

PROTESTANT MINORITIES IN THE SOVIET UKRAINE, 1945-1991

by

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## An Abstract of the Dissertation of

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The dissertation focuses on Protestants in the Soviet Ukraine from the end of the Second World War to the collapse of the USSR. It has two major aims. The first is to elucidate the evolution of Soviet policy toward Protestant denominations, using archival evidence that was not available to previous students of this subject. The second is to reconstruct the internal life of Protestant congregations as marginalized social groups. The dissertation is thus a case study both of religious persecution under state-sponsored atheism and of the efforts of individual believers and their communities to survive without compromising their religious principles.

The opportunity to function legally came at a cost to Protestant communities in Ukraine and elsewhere in the USSR. In the 1940s-1980s, Protestant communities lived within a tight encirclement of numerous governmental restrictions designed to contain and, ultimately, reduce all manifestations of religiosity in the republic both quantitatively and qualitatively. The Soviet state specifically focused on interrupting the generational

continuity of religious tradition by driving a wedge between believing parents and their children. Aware of these technologies of containment and their purpose, Protestants devised a variety of survival strategies that allowed them, when possible, to circumvent the stifling effects of containment and ensure the preservation and transmission of religious traditions to the next generation. The dissertation investigates how the Soviet government exploited the state institutions and ecclesiastic structures in its effort to transform communities of believers into malleable societies of timid and nominal Christians and how the diverse Protestant communities responded to this challenge.

Faced with serious ethical choices—to collaborate with the government or resist its persistent interference in the internal affairs of their communities—many Ukrainian Evangelicals joined the vocal opposition movement that contributed to an increased international pressure on the Soviet government and subsequent evolution of the Soviet policy from confrontation to co-existence with religion. The dissertation examines both theoretical and practical aspects of the Soviet secularization project and advances a number of arguments that help account for religion's survival in the Soviet Union during the 1940s-1980s.

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To the memory of my Mother, Nadezhda, and Father, Yuri

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In January 1963, a group of thirty-nine Pentecostal believers from Eastern Siberia forced their way into the American Embassy in Moscow, asking for help to emigrate from the USSR. Although sporadic evidence of renewed religious persecution in the USSR began to reach the West even earlier, the promises of Khrushchev's de-Stalinization and assurances of co-opted Soviet religious leaders effectively deflected the attention of western public from the reality of believers' life in the Soviet Union. The Pentecostals' dramatic entry into the U.S. Embassy compelled the West to reevaluate its hitherto complacent stance vis-à-vis the violation of believers' rights in the USSR. However, the spotlight of international attention and scholarly investigation often focused either on the rivalry between religious dissenters and co-opted church leaders, Soviet antireligious policies, or state institutions in charge of implementing these policies, leaving the vast gray area between the extremes of active resistance to and collaboration with the Soviet authorities in the shadows. While the majority of ordinary members and parish presbyters of Evangelical-Baptist, Pentecostal, and Seventh Day Adventist communities most often neither hobnobbed with the government officials nor languished in prison camps, their ability to circumvent Soviet restrictions on religious activity and transmit their beliefs to the younger generation made possible the survival of religious

traditions in the USSR under the most unfavorable circumstances of state-sponsored atheism.

While recognizing the importance of such salient players in the drama of state-church relations in the USSR as various state institutions, state-approved religious elites and dissenting reformers, this study brings to the foreground the everyday experiences of ordinary Protestants, providing an overall assessment of specific legal hurdles and social pressures that they had to overcome and withstand during the five decades between the Second World War and collapse of the Soviet Union. Most central to this study is the analysis of Protestant survival strategies and adaptive techniques that allowed these harassed and often demonized religious minorities not only prevent their membership from dwindling, despite the state's efforts to isolate them from the mainstream Soviet society, but to ultimately win an uneven contest with the dominant Soviet ideology for the hearts and minds of the young generation. Moreover, as self-organized, all-inclusive, and family-oriented social groups dedicated to charity, mutual aid, and a healthy lifestyle, Protestant communities proved especially attractive to people left on the fringes of society or those looking for a more meaningful social alternative to membership in such increasingly bureaucratized and spiritually hollowed-out Soviet organizations as Komsomol or the Communist Party. Although religion's triumph in the late 1980s could be in part attributed to the general decline of the stagnant Soviet system, the Protestants' ability to refashion their image and modernize their message in the years prior to perestroika significantly contributed to the unprecedented religious renaissance that accompanied the Soviet Union's collapse.



In recent decades, historians have identified a number of social enclaves whose ethnic, cultural, or religious concerns set them apart from the purportedly uniform, monolithic and single-minded Soviet society projected by the Soviet ideological establishment and often seen so by the Cold War-era western scholars. The post-Soviet specialists in social and cultural studies challenge the concept of a monolithic homogeneous Russia/Soviet culture and discuss it rather as a multicultural entity consisting of diverse and coexisting cultural habitats or subcultures characterized by distinct sets of normative and sign complexes, social lingos, mentalities, educational traditions and visions of the world (intelligentsia, artistic underground, criminal world, political and religious non-conformists, etc). Incapable of a fully autonomous self-replication, a subculture usually borrows some codes and symbols of the mother-culture, transforming and decoding them for its own use.<sup>1</sup> The history of such subcultures or parallel structures certainly preceded the Soviet era. Some contemporary social historians pointed to the subculture of heretics as one of the earliest in Russia and linked its emergence with the influence of Protestantism.<sup>2</sup>

Although Protestant minorities in the USSR certainly added distinct strands to the purportedly red fabric of the Soviet society and shared some characteristics ascribed to subcultures, their distinctiveness should be attributed not so much to their conscientious millenarian withdrawal from the world as to the militancy of the Soviet secularization drive that persistently marginalized and isolated them even as it strove to integrate them

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<sup>1</sup> Tatiana Shchepanskaia, *Sistema: teksty i traditsii subkul'tury* (Moskva: O.G.I., 2004), p. 30-31.

<sup>2</sup> N.A. Khrenov and K.B. Sokolov, *Khudozhestvennaia zhizn' imperatorskoi Rossii: subkul'tury, kartiny mira, menta'nost'* (Sankt-Peterburg: Izdatel'stvo "Aleteia," 2001), p. 429.

into the mainstream Soviet society. As social groups, the Soviet Protestants were in many ways a product of their environment and their multifaceted interactions with the Soviet state and the mainstream society. Between the Second World War and collapse of the Soviet Union, the Soviet policy on religion continuously oscillated among confrontation, cooperation and co-existence. As Protestants reacted to these changes, they not only evolved themselves, but caused an incremental evolution of the Soviet policy on religion.

This dissertation focuses on the Ukrainian Evangelicals-Baptists, Seventh Day Adventists and Pentecostals, with some attention to smaller Protestant groups. The main port of entry for foreign Protestant missionaries since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Ukraine remained a home to roughly two-thirds of all Protestants in both tsarist Russia and Soviet Union. The Soviet officials continuously referred to Ukraine, especially its western provinces, as a hotbed of religiosity. Although Protestants in the recently annexed and religiously pluralistic westernmost parts of the republic attested some preferential treatment by the Soviet authorities, believers in the rest of Ukraine underwent the same experience as their counterparts elsewhere in the USSR. Both the density of Protestants in the republic's demographic makeup and relative representativeness of their experience made Ukraine a prime source of evidence for my study.

The study has two major aims. The first is to elucidate the evolution of Soviet policy towards Protestant denominations, using archival evidence not available to previous students of this subject. The second is to reconstruct the internal life of Protestant congregations as marginalized social groups. The dissertation is thus a case

study both of religious persecution under state-sponsored atheism and of the efforts of individual believers and their communities to survive without compromising their religious principles.

Protestants have never been numerous in the USSR and available statistics on their numerical strength remained inaccurate due to the fact that a sizable portion of the non-conforming Baptists, Mennonites, Seventh Day Adventists, Pentecostals and Jehovah's Witnesses were unregistered, underground and uncounted. The 1984 statistics published by Minority Rights Group lists 500,000 registered and 100,000 unregistered (*Initsiativniki*) Baptists-Evangelicals; 30,604 registered Seventh Day Adventists and arguably 100,000 unregistered Free and True Seventh Day Adventists; and an estimated total of 500,000 Pentecostals of whom only 55,000 were accounted as registered.<sup>3</sup> The first Protestants of Evangelical, Baptist and, later, Adventist persuasions began to enter the Russian scene since the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, emerging in such diverse places as the St. Petersburg's high society (*Pashkovites*), German colonies in the Baltics, Ukraine and the Volga region, and in close proximity to the settlements of sectarians of the Russian Orthodox derivation (*Dukhobory* and *Molokane*) in Transcaucasia. In 1884, the various Evangelical-Baptist branches formed the Union of Russian Baptists, and in 1906, the Seventh Day Adventists also legalized their status in the empire.

In formulating my topic I drew on the comparatively rich historiography of religious minorities in late imperial and early Soviet Russia. Works by such contemporary scholars as Laura Engelstein, Nicholas Breyfogle, Heather Coleman and

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<sup>3</sup> *Religious Minorities in the Soviet Union*, Report No. 1, 1984 (London: MRG), 24.

Sergei Zhuk are notable for their innovative approaches to the study of various aspects of sectarians' life and collectively point to some continuities that originated in the tsarist period and carried over into the Soviet era. For instance, both the tsarist and Soviet authorities suspected the non-indigenous religious denominations of political disloyalty on the grounds that their organizational centers were outside of Russia and, hence, outside the control of the Russia/Soviet government. Although tolerating the spread of Protestantism among the non-Russian subjects of the empire, the tsarist government resented the conversion of ethnic Russians/Slavs into any alien faith and viewed Orthodoxy as a hereditary marker inseparable from their ethnicity—a testimony to both their Russianness and their loyalty to the Russian state. Heather J. Colman described the problem of Protestant sectarians in late imperial Russia as “the problem of interrelation of religious identity, national character and political reliability”<sup>4</sup> while Sergei Zhuk argued that the Russian religious dissenters not only rejected their former peasant identity in the name of a new evangelical identity, but created an evangelical culture that became “an agent of modernization and unification of the local cultures in the Russian countryside.”<sup>5</sup>

Nicholas Breyfogle's study of sectarians as colonizers<sup>6</sup> shows that, despite sectarians' political loyalty and their immense economic potential as sober, honest and hard-working people who managed to build prosperous communities in the most

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<sup>4</sup> Heather J. Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution, 1905-1929* (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005), 22.

<sup>5</sup> Sergei I. Zhuk, *Russia's Lost Reformation: Peasants, Millennialism, and Radical Sects in Southern Russia and Ukraine* (Baltimore-London: The John Hopkins University Press, 2004), 399-400.

<sup>6</sup> Nicholas Breyfogle, *Heretics and Colonizers: Forging Russia's Empire in the South Caucasus* (Ithaca-London: Cornell University Press, 2005).

forbidding conditions of the empire's frontier or in the heart of Siberia, the tsarist government, preoccupied with ideological uniformity, continued to treat its non-Orthodox subjects with suspicion. The policy of containment exercised by the old regime vis-à-vis religious minorities often employed cumbersome legislation, restrictive settlement regulations and popular xenophobia epitomized in the dictum of the reactionary tsarist Over Procurator of the Holy Synod, Pobedonostsev—"there can be no Russian Baptists." Both the tsarist officials and Orthodox hierarchs often presented Protestants to the Ministry of Internal Affairs as people "threatening not merely the spiritual order of the Russian Empire but its civil stability and territorial integrity as well."<sup>7</sup>

Coleman took her investigation of Baptists-Evangelicals into the early Soviet period and discussed possibilities of peaceful co-existence and cooperation between the Bolsheviks and Baptists during the 1920s. Preoccupied with disempowering the former prop of the old regime, the Russian Orthodox Church, the Bolsheviks projected themselves as defenders of formerly persecuted religious minorities and extended to Protestants legal and economic opportunities of which they had been deprived under the old regime. A contemporary Russian historian, O.Y. Red'kina, convincingly argued that the Bolsheviks' favoritism towards Protestants and indigenous dissenters—Dukhobors, Molokans, Old Believers, and others—was predicated not only on the affirmative action policy, extended also to ethnic and national minorities and intended to strengthen the new government's claim to legitimacy, but also on the more mundane concerns, such as the

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<sup>7</sup> Heather Coleman, p. 21-22.

desperate state of agriculture ruined by years of Civil War and War Communism. As skilled and sober farmers and entrepreneurs, the Protestants represented a valuable economic asset for the early Soviet government. The People's Commissariat of Agriculture vigorously promoted the creation of agricultural religious labor communities on favorable conditions for believers. Certain categories of Protestants even enjoyed exemption from military service on the grounds of their religious pacifism. In response to these newly gained freedoms, some Protestants "supported cooperation with the state in the socio-economic sphere, striving to realize in practice the ideals of Christian socialism."<sup>8</sup> Others enthusiastically embraced Russia's political transformation under the Bolsheviks as a prerequisite for a complementary spiritual revolution and an opportunity for their own social activism. Stalin's "revolution from above" in the late 1920s, however, brought this experimentation to an abrupt end. Believing that the class struggle increased in proportion to the construction of socialism, Stalin viewed religious communism as a politically detrimental idea and perceived the economic success of agricultural religious labor collectives as a victory of ideological competitors.<sup>9</sup>

Stalinism's claim to ideological monopoly and total control over the country's institutions left little room for "politically engaged Christianity"<sup>10</sup> and democratic self-regulated associations of fellow-believers. In 1929, the new legislation on religion significantly curbed liberties granted to Protestant denominations by Lenin's 1918 Decree

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<sup>8</sup> O.Y. Red'kina, *Sel'skokhoziaistvennye religioznye trudovye kollektivy v 1917-m—1930-e gody: na materialakh evropeiskoi chasti RSFSR* (Volgograd: Izdatel'stvo Volgogradskogo Universiteta, 2004), p. 214.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 564-565.

<sup>10</sup> Heather Coleman, 129.

on the Separation of the Church from the State and engendered a wave of persecution that landed many believers in prisons and drove the rest of them underground. The 1930s was a time of tremendous trial for all religious confessions, though especially for the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC henceforth), which had been bearing the brunt of persecution since 1917.

Before the Revolution (around 1915), the Russian Orthodox Church had roughly 80,000 churches and other related buildings (monasteries, seminaries, academies, parish schools, etc). By 1941, only 3,000 churches remained open, mostly in the recently annexed regions of Western Ukraine and Belorussia, Bessarabia, and the Baltic states. The fate of the clergy resembled that of the churches. There were, perhaps, 130-160 Orthodox bishops (the number is uncertain) in the pre-Revolutionary Russia, 50,000 priests, 95,000 monks and the number of other clerics (some categories of clerics are missing in statistics), reaching a grand total of 300,000. In 1939 there were only 4 bishops left. By the end of 1930's, 42,000 out of 50,000, or 95 % of Russia's priests, vanished.<sup>11</sup>

The plight of much smaller Protestant denominations in USSR, such as the Seventh Day Adventist Church, was hardly any different. According to one SDA historian, between the years 1930 and 1950, approximately 3,000 activists and 150

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<sup>11</sup> The data on the persecution of the ROC is summarized from the following sources: Dmitry Pospelovsky, *Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov' v XX-m veke* (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo "Respublika," 1995)p. 168-170; Vladislav Tsylin, *Russkaia Tserkov': 1925-1938* (Moskva: Izdania Sretenskogo Monastyria, 1999), p. 286-288; V.A. Alekseev, *Shturm nebes otmeniaetsia* (Moskva: "Rossiia Molodaia," 1992), p. 70-71; A.V. Bakunin, *Istoriia sovetskogo totalitarizma* (Ekaterinburg: Bank Kul'turnoi Informatsii, 1997), p. 42-45; Y.N. Bakaev, *Vlast' i religii: istoriia otnoshenii—1917-1941* (Khabarovsk: Izdatel'stvo XGTU, 2002), p. 92-96; M.V. Petrov, *Krest pod molotom* (Velikii Novgorod: Novgorodskii Gosudarstvennyi Universitet, 2000), p. 324-375.

ministers of this church received prison sentences. Many of them perished in the GULAG.<sup>12</sup> And this is for a church that in 1935 numbered only 13,000 members. The more numerous Protestant denomination—the Evangelical Christians-Baptists—had roughly 600,000 people in 1929. Between 1929 and 1940, about 25,000 members of this church were repressed.<sup>13</sup> Of its 230 leading ministers, repressed between 1929 and 1941, 127, that is, over one half, did not return from their places of imprisonment, including 38 who were shot.<sup>14</sup>

The scope of tragedy that befell the various religious communities during the 1930s was part of a larger Stalinist holocaust that indiscriminately swallowed up priests and atheist Communists, scientists, army Generals, and ordinary peasants—all on trumped up charges of anti-Soviet activity or propaganda under the infamous Article 58. Stalin's anticipation of a new major war, some historians argued, informed his decision to switch the country to a mode of mobilization in order to swiftly build up the USSR's military-industrial base. Living and working under this mode of mobilization in Soviet conditions meant uniformity of thought and blind subordination to the political will that emanated from the center, that is, from Stalin, who mercilessly wiped out the last vestiges of factionalism and political dissent even within his own Communist party. The price that believers paid for their faith in God could have been much higher, had it not been for

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<sup>12</sup> D. Yunak, *Istoriia Tserkvi Adventistov Sed'mogo Dnia v Possii, 1886-1981* (Zaokskii: "Istochnik zhizni," 2002), p. 259.

<sup>13</sup> S.N. Savinskii, *Istoriia Evangel'skikh Khristian-Baptistov Ukrainy, Rossii, Belarussii, Chast' II, 1917-1967* (Sankt-Peterburg: "Bibliia dlia vsekh," 2001), p. 124.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.



the rather abrupt change in the direction of the political wind that occurred, interestingly enough, in the midst of another colossal ordeal—World War Two.

Historians are still not quite sure how to account for Stalin's sudden rehabilitation of religion during the war or for the virtual disappearance of antireligious rhetoric from Soviet public pronouncements even for some years after the war. Although the Allies purportedly mentioned it to Stalin during their wartime rendezvous that "Christian believers in the USSR (both the Orthodox and Protestants) were still illegal and persecuted for their religious convictions,"<sup>15</sup> it is not clear, as S.N. Savinskii pointed out, which one of the two major wartime meetings—the Tehran or Yalta conferences—may have influenced Stalin's change of heart vis-à-vis the church. The Orthodox believers began to hold prayer services at the end of 1942, and the Evangelicals-Baptists dared to do the same only half a year later, whereas the Tehran conference took place considerably later, in November-December of 1943. The Yalta conference seems even less relevant, since it occurred in February of 1945 when "the process of registering the Evangelical-Baptist communities was well under way."<sup>16</sup> It is clear, however, that this sudden shift in the Soviet treatment of religion did not mean that the dominant Soviet ideology had undergone a conscientious systemic change and embraced co-existence with religion as at least theoretically possible.<sup>17</sup> Stalin's decision to re-legalize religion was predicated first of all on the wartime exigencies—a propagandist move to rehabilitate the

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Steven Merritt Miner, *Stalin's Holy War: Religion, Nationalism, and Alliance Politics, 1941-1945* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), p. 86.

Soviet image abroad and help the Allied governments to ensure public support in their countries for the USSR's war effort, on one hand, and to create favorable conditions for the pursuit of the Soviet long-term geopolitical objectives after the war, on the other.

Domestically, the legalization of thousands of churches and prayer houses that were reopened throughout the western provinces of the Soviet Union during the German occupation as a result of both the believers' own initiative and the German occupation authorities' anti-Bolshevik propaganda concerns helped to ease the reassertion of Soviet control over these least sovietized and troublesome territories annexed by the USSR only in 1939-1940. The challenges of extending the Soviet control in Eastern Europe, to countries with strong and uninterrupted religious traditions, also required a new and more nuanced approach to the sensitive topic of religion. The most obvious explanation, perhaps, is that the rigors of war put the Soviet government's shaky legitimacy to an ultimate test and forced Stalin to look for an ally that could appeal to the traditional popular sense of patriotism much better than the Soviet rhetoric. In other words, Stalin realized that in order to be won, the war had to become a holy war for the Soviet people, and that the church was just the kind of institution that could bring this powerful religious dimension into the Soviet war effort. According to Steven Miner,

The Soviets understood that, without some appeal to the non-Communist beliefs and loyalties of the common people, a great many Red Army recruits would not fight. Soviet religious propaganda worked because so many people wanted to believe that time and the war would change the nature of Soviet power, that the alliance with the Western powers would erode the hard edges of Communism, and that the new Soviet line was a reversion to Russian tradition rather than simply another tactical shift in the party line.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

Although a “tactical shift” at the time, Stalin’s decision to re-legalize religion soon acquired theoretical justification that ensured religion’s legal status for the remainder of the Soviet era.

The church’s active support of the USSR’s war effort, the Soviet scholars stipulated, proved that religion abandoned its hostile stance vis-à-vis the Soviet authority. The construction of socialism in the USSR, they further theorized, was largely completed. This meant that the exploitative social classes whose authority religion formerly supported had been successfully eliminated. With its social roots sapped, religion presented no immediate threat to the Soviet power and would eventually die out in proportion to the spread of education and scientific worldview among the new generation of Soviet citizens. The earliest archival documents pertaining to the middle of the war rehabilitation of the church show that this important decision was made not in response to believers’ or clergymen’s petitions, but exclusively on the initiative of Stalin. On September 4, 1943, while at his dacha, Stalin summoned the KGB Colonel, G.G. Karpov, who, as the head of the KGB’s 2<sup>nd</sup> Department (counter-intelligence) was “well-versed in questions of the church,” and informed the latter that the government found it necessary to create a special organ that would mediate between the government and the church, and that this new organ—which Stalin named the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church—should be attached to the Council of People’s Commissars (later renamed the Council of Ministers).<sup>19</sup> Karpov, who would be later that very day appointed the head of this new organ, was asked to immediately summon to Kremlin the

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<sup>19</sup> *Vlast' i Tserkov' v Vostochnoi Evrope, 1944-1953: dokumenty Rossiiskikh arkhivov*, red. T.V. Volokitina (Moskva: ROSSPEN, 2009), tom 1, p. 11-12.

top three ROC hierarchs who arrived shortly after, confused and without any prepared agenda. Stalin essentially presented the surprised Metropolitans, Sergii, Aleksii, and Nikolai, with the already made decision predicated purportedly on “the positive significance of the church’s patriotic activity during the war,” and asked the hierarchs whether they had “any urgent and yet unresolved questions.” As the hierarchs struggled to articulate their needs, primarily revolving around the creation of central leadership and establishing an office, Stalin, acting as a generous patron, offered more than the meek churchmen dared to ask, from access to better food supplies and chauffeured automobiles to a luxurious office space in the building formerly occupied by the German ambassador Schulenburg.<sup>20</sup> The most striking feature about this document is the speed and efficiency with which the Stalin government moved the ROC from virtually house arrest conditions to the center of international attention, with the news of the creation of central administration for the ROC and convocation of a Church Council (*sobor*) widely publicized in newspapers and radio broadcasts the very next day. Commenting on these sudden developments, V.A. Alekseev wrote:

It was necessary for Stalin to provide the church with a certain prestige in the eyes of international community. In his designs, Stalin apparently set aside a significant role for the church to play in establishing close contacts with antifascist and patriotic movements as well as religious circles in Europe, the Near East, and Northern Africa. The Russian Orthodox Church could also substantially contribute to establishing close contacts with influential religious and clerical organizations in England, the United States, and Canada. F.D. Roosevelt, for instance, was a very religious person who was not indifferent to the plight of the church and believers in the Soviet Union.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 16-17.

<sup>21</sup> V.A. Alekseev, p. 187.

The ROC's resurgence could certainly stimulate the Western Allies' hopes that their wartime cooperation with Stalin was not merely "a shotgun marriage,"<sup>22</sup> and that the USSR might assume a friendlier stance towards the West after the war.

Other scholars, W.C. Fletcher for instance, also noted that in the aftermath of the Second World War the Stalin administration planned to use the ROC for counterpropaganda purposes as a vehicle for furthering the USSR's foreign policy interests in the Eastern Bloc countries and beyond.<sup>23</sup> The government also planned to utilize the ROC domestically as an auxiliary mechanism of control over the general masses of Soviet citizens and, furthermore, use both its relationship with the ROC's central leadership and the ROC's organizational structure as templates for building relationships with leaderships of other confessions. In 1947, the head of the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults (a separate branch established in 1944 to oversee the affairs of all other religious confessions besides the ROC), I.V. Polianskii (also a former NKGB Colonel), stipulated in his report to the Department of Propaganda and Agitation:

...the overwhelming majority of the religiously inclined citizens confess Orthodoxy and, therefore, are under certain influence of the Russian Orthodox Church, which, due to its historically evolved doctrine, never laid claim and does not lay claim to a role of the first-rate political player, but always followed in the trail of state politics...The hierarchical organizational structure of the Orthodox Church is more perfect than the structure of any other cult, which allows us to control and regulate its internal life with greater flexibility and effectiveness.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Walter LaFeber, *America, Russia, and the Cold War, 1945-2002* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002), p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> I refer here to W.C. Fletcher's *Religion and Soviet Foreign Policy, 1945-1970* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973).

<sup>24</sup> *Vlast' i Tserkov' v Vostochnoi Evrope*, tom 1, p. 518-520.

The Soviet state's middle of the war rehabilitation of the church, therefore, pursued two practical long-term objectives—to boost the USSR's prestige internationally, and to provide for a more effective control of the population domestically.

The traditional historiography of the Cold War era tended to focus almost exclusively on continuities of the Soviet attitude toward religion, often overlooking or downplaying the significance of changes that took place in the sphere of state-church relations after the Second World War. The scarcity of information available to historians of the subject during the 1960s-1980s determined both the scope and focus of this or that study of Soviet Protestants. Little was known to historians in the West about the conditions in which the re-legalized churches functioned in the USSR in the 1940s-1950s, and the pioneering works in the field by Michael Bourdeaux<sup>25</sup> were prompted by the emerging evidence of the renewed religious persecution under Khrushchev and the rise of a vocal dissent movement among the Soviet Evangelicals. A number of other historians,<sup>26</sup> most notably, Walter Sawatsky,<sup>27</sup> structured their studies around the confrontation between the incumbent Evangelical-Baptist leadership and dissenting reformers, whereas William C. Fletcher researched the contribution of co-opted church leaderships to the Soviet foreign policy.<sup>28</sup> In their studies, historians relied primarily on

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<sup>25</sup> I refer here to Michael Bourdeaux's *Religious Ferment in Russia: Protestant Opposition to Soviet Religious Policy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1968) and *Faith on Trial in Russia* (New York, London: Harper & Row Publishers, 1971).

<sup>26</sup> Contributors to *Dissent in the USSR: Politics, Ideology, and People*, edit. Rudolf L. Tokes (Baltimore, London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1975).

<sup>27</sup> Walter Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals since World War II* (Kitchener, Ontario: Herald Press, 1981).

<sup>28</sup> William C. Fletcher, *Religion and Soviet Foreign Policy, 1945-1970* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973).

either the public statements of the USSR's policy on religion in Soviet press and official church publications—pronouncements that carefully cloaked the Soviet antireligious agenda, making it difficult to deduce the real plight of believers in the USSR, or on the fragmentary evidence of persecution smuggled out of the country and usually presenting the view of a particular dissenting minority. As a result, a number of important areas remained under-researched. Up until the late years of perestroika, for instance, the most important Soviet institution with which religious communities and clergy had to liaise on a regular basis—the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults—remained a faceless bureaucracy whose prerogatives and the role it played in formulating and executing the Soviet policy on religion could be inferred only from limited evidence.<sup>29</sup> Consequently, the Council's role as an ombudsman for believers was often downplayed or neglected altogether. The lack of sufficiently representative evidence also made it difficult to ascertain the exact scope of Khrushchev's crackdown on religion, determine specific strategies and legal and extralegal pretexts the Council and other Soviet agencies used to reduce religion, or illustrate what survival strategies the Protestants employed to keep their communities alive.

The analysis of the now available archival data reveals that despite its pragmatic origins the Soviet decision to re-legalize religion not only marked a radical departure

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<sup>29</sup> Until the late perestroika, when the Council for the Affairs of Religion became more involved in recasting its image through public relations campaigns domestically and abroad, historians made inferences about the inner workings of this institution on the basis of dissenters' statements or the so-called "Furov Report"—a questionable document composed by one of the Councils plenipotentiaries, a copy of which appeared in the West in 1979. See Otto Luchterhandt "The Council for Religious Affairs" in *Religious Policy in the Soviet Union*, edit. Sabrina Petra Ramet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), Raymond Oppenheim "Are the Furov Reports Authentic?" in *Church, Nation and State in Russia and Ukraine*, edit. Geoffrey Hosking (London: Macmillan, 1991), and John Anderson "The Council for Religious Affairs and the Shaping of Soviet Policy on Religion" in *Soviet Studies*, 1991, Vol. 43 (4).

from the violent practice of the 1930s but proved to be an enduring trait. In no time between 1945 and 1991 was the Soviet government prepared to derail its policy of keeping religion legal. Both during Stalin's waning years, when the government temporarily halted the process of registering new religious communities, and during the height of Khrushchev's antireligious campaign, thousands of churches and prayer houses remained open and functioned legally. This did not mean that religious communities in the USSR or in Soviet Ukraine—the focus of this study—exercised true religious freedom or that the government abandoned its goal of ultimately overcoming religion. Herein lies the difficulty of interpreting the postwar Soviet policy on religion. A contemporary Ukrainian researcher of this policy, Victor A. Vojnalovych,<sup>30</sup> relied on an extensive archival data and produced the most impressive up-to-date study of the party-state policies toward religion. However, his study was limited to the 1940s-1960s and addressed the entire religious spectrum in Ukraine, with only one chapter dedicated to Protestant minorities in particular. Moreover, the actual treatment of believers in the locations was not a mere stenciled imprint of the party policy as formulated at the center. The local authorities routinely misinterpreted directives from the center, which accounted for what James W. Warhola termed “the phenomenon of vertical, downward magnification of Moscow's antireligious policies.”<sup>31</sup> Taken in isolation, specialized studies, whether of Soviet policies on religion, atheism, or the general state of religiosity in the USSR, often do not adequately depict the situation of believers who stood at the

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<sup>30</sup> V. A. Vojnalovych, *Partiino-derzhavna politika shchado religii ta religiinih institutsii v Ukraini 1940-1960-kh rokiv: politologichnii diskurs* (Kyiv: Natsional'na Akademiia Nauk Ukraini, 2005).

<sup>31</sup> James W. Warhola, “Central vs. Local Authority in Soviet Religious Affairs, 1964-1989” in *Journal of Church & State*, Winter 1992, Vol. 34 (1), p. 17.



confluence of multiple elements of the Soviet antireligious effort, whose proper implementation was further compounded by prejudice and arbitrariness of local officials.

In theory, the postwar shift from “militant” to “scientific atheism” meant a switch from violent suppression of religion to the more temperate methods of persuasion and gradual reeducation of the believing masses, which would require an extended period of time. During this process, it would be more advantageous for the government to cope with legally existing, registered and transparent communities of believers that could be closely monitored, influenced and manipulated by the appropriate government agencies. The new strategy certainly did not propose a fair contest between atheism and religion, and the legal existence of religious communities depended on their strict observance of the Soviet legislation on religious cults designed to stunt the growth, reproduction, and rejuvenation of religious communities. In practice, the party officials in charge of ideology were susceptible to losing patience when statistical reports routinely submitted to them showed that the reduction of religious networks in the country was taking too long. The governmental reaction to such setbacks usually entailed a flurry of directives to all levels of Soviet authority, demanding that they worked in tandem with the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults (CARC) and toughened the enforcement of legislation on cults or bent it in such a way that it would produce the desired results. The implementation of this bifurcated policy (of combating religion while ensuring its legal status) via a number of rival institutions caused a great deal of confusion, and “gradualism” was frequently transmogrified into blatant abuse of believers as the government decrees and initiatives traveled from the center to the periphery.

Nevertheless, the new institutions, such as the CARC, one of the principal objects of my study, could advocate for religious communities' rights even as they pursued the long-term goal of undermining religion.

Despite its countless excesses and its self-contradictory nature, the postwar Soviet policy on religion, I argue, represented a significant and enduring shift in the direction of observance of constitutional norms. By accentuating the role of law in the field formerly run on an ad hoc basis by the NKVD officers, and by officially subjecting itself to combating religion only legally, the government limited its own chances of victory over religion and provided the Soviet believers with a referential framework that helped them voice their protest and opposition. The legally aware Protestants soon realized that commitment to legal norms, however flawed and inconsistent, was the government's most vulnerable spot, and that by continuously pounding at this Achilles' hill they could ensure their survival, exact occasional concessions, and slowly alter the seemingly unbending nature of Soviet totalitarianism.

A major element of the state's approach to Protestants was to co-opt religious leaders. The transformation of Protestant central leaderships into state-appointed, rigid hierarchies, which assisted the government in its surveillance of parishes, enforced state-imposed regulations, and served as a mouthpiece of Soviet counterpropaganda abroad, outraged many believers, provoking internal dissent movements and schisms. Whereas some religious historians attribute the emergence of Protestant schisms in the early 1960s

to a deliberate government policy of *divide et impera*,<sup>32</sup> I argue that such an assumption is unsustainable. Although on occasions the government could exploit to its advantage the in-fighting between the leadership factions of certain Protestant denominations, as in the case of the Seventh Day Adventist schism, it generally feared schisms on the scale of an entire denomination, which usually led to the swelling of religious underground and disappearance of a large number of communities from the government radars. The government much preferred to manage Protestants by integrating their diverse groups into large confessional unions and co-opting those union's leaderships. In fact, the Soviet secularization project relied on the existence of legally functioning institutionalized religious communities whose members were firmly under the control of co-opted leadership and regularly exposed to messages denouncing religious extremism. The mechanisms of external and internal control of religious communities, the CARC and Protestant spiritual centers respectively, are discussed in Chapters II and III of this study.

In Chapters IV through IX, I switch focus from institutional forces to religious communities, particularly to various techniques of accommodation and circumvention that allowed Protestant communities in Soviet Ukraine to survive and grow despite the debilitating effect of restrictive measures applied to them by the government. Central to the survival of religious communities in Soviet Union was their ability to ensure the reproduction of religious beliefs in the next generation, most importantly, in the

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<sup>32</sup> Some Russian/Ukrainian church historians and memoirists believe that Protestant schisms were intentionally orchestrated by the Soviet government in accordance with the ancient principle of "divide and rule." As evidence, they cite Tuchkov's reports (see *Politbiuro i tserkov', 1922-1925*). While in the 1920s the GPU in fact employed this strategy to combat the Russian Orthodox Church, the government's priority after WW II became the liquidation of religious underground, not the creation of favorable conditions for its further growth.

believers' own children. The Communist Party also realized that success of its antireligious agenda depended on driving a wedge between religious parents and their children and limiting the Soviet youth's exposure to evangelistic propaganda, thus interrupting the continuity of religious tradition. This engendered a hard-fought contest between the Soviet state and Protestant denominations over winning the hearts and minds of youth. As members of closely knit self-organized social groups, the Protestants proved to be remarkably resilient to the government's efforts to isolate the young generation of Soviet citizens from the influence of religion. Contrary to the expectations of Soviet antireligious establishment, the Protestant communities did not turn into abodes of aging and illiterate folks but experienced continuous rejuvenation. Risking imprisonment, many young Protestants with higher education organized clandestine religious schools for children and youth and strove to counter the impact of atheist propaganda by recasting the message of Christianity in terms of contemporary intellectual discourse, thus making it more appealing for the younger generation. The government's failure to win this battle, I argue, was predicated on the inflexibility of the Marxist-Leninist doctrine, on the erroneous assumption that religion was a socio-economic rather than psychological-existential phenomenon whose appeal transcended social classes, gender, age, or exposure to education, and on the generational rebellion against the compulsory institutional Soviet doctrine.

In the last three chapters, I provide a follow-up to some of the issues discussed earlier, particularly the Protestant schisms, their legacies, and their impact on the evolution of Soviet policy from confrontation to co-existence with religion. The Soviet

persecution of religious dissenters, especially the Evangelical-Baptist schismatics, radicalized them and gave their initially purely religious reform movement a pronounced political dimension. Their struggle for the freedom of conscience drew the public attention abroad to numerous violations of believers' rights in the Soviet Union—a country that signed a number of international agreements protecting believers' rights. In order to deflect these accusations, now endorsed by the international community, the Soviet government had to make a number of concessions to registered communities in exchange for their leaderships' participation in counterpropaganda. However, these concessions emboldened the official churches and more and more registered and unregistered believers viewed the existing Soviet legislation on cults as essentially Stalinist and unacceptable, especially in the light of the Helsinki Accords signed by the Soviet Union. In the mid 1970s, the USSR found itself in a precarious situation: in order to combat what the Soviet officials referred to as “religious fanaticism and extremism,” it had to extend the privileges of official churches and come to terms with the continuous growth of religion as such. The trend persisted into the 1980s.

The mounting political and economic pressures forced the Communist Party to adopt the policies of perestroika and *glasnost*. In order to muster support for the reform, Gorbachev and his administration had to appeal to every stratum of Soviet population, including believers, whom the government now viewed as valuable assets and partners in the business of perestroika. The old legislation on religious cults, however, was not in agreement with the new role believers were expected to play. The new law on the freedom of conscience, passed in 1991, ushered in an era of unprecedented opportunities

for believers and, along with other reforms, substantially curtailed the Marxist ideology's claim to totality. The Communist Party too lost its exclusive status as the main visionary and driver of Soviet society and had to work side by side with the new social forces. Just months before the collapse of the Soviet Union, the party finally conceded to its members the right to believe in God, effectively ending the long era of ideological intolerance. Despite their decades-long cooperation with the authorities, the official churches did not begin reaping any substantial benefits until 1987, when the ailing Soviet regime was already on the verge of crumbling. Prior to 1987, I argue, the registered churches received some concessions from the government, but not so much as the result of their leaders' good rapport with the government as the consequence of religious dissenters' struggle for the cause of religious freedom in the Soviet Union. Ultimately, the Soviet Union granted religious freedom to believers under the pressure of complex circumstances and forces that had little to do with either collaborative religious leaders or dissenters. Protestants survived in the Soviet Union primarily because of the remarkable internal cohesion and discipline of their communities, the prominent role their families played as the main engines of preservation and reproduction of religious traditions, and the willingness of ordinary believers, both registered and unregistered, to circumvent the Soviet legislation on cults and adapt to challenges of modernity.

In framing my dissertation, I relied on archival materials collected during my 10 months research in Ukraine, oral histories, memoirs of prominent surviving Protestants, recent studies by Russian and Ukrainian historians, and the existing western scholarship. The documents from the two main archives in Kiev—The Central State Archive of Social

Organizations (TsDAGO) and The Central State Archive of the Highest Organs of Authority and Administration (TsDAVO)—not only provided the bulk of evidence cited in my dissertation but also determined its organizational structure as a bifocal study of institutional and human dimensions as they interacted or collided in the everyday lives of Soviet Protestants. The TsDAGO documents, specifically the reciprocal correspondence between the chief plenipotentiary (*Upolnomochennyi*) of the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine, the KGB, and other top governmental agencies, represent the institutional point of view and shed light on the formulation and implementation of the Soviet policy on religion. Although these documents were classified and not intended for public consumption, they offered processed data—a summary or interpretation of facts reflecting the state of religiosity in the republic. Compiled by the CARC or the party officials, these summaries were usually tailored to meet the party's expectations and often exaggerated the success of applied antireligious measures. At the same time, these documents regularly mentioned cases of believers' abuse by the local authorities and provided clear evidence that such abuses were not condoned by the central party organs.

The TsDAVO documents, on the other hand, represent the more mundane and less ideologically loaded correspondence between the chief Council's *Upolnomochennyi* in Kiev and his subordinates in the provinces. Hence, they are more revealing of the CARC's methods of collecting information about religious communities and ordinary believers and of specific strategies the Council applied to curb religiosity in the republic. Moreover, the TsDAVO files are full of believers' petitions and complaints as well as

informative reports routinely submitted to the CARC by the Protestant leaders. This raw and unprocessed data allows both to reconstruct the life of religious communities throughout the republic and determine the extent of clergy's collaborationism with the authorities.

The nature of these documents, therefore, suggested a narrative that, while unfolding chronologically, would alternate focus between the institutional and human dimensions of the story. Organizing my work chronologically rather than thematically proved difficult due to both the almost five-decade long period the study covers and multiple developments often occurring simultaneously within any given decade. The origins of Protestant schisms, for instance, were closely linked to the co-optation by the state of spiritual leaderships, discussed in Chapter III. The schisms, however, continued to smolder until the late 1980s and could easily dominate the narrative at the expense of other important aspects. I ultimately chose to interrupt the story of schisms to resume it again in Chapters X and XI.

Telling the story of Protestant minorities invited a multi-disciplinary approach. For instance, it could hardly be discussed intelligibly outside the context of state-church relations in the USSR—a broad topic in itself, involving complex legal, taxation, and fire codes; state legislation, ecclesiastic regulations, and international agreements. At the same time, different disciplines have different priorities and are governed by unlike sets of rules. A purely sociological approach, such as that of W.C. Fletcher,<sup>33</sup> would leave little room for the colorful Protestant folklore or vivid oral histories that tell so much

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<sup>33</sup> William C. Fletcher, *Soviet Believers: The Religious Sector of the Population* (Lawrence: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1981).



about the Soviet believers' mentality and worldview, whereas relying on emotionally charged and faith-driven oral histories and memoirs alone would result in a rather skewed and subjective interpretation of the Protestants' life in the Soviet Union. While drawing on a relatively broad frame of reference in this study, I strove to balance out the evidence of different disciplines and keep the spotlight on ordinary believers and their experiences.

## CHAPTER II

### STATE INSTITUTIONS: THE COUNCIL FOR THE AFFAIRS OF RELIGIOUS CULTS

On September 4, 1943, conversing with the KGB Colonel, G.G. Karpov, about the proposed establishment of the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church (CAROC), Stalin remarked that the Council would “not make independent decisions,” but only “report to the government and receive instructions from it.”<sup>1</sup> The subsequent government decrees that officially created the CAROC and its counterpart for non-Orthodox confessions—The Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults (CARC)—however, extended the prerogatives of these new institutions and gave them the authority to participate in the preliminary preparation of instructions and legislative acts concerning religious organizations. Students of state-church relations in the USSR, most notably Michael Bourdeaux, Walter Sawatsky, John Anderson, Otto Luchterhandt, Raymond Oppenheim, Dmitry Pospelovsky, and a number of others, have repeatedly raised questions about the CARC’s specific status, functions and its role in the formulation of the Soviet policy on religion. “Although the creation of the two councils [CAROC and CARC] was announced almost immediately,” wrote Sawatsky in 1981,

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<sup>1</sup> *Vlast' i tserkov' v Vostochnoi Evrope, 1944-1953*, tom 1, p. 12.

“their powers remained shrouded in mystery for decades.”<sup>2</sup> Writing a decade later, John Anderson still had to admit: “We know little about its [CARC’s] inner workings or role in the shaping of that policy.”<sup>3</sup> Most of the information about the CARC, available to the Cold War era historians, came from the occasional samizdat statements of the persecuted Evangelical dissenters who portrayed the CARC almost exclusively as nothing more than a civilian arm of the dreaded KGB. An “eminent scholar,” Bohdan R. Bociurkiw, cited by Sawatsky, surmised in 1968 that the CARC “represented an institutional extension of the long-established secret police department for ‘churchmen and sectarians.’”<sup>4</sup> The dearth of information perpetuated this rather one-sided view of the CARC until 1979, when the western scholars came into possession of the notorious “Furov Report.”<sup>5</sup> Although the Furov Report shed some light on the Council’s “inner workings,” mainly its interference in the internal life of religious organizations, the document instantly raised questions about its date, composition and authenticity. The data in the Furov Report, most scholars believe, comes from the mid-1970s—the time when prerogatives of the Council were significantly expanded and it acquired greater independence from the tutelage of the party organs. The archival data available now allows for a much more detailed reconstruction of the CARC’s multiple functions and its evolution from being an

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<sup>2</sup> Walter Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals since World War II* (Kitchener, Ontario: Herald Press, 1981), p. 59.

<sup>3</sup> John Anderson, “The Council for Religious Affairs and the Shaping of Soviet Religious Policy” in *Soviet Studies*, 1991, Vol. 43 (4).

<sup>4</sup> Sawatsky, p. 59-60.

<sup>5</sup> Raymond Oppenheim, “Are the Furov Reports Authentic?” in *Church, Nation and State in Russia and Ukraine*, edit. Geoffrey A. Hosking (London: Macmillan, 1991), 291.

underdog among the established Soviet bureaucracies in the 1940s to equivalent of a Ministry in the mid-1970s.

This chapter has several aims. The first is to examine, in the light of new evidence, the CARC's functions and prerogatives, as they were defined by the government, and review the scope of work that the Council's republican branch faced in Ukraine. The second is to investigate an uneasy relationship between the CARC and the MGB/KGB. The third is to elucidate the rivalry between the CARC and local party and Soviet institutions, especially during the early 1960s, when Khrushchev vested local authorities with additional powers to monitor the activity of religious communities. Ultimately, the chapter focuses on the Council's role as an ombudsman between believers and abusive Soviet officials.

The Soviet state's dual commitment to treating religious communities within a legal framework and gradually reducing them placed the CARC at the crossroads of two conflicting objectives. On one hand, it defended believers from the excesses of undisciplined and crude local officials and tried to right the wrongs done by them to religious communities and individuals. On the other hand, it continuously interfered, in a massive way, in the internal life of Protestant congregations, trying to undermine their potential for growth, limit their impact on the mainstream society, and ultimately reduce them to a semblance of old folks' homes in which a dwindling number of aging nominal Christians harmlessly paid tribute to the rapidly disappearing phenomenon of religion. In the practical work of this agency, the boundaries between the legal and illegal, persuasion and coercion were often blurred, while its commitment to legality depended on the tone

of a current governmental instruction and even on the personal qualities of its employees (*upolnomochennye*). Operating on a limited data, the previous researchers often stressed exclusively this latter function of the Council. The overall aim of this chapter, therefore, is to provide a balanced assessment of the CARC, paying equal attention to both the positive and negative roles that it played in the lives of believers. The chapter also lays down the groundwork for the discussion of the Council's evolution in subsequent chapters.

