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Popular Religiosity and Images of the Priesthood during the First World War and Revolution

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*The article investigates the reasons for the spread of negative images of the clergy, captured during World War I in the letters of ordinary people and, after 1917, in visual sources. The author explores the state of the systemic religious crisis in the Russian Empire, which manifested itself at different levels: in the relations between those who waited for the convocation of the Church Council (*Pomestnyi sobor*) and those who resisted it; intraclerical conflicts between representatives of the lower and higher hierarchies; conflicts between the parish clergy and parishioners; and contradictions in the writings of the religious philosophers. It is noted that the Great War contributed to the spread of mystical and eschatological sentiments among the different social groups, the growing popularity of sects, and the simultaneous wave of dechurching* (rastserkovlenie).

Keywords: folk religiosity, *rastserkovlenie*, Russian Orthodox clergy, World War I, Russian Revolution.

The revolution of 1917 was an event that had been developing since the beginning of the 20th century. The First World War intensified the confrontation between government and society and created conditions for a new form of violence, spreading the psychology of the "man with a gun." It was the gun that was perceived as a real mandate of the new government in 1917, and the spare soldiers who did not want to be sent to the front turned out to be the main actors of the revolution (Buldakov 1997, 55–76). Indeed, in the days of February's social unrest, the symbol of revolutionary violence became a machine gun. It is noteworthy that the mass consciousness included representatives of the clergy in the discourse on machine guns. Only by taking into account the social and psychological characteristics of

the epoch is it possible to understand the place that images of priests hold in the mass consciousness and the reasons for their formation.

Despite the fact that contemporaries had been speaking with confidence of the inevitability of the revolution since the autumn of 1916, its arrival was a surprise for the average citizen, and also formed a complex emotional atmosphere, in which fear was present along with delight and euphoria (Aksenov 2017). One of the most widespread was a phobia about the "Protopopov machine guns": according to rumors, Interior Minister A.D. Protopopov had placed machine guns on the roofs of the capital in order to provoke unrest in the capital and then brutally suppress it. However, the rumors about priests firing machine guns from the bell towers seemed much stranger. And educated people such as A.N. Benoit, Z.N. Gippius, and others repeated these rumors (Gippius 1929, 90; Benoit 2003, 124). Further, they said that machine guns were delivered to the church at night in coffins. This demonization of priests could be attributed to the nervousness of Petrograd society in the early days of the revolution, but what is important is that these reports were believed in the provinces: the local clergy sent requests to the Petrograd diocese to clarify whether the capital's clergy really helped the police in suppressing the unrest (RGIA f. 797, op. 86, 5 st., d. 22, l. 157). Refutations of these rumors had to be published in the newspapers as far away as Tomsk, as well (*Sibirskii zhizn'*, 8 March 1917). Nevertheless, the image of the machine-gunner priest turned out to be very tenacious. As a result, in April, the *New Satiricon* published a cartoon depicting a priest shooting a machine gun with a cross in his hand. The text in the picture explained: "During the revolution, many machine guns stood on the belfries, from where the rebellious people were fired on" (fig. 1).

This drawing is not the only example of the image of a counter-revolutionary priest — in 1917, mockery of the clergy was a common theme in magazine satire. At the same time, the images existing in the mass consciousness corresponded to the new relationships between parishioners and the parish clergy: a wave of violence against priests swept across Russia in the spring and summer of 1917.[1] The militia arrested some of them right on the pulpit during the divine service and searched churches and monasteries (RGIA f. 797, op. 86, 5 st., d. 22, ll. 139, 161). In a number of cases, the spontaneous activity of the masses found organizational support from local committees and

1. These events have been well studied in historiography. See, for example, Rogozny 2008; Buldakov and Leont'eva 2015).

Fig. 1. B. Antonovsky, "One of the 'Fathers,'" Novyi satirikon, no. 14, 1917, p. 7. "One of the 'Fathers' — We are accustomed to humbling the people with 'this' and 'this.'" Top caption reads: "In the days of the revolution many machine guns stood on the bell towers; the rebellious people were fired upon from there."

councils, which began to interfere in church affairs. This forced the chairman of the Provisional Government, G.E. Lvov, to send a telegram to the provincial commissars on June 17, proposing to take measures to eliminate unauthorized interference in church life by rural, municipal, district, and provincial public committees (ibid., 171).

The clergy were also charged with indecent behavior: bribery, drunkenness, sexual perversion, etc. In the illustrated magazine *Twentieth Century* the section "Monastery Secrets" appeared, which asserted that the monks of the Alexander Nevsky Lavra were allegedly engaging in fornication, drunkenness, and card games; the nuns of the Novodevichy monastery were engaged in prostitution and even set up a "factory of child angels" — a cemetery for strangled babies; Valaam hermits sinned by means of sodomy, etc. (*XX vek*, nos. 18, 22,23, 1917). Against this background the machine-gunning priests looked pretty civilized.

In order to understand the reasons that the clergy became discredited in the eyes of Russian society, it is necessary to refer to the previous history of relations between the church, people, and the state.

It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that at the beginning of the 20th century the church was a sick organism. The historiography shows that the inevitability of reforms was obvious to the clergy, religious thinkers, and secular power (Kartashov 1991; Firsov 2002; Freeze 1983; Roslof 2002; Bremer 2007; Chulos 2003). In the 1890s–1900s, a renewal movement developed, whose participants advocated for the convocation of a church council (*pomestnyi sobor*); in Moscow and Petrograd, there appeared religious and philosophical societies, which discussed topical issues of church life at their meetings. After the 1905 revolution, the government realized the need for changes in the church, which led to the creation of a pre-sobor commission (*predsobornoe prisutstvie*). At the same time, members of the Synod, ruling and nonruling bishops, secular theologians, and representatives of the clergy all had differences in views on the future structure of the church (Smolich 1931, 65–75).

The relationships within the church were complex: the church servitors had problems with the deacons, the deacons with the priests, and the priests with the bishops. The Synod received complaints from priests about each other, and difficult relationships between clergy are found in materials from the inspection of private correspondence. Thus, on October 28, 1916, the archpriest of Minsk wrote about the local bishop George (Eroshevsky):

> It's hard even in dreams to imagine a bishop like ours. This is some kind of a mummy, without life, activity, mind and purpose. . . It's sad for the future of the church. And at the top, she seems to be completely rotten (GARF f, 102, op. 265, d. 1047, l. 24).

