

Formation of Catholic Population in Kazakhstan And its Status During the Period of Soviet Totalitarian Regime (1940's-1980's)

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Abstract: Different regions of Russia were main source of the Catholic population in Kazakhstan. There were two rites in Russian Catholicism: Latin-for the Poles and Germans and the Eastern - for Slavic Catholics. This article is devoted to the German and Polish Catholics, who formed the basis of the Catholic Church in Kazakhstan. As a result of the political process, accompanied by forced deportation of nations in the 1930's-1940's, Kazakhstan has become a place of concentration of German and Polish population and a center of religious life of Catholics in the USSR. The status of the Catholic faithful was influenced not only by the anti-religious policy of the Soviet state. Catholicism in the Soviet Union was subjected to greater pressure and repression than other faiths, as it was the religion of the nations, whose historical roots were in the countries, who fought against the Soviet Union, as well as because of the tough anti-communist attitude of the Pope. The article describes the difficulties and peculiarities of the religious life of Catholics during the period of "catacomb church" from 1940's to 1980's; besides it shows the role of priests and "Eucharistic" women in the preservation of faith.

Key words: Catholic population • Kazakhstan • Soviet Union • Religion

INTRODUCTION

Kazakhstan is one of the most multi-ethnic and accordingly, multi-religious countries. This is due to its historic past connected with the tragic period in the lives of all ethnic groups, who live here today. In Soviet times, Kazakhstan was the place of imprisonment and deportation of many repressed nations of the USSR. After liberation, many of them remained in the country. The Catholic communities in Kazakhstan basically have formed due to repressed nations. Among them, the majority of Catholics is represented by the Germans and the Poles.

The present article seeks to trace the status of the Catholic communities in Kazakhstan over the period from 1940's to 1980's. It was during this period that Kazakhstan became a home country to Catholic population of the USSR. Opportunity to study this problem appeared in the 1990's in connection with the declassification of the archives in the USSR. Main body of archival material is concentrated around the issues of anti-religious propaganda and agitation, as well as atheistic education. Credo material on this topic is contained in the documents

on the history of deported nations [1, 2]. However, the religious life of the Catholic population, driven underground, could not be fully described in the archives. In this regard, the recollections of contemporaries are of particular importance. Sometimes they are the only source of information about the real status of the faith and the faithful. A significant part of such materials is published in "Credo", the newspaper of the Roman Catholic Church in Kazakhstan [3].

The recollections of the priest Vladislav Bukovinsky, containing sufficiently complete and accurate information, should be particularly highlighted in this group of sources. This extremely valuable source on the history of the Catholic Church in the USSR and Kazakhstan in particular, was first published in Paris in Polish language. Excerpts from the memoirs were published in German in the paper written by Josef Schnurr [4, p. 100-124, 136-151]. In Russian, the memoirs were published under the title "Memories of Kazakhstan" [5, pp: 199-283]. The authenticity of the identified and summarized sources does not raise doubt and they allow us to reconstruct those events and occurrences.

Formation of the Catholic Population in Kazakhstan:

Formation of the Catholic population in Kazakhstan began in the XIX century, when the territory of Kazakhstan finally became part of the Russian Empire. The first notable appearance of Catholics occurred after the suppression of 1863-1864 and 1830-1831 uprisings in Poland, when the imperial government exiled Catholic Poles to Siberia and Kazakhstan for their participation in rebellion. The large influx of Catholics to Kazakhstan was observed in the late XIX - early XX centuries during the resettlement movement and population policy of tsarism and, above all, as a result of Stolypin land reform. The first Catholic settlers were presented by the German population living in Russia since the time of Catherine II. According to Karl Shtumpff's "List of German settlements", there were about 150 German settlements (colonies) in Kazakhstan in the 20's of the twentieth century [6, p. 90].

The largest number of German mono-confessional settlements in Kazakhstan was Lutheran, followed by Mennonite and Catholic settlements. In contrast to Lutherans, German Catholics were the people living in peasant villages and they were almost completely absent in the confessional and the demographic structure of Kazakh cities [7, p. 59-60]. Mono-confessional principle of settlement in new areas allowed the Germans preserving traditional ethno-religious way of life, formed in the previous places of settlement.