Since the nature of evidence is such that it presents government institutions and believers as constantly interacting, I found it methodologically more appropriate to structure the discussion in this chapter around this pattern rather than artificially segregate the state and believers into two separate themes. The numerous archival details about both Ukrainian Protestants and state officials that I liberally incorporated into the narrative to create a sort of human dimension help to better visualize all major players at the center of this story, the types of abuses to which the ordinary believers were exposed, and to account for objective and subjective reasons that caused the chronic failure of the new government policy of "gradual reduction of religion within the boundaries of law."

### **1. The CARC's Functions and Prerogatives**

On May 19, 1944, the Chairman of the Council of the People's Commissars, Joseph Stalin, and the Executive for the Affairs of the Council of the People's Commissars, Y. Chadaev, signed Decree 572 "On the Establishment of the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults." The decree charged this newly formed agency with "the

task of maintaining communication between the USSR Government and leaders of [the following] religious organizations: Armenian-Gregorian, Old-Believer, Catholic, Greco-Catholic, Lutheran churches, and Muslim, Judaic, Buddhist and sectarian faiths.”<sup>6</sup>

Modeled on the CAROC, which was established in 1943 and briefly supervised the activity of all religious confessions in the country, the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults (henceforth, CARC) represented a move toward specialization. Both Councils were established as civilian organizations answerable to the main Soviet governmental body—the Council of the People’s Commissars, or Sovnarkom (later renamed the Council of Ministers of USSR)—and not to the People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD) as during the 1930s. The decree’s language betrayed the government’s persisting bias toward the non-Orthodox religions referred to as “cults” in the Council’s official name or as “sectarian faiths”—a generic and diminutive term under which all Protestant denominations were lumped together.

Ten days after the establishment of CARC, the government issued Statutes delineating the new Council’s prerogatives and responsibilities. According to Article III of the statutes, the Council was responsible for:

- a.) Preliminary review of questions raised by religious administrative bodies and leaders of the aforementioned religious cults—issues that require permission by the USSR government.
- b.) Preparation of projects of legislative acts and decrees concerning these religious cults as well as of instructions and guidelines for their [legislative acts’] implementation, and their submission for the review by the Sovnarkom of USSR.
- c.) Monitoring the correct and timely implementation on the entire territory of the USSR of laws and directives of the USSR government that concern religious cults.

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<sup>6</sup> TsDAVO, F 4648, Op. 2, D. 1, p. 1.

- d.) Submission to the Sovnarkom of USSR of resolutions on questions concerning these religious cults.
- e.) Informing the USSR government regularly about the state of religious cults in the USSR, and about conditions and activities of these cults in the localities (*na mestakh*).
- f.) General accounting of churches and prayer houses, the compilation of statistical estimates on the basis of data provided to the Council by the local Soviet organs.

Article V of the same Statutes further stated that CARC at the Sovnarkom of USSR had the right:

- a.) to demand from central and local Soviet organs the submission of necessary information and materials on questions concerning religious cults.
- b.) to form commissions to work on certain questions concerning religious cults.

Article VI also demanded that “all central institutions and departments of the USSR” went through “a preliminary consultation with” the CARC “before carrying out measures concerning issues related to the aforementioned religious cults.”<sup>7</sup>

The central office of this new organization (in Moscow) consisted of the Council’s Chairman (I.V. Polianskii), his assistant, two Council members, and an executive secretary.<sup>8</sup> These five people at the helm of the all-union CARC were to coordinate and supervise the work of its filial branches, established “at the Sovnarkoms of union and autonomous republics, and provincial (*oblast*) and territorial (*krai*) executive committees,” and headed by the *Upolnomochennye*\* “acting in accordance

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

\* The Russian term *Upolnomochennyi* (singular), or *Upolnomochennye* (plural), literally means a person vested with certain powers or responsibilities, a deputy or a representative carrying out duties entrusted to him/her by government or social organization.

with paragraphs C, D, E, and F of Article III of the present Statutes and instructions of the Council.”<sup>9</sup>

In Ukraine, the Council was represented by a chief republican Upolnomochennyi and his assistant, stationed in Kiev, and one Upolnomochennyi for each of Ukraine’s twenty five oblasts. Although the Statutes provided for a seemingly ubiquitous presence of these new supervisors of religion throughout Ukraine, it became apparent from the start that the Ukrainian apparatus of Upolnomochennye, under-equipped, understaffed (only twenty seven strong) and composed of unqualified and hastily trained officials that happened to be available. These 27 officials were charged with task of assessing the extent of religious networks in the republic, accounting for all registered and unregistered communities of non-Orthodox denominations, liaising between these communities and local Soviet institutions, overseeing and enforcing the observance of legislation on religious cults by both believers and Soviet officials, carefully studying the internal life of religious communities, including continuous evaluation and screening of leadership and activist cadre and, ultimately, implementing the government agenda of gradual reduction of religion. Ukraine’s historically leading place in terms of density of religious population vis-à-vis the rest of the country further compounded the work of Upolnomochennye. The Evangelical Christians-Baptists (henceforth EKhB), for example, were so numerous in Ukraine that they occupied “the second place after the Russian Orthodox Church.”<sup>10</sup> In his 1947 report, the chief Upolnomochennyi for Ukraine,

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 4555, p. 44.



P.A. Vil'khovyi, wrote: "Before the beginning of collectivization (1929), in all of USSR there were 6,500 EKhB communities, having a total number of 600,000 members. Approximately  $\frac{3}{4}$  of them resided in Ukraine... As of June 1, 1947, in all of USSR there are 2,669 registered EKhB communities. 1,880 of them or 70%, with the combined number of 94,019 people, are located in Ukraine."<sup>11</sup> Although the dramatic drop in the number of EKhB believers in Ukraine, from roughly 450,000 before 1929 to about 95,000 after the war—in itself a vivid testimony to the tremendous impact that the 1930s' persecution and the war years had on this Protestant community—considerably eased the burden of the Council's Upolnomochennye, monitoring the life of 1,880 registered EKhB communities alone presented a formidable challenge for 27 government officials. Besides, according to the 1949 data, this small group of people had to plan and orchestrate the wholesale "liquidation of the Greek-Catholic church in Zakarpatie"<sup>12</sup> (Western Ukraine), and tend to the affairs of 210 Roman Catholic communities (the third largest denomination in Ukraine), 129 Seventh Day Adventist, 61 Hungarian Reformat, 81 Old Believer, 46 Jewish,<sup>13</sup> and a whole array of unregistered, illegal and hard to track down communities and groups, from Pentecostals and Jehovah's Witnesses to the more exotic Apocalypsists and Inokentievtsy. Moreover, the oblast Upolnomochennye were obliged to write lengthy quarterly reports on the progress of their work and submit them to their superior in Kiev, Vil'khovyi, who, in his turn, had to compile an even lengthier

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<sup>11</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 4556, p. 113-114.

<sup>12</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 5667, p. 16.

<sup>13</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 12, p. 54.

report and submit it to both the CARC in Moscow and his Communist Party bosses in Ukraine, making sure that one copy also went to the KGB.<sup>14</sup>

Something needs to be said here about the first head of the Ukrainian CARC, Pyotr Akimovich Vil'khovyi. There is no evidence to suggest that he was drawn from the same pool of former KGB officers as his superior in Moscow, Ivan Polianskii. Although a Communist, Vil'khovyi did not seem to belong to the same institutional culture as his successors in the 1960s, K. Polonnik and K.Z. Litvin, both prominent party bureaucrats (Litvin serving previously as a Ukrainian party propaganda chief). Besides tending to his responsibilities as the head of CARC in Ukraine, he also pursued a literary career as a writer and actively participated in the activities of the Ukrainian Writers' Union. Among his published works are two novels—*Divchyna z golubymy ochyma* (around 1950) and *Na herekhakh dvokh rik* (1972). The style of his quarterly reports betrayed not only his literary propensities, but also his genuine effort to understand “the internal processes and developments within religious organizations”—one of the specific foci of the Council's work. Unlike his successors, whose reports grew increasingly drier and more formalized, Vil'khovyi had an eye for details and seriously studied religious communities as a socio-cultural phenomenon, providing in his reports valuable observations of believers' religious life and their interactions with the mainstream society. Although this could be in part explained by the novelty of the task and the

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<sup>14</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 4263, back of page 45 (The chief republican Upolnomochennyi routinely prepared up to 8 copies of his quarterly report and submitted them to the following functionaries: Chairman of CARC at the Council of Ministers of USSR, Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine, Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Ukrainian SSR, First Assistant to the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Ukrainian SSR, Chairman of Presidium of Supreme Council of Ukrainian SSR, and Chairman of KGB at the Council of Ministers of Ukrainian SSR).

absence of any set format of reporting during the Council's first steps as an institution, which allowed for a certain degree of improvisation, Vil'khovyi's approach to his duties was clearly less bureaucratic.

The Soviet government must have anticipated that the Council's workload would be unbearable for its limited staff and, therefore, envisioned a sort of cross-institutional cooperation between this new agency and all other branches of Soviet authority. The 1929 legislation on religious organizations, still applicable after the war, provided that the believers seeking registration would apply first at the regional or city executive committee (Raiispolkom or Gorispolkom). The latter would review the believers' application and send it along with its resolution to the provincial executive committee (Oblispolkom) which, in turn, would forward it to CARC for the final resolution. The CARC would thus act as the final stage in the application process—as the agency that would either grant or refuse the registration of a given religious community or prayer house.<sup>15</sup> This procedure, however, instead of easing the work of CARC often complicated it, since the Raiispolkoms and Oblispolkoms at times acted themselves as the final authority, denying the registration of communities and prayer houses and forcing believers to write petitions to CARC which, in turn, had to contact these local agencies and challenge their decisions. The CARC also had no means of enforcing the legislation on cults without resorting to the help of executive and judicial branches—the militia, MGB/KGB, Procuracy and the courts. Although it was an essential feature of Soviet

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<sup>15</sup> *Zakonodatel'stvo o religioznykh kul'takh: sbornik materialov i dokumentov (dlia sluzhebnogo pol'zovaniia)*, red. V.A. Kuroedov (Moskva: "Yuridicheskaiia Literatura," 1971), p. 11-12.

governance, this cross-institutional cooperation frequently malfunctioned and only hampered the Upolnomochennye's ability to perform their duties.

The Upolnomochennye's workload could have been more manageable, if they had had adequate assisting personnel at their disposal. As of 1950, Ukraine's republican Upolnomochennyi, Vil'khovyi, complained that the entire "apparatus" of an oblast Upolnomochennyi "consists of him alone, while visitors with petitions and applications come almost every day;" thus taking up time that he needs "for the fulfillment of his immediate task of regulating and limiting the activity of religious cults."<sup>16</sup> Vil'khovyi himself had an assistant, but apparently could not make the latter double as a typist. As a result, he had to walk 2.5 kilometers to the Kiev Oblispolkom each time he needed the services of a typist. Vil'khovyi made sure to couch his request for a typist of his own in terms that underscored the intellectual character of his work and its importance to the long-term objectives of the state:

Only the meticulous study of religious communities would give us an opportunity to unswervingly guide their activity in the direction of narrowing their scope in every aspect, of limiting their activity to the boundaries of a prayer house alone, and of achieving the goal of complete liquidation of pernicious [literally, "harm-bearing," *vredonosnykh*] religious organizations.<sup>17</sup>

Besides being understaffed, the CARC's central office in Kiev apparently looked quite bare, shabby, and beneath the rank of a governmental institution, accorded to it by the Statutes. On January 30, 1948, Vil'khovyi informed Assistant to the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Ukrainian SSR, comrade I.S. Senin, of foreign delegations he

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<sup>16</sup> TsDAGO, F.1, Op. 24, D. 12, p. 222-223.

<sup>17</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 64, p. 5.

expected to visit his office and asked for some furniture items and upholstery materials to make his work place more presentable. In the list of desiderata, he specifically mentioned: “9 meters of rolled carpet, curtains for two office windows, 20 meters of fake leather (*dermantin*) to upholster two office doors, material to upholster two armchairs, one table and six chairs for the reception room, and one fireproof chest.”<sup>18</sup> The shortages and discomforts described by Vil’khovyi were not uncommon for other government agencies and could be attributed to the legacy of the recent war acutely felt everywhere in the USSR and, especially, in Ukraine—a territory ravaged by many battles and drained economically by three years of German occupation. An upstart organization, such as the CARC, had to vie with the core Soviet institutions for meager available office space, equipment, and other resources. In fact, Vil’khovyi’s problems seemed rather superficial in comparison with the truly abysmal working conditions that his subordinates faced in the provinces. In 1946, even the Upolnomochennyi for Kiev oblast, Zavetskii, did not have any decent clothes to wear and thanked his Moscow superior, Sadovskii, for procuring a set of military surplus uniform for him. Wearing this new outfit, Zavetskii wrote, made him look more respectable.<sup>19</sup>

In 1948, the Upolnomochennyi for Kirovograd oblast, P.I. Bondarenko, asked Vil’khovyi “to relieve him from his responsibilities as the Council’s Uplnomochennyi...due to unbearable conditions for further work.” Since June, 1946, Bondarenko shared a room with the Bureau of Complaints, the Accountant’s Office and

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<sup>18</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 45, p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 14, p. 3-4.

the Oblkartbureau. It was difficult in such conditions to receive representatives of religious cults. When in 1947 the Oblispolkom moved into a different, recently repaired building, Bondarenko had high hopes for better working conditions, and for a short period of time he did enjoy a separate room. However, when the Oblispolkom Chairman, Ishchenko, was making an inspection tour of the building, Bondarenko was ordered to vacate his office and move to a room where the Department of Repatriation and Relocation resided, his short-time independent office being refashioned into the Oblispolkom barber shop. Bondarenko decided to linger on in his office until the barber shop would in fact be organized. For three months, the head of the General Department, Shvets, terrorized Bondarenko. The barber shop, as it turned out, had never materialized. No one else in the Oblispolkom was forced to relocate. Bondarenko remained the only one constantly harassed and pushed around, because “in the Oblispolkom Chairman’s understanding, the work of Upolnomochennyi is not needed by anyone, and is of no value to the state.” On July 6, 1948, Bondarenko found all tables, chairs and the rest of his office accoutrements removed from his office, and his office already occupied by the Department of Accounting, his stuff being moved without his knowledge to a different room. This new room, in Bondarenko’s depiction, “is wet—the walls are damp, the floorboards have shrunk and the wind is blowing through big cracks between them.” This former storage room had never been occupied by any other of Oblispolkom employees. “It seems,” reasoned Bondarenko, “that as a former Red Partisan of the Civil War who had borne a lot on his shoulders and whose health had been damaged, and also as a person belonging to the number of old Bolsheviks who participated in the organization of Soviet

authority in Ukraine, I could deserve better treatment worthy of a Bolshevik.” Since the Chairman, Ishchenko, would not even receive Bondarenko, explaining his refusal by the lack of time, Bondarenko “can no longer bear these kinds of torments (*izdevatel'stv*).”<sup>20</sup>

In 1946, the Council's Upolnomochennyi for Ternopol oblast, I. Chirva, complained in his report entitled “Difficulties in Work” that in nine months of his work as an employee of a Soviet institution and a member of the great party of Lenin and Stalin, no one asked him whether he had any needs or pointed out his shortcomings. “Moreover,” wrote Chirva with indignation, “the Oblispolkom workers, ignorant of the functions of the Upolnomochennyi of the Council for Religious Cults, are inclined to treat the Council's Upolnomochennyi as a member of clergy and not as a worker of the Soviet apparatus. When meeting with the Oblispolkom workers and even with some high-ranking comrades, I can be called ‘bishop,’ ‘patriarch,’ etc.” Chirva further stated that glass in the windows of the building in which he worked was broken, doors not functioning, and that there was no firewood to keep the building warm. “While the Oblispolkom department heads had firewood brought to their apartments, I, as the Oblispolkom secretary, comrade Kekina put it, ‘was not entitled to firewood.’ It is quite evident that I cannot afford to purchase firewood at the market. All these conditions create difficulties for work and quite often make me think: ‘For 28 years I worked for the party and the Soviet people; for 22 years I have been a member of the VKP(b). During all those years, I received nothing but honors and recognition for my work...and now I

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<sup>20</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 45, p. 28-30.

find myself in such a stupid situation.’ I feel pushed to the point when I want to leave all of this...”<sup>21</sup>

A similar report, entitled “The Main Difficulties in My Work,” came in 1946 from the Upolnomochennyi for Rovno oblast, Voloshevich. “To this day I do not have a work place of my own,” stated Voloshevich and proceeded to describe how in the course of 1945 three different departments resided in his office: the oblast Department of Physical Culture and Sports, the oblast Administration for Development of Navigation on Small Rivers, and the Department of State Arbitration.

I cannot continue to work in such conditions. I repeatedly raised this question with the Oblispolkom Chairman and Secretary...I get promises. But one year and three months have passed and I continue in the same conditions. When I travel to various regions, I am forced to gather all documentation on registering communities and other papers and ask someone to hide them somewhere for me [while he is gone], and when I return, I have to collect them again and move them to my work place. I still do not have a phone. Even when there was a phone available in the office of the Upolnomochennyi for the Affairs of the Orthodox Church, our office did not have an account to use it for communication with our workers. And now, the Upolnomochennyi for the Orthodox Church is leaving for his vacation, and he is giving his phone to the Department for the Mobilization of Cadre which already has one phone. I ask you to transfer me to a different oblast or relieve me from my present post.<sup>22</sup>

In Izmail'skaia oblast, the Upolnomochennyi for both CAROC and CARC worked in conditions that were short of being grotesque—they shared a room in a house located on the property of an active Nikolaevskaia Orthodox Church, with the priest of this parish residing in the second half of the same house.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 29, p. 27.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 17-18.



Similar complaints came from Voroshilovograd oblast where the Council's Upolnomochennyi" worked "on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor, in the attic," in a room with walls "dented and covered in soot" and a floor "of bare concrete." The report further indicated that "due to the lack of a reception room for visitors, servants of the cult await their turn to be called in sitting on the steps of a staircase."<sup>24</sup> Although Articles V and VI of the 1944 Statutes obligated all central and peripheral governmental organs to assist the CARC in its work and consult it "before carrying out measures concerning questions related to...religious cults,"<sup>25</sup> in reality, the CARC employees had to fight for access to elementary office facilities and defend their status and turf in the Soviet bureaucratic jungle. The traditional state and party elites at the pinnacle of provincial authority in Oblispolkoms and Obkoms\* seriously doubted the government's commitment to legality in the realm of religious affairs and perceived CARC as a superficial and lightweight addition to the established nomenklatura—a mere side effect of wartime exigencies and something likely to vanish with the country's return to normalcy. Many of these functionaries viewed repressions of the 1930s as the proper approach to religion and disdained the new legalism embodied in CARC. Instead of assisting the Upolnomochenyi and following their lead in matters of religion, some local officials were all too eager to teach them how to combat religion the old-fashioned style. In 1949, the Oblispolkom Chairman for Izmail oblast, Garkusha, called the Upolnomochennyi for

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> TsDAVO, F. 1, Op. 2, D. 1, p. 3.

\* In the Soviet lingua franca, the acronym *Oblispolkom* stood for the Oblast Executive Committee of the Soviet of Workers' Deputies whereas *Obkom* was an accepted acronym for the Oblast Committee of the Communist Party.

the Russian Orthodox Church, Ermakov, into his office and asked him: “Why is religiosity not going down? When the collectivization of agriculture is at 100%, such a state of affairs cannot be tolerated.” He accused Ermakov of doing nothing to lower religiosity and, pointing to the work of the Upolnomochennyi of CARC who purportedly “liquidated all monasteries of Old Believers and sectarian communities” in the oblast, inquired why could not Ermakov do the same and close all Orthodox churches. When Ermakov explained to Garkusha that in his work he was bound by instructions of the Council and governmental decrees, Garkusha demanded that Ermakov “close all churches [123, plus 3 monasteries] in 135 days and quoted examples from the prewar years “when churches and monasteries were closed without any formalities, and when “the Komsomol members took down the church bells to the accompaniment of music.”<sup>26</sup>

The local Soviet and party officials went well beyond merely chiding the Council’s Upolnomochennye but actively interfered in their work by disregarding and violating their decisions concerning the issues of legal existence of religious communities and by disrupting the implementation of general strategies worked out by the CARC. In 1949, Vil’khovyi dedicated a sizable portion of his Informative Report to discussing the lack of understanding of CARC’s objectives and strategies by the local government officials. “Religion, and that of the Evangelical Christians-Baptists in particular,” he wrote, “shores up the remnants of capitalism in the consciousness of people by the authority of a non-existing god,” and although religion “has become an atavism” in the Soviet Union, “the power, tenaciousness and longevity of this atavism cannot be

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<sup>26</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 5667, p. 107.

underestimated,” for “conservative and stubborn...religious views long outlive conditions that caused them.” Besides, he maintained, “the specificity and pronounced democratic leanings of sectarian organizations in general and, in particular, their propaganda—subtle and skillfully camouflaged—are of great significance,” which means that “one must approach the question of reeducation of the believing segment of population with all seriousness and once again categorically prohibit the detrimental, anti-party, administrative practice of combating religion in all oblasts of Ukraine and, particularly, in Kiev oblast.”<sup>27</sup> As an example of such detrimental practice and of infringement upon the prerogatives of CARC, Vil’khovyi quoted the behavior of Chairman of the Village Soviet and the kolkhoz Chairman in village Sokolovochka, who called presbyter of a registered EKhB community, Sorochinskii, to the Village Soviet and confronted him with the following illegal demands:

1. Register the community with the raiispokom and provide the document [of such registration].
2. To compose an outline for each sermon and submit it for approval by the raiispolkom
3. The presbyter must present a certificate from the kolkhoz, stating that the kolkhoz administration releases him to go and conduct a prayer service (at the time when he is not busy working).
4. Submit to the Village Soviet the list of community’s believers.  
When presbyter Sorochinskii presented his community’s registration certificate which we issued, comrade Korchevoi replied: ‘We are shutting down your community, and we do not recognize your Upolnomochennyi.’<sup>28</sup>

Reiterating “the politically harmful character” of such actions, and the fact that such incidents were quite numerous, Vil’khovyi pointed out the general “erroneous

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<sup>27</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 12, p. 70.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 70-71.

understanding” of the role of Upolnomochennye by local officials. The Council’s employees, he maintained, “are party members and not ‘defenders of sectarians’” or “occasional people.” Yet, in the opinion of some low-ranking officials, he complained, “an Upolnomochennyi of the Council for Religious Cults is a person ‘treading the wrong path’—‘a defender of believers, and sectarians in particular.’” Focusing on the actions of Korchevoi and Romaniuk, Vil’khovyi posed serious questions:

They should be asked, and this should be done in the interests of our common party cause, who gave them the right to discredit the Council’s Upolnomochennyi during a conversation with sectarian clergy? Who gave the right to Korchevoi and Romaniuk to consider themselves orthodox Communists, so to speak, and view the Council’s Upolnomochennyi, who works ‘with cults,’ as someone ‘beneath them’? ... These known instances of impermissible understanding of the role of Upolnomochennyi...testify of the existence of some ‘unofficial’ and unknown to us ‘policy conveyed by raiispolkoms to the village soviets.’ Perhaps, raiispolkoms maintain their own policy for some reason, not recognizing the institute of Upolnomochennye of CARC.<sup>29</sup>

Vil’khovyi thought that the time had come “to raise the question before the Council of Ministers of USSR about improving the Upolnomochennye’s working conditions and, in particular, establish the exact place of Upolnomochennye of CARC in the nomenklatura,” for he felt that even Upolnomochennye for the Affairs of the ROC enjoyed higher status and recognition than his own outfit. Since some of the CARC’s employees, he pleaded, “have shown themselves as real fighters on this front,...carrying out specific and quite difficult assignments, it is necessary to ask the Council of Ministers of USSR to somehow recognize our workers also (and not just the workers of the Council for the Affairs of the ROC—we consider this unjust and skewed).” “We are children of

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

the same mother,” he argued, “but as it turns out—sons and bastards.”<sup>30</sup> The head of the Ukrainian CARC hinted in this passage that the amount of financial remuneration of his staff remained inadequate to the gravity of the politically charged duties it routinely carried out. Toward the end of his career as the chief Upolnomochennyi for Ukraine, Vil’khovyi was still trying to determine the status of his agency and to bring the level of his subordinates’ pay to that of the chief Oblispolkom officials. In 1958, he reported that his Upolnomochennye’s salaries hitherto depended on the size and prominence of oblasts for which they were responsible, the lowest range of 950 rubles per month being set for such oblasts as Vinnitsa, Poltava, Zhitomir, etc., the midrange of 1,150 rubles for Dnepropetrovsk, Odessa, Dragobych, etc., and the highest range of 1,350 for such oblast as Kiev and Kharkov. In addition to their flat salaries, Vil’khovyi and his assistant received bonuses of 1,200 and 1,000 rubles respectively. Petitioning the Department of Propaganda and Agitation at the CC CPU, Vil’khovyi argued that the flat salaries of his Upolnomochennye in the lowest paid group of oblasts should be equivalent to those of the heads of the Oblispolkom departments, that is, to 2,400-2,600 rubles per month, whereas his own salary as the republican level Upolnomochennyi and that of his assistant, Shvaiko, should match salaries received by an Assistant to a Minister (for Vil’khovyi) and the Head of Administration of Sovnarkhoz\* (for Shvaiko).<sup>31</sup> This evidence suggests that the inferior status of Upolnomochennye in the eyes of the

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

\* An acronym for the Soviet of People’s Economy.

<sup>31</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 248, p. 19-20.

Oblispolkom bosses was accentuated still further by the low pay the former received throughout the 1940s and 1950s.

Besides failing to see Upolnomochennye as government officials in their own right, charged with specific responsibilities, many Soviet and party functionaries simply viewed them as available cadre at their disposal to be used for the fulfillment of all sorts of Oblispolkom or Obkom-related duties and tasks. Such unauthorized practice threatened to derail the government postwar shift toward legality by undermining the institution whose responsibility it was to ensure the observance of legislation on cults by both believers and state officials. The frequent co-optation of Upolnomochennye to do all sorts of unrelated work prevented them from duly collecting and submitting information about the religious situation in the republic. In a “Note on the Question of Erroneous Attitude to the Work of Upolnomochennye,” an Executive for the Department of Organization and Instruction at the CP(b)U’s Central Committee, Grigoriev, wrote: “In Dragobych, Kirovograd, and Rovno oblasts, Executive Committees of Oblast Soviets of Workers’ Deputies and Obkoms of CP(b)U send Upolnomochennye of the Council...to villages on extended assignments unrelated to the Upolnomochennye’s main work. As a result, a given Upolnomochenyi’s district is left without leadership for several months in a row...Upolnomochennye for Kirovograd, Rovno and Odessa oblast did not send to Kiev reports on their work for the third quarter of 1945.”<sup>32</sup> The Central Committee of CP(b)U reacted quickly and issued a ruling, which stated:

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<sup>32</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 29, p. 17-18.

1. To require of the Chairmen of Ispolkoms of the Oblast Soviets of Workers' Deputies and Secretaries of Obkoms of CP(b)U to create normal working conditions for the Council's Upolnomochennye in accordance with Comrade V.M. Molotov's Directive from February 29, 1945.
2. To forbid [the aforementioned institutions] to send the Council's Upolnomochennye on missions not related to their work.<sup>33</sup>

The practice, however, persisted well into the 1950s, which suggests that the government was either unable to enforce its own ruling, or intended it to be no more than a lip service, since the main victims of this practice were religious communities whose representatives had to wait for months for the return of their oblast Upolnomochennyi to resolve any mundane issue of their existence. Keeping the Council's Upolnomochennyi away meant keeping religious communities in the state of arrested development, although there is no evidence to suggest that this was a conscious policy on the part of Soviet government. There is, however, sufficient evidence showing that at least the CARC had consistently and adamantly opposed such misappropriation of its employees, because an Upolnomochennyi's absence from his post also meant that religious communities were temporarily out of sight, engaging in activities deemed illegal by the legislation.

In his 1950 Informative Report, Vil'khovyi again underscored the detrimental effect of co-optation of his subordinates by the local authorities: "The Council's Upolnomochennye spend most of their time on questions outside of their competency, carrying out assignments by Obkoms and Oblispolkoms. They never complete assignments concerning the cults on time, despite the seriousness and urgency of such

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 19-20.

assignments.”<sup>34</sup> To drive this point home, Vil’khovyi quoted the typical excuses his oblast Upolnomochennye invoked to explain their failure to complete the Council’s assignments. The Upolnomochennyi for Kamenets-Podolsk oblast, for example, wrote:

In accordance with the Oblispolkom assignment, from March 17 to April 3, 1950, I was on a mission, escorting recruits to the FZO schools\* in Voroshilovograd oblast. On April 3, I returned from there and left again the same day on the assignment of Obkom of CP(b)U as the Obkom Upolnomochennyi for the sowing campaign in Medzhibozhskii region. Due to these lengthy assignments, I cannot timely submit the report about my work for the first quarter [of 1950]. The Department of Agriculture at the Obkom of CP(b)U did not take into consideration my pleas that I had to stay in Proskurov to compile my report.<sup>35</sup>

The Upolnomochennyi for Dragobych oblast, continued Vil’khovyi, could not submit his report because “he spent the entire quarter away on a meat procurement mission,” which compelled Vil’khovyi to state that the CARC had to “resolve this question [of appropriation of Upolnomochennye] by way of a special letter from the directive party and Soviet organs of the republic.”<sup>36</sup> Yet, at the beginning of 1951, hardly anything changed with respect to Upolnomochennye’s situation, and Vil’khovyi raised the same question again, quoting from the letter of his subordinate in Dragobych oblast, A.Z. Burik, in which the latter wrote: “Four days ago, I returned from a mission, but I will be leaving again tomorrow for 20 days on an assignment concerning the preparation for the Spring sowing season. This is how it has been going for the past 5 years—all I am

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<sup>34</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 12, p. 222.

\* The Soviet equivalent of trade schools training qualified workers for factories and plants (*Fabrichno-zavodskoe obrazovanie*).

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 222-223.



doing is traveling back and forth on either Obkom or Oblispolkom assignments.”<sup>37</sup> This time, Vil’khovyi advanced his argument a bit more aggressively:

The prolonged and frequent co-optations of the Council’s Upolnomochennye disrupt the schedule of their immediate work. The offices of Upolnomochennye often remain closed for long periods of time during which no one receives visitors. How can he work normally and timely send us special request information and regular reports or conduct a more or less systematic monitoring of the ‘unregistered groups of believers’ when comrade A.Z. Burik, the Council’s Upolnomochennyi for Dragobych oblast (where, by the way, there is a large stratum of the Roman Catholic Church) is constantly sent away on prolonged missions?<sup>38</sup>

Anticipating that his superiors at the Moscow CARC would suggest that he approached the Central Committee of CP(b)U with this problem, Vil’khovyi retorted:

I must say right away that we already repeatedly wrote about this in our reports, three copies of which we submit to the CC of CP(b)U, and had numerous personal conversations, but the Upolnomochennye’s situation in locations has not changed. If the CARC at CM of USSR is unable to secure the exemption of all Council’s Upolnomochennye from lengthy assignments unrelated to their work, perhaps it could secure this at least for those Upolnomochennye who work in the Western oblasts of Ukrainian SSR where there exists an extremely high saturation with religious cults, and of quite complex character at that—Catholics, sectarians, Reformats.<sup>39</sup>

In 1952, Vil’khovyi added a socio-political spin to his argumentation and reasoned that “it was necessary” that his agency “switched to an in-depth study of all internal processes taking place in religious cults,” with the goal of “discovering...‘the secret’ of [their] longevity, adaptability, and tendency toward further growth among Catholics, Reformats-Calvinists, Evangelical Christians-Baptists, Seventh Day

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<sup>37</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 783, p. 104.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 104-105.

Adventists and others.” Vil’khovyi tried to impress it upon his superiors that “the fulfillment of such serious tasks could be achieved only when the Council’s Upolnomochennye were not systematically distracted by lengthy missions unrelated to their work,” and reminded that this question had been raised numerous times before, but to no avail.<sup>40</sup> Later that year, Vilkhovyi pointed out that reports of some Upolnomochennye “were hastily written” and resembled either “a mere tribute to form” or “profuse verbiage without any analysis of concrete material and more rigorous selection of facts about the real scope of religious movement in an oblast.” He maintained that although some of these flaws could be attributed to the low professional qualification of Upolnomochennye, the main cause of their poor performance was that they “essentially do not work with religious cults and are systematically engaged in lengthy assignments on orders of the oblast party or Soviet organizations.”<sup>41</sup> To drive this point home, Vil’khovyi quoted from several reports by his subordinates, including one by Chirva, the Upolnomochennyi for Ternopol oblast, in which the latter wrote: “Concerning the in-depth study of clergy and ecclesiastic cadre in this quarter, I do not have such data at my disposal, since, from June 1 to October 1, I spent 30 days in treatment for my illness and 42 days on an assignment by the Obkom of CP(b)U and, therefore, did not have time to work with religious cults.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 1572, p. 102.

<sup>41</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 783, p. 406.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

Despite Vil'khovyi's consistent complaints, the Upolnomochennye situation seemed to be getting worse rather than better in the 1950s. In his 1954 report to the Secretary of CC CPU, A.I. Kirichenko and Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Ukrainian SSR, N.T. Kal'chenko, Vil'khovyi focused again on the same problem that plagued the work of CARC since its establishment:

For example, in the course of 9 months in 1954, the Council's Upolnomochennyi at the Volyniia oblast ispolkom..., F.T. Prokopenko, was commissioned to do work unrelated to his duties 11 times. The Chairman of Zakarpatie oblast ispolkom of the Soviet of Workers' deputies, comrade I.I. Turianitsa, gave the following tasks to the Council's Upolnomochennyi, M.F. Rasput'ko: 'From March 8 to 16—to Trachevskii region, and from March 22 to 30—to Perechinskii region to conduct political and mass-mobilization work in conjunction with the Spring sawing campaign in kolkhozes of the aforementioned regions. From September 10 to October 10—to Kokchetav oblast of Kazakh SSR for 30 days as the head of the echelon of kolkhozniks being sent there to help with the harvest.' The Upolnomochennyi...for Ternopol oblast, I.A. Chirva, was away on different assignments by Obkom and Oblispolkom 16 times in 9 months, or 137 days combined. This means that he hardly ever works as the Upolnomochennyi of CARC.<sup>43</sup>

While struggling to define its place in the nomenclature and combating abuses of its staff by the Soviet and party officials, the CARC also experienced a shortage of adequately trained and responsible cadre. The oblast Upolnomochennye were hired and fired at an alarming rate. In 1946, Vil'khovyi informed his superior in Moscow, Polianskii, that the Council's Upolnomochennyi, comrade Tverdostup, was released from his post "for unethical behavior (drunkenness and hooliganism)." During his short term as Upolnomochennyi, Tverdostup made a negative impression on Vil'khovyi as "insufficiently restrained due to his youth and unbalanced character, and as insufficiently

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<sup>43</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 174, p. 42-43.

developed culturally and having great gaps in his general educational preparedness.”<sup>44</sup> In 1948, Vil’khovyi raised the question of the release of his subordinate in Zhitomir oblast, comrade Shevchenko, who “was expelled from membership in the VKP(b) for moral dissolution and degrading lifestyle.”<sup>45</sup> The believers’ petition to the Chairman of the Supreme Council of USSR may also have had something to do with the proposed removal of this Upolnomochennyi. “During the last Patriotic War,” they wrote, “the Motherland called upon everyone to come to its defense—Communists and non-Communists, religious and non-religious people. And everyone went, and all people equally spilt their blood for the independence and freedom of our Motherland.” Having introduced their plea with this sensible preamble, they continued:

But, in Zhitomir oblast there is an Upolnomochennyi for religious affairs, B.V. Shevchenko, who is fanatically disposed toward religion and its representatives. He thinks that only the godless are entitled to freedom in the Soviet Motherland, whereas spilling blood for the Motherland is the obligation of believers also. He works tenaciously to stifle religion. He inhumanely treats the representatives of religion: calls them to his office just to torment them. He decrees when and how many times the prayer meetings could be held. He does not give believers an opportunity to freely carry out their ceremonies and interferes with the observance of religious rituals. The believers of Zhitomirskaya oblast are outraged by Shevchenko’s behavior and ask You to restrain him...<sup>46</sup>

The evidence reveals that personal attitudes and characteristic traits of Upolnomochennyye often stood in the way of a uniform application of the Soviet legislation on cults in locations, which compelled Vil’khovyi to spend considerable time reviewing his subordinates’ work—sometimes challenging their decisions as legally

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<sup>44</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 19, p. 37.

<sup>45</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 5069, p. 275.

<sup>46</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 52, p. 48.

unjustifiable, and sometimes reprimanding them for being overly lenient and agreeable toward religious communities in their charge. In 1949, the Upolnomochennyi for Zaporozh'e oblast, P.A. Kiriuga, approved both the suggestion of Novo-Vasilievskii Raiispolkom and the decision of Oblispolkom to close the prayer house of Evangelical Spiritual Christians-Molokans in village Astrakhanovka on the grounds that the old age and dilapidated state of the building made it unsafe for these believers to gather there. As an additional pretext for this prayer house's closure, Kiriuga pointed out that only 25-30 of the 80 to 90 registered members of this community in fact attended the prayer services. Vil'khovyi reminded Kiriuga that a decision to close a prayer house or dissolve a community could only be made when a community in fact fell apart, or the believers did not honor conditions of a prayer house's lease (and that is only after they have been warned), or if there were serious violations of the Soviet legal code, or if there was a need to tear the building down due to the town's plans to develop the area in which such a building was located. Since none of the aforementioned conditions were applicable to the Astrakhanovka community, Vil'khovyi thought that all that Kiriuga could do was to ask the community to start looking for a more suitable building, and argued: "How can the closure of this prayer house and termination of its registration be justified? In this case, you will deprive believers of their right to freely satisfy their religious needs (the right that you had already granted to this community when you registered it) and only provoke negative feelings in the believers...(complaints to the higher agencies, etc.). That is why

we disagree with your conclusion and suggest that you reverse your decision about the closure of this community.”<sup>47</sup>

At the same time, Vil’khovyi was not an advocate of patient persuasion when there were legal pretexts to shut down a religious community. Less than two weeks later the same year, in his letter to the Upolnomochennyi for Vinnitsa oblast, Shumkov, Vil’khovyi wrote:

Studying your reports...we have determined that despite your warnings and repeated clarifications, some EKhB communities continue committing gross violations of the existing legislation on cults... In villages Gulevskaia Slobodka, Yaltushkov, Vysokaia Greblia, Staro-Zhivotovo, Granovo, the town of Kazatin and others, ‘charity’ was being practiced with the goal of missionary activity, that is, the help was being provided not only to members of a community, but also to non-members... You also pointed out: ‘I warned the Senior Presbyter that gathering items to help the poor—flour, clothing, etc—was impermissible. I also called in presbyters of these villages (and the town of Kazatin) and warned them about their personal responsibility for the [illegal] meetings of children (who have not reached the age of 18) and the study of God’s Word...’ A year and six months passed, and in your report...you write again that the aforementioned EKhB communities continue, with the goal of proselytism, to collect things, money, etc, and also work with children, training them for declamations, solo singing; including them in choirs, etc. They also did not stop the study of the Word of God on Wednesdays with the candidate-members [for baptism], and so forth... The result is that you play the role of one who exhorts and beseeches, while they act as in Krylov’s fable—‘The cat Vas’ka is listening, but keeps eating [the food he snatched from the table].’ It’s time to stop your acting as an ‘enlightener’ and to start in fact implementing ‘the more decisive measures,’ including the dissolution of such communities and closures of their prayer houses. I ask you to study the ‘activist’ groups in these sectarian religious organizations, having checked their records for the past 2-3 years, and to send us only your personal opinion about them. We will also study them and ask CARC at the CM of USSR to sanction the dissolution of such EKhB communities.<sup>48</sup>

As Vil’khovyi strove to reduce the element of subjectivity in the work of his subordinates, he occasionally encountered problems that went beyond the mere

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<sup>47</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 61, p. 26.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 29-30.

incompetence of some Upolnomochennye or the lack of clearly defined guidelines from the center that often triggered reactions ranging from the overzealousness of Shevchenko to Shumkov's indecisiveness. The representatives of religious denominations did not always act as passive recipients of Upolnomochennye's dictums and could exploit the government officials' humanity to their own advantage. From time to time, Vil'khovyi uncovered either through his own observation or with the help of KGB that his subordinates in oblasts were susceptible to both corruption and sympathizing with the believers. The evidence is inconclusive in showing whether it was a mere love of small gifts and presents or a true sympathy towards the plight of believers that lay at the basis of such detected misconduct. For example, in 1948, Vil'khovyi informed the party officials:

In the work of comrade Zaretskii [Upolnomochennyi for Kiev oblast], which he has always been carrying out under our constant supervision, we have repeatedly noted...elements of familiarity with...religionists. Thus, elements of familiarity were noticed by us in his relations with the SDA Upolnomochennyi,\* Bondar, the former Senior Presbyter of the EKhB for Kiev oblast, Linev, and presbyter of Zhashkovskaia EKhB community, Kaliuzhnyi. We have had numerous conversations with Zaretskii concerning these negative aspects of his activity, trying to direct his relationship with religionists into a channel of normal conduct. The latest data, with which the representatives of state security organs familiarized us, vividly confirmed our suppositions and testified to the definitive fusion of Zaretskii with the people of alien ideology—to his closeness in relations with the EKhB presbyters Kaplun, Nikulin, Kaliuzhnyi and others, from whom he sometimes received small 'presents,' etc. Having in our possession such

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\* This term should not be confused with the Upolnomochennyi of CARC. In the 1940s, the government instituted an ecclesiastic position of Upolnomochennyi for the Seventh Day Adventist Church in Ukraine, which was roughly equivalent to the position of a republican Senior Presbyter in the Evangelical-Baptist brotherhood. As the SDA Upolnomochennyi, Bondar served as the head of this denomination in Ukraine and was also responsible for representing his church before the government. Later, the government replaced this confusing (and even disturbing for some believers) title with a more appropriate title of Senior Presbyter of SDA for Ukraine.

compromising materials on Zaretskii, we raise the question of his release from the post he occupies.<sup>49</sup>

In 1956, the city of Zhitomir witnessed an unusual occurrence: what should have been a quiet funeral of the deceased Catholic priest, Samusenko, turned into an outdoor religious ceremony, during which 10,000 Catholics marched down the streets of Zhitomir and engaged in other violations of Soviet legislation on cults. The prayer service, with participation of a choir, was held not inside the *kostel* (Ukrainian term for a Catholic church), and not even inside the church fence, but out in the street. Besides, the funeral liturgy was performed not by one priest (as the Soviet law required), but by six (some of which were recently released prisoners who served 10 year terms). Such impermissible public display of religiosity, which attracted the attention of such high Soviet agencies as the Department of Propaganda and Agitation at the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine, Secretary of the CC of CPU, and the Council of Ministers of Ukrainian SSR, not mentioning the KGB (which conducted covert surveillance of this event), occurred due to the strange complacency of Upolnomochennyi for Zhitomir oblast, Pimenov,\* who gave the Catholic community a permission to have this outdoor procession and did not inform either the local oblast authorities or the militia that so many priests converged on Zhitomir. Not being able to get a more or less comprehensible report on what had happened from Pimenov, Vil'khovyi turned to "the workers of the oblast Administration of KGB." Besides providing Vil'khovyi with

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<sup>49</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 5069, p. 275.