Parish priests complained to the diocese about some of their colleagues, accusing them of drunkenness, adultery, and even criminal offenses, while the diocesan authorities were charged with bribery and the sale of parishes (the bribe for receiving the priesthood was 1000 rubles) (GARF f. 102, op. 265, d. 1006, l. 82).

At meetings of religious-philosophical societies, representatives of the clergy noted the "church collapse" of Russia, blamed the episcopate, who ruined the parish clergy by their actions, and even called for the revision or abolition of the church canons ("Preniia po dokladu" 2009, 192–93). Russian religious philosophers were extremely negative about "decadent Orthodoxy" and "the Orthodox bureaucracy" (Berdiaev 1990; Rozanov 1994). D.S. Merezhkovsky was particularly harsh about the Orthodox Church when he wrote about the three faces

of Ham, and if he saw the face of the future Ham in hooliganism, vagabondage, and Black Hundredism (*chernosotenstvo*), and he saw the Ham of the present in autocracy, then the philosopher called the third face, the Ham of the past, "the face of Orthodoxy, giving Caesar what is God's," "the dead positivism of the Orthodox bureaucracy, serving the positivism of the autocratic bureaucracy" (Merezhkovskii 1906, 37).[2]

The "disease" of the Russian church spread far beyond the clergy. Religious philosopher L.A. Tikhomirov described the lack of spiritual unity within the Orthodox parish: "Here live both truly Orthodox and non-believers, and people who are ready to use the parish organization for political or social purposes, and there are also direct enemies of the Church. Here there are a variety of shades of heterodoxy . . . They are not 'brothers,' voluntarily joined to the church, but completely random people" (Tikhomirov 1907, 6).

This situation could not but affect the image of the clergy in the perceptions of the general public. During the first revolution of 1905, the priest M. Levitov in the pages of the *Church Messenger* (*Tserkovnyi vestnik*) stated that "the clergy does not enjoy any influence, is hated and despised by the people, and serves in its eyes as the personification of greed, covetousness" (*Tserkovnyi vestnik* no. 32, 1905). Nine years later, the situation had not changed:

> It is well known that in our time the clergy found themselves in the position of a class that is humiliated, downtrodden, and pushed into the background. Numerous facts confirming this are before everyone's eyes, and everyone can observe them in the sphere of so-called society, and — especially in recent times — even among the common people. (*Tserkovnyi vestnik*, no. 31, July 31, 1914, col. 933)

The attitude of parishioners toward the clergy is most clearly illustrated by the statistics of conflicts dealt with by the Synod. A sharp upsurge in conflict occurred during the first revolution. Thus, in comparison with 1903, the number of complaints of parishioners against the clergy in 1907 increased by 297.6 percent (125 vs. 497). After this, the average annual growth from 1907 to 1912 was only 15.6 cases, that is, 2.7 percent. However, on the eve of the war in 1913, the number of conflicts sharply increased — by 43 percent compared to 1912, amounting to 821 cases

2. Merezhkovsky uses a pun here — in Russian, "kham" (Ham) means "boor," "lout," or "swine," but also refers to the biblical Ham, son of Noah, whose son was cursed because Ham viewed his father's nakedness (Genesis 9:20–27). — Ed.

(RGIA f. 796, op. 183, 188, 189–92, 190–92, 191–92,193, 195, 197). During the First World War, the number of such conflicts tended to decrease by an average of 13 percent annually. However, given the departure of a large part of the peasants to the front, and the fact that the dioceses, when sending priests to the front, sought first of all to get rid of the most scandalous members of the clergy, one can hardly speak of a 13 percent improvement in the relations between the clergy and the world. And the minimum number of conflicts reached in 1916 (531 cases) exceeded the minimum of post-revolutionary 1907 (497 cases) by 6.8 percent.

In the historiography, most often the explanation for conflict is reduced to the financial position of the parish priests: low incomes forced them to raise fees for their services, which caused discontent among parishioners. At the same time, it should be noted that there is no unanimity of opinion on the material status of the clergy among researchers — depending on the diocese, the income of parish priests is determined to have been from 100 to 1000 rubles per year (Rozanov 1904, 24–51; Leont'eva 2002).

The church itself preferred to see the impact of "dark forces" as the main reason for the de-churching of parishioners: "various agitators and rogues trying to arm the parishioners against the clergy" (*Tserkovnye vedomosti*, no. 12, March 22, 1908, 596). Some representatives of the Orthodox clergy shortly before 1917 explained the revolutionary activity as obvious Jewish propaganda; they called the events of 1905 the "Jewish Revolution" (*Moskovskie tserkovnye vedomosti*, no. 22, May 30, 1915, 351). In this context, the view that the Orthodox clergy had a low level of culture is also fair. Contemporaries drew attention to the fact that talented young people left the spiritual estate. V.V. Rozanov wrote: "Will we, then, wait, will the spiritual establishment itself wait, and finally, even the government, until there remains in the field, in the so-called 'village clergy,' only the stupid? Because this is what the situation is coming to" (Rozanov 1904, 249–51). N.A. Berdyaev explained the "brain drain" through the mental conflicts of the period of modernization, noting that the seminary youths' vigorous protest against "decadent Orthodoxy" and the "obscurantist atmosphere of the theological school" developed together with the ideas of Enlightenment (Berdiaev 1990, 40). In 1916, the chief procurator of the Synod stated that "the degree of education of the diocesan clergy is quite diverse, from persons with higher theological education to persons with little education," and in the Siberian and Ural dioceses, not more than 38 percent of priests had a full seminary education (*Vsepoddanneishii otchet* 1916, 40).

The structure of clerical punishments according to the content of the offense for the second half of 1916 and first half of 1917 in the Stavropol, Don, and Kazan spiritual consistories explains the reasons for the dissatisfaction of parishioners with their priests. In 46 percent of cases, parishioners accused priests of unseemly behavior (rudeness, profanity, and drunkenness); in 35 percent of cases of bad faith in the performance of their duties (refusing to give communion to dying patients, to conduct funerals, being late for service, etc.); in 13 percent of cases of financial fraud (increased fees for religious rites, extortion of money from parishioners, embezzlement of church sums, etc.), and in 6 percent of adultery (RGIA f. 797, op. 86, otd. 3, stol 5, d. 32, ll. 2–5, 13–15a [ob.], 22–25). Also among the cases brought against priests there were cases of the murder of parishioners in drunken brawls, accusations of the rape of peasant wives, and robberies (RGIA f. 796, op. 199, otd. 4, stol 1, dd. 315, 36).