By 1917, all the parishes in Kazakhstan belonged to Tiraspol Roman Catholic Diocese with the residence in the city of Saratov, which served German Catholic colony and all parishes. German Catholic settlements of Turgay region belonged to the Orenburg Roman Catholic parish and their co-religionists in the Akmola region belonged to the Omsk parish. Also rural deanery of the Tiraspol diocese was established in Omsk with subsidiaries in Kostanay and Petropavlovsk. German Catholics of Semirechensk and Syrdarya regions were served by the Tashkent parish. Thus, even before the revolution the Catholics were represented in the religious structure of the population in Kazakhstan.

The major stream of Catholics occurred during mass arrests and deportations of people in the late 1930's-early 1940's. The deportation of people was considered by the Soviet state as a preventive measure in order to "cleanse" the strategically important regions of the USSR against potentially "disloyal" population. Mass deportation of nations under the state policy was not limited to the elimination of the "enemies" in the border

areas of the USSR and in addition included the missions of an economic nature, namely development of new regions. This required human resources that could be replenished by former political prisoners. These regions primarily included Western Siberia and Kazakhstan. As a result of the deportation of Soviet state citizens on a national basis, a specific social group developed, which had the special legal status of "special settlers" ("deported"). Collectively, more than 6 million people suffered during the deportation period, [8, p. 4, 9, p. 83]. Among them, according to the various data, 1 to 1.5 million people lost their lives [10, p. 131, 11, p. 84]. Germans and Poles were the largest national groups among this cohort.

The first forced migrations to Kazakhstan took place in the pre-war period. Based on Decree of the USSR Council of People's Commissars of 1936 "On the resettlement of Polish persons out of the Ukrainian SSR", the Polish people of Catholic confession were deported to Kazakhstan. According to this Decree, the number of Polish and German families deported to Karaganda region amounted to 45 thousand people or 15 thousand households [12, p. 49-50]. Another wave of Polish people expulsion as "unreliable elements" from the frontier zones of Poland took place in 1937-1938. In total 35,820 Poles were expelled from the boarderland [13, p. 49-50]. The main stream of the Polish settlers started in January 1940 after the occupation of western regions of Ukraine by the Red Army.

Large-scale deportations of Germans began during World War II, based on the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of August 28, 1941 "On the resettlement of Germans living in the Volga River basin". This was followed by decrees and orders on banishment of the German population from other regions of the Soviet Union. The main core of the Soviet Germans was concentrated in Kazakhstan. According to the population census of 1939, there were 92 thousand Germans living in Kazakhstan. According to the census of 1959, the number of Germans living in Kazakhstan was 660 thousand people [14, p. 5].

The greatest concentration of special German and Pole settlers was reached in North Kazakhstan and Karaganda regions. The reason for the transformation of these regions into concentration places of "punished people" was defined by state policy objectives. The regions "abundant with plowed fields", such as northern Kazakhstan, were selected for such deportees. The region with severe climatic conditions and low

population density required human resources for their economic development. Mass mobilization of the German population to Kazakhstan in 1942-1944, first of all, targeted the industry of Karaganda city and Karaganda region. New influx of the German population into this area occurred after the decree allowing the mobilized people to reunite their families.

In the postwar period, based on the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of December 13, 1955 "On the removal of abridgments in the legal status of the Germans and their family members, who are in special settlements", the deportees got the opportunity to move from one region to another. But freeing them from the special settlement, the government, however, retained against them a number of discriminatory measures. The decree stipulated that "the removal of restrictions from the Germans on special settlement does not entail the return of property confiscated during the eviction and that they have no right to return to the place from where they were evicted" [2, p. 77]. Actions of the Soviet leadership were caused by the fact that special settlers constituted a significant part of the workforce in enterprises and in agriculture and their migration to other parts of the country could cause some damage to the national economy. The issue about saving the de-registered Germans as a workforce became especially topical. In this connection, the special measures were taken to secure the employment of labor deportees in places of their settlement.