\* Pimenov apparently replaced the aforementioned Upolnomochennyi Shevchenko in Zhitomir oblast.



information on the identity and background of the visiting priests, the local KGB head, comrade Skokov, informed him “that the Council’s Upolnomochennyi, comrade Pimenov, took bribes from clergy and representatives of religious communities,” and that Skokov “already had a talk with Pimenov about it.”<sup>50</sup> Vil’khovyi fully agreed that Pimenov had to go, and that his position should be filled by comrade Mangushev who had 25 years of experience working in “organs of state security.”<sup>51</sup>

In December of 1958, in his “Report on Intensification of Activity of Religious Cults in Stalinsk Oblast,” Vil’khovyi blamed such intensification on the negligence of his subordinate, Gushchin, who did not find out, for example, that on May 1, 1958, the EKhB community in the town of Shakhtersk organized a youth gathering with guests coming from other communities. At this meeting there were musical performances, declamations, sermons by young preachers, and a dinner for all 70 youths that arrived for this occasion. Gushchin found out about this only on May 13<sup>th</sup>. The local authorities, the Secretary of Raiispolkom, comrade Alekseev, did not even know the location of the EKhB community in Shakhtersk. Vil’khovyi repeatedly asked Gushchin to keep a close eye on sectarians and study them, but the latter, in Vil’khovyi’s own words, “ignored my instructions” and exhibited “the lack of discipline” and “unjustifiable conceit.” Vil’khovyi, therefore, asked the Moscow CARC to replace the aging Gushchin with a “more politically prepared comrade.” Although the Moscow CARC approved Vilkhovyi’s request (since it received disturbing information about Gushchin through

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<sup>50</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 4263, p. 115-118.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 113-114.

other channels) and informed the Obkom of CPU in Stalinsk oblast about its decision, “9 months have passed,” complained Vil’khovyi, and the Obkom “still has not satisfied the request of CARC.”<sup>52</sup>

In this case, however, Gushchin’s negligence did not benefit the EKhB believers in Stalinsk oblast. The additional evidence, a complaint written by believers and addressed to the Department of Party Control at the CC of CPSU, suggests that before the mentioned EKhB youth gathering on May 1, for which overlooking Gushchin was severely reprimanded by Vil’khovyi, the former, instead of studying sectarians more closely, joined the local officials in some sort of pogrom-like actions against the believers. The complaint’s authors, Smirnova, Stepanov, and Eremenko, who allegedly wrote on behalf of “mothers, fathers, and grandparents whose children died defending the USSR during the Patriotic War,” urgently asked the Soviet higher authorities “to stop the terror in Stalinsk oblast—to put an end to beatings of believers by the workers of Soviet organs during prayer services in Ritchenkovo and other [places].” According to the complaint, “the KGB operative, Evseev (an officer), the Upolnomochennyi for cults at the Oblispolkom, Gushchin, the Upolnomochennyi for cults from Kiev, Babkin, together with the Senior Presbyter of Baptists, Rusanov,” and along with “workers of militia and petty criminals from the street, storm into prayer houses, beat up the believers, take away Bibles, conduct searches in apartments...and rape the young believing girls—the choir members.”<sup>53</sup> The authors claimed that the last such rape case occurred in January, 1958,

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<sup>52</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 248, p. 31-32.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

when Rusanov raped four girls. “Their fathers,” the authors maintained, “appealed to the People’s Court and the Oblast Court, but the UKGB operative, Evseev, in agreement with the Upolnomochennye for cults, Gushchin and Babkin, ordered the courts not to accept complaints about the rapes and beatings of believers...That is why we ask you to take measures and liquidate this anti-Soviet band of rapists-Berievists\* ... We also ask for the return of over 85 forcibly seized Bibles.”<sup>54</sup> The general tone and, especially, the language of this letter indicate that its authors were quite skilled in employing the standard clichés of Soviet official language, while the gravity of crimes implicated to Rusanov compelled Vil’khovyi to forward copies of this complaint to a number of Soviet institutions, including the KGB, “with the request to check the facts described in the complaint.”<sup>55</sup> There is no further evidence showing whether or not Rusanov in fact committed the crimes ascribed to him (the VSEKhB continued to employ him in the 1960s), but it is quite clear that despite the CARC’s insistence on removing Gushchin, the local Soviet authorities, whose illegal actions he condoned and perhaps even encouraged, kept him at his post as late as December, 1958.

## **2. The CARC Relationship with the MGB/KGB and Law Enforcement Agencies**

As the evidence quoted so far suggests, the MGB/KGB maintained its active presence on the religious scene and frequently interfered with the work of CARC. As an

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\* The authors apparently allude here to the recently deposed and executed head of Stalin’s NKVD, Lavrentii Beria, who was known for raping young women.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

inheritor to the earlier VChK, OGPU, NKVD—agencies that were in charge of monitoring and regulating the life of religious communities since the establishment of Soviet authority—the MGB/KGB presided over a tremendous databank containing materials on believers’ background, their whereabouts, education, occupation, and so forth. The archival documents reveal that besides receiving reports from CARC on the religious situation in the republic, the highest party officials also received similar reports from the MGB/KGB. On July 26, 1946, the head of the 4<sup>th</sup> Sector of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Department of UMGB for Vinnitsa oblast, Captain Lezhenko, submitted an 18-page “Top Secret” report providing an assessment of all denominations present in the oblast. The only difference between this report and that of Vil’khovyi is that Lezhenko did not concern himself with studying internal processes in religious denominations but mostly with quantitative analysis and involvement of religious leaders with the German occupation authorities during the war. Lezhenko’s language lacks Vilkhovyi’s political correctness and depicts religious groups bluntly as hostile entities. “The territory of Vinnitsa oblast,” he writes, “is littered with a large quantity of ecclesiastic-sectarian element which, having a widespread network of clerical and presbyter-preacher apparatus, conducts through the latter active religious work among the population, recruiting new individuals into communities, especially from among the youth.”<sup>56</sup> Another report, entitled “On the Presence of Sectarian Ecclesiastic-Monarchist Formations on the Territory of Vinnitsa Oblast,” came from the same oblast in 1952, signed by the Head of Administration of

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<sup>56</sup> GAVO, F. P-136, Op. 13, D. 105, p. 1.

MGB, Colonel Kasatkin.<sup>57</sup> This officer focused on the background of prominent unregistered leaders of Pentecostals, Jehovah's Witnesses and other sectarian groups, portraying them in the same light as Lezhenko did years ago: "The anti-Soviet activity of sectarians-Pentecostals is directed at the sabotage of measures being implemented by the party and Soviet government. For this purpose, they spread among the adjacent population and their fellow-believers provocative anti-Soviet figments, call upon kolkhozniks to abandon kolkhozes, agitate the youth to avoid serving in the Soviet Army and defending the Motherland with weapons in hands."<sup>58</sup>

While it is no surprise that the Soviet government continued to rely on secret services to keep tabs on representatives of "alien ideology," the establishment of CARC in 1944 as the main governmental institution in charge of religious affairs divested the MGB/KGB of direct responsibility in this field and assigned to it the role of a shadow organization that would work behind the scenes, collecting vital information on believers through its own covert channels and providing the CARC with such information should the latter need it, as happened in Zhitomir when the Council's Upolnomochennyi, Pimenov, mishandled the funeral of priest Samusenko. In order for this link in the cross-institutional cooperation to work smoother, the CARC regularly shared information available to it with the MGB/KGB. However, in reality, the state security agency never limited its operation in the field of religion to merely assisting the CARC and used its powers as a super-ordinate agency to directly interfere in affairs that were purportedly the

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<sup>57</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 2090, p. 56-62.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

exclusive domain of CARC. This undermined the prestige of CARC still further, since the believers often did not know whose orders to consider final, or more authoritative—those of the Council for the Affairs of Religion, those of the Obkom or Oblispolkom, or those of the KGB. For example, in 1951, the Upolnomochennyi for Kherson oblast received the believers' complaint "concerning illegal actions of an investigator of Skadovskii regional department of KGB who called [to his office] presbyter of the EKhB community in village Shirokoe, citizen Belous along with 14 other believers and, by way of threats and insults directed at the presbyter, tried to impress it upon the owner of a prayer house to stop allowing believers in her house, threatening her with a 1,600 ruble fine."<sup>59</sup> An investigation initiated by CARC revealed that the MGB agent in fact prohibited the gathering of believers in village Shirokoe on the grounds that the community "was not registered with the MGB." In this case, the believers' complaint was heard and the community could soon resume its prayer services.<sup>60</sup> The Council's Upolnomochennyi for Voroshilovograd oblast, A.A. Likhovodov, reported that the Ispolkom Chairman in the workers' settlement of Sharapkino, comrade Drobotov, demanded that presbyters of the EKhB communities submitted to him "the lists of believers with the attached personal data." The presbyters refused to do so, "knowing that only their spiritual center and the Upolnomochennyi [of CARC] could request such data."<sup>61</sup> Likhovodov met personally with Drobotov and found out that the latter in fact

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<sup>59</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 783, p. 334.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 335.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 390.

demanded the submission of such lists, and that the idea of collecting them was impressed upon him “by the regional department of MGB.”<sup>62</sup>

The evidence shows that on occasions the local party bosses intentionally involved the MGB/KGB in such illegal collection of information on believers. The already mentioned Upolnomochennyi for Stalinsk oblast, Gushchin, who acquired notoriety in this context in 1958, reported to Vil’khovyi three years earlier: “On August 14, 1955, the oblast representatives of UKGB and I were called to the Obkom of the party.” The party bosses, concerned with the activity of religious organizations in Stalinsk oblast, wanted to know “what measures to address this question are being carried out by the workers of UKGB.” The UKGB officers replied that they “investigate the number and whereabouts of unregistered groups, how many believers these groups contain, where they hold their meetings...and that they [UKGB] transmit all this data to the towns’ Executive Committees so that the latter could take measures towards the termination of such groups’ activities.”<sup>63</sup> The situation was hardly different in Khmel’nitsk oblast, which compelled Vil’khovyi to ask the leadership of this oblast to ensure “that certain workers of the oblast Administration of the Committee of State Security would stop taking upon themselves responsibilities of the Council’s Upolnomochennyi and act as his proxy.”<sup>64</sup> To illustrate his point, Vil’khovyi mentioned an embarrassing situation in which he found himself on October 25, 1955, when a rabbi of a Jewish synagogue from the town of Slavuta (Khmelnitsk oblast), citizen Liberson,

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 4263, p. 52.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

appeared in the office of the chief Upolnomochennyi of CARC for Ukraine in Kiev. When the surprised Vil'khovyi told Liberson that no one in his office requested his appearance, the rabbi replied: "And I also do not have any questions to ask of you...but I was sent to you. A worker of the Committee of State Security, whom I know, came to us in Slavuta and told me to appear at exactly 11:00 a.m. on October 25<sup>th</sup> at the office of the Council's Upolnomochennyi, comrade Vil'khovyi. I did just that."<sup>65</sup> The evidence from the Communist Party archive, however, shows that the party officials at the highest republican level consciously sanctioned the KGB cooperation with the local party authorities in the business of suppressing the activity of unregistered religious groups. In 1956, the Secretary of Volynskii Obkom of CPU, I. Grushetskii, reported to the Secretary of Central Committee of CPU, comrade O.I. Kirichenko, "on the work with the Pentecostal underground" whose members "carried out their work underground, gathering for meetings in small groups...refused to bear arms...and also to take part in various campaigns promoted by the party and Soviet order." It was decided to detect and infiltrate these groups with the goal of merging them with the EKHB communities.\* "For this purpose," Grushetskii wrote, "the workers of UKGB put together an initiative group from authoritative sectarians who would work with the ordinary participants of the Pentecostal underground in order to join them with the legal and already existing EKHB communities that are less reactionary, agree to serve in the army and participate in the

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

\* After the war, the Soviet government viewed Pentecostals as a "pervert sect" and deemed them ineligible for registration as an independent religious denomination. In order to exist legally, they were forced to abandon some peculiarities of their belief system and merge with the Evangelical-Baptist brotherhood.



work of kolkhozes and industries.”<sup>66</sup> According to Grushetskii, a number of EKhB preachers—S. Pitel, M. Primachuk, G. Soroka, V. Olifer, Y. Doroshchuk and others—agreed to cooperate with the authorities in carrying out this work.<sup>67</sup> In this case, the Obkom clearly counted on the KGB special skills as a shadow agency to orchestrate the infiltration of the Pentecostal underground by means of coercing one group of sectarians to work against another. Vil’khovyi did not seem to mind the KGB interference for as long as it was directed against the underground religious organizations. “Such organizations,” he wrote, “as the Council’s Upolnomochennye encounter them, do not constitute objects of the Council’s study, and materials on them are transferred to the organs of state security.”<sup>68</sup> Yet, as the evidence quoted above suggests, the KGB did not act alone and actively involved members of registered religious communities in its schemes.

In 1956, the Senior Presbyter of EKhB for Khmel’nitsk oblast, Mazin, deposed presbyter Buntovskii, who served the EKhB community in the town of Shepetovka. During his visit to the Council’s Upolnomochennyi for this oblast, comrade Stetsiuk, Mazin asked the Upolnomochennyi to support his removal of Buntovskii should the latter appear in Stetsiuk’s office with a complaint. Mazin confided in Stetsiuk that his decision to remove Butovskii from spiritual work was made “at the request of one authoritative

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 138-140.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 12, p. 218.

person of Soviet organs [KGB officer].”<sup>69</sup> Commenting on “such administrative interference in the internal life of religious communities on the part of certain workers of the oblast Administration of KGB,” Vil’khovyi pointed out that the Soviet authorities in some oblasts “continue to substitute blatant administrative injunction for proper dissemination of scientific-atheist propaganda among the population, using for this purpose the workers of the Committee of State Security.”<sup>70</sup>

While defending his own turf from the KGB encroachment, Vil’khovyi clearly relied on the cross-institutional cooperation between his Council and the KGB, especially when it came to matters of religious underground. Wrapping up the section of his 1951 report that dealt with the CARC’s findings concerning the unregistered and illegal religious groups—Subbotniks-Reformists, Free Christians, Dukhobors, Khlysty, and others—Vil’khovyi stated: “All materials that we manage to collect on the aforementioned sectarian groups are immediately forwarded by us to the organs of Ministry of State Security for processing and initiating criminal proceedings against the guilty.”<sup>71</sup> The report of the Upolnomochennyi for Rovno oblast confirmed that such cooperation with the KGB was a common practice for CARC’s employees. “Studying Berezovskii region and other regions of the oblast more closely,” he wrote, “I came to the conclusion that the Pentecostal center was located precisely in Berezovskii region. I informed the organs of MGB and, after the appropriate work conducted by these organs,

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<sup>69</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 4263, p. 51.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>71</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 783, p. 108.

the Pentecostal missionary center in Ukraine was exposed and 5 of its leaders and 20 activists were apprehended.”<sup>72</sup> Besides doing his best to inform the KGB himself, Vil’khovyi insisted that “when it came to measures directed at the cessation of the activity of illegal anti-state religious formations (Khlysty, Jehovah’s Witnesses...Zionists, Skoptsy...and others), it is necessary to obligate village, regional and city soviets to immediately transfer data about the activity of these formations to organs of state security and the oblast Upolnomochennyi of the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults.”<sup>73</sup>

The cooperation between the CARC and Procuracy often resembled the same controversial pattern. Frustrated with the growing activity of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Ternopol oblast in 1950, and especially with the adamant non-cooperative position of their leader, Turok, Vil’khovyi quoted in his report a fragment of a conversation between Tukok and the EKHB presbyter in Ternopol, Fediushin, who on this occasion clearly served as an instrument of CARC. Responding to Fediushin’s question concerning the issue of state elections, Turok purportedly said: “We cannot and must not vote for those who do not believe in God.” When Fediushin tried to refute Turok’s argument by saying—“Truman is a Baptist, and yet children and old men are being killed in Korea”—Turok retorted: “I and y fellow-believers do not recognize the state at all, because according to the Holy Scripture only God can govern people on Earth.” Finding such a reaction extremely offensive, Vil’khovyi pleaded: “Does not the Procuracy of Ternopol

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 209.

<sup>73</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 1572, p. 25.

oblast have sufficient 'material' to isolate Turok and others like him?" The CARC, he continued, "already has sufficient materials on this reactionary sect to appeal that the Council of Ministers of USSR applied more effective measures to decisively stop the activity of the sect of Jehovah's Witnesses and, in particular, free the kolkhozes from members of this sect. Why not apply to them the Supreme Council's law on struggle against the parasitic elements in the kolkhozes?"<sup>74</sup>

In 1956, many Protestant ex-prisoners were returning home under the Khrushchev amnesty. Some of them became instantly involved in organizing and revamping their communities. In Vil'khovyi's eyes, these people were conducting "exceptionally active, detrimental, and even hostile work under the guise of religious propaganda among population." Assessing their behavior, he wrote: "These people do not work, engage in speculation, wander around the regions and oblasts, often go to the RSFSR oblasts, to Belorussia and the Kazakh SSR, that is, they live as parasites and play the role of organizers of groups of believers. They excite religious fanaticism, discuss in groups regulations established by the state, pushing believers in the direction of breaking the Soviet legislation on cults or provoking an unhealthy attitude in the believers towards the work of the organs of authority." As a remedy against this new threat, Vil'khovyi asked "the Council of Ministers of Ukrainian SSR to give appropriate instructions to Procuracy and the organs of Militia to apply to these persons provisions of the Decree of Presidium

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<sup>74</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 783, p. 107.

of Supreme Council of USSR from July 23, 1951, ‘On Measures of Struggle against Anti-Social and Parasitic Elements.’”<sup>75</sup>

However, the Procuracy, the guardian of Soviet legality, also contributed to the atmosphere of lawlessness created by the cross-institutional cooperation. The presbyter of the EKhB community in village Virov, Rovno oblast, Fedor Torgonii, wrote in his letter to the Senior Presbyter of VSEKhB for Ukraine, Andreev, that on March 30, 1960, “the Procurator of Sarnovskii region [Rovno oblast], the village soviet chairman, and the director of Virovskaia seven-year school came to the prayer house and demanded that the presbyter opened it. When the presbyter complied, “the Procurator ordered chairs, benches, tables and texts [of Scriptures] to be removed from the building, and announced that it was now a school.” When Torgonii inquired on what grounds such an eviction of his community was taking place, the Procurator replied: “I am the authority, and I order without a trial or investigation.” Commenting on this incident, Torgonii wrote: “Thus, unexpectedly, a nasty deed, in our opinion, was done by the local authorities. On the Procurator’s orders, school tables were brought into the prayer house the same day and, presently, the prayer house is a school. The community is dissipated. The prayer meetings are not held so far. The people are in panic and bewilderment.”<sup>76</sup>

On February 11, 1962, an Assistant to the Procurator of Irshavskii region, Zakarpatie oblast, Bigarii, and an entourage of local Soviet officials barged into the EKhB prayer house in village Zarechie when the believers were about to have a

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<sup>75</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 4263, p. 231-235.

<sup>76</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 309, p. 90.

Communion. “Bigarii jumped on top of a bench and yelled that everything had to be immediately stopped. Then, walking on tops of benches, he quickly reached the pulpit, laid his hands on books that were there, and announced that in the name of law all believers had to voluntarily hand over their books, since they [officials] were about to conduct a search.” Bigarii refused to give the believers several minutes to finish the Communion, and when someone asked him not to be so rude, he reacted: “What? You, scum, are you trying to teach me?” The 200 believers who were present in the prayer house were searched individually at the exit by the militia officers and all their books were taken away.<sup>77</sup> The follow-up to this incident revealed that it was triggered by an article in the regional newspaper *Nove Zhittia*, whose author, the People’s Judge of Irshavskii region, G. Sliusarchuk, mistakenly identified the two brothers Popovich, whom he recently prosecuted under Article 209 of the Criminal Code of Ukrainian SSR, as members of the EKhB sect, whereas in fact they were members of the sect of “Free Christians.” Reporting about this incident, the Council’s Upolnomochennyi for Zakarpatie oblast, Salamatin, remarked: “This mess makes the reader conclude that the Judge did not know whom he was prosecuting (this is the same case when the Procurator of Irshavskii region illegally conducted a search at the EKhB prayer house in village Zarechie and caused a big upsurge in correspondence concerning this question).”<sup>78</sup> Many Soviet servants of the law were ignorant of differentiation between the various legal and

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<sup>77</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 389, p. 179 (e).

<sup>78</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 403, p. 1-2.

illegal religious denominations, but eager to act quickly, without any preliminary consultation with the CARC.

### **3. The Impact of Khrushchev's Empowerment of the Local Authorities on the CARC**

Cross-institutional cooperation, as a means of reinforcing the underpowered CARC, never functioned as a well-oiled machine. The Council's low and sketchily defined status in the Soviet bureaucratic hierarchy hampered its ability to effectively supervise and coordinate the activity of its supporting institutions. The CARC routinely lost considerable time on correcting abuses of believers and violations of legislation on cults committed by its own affiliate institutions. This was certainly the result of the government's inherently contradictory policy of simultaneous commitment to legalizing and combating religion. The legalization of religion presupposed certain liberties granted to religious communities and could not rule out the possibility of their growth and perpetuation on the account of both believers' own children and new converts. Yet, from the government's point of view, religion continued to be an alien competitive ideology and the proverbial "opium of the people" that could not peacefully coexist with the dominant Marxist-Leninist ideology and had to be combated by all means at the state's disposal. But how can one combat the people's addiction to opium by making it legal? In the postwar decades, the Soviet government tried to resolve this paradox by keeping thousands of religious communities (the opium addicts) legal, as a tribute to both external pressures and the internal processes of de-Stalinization, while at the same time severely

restricting their access to religion (opium). As the data, provided by the CARC and other agencies, showed that the application and rigorous enforcement of the restrictive Soviet legislation on cults alone did little to curb religion and undermine its ability to reproduce itself, the government tended to extend the network of cross-institutional cooperation still further by delegating the authority to monitor and regulate the life of religious communities to the Soviet agencies at the grass roots level, that is, precisely to those agencies that were least prepared to honor or observe the prerequisites of legality. Moreover, such swellings of the mechanism of control over religion were usually accompanied by governmental decrees demanding utmost vigilance in the enforcement of Soviet legislation on cults and still greater proliferation of the antireligious propaganda. Summarizing a number of such decrees, issued in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the new head of CARC in Ukraine, K. Litvin, wrote: "All these decrees provide detailed measures concerning the intensification of struggle against religion first by means of propaganda, and also by means of legal restrictions of the activity of religious communities and clergy."<sup>79</sup> The Soviet press usually followed suit by publishing articles of questionable credibility, in which religion and its bearers were represented in exceptionally negative light. Such government decrees effectively mobilized all Communists and Komsomol members to the task of combating religion at the level of their immediate neighborhoods.

On March 16, 1961, the most notorious "Khrushchev" Decree Number 263 "On Intensification of Control over the Observance of Legislation on Cults" was issued by the Council of Ministers of USSR. The decree made "the local Soviet organs responsible for

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<sup>79</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5663, p. 112.



the provision of strict control over the fulfillment of legislation on cults and the timely implementation of measures towards liquidation of violations of this legislation by clergy and religious organizations.”<sup>80</sup> The decree in effect handed over religious communities to the mercy of the same untrained, crude and power-hungry local officials of whose irresponsible actions Vil’khovyi had been informing the party bosses for years. In response to the decree, the local officials hastily formed the so-called Commissions of Support to the Council’s Upolnomochennye “on a broad social basis, from members of local party and Soviet activists, representatives of social organizations, intelligentsia and pensioners.”<sup>81</sup> Such commissions, created in every city, town, village and kolkhoz, were obliged:

...to monitor the fulfillment of Soviet legislation on cults; to inform the party and Soviet organs and the Upolnomochennye at Oblispolkoms about the activity of religious cults and their cadre; to study sermons of religious activists and their methods of work with the youth, children and women; to know the contingent of those who visit churches and prayer meetings of sectarians, choir singers, and other church and sectarian cadre and their practical activity; to detect the non-registered, illegally functioning sectarian groups, their leaders and activists.<sup>82</sup>

The Council’s Upolnomochennyi for Crimea oblast, M. Rudakov, reported on the progress of such collaborative work:

In only 4 months of 1962, the appropriate organs brought criminal charges against 23 people, 21 of whom were sentenced to different terms of imprisonment. The registration certificates were taken away from 1 SDA presbyter and 5 persons of preaching personnel. Four executive organs of

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<sup>80</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 374, 1-3.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 21-24.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

churches, one SDA community and one Jewish synagogue were disbanded. Serious work has been done to weaken the material base of churches.<sup>83</sup>

In its approach to religion, the Soviet government oscillated between a more moderate policy of *détente* and the outright offensives. The Decree of CC CPSU from November 10, 1954 “On Errors in the Conduct of Scientific-Atheist Propaganda among the Population,” for example, marked a period of relaxation when Vil’khovyi could report to the party bosses that his office demanded from some of the Council’s Upolnomochennye “to completely eliminate from their work the practice of administrative and illegal interference in the activity of religious communities and groups of believers.”<sup>84</sup> On February 17, 1955, the Council of Ministers issued Decree 259 “On Changes in the Order of Opening the Prayer Houses” containing provisions that “somewhat simplified the procedure of registering religious communities and provided an opportunity for legalization of communities”<sup>85</sup> that were denied such privilege since 1948, when the government suddenly suspended the registration of any new communities. On January 27, 1965, in the aftermath of the recent “Khrushchev persecution,” Presidium of the Supreme Council of USSR issued a decree “On Some Facts of Violation of Socialist Legality with Respect to Believers,” which indicated the next cycle of relaxation. In response to this decree, the Upolnomochennye were asked to report: “What measures were taken by the republican, oblast and other organs towards

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 4263, p. 46.

<sup>85</sup> S.N. Savinskii, *Istoriia Evangel'skikh Khristian-Baptistov Ukrainy, Rossii, Belorusii, Chast II, 1917-1967* (Sankt-Peterburg: “Bibliia dlia vsekh,” 2001), p. 166.

putting an end to administrative excesses with respect to believers and the correction of permitted errors? Were there any cases of administrative bullying in this current year, and what measures are being taken to defend the legal rights and interests of believers?”<sup>86</sup>

During a period of mobilization, however, the government would mobilize everyone, from the KGB officer to an ordinary retiree to place Protestant communities under a constant watch with the purpose of finding some excuse to close a prayer house, bring charges against capable religious leaders, antagonize parents of religious youths, and terrorize or blackmail the more feeble believers into quitting religion.

As a vehicle of concerted pressure on religion, the cross-institutional cooperation worked relatively well during periods of mobilization. However, a mobilization mode presupposed a considerable suspension of legality and the use of rule by decree and other extrajudicial measures. Each time this mode was reactivated, it caused an overlapping of parametric characteristics of normative and prerogative states in an unlikely symbiosis. Yet, after the war, the Soviet Union struggled to project itself to the world as a normative state that parted with the brutal Stalinist techniques of governing. The mobilization periods, therefore, tended to be short-lived and increasingly targeted one or the other religious group at a time instead of attacking the entire spectrum of religion. Such practice became especially salient toward the end of the 1960s. On August 12, 1969, for example, the government issued a decree “On the Intensification of the Work of Party Organizations in the Area of Exposure of the Hostile Activity of the Sect of Jehovah’s

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 167-168.

Witnesses,” and on September 28, 1970, a decree “On Facts of Violation of Legislation on Religious Cults by the Sect of Seventh Day Adventists.”

The extension of the prerogative of control over religion to local authorities, during the “Khrushchev persecution” between 1959 and 1963, further undermined the status of CARC and its efforts to maintain some semblance of legality. Most local officials interpreted their assignment to assist the Council in enforcing the legislation on cults as a license to combat religion the old-fashioned way. In March of 1960, the presbyter of Penezhevskaja SDA community, P. E. Vdovichenko, wrote to the Senior Presbyter of the SDA church in Ukraine, Parasei, that he was visited at his house by the worker of Uman’ KGB, Major Smirnov, who had a conversation with him and invited him to come to the regional Executive Committee for further questioning. When Vdovichenko arrived, the KGB officer took him to the office of Raiispolkom’s Secretary who took away Vdovichenko’s registration documents and prohibited him to visit the Penezhevskaja community, saying: “If you go, you will get 15 days in prison, and will be cleaning toilets.” When Vdovichenko retorted that it was the job of the Council’s Upolnomochennyi for Cherkassy oblast to supervise his activity, “both Major Smirnov and the Secretary replied that the Upolnomochennyi was not the law for them.” Refusing to relent, Vdovichenko said that he would take the matter to the republican Upolnomochennyi in Kiev. The officials rebutted that “the republican Upolnomochennyi also was not the law for them.” Vdovichenko then declared that he would go all the way to Moscow, to comrade Khrushchev. The officials, however, remained equally unimpressed, and replied: “When you are in Moscow, and you are received by

Khrushchev, you can tell him that he also is not the law for us, for today all power rests with the local authorities.”<sup>87</sup> To a certain extent, the KGB officer and the Raiispolkom Secretary were right, since it was comrade Khrushchev who handed over believers across the country to the mercy of local officials.

The Decree 263 only formalized de jure what had been practiced de facto for years. In the city of Krasnyi Luch, the head of the Department of Propaganda and Agitation at the City Committee of CPU, Seleznev, having read the *Pravda* article from June 29, 1948, “To improve and Develop the Propaganda of Scientific Knowledge,” “drew wrong conclusions about his role in the struggle against religious prejudice,” called to his office the EKhB presbyter, Boiko, “and demanded that the latter submitted to him written copies of his sermons, supposedly for sanctioning, and threatened Boiko that should he not satisfy this demand, he would be arrested and the prayer house closed. When Boiko explained: ‘We do not write down our sermons, but speak from the Bible,’ comrade Seleznev demanded that Boiko brought him the Bible for inspection, which Boiko did. When Boiko tried to explain that believers gathered for prayer meetings in accordance with the existing legislation on cults and had the permission to do so from the Council’s Upolnomochennyi, comrade Seleznev stated: ‘I do not recognize any Upolnomochennye. Do as I tell you to do.’”<sup>88</sup> In 1949, “a Chairman of the Village Soviet in village Dudarkovo, Borispol region, Kiev oblast, comrade T.G. Koltakov, demanded that a presbyter of a registered EKhB community, Sidorenko, applied to the

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<sup>87</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 309, p. 41.

<sup>88</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 5069, p. 224-226.

Village Soviet before conducting every prayer service for a permission to do so, without which Koltakov would not permit prayer services to take place.” The Council’s Upolnomochennyi for Kiev oblast, who mentioned this incident in his report, felt especially outraged by what happened next:

Moreover...when an assistant of a bishop (Senior Presbyter of EKhB for Kiev oblast), Feriupko, arrived in Dudarkovo, having with him an appropriate document and my permission to be there, comrade Koltakov not only forbade his being there but ordered a Village Soviet employee to walk Feriupko out of the village (in the middle of the night). When Feriupko presented our written permission, comrade Koltakov replied: ‘I do not answer to your Upolnomochennye.’<sup>89</sup>

In 1950, presbyter of the EKhB community in Malev, Demidovskii region, Rovno oblast, P.A. Kasian, wrote to the Upolnomochennyi of CARC for Rovno oblast:

During the draw for the Fifth State Bond, an upolnomochennyi of Demidov regional Soviet of Workers’ Deputies, comrade Bezuglyi, and Central Committee upolnomochennyi, comrade Pavliuk, suggested that I paid 900 rubles to State Bond on the basis of earnings I received from the community, which was beyond my capability. Pavliuk then told me to denounce my religion and disband the community, which I could not do. Under obvious pressure, I was forced to pay the 900 rubles. Besides, on June 1, this year, Pavliuk announced at one of the largest kolkhoz meetings that religion was most hostile to the Soviet authority, unlawfully accused me, and ordered to have me kicked ‘with a dirty broom’ [colloquial expression] as enemy of the people and state not only from the kolkhoz, but also from the village. Then he asked me in public to denounce religion. Due to my convictions, I could not agree to do that. Consequently, I was expelled from the kolkhoz, although in fact I was not guilty of anything. I had one son whom I gave to the Red Army where he lost his life. For the year 1950, I already have 44 labor-days,\* whereas the legal norm for the period up to June 15 is 30 labor-days.

By the way, the documents you gave me have no significance at all in the eyes of the aforementioned people. I am waiting for your instructions.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 12, p. 72.

\* A “labor-day” (*trudoden*) was the Soviet unit of measuring the productivity of agricultural workers.

<sup>90</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 94, p. 20.

A member of Malevanskaia community Executive Board, Vera Gritsenko, followed up Kasian's letter with a much more argumentative petition of her own. "To us, registered in accordance with the state law," she wrote, "it never occurred that our faith in God makes us enemies of our state...Now, we are bewildered and simply do not know what to do. If we exist legally, then we ask your immediate help, and if we exist illegally and all the documents provided by the Upolnomochennyi of CARC at the CM of USSR and all his directives mean 'zero,' then why do we need to run so often into such unpleasant incidents? Just terminate our registration..."<sup>91</sup> A copy of Gritsenko's petition was forwarded to Vil'khovyi, and her argument apparently made an impression on him. His handwritten remarks on the margins of Gritsenko's text show that he ordered his staff to immediately look into the matter. As the head of CARC in Ukraine, Vil'khovyi was painfully aware that his agency's resolutions and documents issued by it quite often meant little to local Soviet and party officials, and that the unlawful actions of these officials seriously undermined not only the prestige of CARC but the very notion of Soviet legality in the eyes of believers. Gritsenko's petition also highlighted the circumstance that the government periodic crackdown on religion were triggered not so much by increases in violations of legislation on cults by religious communities but by the very fact of believers' existence. The Soviet state officials in charge of ideology tended to see the mere perseverance of religious communities and their ability to successfully circumvent the government policy of gradual reduction of religion as gross violations of legislation on cults. Instead of admitting that its policy was untenable, the

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

state believed that by exposing religious communities to a short-term concerted massive pressure, with all the attendant scare tactics, it could somehow reduce the number of believers without any long-term suspension of the notion of legality. Moreover, by delegating the task of combating religion to local authorities, without establishing a viable and enforceable chain of subordination—with the CARC acting as the main coordinating body, the government could easily clear itself of any responsibility for the committed abuses of believers by laying the blame on the overzealous and undisciplined local officials. In the aftermath of a major crackdown on religion, the government could always issue an appropriate pronouncement, similar to Stalin's famous 1930 article "Dizzy with Success," which would portray the government as a guardian of socialist legality and present the low-ranking local functionaries as culprits who misconstrued and perverted the original government idea.

#### **4. The CARC's Role as Ombudsman for Believers**

While many of the CARC's complaints to the party organs about the violations of believers' rights by the local authorities and law enforcement agencies were often intertwined with the Council's institutional interest in improving and elevating its own status in the hierarchy of firmly entrenched Soviet bureaucracies, the evidence suggests that some of the Council's *Upolnomochennye* clearly saw abuses of believers as both counterproductive to the long-term Soviet policy vis-à-vis religion and detrimental to the very notion of socialist legality. Vil'khovyi, for example, who headed the Ukrainian CARC from 1944 to 1959, certainly strove to uphold legal norms and did not welcome



any wild experimentation in questions of combating religion that went beyond measures prescribed by the legislation or by the party directives. His reports reveal him as a determined gradualist. In 1948, he wrote:

The rate of decline of religious moods [in the population] will depend in the greatest degree on the level of political-educational work with the masses. However, the crude administrative restriction, the tendency to which we are observing in the work of some local organs of Soviet authority, will sooner give the opposite result. We think that the policy of tolerance must be strictly observed. It is too early to count on the fast rate of the dying out of religion.<sup>92</sup>

A year earlier, reacting to the persecution by the local authorities of some school teachers recently converted by a EKhB community, Vil'khovyi wrote: "Apparently, the leaders of village and kolkhoz decided: since religion does not have social roots in society, it should be done away with unceremoniously—the prayer house should be closed, and the performance of religious cults banned. Thence stems the detrimental, anti-party, administrative practice of struggle against religion."<sup>93</sup> In his 1951 Informative Report, Vil'khovyi advanced the same thesis again:

It appears, some representatives of party and Soviet organizations in locations still do not understand that the struggle for the overcoming of [religious] prejudice must be conducted in a way that does not alienate believing people but draws them closer to our ideology, strengthens the moral-political unity of Soviet people and consolidates them in the struggle for Communism. Therefore, it is necessary to act not through administrative measures, not by way of prohibition or insulting of religious feelings, but by way of propaganda, enlightenment and persuasion.<sup>94</sup>

In the same year, reporting to the Secretary of CC CPU and Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Ukrainian SSR, Vil'khovyi reiterated that the acting legislation

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<sup>92</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 5069, p. 274.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>94</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 783, p. 332.

on cults demands that “the closing of prayer houses in all cases is carried out only upon the passage of an adequate resolution by the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults at the Council of Ministers of USSR, after submission for consideration to the Upolnomochennyi of CARC for Ukrainian SSR.” However, continued Vil’khovyi, “in complete contradiction to the existing law, some representatives of the grassroots Soviet organs allow gross violations and close down prayer houses arbitrarily.” To illustrate his point, Vil’khovyi mentioned a number of cases when the local authorities appropriated prayer houses for their own needs, leaving believers no other choice but to gather in private apartments. “In villages Uglia and Neresnitsa,” Vil’khovyi quoted from the report of his subordinate in Zakarpatie oblast, “there are good unused buildings which require minor repairs and which could be used for state purposes, but the leaders of these villages see only those buildings which are ready to be used [prayer houses] and do not wish to make efforts to utilize the [other] available buildings.” Commenting on this particular case, Vil’khovyi wrote:

Considering believers complaints, the Council’s Upolnomochennyi for Zakarpatie oblast sends appropriate letters to Chairmen of District Executive Committees [Okrispolkoms], asking not to allow such violations, but the Okrispolkoms ignore his letters and do not take any measures to correct these violations. The letter of the Oblispolkom Chairman to the Okrispolkom Chairman also brought no results. Taking into account specific conditions of Zakarpatie oblast [its recent incorporation into USSR]...we have sent a letter to the Secretary of Zakarpatie Obkom of CPU, comrade I.D. Kompanets, asking him to issue an appropriate directive to fix the committed errors.<sup>95</sup>

Vil’khovyi’s reports to the party bosses are peppered with references to such violations and attempts on the part of CARC to intercede on behalf of abused believers.

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 30-32.

These reports also reveal that assumptions equating the CARC with the KGB or portraying it as the sole scourge of religious communities in the USSR do not account for the positive role the Council played in protecting believers. The more flagrant and frequent violations of the rights of believers were committed by local authorities and stemmed not so much from the official government antireligious policy as from the government's nonchalance towards the prosecution of such violators, that is, from a pronouncedly one-sided enforcement of the legislation on cults. In 1956, the Council's Upolnomochennyi for Ternopol oblast, Chirva, stopped at the office of the First Secretary of Vishnevetskii Regional Committee of CPU, comrade Mandzelevskii, to deliver a routine report. "As soon as I began informing about the number and activity of religious groups in the region," complained Chirva, "comrade Mandzelevskii posed the following question: 'Why do you keep these Shtundists?' I answered that according to the data at my disposal communities of Evangelical Christians-Baptists existed in villages of Vishnevetskii region since 1930-1935 and that they were registered." The First Secretary's task, according to Chirva, was "to conduct the political-educational work among the population, and all these cults will gradually die out." Mandzelevskii, however, had a different idea. "All agitation is lost on these idiots," he surmised, "and it would be more correct to deal with them in the following manner: to tear down the houses in which they pray and disperse them..." Chirva did not know of a better way to parry this angry outburst but to suggest that comrade Mandzelevskii "carefully read the Decree of CC CPSU from November 10, 1954."<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 4263, p. 58-59.

In 1956, reporting about more instances of abuses of believers, Vil'khovyi pointed out that "to overlook" such facts "would have been a gross error on our part." He further stated:

In our previous reports, we already noted that the Cherkassy Obkom of the party did not draw any lessons from that shameful fact when one of secretaries of Gorodishchenskii RPK together with the head of regional Militia entered the EKhB prayer house during the prayer service and interrogated believers. Complacency and carelessness continued to occur in Cherkassy oblast. The following fact vividly testifies to that: 'On April 8, 1956, the kolkhoz Chairman, com. A.A. Volochai, the kolkhoz agronomist, com. V.E. Glushko, and the head of party organization, co. Dobroritskii, entered the prayer house during the prayer service. Comrade Volochai interrupted the prayer service and addressed the believers: 'There used to be 70 [religious] denominations in the Soviet Union. We have annulled 66; there are only 4 left to be annulled. Your Shtundist faith is included in these 4...' It would seem that the Cherkassy Obkom of CPU would draw appropriate conclusions from this fact for the education of all party organization, but even after this second fact of the most flagrant violation of the Decree of CC of CPSU 'On Errors in the Conduct of Scientific-Atheist Propaganda among the Population,' it did not go beyond merely reviewing this question at the Bureau of Cherkassy Raikom of CPU, having imposed a penalty on the aforementioned comrades.<sup>97</sup>

It appears that an unknown party official who read this copy of Vil'khovyi's report thought that the criticism of the party organization was excessive, for he heavily underlined all critical remarks with a pencil and drew huge question marks next to them on the margins. The evidence shows that Vil'khovyi's consistent efforts to oversee religious affairs strictly by the book increasingly irritated both his own staff and the local Soviet authorities. In November of 1952, he almost lost his job due to the charges brought against him primarily by his own subordinates. Among other things, he was accused of the following:

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<sup>97</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 4608, p. 58-59.

--Comrade Vil'khovyi often gives hasty and vague directions and tasks...Some tasks [given by him] contradict the Council's directions while others are politically incorrect.

--Comrade Vil'khovyi trustingly treats complaints of servants of cults and employs these complaints in his instructions to Upolnomochennye without verifying whether the facts in these complaints could be confirmed.

--Comrade Vil'khovyi pays little attention to his work, excusing himself by being busy with other things. He treats Upolnomochennye high-handedly and inconsiderately...He does not take criticism well.

--It was pointed out that one of the reasons why Vil'khovyi's leadership is unsatisfactory is that he perceives his job in the capacity of the Council's Upolnomochennyi as secondary, seeing himself first of all as a writer and worker of the Writers' Union.

--The Council concluded that if com. Vil'khovyi does not draw lessons from the critical remarks and a stiff warning given to him, a question will be raised about his release from the responsibility as the Council's Upolnomochennyi.<sup>98</sup>

The government eventually replaced Vil'khovyi with a much more ruthless and unscrupulous official, K. Polonnik, as Krushchev's antireligious campaign began to pick up momentum in 1959. Polonnik did not last long as the head of Ukrainian CARC and, by 1963, as the campaign showed the first signs of subsiding, he was replaced by the more moderate K. Litvin. In 1965, the Council's two branches—for the affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church and for the affairs of other legitimate cults—were combined under the roof of one agency, the Council for the Affairs of Religions, but the status of this reformed CAR and the educational preparedness of its employees left much to be desired in the 1960s as in the 1940s-1950s. It is not until the mid 1970s that serious steps were taken to elevate the authority of CAR, increase the pay of its employees, and introduce tougher selection criteria for employment with this agency.

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<sup>98</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 1572, p. 339.

## 5. Conclusion

Despite the 1944 Decree that vested the CARC with certain powers, its Ukrainian republican branch under Vil'khovyi's leadership, spent a great deal of energies on defining its status among traditional party and Soviet bureaucracies and defending its domain from their intrusions. The Council's struggles further illustrated that the new policy on religion adopted at the center was not readily embraced by the Soviet officialdom at the grassroots level where the old prewar attitudes towards religion persisted. The government's simultaneous commitment to granting certain religious freedoms and combating religion holdovers, which meant using restrictive legal framework and scientific-atheist propaganda as primary means of reducing religion gradually, contributed to the confusion among the local party and Soviet officials who were hardly familiar with the legislation on cults but ready to play their part in the struggle against religion. Instead of assisting the CARC in enforcing the legislation, they often undermined the Council's authority by taking matters into their own hands.

The Council's relations with the MGB/KGB also remained strenuous during the 1940s-early 1960s. Before the Council's establishment, the secret police played a dominant role in overseeing religious affairs, and it is not surprising that the upper echelons of CAROC's and CARC's cadre were drawn from the KGB. The CARC relied on the KGB's extensive database to learn about the background of prominent religious leaders and activists, and relegated to the care of this agency all cases of illegal sectarian groups. At the same time, the Council could not fulfill its intended function in an atmosphere of diarchy, with the KGB continuously infringing upon its prerogatives. The

MGB/KGB presence in Ukraine was certainly more visible in the aftermath of World War II. Once the last vestiges of resistance to the reassertion of Soviet authority in Ukraine disappeared, so did the Council's complaints about the KGB's open meddling in its affairs. The secret police reverted to its more traditional role of a shadow institution, although its offices were never far from the offices of the Council's Upolnomochennye. The Council's officials could literally walk across the corridor to talk something over with "the neighbors"—a codename that from the 1960s onward replaced all references to the KGB in the CARC reports. Although Khrushchev's Directive 263 did more to complicate the Council's work than to assist it, the CARC continued to assert its authority as a primary institution in charge of religion.

The evidence quoted in this chapter should not be construed, however, to mean that CARC, at least under Vil'khovyi's leadership, represented an agency sympathetic to the plight of believers in the Soviet Ukraine. Vil'khovyi's instructional letters to his subordinates in oblasts and to leaders of Protestant denominations show his dedication to the cause of reducing religion and his inventiveness in devising legal pretexts to achieve this goal. The CARC under Vil'khovyi and his successors was not a neutral organization concerned exclusively with enforcing the legislation, but a politically motivated agency—a part and parcel of the Soviet ideological machine. At the same time, this circumstance should not entirely overshadow the clearly positive role that the CARC played in protecting believers from the unbridled combatants of religion, in keeping the subject of violations of the believers' constitutional rights alive and salient on the government agenda and, ultimately, in serving as an avenue of legal recourse for

thousands of Ukrainian Protestants. In the past decades, some historians of state-church relations in the USSR, relying often on insufficient and fragmentary evidence, tended to see CARC/CAR as no more than a sham organization—a camouflaged weapon of state suppression of religion. Otto Luchterhandt, the author of a more recent comprehensive study of CAR, for example, pointed to “a certain disagreement, even contradiction” in “the legal description of the jurisdiction of the Council for Matters of Religion” and to “a deeply hypocritical tone...almost typical for the control of religion in the Soviet state.”<sup>99</sup> While my own research amply supports and illustrates this assertion, I find it difficult to agree with Luchterhandt’s focusing entirely on the political function of CAR in the framework of its dual commitment. According to Luchterhandt, “the Council served, in the first place, as an administrative instrument of the repressive politics of church and religion of the communist party, a religious-political organ of the party and state leadership,” its “main political goal” being “until the collapse of the Soviet state in 1991, the suppression of and battle against the religions in the country,” and “the proper respectable and legitimate control of legality had to submit to this.” The author then drew a rather sweeping conclusion:

Indeed, an opposition between the control of legality and the goal of suppression never really existed, because Soviet religious legislation so severely gagged the life of religious communities, and conceded the state officials such unlimited decision-making authority in church affairs, that almost every arbitrary action could be justified and, as practice has shown, was justified.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Otto Luchterhandt, “The Council for Religious Affairs” in *Religious Policy in the Soviet Union*, edit. Sabrina Petra Ramet (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 62.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*



Luchterhandt's assessment bears resemblance to many Cold War era writings on the subject. Firstly, it underestimates the significance of the postwar shift toward legality in the Soviet policy on religion and focuses exclusively on the continuity rather than change, although a closer look at the now available archival evidence shows that the number of prisoners for religious beliefs after the war (especially after the death of Stalin) dropped dramatically, sentences became milder (mostly 5-6 years, compared to 10-25 during the 1930s), the number of registered and legally existing Protestant communities (at least in Ukraine) remained essentially the same between 1945 and the 1980s while the number of members in those communities continued to grow. Most importantly, in stark contrast to the 1930s, believers now had recourse to justice and could challenge and often reverse certain restrictive measures directed against them by appealing to CARC/CAR.