It should be noted that sometimes peasants sent anonymous denunciations out of a sense of revenge, attributing crimes to priests that they did not commit. After the proceedings, the dioceses did not take action on such statements, but it must be admitted that in most cases the denunciations were confirmed. Thus, in 1915, the Novgorod Theological Consistory examined eighty-nine cases of accusations against priests, of which fifty-eight cases (65%) involved pastors who were found guilty and punished (RGIA 797, op. 86, otd. 3, stol 5, d. 136a, l. 14).

The outbreak of World War I was a definite challenge for parishioners and the clergy. The tsar's manifesto on the declaration of war trusted in Almighty Providence and mentioned Holy Russia, that is, it imparted religious content to the armed conflict. Church printing supported this enthusiasm for the confrontation of Holy Russia with sinful Germany (*Moskovskie tserkovnye vedomosti*, nos. 30–31, July 26, 1914, 554). Archimandrite Hilarion, while discussing the European theory of progress, reduced it to Germanic militarism, viewed it as part of the doctrine of evolution, and called for the rejection of the idea of progress as alien to the patriarchal origins of Orthodox *sobornost'* (*Moskovskie tserkovnye vedomosti*, nos. 47–48, November 28, 1914, 953).

Some members of the clergy saw the beginning of the war as proof of the people's fall into sin. In July 1914, during a prayer service in the Moscow City Duma, Bishop Arsenii said: "The Lord sends us, dear brothers, a great test. A terrible, terrible storm hangs over us, a war. . . Why do we have such a test? Let's not talk about what our fault is before the Motherland. Each of us knows this well if we remember the last decade, when there was a vacillation of minds, disrespect for old

covenants, the holy faith" (*Moskovskie tserkovnye vedomosti*, nos. 30–31, July 26, 1914, 552). The same was said by professors of the Moscow Theological Academy (*Moskovskie tserkovnye vedomosti*, no. 32, August 6, 1914, 585).

However, this concept of war as a punishment for sins did not find sympathy in the masses of ordinary church-going people. In addition, part of society was dissatisfied with the official propaganda campaign, which painted a picture of universal enthusiasm and unity. In fact, patriotism was characteristic of a certain stratum of Russian intellectuals, politicians, and clergy, but the Russian peasant, caught up in the war in the midst of agricultural work, did not feel a great desire to go to war. In private correspondence, Russians were outraged at how the official press distorted the real attitude of the people to the war (GARF f. 102, op. 265, d. 976, l. 48).

The patriotism of the soldiers did not increase after they were sent to the front. Young officers in letters from the front described the mood of the soldiers as a wild despair, contrasting their own observations to official patriotic propaganda: "All the heroism, which is described in the newspapers, can only be a dream of the most ardent fantasist, and all the courage and pride attributed to the hero is a complete fiction of hotheads" (Astashov and Simmons 2015, 236). Rank-and-file soldiers spoke out even more bluntly in their letters (ibid., 490). Faith was an integral part of the patriotism imposed on soldiers, but the soldiers' consciousness began to protest against its ascription to everyone: "It is sickening to read endless lies. Whatever issue of the newspaper you look at, every Russian soldier is an altruist, a Christian, a hero" (Aramilev 2015, 97). This irritation was eventually transferred to the regimental priests, who were charged with keeping track of the soldiers' moods and maintaining their morale with appropriate patriotic speeches.

Contemporaries noted that during the first months of the war the visits of ordinary people to churches became more frequent, but this rise in religiosity was a consequence of the spread of mystical and fatalistic ideas; to talk about the growth of Orthodox religiosity is hardly justified. One of the soldiers wrote from the front: "And there are tears for us here: you go left — there is fire, right — water, you go forward — bullets and shells are exploding, and if you go back, you will be stabbed with a sword. There's nowhere to go. So we have to die for the glory of Russian arms" (Atashov and Simmons 2015, 141). At the front, the phenomenon of "trench religiosity" developed — in the face of death, even a person who did not believe in God was imbued with mystical moods, searched for hidden meaning in signs, etc. However,

this did not always bring soldiers closer to the regimental priests. The soldier Kuznetsov wrote to a priest he knew in February 1915:

> I have formed the following idea of battle: the battlefield is a Temple, where both believers and non-believers go reverently, without any bragging; in this Temple the presence of the Godhead is felt, palpable every second. . . It is a pity that our soldiers are not developed enough to comprehend it. . . And you know who is to blame? You, the priests — that is, the ridiculous system by which our pastors are trained. Well, where do you, scholastics, influence the soul of our Russian people, when you are not taught to talk to them? You have fallen behind our intellectuals, and you have not attached yourselves to the people, and you are not able to give them anything more than bookish morals. (Ibid., 119–20)

Soldiers in letters from the front complained that priests spent most of their time with officers, and that they were not available to the rank-and-file, that they serve when they want to, raise the prices of candles, collect the unburned ones and resell them several times to the soldiers, etc. (ibid., 451). "And the priests who serve here repel our suffering heroes, they have no access to them, you do not see many of them at all, and if you do see them, it is dangerous to approach them, because they behave like leaders, move only among the leaders, the soldiers treat them disrespectfully, with contempt" (ibid., 361–62). It is noteworthy that photographs from the period of the world war allow us to confirm the validity of soldiers' claims: the priests were depicted in the still photos published in illustrated magazines in a comfortable atmosphere, surrounded by officers, sipping tea (*Niva*, no. 38, 1915, 706). Usually, the regimental priests were criticized by representatives of the lower clergy. One psalm-reader wrote home in October 1916: "My priest is so golden, it would be better if he hadn't been born. . . All the priests, as long as I know them here, all play cards without exception, and on occasion [indulge in] a tipple. And right behind their backs a wounded, gray hero, who has already become no one, not necessary, suffers and dies without confession and communion. And there are orphans at home" (Astashov and Simmons 2015, 463). "Although there is a priest in the regiment, he is lazy, and sits in the wagon train and not even the forces of heaven will compel him go to his position at the headquarters of the regiment," said a soldier of the 8th Siberian Rifle Regiment (ibid., 732). In 1916 among the soldiers there was a story how on the eve of Easter the Germans made a bold sortie and caught the headquarters of the regiment off guard, in which there was

a drinking party with the participation of a local priest. They took prisoners, however the next day they returned the priest, writing on the back of his cassock "we don't need devils" (ibid.).