In the second half of 1955, local party authorities took measures to improve the living conditions. The living standard of workers was raised significantly in relation to the wage increase. Wage supplements to people working in heavy industries played essential role in on-site retention of personnel. Most of the Germans, who worked in the mines of Karaganda and its surroundings, large enterprises and construction sites, usually remained in their place of work.

As a result of these processes, the size of German population has reached 111, 044 people according to the All-Union census of 1959. Most of its share (83605 persons) was located in the cities of Karaganda region. In 1959, 35,246 Germans lived in the North-Kazakhstan region and 67,781 Germans-in Kokchetav region [15, p. 124, 143]. The number of Polish people in the Karaganda region was not that significant. At the same time the number of Poles in Northern Kazakhstan was very high. According to the national census of 1959, the number of Poles in North-Kazakhstan region

amounted to 24,733 people (44%) and 25,232 people lived in the Kokchetav region (47, 5) [16, p. 518], that made up about 50 000 people in total.

During the following decades, there was a steady growth of the German population in the region that was due to both natural population growth and migration influx of Germans to Karaganda city and Karaganda region [17, p. 518]. In 1979, the size of the German population in the Karaganda region totaled 130,863 people and 23,729 Germans resided in the neighboring Dzhezkazgan region [18, p. 233-308]. The researcher L. Burgart, being unable to tell the exact number of Catholics among all Germans placed in Kazakhstan, gave a number of at least 50 000 people-about one third of the total German population [19, p.64-65]. Polish population in terms of its religion was entirely Catholic.

Thus, forced mass displacement of the population in the Soviet Union resulted in a significant increase in the number of Polish and German Catholic population in Kazakhstan, with their significant concentration in Karaganda and Karaganda region, as well as in the northern regions of Kazakhstan. While during the 40's of the XX century Kazakhstan, where the Catholic population was several tens of thousands people, did not belong to the major regions with the spread Catholic faith and in the 40-50's it became one of the major regions of Catholics settlement in the USSR [17, 19]. According to the last All-Union census of 1989, there were about 1 million Germans living in Kazakhstan [16, p. 597].

The Religious Policy of the Soviet State in

1940's-1980's: The October Revolution in Russia in 1917 was a crucial historical point for all religions including Catholicism. After coming to power, the Bolsheviks announced the construction of a new society. The church was separated from the state. The Russian diplomatic mission at the Vatican was eliminated. Religion was separated from the new state as a relic of the past. Manfred Hildermeyer wrote about it: "The Bolsheviks left room only for their own and sole ideology: atheism. Since in their view, a person could not be Christian and Bolshevik at the same time, they found it necessary to "wipe out" or "liquidate" any kind of faith" [20, p. 328-330].

The main regulatory act that has expressed the conclusive relation between the church and the state in Soviet Russia, was a Decree "On the separation of the church from the state and the school from the church" of

January 21 1918. Besides, the two major decisions of this decree, the church was confiscated right to register marriages, births and deaths. All these registrations were transferred to government agencies. Religious and church communities were forbidden to own property. All their property was declared as national wealth.

Because German schools paid much attention to religion, the greatest dissatisfaction with the Soviet regime among Germans was caused by separation between the state and the church and the church and the school. A German colony was essentially its own closed little world. It constituted a cultural microcosm that rested on two pillars: church and school. As a matter of course, the representatives of these two institutions, the pastor and the teacher, enjoyed the highest standing. Both embodied the intellectual elite in the German Catholic colonies. They supported and maintained tradition, faith, language and culture. Both enjoyed exclusive authority because they came from their own kind [21, p. 107-118]. Many parents did not agree with the new methods of education, setting a single training program and didn't let their children to school.

Massive anti-religious propaganda also provided negative effects on the faithful. In the years after the revolution, propaganda was of sporadic character, though by the mid 20's it takes well established and distinct form. Gradually the church structures of the Catholic Church in the Soviet Union were destroyed and eliminated. Tiraspol Diocese virtually ceased to exist as well. Along with the closing of Catholic churches, massive arrests of priests took place. Flimsy cases were initiated against the priests, who were accused in concealment of church valuables.