Secondly, the evidence presented in this chapter also reveals that "an opposition between the control of legality and the goal of suppression" of religion, to use Luchterhandt's phraseology, was in fact quite salient in the work of CARC/CAR, and that the entire state mechanism of control of religion resembled totalitarian polycracy rather than a rigid top-down hierarchy of subordination. The "decision-making authority" of state officials "in church affairs" was not "unlimited," and the arbitrary, unsanctioned and purely administrative measures of some officials were often overturned by other officials at the request of CARC/CAR and on the grounds of defending legality. The degree of state interference in the life of religious communities in Ukraine often depended on subjective factors (such as Upolnomochennye's and state officials' personal qualities and their own interpretation of the state agenda concerning religion), on the

geographic location of communities in the republic (the government could modify its antireligious agenda in accordance with its broader geopolitical goals: it tended to be more lenient in the recently annexed Western Ukraine and harsher in the industrial and more Russified Eastern and Southern Ukraine, while the treatment of believers in the RSFSR was still harsher), and on the status of a denomination to which this or that religious community belonged (the Baptists and Adventists, for example fared significantly better than the Greek-Catholics or Jehovah's Witnesses).

Thirdly, the Council's "political goal" did not remain unaltered "until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991" but, as will be shown in subsequent chapters, subject to certain adaptations. The initial goal of gradual reduction of religion through exposure to legal restrictions and atheist propaganda of the 1940s and 1950s was enhanced in the 1960s and 1970s by concerted crackdowns designed to hasten the dying out of religion. By the late 1970s, the CAR officials and other involved experts began to slowly admit that religion would not die out either of its own accord or as a result of controlled state persecution, and that certain small concessions might have to be made in order to stabilize the relationship between church and state and uphold the positive image of USSR abroad. With the beginning of perestroika, the CAR clearly oriented its employees to move from confrontation to cooperation with religion. In 1990, the Supreme Council of USSR adopted the law "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations," and on July 3, 1991, the CC of CPSU approved the new party program that acknowledged "the rights of every party member to freely express his position on any question of

society's life; to believe or adhere to atheist convictions...A party member...has the right...to adhere to atheist convictions or to believe.”<sup>101</sup>

Lastly, Luchterhandt and other historians who did not have access to a broad representative body of archival materials and extrapolated their conclusions from a rather limited number of mostly damning documents viewed the Council for the Affairs of Religions as a faceless dehumanized entity and altogether omitted from their discussion a sizable aspect of this agency's activity, namely, its work with believers' petitions and its efforts to impose the observance of legal norms on Soviet officials. The now available data is not conducive to a unilateral interpretation of the Soviet state objective vis-à-vis religion after the war and compels a researcher to raise a number of important questions. If the CARC/CAR was no more than an instrument of suppression of religion, and if the Soviet state's postwar commitment to legality was a mere sham, then why would the Council persistently inform the highest echelons of the Soviet and party authorities (the architects of the antireligious agenda) of violations committed against the believers, and do so not as formality but in terms demanding immediate attention and correction of errors? If the state's struggle against religion recognized no legal limits, and if any means of reducing religion were acceptable, then why would not the state relieve the Council of its responsibility to enforce legal norms on the local combatants of religion even at the height of Khrushchev's antireligious campaign? Why would every one of Vil'khovyi's classified reports, intended only for the eyes of the top Soviet officials, contain vehement criticisms of abuses against believers along with the data showing his

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<sup>101</sup> V.A. Alekseev, *Shturm nebes otmeniaetsia: kriticheskie ocherki po istorii bor'by s religiei v SSSR* (Moskva: "Rossiia Molodaia," 1992), p. 272.

agency's success or problems in reducing religion? Ultimately, what would remain of the Protestant communities in Ukraine, if the policy of the 1930s continued for another two or three decades? Answering these questions seems impossible without admitting that the Soviet postwar policy on religion represented a much more complex phenomenon than previously thought, and that its complexity stemmed from the government's commitment to two mutually contradicting objectives—combating and legalizing religion at the same time. Focusing on one aspect of this commitment to the exclusion of the other would inevitably produce a distorted view of state-church relations in the USSR. At the same time, the approach adopted in this study should not be construed as an apology of the totalitarian state. It would be difficult to argue that freedom of conscience and religion existed in the Soviet Union in a normative sense. Yet it would be a mistake to overlook a certain gray area that emerged after the war at the confluence of the two opposing tendencies within the Soviet policy on religion—a new, even if awkward, existential habitat that allowed religious communities to maintain a visible presence throughout the Soviet landscape and provided believers with the legal framework that they could utilize to ensure their communities' survival and growth.

**CHAPTER III**  
**ECCLESIASTICAL INSTITUTIONS:**  
**THE VSEKhB AND THE VSASD**

The Soviet government's volte-face regarding religion led to the establishment of the CARC, but also brought to life new ecclesiastic institutions. While maintaining its long-term goal of the "withering away" of religion, the state proposed a new cooperative relationship with religious communities, and for that purpose, it needed organizational structures in each denomination (deemed eligible for registration) that would facilitate the transmission of state policy. Governmental authorities thus revived the All-Union spiritual centers of the Evangelical Christian-Baptist brotherhood (VSEKhB) and the Seventh Day Adventists (VSASD), which had existed in the 1920s. These new bodies authentically responded to believers' desire for legal recognition after a decade and a half of repression, but at a cost. With state-approved, rather than democratically elected, leaders, the spiritual centers were expected to serve the state's ends of monitoring religious communities and implementing state policy.

The members of the spiritual centers were placed in an impossible position. To carry out their official mandate was to risk alienating believers, while to ignore it was to risk a return to the precarious, underground existence of Protestants in the 1930s. To a significant degree, the history of Soviet Protestantism between 1945 and 1991 was a

product of two antithetical tendencies: the tendency of the state to integrate believers into the system through cooptation and institutionalization and the internal struggle within religious communities to purify themselves. This struggle was expressed most vividly in the schismatic movements of the EKhB and, to some extent, SDA churches (discussed in Chapter IX), but those schisms were prefigured by the development of the spiritual centers between 1945 and 1960.

The VSEKhB and the VSASD grappled with their dilemma in contrasting ways. “Caught in a three-way tug between God, the state, and the church,”<sup>1</sup> to borrow Roland Blaich’s characterization of a not altogether dissimilar challenge faced by Protestants under the Third Reich, the VSEKhB opted for its church’s security at the expense of endorsing regulations that were considered anti-evangelical by many believers and usurping powers beyond those traditionally vested by Evangelicals in their spiritual leaderships. These abuses provoked a reform movement within the EKhB brotherhood that challenged both spiritual authority and legitimacy of the VSEKhB. With the state backing the cooperative incumbent leaders and persecuting reformers, the schism became inevitable. Initially an internal church movement for purification, it soon acquired a pronounced political dimension as a movement for the freedom of conscience in the USSR. The VSASD, on the contrary, put a limit to its cooperation with the state and enforced the governmental restrictive measures vis-à-vis religion only willy-nilly. The state reacted by first replacing the uncooperative Matsanov leadership with a more agreeable Kulyzhkii leadership, and then disbanded the VSASD altogether, thinking that

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<sup>1</sup> Roland Blaich, “Religion under National Socialism: The Case of the German Adventist Church” in *Central European History*, 26 (3), 1993, p. 260.

the VSASD acted more as a catalyst of religious revivalism rather than its restrainer. Left with no legitimate central leadership, the SDA communities began gravitating towards one or the other of the former VSASD leaderships both vying for power and accusing each other of either collaborationism with the authorities or illegitimacy. Although a highly convoluted affair, the SDA schism remained an internal church squabble and never developed a political dimension. The Protestant spiritual centers' existence and survivability, therefore, depended on their utility to the state.

In conceptualizing this chapter, I drew on investigations of modern governmental technologies of control and surveillance by the French philosopher, Michel Foucault, and Czech dramatists and statesman, Vaclav Havel. In his investigation of penal practices and institutions in Europe during the past three centuries, Michel Foucault traced the evolution of the old regimes' punitive repertoire, with its unsightly disembowelments and beheadings, into a new disciplinary system that displaced "the traditional, ritual, costly, violent forms of power" by a more "subtle, calculated technology of subjection,"<sup>2</sup> making the public both an object of discipline and an instrument of its exercise. In the model panoptic prison, envisioned by the English utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham and used by Foucault as a conceptual scale model of a self-disciplining social system, society occupies space on either side of the iron bars: it administers the punishment, it is being punished, and it observes itself being punished. Bentham's *Panopticon* is certainly useful for the discussion of mechanisms and technologies of control over religion in the postwar USSR, when the Soviet government largely abandoned the practice of mass shootings,

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<sup>2</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 220-221.

imprisonment, and deportation of believers, applied during the 1930s, and adopted this more subtle policy. Not content with controlling religion exclusively from without, through CARC and the entire network of cross-institutional cooperation, the government devised a way of controlling it from within by turning religious communities into a myriad of tiny *panopticons* and slowly integrating them into a massive *Panopticon* of the mainstream Soviet society. According to Foucault, in a self-disciplining society the power to produce docile bodies is not concentrated in any one place, “not localized in the relations between the state and its citizens or on the frontier between the classes,” but is rather diffused in a variety of “micro-powers” that “go right down into the depths of society.”<sup>3</sup> In his 1937 report dedicated to the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of CHeKA—GPU—NKVD, Anastas Mikoian expressed this idea most succinctly, when he said: “Every citizen of the USSR is an agent of NKVD.”<sup>4</sup>

The evidence presented in the previous chapter illustrated how a wide array of agencies, from the KGB to Commissions of Support to a village party cell, served the function of such “micro-powers,” applying to believers—perpetual delinquents—both the carceral-born disciplines (surveillance, interrogation, infiltration, blackmail) and the norm-establishing knowledge (scientific atheism, reeducation, instructions, regulations). The application of such scheme alone, however, could not provide for the kind of transparency of religious communities that the government hoped to gain under its new plan of legalized religion. Moreover, the smooth operation of this new plan presupposed

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>4</sup> Aleksandr Obolonskii, *Sistema protiv lichnosti: drama Rossiiskoi politicheskoi istorii* (Moskva: Institut gosudarstva i prava, 1994), p. 271.



that believers' conformity with the government designs came about not as the result of external pressure on religious communities (which would still smack of the old dictatorial practices), but as a genuine and spontaneous desire on the part of the latter to comply.

Vaclav Havel spoke of this new system of control as "post-totalitarian" because it could "no longer base itself on the unadulterated, brutal, and arbitrary application of power."<sup>5</sup>

Describing this post-Stalinist approach as a ubiquitous "social *auto-totality*," he wrote:

...it draws everyone into its sphere of power, not so that they may realize themselves as human beings, but so they may surrender their human identity in favor of the identity of the system, that is, so they may become agents of the system's general automatism and servants of its self-determined goals, so they may participate in the common responsibility for it, so they may be pulled into and ensnared by it...so they may create through their involvement a general norm and, thus, bring pressure to bear on their fellow-citizens...so they may learn to be comfortable with their involvement, to identify with it as though it were something natural and inevitable and, ultimately, so they may—with no external urging—come to treat any non-involvement as an abnormality, as arrogance, as an attack on themselves, as a form of dropping out of society. By pulling everyone into its power structure, the post-totalitarian system makes everyone instruments of a mutual totality, the auto-totality of society.<sup>6</sup>

The Soviet institutional model of religious organizations presupposed the extension of this network of self-surveillance and collective responsibility to the greatest number of clergy and ordinary believers. Participation in this network slowly eroded the believers' sense of identification with their communities. The greater was their complicity with the state, the less likely they were to tolerate manifestations of non-conformism in their communities.

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<sup>5</sup> *The Power of the Powerless: Citizens against the state in central-eastern Europe*, edit. John Keane (New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1985), p. 23.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36-37.

Luchterhandt noted that the CARC/CAR routinely collected information about religious communities and “used the collected information only in order to influence and manipulate the fate of religious communities much more effectively by active intervention in the interest of the communist system.” He also claimed that the Council was involved in “immediate steering of religious happenings through administrative pressure on the church leadership, in other words through misuse of canonical power of jurisdiction and religious official authority for state purposes.” The Council’s “general goal,” in Luchterhandt’s words, “stood unshakably solid” and consisted in “the gradual weakening and final destruction of the very organization [religious communities] which alone removed itself from total, complete integration into the totalitarian ideological state.”<sup>7</sup> Luchterhandt’s comments suggest that both the state and religious leaderships closely cooperated in matters of controlling religion from within, although the author de-emphasized the fact that the church leaders, and often ordinary believers, were the primary suppliers of information about religious communities to the state agencies and, therefore, shared responsibility with the CARC for the “steering of religious happenings” in the direction suggested by the state agenda, that is, in the direction of “the gradual weakening and final destruction” of religious organizations. It appears then that religious organizations resisted integration into the totalitarian state and, at the same time, oiled the cogs of the state integration machinery.

The problem of state-church relations in the postwar USSR would make more sense if restated in different terms. The state did not plan the final destruction of

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<sup>7</sup> Otto Luchterhandt, “The Council for Religious Affairs” in *Religious Policy in the Soviet Union*, p. 66-67.

religious communities because they resisted integration (the state almost achieved that goal in the 1930s), rather it hoped that the “withering away” of religion would occur naturally as a result of gradual integration of religious communities into the general autototality of the Soviet system. As religious leaders at the union and republican levels, the oblast Senior Presbyters, and members of parish communities’ Executive Boards, not to mention the ordinary snitches and informants whom the government could coerce or blackmail into cooperation, began providing the state with personal data on their fellow believers and enforce in their communities the state’s idea of what a model community or a model believer should be, they added to the existing network of “micro-powers” and became “weapons, relays, communication routes and supports,” or actors and objects in what Foucault termed “the power-knowledge relations.”<sup>8</sup> The information (knowledge) provided by them to the state turned into power in the hands of state, while the state reciprocated by ensuring the status and power of its compliant servants in the communities. By drawing more and more believers into this ritualized collaboration, always portrayed as simply being a law-abiding and patriotic citizen (a psychological excuse), the state effectively turned them into active components of its power and used them as “the principal instrument of ritual communication within the system of power.”<sup>9</sup> In Havel’s words, the state power “does not rely on soldiers of its own, but on the soldiers of the enemy...that is to say, on everyone who is living within the lie.”<sup>10</sup> On the

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<sup>8</sup> Foucault, p. 28.

<sup>9</sup> *The Power of the Powerless*, p. 31.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

moral plane, this “living within the lie” could not go on unchecked and provoked dissent movements within Protestant communities, driven by the desire to live “within the truth.”

### **1. The Formation and Aims of the VSEKhB**

The VSEKhB was to unite under one roof the various shades of Evangelical Christians, Baptists and Pentecostals living on the territory of the Soviet Union. Attempts were also made in the late 1940s to bring under the VSEKhB’s jurisdiction the Hungarian Reformats of Western Ukraine. In 1963-65, the Mennonites joined the All-Union Council of the Evangelical Christians-Baptists. Such mergers were contemplated earlier, as between Evangelicals and Baptists in the 1920s, or in fact occurred, as in 1942 in Belorussia, when the German Occupation authorities formally joined the Evangelicals, Baptists and Pentecostals. Commenting on these “rather striking parallels between Nazi and Soviet religious policy,” Walter Sawatsky wrote: “The Nazi policy included fostering a union of all denominations practicing believer’s baptism, holding the leadership responsible for all the churches, and forcing Pentecostals to surrender such practices as choral prayer and speaking in tongues (glossalalia). These were also the policies of Soviet authorities.”<sup>11</sup> Such mergers, if at all possible, required a careful examination of doctrinal, ceremonial, and organizational peculiarities of denominations to be joined, the working out of acceptable compromises, and the establishment of fair representation of these denominations in the union. In other words, the work of a Congress in charge of

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<sup>11</sup> Walter Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals since World War II* (Kitchener, Ontario: Herald Press, 1981), p. 91.

such a daunting task required maximum transparency and the broadest possible participation of all involved parties to ensure the legitimacy of such Congress' decisions for local parish communities throughout the country. When the preparatory work for the establishment of VSEKhB began in 1942, the Protestant communities barely lingered, "gathering illegally" but, due to the wartime shift in the Soviet religious policy, "without the persecution by local authorities."<sup>12</sup> Most reemerging communities were also leaderless. "Repressions of the 1930s," as a contemporary church historian, Savinskii, pointed out, "'swept up' the former servants almost entirely: survivors lingered on in but a few places, and even there they came from the number of '*lishentsy*' [persons stripped of rights], living in exile, or those who recently returned from camps. Under the acting Decree of the Soviet of People's Commissars of USSR Number 1603, from November 19, 1944, such persons were deprived of the right to be elected by the church not only to serve as presbyters, deacons or preachers, but even to be included in the number of founders ('*dvadtsatka*') of a parish community being established."<sup>13</sup>

The Seventh Day Adventist church shared the same predicament. The SDA All-Union Council, the VSASD, existed during the war "in one person," that of G.A. Grigoriev, who was in charge of the lingering Moscow SDA community.<sup>14</sup> Describing this period, the SDA memoirists-historians A.F. Parasei and N.A. Zhukaliuk wrote:

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<sup>12</sup> Savinskii, p. 152.

<sup>13</sup> Savinskii, p. 170.

<sup>14</sup> D. Yunak, *Istoriia tserkvi Adventistov Sed'mogo Dnia v Rossii, 1886-1981* (Zaokskii: "Istochnik Zhizni," 2002), Tom I, p. 308, 316.

G.A. Grigoriev had to head the Moscow SDA Church and serve as a ‘showcase’ confirming the existence of religious ‘freedom’ in USSR. ...The Church organization and majority of communities were destroyed. A handful of faithful servants and Church members, who were still free, went into the underground. G.A. Grigoriev, who had in the past been arrested multiple times and who had finished the term of exile for religious convictions, remained a single official leader of both the Moscow community and the entire [SDA] Church in USSR...The years of prewar repressions...plunged the Church into a sort of shock and caused confusion. Most communities were beheaded, and only a tiny number of the faithful followers of Jesus continued gathering in small groups for prayer and study of the Word of Life, hiding from persecution and strengthening each other in the faith.<sup>15</sup>

Yet someone had to respond to the government initiative to legalize Protestant communities. Moreover, the remaining beleaguered communities welcomed this long awaited shift toward legalization. The meager available evidence concerning the initial steps in the preparatory work for the convocation of the all-union councils leaves plenty of room for speculation. Commenting on the establishment of VSEKhB, Walter Sawatsky wrote: “The 1944 unity congress remains to the present day somewhat of a mystery and a point of controversy.”<sup>16</sup> Nonetheless, it could be safely inferred that the government did not simply welcome the first group of self-ordained enthusiasts or gave these individuals a carte blanche to organize their prospective spiritual headquarters in a way that befitted them most. The people who emerged at the forefront of this effort were the people whom the government knew fairly well and kept artificially alive throughout the war as leaders of the “showcase” Moscow communities. These people were to select, in close cooperation with CARC, the other potential candidates for the leadership

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<sup>15</sup> A.F. Parasei and N.A. Zhukaliuk, *Bednaia, brosaemaia bureiu: istoricheskie ocherki k 110-mu yubileiu Tserkvi ASD v Ukraine* (Kiev: “Dzhereho Zhittia,” 1997), p. 48.

<sup>16</sup> Sawatsky, p. 85.

positions in the proposed councils. The government left nothing to chance and, apparently, had a predetermined plan concerning the structure and agenda of these councils. M.A. Orlov, whom Savinskii characterized as “the authorities’ confidant” (because the “authorities trusted him more”<sup>17</sup>) became the leading figure in “knocking together the Provisional Council” for the Evangelicals and Baptists.<sup>18</sup> Orlov and another Evangelical at large, A.L. Andreev (the future chief deputy of VSEKhB in Ukraine) contacted the recently freed Evangelical A.V. Karev and Baptists P.I. Malin and N.A. Levindanto. “But in order to bolster the authority of the Provisional Council,” opined Savinskii, they also “sought out the Evangelical Y.I. Zhidkov, who was at the time in exile, and Baptist F.G. Patkovskii serving time in labor camps, both of whom were immediately released.”<sup>19</sup> The memoirs of Orlov and Levindanto suggest that the Baptists rather than Evangelicals first advanced the issue of a merger,<sup>20</sup> whereas Sawatsky saw the matter as much more convoluted:

Considering the protracted struggle to unite Evangelicals and Baptists [attempted in the 1920s], the unity congress that took place in October 1944 appears deceptively placid. That was because all problematic issues had been settled in advance. By whom they were settled is not entirely clear. According to the published record, two Baptist spokesmen, N.A. Levindanto and M.I. Goliaev, had formally requested the Evangelical Christian Union to look after their Baptist congregations. But Levindanto was in prison. Secret police officials visited him and another leading Baptist, F.G. Patkovskii, in the prison and informed them that churches would be reopened and that Baptist and Evangelical congregations were to be united. Levindanto and Patkovskii were to be released to help lead the

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<sup>17</sup> Savinskii, p. 158.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p 154.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 153.

unification. These men were only too glad to hear that churches would be opened and set about their part of the task immediately. Who took the first initiative therefore remains shrouded in mystery.<sup>21</sup>

For purposes of this chapter I will focus only on those details of the 1944 unity congress that had long-term consequences for its legitimacy. It remains unclear what criteria the Provisional Council used for the selection of delegates to this all-union congress. According to Savinskii, “brothers from Central Asia, Transcaucasia, Kazakhstan, Siberia and the Far East were not present. Among those present were not the delegates of regional organizations (which were not yet formed) or even groups of communities but rather some presbyters, who were known, but through whom nothing could be delegated since they were not elected.”<sup>22</sup> Walter Sawatsky noted that of 45 persons who attended the congress 21 were “Moscow representatives,” the next largest delegation being that of Ukraine—11 people.<sup>23</sup> The Baptists were also underrepresented—19 against 28 Evangelicals. Although Sawatsky argued that such representation reflected the actual proportion of Baptists and Evangelicals in the union,<sup>24</sup> Savinskii thought that the occupation of the top three positions in the VSEKhB by the Evangelicals (Chairman—Y.I. Zhidkov, Assistant to the Chairman—M.A. Orlov, and

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<sup>21</sup> Sawatsky, p. 84.

<sup>22</sup> Savinskii, p. 157.

<sup>23</sup> Sawatsky, p. 86.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.



Secretary—A.V. Karev) “secured their potential superiority in making decisions on most vital questions of the united brotherhood.”<sup>25</sup>

The government initially wished to see Orlov as the head of VSEKhB. Savinskii found a “curious document” in the VSEKhB archive. Written on September 25, 1944, by CARC, it was “addressed (literally) ‘To the Chairman of the All –Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists, M.A. Orlov.’” Besides calling Orlov “the Chairman,” the letter recommended “photographing certain moments of the meeting of leading figures of Evangelical Christians and Baptists, in accordance with the laid down plan.”<sup>26</sup> The reference to this “laid down plan” reinforces Sawatsky’s suspicion that “the preparations for the congress and the decisions...had obviously been taken by a smaller group earlier” and “have never been discussed openly.”<sup>27</sup> The congress simply approved the predetermined merger on the grounds that “the decisions on unity were based on the commandments and prayers of the Lord Jesus Christ,” or because the unity “had been agreed upon at earlier congresses” (although no final decisions on unity were passed at the much more representative congresses of the 1920s). “These arguments,” remarked Sawatsky, “...were needed to offset the fundamental weakness of the congress, namely, that the participants were not elected representatives of congregations or regional unions. This violated the fundamental congregational principle of both unions, although it was in keeping with the new state policy toward religion which favored negotiations with a

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<sup>25</sup> Savinskii, p. 160.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 158.

<sup>27</sup> Sawatsky, p. 85.

centralized leadership.”<sup>28</sup> Although the top VSEKhB leadership figures confirmed by the congress were fairly known individuals (Zhidkov and Karev occupied positions in the VSEKh while Patkovskii—in the former Baptist Union) and provided a tenuous link to the earlier Evangelical and Baptist central organizations (a claim to legitimate succession), it was quite apparent that “the Soviet prison-death system...swallowed up” the majority of prominent brothers—a circumstance that could not but place a pall on the congress’ proceedings and make believers ask the same questions that Walter Sawatsky posed: “Were the participants free agents, or were they forced to consent to policies dictated by the state? Was it possible that these earlier heroes including all the new council members had been broken by their prison experience? Were Orlov and Andreev to be trusted? This watchful distrust of the leaders by the rank and file remains and still plagues the leadership of today.”<sup>29</sup>

The structure and prerogatives of the new Council, reflected in the VSEKhB Regulatory Code or Statutes adopted by the congress, presented even greater problems. The VSEKhB acquired the status of a governing organ of the Union, whereas in the practice of 1910s-1920s both the Evangelical and Baptist central leaderships fulfilled the functions of *executive*, not governing, organs during the periods between congresses. The congress constituted the only authoritative body to solve the questions of the brotherhood. The Statutes contained no provisions for the convocation of congresses of parish churches, whereas in the past only a congress represented the highest organ of the

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 85-86.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

Union. A congress made decisions and submitted them to the Council and its Presidium for execution. Furthermore, the VSEKhB adopted the system of Senior Presbyters, or plenipotentiaries who would enforce the VSEKhB Regulation/Statutes and instructions in the provinces. In the past, the brotherhood temporarily employed this system during periods of disorganization. This time, however, the status, functions and ministry of a Senior Presbyter looked different. The Senior Presbyters were referred to as “shepherds and teachers,” “leaders of Christianity...to whom a double honor is due,” “God’s messengers,” and “the commanding men among brothers.” The Senior Presbyters were guided by the VSEKhB Statutes and instructions, and answerable to the Council, not the congress. Such an arrangement resembled the Episcopal system of the second century, with presbyters being treated as both “the commanding men among brothers” and “representatives of God.” This centralized system of leadership/governorship “violated one of the most important principles of faith for the Evangelical Christians—Baptists—the exclusive right of the parish churches to solve the problems of their internal life autonomously, without depending on directives from above, from Senior Presbyters or the VSEKhB.”<sup>30</sup>

Despite certain gaps in research, it is quite evident that the government meddled in the formation of VSEKhB. Neither the “government’s confidant,” Orlov, nor Andreev had the authority to release prisoners or bring people back from exile, but they could vouch that the individuals they wished to see at the top ranks of the new Council would comply with the state agenda. The government was concerned with the VSEKhB only in

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<sup>30</sup> Savinskii, p. 160-162, 180.

as far as it helped to streamline the application of the Soviet policy on religion in the diverse Evangelical and Baptist communities throughout the country, police the reluctantly integrating Pentecostal communities, and camouflage the state demands and impositions as its own religiously sanctioned and independently taken measures. Stamping out the last or potential vestiges of Protestant democracy and turning the VSEKhB into a hierarchy of plenipotentiaries who would discourage discussion and impose strict subordination to decisions emanating from the center were certainly objectives that the state pursued vigorously. Reporting to the head of the Department of Propaganda and Agitation in 1947, the Chairman of CARC in Moscow, Polianskii, wrote:

The cults' governing centers exercise serious and almost always decisive influence on the activity and orientation of cults. The higher is the center's prestige and the better its organization, the fewer are the complications we encounter and the easier it is for us to regulate processes occurring within religious organizations. Therefore, the Council's connections with religious centers and the influence the Council exerts upon these centers have the first-rate importance...In the process of its work, the Council...took measures towards localization of religious movements within the boundaries of communities...and neutralization of these communities' tendencies to have influence on the social life of Soviet people. The solution of this problem was primarily achieved by way of applying appropriate pressure on religious centers and their hierarchies.<sup>31</sup>

The now available archival documents reveal that despite certain resistance and non-compliance on the part of some spiritual leaders, the government never let up the pressure and ultimately inured the VSEKhB to become a conduit of its policy. In his 1947 Informative Report, Vil'khovyi wrote:

Until 1944, the organizational structure of the church [EKhB] was more 'democratic.' In contrast to the former, the present structure of the sect brings to the forefront the cadre of presbyters as the main leaders of not only spiritual but

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<sup>31</sup> *Vlast' i tserkov' v Vostochnoi Evrope*, vol. 1, p. 520-522.

the entire life of communities, approximating in this instance the hierarchy of the Russian Orthodox Church. As of June 1, 1947, the entire EKhB church [in Ukraine] comprised 1,183 presbyters, 25 Senior Presbyters, 9 assistants to Senior Presbyters, 1 Upolnomochennyi of VSEKhB for Ukrainian SSR, and 3 of his assistants. The present structure completely liquidates the sect's vague 'democratism' in questions of leadership, transferring into the hands of Upolnomochennyi of VSEKhB, oblast presbyters and presbyters of communities the entire scope of authority concerning all aspects of life and activity of communities, which makes it easier for the Upolnomochennyi of CARC to select the appropriate presbyterian cadre and regulate their activity.<sup>32</sup>

In this document, the head of CARC states in the most straightforward terms how the hierarchical system of leadership adopted at the 1944 unity congress benefitted the government: it allowed the CARC officials to manipulate the appointment of presbyters and control their activity without any consideration for the consent of the parish communities. In other words, this system effectively replaced legitimate elections with *appointeeism*. The established system did not always work smoothly and, from time to time, even the highest VSEKhB dignitaries attempted to find the way around the state restrictions. In 1946, Vil'khovyi wrote:

Aware of the difficulties of obtaining the government sanction for the conduct of any meetings, the EKhB leadership in Ukraine, in the person of Senior Presbyter Andreev, embarked on the path of gross violation of Soviet legislation and deception of Soviet organs of authority and conducted several oblast level counseling meetings of presbyterian cadre, having camouflaged them with an innocent rubric—'conversations'... At these meetings not only the questions of organizational and dogmatic but also of pronouncedly political nature were discussed. In Sumy, for example, the following questions were posed: 'Does the VSEKhB initiate appeals about the release of believing servants falsely accused in 1937? Our brothers-soldiers proved their loyalty to the motherland with their blood, but their fathers remain to this day in some unidentified incarceration. You know, they were sentenced not by honest citizens, but by enemies of the people...' This question was posed to Andreev by a presbyter of the Konotop church, Aleksei Danilovich Dubovik. The presbyter Dubovik expressed his

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<sup>32</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 4556, p. 118-119.

dissatisfaction with the believers who, supposedly, take an incorrect stance, making deals with the authorities. ‘The church,’ he said, ‘is separated from the state. Why then the lists of people and personal data are needed [for submission to authorities]?’

The Upolnomochennyi of VSEKhB, Andreev, charged the Senior Presbyter, Dmitriev, with the task of removing presbyter Dubrovik from ministry. The removal of such a presbyter as A.D. Dubrovik is certainly only a half-measure. A much deeper study of the character of such presbyters is needed here, and when there is an intensification of such moods—more effective measures are needed. We have instructed the Council’s Upolnomochennyi for Sumy oblast, com. Chalovskii, to switch from the survey-type study of the presbyterian cadre to a live, everyday study of presbyters’ activity and, in particular, that of presbyter Dubrovik.<sup>33</sup>

In the same report, Vil’khovyi mentioned another “meeting of the EKhB activists that took place in Kirovograd oblast without our knowledge or permission.” At this meeting, “the idea of creation of ‘an oblast EKhB church’ was discussed and a new Senior Presbyter, Nikolai Romanovich Levchenko, was elected.” The head of CARC found this meeting noteworthy because “it was a mirror reflection of the yearning of the EKhB sect to revive and affirm the practice that existed before the 1930s.” As it turned out, Andreev’s own assistant, D.I. Ponomarchuk, informed Vil’khovyi about these developments. Called in to Vil’khovyi’s office, Andreev denied giving any instructions concerning the election of a new presbyter and agreed with Vil’khovyi that “an unlawful democracy had taken place with respect to the appointment of a new candidacy to the post of Senior Presbyter.”<sup>34</sup> Andreev, subsequently, “ruled to cancel the election of Levchenko and ‘temporarily appointed Kuz’menko as an interim Senior Presbyter for

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<sup>33</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 4555, p. 374-375.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 378-379.

Kirovograd oblast.”<sup>35</sup> The CARC made every effort to erase whatever residual memory of the Protestant communal self-organization still remained, made sure that the VSEKhB did not delegate the selection of leadership cadre to representatives of communities, and swiftly weeded out the non-cooperative presbyters. Since the VSEKhB and its Senior Presbyters had greater access to communities, the CARC honed and trained this religious hierarchy to become the vehicle by which the Soviet antireligious policy could be inconspicuously delivered to communities of believers. The government could thus successfully police and refashion the EKhB communities from within without being directly implicated, or risking to lose its aura of legality.

In 1947, the EKhB community located at the center of the town of Sinel’nikovo, Dnepropetrovsk oblast, and near an important railroad hub attracted the attention of Vil’khovyi because “from time to time people from other communities come to this community to learn from its ‘experience.’” He further explained why this particular community was under his “special observation”: “When we prohibited here the arrangement of ‘night lodgings’ for transiting ‘passengers,’ they began arranging ‘dinners’ for visitors. We also forbade that, and now they are using their activists to improve ‘individual’ work with members of the community.”<sup>36</sup> Such “individual work,” surprisingly, consisted of checking that the sanitary conditions of believers’ and their neighbors’ apartments were acceptable. One believer, Pinchuk, working as a postman, easily conducted a survey of apartments and presented his findings to the community’s

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 380.

<sup>36</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 5069, p. 24.

Council which, in its turn, promised some community members to help with repairs of their apartments and urged other members to keep the air fresh in their homes. “It is very difficult for a Council’s Upolnomochennyi to bring such facts to light,” thought Vil’khovyi. “But in Dnepropetrovsk oblast, the EKhB Senior Presbyter, Mel’nikov, ‘frankly’ tells the Council’s Upolnomochennyi about such occurrences.” Stressing the importance of cooperation between the Senior Presbyters and Upolnomochennye, Vil’khovyi reasoned:

In places where ‘a certain contact has been established’ between the senior clergy and Upolnomochennye...with respect to suppressing violations, where the senior clergy ‘understands’ our ‘recommendations’ and tries to ‘wisely’ implement in life, it is easier for a Council’s Upolnomochennyi to conduct supervision, study and regulation of religious movement. There are very few Senior Presbyters like Mel’nikov among the clergy. At the last group meeting of the Council’s Upolnomochennye the latter gave positive evaluations to the following EKhB Senior Presbyters: Mel’nikov (Dnepropetrovsk obl.), Patkovskii (Kiev obl.), Lisovskii (Vinnitsa obl.), Isaichenko (Zaporozhie obl.), Lipovyi (Izmail obl.), Kuz’menko (Kirovograd obl.), Dmitriev (Sumy obl.), Tesliuk (Ternopol obl.), and Kalibabchuk (Kherson obl.)... We have secured the removal of some EKhB Senior Presbyters due to their hostile behavior (Kushak, Brichuk) while the MGB arrested several others (Voinov, Kharkov obl., and others). Since the situation in Rovno and Lvov oblasts is very complicated...we are raising the question before the spiritual center of the EKhB in Ukraine about the replacement of Senior Presbyter, Nechiporuk (Rovno obl.) and interim Senior Presbyter for Lvov oblast, Nagorny. If the Senior Presbyter for Zhitomir oblast, Linev, does not stop the work among the youth, we will raise the question about his removal also. We have also scheduled the removal from leadership positions in communities of certain presbyters from among ‘the young,’ whom the spiritual leadership promoted as a measure to rejuvenate the cadre of ‘elderly’ presbyters and thus reinforce religious communities.<sup>37</sup>

In 1948, in his “top secret” report to N.S. Khrushchev, Vil’khovyi returned to the aforementioned Linev and other non-compliant Senior Presbyters:

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 25-26.



In his practical activity, Linev permitted a whole array of violations of the Soviet legislation on cults. On his immediate directives, the prayer meetings of unregistered groups of believers were conducted in private apartments and preachers from the number of the more influential sectarian activists were systematically sent to communities. In order to stop Linev's illegal activity, the latter was taken by us off registration while the spiritual center removed him from serving the church as a presbyter... In a tactful, but categorical form, we pointed out to the Senior Presbyter of VSEKhB for Ukraine, Andreev, the necessity of taking more decisive measures towards bringing to order the behavior of Senior Presbyters in the business of unswerving fulfillment of the law on cults. On our advice, the Senior Presbyter for Kharkov oblast, Parchevskii, was summoned to the Senior Presbyter for Ukrainian SSR, Andreev, and together with the latter visited us. In a decisive form, we pointed out to him that his actions, grossly violating the law on cults, were impermissible. On our recommendation, an Assistant to the Senior Presbyter for Ukrainian SSR, Ponomarchuk, was sent on a mission to Nikolaev oblast to check the actions of Senior Presbyter Sukhanov. The reported facts of [Sukhanov's] violations were fully confirmed and, at the office of our Council's Upolnomochennyi, Sukhanov apologized before Ponomarchuk for his incorrect actions and promised that such things would not happen again.<sup>38</sup>

Applying such training/taming techniques and selection criteria, under which the potential trouble makers were demoted and conformists promoted, allowed the CARC to transform the EKhB spiritual center into a docile organization that would channel to religious communities under its jurisdiction some of the most unreasonable of government's demands crafted specifically to stunt the ability of religion to reproduce. The following excerpt from Vil'khovyi's "Note on the Condition of the Church of the Evangelical Christians-Baptists in Ukraine," dated June 1, 1947, is rather lengthy, but it is imperative to cite this document in its entirety because it lists the main points of the Soviet antireligious policy in the late 1940s and early 1950s and reveals the VSEKhB's direct involvement in the implementation of this policy. The VSEKhB leaders were fully aware that they had become major actors in the government master plan of gradual

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<sup>38</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 5667, p. 25-26.

reduction of religion, and that their collaborationism could potentially provoke opposition and split the Evangelical-Baptist brotherhood. “Since in a number of cases the forms and methods of religious activity of the EKhB have been overstepping the boundaries of Soviet legislation on cults,” wrote Vil’khovyi, “the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults at the Council of Ministers of USSR for Ukrainian SSR, acting through the Upolnomochennyi of VSEKhB for Ukraine and Senior Presbyters, has been and is taking the following measures to regulate the activity of the Evangelical Christians Baptists:

1. Measures have been taken towards the liquidation of all special work by the EKhB communities among women, youth, and children (special meetings, circles [*kruzhki*], festive events for the youth, concerts, matinal gatherings [*utrenniki*], New Year’s celebrations, free dinners, distribution of presents, participation of the underage youth in choirs and musical circles, etc., have been banned). In Zakarpatie and western oblasts of Ukrainian SSR, the peculiarity of local conditions is taken into account when the liquidation of these forms of the EKhB religious propaganda is carried out. Nevertheless, it is carried out sufficiently firmly and consistently.
2. The full-immersion baptism of those newly inducted into the sect is performed only in strictly designated places, distanced from populated areas, during early hours, and on days determined by a community upon the approval of the Upolnomochennyi for the Affairs of Religious Cults...
3. Only persons who have reached the age of 18 can become members of the sect (of those who have received the full-immersion baptism).
4. The formation of choirs and string orchestras is allowed only inside the walls of a given prayer house and from among members of a given community. The trips of choirs and orchestras to other communities are not permitted as well as participation in choirs and orchestras of children and underage youth.
5. A parish community presbyter serves only that community in which he is registered by the Upolnomochennyi of the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults. Travels to other communities with the purpose of delivering sermons are not permitted. The Senior Presbyters and the Upolnomochennyi of VSEKhB are allowed to tour the already registered communities in accordance with the routes approved by the Upolnomochennyi of CARC.
6. Sermons at prayer meetings are delivered only by a registered presbyter and, in exceptional cases, by a prepared believer on the assignment and under responsibility of a presbyter. With respect to this issue, the VSEKhB has already sent a circular letter to locations. This circular letter has a great significance in that it limits the number of speakers at prayer meetings.

7. The 'Harvest festivals' are permitted only within the confines of a community (inside the prayer house) and only for members of a given community, without inviting the outsiders.
8. All material aid to the needy members of community, coming from the sums of money collected by the church, is prohibited.
9. The oblast Upolnomochennye of CARC are given instructions to categorically suppress all missionary work on the part of ordinary community members (visiting believers of other confessions, the distribution of Bibles, hymns, etc.).
10. For the purpose of stabilization and gradual reduction of the number of EKhB communities:
  - a) The lease agreements for the rent of privately owned houses as places of prayer meetings must be signed for the period of no less than 3-5 years.
  - b) In oblasts with the large number of communities, small communities, being 3-8 kilometers away from each other, are merged into one large community. In this manner, a number of oblast Upolnomochennye reduced, through the oblast presbyters, 325 EKhB locations.
  - c) When considering the question about the opening of a new EKhB prayer house, the location of the nearest and already functioning prayer house is taken into account.
  - d) The oblast Upolnomochennye of CARC significantly elevated the sanitary-technical and fire code requirements with respect to the buildings in which the EKhB prayer houses are proposed to be opened.
11. Concerning the presbyterian cadre of VSEKxB, an approach is taken to gradually adapt them to a role of professional cult servants, exempt from employment in industries, institutions or kolkhozes, with communities picking up the tab for their maintenance.<sup>39</sup>

Introducing his program points, Vil'khovyi mentioned that the Chairman of VSEKxB, Zhidkov, in his article "Our Full-Immersion Baptism" published in the VSEKxB periodical *Brotherly Messenger*, Issue 5 for 1946, already addressed one program point—baptism control. Considering that Protestants in Russia/USSR always viewed baptism ceremonies as opportunities to make themselves known to the broader public and as a manifestation and celebration of one of the central tenets of their belief

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<sup>39</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 4556, p. 125-128.

systems, the awkward reasoning behind which Zhidkov tried to hide his subservience to CARC must have alerted some believers and prompted others to look for the truth between the lines.

It should be said that the outdoor baptism has many inconveniences, since in this instance it serves as a spectacle for the curious... Therefore, the VSEKhB has given direct instructions to our communities' leaders not to arrange large processions to the site of baptism. It has been pointed that the baptism must be performed early in the morning in the more secluded places...and people should be going there in small groups...The baptismal service, that is, the appropriate sermon, singing and prayers could be performed by the church inside the prayer house after the baptism.<sup>40</sup>

However, such concessions on the part of VSEKhB could not assuage the CARC's zeal to radically curb both the conspicuousness of baptismal ceremonies and the number of new converts, and in 1948 Vil'khovyi reiterated his demands in yet stiffer terms:

Only the persons of legal age (not younger than 19-25) are permitted to receive baptism. Moreover, such 'youth' is permitted to baptism in very 'small quantity.' Vagrant persons and those coming from other communities with the only purpose to receive baptism are not permitted to baptism. A baptized person must be a local resident, not a person temporarily living in the location.

Since some EKhB communities continue to violate the existing regulation and travel to sites of full-immersion baptism [rivers, lakes] in large processions, transforming baptism into a tribune of sectarian propaganda, we raised a question before the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults [central Moscow office] about giving appropriate recommendations to the EKhB spiritual center to perform baptism of persons being inducted into the sect inside the prayer house, erecting for this purpose the so-called 'baptisteries.' These 'baptisteries' already exist in the EKhB community in Moscow and in Zakarpatie.<sup>41</sup>

Addressing another one of the aforementioned program points, Vil'khovyi wrote: "At the recommendation of CARC, the EKhB spiritual center sent to its bishops (Senior Presbyters) in locations a circular letter expounding the 'church rules' in which it

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 126.

<sup>41</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 12, p. 73.

is stipulated that ‘only a registered presbyter and person picked out for such service are allowed to deliver homilies. In no community should persons arriving from other places and not listed as members of a given community be allowed to preach.’”<sup>42</sup> In effect, this measure firewalled communities from any uncensored utterances and exchange of ideas and news, since only the prescreened, carefully instructed, and politically correct persons could address a congregation of believers with a standardized and VSEKhB-approved message. By removing communities from participation in any decision-making concerning their own internal life, and by concentrating this power in the hands of a cast of “bishops,” as Vil’khovyi sarcastically called Senior Presbyters and the entire VSEKhB apparatus, the CARC spared itself the trouble of coping with hundreds of communities individually. Controlling the EKhB spiritual elite also allowed the government to eliminate the potentially dangerous discussion and diversity of opinion and enforce the more manageable uniformity. In this context, the VSEKhB’s hypertrophied emphasis on unity and its one-sided treatment of dissent as an intolerable dismemberment of the body of Christ become very suspicious. The precipitous path upon which the VSEKhB embarked (even if under pressure) would have serious consequences for the Evangelical-Baptist brotherhood in the near future.

Some time in late 1949-early 1950 (the document is undated), members of the Presidium of VSEKhB, Y.I. Zhidkov, M.I. Goliaev, M.A. Orlov, A.V. Karev, and I.G. Ivanov, composed a circular letter to all EKhB Senior Presbyters. This less known precursor of the notorious “VSEKhB Regulatory Code” and “Instructional Letter” of the

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 74.

1960 reflected almost verbatim most of Vil'khovyi's program points cited earlier.

Enigmatically titled "A Project," this letter accompanied the new certificates of authorization annually distributed by the VSEKhB to its Senior Presbyters in the republics and oblasts.