Of course, not all regimental priests were despised by the soldiers. Part of the correspondence described examples of the heroism of the military clergy when priests inspired soldiers in the attack or under the hail of enemy bullets gave communion to dying soldiers in the field. There were stories about how the prayer read in a hopeless situation led to an unexpected turning point in the battle. However, in addition to the image of a hero priest who reads a prayer during the battle, there was also the image of a coward priest who shuddered during prayer in the rear from any loud sound. It is noteworthy that in the discourse about regimental priests there were two almost identical stories, but with different endings: a priest near the front line held a prayer service, and suddenly enemy airplanes appeared, dropping bombs. In one case, the bomb blew up a part of the church, but the priest did not even shudder, while the praying soldiers all fell to the ground; in another case, the priest fled from an explosion that thundered in the distance, deserting the praying soldiers, or he fell into a faint. The second version of this story was given in the memoirs of A.A. Brusilov, however, in his story the prayer was still brought to the end after some interruption (Brusilov 1963, 192).

Despite real examples of the heroism of the clergy, as well as appropriate propaganda, the image of the priest-hero did not take its deserved place in the visual record of the era. If we look at the patriotic posters and prints of the period of the First World War from the collection of the State Museum of the Modern History of Russia, we will not find a single image of the priest in 391 storage units (Shumnaia 2004). Images of participants in the war include soldiers from all kinds of forces (infantry, sailors, aviators, artillery, cavalry); civilians, such as village women; captive enemy airplanes; children; doctors and nurses; leaders in the attack on infantry; but the regimental clergy is absent.

In the officially published, illustrated *Chronicle of War*, visual images of regimental priests made up only 0.8 percent of the total number of drawings and photographs, and the bulk of them are group, multi-figure compositions (photos of prayer services), in which the representatives of the clergy can barely be seen, and only three portraits of priests, shot in close-up, were published in the *Chronicle* during the three years of war: one portrait of Archpriest I.S. Yarotsky, who received a concussion at the front and was captured, and two portraits of the head of the military clergy Protopresbyter G. Shavelsky.

It is noteworthy that the verbal images of the clergy in the *Chronicle* were better, the deeds of some of them were described in the magazine, but were not accompanied by illustrations, such as hieromonk Antony Smirnov, who served as a priest on the minelaying ship "Prut," who gave up his place in the lifeboat and descended into the hold of the sinking ship to the wounded sailors. Thus, we can talk about some discrepancy between the verbal and visual images of the war.

In the literary-artistic journal *Niva*, there was a slightly higher percentage of images of priests at the front in 1914–1916 than in the *Chronicle* — 1.5 percent. However, the religious theme was not as unpopular in illustrated magazines as portraits of the clergy. In a number of cases, photos of prayer services and religious processions were published, in which priests were simply absent. For the Easter issue of the *Chronicle* in 1915, artist E. Butrimovich painted the picture *In Galicia: Procession of the Cross on Easter Night*, where the procession was led by a nurse, an officer, and a doctor, followed by soldiers, but the regimental priest was nowhere to be seen (*Letopis' voiny*, no. 31, 1915, 499). In the same issue priests were also absent from a painting by S. Kolesnikov, *Red Egg in Galicia*, depicting peasant women who treated wounded soldiers to eggs and kulich for Easter, as well as in A. Petrov's *In the Hospital Christ Is Risen!* In this Easter issue there were twenty-seven illustrations and only one — *His Imperial Highness the Supreme Commander-in-Chief among the Officers of One of the Cossack Regiments* — with a representative of the church perched at the edge (ibid., 490). The April issue of *Niva*, which was issued on Easter, was not entirely devoted to the holiday of resurrection, however, in two photos of forty-two illustrations clergy were present (*Niva*, no, 16, 1915, 303).

Visual sources suggest that the religious holidays were actually reprivatized from the church and control was given over to the people. These trends are not surprising given the specifics of "trench religiosity." Soldiers from the front wrote that, having lost hope in the help of priests, they acquired their own icons and arranged in trenches and dugouts something like places for prayer, where they invited their comrades: "I have an icon of decent size, I have made a candlestick and wax candles are burning, I bought all of this with my last wages; soldiers who like to pray, come to me and pray and read the Gospel" (*Pis'ma s voiny* 2015, 379). In this regard, popular religious creativity developed: peasants themselves drew icons, often violating the canons, and made images and crosses and sold them to soldiers and officers. This image was even published in *Niva*, and, judging by it, such folk art was popular among the military (*Niva*, no. 13, 1915, 251). *Niva* published photos of

examples of soldierly ingenuity: they would build a crucifix on a century-old oak tree, then gather a camp church of spruce branches (*Niva*, nos, 12, 17, 1915). At the same time, the religious sentiments of the soldiers of the period of the world war did not exclude the clergy completely from the religious discourse, but often replaced the modern regimental priests with the legendary representatives of the church. Thus, more often than others, Peresvet and Oslyabya[3] appeared in the visual religious-historical discourse for obvious reasons.

Not only mystical and fatalistic, but also eschatological moods were manifested in "trench religiosity." Natalya Goncharova, who carefully studied the folk *lubok*,[4] created series of lithographs in 1914 called "Mystical Images of War," which, on the one hand, reflected the official religious discourse about the sacred Russian army, accompanied by angels and attended by the aforementioned Peresvet and Oslyabya, departing for war with Germany, but, on the other hand, also clearly manifested eschatological themes in the works *The Pale Horse*, *The Doomed City*, and *Woman Riding a Beast*. The world war was perceived by the people in the context of the End Times, the peasants said that a new King Herod was born, and some believed that it was Nicholas II (RGIA f. 1405, op. 521, d. 476, l. 332). As an example of the discrepancy between the official and popular pictures of the war, it can be noted that the official propaganda deliberately exploited the eschatological theme, calling William II the Antichrist. Corresponding posters depicting the German emperor in the form of a beast were issued. At the same time, there were disputes between peasants as to whether the Antichrist was actually the German or the Russian tsar. But perhaps one of the most paradoxical twists in the folk religious-eschatological consciousness was a series of rumors that the Antichrist would soon appear, Jesus would be crucified again, and then the peasants would be immediately given the land they had long dreamed of (ibid., 278; Melgunova-Stepanova 2014, 41–42).

