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Documents of the Vyazniki Investigation (1665–66) on the Ideal Basis of Anti-Church Beliefs and Actions of the Raskolniki in the Central Uezds of Russia

Abstract

The controversial issue of balance between ideal and material causes of the religious Raskol in the Russian Orthodox Church remains significant from its emergence to present day. Some definitions of developed Soviet historiography are also controversial, in particular, the thesis of the Schism being an “external religious shell” that hides its secular core. The article examines the religious (ideal) content of the protest. It draws on published documents of the Vyazniki Investigation Office of the Secret Chancery (Prikaz tainykh del) stored in the Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts (RGADA) (fond of State Archive of the Russian Empire in the XXVII

Category). Reliability of the data has been established by comparing of independent sources and interrelated messages. The dossier includes 106 documents: accusations (Izvety), petitions (Chelobitnye), edicts (Ukaznye gramoty), orders (Nakaznye stat'i) of the Secret Chancery, extracts from the Secret Chancery books (Iz zapisnoi knigi Tainogo prikaza), interrogations (Doprosy), torture evidence (Pytochnye rechi), law confrontations (Ochnye stavki), reports (Otpiski), etc. They testify that the religious (ideal) "beliefs" of the Raskolniki laid the basis of their religious movement and were the reason for introduction of protest "norms of behavior" in the Vladimir, Suzdal, and Gorokhovets uezds of Central Russia in 1665–66. Totality of documentary data proves that Schism teachers and "ordinary" dissenters unanimously explained their protest by religious (ideal) motives. They refused to go to "the Lord's church" for office read from "new books," to sign themselves "with three fingers," "to be baptized," to confess, to receive communion. Religious dissidents believed the word of their teachers that the "change of the Holy Scripture" should result in the appearance of the "forerunner and Antichrist." Some Raskolniki joined in the "blasphemies" on the tsar and Patriarch Nikon pronounced by teacher Vavila. For "salvation of their souls" from the "Antichrist," the old believers implemented medieval "norms of behavior": they withdraw to deserts, they were guided by the Raskol teachers, fasted, and prayed before their own icons. The ideal and material forms of protest sprang from the ideal nature of the Raskol.

Keywords

Religious schism in Russia, materialistic doctrine of the Raskol, Vyazniki Investigation documents, ideal base of protest; anti–Church and anti–state movement.

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