Along with sending to you your certificate for the new year of 1950, we give you our brotherly advice to pay attention to the following aspects of service as a Senior Presbyter:

1. Remember that your main task is to monitor the continuous and exact implementation in every community in your oblast of the Regulation of the Council of the Evangelical Christians-Baptists that we had sent out, and also of the instruction by the VSEKhB concerning the order according to which the work in our Evangelical-Baptist communities should be carried out.
2. Pay special attention that persons preaching in your oblast are exclusively the persons appointed to do such service. Persons arriving from other places, who are not listed as permanent members of a given community, must not be allowed to preach in any other community [except their own].
3. You should also pay special attention that in none of the communities of your oblast the reading of poems, performance of solo and other singing, except for collective congregation and choir singing, are practiced. We remind you one more time that only members of a community, excluding those attending educational institutions, should participate in choirs. You should monitor the observance of this instruction very closely.
4. In none of the communities the Harvest festivals may be followed by collective meals or congresses of guests from other communities. Pay special attention that this regulation is observed.
5. We recommend again that only those persons who have reached the legal age, that is, 18 years, and who are local residents may be admitted for baptism, and only after one year has passed since their conversion. Persons who come to your communities from other places with the sole purpose of receiving baptism must not have access to baptism. Our advice is that you reduce the number of baptized youth, that is, persons from 18 to 25 years of age, to a bare minimum, since the youth in general is not very stable spiritually. Youths who attend educational institutions must not be permitted to baptize at all.
6. If you have Pentecostals in your oblast, and if they are accounted as members of our communities, the attitude toward them of presbyters and community members should be such that it would bring them closer to our brotherhood and not reject them. In order to do this, you should avoid sermons ex cathedra that are directed against them, or sermons that may offend their sensibilities. As for those Pentecostals who carry out work in our communities that

undermines the unity, you should follow instructions given by us earlier, namely: if your attempts to persuade them fail, and if they do not correct their attitude, expel them from your communities... This letter is intended for you personally, not for circulation in your communities.<sup>43</sup>

The cracking down on “reading poems” in communities (that is, spontaneous uncensored Protestant folklore), indicated in paragraph three of “A Project,” also originated with the CARC. The same year (1950), Vil’khovyi included the following statement in his report after citing several examples of spontaneous Protestant poetry:

At the level of spiritual center in Ukraine, the Senior Presbyter of EKhB, Andreev was given these recommendations:

- a) to send a letter to the oblast Senior Presbyters about banning and requisitioning from circulation of all poems that did not have appropriate permission of spiritual center;
- b) to take measures toward requisitioning by the hands of presbyters of harmful ‘religious’ literature from the home libraries of believers, especially literature brought from the western oblasts, having left for believers’ use only Bibles, New Testaments, and collections of spiritual hymns...<sup>44</sup>

Despite the VSEKhB’s best efforts to comply with the government agenda, the local communities and presbyters continued to ignore instructions of their spiritual center and compelled Vil’khovyi to include the following angry statement in his report for the last quarter of 1950:

All Senior Presbyters and ordinary presbyters permit violations because they know very well that the spiritual center, essentially, would not punish them, would not demand, as it should have been done, the unswerving observance of its own ‘circular letters.’ A sectarian from the Evangelical Christians-Baptists essentially does not recognize hierarchical administration.

Six years passed since the establishment of spiritual center (VSEKhB), and it has not been able to make sectarians ‘respect itself.’ The observation and study of the internal life of the EKhB religious communities brought us to the conclusion that this ‘spiritual center’ only verbally ‘recommends’ not to conduct missionary

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<sup>43</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 84, p. 8.

<sup>44</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 783, p. 15.

work, but in fact, in a cloaked, but often in an open, form attempts by all means to strengthen religious communities, and in every way ‘protects’ them from dissolution...

With respect to what was stated above, the CARC at CM of USSR must, in our opinion, demand in a categorical form that the All-Union Council of the Evangelical Christians-Baptists exercised a more responsible leadership over its subordinates—Senior Presbyters of both republican and oblast levels. Herewith we want to underscore the thought: if the VSEKhB, as a spiritual center, so far presented its ‘demands’ in its ‘circular letters’ to Senior Presbyters in the form of ‘wishes,’ the time has come to express these ‘demands’ to Senior Presbyters in an adequate form, that is, in the form of orders for ‘unswerving execution.’

If the VSEKhB has no power to do so, or is unable to implement more effective measures, then the existence of this ‘superstructure’ is entirely unjustified. The VSEKhB must represent a strict system of hierarchy whose directions are not liable to a discussion in locations. The existing ‘superstructure,’ in its present form, is not only outdated, but it is utterly passive towards ‘our recommendations.’ Yet, it is very active (as any spiritual center) in the business of inflating religious fanaticism. It would be desirable to hold a special meeting of CARC at the CM of USSR on the question of expediency of further existence of the All-Union Council of the Evangelical Christians-Baptists.<sup>45</sup>

Vil’khovyi’s assessment of VSEKhB’s activity up to date showed not only his disappointment with the failure of this agency to perform as the religious agent of CARC, but also revealed the government rationale behind the establishment of this spiritual center. Drawing on familiar Marxist terminology, Vil’khovyi characterized the VSEKhB as a “superstructure”—an artificial entity standing in subordinate and derivative position to the “base”—the state and religious communities. It could be inferred from Vil’khovyi’s ratiocination that he viewed the relationship between the “base” and the “superstructure” as that of utility of the latter to the former. The government, however, was not concerned with the utility of VSEKhB to religious communities but only with its utility to the state. Since the EKhB spiritual center was an artificial creation of the state, the state could at any point disband it or replace it with another, more adequate,

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 73-74.



“superstructure.” The head of Ukrainian CARC, therefore, implied quite forcefully that the state, not the communities, ultimately legitimized the existence of VSEKhB.

The cited excerpt of Vil’khovyi’s report to the party bosses could also be viewed as a significant landmark in the history of VSEKhB, for a strikingly similar assessment of the Seventh Day Adventist spiritual center (VSASD), filed by Vil’khovyi’s successor, Polonnik, in 1959, served as a prelude for the actual dissolution of VSASD in 1960. The fact that VSEKhB came to the brink of extinction in 1950 and yet continued to function not only throughout the 1950 but the remainder of Soviet era meant that the EKhB leaders somehow managed to prove their utility to the state and took to heart Vil’khovyi’s “recommendations.” The next challenge to the authority of VSEKhB came in the early 1960s not from the state but from the rising internal opposition within the Evangelical-Baptist brotherhood. Instead of triggering another round of state accusations, however, the struggle against the internal religious opposition further cemented the VSEKhB’s relationship with the state, for there is no registered evidence suggesting that the Soviet government considered the dissolution of VSEKhB ever again.

In 1951, Vil’khovyi reported: “The spiritual center of the Evangelical Christians-Baptists endorsed our recommendations concerning the reduction of quantity of baptized youth under the age of 25, especially youths attending educational institutions.”<sup>46</sup> To demonstrate the success of this measure, Vil’khovyi quoted statistics showing that the number of baptized youths in the EKhB communities in 12 oblasts dropped from 531 in 1950 to 320 in 1951. He explicitly stated that “a certain portion of youths, prepared for

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<sup>46</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 1572, p. 76.

the full-immersion baptism, formally did not perform this ritual due to the restrictive measures on our part,” and illustrated just how such restrictive measures were applied by drawing an example from the report of his subordinate in Poltava oblast who wrote:

After a conversation with the Senior Presbyter and reminding him about the fulfillment by him and his subordinates of recommendations of their spiritual center, 8 youths did not undergo the full-immersion baptism. But this does not mean that these youths’ religious holdovers have vanished...From the experience of study of sectarian communities, we know that they are still believers and visit prayer meetings.<sup>47</sup>

Despite the qualitative deficiency of such reduction, preventing youths under the age of 25 from receiving baptism allowed CARC to significantly stunt the growth religious communities. The Council’s Upolnomochennyi for Stalinsk oblast, Gushchin, for example, reported in 1953 on the progress of this baptism-control system:

In 1950, ...150 EKHB youths under the age of 25 applied for baptism... Only 3 were permitted to baptize... In 1951, in the category under 25 years of age, 74 people applied for baptism... None of them received permission to baptize... In 1952, 216 people under the age of 25 applied for baptism. None was allowed to baptize. In 1953, 142 people in this category applied for baptism. None of them was allowed to baptize.<sup>48</sup>

Curbing the baptism of youths constituted only one aspect of a much broader campaign to reduce the number of baptisms in all age categories. A summary of statistics for such artificially induced reduction in Stalinsk oblast between the years 1949-1953, provided by Gushchin, shows the following figures:

1949—380 people applied for membership in religious communities through full-immersion baptism; 305 people were permitted to baptize.  
1950—584 people applied, but only 379 received baptism.  
1951—of the 387 applicants, only 143 were in fact baptized.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 77-78.

<sup>48</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 158, p. 26-27.

1952—475 people applied for baptism, but only 216 were allowed to baptize. 1953—642 people applied, but only 380 received baptism.<sup>49</sup>

Similar reports, showing a steady decline in baptisms in both the EKhB and SDA churches, were coming from other oblasts of Ukraine. A letter by the EKhB Senior Presbyter for Lvov oblast, Gritchenko, to Andreev, reveals that baptism during these years was turned into a rather cumbersome procedure requiring the approval of all candidate-members by a Senior Presbyter and the Upolnomochennyi of CARC, and when both the secular and religious agencies were involved in determining the outcome of one's application for baptism, conflicts could arise over the interpretation regulations, leaving an applicant in a precarious situation. Gritchenko wrote that while making a routine visit to the Upolnomochennyi, he informed the latter of the circular letter Number 845, sent out by the VSEKhB, allowing the oblast presbyters to make a determination what sort of people could be baptized or exceptions made. The Upolnomochennyi dismissed this letter as irrelevant and stated that "in Dragobych oblast" he "would not allow anyone under the age of 25 to be baptized. No exceptions could be permitted. This is decided by your center [VSEKhB], and no changes could be made." Gritchenko then described an incident he had encountered as a result of a rigmarole surrounding baptism:

As a consequence of this, brother Leontii Parfenov, 24 years of age, who wants to get married, has been denied baptism for two years. Our sister, a member of the church, would not marry him for as long as he is not baptized. Brother Parfenov finished his military service, returned from the army, and now cannot marry because he is denied baptism. He is truly converted and lives a Christian life. I need your advice as to what this brother should do. He asks for your

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

advice. Comrade Burik [Upolnomochennyi] does not give me permission to baptize the aforementioned brother.<sup>50</sup>

The VSEKhB leaders were quite aware that unlike other restrictions listed in Vil'khovyi's program points and reflected in the acting 1929 legislation on religious cults, the denial of the right to baptism to persons under the age of 25 was an extralegal imposition standing in clear contradiction to the legislation "On Religious Organizations," according to which "a religious organization is a local congregation of believing citizens who have reached the age of 18."<sup>51</sup> Having conceded to endorse this extralegal age criterion, the VSEKhB may have saved itself from dissolution but at a cost of planting a seed of discontent in communities and placing believers into a really awkward situation vis-à-vis their own deep-seated religious convictions.

The government also heavily involved the VSEKhB in collecting detailed information about religious communities and, especially, leaders of these communities, using the EKhB spiritual center as a convenient façade to palliate the impact of such illegal surveillance on the believers. When Vil'khovyi proposed in 1951 a particularly intrusive survey of the EKhB preaching cadre, his superior in Moscow, Polianskii, replied:

While not being in principle against conducting a survey [*anketirovanie*] of the preaching cadre in the course of 1951-1952 with the purpose of a thorough study of its socio-political profile, the Council thinks that it would be more expedient to carry out this measure through the immediate servants of the cult and, first of all, through the Upolnomochennui of VSEKhB for Ukrainian SSR [Andreev]. Such an approach to the solution of the first part of the question (filling out the questionnaire) would be, in the Council's opinion, more correct

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<sup>50</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 156, p. 57.

<sup>51</sup> *Zakonodatel'stvo o religioznykh kul'takh*, p. 10, 77.

tactically, for it would exclude all possible misinterpretations, rumors, and unnecessary alertness toward this measure, etc.

It is expected that asking Andreev's cooperation in this matter would not raise objections on his part. Besides, it would not be necessary to design a new form of a survey and the existing survey form for servants of the cult could be used. As you begin receiving from Andreev the filled-out surveys, you will have to, naturally, forward them to the addresses of appropriate Upolnomochennye of the Council. Having received such surveys, which, undoubtedly, would give a Council's Upolnomochennyi some orientation on this question, the Upolnomochennui would have to make for himself a plan of concrete measures, such as calling in the appropriate groups of Baptist communities' preachers and having tactically thought-through and sufficiently restrained general conversations with them. In the course of these conversations, an opportunity should not be missed to clarify objective data about each preacher. The Council recommends that Upolnomochennye converse with each preacher separately and avoid inviting large groups [of preachers] for this purpose.<sup>52</sup>

An attached form of a preacher's questionnaire contained the following questions:

1. Last name, first name, patronymic.
2. Since what year a person preaches ex cathedra in a prayer house (Was he ever a presbyter?)?
3. Date of birth.
4. A detailed list of former places of service, work and residence. Has a person ever been elected to a position of leadership in a religious community? Indicate a person's present status in the community.
5. Was a person ever on the German-occupied territory, and what was he/she doing?
6. Convictions [Has a person ever been convicted?]<sup>53</sup>

There is evidence, however, that some Senior Presbyters used much more detailed questionnaires as, for example, the Senior Presbyter of VSEKhB for Zaporozhie oblast,

M. Bova, who required the following data to be sent to him:

1. A general list of your community members as of 12-15-1946:  
--Full name, date of birth, year of baptism, education, social status, comments  
(Instructions: In the column "Comments," indicate whether a person is a member of the Church Council, Revisional Commission, a presbyter, a

<sup>52</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 109, p. 5-6.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

- deacon, an ordained preacher, a choir director, etc., and whether a person has government awards and what kind.)
2. A list of candidate-members as of 12-15-1946:  
--Full name, year of birth, education, social status, place of work and occupation, home address. When did a person become a candidate-member?
  3. A list of expelled members as of 12-15-1946:  
--Full name, year of birth, year of baptism, year of expulsion (1944, 1945, 1946), the cause of expulsion.  
(Instructions: In the column "The cause of expulsion," it is necessary to describe the type of behavior that caused expulsion. For example, if it is adultery, then it should be explained what sort of adultery.)
  4. A list of circles [*kruzhki*] as of 12-15-1946:  
--Name of a circle, the number of members, the age of a circle's members. What is being studied in a circle? Who leads a circle?  
(Instructions: a) In the column "Name of a circle," it should be indicated whether it is a youth or women's circle, a choir, a musical or other circle. b) Not only the number of a circle's members should be indicated but, in the case of a musical circle, also the number of musical instruments and what kind of instruments. c) In the column "Age of a circle's members," it should be indicated how many of a circle's members are below the age of 18, how many are of the age 18-25, how many are of the age 25-45, and how many are from 45 years of age and older.)
  5. A list of available literature in your community as of 12-15-1946:  
--Name of a literary work, year of publication, names of authors and publishers, and the number of copies  
P.S. [hand-written] All of you, to the last member, must participate in elections to the Supreme Council, and inform me about it afterwards.<sup>54</sup>

The format and objectives of this much more thorough questionnaire, apparently in use around 1946, are rather puzzling. Given the rigid system of subordination adopted by the VSEKhB, it is very unlikely that Bova composed this questionnaire on his own and distributed it to communities in his charge without the VSEKhB's approval. It is also quite evident, especially from the tone of Bova's post scriptum, that this was not a proposal of a questionnaire written by Bova and sent to the CARC or VSEKhB for consideration and approval, but a working version. The information requested in

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<sup>54</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 34, p. 59.

questions 4 and 5 of this survey is especially troubling, since providing affirmative answers to these questions would be self-incriminating for any religious community. Since there is no additional evidence on the origin of this particular survey, one may only assume that either the VSEKhB adopted this survey and used it during the late 1940s, or the Senior Presbyter Bova succumbed to the pressure exerted upon him by the Zaporozhie oblast Upolnomochennyi or the MGB and agreed to collect such information using the template given to him by these latter agencies. Even given such speculative allowances, Bova's survey remains striking, for it aimed to obtain in one broad sweep the information that the CARC attempted to acquire piecemeal over a number of years.

Even before Polianskii's clarification on the preference of the indirect means of acquiring information about religious communities and their leaders through the VSEKhB and its Senior Presbyters, the Ukrainian CARC began experimenting with more subtle means of conducting surveillance which allowed it to stay in the shadows of the highly offensive and illegal collection of private data on believers. In 1949, Vil'khovyi distributed to all Upolnomochennye a detailed description of the style of work practiced by the Council's Upolnomochennyi for Poltava oblast, Alekseev, as an example that should be emulated by the rest of the Council's employees in oblasts. The following passage from Alekseev's report contains in a nutshell his method of extracting information:

All data of interest to me I obtain by means of study, analysis and inspection of materials and documents found in files for each religious community since its registration. I obtain other additional information by visiting communities in locations, through visitors to my office—ordinary believers and servants of the cult, and from the data kept by the local Soviet and party organs. In some cases, I summon servants of the cult and believers to my office to clarify this or that

question concerning their community. Some data I collect from conversations with the Senior Presbyter (which I later verify using other sources). Some information comes from letters sent to the Senior Presbyter by communities. The Senior Presbyter turns in some of such letters to the Upolnomochennyi when circumstances require it.<sup>55</sup>

The reference to letters written by communities to their Senior Presbyter and turned over by the latter to the Upolnomochennyi is only a documented confirmation of what can be clearly seen by anyone inspecting the CARC's files. Hundreds of letters written confidentially by communities and individual believers to Senior Presbyters or the head of VSEKbB in Ukraine, Andreev, were forwarded by the latter to the Council's main office in Kiev. Relying on such confidential information, the Upolnomochennyi could stun the unsuspecting believers by asking very specific questions about the internal life of their communities, thus hinting to the believers that the government already knew the secret and that their persistence on keeping such a secret would serve no other purpose but compromise them as uncooperative in the eyes of the government. By lending the first thread of evidence to the Upolnomochennyi the Senior Presbyters often indirectly turned the wheel of the investigatory spinning machine...

It is naturally quite difficult to objectively ascertain on the basis of rather fragmentary evidence the nature of data collected by the Upolnomochennyi "from conversations with Senior Presbyters." The clergy's visits to the Upolnomochennyi were frequent. In his report for 1955, Vil'khovyi mentioned that his office alone was visited that year by "representatives of the EKbB spiritual center (citizens Andreev, Mitskevich and Ponomarchuk)—62 times" and "representatives of the SDA spiritual center

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<sup>55</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 61, p. 36.



(Kulyzhskii, Mel'nik, and Sil'man)—23 times.”<sup>56</sup> Although most such visits concerned routine issues, such as the registration of religious communities and construction or acquisition of buildings for prayer meetings, there is evidence to suggest that private conversations between the members of clergy and Upolnomochennye could include much more sensitive topics of communities' internal life or a discussion of other presbyters' personal qualities and orientations. One excerpt from Vil'khovyi's “Record of receptions of servants of religious cults and groups of believers” for 1955 contains an entry concerning the visit of Senior Presbyter of the EKhB for Kharkov oblast, P.A. Parchevskii. The latter was summoned to the CARC's office in Kiev on April 13<sup>th</sup> to explain the recent convocation of meetings of presbyters without the Council's permission. Having apologized for this infraction, Parchevskii, according to Vil'khovy, shared the following information:

Further in our conversation, Parchevskii informed us (but asked not to tell about it to the Senior Presbyter for Ukrainian SSR, Andreev) that Baptists in Kharkov are raising their heads, saying that they are, supposedly, oppressed in the Union [with the Evangelicals]; that they are ruled by the Evangelicals. Last year, when the Senior Presbyter, citizen Levindanto (Baptist), visited them along with the delegation of foreigners, the Kharkov Baptists surrounded him, asking: ‘How much longer are we going to tolerate the leadership of Evangelical Christians?’ Levindanto supposedly answered: ‘Wait a little longer, and I will restore everything we once used to have.’ ‘Baptists,’ [said Parchevskii], ‘desperately want leadership and access to administrative positions within communities. They want to see more Baptists delivering sermons than Evangelical Christians. It appears that Baptists (I, myself, am an Evangelical Christian) want to have their own union—a council for Baptists only. They say that they are above the Evangelicals, that they have the World Baptist Union... That is why it is not easy for me to work with them in Kharkov and in the oblast. In the town of Iziium, for example, the community is headed by presbyter, citizen Borshch. He is a Baptist to the marrow of his bones. He is hostilely disposed in general, and to us, Evangelicals Christians, in particular. Now it is already difficult to reeducate him

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<sup>56</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 4263, p. 65.

in our spirit. For the same reason, they [Baptists] are negatively disposed toward the Pentecostals. We only have few of the local Pentecostals, but more of them come as visitors from the western oblasts of Ukraine. I have already reeducated some of them and they joined us.’

We took this into consideration and the meeting was adjourned.<sup>57</sup>

This compromising evidence, deliberately shared by Parchevskii and showing the level of tension between the hastily merged denominations in the EKHB Union, was not only taken into consideration by Vil’khovyi but “submitted for information” to the head of CARC in Moscow (Polianskii), the Secretary of CC of CPU (A.I. Kirichenko), Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Ukrainian SSR (N.T. Kal’chenko), and Chairman of KGB at the Council of Ministers of Ukrainian SSR (V.F. Nikitchenko).

The problem of interdenominational tension that Parchevskii brought up in his conversation with Vil’khovyi certainly existed, although with respect to the Evangelical Christians and Baptists this tension was residual and less pronounced in comparison to the tension that existed between the Evangelical-Baptists and the Pentecostals. As indicated earlier, the government encouraged such multiple mergers between denominations whose teachings were more or less similar, but it did not do so indiscriminately and without determining the utility of this or that merger to objectives pursued by the state. The Mennonites, for example, were easily absorbed by the VSEKHB in 1963-1965, and their “unification with the Evangelical Christians-Baptists has never been a problem,”<sup>58</sup> whereas the incorporation into the union of “Pure” and “Free” Baptists “who were against any form of hierarchical organization and demanded

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>58</sup> Savinskii, p. 189-190.

that every member of the congregation should be equally commissioned by the laying on of hands” could potentially cause a “serious schism.”<sup>59</sup> In the late 1940s, the VSEKhB made attempts to bring into its fold the Hungarian Reformed Church (HRC henceforth) found almost exclusively in Zakarpatie oblast and numbering approximately 40,000 believers, according to the government statistics for 1949.<sup>60</sup> The CARC, however, vigorously opposed this initiative on grounds that deserve closer attention. In his 1947 report, Vil’khovyi wrote:

With the purpose of spreading reformism, fanatics—the active pastors of this church, S.I. Derke, Z.I. Shimon, and V.B. Gorkan—organized in 1936 the so-called ‘Club of Biblical Brothers’ in the town of Beregovo. Later, in 1939-1943, the club was given a new name—‘The Eastern Brothers’ (in accordance with the missionary work directed to the East). The club members assisted the fascists in every way in the business of transforming Ukrainian Zakarpatie into the ‘Province of Saint Stephen’s Fatherland’ (that is, annexation to Hungary). After the reunification of Zakarpatskaia Rus with the Soviet Ukraine, the club of ‘Eastern Brothers’ decided to adapt to the new situation... having renamed its nationalist organization ‘The Brotherly Concord.’ Under the cover of ‘fanaticism,’ this group of pastors hostilely disposed toward the Soviet authority approached the Upolnomochennyi of CARC with a letter addressed to comrade Stalin, in which they expounded the ‘soul’ of crazed petty bourgeois. In this letter, they impudently state: ‘We have received an order from God to warn you, lovingly but seriously, about the impending God’s retribution that will befall our entire state if its leader and people do not succumb to God and return to Him. Our state under your leadership rejected God before the entire world. Here are some examples to prove it:

--praying is forbidden in schools...and one must teach that there is no God  
 --Making fun of God is completely allowed, whereas the preaching of God’s Word is severely restricted. When the harvest is good, the following plaques are set up in the fields: ‘All this [is achieved] without God and prayer, only with superphosphate and tractor.’

The cited excerpt of this letter is sufficient to imagine how this group of pastors conducts its enemy work among the laity. We were very much alerted by the trip of the member of VSEKhB, Ivanov, to Zakarpatie, who, relying on this

<sup>59</sup> Michael Bourdeaux, *Religious Ferment in Russia: Protestant Opposition to Soviet Religious Policy* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1968), p. 10.

<sup>60</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 12, p. 75.

kind of fanatics, began carrying out without permission the work of merging the HRC with the Evangelical Christians-Baptists. The preparation for a merger gave 'fanatics' an opportunity to gather, 'wander around,' conduct meetings and congresses, and contrive at these 'meetings' yet another calumny against the Soviet authority and, then, under the cover of Bible, peddle it as 'god's order' to do so and not otherwise, that is, not how the Soviet authority teaches but how the 'holy scripture' requires. That is why we disbanded the club of 'Brotherly Concord' as organization having nothing in common with the performance of Reformats' religious cult. That is why we are against the 'friendship' of Evangelical Christians-Baptists with Reformers in Zakarpatie. The processes taking place in the internal life of the Reformed Church testify that this church must be kept under a 'domed glass lid' [*pod stekliannym kolpakom*], so-to-speak, and not hidden behind the façade of the Evangelical Christians-Baptists... The so-called 'awakened' reformers, who supposedly stand closer to the Evangelical Christians-Baptists, are incomparably more dangerous (in this sense) than the ordinary HRC believers who 'smoke,' 'drink vodka,' etc... All of this evidence combined testifies that the cooperation between the HRC and Evangelical Christians-Baptists must not be permitted under any circumstance.<sup>61</sup>

On the basis of this telling evidence it could be concluded that the government opposed the prospect of a merger between the VSEKhB and the HRC on the suspicion that the influx of a more radical HRC clergy, with its experience of free associations, would bring along the ferment of religious revivalism into the EKhB brotherhood. The CARC also took into account "the high saturation of Zakarpatie oblast with religious organizations."<sup>62</sup> Occupying the first place in Ukraine in terms of religiosity, Zakarpatie continuously exported religious activists to other parts of Ukraine and Soviet Union in general. Yet the government adopted an affirmative action type policy toward this province, due to its recent incorporation into the Soviet Union, and treated most religious denominations in this area with some difference (except for the Greek Catholics and Jehovah's Witnesses). Keeping the Zakarpatie contagion localized, under the 'domed

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<sup>61</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 5069, p. 33-35.

<sup>62</sup> TsDAGO, f. 1, Op. 24, D. 5205, p. 88.

glass lid,' as Vil'khovyi put it, seemed more expedient from the government point of view than deliberately importing it to the rest of the country by merging the Reformed Church with the VSEKhB. Trying to explain away this particularly religious bent of Zakarpatie, Vil'khovyi wrote:

Among the intelligentsia of Zakarpatie, especially Magyars, most of whom are Calvinists [another term for the HRC], there are people who have not yet given up the slavish admiration of the bourgeois culture, and who hold on to the old, long obsolete currents and views in science and philosophy. The hostile ideology of bourgeois nationalists drapes itself in robes of the Reformed Church, trying to draw religious communities on the path of reactionary activity. The nurturing roots of this reactionary activity are embedded in the still existing small commercial agriculture, and also in the power of traditions, customs; in religious fanaticism supported and fueled by the bourgeois world hostile to us.<sup>63</sup>

Transplanting this deep-seated traditional religiosity, so much a part of the HRC's ethno-cultural makeup, to the VSEKhB, which was founded in violation of the established Protestant tradition and with the implicit goal of being used by the government as an instrument of combating religious fanaticism and conspicuous expressions of religiosity, could not possibly further the state agenda.

## **2. The VSEKhB and the Pentecostals: A Failed Union**

When the government encouraged certain interdenominational mergers, it did so for the sole purpose of simplifying and streamlining its mechanism of control over a greater number of communities by subjecting them to the authority of a single spiritual center which it could then hold responsible for everything that transpired in communities. The control of a spiritual center and its reliability, therefore, served as preconditions for

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<sup>63</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 12, p. 76.

the existence of a broad interdenominational union. The government's distrust of HRC's leaders, for example, prevented, among other things, the incorporation of this Protestant denomination into the EKhB brotherhood. Why then did the government not oppose the merger between the EKhB and the Pentecostals (often referred to as Christians of the Evangelical Faith or KhEV)? First of all, the Pentecostals did not represent a merely Zakarpatie phenomenon and could not be isolated and monitored locally. Their communities made a remarkable comeback after the war and were widely spread throughout Ukraine and the entire Soviet Union. In 1945, according to the government calculations, in Ukraine alone there were "500 functioning KhEV communities with the combined number of believers reaching 25,000."<sup>64</sup> Monitoring the life of these numerous communities without the aid of spiritual center would be quite difficult, if not unfeasible, for the state. For the Pentecostals, the organization of their own spiritual center would mean legalization of their de facto existing communities. However, when representatives of KhEV, Ponomarchuk, Shokalo and Bidash approached CARC at CM of USSR and the Council of Ministers of Ukrainian SSR "with a declaration in which they stated their loyalty to the Soviet authority and their unquestionable recognition of military service with weapons in hands as mandatory for the sect's members and asked for the right of the sect of KhEV to exist legally and to convoke the all-Ukrainian congress of the sect for the election of its governing organ," they were told that their petition would be taken into consideration and the final answer given after familiarization with the sect's nature and

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<sup>64</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op.23, D. 4555, p. 347.

activity.”<sup>65</sup> This “familiarization” consisted of “gathering materials” through the Council’s Upolnomochennye in oblasts “about the sect’s behavior during German occupation and after the expulsion of Germans from Ukraine; figuring the number of functioning communities in Ukraine; and accounting for servants of the cult and facts of anti-Soviet expressions on the part representatives of the sect.”<sup>66</sup> It was determined that “during German occupation the sect’s leaders, on the account of some concessions, received permission from the headquarters of German occupation authorities for the sect’s legal existence,” and that “since the return of Soviet troops to Ukraine no facts of negative attitude of the sect’s believers and its leaders [to the Soviet authority] were registered, with rare exceptions.”<sup>67</sup>

Despite the pledge to honor the Soviet requirement to bear arms without which no negotiations concerning legalization of any religious denomination could take place—a pledge, it should be noted, given by a group of leaders without the consent of communities—the Pentecostal requests for legalization and convocation of an all-union congress were denied. D.I. Ponomarchuk wrote:

In 1945, at the request of the Dneprodzerzhinsk community and other brothers, I went to Moscow with a petition. Here, I did not get the approval of CARC for the establishment of our union, and I was given a clear answer that the Council of KhEV would not be registered. Then the question arose about the possibility of unification with the VSEKhB.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 347-348.

<sup>68</sup> Savinskii, p. 182.

In his account of the merger, Vil'khovyi altogether overlooked the fact that the Pentecostal request for the establishment of their own center was denied by the Moscow CARC and presented the merger as a consensual move on the part of the KhEV “bishops” to unite with the EKhB:

In the process of conversations with the KhEV episcopate, it was determined that there were no serious dogmatic disparities between the teachings of the KhEV and EKhB sects. On the basis of this, they were offered to consider the possibility of merging the functioning KhEV communities with the EKhB communities. The KhEV bishops did not object to the merger in principle, but insisted, however, that the unification was only of organizational nature, allowing the KhEV communities to observe their rituals of ‘feet washing’ and praying in ‘other tongues.’ In August of 1945, the leading activists of the KhEV sect, bishops Ponomarchuk and Bidash were invited to Moscow, to the plenum of VSEKhB for negotiations. In the course of negotiations, an agreement was concluded about the merger of KhEV and EKhB communities, on the condition that members of the KhEV sect would abstain from ‘praying in other tongues’ and the ritual of ‘feet washing.’<sup>69</sup>

The signing of the so-called “August Agreement” was fraught with some of the same problems that attended the establishment of VSEKhB in general, and first of all—the problem of legitimacy. “It should be said,” remarked Savinskii, “that the solution of such important problems as adjoining to the EKhB Union of Evangelical denominations of unlike creeds lies within the competency of a congress of representatives of parish churches, and not the Council of the Union (VSEKhB), because the consequences of mergers with other denominations are to be born by the parish churches.”<sup>70</sup>

Since under the terms of the August Agreement the Pentecostal “bishops” were incorporated into the hierarchy of VSEKhB to make the Council look representative, they

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<sup>69</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 4555, p. 348.

<sup>70</sup> Savinskii, p. 182-183.



became automatically responsible for all the violations of Protestant congregationalism that tainted that surrounded the Council's establishment. In a brief span of time, a small and non-representative group of Pentecostal leaders renounced the principle of Christian pacifism by promising the state that members of its communities would bear arms in the Soviet Army (something that should have been left to the discretion of an individual believer's conscience) and, furthermore, conceded to the EKhB conditions that stripped the Pentecostal rite of attributes that distinguished it from the other Evangelical currents. These concessions included not only the abandonment of "glossalalia" and "foot washing," but also of "baptism by the Spirit" and the tradition of prophets and prophesying. The insult was thus added to injury, and one could predict that legalization on such demanding conditions would not be welcome in many Pentecostal communities, especially if one took into consideration that these communities were not homogeneous and encompassed believers of the more moderate Schmidtian and the more radical Voronaev persuasions, as well as the so-called "shakers."<sup>71</sup>

Vil'khovyi was quick to notice the uneven and mostly negative reaction of many Pentecostal communities to the merger. In his 1947 report, he included samples of various KhEV communities' responses to the merger:

Chernigov oblast—Leaders of a number of 'KhEV' communities are suspicious of the decision to merge and categorically object to the abrogation of praying in 'other tongues' and the ritual of 'foot washing.'

Odessa oblast—Administration of Odessa 'KhEV' community...wrote a written statement to the Council's Upolnomochennyi, protesting against the

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<sup>71</sup> Both Sawatsky and Savinskii provide a more detailed discussion of major tenets of the Pentecostal creed and theological justification of specific Pentecostal practices (Sawatsky, p. 92-95; Savinskii, p. 182-186). For purposes of this chapter, I focus only on the untenable nature of the Evangelical-Baptist-Pentecostal union.

concluded agreement about the merger with the EKhB sect and asking for a permission to create an autonomous 'KhEV' council in Ukraine.

Voroshilovograd oblast—A representative of community in village Mikhailovka, citizen I.K. Khlipovka, stated in a conversation with the oblast Upolnomochennyi: 'The believers empowered me to announce to you that they do not recognize bishops Ponomarchuk and Bidash, who were present at a joint meeting, as representatives of the KhEV, since no one vested them with the authority to give consent to the abrogation of praying in other tongues and ritual of feet washing.

Lvov oblast—Presbyter Adamchuk hinders the unification, stating: 'It is not us who ought to join the VSEKhB, but they should join us. The name of our sect must be written on the common sign-board, or the word Baptists omitted and only the word Evangelicals left. Otherwise believers would not agree to the merger.

Izmail oblast—The majority of leaders of the KhEV communities consider the merger 'a veil' [cover up or façade] necessary for the acquisition of a legal status. Their attitude towards the merger is negative. In most communities, the manner of praying remained the same.<sup>72</sup>

Similar problems were registered by the Council's Upolnomochennyi for Kamenetsk-Podolsk oblast, Popov, who reported that presbyter of the Pentecostal community in village Staro-Konstantinov, V.I. Shur, first agreed to join the EKhB community and in January of 1946 appeared in Popov's office to register his community, but under the name of "Evangelical Faith." However, when the EKhB Senior Presbyter, Luk'ianchuk, who happened to be in Popov's office, corrected Shur and said that the community should be given the name of "Evangelical Christians-Baptists," the latter refused to register his community and announced: "I do not agree with such a merger; the community should bear its old name—Christians of the Evangelical Faith."<sup>73</sup>

For other Pentecostals the main obstacle on the path to unification with the EKhB was the issue of bearing arms. The same Popov reported that the head of the Pentecostal

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<sup>72</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 4555, p. 348-349.

<sup>73</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 14, p. 7.

community in village Butsnevo, Derazhnianskii region, Kravchuk, having examined the VSEKhB letter, stated:

Everything would have been well had the brothers from the union not made the decision in favor of bearing arms. I am against it. People who sit at the EKhB and Pentecostal center are completely irreligious. How can I agree with them and their decisions? I will first gather all Pentecostals from all the villages of the region, talk to them and see what they say. As for me personally, I repeat: I do not agree with bearing arms.<sup>74</sup>

The EKhB Senior Presbyter, Luk'ianchuk, Popov further reported, forbade Kravchuk to convoke any meetings of Pentecostals from adjacent villages,<sup>75</sup> for the simple reason that suppression of such expressions of communal democracy constituted one of the main tasks of the EKhB spiritual center. Neither conditions of the merger nor the legitimacy of VSEKhB were to be discussed locally.

Such unceremonious imposition of arbitrary decisions made by the EKhB spiritual center provoked discontent not only among the Pentecostals but within the core Evangelical-Baptist communities, creating conditions for a possible accord between the oppositionists on both sides of this ill-conceived merger. The leader of the EKhB community in Kamenetsk-Podolsk, I.A. Rostovskii, according to the same Upolnomochennyi Popov, inspired his fellow-believers against the Senior Presbyter Luk'ianchuk, saying:

Luk'ianchuk restricts communities, does not allow members to have any freedom or free visitation of other communities, and demands travel permits. We do not know who appointed him Senior Presbyter. The All-Union Council

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

wrongly decided that practicing members of the EKhB were obligated to bear arms. We must not do that. We must be given full freedom.<sup>76</sup>

Popov thought that the leaders of VSEKhB did not exercise enough influence on the EKhB and Pentecostal Senior Presbyters, for even Luk'ianchuk carried out the work of unifying the named community "weakly and slowly," having "some sort of fear that the Pentecostals, when they have entered the EKhB sect, would continue performing their religious rituals, such as foot washing, descent of the Holy Spirit, etc."<sup>77</sup>

When the more cooperative of the Pentecostal pro-merger leaders, Ponomarchuk, now a Senior Presbyter of VSEKhB for Stalinsk oblast, and his companion, Gaenko, visited the EKhB community in Makeevka in April of 1947 and "raised the question of uniting all children of God into a single powerful family,... a whole array of accusations," according to Ponomarchuk's report, "fell upon us, and not only upon us, but upon the entire Council and all our leading brothers." The VSEKhB was accused of "agreeing to unify the clean with the unclean." The local brothers thought that when Christ prayed to his Father about Christian unity, he meant only the Baptists and not the other currents. "They think," Ponomarchuk continued, "that we introduce a heretical teaching and pray that the Lord deliver them from the evil doers who bring to them such unity." Especially, Ponomarchuk was frustrated by brother Volkovskii "who receives a salary of 600 rubles per month" from the VSEKhB, but "causes disintegration...and works against us." He and some others, such as Vidoliaev and Semenov, with the encouragement of presbyter Nesterenko, armed the whole community against

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

Ponomarchuk and Gaenko. Volkovskii said that did not consider his brothers “all those who created such unity.” The VSEKhB emissaries were told “the Council [VSEKhB] assumed more power than the department of cults [CARC].”<sup>78</sup> Vil’khovyi also noted considerable apprehensiveness with which the EKhB approached the merger. In his 1947 report, he wrote: “In the course of practical implementation of the merger between the KhEV and EKhB, we detected a certain fear on the part of EKhB of ‘being swallowed up’ by the KhEV. Thence stems their [EKhB] unwillingness to work actively towards the fulfillment of the Moscow unification agreement.”<sup>79</sup>

Assessing the nature of the EKhB-KhEV union Walter Sawatsky wrote: “Neither side was eager for the union. Pentecostals had no other legal possibility. This explains why the August Agreement, which spelled out the terms of union, reads like a Baptist ultimatum. The full terms of the August Agreement were not published officially until twelve years later...”<sup>80</sup> In Savinskii’s evaluation, the manner in which the merger was implemented bore an inherent danger of destabilization and disorder for the existing EKhB communities. He pointed out that the KhEV groups and communities were accepted into the EKhB communities not on the personal basis, that is, each member individually, but in bulk. Such a hasty and formal induction led to the following problems:

Therefore, as it should have been expected, disorders began to emerge in mixed communities from the very beginning. Having not understood the terms of

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<sup>78</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 34, p. 88.

<sup>79</sup> TsDAGO, F.1, Op. 23, D. 4555, p. 351.

<sup>80</sup> Sawatsky, p. 93.

the August Agreement, the KhEV believers set about the work of attracting the EKhB believers, especially the newly converted, into their fold. The cases of mass fascination with ‘prophecies,’ ‘prophetic dreams,’ and ‘wonder-workings,’ with all the sad consequences, occurred frequently. Such instances were especially numerous among the Pentecostals of the Voronaev current (in Southern Ukraine).<sup>81</sup>

In this context, the stiff terms of the merger should be viewed not so much as a “Baptist ultimatum,” but as minimal safeguards installed by the EKhB out of their sheer instinct of self-preservation. It is perhaps more appropriate to see the merger itself as an ultimatum imposed by the Soviet state on both the EKhB and the Pentecostals. As soon as the KhEV had an opportunity to form their own union in 1989, “almost all of them,” according to Savinskii, “walked out from under the tutelage of the EKhB Union, for they could not do otherwise: their adjoining in 1945 was a forced one.”<sup>82</sup>

The Pentecostal opposition to the merger and their struggle for the establishment of their own center will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. In the context of this chapter the two driving questions that remain to be answered are: Why did the government deny the Pentecostals an opportunity to legalize under a spiritual center of their own and preferred to merge them with the EKhB at the risk of destabilizing the already problematic VSEKhB? What role was the VSEKhB to play in making this merger work? It could certainly be argued that the government decision to merge the Evangelical-Baptists and Pentecostals was predicated on the very nature of the Soviet system—on its perpetual tendency toward centralization, standardization and uniformity. By allowing the Pentecostals to form an all-union center of their own the state would ran

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<sup>81</sup> Savinskii, p. 184.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 188.

the risk of setting a precedent that could be exploited by other denominations that hitherto did not have such all-union organizations. The government, however, permitted the formation of such denominational centers only if their existence could be of utility to the state agenda, and only if it could easily control them. In 1950, when the VSEKhB was in dire straits and on the brink of dissolution, Vil'khovyi included this telling comment in his report:

The CARC acted correctly in that it did not allow the creation of a spiritual center for the Roman Catholic Church or the All-Union Rabbinate for the Judaic confession. Due to the absence of central spiritual administrations these cults are less active in comparison with sectarians who, regrettably, have their own 'spiritual governing center.'<sup>83</sup>

As the case of Hungarian Reformed Church illustrated, the Soviet government also took into consideration the character of a particular denomination and the degree of potential threat to the state agenda it represented. Upon the close study of Pentecostals, the government determined that although doctrinally this denomination's creed resembled that of the Evangelical-Baptists, the outer manifestations of Pentecostal religious practices were much more flamboyant and conspicuous, and that the general attitude of this Evangelical branch toward state duties varied from one current to another. This latter circumstance alone would make it quite difficult for the hypothetical KhEV spiritual center to impose a standardized government-approved regulatory code on the diverse Pentecostal communities and, moreover, could render the formation of a single-minded center, similar to the VSEKhB, impossible. While being aware of at least two currents within the KhEV denomination, Vil'khovyi often lumped them together under

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<sup>83</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 783, p. 74.

the name of “Pentecostals-Shakers,” as he did in his 1950 report, in which he described this “sect” as “pertaining to the category of mystical reactionary currents, allowing in its religious rituals far-fetched and physically exhausting forms of praying, such as falling into ecstasy and nervous shaking reaching the state of swooning and causing a psychic disorder of an organism.”<sup>84</sup> Since Vil’khovyi operated within the framework of Soviet axiomatic ideology, he did not feel the need to explain why religious mysticism was necessarily reactionary, or why an emotionally charged religious worship could not be viewed as a mere cathartic experience—something not nearly as damaging as mass alcoholism that gripped the Soviet Union during this era. Vil’khovyi’s subordinate in charge of Rovno oblast added a political spin to the characterization of Pentecostals. “Shakers,” he wrote, “are fanatics and perverts hostilely disposed toward the Soviet authority. They spread all kinds of provocative figments about the Soviet reality and ignore the law on mandatory military duty.”<sup>85</sup> Reiterating the same charges of political disloyalty, Vil’khovyi concluded: “On the basis of stated facts, the sect of Pentecostals (that is, Shakers), as reactionary and socially harmful, is banned by Soviet laws and is not registered by the CARC at CM of USSR and its Upolnomochennye in locations.”<sup>86</sup> The government’s decision not to register Pentecostals independently was predicated on two equally questionable premises:

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<sup>84</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 12, p. 18.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.



1. Generalizing from a rather limited number of instances of conscientious objection to violence (refusal to bear arms), the government assumed that the Pentecostals were a threat to the Soviet authority.

2. Culturally accustomed to the orderly, somber and reverential Orthodox liturgy, the Soviet experts on religion could neither understand nor embrace the diversity of religious expression, and misconstrued the spontaneous emotionalism of Pentecostal worship as a “perversion” and, hence, made it a convenient pretext for the denial of registration to this denomination. Moreover, the government viewed any flamboyant expression of religiosity as religious propaganda.