This attitude to the Antichrist, if not complimentary, was tolerant enough to indicate a certain philosophical crisis, an inversion of good and evil, which is fully consistent with the extreme times of the world war. Soldiers from the front reported that for them the battlefield seemed like hell: "the shells are buzzing, the guns are rattling, the bombs are exploding, you are standing there and you think that you are surrounded by hell" (*Pis'ma s voiny* 2015, 242). However, soon all of

3. Peresvet and Oslyabya were relatives (perhaps brothers) and monks who are said to have fought against the Tatars in the Battle of Kulikovo in 1380. –Ed.

4. Popular prints. –Ed.

life in the front turned into a continuous hell: "Here all is commotion, everything is the same hell — before there was a hell of danger, anxiety, a hell of death, and now — hell moves without rest and without end, the hell of the rear with all its mud," wrote an ordinary noncombatant from a company of the Zhitomir Regiment (ibid., 573–74). Hell's habituation also led to reconciliation with his lord, the Antichrist. Moreover, as the war dragged on, collaborationist sentiments spread among the people, who said that if William (the Antichrist) won, then life would get better (RGIA f. 1405, op. 521, d. 476, l. 141). The official Orthodox prayers of regimental priests could not satisfy new religious needs of soldiers from the point of view of such eschatological ideas.

Sooner or later, soldiers began to pay attention to the contradictions between the church's military-patriotic rhetoric and Christian ethics. For example, in November 1914, the *Moscow Church Gazette* (*Moskovskie tserkovnye vedomosti*) published the article "Patriotism and Christianity" by Professor S. Glagolev of the Moscow Theological Academy, in which the author objected to the thesis that all people are brothers, justifying the statement that Russians should be loved more than Germans, and, therefore, the latter can be killed (*Moskovskie tserkovnye vedomosti*, no. 44, November 1, 1914, 882). The new recruits were given classes in the camp before they were sent to the front, where they were taught military regulations, and they also interpreted Filaret's Catechism, in particular the sixth commandment, in such a way that it turned out that it was not only possible to kill the enemy, but also the officer has the right to kill soldiers who disobeyed, and such a murder was not contrary to Christianity (Aramilev 2015, 62–63). The new ethics also penetrated the visual and symbolic space of wartime. A very ambiguous illustration appeared in the journal *Niva* in 1915 called *Magi of the Twentieth Century*, in which the kings presented the baby Jesus with gifts of shells and weapons (*Niva*, no. 44, 1915, 809). Obviously, the viewer's perception of it was ambiguous. A soldier who faced death every day and saw the collapse of former humanist values, began to feel the collapse of Christian civilization more subtly, it began to seem to him that the world was plunging into pagan times with their sacrifices to the bloodthirsty gods:

> After the first battle near Belaya at the sight of disfigured, bleeding people and horses, an unresolved question involuntarily came up before me: what is all this for? Hundreds of thousands of human lives are sacrificed for strategic, political and other purposes. This is not the old idolatry, which we condemn without any regret, but the improved worship of

> the God-War. Previously, single sacrifices were made to the gods to satisfy religious feelings, and now entire states with millions of people are being destroyed. . . Wherever you look, the ghost of death is everywhere. (Astashov and Simmons 2015, 640)

Illiterate peasant soldiers argued more simply, but in the same direction:

> I've already cursed this war is it really given from God that I killed and also it's not from God, God gave us life so we would live with each other not kill so that we remember the sixth commandment. (Ibid., 652)

The soldier's logic was very simple: since war is contrary to the commandments, it is not from God, but then the clergy, calling them to go and kill, is also not from God. In December 1916, a soldier wrote with anger and sarcasm about the regimental clergy:

> I am going this winter to die heroically and move to the promised paradise that our priests built there from the creation of the world for laying down our life for our Friends, these priests constantly promise to us an Eagle in the clouds, and they thrust bombs and rifles in our hands, to go boldly and heroically die for the Faith, the Church and our dear and abundant Fatherland. (Ibid., 724)

The rejection of official religiosity required filling in the gaps formed in religious consciousness, which gave rise to alternative forms of worship close to sectarianism. Thus, "conspiracy letters" — the prayers that were supposed to be rewritten, sent further along by trench mail, and whose text was learned and regularly repeated — became very popular among the soldiers. One of those letters said:

> In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Lord, have mercy on me, and have mercy on me, and send an angel to protect me, your sinful servant. . . Christ was coming from the seven heavens, carrying Christ the life-giving cross; I, Vladimir, am a servant of God, for 24 hours, around the clock, from the blade of a bayonet from lead steel copper bullets and from cast iron grenades of shrapnel and other metals, and if my life were stronger than that of Peter the Tsar, and if my body were stronger than the stone of the wilderness. My enemies will shoot with rifles, machine guns, and canon; fly bullets and do not hit me in the clear field in the wet ground I would be unharmed for all eternity Amen Amen Amen. (Ibid., 359)

The periodical press reported that similar prayers were also found on German prisoners and Austrians (*Vokrug sveta*, no. 4, 1915, 64).

During the war years, due to the transition of the Orthodox population to other faiths, the Orthodox population declined in number. One of the most widespread currents was Stundo-Baptism, the popularity of which inhabitants explained in private letters as the dissatisfaction of the population with their priests and penetration into society of Western (German) cultural values (GARF, f. 102, op. 264, d. 1012, l. 227). In 1914, there were 146 people seduced from Orthodoxy in Moscow diocese (most became Lutheran, followed by Baptist) (RGIA, f. 796, otd. 6, stol 3, d. 109, l. 2). In Smolensk diocese, the number of Stundo-Baptists increased by 23 percent in 1915 (from 441 in 1914 to 531 in 1915) (RGIA, f. 797, op. 86, otd. 3, stol 5, d. 136a, l. 47). In 1915 in Stavropol diocese 481 people left Orthodoxy for other religions and sects (401 for the sect of spiritual Christians) (ibid., l. 159). It should be noted that the departure from Orthodoxy was partly due to the lack of parish priests, who for objective reasons could not keep their flock (researchers estimate the ratio of clergy to parishioners fluctuated from 1:1000 to 1:2000) (Firsov 2002, 24; Leont'eva 2002, 17).

