repressive actions of the authorities.

Priests often convinced peasants of the unrighteous actions of the Komsomol in relation to the faith, demanded the release of the premises occupied by the Komsomol, dissuaded non-union youth from participating in events organized by the Komsomol. Many peasants tried at home “to free their children from delusions”. Komsomol veterans recalled that fathers and mothers of many of them tried to forbid them from joining the Komsomol and especially from participating in their anti-religious campaigns [46, p. 17]. It even came to the point that fathers beat, and sometimes kicked out of the house their children-atheists [32, p. 98]. It was the communists and Komsomol members that peasants, as a rule, accused of “forgetting God”, that, allegedly because of them, weather disasters led to crop failures and famine.

The communist youth was at least as aggressive as most peasants of the older generations. A contemporary assessed the anti-religious activities of the Komsomol in this way: “In some cells, it exclusively comes down to pulling out crosses in a cemetery, stealing a bell from a bell tower, or shouting anti-Godly ditties under the window of devout peasants” [47]. In the Aktashevskaya volost of the Naberezhnye Chelny canton, young men broke the priest’s head. Before that, young activists kicked him out of the service twice, and once they came to him at night, his son was forced to play the accordion, and the priest to dance. In the Yadrinsky district of the Chuvash Republic, a pioneer leader staged a pogrom in the prayer room of sectarians [40, p. 157]. At many pre-Christmas Komsomol meetings, it was discussed whether it is necessary to take weapons during anti-religious events [53]. Local Komsomol committees noted as a positive phenomenon that “the Komsomol Christmas” caused “anger among the townsfolk, the elderly and other religious strata of the population” [22, p. 76], boasted that they “made a huge noise among the narrow-minded” [16]. The disruption of services was considered as a success [16]. The indignation of peasants was equated with cowardice [55]. The reasons for the lack of open speeches were also interpreted too simplistic: “The flock turned out to be not so religious as to cause riots” [16].

The youth press seriously discussed the replacement of Christmas with the Feast of the Overthrow of All Gods, the introduction of a new chronology (from 1917). A campaign began to unfold against the “Mohammedan holiday of Bayram” and the Jewish Easter. In order to increase the attention of peasantry to revolutionary holidays, local authorities tried to prohibit the organization of bazaars on church holidays, timing them specifically for new holidays.

One of the main propagandists of the new festive culture was V.V. Mayakovsky. He associated the uselessness of Orthodox holidays with peasant troubles of the past (“Peasants prayed to Christ for centuries, / and the war was stopped not by them, but by Bolsheviks”) and revolutionary achievements (“Christ did not help – Soviet power did. / Why bow to Christ?”). Considering it necessary to stop “celebrating various nonsense”, V.V. Mayakovsky urged: “We will celebrate the freemen of the Commune with all the heart of the peasant” [28, p. 128]. I. Sadofiev proclaimed that “Only with the death of God / God’s servant is resurrected”, while noting: “And on his ashes quickly / the Komsomol prepares a stake” [28, p. 131]. Demyan Bedny associated religion primarily with the delusions of old men and women: “It’s not easy for adults to argue with children for a nipple / Adults can’t do it: / “You can pray to the board, / Fools” [28, p. 133]. It is symptomatic that derogatory definitions of representatives of the older generations were constantly used in anti-religious verses: “an old liar” [28, p. 140], “blind nags” [28, p. 142], “stink of incense”, etc. [28, p. 145]. But “Komsomol members came / praise the sighted mind” [28, p. 1442]. The lives of Komsomol members and their parents were clearly opposed: “We no longer believe in shrines, / As before, we will not go to the temple, / We have learned the truth even now / We follow in Lenin’s footsteps” [26, p. 108]; “Komsomol people are cheerful, / But priestly life is different, / Just hang yourself” [28, p. 152]. New holidays and rituals were tried to be promoted in such a way as to “get through” to everyone. For example: “We won’t catch a cold for our children / At the priest in the trough. / We will not baptize children, / We will better wash them” [28, p. 148].