At the same time, the government knew that even if deemed illegal the numerous Pentecostals would continue to proliferate in the underground. Merged with the hierarchically structured VSEKhB, the Pentecostal communities would become more transparent to the government and exposed to the “normalizing” influence of the Evangelicals-Baptists. The government thus perceived the EKhB brotherhood as a sort of confessional melting pot in which the radical and exotic Pentecostals would gradually shed their exotic peculiarities under the reeducating influence of the more orderly and reserved Baptists. In 1950, Vil’khovyi remarked: “The EKhB spiritual center is conducting work, so to speak, among the former sect of Pentecostals, with the purpose of their ‘reeducation’ and induction into its ranks.”<sup>87</sup> The government thus envisioned the Pentecostals’ eventual disappearance by means of their complete assimilation into the EKhB brotherhood. Since this process could take some time, the job of VSEKhB would

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 57.

be to serve as a reeducation camp and a correction facility. By orchestrating this merger, the government, in some sense, converted the EKhB Union into a *Panopticon* in which the Pentecostals were constantly exposed to the inquisitive eyes of Evangelicals-Baptists who, out of sheer instinct of preserving the integrity of their own communities, closely monitored the newcomers for signs of relapsing into forbidden practices and reported such detected infractions to Senior Presbyters and, hence, the government. The government also expected that the Pentecostal “bishops” incorporated into the VSEKhB hierarchy would act as enforcers of the August Agreement in communities and applied the same template of promotion and demotion to them as it did earlier to the EKhB leadership. Vil’khovyi provided a vivid example of such selection in his 1947 report:

Participant of the VSEKhB plenum, bishop Bidash, who signed the agreement concerning the sects’ merger, tried to present the merger in his letters to religious communities as something that had to be done—a measure of purely organizational character—thus leaving out the main conditions of the merger. Due to this, we demanded from the spiritual center the removal of bishop Bidash, and he was removed. At the same time, we advised the Upolnomochennyi of the EKhB sect in Ukraine, Senior Presbyter Andreev, to invite Ponomarchuk for permanent residency in Kiev, having offered the latter the post of his [Andreev’s] assistant. Ponomarchuk accepted Andreev’s offer of appointment to the post of an assistant to the Upolnomochennyi of the EKhB sect with great pleasure and decisively switched to the position of unconditional observance of all articles of the merger agreement. With his active help and cooperation, the KhEV communities that functioned in Dnepropetrovsk oblast dissolved themselves and merged with the EKhB communities.<sup>88</sup>

The evidence suggests that on occasions the CARC may have used such promotions as clever psychological ploys to cure some Pentecostal leaders of their reluctance to comply. The Council’s Upolnomochennyi for Dnepropetrovsk oblast,

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<sup>88</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 4555, p. 351.

Pavlov, proposed in his 1947 report to Vil'khovyi that those former KhEV elders who “have grudges” should be promoted to positions of leadership as communities become more stable.” He then remarked somewhat cynically: “This appeals to their sectarian ambition, makes them responsible for communities’ conduct, and deprives them of the aura of firm ‘fighters for convictions’: they relax and gradually submerge into a common swamp.”<sup>89</sup>

In 1947, the CARC calculated that “of the 650 KhEV communities that were accounted for, there were 81 communities left to be merged.”<sup>90</sup> This meant that 545 Pentecostal communities had already merged. Elsewhere, Vil'khovyi indicated: “As of January 1, 1947, 441 [KhEV] communities, with the total number of believers reaching 20,419, had completely merged with the EKHB.”<sup>91</sup> Optimistically assuming that this initial success could be sustained, Vil'khovyi reported to his party bosses: “We consider the unification of Pentecostals with the EKHB completed. In the future, if some Pentecostal group raises the question about merging—it may join on an individual basis.”<sup>92</sup> Full of faith in the ultimate success of its ingenious scheme, the CARC adopted a hard line stance towards the still undecided or reluctant Pentecostal communities. The mop up operation, proposed by Vil'khovyi, contained the following stiff points:

--to implement more decisive measures towards the unyielding ‘Pentecostals,’ terminating all talks with them concerning the necessity of a merger

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<sup>89</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 30, p. 17.

<sup>90</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 4555, p. 351.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 349.

<sup>92</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 5069, p. 27.

- to demand from leaders of Pentecostal communities the cessation of all activities
- to take measures through organs of the Department of Finances to levy taxes on the unlawfully functioning communities
- to turn down all Pentecostal petitions concerning the opening of prayer houses
- the EKhB spiritual center was advised to continue the work of drawing Pentecostals into its own communities
- in conjunction with the unfolding collectivization campaign in western oblasts of Ukrainian SSR and the anti-kolkhoz agitation on the part of KhEV 'prophets' and 'prophetesses,' Andreev was advised to send active EKhB workers on a mission to some oblasts to conduct the appropriate work concerning the liquidation of antisocial moods in affected communities<sup>93</sup>

By 1949, however, the tone of Vil'khovyi's reports began to change. He could now account for only 366 merged KhEV communities numbering 18, 078 believers. 151 communities, or 4,886 believers, refused to merge.<sup>94</sup> Explaining this noticeable regress, he wrote:

Undoubtedly, the 'calmer' elements acquiesced to the merger. It is still possible that a certain part from the group of non-merged Pentecostals will eventually abandon the pervert doctrines and join the more 'tranquil' religious communities. But within the remaining group of this pervert sect of Pentecostals-Shakers—a grouping that is very hostile to the Soviet authority is being crystallized more and more vividly.<sup>95</sup>

In fact, Vil'khovyi could no longer provide any accurate figures concerning the illegally functioning Pentecostal communities, since, as he chose to put it, "the believers of this sect are reserved, observe conspiracy, do not talk, and conceal information about their groups and, especially, their leaders."<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 4555, p. 352.

<sup>94</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 12, p. 57.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

In 1950, according to the data Vil'khovyi obtained from the VSEKhB, the number of non-merged KhEV communities rose to 305 while the number of believers in these communities reached 8,527.<sup>97</sup> The voluminous Case 83, deposited in the archive of the Upolnomochennyi of CARC for Ukraine and reflecting the rate of closures of prayer houses during the year 1950, contains numerous protocols revealing that the Pentecostals were exiting the EKhB brotherhood en masse. The majority of the protocols indicating this Pentecostal exodus read as follows:

--Protocol 5, February 21-22, 1950: Approval of the decision of Vinnitsa Oblispolkom to close the prayer house of the EKhB community in village Gryzhentsy, Tyvrovskii region, due to the dissolution of this community as a EKhB community and its believers' going over to the sect of Pentecostals, and also due to the anti-Soviet agitation against service in the Soviet Army with weapons in hands.

--Protocol 7, May 30, 1950: Approval of the decision of Dnepropetrovsk Oblispolkom to close the EKhB prayer house in village Tsyganovka, Sinel'nikovskii region, due to the 'self-liquidation' of the community'—'majority of its members joining the Pentecostals.'

--Protocol 6, April 28, 1950: Approval of the Zhitomir Oblispolkom's decision to terminate the registration of the EKhB community in village Malin, Malinskii region, due to the community members' going over to the Pentecostals.

--Protocol 14, September 29, 1950: Approval of the Zakarpatie Oblispolkom's decision to close the EKhB prayer house in village Kushnitsa, Irshavskii district, due to the community's going over to the Pentecostals.<sup>98</sup>

Similar protocols were filed by Oblispolkoms of other oblasts (Kiev, Nikolaev, etc.). The Pentecostal exodus seemed especially conspicuous in Rovno oblast. The Rovno Pentecostals not only established a numerous underground in their own oblast but

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<sup>97</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 783, p. 97.

<sup>98</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 83, p. 7, 23, 30, 49.

exported their movement, “under the guise of migrants, to Kherson, Zaporozhie, and other oblasts.”<sup>99</sup>

In his 1952 report, Vil’khovyi felt it “necessary to focus attention on the unceasing activity of pervert anti-Soviet groups of Pentecostal believers” who “have completely slid into the so-called religious underground.”<sup>100</sup> The Council’s Upolnomochennyi in Kirovograd oblasts reported that “in order to hide the traces of their illegal activity from local organs of authority, Pentecostals-Shakers go deep into the underground, conducting their prayer services...at night, often changing their meeting places and dividing themselves into small groups.”<sup>101</sup> The Upolnomochennyi for Stalinsk oblast noted that the Pentecostal group near the mining town of Gorlovka “holds its prayer meetings in various places, observing strict conspiracy.”<sup>102</sup> According to the information provided by the EKHB Senior Presbyter for Kiev oblast, A.I. Mitskevich, the leader of a Pentecostal group in village Berezianka, Cherkasskii region, Kiev oblast, I.P. Shtompel, declared: “It is better to go underground than join the registered Baptist community in village Moshny.”<sup>103</sup>

Having no effective means of infiltrating these highly conspiratorial and mobile communities of Pentecostals, the CARC came to rely increasingly on information provided by the EKHB Senior Presbyters who, in their turn, received it from the parish

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<sup>99</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 783, p. 13.

<sup>100</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 1572, p. 205.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 206.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

presbyters and ordinary EKHB believers. Since the Pentecostals did not isolate themselves entirely from local registered EKHB communities and often visited these communities, even if for the purpose of proselytizing only, the EKHB believers had a much better idea of the Pentecostals' whereabouts, their activists, and their attitude toward the VSEKHB and the merger. The Senior Presbyters collected such information during their regular tours of communities in their charge and dutifully incorporated it in their extensive reports to CARC. These reports usually included the following data: locations of unregistered KhEV community (villages, regions), the number of members, full names and addresses of these communities' leaders and activists, their approximate age and characteristics of their activities.<sup>104</sup> One of such reports, for 1951, included the following depiction of Pentecostals:

The majority of Pentecostal communities and groups that did not join the VSEKHB, while unregistered, continue to conduct their prayer meetings featuring all of their [Pentecostal] peculiarities (speaking in tongues, 'prophecies,' and feet-washing). Agitating against unity with the VSEKHB, they, in a way, cast a shadow on our brotherhood, saying that Baptists are forcing registration upon them, while the authorities give them full opportunity to gather for prayer freely and without obstruction.<sup>105</sup>

According to the EKHB Senior Presbyter for Dnepropetrovsk oblast, Mel'nikov, the Pentecostals in village Sinelnikovo "consider the VSEKHB members utterly untransformed and given to carnal things" and, hence, "the Devil's children."<sup>106</sup> The Senior Presbyter for Kiev oblast, A.I. Mitskevich, reported about the "secret meetings" arranged by Pentecostals and provided names of people whose houses and apartments

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<sup>104</sup> TsDAVO, F. 1, Op. 2, D. 102, p. 1-49.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 5-6.

were used for such secret meetings. Mitskevich's motivation for providing such information could in part be explained by his worries about the impact of proselytizing Pentecostals on communities under his jurisdiction. In Mitskevich's opinion, when Pentecostals visit the EKhB prayer houses, they do it not because of their genuine desire to join the registered communities, but "only to make a false impression [*dlia otvoda glaz*], or with the purpose of snatching someone into their fold." On December 13, 1951, for example, Mitskevich received a message "that in village Krivets, Bukskii region, some unknown visitors passing through, supposedly, converted the entire EKhB community to the Pentecostal rite with their prophecies and speaking in tongues."<sup>107</sup>

The consequences of this ill-fated merger gave rise to conditions in which members of the EKhB upper clergy, perhaps against their better judgment and out of sheer concerns of pastoral care for their own communities, were becoming government informants. The Senior Presbyter for Dnepropetrovsk oblast, Mel'nikov, for example, supplied CARC with the following information on Pentecostal activists:

--Nosenko, Maria Ignatievna, born in 1928, lives in Dnepropetrovsk, 64 Krasnopovstancheskaia Street. She is a prophetess and an interpreter of tongues; conducts work among youth, preaching 'baptism by the Spirit.'

--Bondar', Evgenii Ivanovich, approximately 25 years old, lives in a dormitory at the Petrovskii factory, building Number 84. He arrived from Western Ukraine and is a fierce opponent of unity. He is very active in involving youth in the Pentecostal rite. He visits villages and workers' settlements near Dnepropetrovsk, corrupting certain believers.

--Pishchikova, Nina Fedorovna, born in 1929, lives in Dnepropetrovsk on the 1<sup>st</sup> Simferopol'skaia Lane, 17/7. Together with her sister, Nadezhda, born in 1928, she works on promoting 'baptism by the Spirit.' Pishchikova, Nosenko, Bondar', and Maksimov constitute a group of young Pentecostal activists.

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 11-13.



--Eremchuk, Mefodii, 52 years old, lives in Sinel'nikovo, a preacher. He often travels to Western Ukraine (went there twice this year). He does not work anywhere and is involved in various trade operations. [He is] a friend of Chernobrivets. [He] carries out the work of dissolution.<sup>108</sup>

One only has to compare this excerpt (the entire list of Pentecostal activists is much longer) from Mel'nikov's report (submitted to CARC) with Vil'khovyi's report to the party bosses to realize that the bulk of data the government had on the illegal Pentecostals was handed to it by the EKHB Senior Presbyters. The following excerpts from Vil'khovyi's report are verbatim reproductions of Mel'nikov's account:

In Dnepropetrovsk oblast, a large group of 'prophetesses' and several 'prophets' crawled out of the deep underground. Among them: Maria Nosenko (lives in Dnepropetrovsk, 64 Krasnopovstancheskaia Street), born in 1928. She conducts work among youth. She is assisted by Evgenii Bondar'. He is approximately 25 years old and arrived from western oblasts of Ukrainian SSR. He actively works to draw youth into the Pentecostal faith. He visits villages and workers' settlements near Dnepropetrovsk. He lives in a dormitory of Petrovskii factory, building Number 84, where he also conducts missionary work. His friend, Nikolai Maksimov, 25 years old, who also arrived from Western Ukraine (lives in a workers' settlement at Petrovskii factory, building Number 4), is gathering youth around himself. They attracted to their group Nina Fedorovna Pishchikova, born in 1929, and residing on 1<sup>st</sup> Simferopol'skaia Lane, 17/7. They also attracted her sister, Nadezhda Pishchikova, born in 1928. They all baptize youth 'by the Spirit.'

A sectarian underground communications specialist, Mefodii Eremchuk, deserves special attention. He lives in Sinel'nikovo. He is 52 years old. He is an active preacher, and is especially active when he travels to western oblasts. In 1950, he traveled there twice. Eremchuk does not work anywhere and is engaged in some sort of trade operations.<sup>109</sup>

As indicated earlier, in Chapter Two, Vil'khovyi dutifully sent copies of his Informative Reports to the KGB. In fact, just three months before mentioning Nosenko, Bondar', Pishchikova and others, Vil'khovyi wrote:

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>109</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 783, p. 100-101.

Presently, in the work concerning 'religious underground,' the Upolnomochennye are given directions to focus their attention on further detection of diverse groups of believers conducting illegal religious activity. Measures are taken to establish a strict system of accountability with respect to collection of information on residence, nationality, social status, gender and age of believers.

All materials collected by the Council's Upolnomochennye are being transferred to the organs of MGB, so that appropriate measures could be taken.<sup>110</sup>

The following evidence from Vil'khovyi's report for 1952 illustrates that such information sharing could easily cause a rather ominous development:

In village Rudniki, Kolkinskii region, during the days of religious celebration of Ester, an illegal meeting of Pentecostals was convoked in which representatives of Kiev and Kaluga participated. The organizers of this gathering were taken into custody by the organs [of authority] and prosecuted. 6 people were sentenced: 4 to 25 years of imprisonment each, and 2 to 10 years each.<sup>111</sup>

There is no evidence at my disposal to link these arrests to particular leads possibly originating in a report by the EKHB Senior Presbyter. However, it is quite clear that any information concerning the activity of religious underground, when made available to the government, could potentially result in the suffering and misery of a fellow-Christian, even if he/she belonged to a different denomination. It would be naïve to think that experienced representatives of their era, such as Mel'nikov, did not know that by supplying the CARC with information that exposed the illegal Pentecostals' whereabouts and activities, they were becoming, even if indirectly, a part of the Soviet punitive apparatus.

The Senior Presbyters' reports on the non-compliant KhEV also reinforced the government's negative perception of this sect as hostile to the Soviet authority and

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>111</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 1572, p. 247.

legislation on cults. The Senior Presbyter for Izmail oblast, Lipovoi, wrote that the Pentecostals portrayed the EKhB as “altogether not spiritual people, perished people who go hand in hand with the government—paper Christians, and so forth,”<sup>112</sup> while the Senior Presbyter for Rovno oblast, M. Nichiporuk, accused the Pentecostals M.A. Adamchuk and A. Prokaziuk, from villages Zaruddia and Prokazy, of “walking from home to home” and “arranging meetings at people’s homes like Jehovah’s Witnesses.”<sup>113</sup> The Senior Presbyter for Chernigov oblast, Savenko, submitted a list of Pentecostal activists accompanied by the following commentary:

They indoctrinate both their own members and also members of the EKhB communities that one must pray ardently, speak in tongues, prophesy, desire the gifts of healing and other gifts, and practice feet-washing. At the same time, they persuade people that the VSEKhB has merged with the government and carries out its directives, not the Lord’s directives. They [Pentecostals] interpret their dreams and await some kind of freedom under which they would freely speak and sing by the Spirit. The persons underlined by me are the most active in this respect.<sup>114</sup>

Perhaps the most telling of such reports was the one written by the Senior Presbyter for Stalinsk oblast, Rusanov. “The KhEV in Zhdanov,” Rusanov informed, “convene their meetings from 6 to 8 or 9 a.m., and each time at a different place.” One of the most influential persons among them, Maliuta, urges them not to agree with proposals of the VSEKhB representatives and say “no” to the unification with the EKhB. He [Maliuta] points out to his followers that they “stand higher, and that there is no need to

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<sup>112</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 102, p. 38.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 49.

return to a lower level.”<sup>115</sup> Rusanov then articulated the problem that plagued the merger efforts the most and clearly served as a motivation for many Senior Presbyters to inform on their Pentecostal rivals:

Most KhEV do not recognize any limitations and violate regulations that exist for all religious organizations. Their specific method of work with the EKhB consists of conversations in apartments, in indoctrinating people and granting them the Pentecostal special gifts. At the EKhB meetings, the KhEV almost everywhere hunt for the infirm, doubting and dissatisfied souls, influencing them and luring them into their fold... The KhEV freely and with impunity move from place to place and visit their illegal communities and members, ignoring all limitations and warnings. We, the EKhB, do not have the ability to protect our communities from the influence of KhEV, especially in those cases when the latter visit the EKhB members in their apartments or invite them to their homes. It appears that all KhEV groups act as if by a signal [simultaneously], as if they responded to a command to act... Each time when the EKhB accept into their midst one or two KhEV [believers], the result is such that half a year later the KhEV attract to their side 16 or more of our people. Such was the case in the community of Belaia Krynitsa, Tel'manovskii region, Stalinsk oblast... We, the EKhB, cannot permit such actions—allow the KhEV to take over the VSEKhB communities...

In the city of Slaviansk, the KhEV community was formed only 1 ½ year ago.

The presbyter of the EKhB community in Slaviansk, Panas, and his assistant, Grechka, became themselves captivated by the Pentecostal rite, broke away, and formed their own community of 40 people from among the former EKhB members. From the first day of its existence, the KhEV community of the city of Slaviansk openly and freely conducts its religious meetings in a rented house, without the registration and on the same days when the EKhB community holds its meetings. What is characteristic [of the KhEV] is that a lot of people arrive for their meetings from different towns and places—men and women, prophets and prophetesses—and participate in sermons and religious rituals. Similar occurrences continue also in a number of other KhEV communities, and always under the EKhB guise. Such actions of the KhEV cause trouble and cast suspicion on the VSEKhB communities. The KhEV in Stalinsk oblast are visited by people from other oblasts, which fills them with vibrancy and a sense of freedom of action.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 75, p. 16-19.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

The grievances expressed by Rusanov are understandable. However, they were not discussed in the narrow circle of concerned EKhB senior clergy or delivered in a form of a complaint to the Pentecostal leadership. Rusanov composed his report from the point of view of a state official, accentuating specific violations of state legislation routinely committed by the Pentecostals and implicitly challenging the state to take actions against the impudent non-conformists whom the VSEKhB was powerless to discipline on its own. By targeting the freedom of action that a purportedly illegal group of believers enjoyed, tempting and corrupting the law abiding EKhB communities under the strict tutelage of VSEKhB, Rusanov intended to provoke an appropriate reaction on the part of the state. If Pentecostal activism proved disruptive to the policy carried out by the VSEKhB, so was the VSEKhB's continuous interference in the affairs of those Pentecostal communities that strove to establish themselves independently. A letter written in 1946 by the Administration of the KhEV community in Odessa and addressed to the VSEKhB conveyed sentiments similar to those expressed in Rusanov's report:

We hereby inform you that since the day of initiation of your proposal about a merger, it was declined by us as unfeasible, because it is not grounded in Holy Scripture. In spite of this, your leadership and members of your communities come to our prayer meetings and behave disrespectfully, trying to coerce us into this union. This causes outrage among our members. The aforementioned disorderly conduct of your members disrupts the course of our sermons.

Therefore, we suggest that you take serious measures to put an end to such contemptible actions. Otherwise, we will take measures through the Upolnomochennyi for Religious Affairs at Sovnarkom.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 19, p. 7.

The Pentecostals of Odessa gave the VSEKhB a fair warning. Yet they were also prepared to engage state machinery, even if their intentions could only prove their naïveté than present a real threat.

In 1959, with the number of illegally functioning Pentecostal communities steadily on the rise, the government urgently looked for means to legalize them. The new head of CARC in Ukraine, Polonnik, wrote in his Informative Report: “It is necessary, at any cost, to bring Pentecostals from the underground over which we, the Upolnomochennye of CARC, have no possibility at all to exert influence.”<sup>118</sup> The VSEKhB also appeared to have exhausted its potential as a means of securing the merger, prompting Polonnik to write:

Attention should be paid to the passivity of VSEKhB and its representatives in locations who do not conduct any work towards diverting believers from the sect of KhEV. Even the former leaders of this sect, who now occupy positions of leadership in the EKhB communities, show no signs of struggle for the adjoining their former fellow believers—Pentecostals—to the EKhB communities. On the contrary, we have plenty of incidents of exodus of the earlier merged Pentecostals from the EKhB communities. The VSEKhB also does not counteract to this phenomenon.<sup>119</sup>

Yet the government was reluctant to register even those Pentecostal communities that expressed their desire to join the EKhB brotherhood, since in 1947 the CARC pronounced the merger completed and pledged henceforth not to register any Pentecostal communities. Polonnik, therefore, reasoned:

We could even agree to entire Pentecostal groups joining the existing EKhB communities, but to register them separately under the rubric of EKhB—we shall not. The experience shows that even those Pentecostals who joined the EKhB

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<sup>118</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5205, p. 71.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

communities often strive to perform their Pentecostal rituals which, as is known, harmfully impact the people's health and psyche. If the aforementioned... [Pentecostal] groups are legalized under the EKHB rubric, it cannot be ruled out that the pervert Pentecostal rituals will acquire even greater diffusion.<sup>120</sup>

In the beginning of 1963, according to the incomplete data presented by the new head of CARC, Litvin, there were 538 illegally functioning Pentecostal communities numbering 13,500 believers. The largest of the underground religious formations, the Pentecostals had "their representatives in all oblasts" of Ukraine.<sup>121</sup> Toward the end of 1963, Litvin already reported 625 unregistered Pentecostal groups numbering 15,650 believers.<sup>122</sup> He commented that "despite measures taken toward the suppression of the activity of groups not eligible for registration, the network of sectarian underground continues to grow," and thought that such a steep rise in the number of illegal groups of all denominations in 1963 "occurred on the account of those groups that functioned in previous years but were not detected and documented."<sup>123</sup> The real reason for the government's failure to eliminate the sectarian underground could have been attributed to the circumstance noted by Litvin himself: "Unfortunately, the People's Courts' sentencing of sectarian leaders does not always and everywhere paralyze the activity of religious organizations. The place of those sentenced is taken by others, and they continue their unlawful activity."<sup>124</sup> In 1947, Vil'khovyι claimed that of the 650

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>121</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5663, p. 107-108.

<sup>122</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5908, p. 88.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p. 90-91.

<sup>124</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5663, p. 109.

Pentecostal communities that the CARC could account for, 545 communities, or 20,419 believers, were successfully merged with the EKhB. In 1963, after 15 years of applying its techniques of normalization to this “pervert sect,” the government could pride itself on merging no more than 5,000 Pentecostals. In effect, the government policy triggered a reversed process that contributed to the swelling of religious underground, with 625 Pentecostal groups or 15,650 believers constituting its core. In 1963, the CARC also admitted that “the liquidation of sectarian underground, Pentecostals in particular, would require registration of larger communities of this sect that have already renounced the pervert doctrines, recognized and promised to observe the legislation on cults, and gave their consent to enter the religious organization of EKhB.”<sup>125</sup> Despite all the apparent qualifiers, this statement essentially amounted to the revision of the former policy of not registering Pentecostal communities separately, even under the rubric of EKhB. In order to get the permission to implement this new approach, the CARC had “to enter into negotiations with the Central Committee of CPU and the government of Ukrainian SSR.”<sup>126</sup>

The merger was ultimately a failure: it radicalized the Pentecostals and served as an excuse for the state to draw the VSEKhB still deeper into the framework of Soviet auto-totality that slowly eroded the EKhB leaders’ sense of right and wrong and often made them unwitting accomplices in incriminating other fellow-Christians. In the 1940s-1960s, the VSEKhB constituted a multi-denominational union that officially included a

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<sup>125</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5908, p. 92-93.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.



large number of defaced Pentecostals. Their mass exodus from the union in the 1950s was, in effect, the first and generally unrecognized schism that preceded the more notorious schism that developed within the Evangelical-Baptist branch of the union in the late 1950s-early 1960s. Aside from resistance to abandon certain distinguishing peculiarities of their rite, the Pentecostals also rebelled against the VSEKhB's illegitimacy, its hierarchically structured leadership, and its fusion with the state.

### **3. The Foreign Relations Role of the VSEKhB**

The discussion of VSEKhB—the largest of the two Protestant spiritual centers instituted after the war—would be incomplete without at least a brief review of its role as an auxiliary of the Soviet counterpropaganda machine responsible for manipulating the public opinion domestically and abroad on issues concerning religious freedom in the USSR. In the 1950s, and especially after the death of Stalin, when the Iron Curtain became more permeable, the government began to increasingly involve the VSEKhB in the disinformation campaign aiming to produce a positive impression on foreign tourists and visiting church representatives about the life of religious organizations in the USSR. According to the government statistics, in just one summer of 1956, the VSEKhB and the Moscow EKhB community were visited by 206 foreigners from 21 different countries. Most of them, 129, came from the United States.<sup>127</sup> Such an influx of curious foreign eyes and ears seeking information about the plight of believers in the country of state-sponsored atheism certainly put pressure on the government. In his report for 1956,

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<sup>127</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 237, p. 10.

Vil'khovyi wrote: "The experience has shown that almost all tourists seek to visit the prayer houses of all cults, but they are especially interested in those of Jewish communities (synagogues), Evangelical Christians-Baptists and Catholics where they look for an opportunity to deliver sermons."<sup>128</sup> But some of these communities were brewing with discontent and carried in their midst all sorts of unreliable people, including ex-prisoners for the faith recently released under the Khrushchev amnesty. The government, therefore, initiated a process of screening all religious communities with the purpose of determining which of them could be considered safe for visits by foreign guests. In the same report, Vil'khovyi remarked:

We have oriented the Council's Upolnomochennye in oblasts to collect data about the behavior of persons who have recently returned from places of imprisonment and, in cases of detection of their hostile activity, inform the oblast leadership and ask Oblispolkoms to transfer materials on such persons to Procuracy.

While studying the practical activity of religious organizations, we strive to determine first of all the socio-political identity of communities' leadership, members of 'dvadtsatka,' preachers, and the influence of religionists on the surrounding population. Along with this, we have ascertained whether or not a given religious community could be visited by tourists and religious delegations from abroad. Over the past two-three years, in cooperation with Obkoms of CPU, 5 to 10 religious communities in each oblast were selected as those that are being or could be visited by tourists.<sup>129</sup>

The VSEKhB leadership was assigned to play a crucial role in the government scheme of setting up a network of Potemkin villages along the potential routes of foreign delegations. In 1956-1957 (the date is unclear), in conjunction with the upcoming World

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<sup>128</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 4608, p. 63.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

Youth Festival to be hosted by USSR, the VSEKhB distributed the following circular letter to EKhB communities (via the Senior Presbyters):

1. Bring the prayer house into appropriate order, inside and outside.
2. Brief communities' leaderships on the order of service and choir singing during visits by [foreign] guests.
3. Presbyters and all servants of the church must look neat, shaven and wear a decent attire.
4. The presbyters' apartments must be clean and orderly. It is not unlikely that guests may want to visit them in order to see how the Soviet clergy lives.
5. Select in each community 5 to 10 families whose domestic lives could be shown to guests (the homes must be clean and comfortable, and representative of various social strata—workers, state office employees, and invalids).
6. It is necessary to select in every community a group of young people with secondary and higher education who, at the request of leadership, could visit with the representatives of the student youth festival, should the latter express their desire to meet with our youth.
7. Should they [foreign guests] inquire whether we have youth and women associations/circles, you must explain that we favor the old apostolic order when the church did not have such divisions or segregation.
8. Regarding the Sunday Schools for children, you should say that the believing parents themselves and in home conditions bring up their children in the spirit of Christianity and their own confession.
9. With regards to various entertainment/amusement activities [for religious youth]: the government and professional organizations tend to this sphere, satisfying the needs of youth and children quite sufficiently and in diverse ways.
10. Concerning charity: the state treats this question with exclusive attention (provides pensions). The believers may, of their own accord, provide this or that material help.<sup>130</sup>

As this document reveals, the VSEKhB leadership played an important role in the government campaign of masking the authentic life of religious communities. Having invested in preparatory work, the VSEKhB could offer foreigners a number of itineraries that would take them to showcase communities where groups of hand-picked and thoroughly instructed EKhB members would lead foreign guests to specially prepared

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<sup>130</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 237, p. 39.

showcase homes of Soviet believers and satisfy the foreigners' curiosity in conditions of religious life in the USSR with sets of prescriptive answers carefully crafted to conceal the government prohibition on religious instruction, charity and associational life behind the veil of purportedly indigenous conventions and preferences.

The government also tried to keep the Soviet Protestants at a safe distance from foreign guests who could potentially influence the local believers as did the Romanian Baptist, L.Z. Mudriak, who, while visiting his relatives in Chernovtsy oblast in 1956, arranged prayer meetings for local Orthodox and sectarian believers, "offered his exegesis of certain biblical predictions, gathered youth separately for the so-called sectarian 'evenings of love' at which psalms were sung with the accompaniment of string musical instruments, poems were declaimed, and so forth," resulting in the induction into the sect of EKhB of a group of local residents.<sup>131</sup> "In order to limit such activity of 'guests' from abroad," wrote Vil'khovyi, "we have oriented the Council's Upolnomochennye to demand from leadership of registered communities not to allow persons arriving from abroad to deliver sermons or engage in other forms of religious propaganda and also inform the local organs of authority about the unlawful gatherings of groups of believers in apartments."<sup>132</sup>

In 1959, the members of VSEKhB in Moscow, Karev and Mitskevich, informed the head of Evangelicals-Baptists in Ukraine, Andreev, of the arrival in Kiev of foreign tourists: a representative of the American Baptist Missionary Society in Europe, Edwin

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<sup>131</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 4608, p. 65.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p. 65-66.

Bell, the general secretary of the same society and a presbyter of a Baptist church, Dr. Willingheim, a US preacher, Frank Lowman, and the executive secretary of the Methodist Council for Peace at the UN, Charles Boss. Karev instructed Andreev: “Generally, we do not allow tourists to speak [in the EKHB prayer houses]. If they come to your prayer meetings and would want to deliver greetings [from their home churches], you deliver those on their behalf.”<sup>133</sup> There is a stenographic report of Andreev’s conversation with Charles Boss who visited the EKHB community in Kiev on a different occasion as a member of another group of foreigners. In this report, which was subsequently submitted to CARC,\* there is a reference to a request that Karev anticipated in his letter to Andreev:

Charles Boss: We would like to deliver our greetings to the believers. Also, there is a Baptist preacher from California among us, Mr. G. Emmanuel. Since he is a presbyter of a Baptist church, he would like to take part in your service, even though briefly—to read the Word of God and address the believers with a short greeting from the American Baptists, so that upon his return to the States he could tell about this happy occasion.

Andreev: In order not to disturb the orderliness of our prayer service, it would be better and in accordance with our tradition if I personally delivered your greetings to the believers, since the preachers who are to preach have already been appointed.

When the translator Mel’nik translated these words, Emmanuel began to decline [Boss’] idea that he should preach, telling Boss that it was not necessary. At the same time, the woman, E. Sprague, who was sitting next to Emmanuel, said to him quietly but loud enough for the translator to hear: ‘It feels like they are restricted and oppressed here, and this [allowing foreign guests to address the congregation] may be something that is forbidden.’<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 281, p. 6.

\* The government demanded from the EKHB leadership the timely submission of detailed reports about everything that transpired between the visiting foreigners and local believers.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23-25.

As the guests were leaving the prayer house, the perceptive Sprague asked Mel'nik whether Baptists in USSR had Sunday Schools for children. Mel'nik replied evasively: "Baptists in USSR have no need to have special Sunday Schools to educate children, since children receive general education in [public] schools, and not just children of believers, but children of all citizens. As for their spiritual knowledge, they get it from their parents at home."<sup>135</sup> A documented dialogue between Andreev's assistant, Mel'nikov, and a presbyter of a Baptist community in Berlin (GDR), Hans Gilger, that took place in 1959 in Kiev was even more revealing of how strictly the VSEKhB followed the government-imposed restriction on foreigners' participation in religious services of the EKHB communities in the USSR:

Gilger: We wish to deliver a short sermon for you and relate greetings from our community.

Mel'nikov: In our communities it is customary that sermons are delivered only by servants of a given community or persons who carry an assignment from the Senior Presbyter of this oblast, or delegations that visit the USSR on the approval of VSEKhB. The tourist guests do not have the right to deliver sermons. Greetings, of course, will be delivered at your request to the Kiev community.

However, as a citizen of East Germany, Gilger was all too familiar with the so-called "customs" and tried to bargain with Mel'nikov.

Gilger: We are familiar with your customs, but we also know that if you resolve this question at wherever it is you are supposed to go to, we may be permitted to say a homily. In Moscow, brother Mitskevich resolved such a question and we were allowed to speak, just as in Tbilisi—someone was approached, and we were allowed to preach. We hope you can do the same.

Mel'nikov: There is actually no one we can approach, since, I repeat, we have a custom that we uphold. Certainly, when some question arises, we have to run it by someone. But we are not going to talk about it now, since this is not essential.

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

Gilger: I understand you, and do not think that we are unaware of anything. We understand and know everything, and if it is not allowed and you have such a custom, we won't be doing anything, although we would very much like to say a short sermon for the Russian Baptists.<sup>136</sup>

By depriving foreigners of the right to speak to congregations directly the government precluded the possibility of any uncensored utterances or questions that could break up the formalistic monotony of a prescreened religious service, inform the Soviet believers of life outside the USSR, or provoke the church members to say something impermissible. On occasions, however, the VSEKhB could alter its discriminatory policy and make exceptions for certain foreigners. Such exceptions were predicated on whether or not the government deemed certain foreign guests pro-Soviet politically. In the same letter in which Karev advised Andreev to prevent American Baptists from addressing the congregation of their fellow-believers in Kiev, he wrote:

On June 26, a recipient of the Lenin Prize, a pastor of the Lutheran Church in Oslo, Ragnar Forbek, will arrive by plane from Leningrad. He is the guest of the Patriarchy of the Orthodox Church. It would be desirable if you, Aleksei Leonidovich, met him personally. Should he wish to visit your prayer service, he, as a guest, could be allowed to say a word of greeting. Contact the Patriarch of Ukraine and find out the exact time of his arrival. We also asked brother Mikhail Akimovich Orlov to telegraph to you the date and hour of his [Ragnar's] departure from Leningrad.<sup>137</sup>

It is quite evident that this Lutheran recipient of the Lenin Prize was treated with a lot more difference by the VSEKhB clergymen than representatives of their own denomination from the United States.

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., p. 33-34.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

While being consistently elusive in answering questions directly related to the life and activity of their church, the VSEKhB leaders were all too eager to discuss issues of political confrontation between the United States and Soviet Union. In 1959, a member of a delegation of American Quakers, Leslie, asked Andreev: “We are interested whether your church does any social work—charity, for example?” Andreev replied: “As believers, we are certainly obliged to help our brothers in the faith, but that is [everyone’s] personal business. In general, the aid for the needy is provided in our country through special organs, such as, social assistance [*sotsial’noe obespechenie*].” Andreev then changed the subject, and the following exchange transpired:

Andreev: It needs to be said that our government moves towards the reduction of international tension: it offers disarmament and cessation of nuclear testing. But there are no reciprocal steps yet on the part of America.

Leslie: One cannot say that, because the United States too wishes to ease the international tension, but without inspections by both sides such negotiations cannot bring the desired results, since one side cannot believe that the other side has reduced armaments or stopped testing nuclear weapons.

Andreev: What do you do in America to alleviate tensions?

Leslie: ...I want to note that many Americans have already visited the Soviet Union. In the past year, 5,000 people—delegations and tourists—visited your country. We think that it would be beneficial if there were more visits [to the US] on your part.

Andreev: I was in America and became convinced that many people there have the wrong impression that there are no believers at all in the Soviet Union. But, as you see, this is not true, and believers in our country hold their religious services without any obstruction. We wish that the American brothers had the right perception about us—believers in USSR... To tell you the truth, my visit to the United States together with the other guests made a very negative impression due to the way we were met there. Should have another opportunity arisen for me to visit your country (now, my age does not permit me), I would not have had a desire to experience the same hostility again. ... Why is it that the Americans, who have such good intentions, establish missile bases in countries around us? This is what we, simple people, cannot understand.

Leslie: It is difficult to explain for us, pacifists... While analyzing our actions, we say that we defend our homeland, whereas if someone else analyzes our actions, he may say that we are threatening the other side.



Andreev: It would be nice if upon your return to the United States you honestly, correctly, and in a brotherly way elucidated that our people show good will towards all people, and the American people in particular. This, of course, refers to the American people in general, for we know that in some circles, unfortunately, we do not find such mutual good disposition.<sup>138</sup>

The hostile reception of the VSEKhB delegation in the United States in 1956, to which Andreev referred in his conversation with Leslie, was prompted by refugees from the Soviet Union who knew all too well what Andreev and other VSEKhB leaders tried so hard to conceal from their foreign guests. The delegation consisted primarily of members of the top echelon of the EKhB clergy—Zhidkov, Karev, Levindanto, Ivanov, Andreev, and others. Upon the delegation's return, Karev provided information on the basis of which a report was composed. Here are some excerpts of this report:

Generally, the delegation found a warm welcome... and yet in many places on delegation's route it was accompanied by a display of hostility on the part of the so-called refugees and on the part of the so-called 'International Council of Churches of America' in New York. The leader of this council, some pastor McIntire (a Presbyterian), publishes a small magazine, *Christian Beacon*, and in the mornings, at 7: 45, his radio programs are aired in the United States. McIntire met the arrival of our delegation with hostility. His magazine and his speeches on the radio spewed bile. He printed quite a few leaflets in which he represented the delegation members as 'Kremlin's agents,' and A.V. Karev as participant and leader of the Revolution of the 1917-18, as a participant of the Communist Stockholm Appeal, and so forth. In his leaflets, McIntire wrote: 'Americans, come to our meetings, and we will tell you about the VSEKhB delegation.'

When the VSEKhB delegation arrived in New York, McIntire organized protesters with posters and slogans against the delegation. The police had to interfere to defend the delegation from the onslaught of protesters. According to some evidence, pastor Klaupik (an immigrant from Latvia, living in Washington D.C.) may have been involved in this and responsible for it...Almost the same antipathy was encountered in Chicago. People were especially rioting there against Karev. During the delegation's visit to the church in Morgan Park,

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., p. 13-17.

several notes were received, saying: ‘We know you—wolves in sheep skins,’ ‘Get out,’ and so forth.<sup>139</sup>

In his turn, Karev portrayed American Baptists in mostly negative colors, making sweeping and unsupported assumptions, while his evaluation of the United States as a country closely reflected the typical bias of Soviet media:

They [Americans] wanted to show the Russian Baptist delegation that the United States was mainly a Baptist country. But that was only the side they were allowed to show us, and that which was not allowed to be shown, we could not see. We were not shown, said Karev, the slums of New York, the ghettos for the Chinese and Negroes, and the discrimination of Negroes that reigns in the United States... Despite the spread of Baptism and other religious currents in the United States, 67 millions of Americans do not belong to any religion, and millions of religious people are only formally religious. This is especially felt in villages and on farms where only 10% of people are religious and where many farmers do not observe Sunday at all [???]. Only in cities religious life is more visible [???]. The prominent American preacher, Billy Graham, said that 25% of American Baptists were people who have not been reborn spiritually. And in my opinion, ...75% of the people there have not been reborn, because in general, baptism is given there to 7-9 year old children. The churches are supplied with juvenile pastors—college graduates who, as pastors, themselves are spiritually non-reborn people. There are many divorces (approximately 1/3) among Baptists in the United States, and no one is expelled from communities for it. Many female believers wear lipstick and earrings—something that female believers in the USSR do not do. In one prayer house, a pianist [a woman] wore a dress with such a huge cut-out on the back that she almost looked naked. And besides, she smoked. The attendance of prayer meetings there is very low.<sup>140</sup>

Karev’s report was intended for mass consumption within the VSEKHB’s domain and satisfied the expectations of Soviet government that granted Karev a rare opportunity to go abroad. He also skillfully worked into his report an implicit justification of Soviet policy of denying baptism to young people under the age of 25 by claiming that the high number of “spiritually non-reborn” Baptists in the United States had something to do

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<sup>139</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 237, p. 8-10.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

with the practice of baptizing children at a young age. Similarly, he attacked the young American pastors with college education to veil the fact that many EKhB communities in the Soviet Union were run by authoritarian geriatric men with elementary education. Karev concluded his report with a panegyric to Soviet Baptists. “Thank God,” he said, “that in the USSR there exists a truly apostolic Christianity, and we must preserve it and make it grow.”<sup>141</sup> There is no doubt that had Karev lived in a normative state that did not regulate religious life so thoroughly, his report would have sounded differently. Under the present circumstances, however, all interactions between the Soviet Protestants and their foreign counterparts were subjected to doctoring by means of intentional disinformation and partial disclosure of real facts, aiming to produce the most positive impression of USSR on western visitors while presenting the Soviet believers with platitudinal, distorted, and often negative, accounts of life in the West.

The EKhB Senior Presbyter, P.A. Parchevskii, who participated in the European Congress of Baptists in West Berlin in 1958, told stories upon his return that resembled outbursts of crudity, intolerance and xenophobia in the general style of Nikita Khrushchev. Parchevskii seems to have disliked everything about this congress—from the fact that all presentations were made in either German or English (which the Russian delegates did not understand) to the unfortunate circumstance that the organizers of this congress had not reserved a place for a delegate from USSR in the All-European Council of Baptists, whereas Spain, which had “one and a half Baptist,” as Parchevskii put it, was

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

represented in the Council.<sup>142</sup> Parchevskii also found it offensive “that of all presenters and preachers who spoke at the congress, not one inserted a word about the events in the Middle and Near East or the world being at the brink of war,” except for the VSEKhB delegate, Karev, who “called to pray for peace and proposed to write a special letter or an appeal to the United Nation, asking the latter to defend the cause of peace.”<sup>143</sup> According to Parchevskii, the VSEKhB delegate Zhidkov, in his report about the work of missionaries, “told that in the persons of Senior Presbyters, their assistants and other workers, the VSEKhB has not fewer, but more qualified missionaries than other countries.”<sup>144</sup>

Zhidkov certainly knew that what he was claiming was a lie. The Soviet Union not only prohibited all missionary activity, but obligated Zhidkov and the entire institute of Senior Presbyters to serve as enforcers of this prohibition. When one American asked why the Soviet Union was refusing to accept material aid for its poor Baptists and other citizens, Parchevskii replied: “Our country is not poor. We do not need help now... We have not seen in the stores of Berlin such fine fabrics as crepe de Chine, faille de Chine, Bastogne, and other fine goods. But in Kharkov, the store shelves are about to break under the weight of such goods.”<sup>145</sup> When the same skeptical American expressed doubts about the sincerity of Parchevskii’s depiction of freedom of religion in the USSR,

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<sup>142</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 4829, p. 144.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

Parchevskii recommended that he asked Adams who was in the USSR, visited the EKhB communities and could confirm Parchevskii's story.<sup>146</sup> Adams, apparently, was one of those western tourists who had been given a tour of Potemkin villages and gave a positive account of the state of religion in the Soviet Union upon his return home. When someone doubted Parchevskii's claim that a choir of 80 people in Kharkov could sing much better than the 130 member Swedish choir that performed at the congress, Parchevskii again advised that person to talk to Adams who visited the Kharkov community and heard its choir.<sup>147</sup> In the 1970s, the Soviet government would make great strides in perfecting this kind of counterpropaganda. One retired German teacher of a Russian descent inquired about the conditions of pensioners in the Soviet Union. With the same air of superiority, Parchevskii said: "Our pensions are beyond any comparison with yours. Our pensioner is provided for."<sup>148</sup>

Some of Parchevskii's stories were almost anecdotal. He complained that his German host, Hans, gave him only one little piece of bread with his dinners and did not serve any bread at all with at suppers. One day, grated cucumbers were served with the dinner. Parchevskii refused to eat them and asked for a whole cucumber. Hans thought that a whole cucumber might be a bit heavy on Parchevskii's stomach, but Parchevskii insisted, saying: "Our Soviet stomachs are tough and can digest everything." Perhaps somewhat piqued by Parchevskii's attitude, Hans retorted: "Yes, the Soviet stomach is

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

very tough—it swallowed several countries, and feels just fine.”<sup>149</sup> Sharing these stories with the Council’s Upolnomochennyi for Kharkov oblast, Slavnov, who documented them, Parchevskii, it could be argued, intentionally catered to the government expectations. But the government expected that he would tell no more to his home community in Kharkov. Parchevskii in fact mentioned to Slavnov that he shared his impressions of the congress with the Kharkov community, and added: “They thought I would tell them all the details, but in order not to indulge certain connoisseurs, I told them only what they were allowed to know.”<sup>150</sup>

In private conversations with the VSEKhB clergy, many foreigners tried to compel the former to break their oath of silence and give straightforward answers to some burning questions, but always in vain. The head of the American Methodist delegation to USSR, Theodor Mayer, inquired Andreev in 1958: “What is your stance with respect to the Hungarian question? What could happen to a presbyter if he spoke against the government on this issue?” Andreev replied: “As I said, we are not involved in politics, and in our practice we do not have such instances.” Mayer pressed on by paraphrasing his question: “Can you at all criticize your government or demand concessions from it as we do in the United States? Do you have such freedom?” Andreev evaded a direct answer by asking a question of his own: “If you have so many different Christian organizations, then why haven’t you influenced your government yet to stop nuclear testing?”<sup>151</sup> In 1959, Andreev’s assistant, Mel’nikov, in response to a question by the

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid., p. 148.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

chief editor of Daily News, Benjamin Heidyn, whether there was any difference in the attitude of authorities toward believers now, in comparison to the Stalin era, declared: “We have had and continue to have full possibility to satisfy our spiritual needs in our churches.” Heidyn persisted and asked Mel’nikov: “Do you notice any increase of pressure today from authorities and atheists?” Without any hesitation, Mel’nikov replied: “Such pressure does not exist.”<sup>152</sup>

A similar exchange took place in the Kievo-Sviatoshinskaia EKHB community in 1959 between Andreev and an American Methodist and businessmen from Idaho, K.B. Radcliff:

Radcliff: Have there been any changes within the past 10 years in the direction of increase of religious freedom in your country, since we know that under Stalin there was a great pressure on religion?