In 1920's, the Soviet government adopted a series of laws that infringed the rights of individuals involved in religious activities. According to the resolution issued by the Central Executive Committee and Sovnarkom of the Russian Federation "On Religious Associations" of April 8, 1929, the priests were finally announced as the enemies of the people. The final stage in the struggle against religion in the USSR began since the mid 30's. This struggle was conducted in three main areas: the arrests of the remaining priests, closing sparse churches and the termination of activities of all church bodies and structures. Between 1929 and 1935 all churches in the Catholic colonist villages were closed and turned into clubs, dancing halls, cinemas, etc. By 1935, all priests of the Tiraspol Diocese were either arrested and banished, or executed in prison [21, p. 107-118].

Thus, due to the pronounced anti-religious policy during the 40's of the XX century the Catholic Church ceased to exist nominally like other religious organizations in the Soviet Union. It lost its clergy, all religious buildings, property and church valuables, all of its structures were actually abolished. However, despite the official ban, the anti-religious policy in general has not affected religious way of life, especially in mono-confessional German settlements. The religiosity level of the German population was very high. This was noted by the local authorities [1, p. 23, 50].

Under heavy pressure from the state and the wave of mass political repression, the faithful prayed secretly at homes. Priests used to come to them sometimes at night: they baptized, confessed, performed the Eucharist and blessed marriages. Religious life began to go into hiding. The decisive blow to the Catholics religious way of life was inflicted as a result of the mass deportation of people, which started at the turn of 1930-1940's.

Forced resettlement of large numbers of people during deportation involved substantial restriction of their rights and freedoms, especially the right to free travel, as well as discrimination in various spheres of public life. As it is known, during the war of 1941 - 1945 political leadership of the Soviet Union dropped plans on early abolishment of religion and the church and moved to a policy of partial revival of religious life in the country under strict government control. However, this relaxation of the religious policy absolutely did not concern the Catholics, who traditionally experienced the clearly negative attitude since the time of the Russian Empire. American researcher considering "Catholic issue" in Tsarist Russia pointed out that since the Polish uprisings in the XIX century, The Russian government almost instinctively understood «Catholic» and «Polish» as synonyms. Late Imperial Russia, to paraphrase Marx, was haunted by a specter-the specter of Catholicism [22, p. 52 - 59].

Catholicism is the religion of such ethnic groups as the Poles and the Germans, whose historical roots were in the countries situated on the other side of the front during the First World War and fought against the Soviet Union during the military intervention. More negative attitude of the Soviet government to the Catholic Church, rather than to churches of other confessions, was largely determined by the rigid anti-communist attitude of Pope. As a result of these factors, the Catholics of the USSR suffered more pressure and repression comparing to the representatives of other faiths.

As a result of forced migrations of the nations, traditional mono-confessional principle of settlement, which was one of the main factors in preservation of ethnic and religious identity of the different groups of German and Polish population from the time of the Russian Empire, was broken. Then, hundreds of Catholic village residents were scattered over great spaces of Siberia, Kazakhstan and Central Asia [23, p. 82-93]. Deported German Catholics were located in rural areas with the Russian, Kazakh and Ukrainian population, German Lutherans and Mennonites. Despite the prevailing dispersed character of their settling, the separate regions were formed with significant concentration of German and Pole Catholics. As it was already noted, such an area with the German Catholic population was formed in Karaganda and its surroundings. This circumstance led to the fact that the revival of the Catholic Church in Kazakhstan began exactly in Karaganda. However, this process was not only connected with a large concentration of Catholics in the vicinity of this city, but also to the fact that most of the priests had been exiled to the camps near Karaganda. Later, after Stalin's death in 1953, the priests, set at liberty, began to arrive to Karaganda. They played a significant role in the revival of the Catholic Church. Concentration of a large number of Catholic clergy representatives became one of the main reasons that caused another migration wave of Catholics to Karaganda and its vicinity from all over the Soviet Union-notes L. Burgart [24, p. 62].