The priest's ability to preach played a special role in the relationship between the clergy and the flock. The priest who was able to find common ground with the parishioners was forgiven a great deal. But often the church press noted that the sermons of the Orthodox faith did not reach the minds of parishioners because of the difficult, pompous style. The lack of understanding of the sermons led to the gradual de-churching of the people, conflicts, as well as the emergence of so-called "brothers" who could interpret the holy texts in an accessible way. Missionary D. Bogoliubov said this about them:

> The people, yearning for a righteous life, put forward their brothers to the pulpit, according to their thoughts and intentions. What the "brothers" say, of course, is bad in its literary form; but to the people their words seem to have a holy meaning, like a "living gospel." (*Prikhodskoi sviashchennik*, no. 16, 1911)

In order to somehow improve the quality of sermons and make them more accessible, as well as to counteract sectarian brothers, the Synod recommended that parish priests refrain from improvisation and read sermons that had been published in church magazines. But even this did not help the parishioners' skepticism toward their priest. An illustrative case took place in March 1917 in the village of Turishchevo

in Yeletskaya diocese, when local priest Nikolai Bulgakov preached a sermon to the parishioners on the Feast of the Annunciation from the magazine *Spiritual Conversations* (*Dukhovnye besedy*) on the theme "Beware Networks of Cunning Germans," in which the following words appeared:

> A bird released from the cage is often unable to live free and dies. Often she knocks again at the window, at the cage, escaping from cold and hunger; often she is unwise and falls back into the fowler's net. My brothers, no matter what happens to us when we get rid of the German yoke, we will not fall again under the Germans. (RGIA, f. 797, op. 86, stol 5, d. 22, l. 197–197ob.)

However, the peasants interpreted Bulgakov's words as pro-German agitation for the preservation of the old system, and sent a message to the bishop of Yeletsk about it. Such cases of cognitive conflict were common in different places (ibid., ll. 290ob.–291).

The struggle against the spread of sectarianism during the war years affected the soldiers who fell under the influence of "trench religiosity" and attached great importance to all sorts of signs that were interpreted in a mystical way. Military censorship seized those letters that contained noncanonical descriptions of Christ and the Virgin Mary. Thus, in August 1916, of all the letters withdrawn by military censorship at the main post office of Petrograd, 12 percent were letters containing sectarian propaganda (noncanonical interpretation of sacred texts, mystical signs, etc.) (RGVIA, f. 13838, op. 1, d. 18, ll. 1–544).

However, what was forbidden to ordinary soldiers was allowed by the official press, both secular and religious. One of the most common mystical subjects at the front — the phenomenon of the angelic "white lady" (to be distinguished from the ghost of the "white woman") — appeared in 1915 in the *Chronicle* in a reprinted picture by the British artist G. Scott, depicting a translucent woman in white clothes, hovering over the fallen soldiers (*Letopis' voiny*, no. 71, 1915). However, Russian soldiers, retelling rumors about the "white lady," often gave her the more familiar features of the Virgin Mary from the Orthodox visual tradition. One of the most famous mass visions allegedly happened on the night of September 7–8, 1914, on the eve of the Battle of Augustów — the Mother of God appeared in heaven with the baby Jesus in her arms, with one hand she pointed to the West, then the vision was transformed into a great cross and disappeared (Preobrazhenskii 1916, 55). The rumor about it quickly spread in the army, an article was printed in the

Stock Exchange Gazette (*Birzhevye vedomosti*), and in the same year an appropriately patriotic poster, "The Sign of the Augustów Victory," was issued, and people's artists began to paint the icons of the Mother of God of Augustów. The Synod opened a case "On the investigation of the miraculous event of the apparition of the Mother of God" and on March 31, 1916, officially recognized the apparition of the Mother of God and decided to bless the commemoration of the Augustów icon in churches. It is noteworthy that in the original folk version of the Augustów Mother of God, she was dressed in noncanonical white clothing, which corresponded to the original etymology of the rumor of the "white lady."

In addition to the phenomenon at Augustów, recognized by the church, there were many private stories of soldiers about the phenomena of the Virgin Mary. In a number of cases, the storytellers were shell-shocked and in a half-conscious state. During the war, traumatic psychosis spread among the soldiers, accompanied by delusions, deceptions of sight and hearing, so that visions as well as auditory hallucinations due to concussions became constant companions in military daily life.[5] So, the ordinary soldier who survived shock, who miraculously escaped from under the enemy shelling and reached the hospital, being in a state of extreme emotional distress, told the story how one of his company survived, and when he climbed out of the trench at night, he saw the Virgin Mary, who descended to his dead comrades and placed a crown on each one's head, then she came up to the soldier and, pointing to the north, said: "Go over there, to your own. Don't be afraid! Go this way with courage. No one will hurt you." Despite the fact that the fight continued and bullets were flying, the soldier reached the hospital unharmed, where he immediately told everything to the first nurse he met (Preobrazhenskii 1916, 59–60). V.M. Bekhterev, in his article "War and Psychosis," considered the phenomenon of the "Augustów Mother of God" as a typical collective hallucination experienced by a group of people who were in a state of extreme distress (Bekhterev 1914, 329–30).