Andreev: We have had and still have the freedom of religious beliefs throughout all the time, but since you have earlier received information about it from tendentious American propaganda (and now you see for yourself how we live), you have formed an incorrect idea about the pressure on religion in our country.

Radcliff: You said that the state did not put pressure on religion, and that you had freedom of religious beliefs. But isn’t atheist propaganda in schools a pressure on religion?

Andreev: I have already said that in our country the church is separated from state and school from church, and that in our schools children are brought up according to the established state program. But the state in our country does not interfere with the church and we, believers, raise our children according to what the Scripture teaches us...

Radcliff: I am interested in all these issues because our city in the US was visited by comrade Fedorov from the Soviet Embassy, who read a lecture and answered a number of questions. To the question—‘Will religion be ultimately liquidated in a Communist society?’—he answered ‘Yes’ and said that it was the motto of Communism. We were all shocked and did not know what to think. In your opinion, is Communist society acceptable for believers and Russian people?

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>152</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 281, P. 36-37.

Andreev: We see that the first Christians strove towards the collective distribution of labor and values, towards the liquidation of classes of rich and poor. Therefore, the Communist system fully justifies itself and satisfies all needs.<sup>153</sup>

The cited dialogue reveals that some better informed and observant foreigners sensed the disparity between the official state and VSEKhB propaganda and evidence that was becoming available in the West through other independent sources. The Soviet government, therefore, increasingly used the EKhB clergy and the showcase communities to dissuade such doubting foreigners. Andreev's controlled responses also demonstrate that the EKhB leaders in charge of accompanying and entertaining foreign guests had very little room for improvisation and preferred to fall back on standard answers prepared in advance and designed to bring an unpleasant discussion to an abrupt conclusion. In his last response, Andreev clearly drew on the Evangelical legacy of the hopeful 1920s when leaders like Prokhanov had entertained the idea of compatibility of Communism and the Evangelical model of Christianity. Reviving this idealism after a decade of militant godlessness was rather awkward and not really welcome by the guardians of Soviet ideology who were not at all interested in enhancing the image of Christ at the expense of Communism. Yet for the limited purpose of befuddling foreigners, the government found the employment of such an unlikely syncretism quite useful.

In the 1940s-1960s, all Protestant denominations in the Soviet Union experienced a tremendous shortage of religious literature—Bibles, New Testaments, and hymnal books. Walter Sawatsky wrote:

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., p. 28-29.



The Bible hunger is greater in the Soviet Union than in any other East European country. This is because it is the largest country where evangelicals in particular urgently appeal for the Book that is the basis of their movement. The Soviet Union has also been stricter than other countries in limiting the production and import of Bibles. They have permitted only a very limited amount to be printed or legally imported. Customs officials regularly insist that it is forbidden to bring Bibles as gifts. No published Soviet legislation forbidding Bibles exists, but then, Soviet policy has never been that dependent on legislation.<sup>154</sup>

Unlike the Russian Orthodox and Roman Catholic believers, who receive their spiritual nourishment primarily through liturgy and a short homily delivered by priests during the service, the Protestants are Bible-centered and their systems of beliefs presuppose a careful and daily study of the Word of God by individual believers. The ubiquitous shortage of religious texts had a crippling effect on Protestant communities in USSR, and the government exploited this artificially-induced paucity of what it perceived as an “ideological dynamite”<sup>155</sup> as a silent weapon against religion. As Sawatsky commented, “the Soviet state has a remarkable fear of one book which they like to claim is just a collection of useless myths.”<sup>156</sup>

The EKHB historian, Savinskii, noted that collections of spiritual songs published during the 1920s “survived in miserable quantities after the devastating 1930s,” and that “they were often copied by hand into notebooks and used [in this reincarnated form] during prayer meetings.”<sup>157</sup> But even more so, the EKHB believers needed Bibles. According to Savinskii, Y.I. Zhidkov told in 1946 that the VSEKHB literally inundated

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<sup>154</sup> Sawatsky, p. 389-390.

<sup>155</sup> Savinskii, p. 170.

<sup>156</sup> Sawatsky, p. 337.

<sup>157</sup> Savinskii, p. 249.

with believers' letters, nearly 5,000 of them. "We receive requests from many brothers and sisters," he wrote, "to send spiritual literature, especially Bibles, New Testaments, and collections of hymns."<sup>158</sup> A prominent leader of Seventh Day Adventists in Ukraine, N.A. Zhukaliuk, reminisced in his memoirs:

There was a great spiritual hunger during the 1960s. The old supplies were drying up. The available Bibles have become so worn out from the studious reading by many people that they were turning into heaps of frayed pieces of paper that one could no longer read. The same happened to collections of songs and sets of stitch-bound old periodicals. The country rulers of that time, who officially condemned Stalin's 'cult of personality,' differed little from their chief. The difference consisted only in that Stalin physically exterminated people for their convictions and his followers left people to die of spiritual hunger... During searches, Bibles were requisitioned and burned. Even if some Bible could make it into the country via contraband, its cost was higher than a working person's wages for two months.<sup>159</sup>

Zhukaliuk and his wife, Evgenia, embarked on the project of salvaging the old Bible by completely restoring them. Nikolai Arsentievich studied the craft of book-binding by taking apart and examining the construction of old school textbooks, while his wife ironed out the old wrinkled pages, glued together the disintegrating fragments, and copied by hand the missing pages. "Sometimes," recalled Zhukaliuk, "a whole month of tedious labor went into the restoration of a single Bible, but it was so pleasant to see the Holy Book entering the ranks again to fulfill the function intended for it by God."<sup>160</sup>

For all of its concessions to the government, by 1956 the VSEKhB could report that it projected to extend the issue of its magazine, "The Brotherly Messenger," to 5,000

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>159</sup> N.A. Zhukaliuk, *Cherez krutye perevaly* (Zaokskii: "Istochnik zhizni," 2002), p. 130.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., p. 131.

copies. Karev announced at the meeting of the Presidium of VSEKhB in Moscow “that this question has not yet been resolved to this day, but since a significant portion of the issue goes abroad, there is hope that the question of obtaining permission [for a larger issue] will soon be solved.”<sup>161</sup> The government also allowed the VSEKhB to publish 15,000 hymnal books and 10,000 Bibles. This limited publication, however, was a drop in the bucket, given that it had to be somehow divided between 5,400 EKhB communities or 530,000 believers that purportedly comprised the VSEKhB’s domain in the Soviet Union around 1958.<sup>162</sup> According to government statistics, in 1957, Ukraine alone had 1,349 EKhB communities\* and approximately 100,000 believers.<sup>163</sup> The number would have been much higher had it not been for the continuous Pentecostal exodus from the VSEKhB during the 1950s. Karev realized this when he admitted in his report: “The present publication of the Collection [of Spiritual Songs] that has just been released by the publishing house could not in any way satisfy the needs of communities of our brotherhood, and the VSEKhB is literally flooded by letters requesting to send out the hymnal books.”<sup>164</sup> The VSEKhB also encountered obstacles publishing the permitted 10,000 Bibles. In the same report, Karev stated: “...the print blocks for the Bible have been available for quite some time. However, since it has been very difficult to find a

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<sup>161</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 237, p. 8.

<sup>162</sup> Savinskii, p. 195.

\* This was a considerable drop in the number of EKhB communities that occurred due to the government strategy of “quantitative reduction” of communities. In 1948, there were 1,638 EKhB communities in Ukraine.

<sup>163</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 4608, p. 68.

<sup>164</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 237, p. 8.

publisher that would accept this printing order, the Bibles are not published to this day. Only recently, with the help of CARC, one publishing house accepted the order and there is hope that the Bibles will be printed.”<sup>165</sup> In 1957, the Bibles were eventually published, but if the VSEKhB statistics reflecting the number of EKhB communities and believers in USSR were correct, and if the Bibles were to be divided in an egalitarian fashion, each registered community would receive slightly over one and three quarters of a Bible and each individual believer—0.018 of a Bible. The mentioned publications were all that the VSEKhB managed to accomplish in the 1940s-1960s, and by 1967 the underground press “The Christian” (to be discussed in Chapter IV) sponsored by the EKhB internal opposition had overtaken the initiative of publishing religious literature. Additional copies of religious texts smuggled into the country helped, but could not satisfy the growing demand. The VSEKhB leaders were quite aware of this dramatic shortage of Bibles and Song Books in their brotherhood. However, each time the representatives of foreign religious organizations offered help they flatly rejected it as unnecessary. As a part of the government counterpropaganda machine, the EKhB clergy was under an obligation to defend the USSR’s image at the expense of their communities.

In 1957, two guests from the United States, Heiman Appleman and M.E. Gitlin, visited the Kiev EKhB community. According to Andreev’s or his assistant’s detailed report to Vil’khovyi, the following conversation took place:

Gitlin said that he and brother Appleman had an intention of presenting every preacher in Ukrainian communities with a Bible and a Concordance. Brother Andreev replied: ‘Today our presbyters have Bibles and soon all communities

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

will receive new issues of a Bible which are already in print. The Collections of Spiritual Songs have already been published and distributed to all communities.<sup>166</sup>

In 1959, another foreign guest from the United States, G. Ericson—a Baptist and an instructor of theology at the University of Indiana—visited the Kievo-Sviatoshinskaia EKHB community and tried to tape-record the sermon. He was forbidden to do that. Unperturbed by such unusual restrictions, he offered help in the acquisition of hymnal books, and asked about the best way to do it. The EKHB official, G.B. Nebesnyi, who served as Erikson’s translator, reported to Vil’khovyi:

He [Ericson] was told that the Books of Spiritual Songs and other literature were being printed in Moscow by our Council as needed and distributed to communities...Ericson said that they could help communities financially to obtain these hymnal books. He was given an answer that communities did not need such help and acquire hymnal books themselves.<sup>167</sup>

Reporting about the 1962 visit to Kiev of the General Secretary of the World Baptist Union, Nordenhoug, the head of Ukrainian CARC, Polonnik, wrote that when Nordenhoug offered American help in acquiring religious literature for Ukrainian Baptists, “the leadership of the EKHB sect, thoroughly instructed by us on matters concerning the reception of foreign delegates and conversations with them, politely declined Nordenhoug’s offer, saying that Baptists in Ukraine do not experience the lack of Bibles or any other religious literature.”<sup>168</sup>

Although the cited evidence may compel one to see the EKHB leaders as nonchalant ecclesiastic functionaries doing the state’s bidding, it should be kept in mind

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>167</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 281, p. 27.

<sup>168</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1. Op. 24, D. 5589, p. 102-103.

that most reports reflecting the clergy's involvement in the governmental campaign of disinformation were crafted specifically for consumption by the government officials and for that reason do not convey the complex deliberations that may have preceded Andreev's or Mel'nikov's decision to participate in this spectacle of deceit or the emotional drama that may have unfolded beneath their seemingly blithe prevarications.

D. Nussbaum, a representative of the SDA General Conference in the United States, who visited Moscow and met with the head of the SDA spiritual center, G.A. Grigoriev, wrote: "That which brother Grigoriev was not at liberty to express in words, I read in his eyes that were full of grief. How much pain and sorrow was in those eyes, but he had to keep silent..."<sup>169</sup> One SDA believer, who visited Grigoriev in his apartment and office in Moscow, told the following story:

I witnessed an incident when a postman came to Grigoriev and handed him a postal notification for a shipment of Bibles from abroad. 'Sign that you have received the notification and send people to pick up the cargo,' said the postman. Grigorii Andreevich took the notification and wrote on it: 'We do not need the Bibles, send them back.' I tried to stop him, for we had a great need for Bibles... When the postman left, Grigoriev explained to me that he was aware of all our needs, and that the Bibles would not have been released anyway—they would have been requisitioned and burned while the documents would have indicated that the shipment had been received.<sup>170</sup>

Unfortunately, the evidence concerning this sensitive topic is too fragmentary and does not reveal a single uniform line of reasoning that may have influenced this or that clergyman's decision to decline foreign help or feed apparent lies to guests from abroad. The whole Soviet experience trained both Protestant leaders and laymen to be very

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<sup>169</sup> D. Yunak, *Istoriia Tserkvi Khristian Adventistov Sed'mogo Dnia v Rossii, Tom I, 1886-1981* (Zaokskii: "Istochnik zhizni," 2002), p. 329.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 329-330.

cautious in their interactions with the foreigners, since any such contacts, no matter how innocuous, made them automatically suspicious to the government. The following document reveals to what extent the government succeeded in drawing even ordinary parish presbyters into the framework of a self-disciplining panoptic society. On June 27, 1960, presbyters of the EKhB community in Odessa, A.G. Kvashenko and N.V. Kuz'menko, wrote to Andreev that on the previous day, which was Sunday, 15 foreigners, who, as the presbyters ascertained later, were Baptist and Presbyterian farmers from Pennsylvania, walked into the prayer house unexpectedly through the side door. The presbyters did not fail to mention in their letter that the foreigners were not accompanied by "a translator from the hotel 'Intourist,'" which meant that the state did not have its eyes and ears to witness what these Pennsylvanian farmers said, heard or saw. The tone of this letter is that of implied fear that the presbyters may have done something wrong or overlooked something. Thus, Kvashenko wrote:

The guests stayed at the prayer service for one hour and left... I, Kvashenko, went to see them off while brother Kuz'menko stayed behind to wrap up the service. When exiting the prayer house, the foreigners began giving away different literature to the worshipers. I gave an instruction to community members to immediately collect all the literature that they [foreigners] had given away. I myself followed the guests outside where 4 vehicles 'ZIM' stood waiting... When I returned from the street, having seen the foreigners off, brothers and sisters gathered the literature that the foreigners had given away and handed it to me. It turned out that there were several gospels—one evangelist per book: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John—29 in all, 3 brochures and 22 leaflets in English. I collected all of this and handed it to the Upolnomochennyi [of CARC]. I also found out from the foreigners that they were going to visit several other places in the Soviet Union. That is why I inform you about what happened to us.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 308, p. 2.

In the same year, the Senior Presbyter of the SDA church in Ukraine, Parasei, informed Vil'hkovi that his community in Kiev was visited by a Canadian of Ukrainian extraction, Ivan Matiiko. Having mentioned all the places that Matiiko had already visited and his plans to visit the village in which he was born, Parasei commented: "I got an impression that he [Ivan Matiiko] is a straightforward and honest fellow who does not have any hidden thoughts when he converses with people."<sup>172</sup>

In fifteen years since the establishment of spiritual centers, the government made great strides in transforming the registered Protestant denominations into places where the state mechanisms of control could be activated without any visible presence of the state—places where the foreigners could be presented with false ideas about religious freedom in USSR and where information about their intentions, activities and outlooks could be inconspicuously collected and transferred to the state. As the evidence shows, the Protestant communities' leaders also made sure that there were no unattended contacts between believers and foreigners. Towards the end of the 1950s, the government succeeded in turning the VSEKhB leadership into a relatively reliable spiritual elite enjoying privileges that presupposed a tremendous level of trust on the part of the Soviet government. Besides allowing the VSEKhB leaders to make frequent trips abroad, the government involved them in the following activities:

--When a reception was held by Molotov to honor a visit of the Canadian Minister, Pierson, Zhidkov and Karev were invited among other guests.

--Zhidkov, Karev and Karpov were invited by the US Ambassador, Bollen, to a reception dedicated to the Independence Day.

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid., p. 11.



--Zhidkov and Karev were at the reception arranged by the Supreme Council in honor of the delegation of Norwegian Parliament.<sup>173</sup>

Of the five EKhB students who were allowed to study abroad between 1956 and 1959, two—M.Y. Zhidkov and I.M. Orlov—were children of the top VSEKhB officials, while the other two—A.N. Stoyan and A.N. Kiriukhantsev—were one—the head of VSEKhB’s International Department, and the other—a member of the Presidium of VSEKhB, respectively. “Their selection,” remarked Savinskii, “was, understandably, very discrete: the candidates were checked by the appropriate organs for loyalty and prospective collaboration.”<sup>174</sup> Summarizing the international aspect of VSEKhB’s activity, Savinskii wrote:

During meetings with representatives of foreign brotherhoods, the leaders of the EKhB Council always gave negative answers to the question whether there were cases of oppression of believers on the grounds of their religious convictions, stating that in USSR people were not persecuted or sentenced for their faith. They were saying this precisely at the time when the persecution and trials of believers continued (with the exception of a period of Khrushchev’s Thaw between 1953 and 1956) and even increased during the 1960s. Such statements by those brothers can be understood, but not justified.<sup>175</sup>

The scope of VSEKhB’s everyday responsibilities certainly included the more traditional duties of pastoral care, organization and, most notably for this period, of mediation between the government and the harassed communities (to be discussed in the next chapter). For purposes of this chapter, I intentionally focused exclusively on those negative aspects of this spiritual center’s activity that reflected the postwar arrangements between the state and the rehabilitated Evangelical denominations.

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<sup>173</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 237, p. 10.

<sup>174</sup> Savinskii, p. 256.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

#### 4. The VSEKhB as Enforcer

As the government increased its pressure on religion in the late 1950s, the VSEKhB continued to pusillanimously accommodate every extralegal demand imposed by the CARC. On May 18, 1957, Andreev sent a letter to all Senior Presbyters in Ukraine, in which he reiterated in yet stricter terms the VSEKhB's policy on baptism that had already been causing serious discontent and tacit opposition in communities. In this craftily disguised statement of pseudo-care, Andreev in fact reacted to the government's concern with the growing number of baptized EKhB youths. "You and I both know," wrote Andreev, "that in past years there took place in some communities a hasty acceptance of candidate-members who, in fact, were not yet properly taught the Word of God and did not yet grow firm in their faith... In order to avoid the unnecessary extremes and approach the question of baptism with all seriousness, I find it necessary to give you some instructions..." Here is a summary of Andreev's instructions:

a.) Only those candidate-members can be allowed to baptize who are really reborn, firm in their faith and who passed the appropriate trial period... Therefore, you need to pay attention to when a person found faith and when he/she submitted an application for baptism; whether or not a person's relatives were believers and whether a person received an appropriate spiritual upbringing, because such persons have firmer faith than those who come to church as a result of some eventuality [Such as missionary work?—A.K.].

b.) Special attention should be paid to the young brothers and sisters whose spiritual views have not yet been formed and can change quickly. Also, a careful approach should be exercised towards students who are in a special condition due to their schooling. As their knowledge increases, their views on religion sometime change and they fall away from the faith, which always negatively affects believers in communities. Due to these reasons, the VSEKhB gave instructions to Senior Presbyters and communities to abstain from the hasty acceptance...of young people, especially those who attend educational institutions... Nevertheless, some Senior Presbyters allowed some frivolity this past year and, having pursued quantity instead of quality, permitted to baptize a large number of young people without their proper testing. Therefore, we appeal

to you once again and remind you to heed our previous instructions and follow them as you confirm the baptism of candidate-members.

c.) Besides, as you accept the candidates, you need to pay serious attention to whether they are attached to some alien teaching or have a negative attitude toward the existing spiritual order within our brotherhood or toward their civic duties... In order that our communities accepted fully reborn souls, with deep faith and firm grounding, it is necessary that Senior Presbyters took upon themselves the control of all candidate-members... The communities' leadership should also be forewarned that baptism ceremonies were carried out humbly and quietly, without attracting the outside people, and that only church ministers, the baptism recipients and service personnel were present.<sup>176</sup>

This circular letter, in which the VSEKhB again played the role of an ecclesiastic translator of the government policy targeting the growth and rejuvenation of religious communities, appeared in circumstances similar to those that surrounded the issuance of the VSEKhB's instructional letter of the 1950. Judging by Vil'khovyi's report for 1957, the government did not fail to detect the steady growth of membership in the EKhB communities that resulted in part due to what Andreev termed "frivolity" of some Senior Presbyters who "permitted to baptize a large number of young people," and in part due to communities' simply ignoring the VSEKhB's instructional letters. Vil'khovyi calculated that if the CARC succeeded in reducing the number of EKhB communities by 289, from 1638 in 1948 to 1349 in 1957, the number of members in these reduced and integrated communities rose at the same time by 22,000, from 78,000 in 1948 to 100,000 in 1957. The following table<sup>177</sup> (Table 1) shows the incremental growth of membership between 1951 and 1956.

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<sup>176</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 237, p. 25.

<sup>177</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 4608, p. 68.

Table 1

*General and Youth Membership Growth, 1951–1956*

Year	Number of recruited candidates	Number of de facto baptized members	Number of baptized youths (inclusive)
1951	2,497	1,988	358
1952	2,581	2,038	301
1953	3,190	2,265	443
1954	3,337	2,258	496
1955	3,622	2,690	561
1956	4,229	3,326	920

Commenting on figures presented in this table, Vil'khovyi wrote:

Thus, in the course of six years, sectarians of this religious current created a reserve of 19,500 people, on the account of which they have been annually replenishing their natural losses and increasing the number of their followers. The comparison of data from 1951 and 1956 shows that the number of people recruited by sectarians doubled as well as the number of those who received the full-immersion baptism. Persons who have not received baptism...in their predominant majority do not cut ties with sectarians, remain among candidate-members and, in the following years, still undergo this religious ritual.<sup>178</sup>

Vil'khovyi felt especially perturbed by the fact that of 1,573 people prepared for baptism in Stalinsk oblast in the preceding three years “only 615 or 51% had familial relations with sectarians” and by the age and social composition of the entire group of new converts, featuring “33% of youth, 40% of industrial workers, 9% of clerical employees, and only 1% of kolkhoz workers.”<sup>179</sup> Andreev’s disapproval of the induction of people “who came to church as a result of some eventuality,” and not as a result of having

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., p. 70-71.

religious relatives, closely mirrored the government's agitation over the growing number of new converts to the EKhB communities (49% in Stalinsk oblast) who had no religious relatives and were apparently recruited from the mainstream Soviet society by the EKhB missionaries. I argue that the main purpose of Andreev's circular letter was to curb the missionary activism of EKhB communities in Ukraine and make them appear, at least statistically, as consisting primarily of older folks. By writing such instructional letters, Andreev and other VSEKhB dignitaries manifested their responsiveness to the demands of CARC and ensured the good standing of their spiritual center with the Soviet government. Such survival tactic, however, also proved counterproductive: while securing the survival of VSEKhB—this official emblem of the EKhB unity—it continued to alienate communities from their spiritual center and caused dissent on the part of some influential leaders of the EKhB brotherhood.

Neither the VSEKhB's 1950 instructions nor Andreev's 1957 letter could become the last and final concession to the government. As the Khrushchev antireligious campaign accelerated towards the end of 1950s, the VSEKhB had to pay a much greater tribute to the state and issued in 1960 the notorious "New Statutes of VSEKhB" accompanied by yet another "Instructional Letter." The latter document expressed the VSEKhB's previous suggestions and urgings in a form of a dictum addressed not only to Senior Presbyters but to all EKhB communities:

Our communities must decisively put an end to the race for quantity of believers, paying more attention to the education of our members. Therefore, presbyters of communities must strictly observe the 2-3 year trial period for baptism candidates as well as the age of those being accepted into communities, and try to reduce the baptism of youth in the age category from 18 to 30 to the most minimal number, accepting into communities only those people who are

really firm in the faith and well-tested. Applications for joining our communities from persons studying in educational institutions or serving in the army must not be accepted at all until their schooling or military service is over... In those cases when baptism is performed not in the baptistery inside the prayer house but somewhere in a river...it must be enforced that people do not gather in large quantities around those being baptized, and that everything is carried out calmly and in silence... An outdoor baptism should be performed only in summer time and with the knowledge of organs of Soviet authority.<sup>180</sup>

The VSEKhB's leaders' casuistry went as far as to claim that this needed to be done so that communities "would not become overgrown with weeds, as Christ mentioned in his parable on weeds /Matthew 13: 24-27/." In the same letter, the EKhB elders demanded that "a presbyter must not allow the prayer service to deviate in the direction of making calls for hasty induction of new members, or the arrangement of concert-type choir performances, or the use of orchestras, declamation of poems and other forms of service not outlined in the 'VSEKhB Statutes.'" The elders further insisted that "members of community must be worthy citizens of our great socialist Motherland," and that duties of a Senior Presbyter "also include the struggle with incorrect views on art, literature, cinema, radio, television, and other forms of culture that can still be found among our brothers and sisters in the faith."<sup>181</sup> Given that the mentioned channels of mass media were not neutral in USSR but highly politicized and in the service of an atheist state, the VSEKhB leaders' insistence on the greater exposure of EKhB believers to the mainstream Soviet culture meant that the spiritual center, in contradistinction to its direct purpose, had taken upon itself the function of an agent of secularization. In fact, under the New Statutes (Paragraph 12) the Senior Presbyters

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<sup>180</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 454, p. 49-58.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

were freed from carrying out any spiritual functions, such as administering Eucharist, baptism and so forth, and converted into the VSEKhB's law enforcement officers. The 1960 "Instructional Letter" clearly stated:

--The main task of a Senior Presbyter of VSEKhB is to enforce in communities the observance...of the Statutes of VSEKhB in all its paragraphs and of the Soviet legislation on cults.

--Less preaching and performance of religious rituals, but more attention to observing the activity of presbyters and preachers and to the exact fulfillment of order and requirements provided in the Statutes...

--The Senior Presbyter must firmly know and remember that the main purpose of a prayer service today is not the attraction of new members but the satisfaction of the necessary spiritual needs of believers.

--It is the responsibility of a Senior Presbyter to contain the unhealthy missionary manifestations (which Apostle Paul called zealotry for God not based on knowledge /Romans 10:2/) on the part of individual servants of the church and groups of believers who try to hastily induct people into communities.<sup>182</sup>

Point 6 of the "Instructional Letter" stated that children of pre-school and school age were not permitted at prayer meetings. Savinskii commented that in fulfillment of this requirement, "in almost all registered churches there was established an institute of 'Egyptian midwives' appointed primarily from among brothers" whose responsibility it was "to stand at the entrance to the prayer house and prevent children, coming to service with their believing parents, from entering."<sup>183</sup>

The passing of VSEKhB's "New Statutes" and "Instructional Letter" in 1960 became the proverbial last straw that broke the camel's back. Most unregistered EKhB communities flatly refused to accept these documents and joined the ranks of opposition, whereas the reaction of registered communities to these new impositions varied from

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Savinskii, p. 205.

place to place. According to survey conducted by the VSEKhB, “of 1959 communities, 743 (38%) accepted the new regulations, although with some objections; 1053 communities (53%) did not respond at all; 163 expressed their disagreement with the more essential paragraphs, and 30 (only 1.5%) voiced their protest and outrage.”<sup>184</sup> It appears that most of those communities that did not respond chose to tacitly ignore the “New Statutes” and “Instructional Letter.” Some local presbyters read both documents to their communities and drew conclusions similar to that of the presbyter of Georgievskaiia community (Stavropol oblast): “As for us, we will continue to do God’s work as we did before. We are accustomed to bringing our children to the prayer house, and we will continue to do so in the future. These are our children.”<sup>185</sup> In other communities, the presbyters, sensing that these documents had been passed by the VSEKhB under the pressure of CARC, preferred not to make these documents known to their congregations and simply ‘tucked them away under the table cloth’ [*polozhiv ikh pod sukno*].”<sup>186</sup> Savinskii remarked that during preparatory meeting preceding the issuance of these unfortunate documents, Karev stated “in a veiled but unambiguous form that the growth EKHB parish churches disturbs ‘the people of other ideology’” and that “the CARC is hinting that we should recede and stay within the embankments.” Karev, supposedly, also said: “We bear responsibility before the One on High. We are also responsible before churches. We may ruin our reputation, but we are also responsible before the

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid., p. 207.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., p. 205.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.



organs of authority. We can make reasonable suggestions, for no one is interested in the departure of masses from the VSEKhB.”<sup>187</sup> The EKhB leaders were thus caught in a three-way tug between God, the Church, and the state. Despite many objections, “A.V. Karev, by the force of his authority, insisted on the adoption of both documents.”<sup>188</sup>

The EKhB schism will be discussed in more detail in Chapter X. It is relevant for this chapter, however, to restate that this schism developed over time as a reaction to the perverse role the VSEKhB played in the life of communities, acting often as the state’s proxy. Its continuous policy of appeasement towards the intrusive atheist state and its inability to draw the line beyond which no further accommodation of state demands would be possible, could not but provoke serious resistance. In 1960, the VSEKhB realized that its already tarnished reputation was at stake. Savinskii speculated that upon analyzing the results of communities’ reaction to the “New Statutes” and “Instructional Letter,” the VSEKhB could have listened to the voice of majority and suspended the implementation of these documents. It could have told to the CARC that the new regulations could not be implemented because the communities flatly rejected them, and that any attempt to force these regulations on communities would only result in the swelling of the underground. The first indications of this were already visible in many places around the Soviet Union. Ignoring these signs, the VSEKhB pressed on with the implementation of the new regulations. In less than a year, the Initiative Group (reformed later into the Organizational Committee) rallied to its side a sizable opposition

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid., p. 203.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

and openly challenged the authority of VSEKhB. Confronted with this new threat to its existence, the VSEKhB leaders interpreted it appropriately as a threat to the EKhB “unity” and drew still closer to the government, employing the state punitive machinery to purge the rank and file of its own brotherhood of the real and potential dissenters. The VSEKhB’s policy toward its own internal opposition in the 1960s strikingly resembled its policy toward the Pentecostal non-conformists in the 1950s. In both cases, the VSEKhB leadership handed over supporters of the opposition to the state on the grounds of their violation of a particular statutory document—the “August Agreement” in the case of Pentecostals, and the “New VSEKhB Statute” in the case of supporters of the Initiative Group and the Orgcommittee.

A letter written by Andreev in 1962 and addressed to the harshest of all chief Upolnomochennye of the Ukrainian CARC during the postwar era, Polonnik, testifies that the EKhB leaders could on occasions outdo even the state officials in enforcing the government-imposed regulations. Informing Polonnik about the state of affairs in the EKhB communities in Lugansk oblast, Andreev vehemently complained that “the Rubezhanskaia EKhB community is totally rotten, and that a significant number of members of the executive organ, revisional commission, and the *dvadtsatka* in this community violate the VSEKhB Statute, allow people who are not members of the executive organ to deliver sermons, and that some people named Maiboroda and Kolomiets, who carry out work on the assignment of the ‘initiative group’ and the so-called ‘orgcommittee,’ are allowed to preach with the permission of presbyter Shapovalov.” Andreev further reported that these peripatetic preachers “read to the

community...their interpretation of the VSEKhB's Instructional Letter, portray the VSEKhB in the darkest colors, and suborn believers not to listen to the Senior Presbyter and the VSEKhB."<sup>189</sup> According to Andreev, when his assistant, Mel'nikov, had a meeting with the Upolnomochennyi for Lugansk oblast and told him about what was going on in the community, the Upolnomochennyi stated "that he thought that this community was in good standing and everything in it was in order." Expressing his reaction to the government official's assessment of the situation, Andreev wrote:

We are very surprised by such answer of the Upolnomochennyi. On our part, we have issued another very serious warning to this community...which, apparently, was not even read to the community, and this is while the community completely disregards the VSEKhB Statute and the existing Civil Code.

The Senior Presbyter [for Lugansk oblast] Gaivaronskii suggests to disband the leadership and the incumbent *dvadtsatka* of this community, to put together a new *dvadtsatka*, and to elect the new leadership. Unfortunately, he did not inform us about the opinion of Upolnomochennyi concerning this matter. Perhaps, he [Upolnomochennyi] thinks to this day that everything is in order there. Keeping in mind that this community, with its violations, has a corrupting influence on other communities, we cannot consider it a EKHB community and support before you the suggestion of the Senior Presbyter. We ask you to give appropriate instructions to the Upolnomochennyi for Lugansk oblast, so that an appropriate *dvadtsatka* was recruited [*ukomplektovana*] there and a new leadership elected, and so that the present dissolute leadership could no longer conduct prayer services until the election of the new one.<sup>190</sup>

Andreev's letter naturally caused a chain reaction. After receiving "appropriate instructions," or rather scolding, from Polonnik, the Upolnomochennyi for Lugansk oblast, Mesilin, soon reported to both Polonnik and Secretary of the Obkom of CPU that he "carefully studied the activity of Rubezhanskaia EKHB community" and determined

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<sup>189</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 389, p. 110.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

“that the community blatantly violated the legislation on cults.” Mesilin further reported about the measures he took to prevent these violations:

The registration of the community’s presbyter, Shapovalov, was terminated for allowing vagrant preachers and unregistered persons to preach, and for not taking any measures to stop the activity of the so-called ‘initiative group.’ Members of the old executive organ were removed by believers themselves. I denied the registration of the new executive organ on the grounds that its members promoted the agenda of the ‘initiative group’ and rudely violated the legislation on cults. The *dvadtsatka*, in its old composition, is dispersed, and the prayer house is temporarily closed.<sup>191</sup>

Reading Andreev’s, Mel’nikov’s, and multiple similar reports makes one wonder whether the VSEKhB’s functionaries cared about the spiritual probity of their communities or about the so-called unity of the EKhB brotherhood (an understandable concern), or simply protected their own cast’s claim to power when they deliberately exposed their fellow-believers to government’s retaliation. In his letter, Andreev, even if only by implication, suggested a certain connection between the violations of the “VSEKhB Statute” and those of the Soviet Civil Code, whereas Mesilin, upon his investigation, presented the believers’ non-compliance with the VSEKhB regulations as violations of the Soviet legislation on cults. Such a fusion between the ecclesiastic and secular norms in the CARC’s practice of regulating the life of the EKhB brotherhood prompted many believers to see the “VSEKhB Statutes” and the Soviet legislation on cults as interchangeable, as one and the same thing. The EKhB schismatics made use of this association and soon added a new spit to it by portraying the VSEKhB and the CARC as two sides of the same coin. While employing the rhetoric of unity, the

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<sup>191</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 373, p. 46-48.

VSEKhB adopted and tried to enforce the regulations that made the cost of unity unbearable for many Evangelical and Baptist believers.

Was the stance adopted by the VSEKhB leadership vis-à-vis the Soviet state the only plausible one under the circumstances? Were the EKhB spiritual leaders correct in their assumption that a less conciliatory approach to the Soviet state's demands would have necessarily exposed the church to the horrible conditions of the 1930s? In 1959, A.V. Karev purportedly stated: "We are facing a dilemma: to wind up our work and dissolve the Council, or...make concessions."<sup>192</sup> Would the EKhB brotherhood blame its leaders if they chose the first option? Should the state dissolve the VSEKhB for non-compliance, would it automatically outlaw the entire brotherhood? Answering these questions would have been an exercise in retrospective speculation had it not been for the story of the Seventh Day Adventist spiritual center that helps to envision an alternative scenario.

### **5. The Contrasting Example of the VSASD**

The SDA church also experienced a schism and in the course of 1960s-1970s accumulated its own baggage of misery, factional animosity, and disgrace. However, the activity of its spiritual center, the VSASD (active from 1946 to 1960), does not lend itself to the kind of visceral and lasting criticism frequently invoked against the VSEKhB. Arguably, the dissolution of VSASD by the government in 1960 saved it from the potential infamy of collaborationism. It also worked to the VSASD's advantage that,

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<sup>192</sup> Savinskii, p. 196-197.

compared to the VSEKhB, it generated a much smaller paper trail of correspondence with the CARC. This circumstance could be explained by the fact that the SDA church represented numerically only one-tenth of the EKhB brotherhood. In 1946, Vil'khovyi wrote: "Judging by the number of communities, the SDAs cannot compare with the EKhB and constitute a rather small number—about 140 communities."<sup>193</sup> In comparison with 1,866 EKhB communities registered in 1946, the SDAs indeed "occupied a significantly smaller 'space' in Ukraine," especially if it is taken into consideration that by 1950 the CARC succeeded in reducing the number of registered SDA communities to 129.<sup>194</sup> According to the SDA data, in 1946 there were 300 communities of this confession in the USSR, comprising 13,257 believers.<sup>195</sup> Vil'khovyi corroborated these figures in his 1946 report. During Vil'khovyi's conversation with the SDA preacher, Bondar', the latter said while outlining the history of Adventism in USSR: "Now, beginning in 1944 and to the present, we are experiencing the period of restoration of the destroyed. Over 300 communities numbering over 13,000 members have already been organized and registered throughout the USSR's republics (that is, we already have as much as we had on the war's eve)."<sup>196</sup> If this data is correct, one half of all SDA communities and approximately three quarters of SDA believers in USSR resided in Ukraine. The government statistics on the SDA church are not very consistent due to

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<sup>193</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 4555, p. 388.

<sup>194</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 12, p. 83-84.

<sup>195</sup> A.F. Parasei and N. A. Zhukaliuk, *Bednaia, brosaemaia bureiu*, p. 52.

<sup>196</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 4555, p. 390-391.

both the difficulty to keep track of all existing (and often unregistered SDA communities) and the continuous fluctuation of the number of registered communities caused by the state policy of “quantitative reduction.” In 1964, the new head of Ukrainian CARC, Litvin, submitted a report showing that the number of SDA communities dropped from 154 in 1947 to 81 in 1964. At the same time, the membership in these communities increased from 6,358 in 1947 to 9,420 in 1959, dropping again to 7,400 in 1964. Litvin calculated that from 1947 to 1964, the CARC terminated the registration of 1,191 communities of various confessions, including 840 EKHB and 73 SDA communities.<sup>197</sup> According to Polonnik’s report for 1959, Ukraine had 106 registered SDA communities and 59 groups numbering 10, 103 believers altogether.<sup>198</sup> The discrepancy between Polonnik’s and Litvin’s estimations of the number of SDA believers in 1959 consists of 863 people. The Vinnitsa oblast consistently boasted the largest number of SDA communities and believers in Ukraine—28 communities and 1,050 believers in 1946 (MGB report),<sup>199</sup> 26 communities and 1,300 members in 1952 (MGB report),<sup>200</sup> and 24 communities, 9 groups and 1,454 believers in 1959.<sup>201</sup>

In its essential aspects, the formation of VSASD in 1945-1946 differed little from that of VSEKHB. The head of the Moscow SDA community and the nominal wartime leader of Soviet Adventists, G.A. Grigoriev, gathered a group of surviving SDA

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<sup>197</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5908, p. 58-59.

<sup>198</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5205, p. 78-79.

<sup>199</sup> GAVO, F. P-136, Op. 13, D. 105, p. 1-18.

<sup>200</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 2090, p. 61.

<sup>201</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5205, p. 78.

dignitaries and, with the government approval, this self-ordained ad hoc collective began to act as the All-Union Council of the Seventh Day Adventists. Initially, it consisted of five people: G.A. Grigoriev, P. Matsanov, F. Mel'nik, A. Galadzhaev, and V. Yakovenko. The latter joined the VSASD team almost straight from prison. Soon afterwards, Yakovenko became the first postwar leader of Seventh Day Adventists in Ukraine. "The Adventists all around the USSR," wrote Parasei and Zhukaliuk, "recognized this organ as legitimate, although it was not formed in accordance with the principles governing the activity of the General Conference. Moreover, the directives and decisions of the new VSASD were accepted as lawful and carried out. The Church arose in spirit, having felt the pulse of organization... Gradually, the VSASD expanded to include 15 members as the state term 'plenum' had become fashionable again."<sup>202</sup> It should be noted here that the undisputed acceptance of the newly formed VSASD by the communities owed a great deal to the confessional homogeneity of the Seventh Day Adventist church. Unlike the VSEKhB, the VSASD did not face a daunting task of merging the various currents of Evangelicals, Baptists and Pentecostals. Presiding over a relatively small and closely knit family of believers, the VSASD had only one rival—the Adventist Reformists. However, this tiny break-away current had its own leadership since the 1920s and posed no greater threat than the proselytism of any other religious denomination.

As in the case of VSEKhB, the government evaluated the VSASD first of all from the point of view of its utility to the state agenda. The SDA spiritual center was to

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<sup>202</sup> Parasei and Zhukaliuk, p. 52-53.



discipline its communities, enforce the observance of Soviet legislation on cults and other extralegal restrictions, and provide information that would render the Adventist communities transparent to the state. Contrary to its expectations, the CARC found it very difficult to penetrate communities under the VSASD's spiritual leadership. In 1949, Vil'khovyi wrote:

The study of the internal life of this sect is complicated by its reticence and secretiveness. They are very taciturn in conversations. A lot of time and strength has been wasted before we determined that presbyter of the Adventist community in village Fursy, Belo-Tserkov region, Kiev oblast, V.N. Kuzemka, while being the community's leader, had 'internal convictions' similar to those of Adventists-Reformists (that is, those who oppose service in the Soviet Army). He needed the leadership of a registered community only to cover up his real anti-state orientation. He put together his own group of 4 people from the church executives and retreated into the underground. The community was dissolved by us.<sup>203</sup>

A year later, Vil'khovyi again commented on the same problem:

Members of the SDA sect maintain a very secluded lifestyle; they are not sociable and more mystically inclined than, for example, the Evangelical Christians-Baptists, which is a significant impediment to the study of the internal life of communities. The Adventists' domestic life rests on the basis of exceptionally strong influence and pressure of believers on members of their families who are not yet inducted into membership in the community.<sup>204</sup>

In 1957, Vil'khovyi revisited the same subject again. "This sect," he wrote, "...is very secretive, and the believers of this cult are more fanatical in comparison with the Evangelical Christians-Baptists."<sup>205</sup>

Just as their counterparts in the VSEKbB, the VSASD leaders in Ukraine were expected to make routine tours of their spiritual domain and submit to CARC reports on

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<sup>203</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 12, p. 85-86.

<sup>204</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 783, p. 86.

<sup>205</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 4608, p. 78.

the condition of communities and the outlook of their leaderships. However, such reports are very scarce in the archive of the Ukrainian CARC and, in most cases, they make an impression of uninformative rhetorical circumlocutions specifically crafted to tell the bare minimum. Perhaps one of the longest of such reports was the one submitted in 1947 by Yakovenko after his tour of the SDA communities in Zakarpatie and Volynia. It is a rather mechanical depiction of Yakovenko's travels, saying virtually nothing about the SDA leaders he encountered besides their names or the "poor physical condition" of one of them that served as the basis for his replacement. In the largest of visited communities, Ilnitsa, Yakovenko held a council with some presbyters to whom he explained "the new system of work" based on "our situation in the Ukrainian SSR" after the region's separation from the European Union of the SDA Council [The SDA church around the world is subdivided into Conferences, Unions and Divisions. Zakarpatie and Volynia, recently incorporated into the USSR, were now a part of the Russian Union]. Commenting on this meeting, Yakovenko wrote: "Of course, for them it was something rather new, since they were accustomed to the old order worked out by years of experience of Adventists at Conferences and in our missionary schools that prepared preachers, good news messengers, Bible workers, colporteurs and medical missionaries for evangelical careers."<sup>206</sup> In Volynia, Yakovenko explained to the local leaders that "under the new system, the work of presbyters becomes more circumscribed and may be limited to just one community." Vil'khovyi's marginal remark in pencil reveals that he was not satisfied with Yakovenko's vague statement of the new policy. "It is not

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<sup>206</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op 2, D. 30, p. 10.

‘maybe,’” wrote Vil’khovyi, “—this issue is already settled.” Yakovenko also informed the Volynia presbyters that they “should not think about the revival of children’s circles, as it used to be under Poland,” for “everything should be in such a way as not to interfere with the public education.” Yakovenko concluded his report by suggesting that the region could benefit from fresh cadre.<sup>207</sup>

Having visited communities in Uzhgorod, Mukachevo, Vinogradov, Ilnitsa, Lutsk, Sviniuki, Sernichki and Pozharki, Yakovenko mentioned, in passing, only one potential problem—that some communities in Zakarpatie suffered from the influence of Reformists. However, he provided not a single statement made by these Reformist infiltrators, nor their names and addresses. In the eyes of the government, Yakovenko’s report had nothing substantive in comparison with multi-page reports by Andreev, Mel’nikov, Ivanov, Mitskevich or Rusanov, teaming with incriminating and detailed information about the non-compliant leaders and laymen.

The CARC also noticed quite early that instead of vigorously enforcing the Soviet legislation on cults, the truant VSASD leaders tacitly encouraged laxity towards its observance, and instead of promoting “the new system of work” strove to preserve the “old order.” In 1947 Vil’khovyi wrote:

In our previous reports, we stressed the exclusive attention that the Adventists pay to the spiritual upbringing of their members and to the training of appropriate cadre selected from their midst by means of organizing the Sabbath Bible studies [literally, *beseđy*]. During the period under review, the systematic studies were held in Marianovskaia and Spasovskaia SDA communities in Zhitomir oblast, and in village Grigorievka, Stalinsk oblast... The spiritual leadership of Adventists in Ukraine, in the persons of the Upolnomochennyi [of VSASD], Yakovenko, and his assistant, Bondar’, pay serious attention to this undertaking, trying to conduct

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

studies according to a uniform program developed by them personally. Recently, they prepared a cycle of 'thematic' Sabbath studies based on the Gospel of Luke, typed on 33 pages and subdivided into 18 conversations. Concerned about the uninterrupted course of study, they are sending these conversations to all communities within Ukrainian SSR.