After the end of war and a return to peaceful labor, Soviet authorities have once again tightened control over all spheres of public life. Since the second half of 1948, active anti-religious policy was newly launched in the USSR followed by arrests of priests. The same anti-religious campaign was swept across the countries with the communist regime. For example, in East Germany in 1953, the government stopped collecting taxes for the church. The church was in charge of collecting all the money necessary for their activities. Catholics owned buildings were continuously being confiscated by the government including the hospital, an orphanage and the kindergarten [25, p. 157].

New surge of anti-religious struggle occurred after the XX Congress of the Communist Party, when N. Khrushchev came to power. On October 4, 1958 a secret Resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party "On the shortcomings of scientific-atheist propaganda" - the note of the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, sent to

the union republics" was adopted. This document required the Communist Party, Komsomol and community organizations to deploy a propaganda offensive against the "religious survivals". In 1959, all the churches remaining after the years of war were closed. On March 16, 1961, the Resolution "On strengthening the monitoring of the implementation of the legislation on cults" was adopted. This Resolution demanded the full reinstatement of the previously adopted Resolution of 1929. All resolutions adopted during the wartime period, in which the religious institutions in the Soviet Union were acknowledged, were recognized as invalid.

The activities of Catholic communities, as well as a number of other religious groups, were recognized as illegal. Therefore, they could not be registered with the authorities and forced going underground. In 1950's, German religious communities were placed in a difficult position. Often an active "preventive and destroying activity" of state security and the Communist Party led to organizational weakening and even collapse of these religious communities.

The new Criminal Code of 1961 and the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Communist Party of March 18, 1966 "On administrative responsibility for violation of the legislation on religious cults" and other documents set three types of liability for violation of religious law: disciplinary, administrative-for the avoidance of religious associations registration and other violations (a fine of up to 50 rubles) and criminal liability - for the performance of religious rites, forced collection of fees, production and mass distribution of appeals, letters, leaflets calling for non-fulfillment of the legislation on religious cults (up to 3 years in prison).

Anti-religious character of Soviet policy did not mean the existence of a single course regarding to all faiths. Bukovinsky wrote in his memoirs: "The Soviet power perceives various religions and beliefs completely in a different way. It is more loyal to the Orthodox, who recognizes the Patriarch of Moscow, followed by Baptists and some other sects, Lutherans and Muslims as well. The worse attitude is shown towards Catholics and especially towards the Ksiadz-Catholics as "agents of the Vatican." But the worst attitude was shown to the Orthodox opposition and those sects that have their centers in the United States, such as Jehovah's Witnesses" [5, p. 232].

Real practical possibilities for the legal implementation of the religious life, under implacable course of public policy with regard to religion and the

Church in the Soviet Union in general and the specific situation of the Catholic Church, in particular, have been reduced to zero. This period of time in the history of Catholicism in Kazakhstan characterized by the absence of the Church as a full religious structure and as a place of worship, is known as the period of so-called "Catacomb Church" [5, p. 248].

Some changes occurred only in the mid-1970's, following the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Communist Party "On Amendments and Additions to the Decree of the Central Executive Committee and Sovnarkom of the Soviet Union of April 8, 1929 "On Religious Associations"" adopted in 1975. It specified the registration procedure of religious communities. According to this decree, a multistage procedure was remained. Responsibility for the opening and closing of churches was imposed from local Soviets to the Council for Religious Affairs under the Council of Ministers. The adoption of this document resulted in the gradual legalization of the Catholic community activities. Registration of religious communities started with great difficulty in the late 1970's and 1980's. Official opportunity to practice one's own faith appeared only after the "Perestroika" (1985 - 1991).