In addition to rumors about the "white lady," rumors about the "white general" were widespread, but to a lesser extent. During the battles near Warsaw in October 1914, it was said that at the most difficult moment a "white general" appeared over the Russian army, who hovered over the soldiers and commanded them. The "white general" sometimes met the soldiers on the march: and if he looked into the

5. For mental disorders on the front, see Fridlender 1999, 315–25; Astashov 1914, 340–414; Merridale 2000, 39–55.

Fig. 2. "A Heavenly Vision," postcard published by the Martho-Mariinsky Monastery, 1915.

eyes of a soldier, he would live until the end of the war, and if he passed by and did not look the soldier would not escape death (Kandidov 1927, 52). The origins of this image are less clear. It is worth remembering that the nickname "white general" was given to M.D. Skobelev in his time, which was reflected in the popular print that depicted him on a white horse in white clothes. The popular print from 1914, "Suvorov and Glory," on which the grey-haired Russian commander was depicted watching the battle of the Russians with the Germans from heaven next to a white-winged archangel in armor and with a sword was also well-known. It is probably necessary to recognize the collective character of the image of the "white general" from among hero-command-

ers. Taking into account the specifics of popular religiosity, by analogy with the "white lady" it can be assumed that the image of Christ might be concealed under the "white general," especially as magazine illustrations and popular prints replicated the image of Jesus in white robes, who came down to earth to bless the soldiers (*Niva*, no. 46, 1916).

Despite the apparent lack of canonicality of these images, the church press responded to mystical sentiments and replicated them on its pages. Thus, the *Volyn Diocesan Gazette* reported in 1916 that the Virgin Mary in the form of a woman in white attire frightened the Germans with fiery eyes. Protopresbyter G. Shavelsky, who understood the need to adapt the official faith to the soldiers' religiosity, contributed to the spread of a number of rumors about the miraculous signs. Shavelsky himself told journalists about his own prophetic dreams (*Novoe vremia*, December 15, 1915). Thus, a contradictory picture was created: the authorities, who officially prevented the spread of the soldiers' mystical rumors, allowed themselves to print stories similar in meaning, as if privatizing the popular mystical discourse. However, this did not raise the prestige of the clergy, as such stories were considered to be the property of soldiers' "trench religiosity" and were spread regardless of how the church reacted to them.

By 1917, the authority of the clergy was also discredited by the fact that they had to persuade the peasants to carry out wartime obligations, in particular, not to resist the requisitions of cattle. On this basis, clashes were not uncommon, accompanied by beatings and insults directed at the clergy by the peasants (RGIA, f. 797, op. 86, otd. 3, stol 5, d. 129, l. 1). Blasphemy penetrated into the popular obscene vocabulary, and often cursing addressed to God ensued in conjunction with curses against the tsar — in this case, both the desacralization of the monarchy and of the church was observed. Thus, for example, in February 1916, in response to the comment of a police officer that it is not necessary to play the accordion loudly near the church in which the service was going on, Gerasim Samarin, a peasant of Tomsk province, replied: "Fuck . . . the Church, God, the Tsar and the government" (RGIA, f. 1405, op. 521, d. 476, l. 362–362ob.). Another peasant, cursing the tsar, reproached him for not preparing for war, but only building taverns and churches (ibid., l. 391). Savely Berezin, a peasant of Kazan province, came to the conclusion in April 1915 that instead of going to war, the Synod and the royal palace should be blown up (ibid., l. 112). At the same time, a song brought from Siberia by former convicts was popular: "There is no God, there is no need for a tsar, we will kill the governor, we, the swindler-convicts, will cross the whole of

Russia!" (ibid., l. 286). It is noteworthy that from the autumn of 1916, the army began to receive a large number of criminals, including convicts, who had previously not been allowed to be drafted (Astashov 2016, 75). As noted by researchers, they made a significant contribution to the criminalization of the army, and promoted unrest among the soldiers. The tradition from the criminal world of making tattoos on the body, including religious content, gained a new meaning at the front: they said that one soldier escaped punishment with a rod because of the image of the Savior on his buttocks — inquisitors were afraid to whip the image of Christ (Astashov and Simmons 2015, 395).

Political opposition protests at the front became criminal offenses, while criticism of the supreme power, as a rule, implied an anti-church stance. In August 1915, I.T. Yevseev, a peasant deputy to the Fourth Duma, received a collective letter from wounded soldiers that criticized the government, which did not want to end the war, and this was immediately followed by strong accusations against the church:

> Our culturally backward Orthodox Church, headed by rude, uncultured, dirty, disheveled, cruel, greedy, selfish, ambitious egoist-priests and bishops, is the cause of the suffering of the people. The Christian priest's ideal is humility and other Christian virtues, from patience to self-denial. And our most vile priests interfere in politics, evading Christian duties and generating religious strife and enmity. (Ibid., 645–46)

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to portray the clergy in one political tint and to place them exclusively on the side of the authorities. As has already been shown, the spiritual class was extremely diverse in terms of material wealth, education, and political views. During the war years, the authorities repeatedly paid attention to the opposition of priests. In 1914, the governor of Kazan described the local clergy as left-wing, in connection with which he petitioned for the allocation of priests to a special curia at the congress of landowners (RGIA, f. 1282, op. 1, d. 732, l. 26). In Samara province, the clergy's two-faced behavior was noted: "officially registered in moderate organizations, they sometimes submitted notes with the names of the left in the elections" (ibid., l. 49ob.). In Riazan province, the priest Ostroumov, who was elected a member of the Duma, first signed up as a nationalist and then moved to the Octobrists (ibid., l. 58).

However, even among the bishops there was growing dissatisfaction with the supreme power, which delayed the convocation of the Church Council. In September 1916 in Petrograd there was a rumor

that Antony Khrapovitsky was telling how the bishops came to the sovereign to talk about the convocation of the council and the choice of a patriarch. The emperor expressed his sympathy on this issue and asked if the bishops had identified a candidate for patriarch. The bishops, each of whom dreamed of becoming a patriarch, were silent. Then the tsar proposed the following: he would renounce the throne in favor of his son, divorce his wife, become monks and then they would elect him patriarch. The stunned bishops did not answer, and then the tsar left in silence (Tikhomirov 2008, 85).

The opposition of the parish clergy grew as the war dragged on, with priests making insulting remarks about the supreme authority during sermons. Thus, on July 28, 1915, in Kazan province, the village priest Kondratyev addressed the peasants with the following words: "Peasants, it is getting bad for you: His Imperial Majesty the Emperor Nikolai Alexandrovich sells the whole of Russia. It's time for the whip for him on the back of his head — he can't wage war (RGIA, f. 1405, op. 521, d. 476, l. 394). Among the priests there were those who were convicted during the First World War under article 103 of the criminal code — for insulting the reigning monarch. There are cases when priests were openly engaged in revolutionary propaganda and even tried to organize the parishioners into combat brigades — "red hundreds" (RGIA, f. 1405, op. 521, d. 476, ll. 86–88).