When explaining the origin of religious holidays, the task was formulated as follows: to get rid of “all sorts of fictions, all sorts of fairy tales about non-existent gods and miracles”, to fill the holidays with “reasonable fun, knowledge, to learn how we can further improve our lives, how to free the economy from the power of nature, how to conquer this nature by man [82, p. 11]. Presumptuously considering the “Komsomol Christmas” campaign successful, the Komsomol decided to continue to hold such events. Their direction is clearly demonstrated by a poem published on the next Christmas: “Let the gods turn to ashes. / We have the answer to everything ready. / Hey parasites... Get out of the way. / Down with rabbis, mullahs, priests” [6]. On the Don, as in many other regions, rallies were replaced by lectures, lectures – by theatrical performances, theatrical performances – by demonstrations, demonstrations – by conversations, conversations – by a carnival, which included stories: “how the devils were taken to bury a priest lying in a coffin”, “how the devil and the priest were Christed”, etc. [71, p. 122]. Like the anti-church holidays, the holiday of “Comrade Harvest” was accompanied by carnival processions, solemn meetings, as well as honoring the heroes of agricultural labor and bringing them gifts from city workers [50].

In 1923 L.D. Trotsky encouraged the Komsomol: “Not every invention will be successful, not every idea will take root. What’s the trouble? The necessary selection will take its course. The new life will adopt those forms that it will like” [74, p. 52]. L.D. Trotsky insisted: “If everyday theatricality in the past was always closely connected with the church, this does not mean at all ... that they cannot be separated” [74, p. 51].

Nevertheless, after the stormy Komsomol holidays, the authorities received a lot of peasant complaints. Komsomol actually failed the elections to the village councils. A noticeable level of religiosity of the masses did not occur, and the tension in the relationship not only of the Komsomol, but also of the authorities with the peasantry, as well as within the rural society, intensified.



Kruglikova E. “Woman! Learn to spell! Hey, Mommy! If you were smart, you could help me!” 1923.



According to observations of the 1920s, peasants liked it when they were spoken to “in a businesslike way”, “on an equal footing”. They perceived the ridicule of youth over religion as mockery at themselves. Even more adult peasants were outraged by the teachings of the younger ones addressed to them, accusations of backwardness and darkness. Objective reasons for this, no doubt, took place. But this by no means denies the tactlessness of Komsomol members, which sometimes developed into offensive rebelliousness. No wonder Komsomol members were increasingly called “abusers” [27, p. 79]. According to A.M. Bolshakov, “Komsomol members sometimes behave even worse than non-party people”. He wrote: “It’s a terrible pity when you watch how the precious energy of a young, just getting on its feet, youth association is spent quite often in vain – on scandals and drunkenness” [8, p. 334]. Often, even local communist mentors condemned the revelry of Komsomol antics [58]. But the criticism of patrons was in the nature of another campaign, no decisive measures were taken against the hooligans. By and large, the determining factor for the communists was the approach that was most succinctly formulated by A.A. Soltz: “Everything that makes our fight easier, everything that strengthens us as fighters, everything that helps us in this fight is ethical, good” [48, p. 174]. An ambiguous reaction to the “noisy” campaigns of the Komsomol turned out to be among the Party leaders in the center. N.K. Krupskaya recalled: “I remember how I came to Vladimir Ilyich and said that we released so many thousands for Komsomol Christmas. He says: “And what right did you have? Although anti-religious propaganda is a good idea, the money is Soviet and should be spent in the Soviet way” [36, p.184]. There were forces in the Soviet leadership who realized the ineffectiveness of the “storming of heaven” - the predominant use of forceful methods to overcome religious influence on society. The XII Congress of the Communist Party focused on “in-depth systematic propaganda” against religion [45, p. 115]. G.E. Zinoviev, speaking in the absence of Lenin with the Central Committee’s report, demanded that the atheists “be easier on the turns and not tease the peasant”. Having approved the ban on “the Komsomol Easter” in the Donetsk province, he said: “We need to remember the peasant, on whom very, very much depends. We will educate him, but it takes years” [14, p. 44]. On the Easter eve, the Central Committee of the Party recommended “shifting the center of gravity to a scientific explanation of the origin of religious holidays” [23, p. 204]. And the Smolensk Provincial Komsomol Committee stated bluntly: “It is necessary to work out our program without overdoing it, because this may lead to an insult to the religious feelings of masses” [13, p. 31]. But at the same time, they saw a benefit in the old methods: at least on a subconscious level, they reduced religious moods of young people. However, now they tried not to alienate adult peasants with anti-religious work. Therefore, a bet was made on its systematic and propagandistic nature.