The Status of Catholics in the Soviet Totalitarian Regime: The situation with Catholics in Kazakhstan changed in line with the state policy of the Soviet Union in regard to religion. Faithful Catholics maintained external and internal resistance against anti-religious policy of the Soviet authorities in 1920-1930's, which was expressed in the form of a secret teaching of God's law, boycott of the Soviet schools, refusing to join the Pioneer and Komsomol organizations, in the creation of secret religious schools under the guise of various cultural and educational circles and in other forms. It was still possible during the times before the war. Church structures and the clergy were persecuted; though the traditional practices of the Catholic community has not undergone any significant changes. Since the late 1930's, the circumstances have changed. Since the beginning of the mass deportation of nations and during subsequent periods of Soviet power, the faithfuls themselves became the main object of the anti-religious policy.

The war and the work in the labor army became a living hell. The term "labor army" means a specific form of forced labor of Soviet citizens of the nations, whose native states fought a war with the Soviet Union. All able-bodied men aged 17-50 years (for Germans-

additionally men aged 15-16 and 51-55 years and women aged 16-45 years) were mobilized through the military enlistment offices and transferred to the jurisdiction of the Peoples Commissariat (NKVD). These people formed working columns that were used for production needs in the east regions of the country: at the most important construction sites, for timber harvesting, coal mining, oil extraction, etc. Formal status of "labor army man" was similar to a military service workers. However, the barrack accommodation, the separation from family, the camp fence, food rations and heavy physical work actually put them in a position equal to that of the prisoners. Accommodation in special settlements in the postwar period was also characterized by severe life conditions. All this deprived Catholics conditions for practical fulfillment of religious life and participation in the sacraments of the church.

Up to 1956, people gathered in secret. In each village, where the settlers lived, there was the commandant, who could punish the "politically unreliable people." After rehabilitation, the migrants have become a bit easier. Older people, who did not work, could meet freely. Working people and youth could not attend the body of believers, because they could be expelled from school or fired from their jobs. In 1960's, when even the old women were prohibited against gatherings in prayer groups, inspectors used to visit homes to remove crucifixes and icons. One could be brought to justice for attendance of secret meetings. During these years parents often faced persecution for any attempt to draw children to religion, they often were threatened by authorities to deprive their children, even for the fact that they pray with them at home. Practicing religious life was unsafe.

Children and young people were afraid of being ridiculed. Vladislav Bukovinsky, describing the Soviet atheist propaganda, noted that its main method was "just a mockery, not the argumentation" [5, p. 229].

One woman from the prayer group of the late 40-50's living in the village situated in the East Kazakhstan region, recalled: "When I was a schoolgirl, teenager, I also attended some prayer group with my mother, but soon after being denounced, this became known at my school. I was put on the lineup in front of the whole school, shamed and ridiculed, threatened to be excluded from school. I could not attend these meetings any more. But we continued to pray at home ..." [24, p. 119]. The rush of anti-religious propaganda in the Soviet Union and a very rigid position of the state regarding the atheistic education of children and youth, forbidding

religious education until 18 years and prosecuting for its violations, contributed to the weakening of the Catholic community. A Catholic family was the most important factor in maintaining the faith and religious way of life. Actually the family opposed the atheistic state and became a "home church".

By this time in the Soviet Union no Catholic administrative structures existed. Catholics could unite only around priests deported to Siberia and Kazakhstan. Catholic priests, who have received a religious education before the revolution and survived after confinement and deportations, concentrated in Karaganda and secretly conducted pastoral work. They include such vivid persons as Vladislav Bukovinsky, Alexander Hira, Albinas Dumblyauskas, Michael Stones, Alexander Shtaub, Franz Atomaytis, Michael Bengas, Stefan Prishlyak, Joseph Shaban and others.

The priest Alex Zaritsky (1912-1963), subsequently canonized as a beatified Hieromartyr, was among those striking personalities. Sentenced to eight years, he has been imprisoned in the camps situated in Kemerovo, Omsk and Karaganda regions.

After his release from the 8-year sentence in 1954, he was exiled to Karaganda, where he served a secret liturgy, then secretly made missionary trips to the Urals, Siberia and Kazakhstan. In 1962, he was arrested again for active religious activities and sentenced to two years imprisonment in the camp Dolinka (Karaganda) [26], where he suffered from martyrdom and died [27, p. 16-23].