Despite the diverse political palette of the Russian clergy, the revolution of 1917 painted it in the black of counterrevolution. The caricature by the artist A. Khvostov from the magazine *Budil'nik* (Alarm clock) is indicative — monks repainted their black robes red. Meanwhile, the abbot said: "Put the paint on thicker, citizen, so that there won't be a single spot of the old black left."

Despite the metaphorical nature of the image, it should be noted that Khvostov managed to anticipate the real facts of the spring of 1917: in the early days of the revolution, some priests pinned red bows on their clothes, decorated iconostases with them, and sometimes even changed into red robes (Kolonitskii 2001, 62). The red bow became the symbol of a citizen's revolutionary identification and in the conditions of developing forms of spontaneous violence some people wore it for security purposes.

The journalistic cartoon very accurately recorded the public moods, focused attention on the subjects that worried society, and conveyed the hidden fears of ordinary people and attitudes toward one or another public institution. The ridicule of priests was characteristic of the vast majority of magazines. However, in quantitative terms, there were not very many caricatures of the clergy (the most popular sub-

Fig. 3. A. Khvostov, "Turncoats," Budil'nik nos. 11–12, 1917.

jects were: ridicule of the old system and members of the royal family, the economic situation, and from the summer of 1917 — the threat of anarchy). In the magazines *Strekoza* (Dragonfly), *Bich* (Scourge), *Novyi satirikon* (New satiricon), and *Baraban* (Drum) the clergy were mocked in only 1.8 percent of the images. Of course, the distribution of cartoons among magazines was uneven. Thus, in the journal *Strekoza* only 0.3 percent of cartoons were of priests, while *Bich* can be called the leader of anti-church propaganda at 6.4 percent. At the same time, there were more caricatures of priests in *Bich* than of Nicholas II (5%). However, "quality" often compensated for the quantity in the sharpness of the statements. In this respect, *Strekoza* did not fall far behind *Bich*. The main vices ridiculed were the greed and graft of priests, support for the old system, church marriage (which in the context of the discussion of marriage reform was seen as slavery), and cowardice (fear of being sent to the front). It is noteworthy that, despite the presence of the theme of clerical sexual perversions in anti-church articles, it was not visualized in journalistic caricatures (in

contrast, for example, to the theme of intimate relations of the triangle of Alexandra Feodorovna, Rasputin, and Nicholas II). In this respect, it can be said that artists, unlike writers, spared their object of criticism, realizing that the visual image has a more trenchant effect on the addressee.

Most of the cartoons were in April and May: one of the central events of April, depicted in the cartoons, was the new red Easter, which in some cases tried to oppose the old Easter and even to carry out its symbolic desecularization. In the Easter issue of *Bich* a "comic" appeared, which told about the attempt of the clergy to cancel Easter 1917, but despite everything, the soldiers celebrated it (*Bich*, no, 13, April 2, 1917). Just as curious are the cartoons in which the clergy nailed Jesus to the cross, lamented that they had sold Christ for only 30 pieces of silver, and reflected on how to hang and crucify him (*Bich*, no. 18, 1917; *Novyi satirikon*, no. 13, April 1917). At the same time, some ordinary people gave the revolution sacral and religious content and perceived it as a moral and spiritual revival of Russia, contrasting the old church with a new one. Analyzing conflicts between parishioners and priests in the spring of 1917, it appears that peasants, berating old priests, demanded new ones from the diocese (RGIA, f. 797, op. 86, stol 5, d. 22, ll. 48, 139). Nevertheless, we cannot speak of widespread trust in the "new" clergy, which had begun to make changes in church life, including in terms of interaction with parishioners. In May, satirical magazines prepared a series of anti-church cartoons for the opening of the Congress of Representatives of the Clergy and Laity in Moscow. On one of them, called the "Cross-Spider,"[6] the pope was depicted in the image of a spider, luring parishioners into the network of the church.

Despite the fact that in 1917 the Congress of Clergy and Laity was held, the Church Council was initiated and a patriarch was elected, the revival of the church did not happen. The beginning of the civil war pushed the religious issue aside, putting physical survival on the common people's agenda. In addition, the political propaganda of the Bolsheviks actively used anti-church rhetoric: clergymen were classified as enemies, they were described as bourgeois, they recalled absurd accusations, which they retransmitted through rumors. The plot of the cartoon about the machine-gunner priests from *Novyi satirikon* was repeated in the later poster by artist N.N. Kogout, "The Cross and the Machine Gun."

6. This is a play on words—*krestovik* relates to "cross" and thus the clergy, but *pauk-krestovik* is also the proper name of *Araneus diadematus*, known as the European garden spider, cross spider, and crowned orb weaver, among other names. –Ed.

Fig. 4. "With a Cross and a Machine Gun — February Days 1917," a poster of the Civil War period.

In some cases the rumor about priests firing machine-guns from belfries in February 1917 was transferred to the Moscow events in October (Kandidatov 1930, 21). In mass consciousness, religion and the machine gun were linked. Later, rumors about machine gun emplacements on the belfries (objectively a convenient position for firing) repeatedly appeared during the Civil War and became a reason for violence against priests.

Thus, the church, and with it the religious consciousness of the subjects of the Russian Empire, was in a state of crisis at the beginning of the 20th century. The First World War did not lead to the unity of the church, state, and people; the regimental priest, who advocated for the war, caused irritation in the face of rising anti-war sentiment among soldiers; the soldiers at the front and the peasants in the rear were imbued with anti-church attitudes, leading not only to local conflicts with the parish clergy, but also to the departure from Orthodoxy

into sectarianism and other faiths. Even in the official visual patriotic propaganda the image of the priest at war was extremely faint. At the same time, the religiosity of the people did not disappear, but acquired mystical forms: the world war was often conceived of in eschatological categories. The revolution of 1917, which abolished censorship, established a natural point in the development of the images of the clergy: the counterrevolutionary priest, the most striking embodiment of which was the priest-machine gunner, embodied the accumulated years of popular distrust. Bolshevik anti-church propaganda during the Civil War, which picked up absurd but popular rumors about clergy, found gullible listeners among the former subjects of the empire.

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