**Participants in the play “Trading House God the Father, God the Son and Co” during the Komsomol Easter in the village of Malyshevo, Zagorovskaya volost, Bronnitsky district. Smena.1924. №. 8. P. 31.**





"The Komsomol Easter" was indeed accompanied by lectures, but the former forms of anti-religious work were not completely discarded: at least it was easier for Komsomol members to use the carnival method [2]. And in September 1924, "The Young Comrade" stated: "At every opportunity and inconvenience, we will fit something anti-religious into the demonstration, dress up several priests like clowns and let them in on a laughing stock" [66]. Even in such a conservative region (in terms of the development of anti-religious work) as the Republic of Volga Germans, anti-Easter events were carried out on a grand scale in many villages. "The Komsomol Easter" was given the name "the second, stronger assault on the gods" [54].

In reality, at least in rural reality, the Komsomol and their Party mentors still presented religion and the church as an unambiguous evil, which was not really explained. There were almost no people able to propagate atheism among rural youth. Therefore, in the Komsomol, they still preferred to use the "carnival" method supplementing it with reading aloud the texts of lectures sent from the center, the content of which was incomprehensible even to the newly minted "lecturers".

#### IV. CONCLUSION

It is worth mentioning the modern historian R.V. Rybakov: "At all times, young people are characterized by the desire to expand the allotted cultural framework, the overthrow of the imposed restrictions, the realization of forbidden desires. And in the conditions of mass nihilism of the 1920s, the sweeping denial of the entire old culture, such sentiments received an additional impetus" [62, p. 125].

In the village, the relations between peasants and the Komsomol were most acute. Although the rural Komsomol organizations were still small, in terms of numbers they nevertheless outstripped the Party cells, and most importantly, they were more active, including in the reconstruction of rural life and influencing the outlook of peasants.

The anti-religious activity of the Komsomol in the early 1920s was just unfolding and was largely experimental in nature. But already its first manifestations in the village contributed to the intergenerational conflict, which gradually turned into an intergenerational rupture in the Russian village. The Komsomol outlook by no means cultivated the value of the experience of the fathers. Moreover, the Komsomol actually tried to overturn the existing hierarchy, calling on the youth to teach their elders. Many of the Komsomol activists were already largely out of touch with the reality, so they easily accepted the calls for violent action that came from above. Not only atheistic views, but also hooliganism, a defiant refusal to take into account parental will, attempts by young people to teach adults, and radical changes in the festive culture of the village were introduced into rural everyday life as by no means deviant norms. The phenomenon of generational conflict in the conditions of the New Economic Policy took on an increasingly destructive form, which largely depended on the circumstances of the confrontation between young atheists and peasants of older generations in the spiritual sphere of the Russian village.

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## ПРОТИВОСТОЯНИЕ КРЕСТЬЯН И КОМСОМОЛЬЦЕВ В ДУХОВНОЙ СФЕРЕ РУССКОЙ ДЕРЕВНИ НАЧАЛА 1920-х ГОДОВ

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### Аннотация

Статья посвящена анализу взаимоотношений в духовной сфере комсомольцев и крестьянских представителей старших поколений, в том числе поколения «революционного перелома» (родившихся на рубеже XIX - XX вв.). Проанализирован состав сельских комсомольских организаций в первой половине 1920-х гг. Изучена роль молодых «безбожников» в эволюции морально-нравственного состояния крестьянских «отцов». Чисто силовым способом преодоления церковно-религиозного влияния, в ходе так называемого «штурма небес» явно способствовали психо-возрастные особенности комсомольцев, большинство которых в силу подросткового возраста стремились к высвобождению от зависимости родителей во всех отношениях, в том числе и от сковывающих развитие самостоятельности норм поведения. Показано, что духовное наследие, которое по правилам преемственности развития, старшие поколения призваны были передать своим преемникам, в реальной жизни комсомольцами (как активными представителями младшего поколения) было отвергнуто. Противостояние молодых «безбожников» и приверженцев традиционных религий существенно повлияло на формирование межпоколенческого разлома российского села.

**Ключевые слова:** крестьяне, поколения, революционный перелом, отцы, молодежь, комсомол, религия, НЭП.

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