The activities of the exiled Catholic priests in Karaganda in the 1950's – 1980's became one of the major factors in the transformation of Karaganda into the center of revival, preservation and development of the Catholic faith not only in Kazakhstan, but in the whole Soviet Union. The following history was recalled by Catholic Clara Ritter: "We lived over 15 years in the north under the care of commandant's office. When it was removed, the father went to relatives, to see where it would be best to move. When he returned, he said: "We can live everywhere, but in Karaganda - there is faith." And we decided to go there, where was a faith ... There were priests, who secretly served people" [28, p. 16].

German scholar Gerd Shtrikker notes: "The Karaganda region in Kazakhstan with half million deported people of different nationalities became a center of Catholicism in the Soviet Union". "The Vatican of the Soviet Union"-as it was called by deportees.

After Stalin's death in 1953, the gates of many camps placed there were opened. A large number of priests, former prisoners, still stayed for some time in Karaganda. Thus in the mid 50's in Karaganda there were five or six, sometime even twelve underground priests at the same time" [29, p. 408] In the mid 50's there were 3 Catholic Churches (chapels) in Karaganda opened without permission. But they had very short-live existence and during 1957 all three were closed by authorities [5, p. 248]. Karaganda became illegal Centre of the Catholic faith and was named by the people "the second Rome" and "Vatican of the Soviet Union".

Karaganda was not the only place of concentration of Catholic faith. Thus, in 1958's-1959's the first attempt to legalize the Catholic community of the city under the Soviet regime was made in Tselinograd (now Astana) where the church was opened and registered. Preaching-house was bought at the expense of the faithful. But those days these attempts were not successful. Though in the 60's-70's in Tselinograd, there were several private houses, where prayer meetings were conducted in strict secrecy [30].

Given the lack of churches, the priest became the central figure, who represented unique illegal "church" that permanently moved from one place to another. Faithful homes served as places for church service. Father Bukovinsky, who exercised underground pastoral care of Catholics over 20 years, wrote about it: "I permanently go door to door. I never give big church services at my home, as authorities could quickly blame me for illegal Church" [5, p. 250]. At that, the house for pastoral service was chosen with great care, usually in the suburbs, away from the administrative and public institutions, the availability of good neighbors was also taken into account. Since the flock was multinational, the priest during his ministering had to cope with difference in languages [5, p. 250, 251]. These are the conditions that were typical to the religious life of faithful in Karaganda and in many other areas of Kazakhstan.

Despite the concentration of a relatively large number of priests in Kazakhstan, most Catholics have never seen a priest that was quite typical. The older generation of faithful who survived deportation, was last seen the priests in the mid-1930's in their former places of residence. Generation of their children, who born in the late 30's and after the war, did not know in their lifetime neither priests, nor the true Church with its sacraments.

H. Roymih, describing the status of three German-Christian faiths, including Catholicism, in the USSR in the 60's, notes that they "do not have pastors, preachers and ordained priests over more than 30 years and live in the midst of the atheistic world over several decades not as an organized church, but as a separate religious community ... "[31, p. 37]. Ordinary devout Catholic women of old age were becoming major figures in communities lacking for priests for decades. Right these laity women performed basic religious rites. These women, called "Eucharistics" secretly baptized children, conducted the wedding ceremony or performed burial rite and even conducted Eucharistic adoration and the distribution of Holy Communion. This phenomenon was common in all areas with population of a few dozen Catholics.

In the absence of the Church, prayer groups became the main centers of faithful religious life. Such examples are found in all regions of Kazakhstan, where Catholics used to live. During the resettlement, when people were not allowed to meet in prayer, in the village of Green Guy (Akmola region) the faithful gathered secretly, curtained windows tightly and prayed, trying not to attract "attention of prying eyes" [32, p. 16]. In the Tonkoshurovka village (North Kazakhstan) "during the times of persecution, 54 women and 3 men used to meet on Sundays to pray the Rosary and to read the Bible, changing their flats each after each" [33, p. 4]. In Tselinograd (now Astana), Petropavlovsk and other places, where the religious life also went underground, faithful Catholics" alternately opened the doors of their houses for prayer" [34, p. 6].

In these circumstances, when the state authorities had imposed a ban on meetings at homes, people gathered at the cemetery, which often replaced the church. Prayer at the cemetery was widespread among German Catholics. Authorities forbade Catholics to gather at the cemetery [35]. Faithful also used to go out of the village, where they executed prayerful procession with rosary.

The practice of the religious life of Catholics in Kazakhstan, Central Asia and Siberia was developed in a quite specific way that was caused by lack of priests. It was described in detail by B. Bukovinsky. For example, he notes three characteristic features for the sacrament of baptism. The first feature concluded in baptizing a person at adult stage, rather than at infancy, as is customary for Catholics. Second, quite common feature was conditional baptism. In his recollections, father Bukovinsky wrote: "In these vast territories, where no

priest is nearby, it is very common to baptize by laic Catholics. Most often person was baptized by authoritative elderly woman (babushka). Poles call such baptism "water baptism" and the Germans call «Nottaufe». It was quite common situation, that Catholics, for lack of other opportunities, baptized their children at the Orthodox Church. The third feature was the mass baptism during mission trips of priests [5, p. 252, 253].

As a distinguishing feature of confession, the sacrament of penance, V. Bukovinsky mentions its "general character", i.e. the confession for 10, 20 years and sometimes for a lifetime. However, he notes: "Sometimes it happens that I am the first Catholic priest, whom the penitent, talking to me, has seen over the last 20 or 40 years" [5, p. 254]. For the sacrament of marriage it was typical to marry the couples many years after their marriage. Many couples in those times lived without the priestly blessing. According to B. Bukovinsky's, Nottraung was very common among Germans. In the communities where there was no priest, newly wedded couples used to give each other an oath of loyalty at the presence of two Catholic witnesses. If such spouses later met a Catholic priest, both confessed, took St. Communion and repeated marital vow in his presence. However, Nottraung was not practiced by the Poles" [5, p. 255].

Similar phenomena in the practice of Catholics religious life, described by V. Bukovinsky, can be observed today. Thus, for example, in 2006, we recorded the fact that in the Zhylymdy village (Akmola region), where mixed German Catholics and the Kazakhs had previously lived, only two families left as a result of the mass exodus of the German population from Kazakhstan in 1990. Because of the lack of a Catholic priest, in order to conduct burial rites of elderly Catholic Mina Root, the family appealed to the Orthodox priest of the neighboring Elenovka village. Having received his refusal, they applied with the same request to the mullah. With the consent of the Chief Imam of the district mosque, a Catholic woman was buried with a partial observance of Catholic rites and reading the Koran for the deceased.

CONCLUSION

As a result of the political process in the late 1930's-1940's, Kazakhstan became the center of the Catholic religion in the USSR. The position of the Catholics in the period of the Soviet totalitarian regime was influenced by a number of prevalent factors.

A number of political circumstances caused more negative attitude of Soviet authorities to Catholics, compared with other confessions.

Under the period of "Catacomb Church", i.e. underground existence of the Catholic Church, settled in 1940's-1980's, the faithfuls could not perform a full religious practice. A secret group, family, or personal prayer was the main form of religious life. An important role was played by elderly religious Catholic women, who performed all the religious rituals and sacraments and led the prayer groups of faithful.

As a result of the destruction of the mono-confessional principle of German settlements during the period of deportation and dispersive resettlement, Catholics found themselves in different confessional environment. This has brought in Catholics religious life such features, as an appeal to the Orthodox, the Lutherans and in extreme cases - to the Muslim clergy for conducting certain ceremonies in the absence of a priest or a woman, who knew how to perform these ceremonies.

The uniqueness of the situation was that, despite a great number of destructive factors and repressions of religious conviction, the Catholics have managed to retain their religious identity. This was promoted by a deep piety and traditional conservatism of Germans and Poles. Compliance with Catholic rites was a purely personal testimony of inner life, untouched by the Soviet morality. Family and community were the main custodians of tradition and religion. They have become the main form of Catholics survival and defense mechanism, protecting people from a brutal totalitarian regime.

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