The practice of such studies, established by the Adventists, does not constitute a necessary element of their prayer services [ \* ] and is used exclusively as a form of training preachers. In order to address this problem, we pointed out to the Upolnomochennyi of VSASD, Yakovenko that the transformation of prayer houses into schools was not permissible and demanded from him that the biblical conversations were no longer conducted in communities, having prohibited the distribution of methodological materials prepared by him to communities.

Since the Chairman of VSASD, Grigoriev continues to support the preservation of these conversations, the CARC on its part should exert appropriate influence on Grigoriev in order to stop these biblical studies everywhere.<sup>208</sup>

To its chagrin, the government began to discover that the VSASD leaders and their subordinates in the oblasts served not as brakes but as the engine of SDA activism. In his 1949 report, Vil'khovyi again complained about "the Sabbath biblical conversations," which he viewed as the manifestation of Adventists "exceptional preoccupation with the 'proper' upbringing of believers" and a means of "training the new leadership 'cadre.'"<sup>209</sup> Vil'khovyi, therefore, took the following measures:

In conjunction with this circumstance, we gave directions to the Council's Upolnomochennyye in oblasts to demand from presbyters to shut down such 'schools.' Working towards the growth of their sect, the SDAs pay special attention to women and youth, applying the method of individual indoctrination. Already in 1946, we uncovered an illegal inter-oblast convention of Adventist youth. 53 people were present at this convention. The convention took place in

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\* This is a rather arbitrary assumption on the part of Vil'khovyi. He was right in sensing intuitively that the so-called "biblical conversations" were in fact disguised structured lessons in SDA theology, but he certainly erred in asserting that these lessons were not essential components of the SDA sermon, since these Sabbath Schools lessons had always constituted an integral part of the SDA prayer services.

<sup>208</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 4555, p. 354-355.

<sup>209</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 12, p. 84.

village Zhezhelevo, Komsomol'skii region, Vinnitsa oblast. We subsequently demanded of the SDA spiritual center:

1. To do away with the position of oblast bishops (Senior Presbyters), because they were 'preparing the delegates.'
2. To remove the presbyter of Zhezhelevskaia community, citizen Gross, from his post.

On our part, we disbanded the Zhezhelevskaia SDA community and prohibited the travels of Senior Preachers (bishops) to communities. Only as an exception, some preachers, on the approval of the Upolnomochennyi of CARC, have the right to travel to other communities. For the time being, Yakovenko, Kulyzhskii and Lukashenko have this right...

Studying the work of the SDA spiritual administration, we have come to the conclusion that there is no need to have two Senior Preachers in the 'spiritual administration' in Ukraine. Therefore, as soon as we determined that the assistant to the Senior Preacher of SDA for Ukraine, I.S. Bondar', was trying to deceive us, we terminated his registration and demanded from the spiritual center [VSASD] to remove him from his work.<sup>210</sup>

The prohibition on the SDA preachers' visitations of other communities, mentioned by Vil'khovyi, had already been in place since 1947, when Yakovenko distributed to communities a circular letter outlining the government restrictions according to which a parish preacher/presbyter was affixed to a given community. The right of visiting other communities as well as the right to deliver sermons in communities other than one's own was reserved only for the republican Upolnomochennyi of VSASD.<sup>211</sup> Essentially, the traveling restrictions for the SDA preachers were similar to those imposed by the government on the EKhB parish presbyters. The VSEKhB, however, had a sizable presence in Ukraine. Besides its chief representative in Ukraine, Andreev, the VSEKhB could count on its Senior Presbyters and their assistants in every oblast, who had the right to visit communities under their jurisdiction. In the case of

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>211</sup> D. Yunak, *Istoriia Tserkvi Adventistov Sed'mogo Dnia v Rossii*, p. 322-323.

VSASD, the government found such arrangements undesirable and disbanded the SDA institute of oblast Senior Presbyters (or Upolnomochennye), because in the eyes of CARC they were fulfilling the function opposite to that intended by the government. In 1946, wrote:

The leadership of Ukrainian Adventists, counting on its 'core' consisting of Senior Presbyters in the oblast centers and 'spurious' inter-regional preachers, projected a wide array of organizational and religious-propagandist work among the believers of their communities. Their 'good' intentions were quite unexpectedly upset by our recommendation to liquidate the institute of Senior Presbyters in the oblast centers and by our categorical demand to stop the activity of their artificially created inter-regional preachers. Our initiative...disrupted all their plans, undoubtedly leaving a bitter residue in their internal affairs. Bondar' got disputatious and pointed to the uneven attitude of the organs of authority to religious cults, trying all along to show the privileged status of the EKhB.<sup>212</sup>

Vil'khovyi ignored Bondar's arguments and sent a directive to his subordinates in oblasts "to make sure that all oblast Upolnomochennye of SDA were affixed to communities as permanent presbyters or preachers, according to their spiritual rank."<sup>213</sup> The "privileged status of the EKhB" Senior Presbyters, to which Bondar' referred in his argumentation against the grounding of Adventist clergy, was predicated on the willingness of the EKhB spiritual center to comply with the government agenda. Whereas the EKhB Senior Presbyters enforced the government restrictions as they toured their communities, the SDA leaders, on the contrary, served as a catalyst inducing religious ferment in communities. Already in 1946 Vil'khovyi remarked that the Upolnomochennyi of the SDA Council, Kulyzhskii, who for the time being was allowed to travel, visited communities in Kherson and Izmail oblast, tested the Sabbath School

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<sup>212</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 4555, p. 73-74.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

“students” on their knowledge of the Bible and SDA doctrines.<sup>214</sup> The CARC, naturally, could neither condone nor tolerate such a tendency and took practical steps towards restricting the activity of zealous SDA leaders to only one community, thus isolating them from access to communities at large. Grigoriev, Yakovenko, Bondar’ and other SDA leaders did not succumb to such a drastic limitation of their activity without putting up a fight, which prompted Vil’khovyi to write in 1947:

During the liquidation of the institute of Upolnomochennye of SDA in the oblast centers, the Adventist leadership urgently tried to get our sanction for the unobstructed visitations of communities by presbyters and preachers. This was categorically denied to them. We, however, told them that in specific cases, at the appeal of the spiritual center and with our permission, we would not object to certain preachers’ traveling to neighboring communities for the performance of Eucharist, baptism, etc. At the same time, we suggested to expedite the ordination of presbyters, so that every community would have its own ordained presbyter. With this measure, we will deprive them of the possibility to send the more orthodox and experienced Adventists to other communities. Having taken us up on our proposal, Grigoriev, Yakovenko and Bondar’, it seems, decided to fool us and, under this guise, intentionally revive the ‘branch Upolnomochennye’ of the spiritual center, regulating their work on the basis of a specially designed schedule of distribution of communities for permanent pastoral service...

Yakovenko and Bondar’ are working hard to put together a solid administrative apparatus, looking to fill the position of a secretary with a person who would be capable to play the role of leader in their spiritual center, and not merely that of a technical clerical worker. To complete this trinity [*troika*], they had in mind to bring in as ‘a technical worker, capable of typing very well on a type-writer,’ a young and very active Adventist, presbyter Lukashenko. Having disclosed their intentions, we found a good pretext to decline the candidature of Lukashenko... We consider it utterly inexpedient to give them a chance to strengthen their grass-roots communities. Under these ‘branch Upolnomochennye,’ such communities will intensify their religious-propagandist activity to even greater extent than they did under the oblast Upolnomochennye. We suppress in the most categorical form all their attempts towards widening the sphere of the preachers’ activity.<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid., p. 389-390.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., p. 353-354.

In 1949, Bondar' was completely stripped of his spiritual responsibilities but lingered in Kiev, having taken up a secular job at the dry cleaners.<sup>216</sup> Vil'khovyi's frustration with the SDA leadership in Ukraine, however, spilled over into his 1950 report, in which he inserted the following observation:

During the period under review, we have detected the continuous activism on the part of a prominent leader of Adventists, presbyter of the SDA community in the city of Poltava—Likarenko. In the community which he leads, Likarenko pays special attention to the missionary work, conducting it by way of individual conversations with residents, employing for this purpose the community's activist cadre. At the same time, he continues to pursue the goal of drawing the working and school-going youth into the community... The heightened spiritual activity of the SDA presbyter cadre, extending beyond the boundaries of the prayer house, will be suppressed by us by means of appropriate recommendations to the Upolnomochennyi of VSASD for Ukraine, Yakovenko, whom we will warn that should such 'activism' recur in the future, the [guilty] presbyters will be taken off registration.<sup>217</sup>

In 1950, came the turn of Kulyzhskii, when the CARC ultimately revoked even his limited permit to travel. Characterizing him as "extreme fanatic," who "in his religious propaganda actively propounds 'the coming of Christ,'" Vil'khovyi reported:

In order to restrict the missionary activity of preacher Kulyzhskii, we categorically forbade him to travel to religious communities, having enclosed his activity by the walls of a prayer house where he is registered as a presbyter. If our recommendations are not observed, we will take more decisive measures, up to taking him off registration.<sup>218</sup>

The evidence cited so far suggests that the SDA church during this period did not experience any internal tensions between its defiant spiritual center and communities on the periphery, despite the fact that the VSASD was not elected by a congress of

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<sup>216</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 12, p. 85.

<sup>217</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 783, p. 85-86.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid , p. 82.



representatives as the SDA custom required. This rather idyllic state of affairs could be attributed to both the confessional homogeneity of the SDA church and to its leadership's secretiveness and unwillingness to report any problems, even if such problems existed. One document, however, deposited in the archive of the Upolnomochennyi of CARC in 1951, indicates that the SDA leaders were not all religiously driven zealots, as Vil'khovyi tended to portray them. A letter written to Vil'khovyi by an SDA preacher, A.G. Miriuka, reveals how one man's grudge and ambition could furnish the government with "substantive" information about the internal life of a religious community. The SDA community in Chernovtsy, it seems (the nature of this affair is not clear), uncovered certain transgressions on the part of Miriuka and invited Yakovenko to serve as an arbiter. Miriuka, in his turn, decided to take the trash out of the house and clear his name before the government. According to Miriuka, Yakovenko "arrived in Chernovtsy with the goal of investigating my 'case' on the account of some slanders." Outraged by the fact that Yakovenko did not concede to either visiting him nor calling in "slanderers" whom he could question in Miriuka's presence about whether or not what they had said about him was true, Miriuka continued to describe the unfolding of events, inserting compromising information on his fellow believers:

Without my knowledge, he [Yakovenko] continued to collect different rumors...together with Kostomskii and Klevniuk. A former missionary of the Adventist community, Leon Bilinskii, who had done time for his refusal to serve in the military during the Great Patriotic War, also joined them and announced that they had proof that I, supposedly, repeatedly committed serious moral crimes, namely, that I had a promiscuous lifestyle. On these grounds, Miriuka must be relieved from his post as a preacher and expelled from the community. I declare that all accusations against me...are fictional... I also announce that all 'witnesses' accusing me are professional liars and by their religious convictions—habitual reformists, against whom I led and continue to lead a hard struggle,

exposing their real face of enemies, not only of Adventists, but of all people. The main reason for these accusations consists in that I, in the course of my entire career, have not been a blind performer of religious rituals, but actively exposed all errors and delusions of religious teachings—something that religious fanatics like Kostomskii, Klevniuk and others did not like. Not being able to accuse me of not going to movies, theaters and other cultural institutions, or of reading Soviet fiction and popular science literature, they decided to get at me in a different way. Having gathered false accusations, they decided to present me before all believers as a godless and morally dissolute person. I ask you to take this into consideration should Yakovenko submit to you a petition about my removal from the position of a preacher. I ask you to hold this action until an investigation is carried out inside the community and before the Soviet court.<sup>219</sup>

While trying to clear his name before the CARC, presenting himself as a progressive-liberal individual in the crowd of religious fanatics, Miriuka accused Bilinskii, Kostomskii, Klevniuk, and a sizable segment of Chernovtsy SDA community of missionary work, and reformist and anti-secular tendencies. Interestingly enough, shortly after his expulsion from the community, according to reminiscences of the SDA old-timers, Ivan Fedorovich and Marta Khimenets, Miriuka began to “actively expose” not only “all errors and delusions” of his fellow-believers, but of religion in general—he became an atheist lecturer who purportedly died on stage while reading one of his antireligious lectures in which he openly challenged God.<sup>220</sup> Miriuka, who within a short period of time had undergone a complete volte face, from being a projected branch Upolnomochennyi in charge of several SDA communities to an atheist agitator, left a bitter residue in the memory of Ukrainian Seventh Day Adventists, and for the time being it was an exceptional occurrence. As the SDA church descended into the dark era of the

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<sup>219</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 117, p. 23.

<sup>220</sup> Interview with I.F. Khimenets, Kiev, 2008.

internal schism in the 1960s-1970s, more letters of similar nature were deposited on the tables of government officials.

In the meantime, the VSASD had to make adjustments to its top leadership echelon. In 1952, the Chairman of VSASD, Grigoriev, died of gangrene of both legs. During the last years of his life, he felt more and more the impact of past decades—“cold and damp prisoner cells and exiles to hungry Siberia.”<sup>221</sup> Honoring Grigoriev’s last wish, the surviving members of VSASD elected Pavel Matsanov to be the new chairman. Yakovenko moved from Kiev to Moscow to fill the position of Matsanov’s assistant. Galadzhev was appointed to serve as secretary and treasurer of VSASD while the other two positions of VSASD’s members were filled by Mel’nik (who would also replace Yakovenko in Ukraine) and Kulyzhskii. “And again,” commented the SDA historian D. Yunak, “the Adventist people accepted the decision of senior brothers, made without the convocation of a congress, as legitimate...under the circumstances.”<sup>222</sup> “Although outwardly everything seemed all right with the central leadership of the Church,” remarked Parasei and Zhukaliuk, “...there was uneasiness inside the organization. To some extent, one could sense tensions in relations between members of the presidium even when pastor Grigoriev was still alive. However, his personal involvement in meetings had a restraining influence on all participants. After his death, the brothers could no longer come to consensus on many organizational issues.”<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> Parasei and Zhukaliuk, p. 54.

<sup>222</sup> Yunak, p. 334.

<sup>223</sup> Parasei and Zhukaliuk, p. 55.

Matsanov essentially continued the policy of camouflaged sabotage of government restrictions, adopted by the previous VSASD leadership and could certainly draw the line beyond which no concessions could be made to impositions of the Soviet state. At the same time, he was shrewd and pragmatic enough to avoid confrontations in those cases when indulging the state would be of no great sacrifice for the church. In 1952, Matsanov represented the SDA church at an International Conference of Churches and Religious Organizations of USSR in Defense of Peace, held in Zagorsk, Moscow oblast. In his fiery speech—a sure contribution to the Soviet counterpropaganda campaign—he said:

We, the Seventh Day Adventist believers, gratefully accepted the invitation of Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia, because the task of this conference—the preservation of peace in all the world—is very close to us...as believers and citizens of the Soviet Union...

When one thinks about the atom and hydrogen bombs that the American aggressors want to use in a future war, it seems that humanity has lost all its dignity. But if bacteriological substances are added to this as a weapon of a future war, then one can definitively state that culture and humanity stand at the precipice of destruction. The war in Korea should serve us as a lesson and a warning... The USA, which considers itself a Christian country, acts treacherously and not at all in a Christian-like manner. Had Christ ever acted in the way the Americans are acting in Korea, dropping bombs and bacteria, causing infectious diseases, on old men, women and children?... All our Soviet people, under the leadership of our popular government, not only do not pursue war, but use all their strength and scientific achievements towards peaceful construction for the benefit of all people. The result of this is the prosperity of our Soviet people that grows by the year... We call upon them [the Americans] to strive towards reaching a peace agreement and the cessation of this inhuman war in Korea. (Aplause)...<sup>224</sup>

Such smokescreens, however, could not conceal Matsanov's uncooperativeness for very long. Towards the end of 1954, only two years after Matsanov's assumption of

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<sup>224</sup> Yunak, p. 337-340.

the post of the Chairman of VSASD, he was accused “of permitting too many baptisms in the Moscow SDA community, of ties with the unregistered communities and of providing aid to families of the repressed. His registration certificate of the Chairman of VSASD was revoked, and he was asked to leave not only Moscow, but the Moscow oblast.”<sup>225</sup> In Parasei’s and Zhukaliuk’s opinion, prior to Matsanov’s removal the government attempted to drive a wedge between Matsanov and other SDA leaders:

The KGB agents hinted in conversations with both members of the all-union leadership and local clergymen in different parts of the country that not only Matsanov could be dismissed from his post for such ‘illegal activity,’ but the VSASD itself, which would place the SDA Church outside the law. For many, the liquidation of VSASD was equivalent to the destruction of the Church, to spiritual death. Therefore letters and personal pleas were being sent to Matsanov, asking to change the course for the sake of preserving the Church’s central leadership... Perhaps, he should have conceded certain principles and looked for a compromise. On the other hand, according to Matsanov’s own statement, the required concessions would not have altered the situation. <sup>226</sup>

According to Yunak, the CARC wanted to fill the vacant position of the VSASD Chairman with Yakovenko. However, by that time Yakovenko was charged with some infractions\* by the Moscow community, where he also served as a presbyter, and “lost his membership and, with it, all his ecclesiastic posts.”<sup>227</sup> Confronted with the necessity to choose yet another Chairman in such a quick succession and still without a possibility to convoke a congress, the remaining VSASD members elected Kulyzhskii whose

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<sup>225</sup> Parasei and Zhukaliuk, p. 56.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., p. 70-71.

\* The nature of these infractions remains obscure and the SDA historians-memoirists are recalcitrant to shed any light on this matter in their publications, except that 13 years later, in 1967, Yakovenko’s membership in the Moscow SDA community was restored.

<sup>227</sup> Yunak, p. 341-342.

candidature the government approved (And this is after Vil’hkovi’s assessment of Kulyzhskii as “extreme fanatic”!). An Estonian, P.G. Sil’man, took the post of Kulyzhskii’s assistant and A.F. Parasei—that of a secretary-treasurer. The other two members of VSASD, A.G. Galadzhev and A.I. Cholders, combined their responsibilities in the spiritual center with heading their SDA communities in Ukraine and Latvia, respectively.<sup>228</sup>

Evaluating a rather confusing situation that arose within the SDA church as a result of Matsanov’s dismissal by the government, contemporaries of those events, Parasei and Zhukaliuk, wrote:

The majority of ministers and ordinary believers considered the decision of the plenum [of VSASD] illegal, carried out under the pressure of CARC, and saw Matsanov as persecuted by the godless for his principled stance in defending the purity of the truth. He continued to be recognized as the spiritual leader of Adventism in the Soviet Union. As a result, a new spiritual center, with all the appropriate for the SDA Church structures and departments, began to gradually form around Matsanov.

Matsanov himself also had never renounced his status as a leader and fulfilled the functions of a Chairman for the greater portion of Adventists in the USSR... The spiritual center in Moscow, headed by Kulyzhskii, also continued to function... It led that portion of communities and ministers that recognized it. Matsanov’s supporters considered the Moscow center pro-Communist while the official VSASD announced the spiritual center headed by Matsanov—illegal.

The state authorities, naturally, acknowledged and supported the official VSASD while also flirting with the other side. Fairly soon, the outlines of a third group, that considered itself neutral, began to take shape. Such people could also be understood. They did not want to take part in a confrontation, perceiving both spiritual senters unlawful, since they were not elected according to the practice of the General Conference.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid., p. 342.

<sup>229</sup> Parasei and Zhukaliuk, p. 72-74.

In subsequent years, more and more communities began gravitating toward one or the other of these multiple spiritual centers, making it impossible for the official VSASD to effectively coordinate or regulate the life of the fragmented SDA church. Moreover, already functioning under a crippling suspicion (largely unjustified) of being pro-Communist, the Moscow VSASD tried to err on the side of laxity rather than rigor. As the Khrushchev antireligious campaign gained momentum in the late 1950s, the VSASD's position became untenable. In 1959, the chief Upolnomochennyi of CARC for Ukraine, Polonnik, complained to the party bosses:

It is necessary to note that the spiritual center of the SDAs—the VSASD—not only fails to orient its communities toward strict observance of the existing legislation on cults, but even pushes them towards its violation... With the VSASD's blessing, the SDA communities in Kiev, Kharkov, Poltava, Vinnitsa, Simferopol, and a number of other places in Ukraine had bought buildings, registered them to proxy owners, and then signed fictitious lease agreements with them for the rent of those buildings as prayer houses... Having verified these facts, we initiated court proceedings against the culprits. On decisions of People's Courts, all unlawfully acquired houses, the combined cost of which comprises several hundreds of thousands of rubles, were requisitioned from communities and transferred to the communal housing fund of the local Soviets of Workers' Deputies... The VSASD leadership had given full freedom of action to its local formations. This is precisely what accounts, for example, for the emergence in Bukovina /Chernovtsy oblast/ of a local spiritual center of the SDAs, the so-called committee headed by the former Senior Presbyters... Belinskii, Vovk and Kostomskii. This committee is trying to govern all 18 SDA communities of the oblast. Its leaders declare that they do not recognize the existing spiritual center in Moscow. We are totally uninterested in the relationship between the individual representatives of clergy—let them bite each other all they want—but using the kind of freedom permitted to it by the VSASD, the committee created in Bukovina sets the tone for all SDA communities: instigates them to form Sabbath schools for the study of doctrines, musical circles, and so forth... Had the VSASD, in its present composition, fulfilled its purpose, we would not have had these kinds of surprises in various places. Anyway, if the VSASD cannot exercise influence over the periphery and does not raise it in the spirit of obedience to the demands of Soviet legislation on cults, then why in the hell do we need it? The CARC permitted to have an SDA Senior Presbyter in Chernovtsy oblast. We registered in this capacity the former presbyter of Kazatin

community /Vinnitsa oblast/, I.S. Bondar', having discussed his candidature in advance with 'the neighbors' [KGB—A.K.]. We obligated him and Senior Presbyter of the SDA church in Ukraine, A.F. Parasei, to straighten out the SDA communities in Bukovina and enforce in them the strict observance of the existing legislation on cults.<sup>230</sup>

Parasei and Bondar', as well as the VSASD leadership in Moscow, apparently could not live up to the expectations of CARC. On October 24, 1960, Polonnik reported to the head of the Department of Propaganda and Agitation at the CC of CPU, comrade P.T. Tron'ko: I hereby inform you that, on the decision of CARC at the CM of USSR, the All-Union center of the sect of Seventh Day Adventists has been liquidated."<sup>231</sup>

Polonnik further cited from the report dispatched to him by the Moscow authorities:

By its confessional creed and nature of its activity, the SDA sect is one of the more reactionary sects. Quite often, the sectarian communities are headed by persons who in the past were prosecuted for anti-Soviet activity. As the facts reveal, Adventists have illegal connections /through tourists, etc./ with foreign centers of the SDAs whose main administration is located in the USA. There were established facts of dissemination among believers of anti-Soviet literature published in the United States and other countries.

Thus, in 1959-1960, the state organs discovered in sectarians' apartments the handwritten, typewritten and printed materials of anti-Soviet character in Russian, English and German, as well as typewriters, typing paper and carbon paper, used for the multiplication of these materials, and tape-recorders with reels on which sectarian sermons, prayers and songs were recorded. The American magazine 'Ministry,' requisitioned from sectarians, states the following in the article 'Soviet Russia:' 'Today, Bolshevism is the cruelest adversary of our faith. Bolshevism rejects faith and struggles against any faith, especially against any kind of Christian faith...In the book 'Prophecies of Jesus Christ,' the following is said about the events of our time: 'In recent time, the various disasters increasingly shake up the world, and one can see them as signs of the approaching end of the world...In 1922-23, 7 million people perished in USSR from famine, and the number of those perished in USSR during 1933-1934 is incalculable...'<sup>232</sup>

<sup>230</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 2, D. 5205, p. 81-82.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., p. 404.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., p. 405.



However, this rather standard suspicion of political disloyalty, automatically leveled by the Soviet state against any non-indigenous but nonetheless legally existing confession, such as Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Evangelicals, Baptists, Hungarian Reformed Church, was not the main determinant for the government's decision to dissolve the VSASD (after all, the government took this circumstance into consideration when it registered the SDA church in 1918, and again in 1946). The CARC made a determination to liquidate the VSASD primarily due to the uncooperativeness of its members, as the following excerpts from the same report suggest:

In recent time, the CARC at CM of USSR and local Soviet organs repeatedly took measures to stop the SDA servants of cult from violating laws. Several leading figures of this sect were removed from their ecclesiastic posts. However, the state of affairs in this religious center had not changed. The leadership of VSASD acts contrary to measures carried out by the Soviet organs—measures that aim at the liquidation of violations of Soviet laws by servants of the cult.

The VSASD has established connections with unregistered and illegally acting on the territory of USSR sectarian organizations and supervises their activity. It also established contact with sectarian leaders and preachers who have returned from places of imprisonment and involves them in active religious work. The servants of the cult, who have been removed by the state organs from ecclesiastic activity for violating Soviet laws, receive pensions from this sectarian center and use the latter to communicate with and oversee the unregistered sectarian communities and groups.<sup>233</sup>

A protocol, composed by the VSASD leaders, Kulyzhskii and Likarenko, describe in dramatic terms events surrounding the liquidation of their spiritual center. The government did not provide the SDA leaders with any written copy of the decision and refused to even read it to them. The member of the Moscow CARC, P.A. Zadorozhnyi, only stated tersely that the VSASD was liquidated for a number of violations. When

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid., p. 405-406.

Kulyzhskii and Likarenko expressed their wish to invite other VSASD members to decide what to do with the VSASD library, archive and finances, they were told that according to a certain article of the instruction of Ministry of Finance (which was immediately read to them), all financial assets of closed religious organizations were to be transferred to the state. As for the office equipment and paperwork, it had to be transferred to the Upolnomochennyi of CARC in Moscow. Thus, in an instant, the SDA church lost over 700,000 rubles.<sup>234</sup>

Despite the worst fears, expressed by some SDA leaders of the time and still applied retroactively by Parasei and Zhukaliuk even in 1997, that “the liquidation of one of the lesser confessions, such as the SDA Church was at that time, always figured in the projections of Communist regime as a pack and parcel of its struggle against religion,”<sup>235</sup> the dissolution of VSASD did not signal the liquidation of the entire SDA church. Rather, it signaled an alteration of the government approach to taming the Seventh Day Adventists. By reorganizing the registered SDA communities into autonomous entities, deprived of communication with each other and guidance of their spiritual center, the CARC planned to assume direct control over the life of these communities and apply to them the set of restrictions that the VSASD had been too hesitant or unwilling to enforce. In March of 1961, Polonnik gave the following instruction at the group meeting of the Upolnomochennye of CARC:

[It is] necessary to establish close control over the SDA communities due to the liquidation of the SDA all-union and republican centers. The liquidation of

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<sup>234</sup> Yunak. P. 349-350.

<sup>235</sup> Parasei and Zhukaliuk, p. 71.

the SDA spiritual centers must be used to the maximum to decrease the activity of Adventist communities and, first of all—to weaken their spiritual leadership. Strong preachers and organizers must be removed from leadership under any passable pretext. But this must be done subtly and wisely. The same requirement should be also carried out in relation to the EKhB communities.<sup>236</sup>

Neither the party archive nor the archive of the Upolnomochennyi of CARC for Ukraine contain a single shred of evidence suggesting that in the postwar years the government planned the dissolution of any religious denomination that it initially deemed eligible for registration. Moreover, shortly after the liquidation of VSASD, the CARC allowed for at least partial restoration of the SDA leadership by establishing the post of a Senior Presbyter of the SDA church in Ukraine—a position that was filled by A.F. Parasei. The fear (shared by both the VSASD and VSEKhB leaders) that the dissolution of a spiritual center would automatically entail the dissolution of an entire denomination, stemmed in part from the still fresh memory of the 1930s, and in part from a peculiar mentality shared by people accustomed to living under the highly centralized and autocratic regimes where the state and its leadership are often equated with the entire people.

The loss of central leadership certainly brought about dramatic consequences for the SDA church, but it should not be only regretted and bemoaned as an utterly tragic event, but also accepted as an inevitable price the SDA leaders had to pay for their principled stance vis-à-vis the Soviet state. The fact that the Soviet leadership did not outlaw even such a tiny denomination as the SDA church for the non-compliance of its spiritual center puts into different perspective the protectionist rhetoric of the compliant

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<sup>236</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5407, p. 151.

VSEKhB. As the story of the Pentecostal exodus from the VSEKhB revealed, the state was not at all interested in the expansion of the underground. Given the sheer numeric strength of the EKhB brotherhood, the VSEKhB leaders may have had more room for tougher negotiations with the state than they dared to acknowledge. The evidence, I maintain, supports the argument that in the postwar decades the Soviet government did not look for a pretext to outlaw entire registered religious denominations or religion in general, but to keep religious communities in a state of arrested development, within the confines of what I would like to term a “confessional reservation,” where they could always be under the spotlight of CARC and cooperative spiritual centers. To allow these denominations to disperse in the underground would mean the same for the Soviet government as for the US government of the Manifest Destiny era to see the Native Americans escape from their reservations and roam unchecked under the leadership of their bellicose chiefs. The Soviet government’s policy on religion after the war, as I argued earlier, was more subtle. By continuously filtering out and isolating radicals, non-conformists and simply capable leaders from the midst of registered religious communities, the Soviet government hoped to achieve its two-pronged objective: to allow religion gradually die out of old age, and to maintain the facade of legality and purported freedom of religion in the USSR.

Perhaps the most puzzling outcome of the activity of both spiritual centers discussed in this chapter is that despite the diverse paths they had followed both the EKhB brotherhood and the SDA church could not avoid the painful internal schisms. While the schism in the EKhB brotherhood was prompted by the overpowering presence

of its hierarchically structured central leadership and its overly accommodating stance vis-à-vis the Soviet state, the schism in the SDA church occurred mainly due to the government's meddling with its spiritual center, which resulted in its ultimate dissolution and the fragmentation of the SDA central leadership. Under conditions of such close regulation of religion by the state, there was perhaps no safe alternative that would have allowed these denominations to avoid serious disruptions to their internal life.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **PROTESTANTS AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES**

In the postwar decades, the Soviet Protestants lived under two sets of conditions that affected all aspects of their activities as members of religious communities and as citizens in the broader Soviet milieu. On a macro level of Protestants' social interactions and professional lives in the mainstream Soviet society these conditions were determined by a set of negative assumptions about religion and religious people, especially sectarians, that the government vigorously propagated through the mass media and an army of atheist lecturers frequently visiting virtually all places of study or employment. The general public was systematically trained to perceive religion as an atavism and Protestants as social misfits, preachers of obscurity, crypto-sympathizers with bourgeois ideologies, and simply crooks taking advantage of simple-minded and uneducated Soviet citizens. If the Russian Orthodox Church was viewed as a mere residue of the old pre-revolutionary mentality, lingering on due to being anchored in centuries-deep, outmoded, but indigenous Slavic culture, the Protestant denominations represented a more annoying, and potentially more dangerous, phenomenon of religion's adaptability to modern conditions. Although it was legalized in the postwar USSR, religion was expected to lose its ground and eventually vanish under the bombardment of evidence provided by natural sciences. In other words, religion would yield to persuasion and education. In reality,

however, this educational model of the secularization of Soviet society tended to take on attributes of forceful reeducation. The forms of antireligious propaganda became progressively cruder in proportion to the degrees of separation of this effort from its emanating ideological center. In the Russian/Soviet political culture, it did not seem contradictory to substitute coercion, threats, blackmail, demonization and blatant administrative bullying for education. Religious communities on the periphery often suffered the most from this perverse practice.

To make things worse, the government intentionally kept believers ignorant of their legal rights, for in the 1940s-1960s only the Council's Upolnomochennye and other involved officials had access to the official text of the Soviet legislation on cults. For the same reason, and also to hide the evidence of their illegal or contestable actions, the CARC and local Soviet officials often refused to provide believers with any written documents stating the grounds on which a certain legal action was taken against them. In the absence of any independent legal advice or courts, whereby the unconstitutionality of a certain action against them could be contested, the believers often had little choice but to succumb to the pseudo-legal pretexts for harassment conjured up by the CARC or KGB. However, as the local Soviet officials often perverted the Soviet legislation beyond recognition or dismissed it altogether—in “the phenomenon of vertical, downward magnification of Moscow's antireligious policies,”<sup>1</sup> as James W. Warhola termed it—even the most gullible and legally unaware believers armed themselves with

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<sup>1</sup> James W. Warhola, “Central vs. Local Authority in Soviet Religious Affairs” in *Journal of Church and State*, Volume 34 (1), Winter 1992, p. 17.

pens and paper and wrote vehement protests against what they perceived as violations of their legal rights.

### **1. Protestants as Victims of Prejudice and General Brutalization of Soviet Society**

In 1946, Vil'khovyi included the following story in his quarterly report to the party officials:

In village Semenovka, Lisianskii region [Kiev oblast], the district militia officer, Nemchenko, appeared in the prayer house of the local SDA community and, firing his revolver, dispersed the believers, gathered their religious books and locked them up in the kolkhoz storeroom. He ordered the presbyter and the owner of the house in which the prayer service took place to sit on the ground next to the house and, pointing his revolver at them, threatened to shoot them for counterrevolution.<sup>2</sup>

A description of a similar incident appeared in Vil'khovyi's report for 1952. In this case, the "fact of grossest administrative bludgeoning in relations with a servant of the cult" was permitted by the Upolnomochennyi of the regional committee of Communist Party in Shumskii region, Ternopol oblast, comrade Zadneprianskii, and Chairman of Zaleskii village soviet, comrade Kravchuk. On May 9, at midnight, these two officials in charge of procuring subscriptions for the State Bond came to the apartment of presbyter of the EKhB community in village Zalestsy, S.F. Soltis.

Using threats, they tried to pressure him to subscribe for the State Bond on behalf of the community. When Soltis stated that the community did not have any income, and that he could not subscribe on behalf of the community and could only do it for himself, Zadneprianskii told Soltis to follow him to the village soviet. Once outside the apartment, Zadneprianskii began beating Soltis unmercifully. Soltis, having taken advantage of the darkness, managed to escape. Zadneprianskii then returned to the apartment and began threatening Soltis' wife

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<sup>2</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 4555, p. 385.



with a firearm. Having finally left the apartment, Zadneprianskii fired his revolver twice in the courtyard.<sup>3</sup>

While such acts of intimidation and violence represented an inseparable part of believers' experience and occurred quite frequently in Ukraine and elsewhere in the USSR, they did not fall into either one of the admissible categories of government-sponsored antireligious work—containment of religion through vigorous enforcement of restrictive legislation on cults, or education and dissemination of scientific atheism. Commenting on the incident in village Semenovka, Vil'khovyi wrote:

People who do not understand the party line on issues of antireligious propaganda think that if they lock up a prayed house or disperse a religious community, the religious holdovers in the consciousness of believers would thus be liquidated. They do not take into account that administrative measures produce harmful results and intensify religious fanaticism in believers. 'Suborning' a militiaman to liquidate a sect is just one example of such head lopping [*golovotiapstvo*]... The militiaman Nemchenko is being held responsible. But, essentially, it does not yield the desired result. The Procuracy needs to look deeper into this matter. Nemchenko in fact carried out an 'assignment' of zealous administrators who cannot grasp that such actions have an anti-Soviet and counterrevolutionary character. Only enemies of the people can act in such a manner, that is, to provocatively shut down prayer houses, thus aggravating relations between the population and organs of Soviet authority.<sup>4</sup>

With respect to the incident in village Zalestsy, Vil'khovyi remarked that "all materials concerning the unlawful actions of comrades Zadneprianskii and Kravchuk were forwarded by the Council's Upolnomochennyi to the oblast Procurator and Secretary of Shumskii Regional Committee of CP(b)U for verification and holding the culprits

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<sup>3</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 1572, p. 242.

<sup>4</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 4555, p. 384-385.

responsible.” At the time, however, Vil’khovyi had “no information about the results of investigation.”<sup>5</sup>

The absence of evidence confirming that either the CARC or the central party leadership inspired or condoned the lynch law methods often applied to believers by the local officials suggests the relegation of such occurrences to the phenomenon of Russian/Soviet political culture characterized by the continuity of autocratic and prerogative traditions, suspicion towards any form of otherness, the immaturity of legal consciousness, the insignificance of an individual in the general framework of collectivist mentality, and the extension of military methods of command and control, reinforced by the recent war experience, to civilian life. Most local Soviet officials who harassed Protestant minorities in villages and towns were either survivors of the 1930s or people whose character-forming experience was closely linked to the recent war. Historians have often pointed out that for many Soviet citizens the ordeal of war was profoundly liberating. “The wartime culture,” in Richard Stites’ assessment, “reflected the partial relegitimation in Soviet public culture of personal life, intimate feelings, interior authenticity, and even quasi religiosity that had been muted during the ‘optimistic’ thirties...Suffering and perhaps fear led to a passionate exaltation of Russian nature, its people, history, culture, and ancient religion.”<sup>6</sup> Catherine Wanner also commented that “when coercive mechanisms in the USSR against religious practice were lifted...during

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<sup>5</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 1572, p. 243.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Stites, “Soviet Russian Wartime Culture: Freedom and Control, Spontaneity and Consciousness” in *The People’s War: Responses to World War II in the Soviet Union*, edit. Robert W Thurston and Bernd Bonwetsch (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), p. 175.

World War II, religious communities rebounded with tremendous agility, suggesting that secularization in the sense of an eradication of religious belief did not have deep roots in Soviet society.”<sup>7</sup> Like the majority of Soviet citizens, the Protestant believers, many of whom served in the Red Army and bore the burden of wartime sacrifices, also hoped that in the postwar years they would be able to capitalize on this newly gained freedom, and that their service to the Motherland would help them to carve out a more elevated and legitimate place in the Soviet society. The Soviet establishment, however, hijacked the people’s victory and reformatted it as a new foundational myth to justify the regime’s legitimacy. In the confines of this state-owned memory of war, there was no room for freedom, spontaneity or the sense of camaraderie that had bound the diverse segments of Soviet society during the war. Amir Weiner’s study of the formation of the postwar ruling elites in Ukraine showed that “the myth of the war defined criteria for legitimate membership in and exclusion from the Soviet family.”<sup>8</sup> The rise to power and access to rationed benefits and privileges that a war-torn country could offer depended on one’s ability to pass the “purification campaign” and prove his/her active stance against the German invaders during the occupation or at the front lines, and on one’s willingness to embrace and promote the state and party-centered myth of the war. Since Protestant believers were not members of the Communist Party and, hence, could not be appointed to positions of leadership, succeeding in meeting the aforementioned criteria was of little relevance to their everyday life. The present digression from the main focus of this

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<sup>7</sup> Catherine Wanner, *Communities of the Converted: Ukrainians and Global Evangelism* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2007), p. 7.

<sup>8</sup> Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War: The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 8.

chapter pursues the goal of determining what sort of people did rise to positions of authority in the postwar USSR and what may have accounted for their frequent mistreatment of their believing fellow-citizens.

While suppressing the authentic lore of the war era and its bearers, the government promoted those *frontoviks* (veterans) who were buying into the newly created lore of official patriotism. Describing this category of people, Catherine Merridale has commented:

Instead of aspiring to freedom, patriots would henceforth—wittingly or not—become complicit in the repressions of minorities, large-scale arrests, and a bleak and deadly dogma that had almost nothing in common with the libertarian promises... The new Soviet patriotism would be used to condemn and exclude all kinds of dissidents in the years to come. War veterans, many of them still intoxicated with the original idealistic brew and still breathing the old pietism, were trapped. They could not be unpatriotic and they could not stand against the government... It did not take the veterans too long to turn into conservative bastions of Soviet rule.<sup>9</sup>

In more than one sense, the people who came to occupy the seats of power at the regional and provincial levels in the postwar USSR strikingly resembled the upwardly mobile lumpen-proletarians of the prewar era, who were characterized, in Alexander Obolonskii's words, by "accentuated loyalty to everything emanating from the authority, which in effect masked [their] pragmatic careerism," by "a Philistine desire to ensure [themselves] against any possible trouble," by "a dual or triple morality," and "an open elevation of moral relativism to a status of *modus vivendi*... which simultaneously anesthetized [their] conscience and did not threaten [their] personal welfare."<sup>10</sup> Vaclav

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<sup>9</sup> Catherine Merridale, *Ivan's War: Life and Death in the Red Army, 1939-1945* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006), p. 373-374.

Havel's greengrocer, who placed in his window, among the onions and carrots, the slogan "Workers of the World, Unite!", acted out of the same basic instinct as the "zealous administrators" in Ukraine, who commissioned the militiaman, Nemchenko, to disperse the SDA religious community in village Semenovka. What united the diverse people in this category was their eagerness to emit signs of conformity with the dominant ideology in order to secure their good rapport with the totalitarian state.

The problem, however, appears to be more complex, for there was a difference in the attitude towards believers of the various grades of Soviet officials. While fully embracing the postwar Soviet agenda, the party member, Vil'khovyi, would never permit or condone the sort of brutish behavior manifested by another Communist, Zadneprianskii. It is therefore plausible to interpret the conduct of Soviet officials like Zadneprianskii as evidence of transposition of quick and high-handed methods of problem solving, applied during the war, to the postwar civilian life. Amir Weiner averred that "for party leaders who returned from the front, representations of war were the prism through which they viewed civilian life and a major instrument with which they cemented their political power and authority."<sup>11</sup> The postwar Soviet media, in Weiner's observation, encouraged the front-line assertiveness of the former Red Army soldier turned administrator, "who cut through the red tape with a display of iron will and voluntarist enthusiasm." The Soviet popular literature "celebrated a new hero: the demobilized officer who transferred his zeal from the front to pursue the electrification of

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<sup>10</sup> Aleksandr Obolonskii, *Drama rossiiskoi politicheskoi istorii: sistema protiv lichnosti* (Moskva: Rossiiskaia Akademiia Nauk, 1994), p. 333.

<sup>11</sup> Weiner, p. 51.

the backward countryside,” and contrasted “the character of the relentless veteran with that of a laid-back bureaucrat, most likely one who avoided the front and adapted a ‘soft’ and conservative approach to the task of reconstruction.”<sup>12</sup>

At the level of everyday routine work and problem-solving, however, such front-line assertiveness of the new Soviet officials often manifested itself in the manhandling of those who dared to object or disagree. Reflecting on this typical for the Red Army technique of “persuasion,” Victor Suvorov wrote:

Face-thrashing among Generals as well as among all lower ranks of the Red Army was as common as theft and drunkenness...If a corps commander pummeled the face of a division commander, the beat-up commander summoned the regiment commanders and took out his anger on them. The face-pummeling descended from the top to the very bottom.<sup>13</sup>

The Soviet officials often resorted to the use of this culturally acceptable and even ritualized disregard for both human dignity and legal procedures, especially when certain deadlines had to be met. In 1952, while conducting the general supervisory work in Vinnitsa oblast, the organs of Procuracy uncovered the following incident:

The Chairman of the ‘May First’ kolkhoz in village Kamenka, Teplikskii region, I.G. Zbarashchuk, Chairman of the Kamenka village soviet, I.A. Stoliarchuk, and Secretary of party organization, G.D. Metelitsa, being inside the party office located inside the kolkhoz club, invited citizen N.S. Kachan to come in for a conversation concerning the upcoming State Bond drive. Citizen Kachan, who was in the club where a play was to be performed, refused to go. The village soviet Chairman, Stoliarchuk, then took him by the arm and walked him into the party office. Zbarashchuk, Stoliarchuk and Metelitsa began to persuade Kachan to subscribe for 600 rubles in State Bonds... Kachan agreed to subscribe only to 400 rubles. Since Kachan was not agreeing to subscribe to 600 rubles [in bonds], the kolkhoz Chairman, Zbarashchuk, pushed Kachan and caused him fall on an iron chest. Zbarashchuk then began battering Kachan with his hands and feet.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>13</sup> Viktor Suvorov, *Ten' pobedy* (Donetsk: Stalker, 2007), p. 19-20.

The village soviet Chairman, Stoliarchuk, also joined and began assaulting Kachan, causing him injuries. Kachan began to holler 'Help!' Stoliarchuk then tried to clamp Kachan's mouth with his hand and scratched Kachan's mouth and lips in the process. Metelitsa, who had so far been standing aside, grabbed a banner and began to batter Kachan with the banner's shaft. As a result of sustained injuries, Kachan spent 4 days ...in the regional hospital... The Vinnitsa oblast court sentenced Zbarashchuk and Stoliarchuk to 5 years of imprisonment... Metelitsa received 3 years of imprisonment.<sup>14</sup>

The case of a non-believer, N.S. Kachan, stands as a testimony that the illegal and violent actions of some Soviet officials towards the vulnerable religious minorities did not always stem from such officials' misreading of the government antireligious agenda, but originated in the Soviet, and perhaps even older Slavic, political culture that deemphasized the dignity of an individual. The recent war certainly contributed to the readiness with which the lower ranking and least educated Soviet officials resorted to coercion, intimidation and physical abuses as the surest and quickest means to achieve the desired results. Characterizing this "front-line assertiveness" that "pervaded every realm of the Soviet polity," Weiner wrote: "The prolonged experience of warfare created a unique mode of association and a sense of self that did not run through the socialization channels provided by the regime....Whereas the front did not breed Western-style democrats, it did produce an assertive Soviet individual who held tightly to his...newly earned-in-blood right to define his identity and status based on his wartime exploits."<sup>15</sup> In the civilian setting, however, this straightforward and unceremonious trench-style assertiveness, with its contempt toward petty rules, systematic analysis and, most of all, feelings, caused a lot of collateral damage and often proved counterproductive, for as the

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<sup>14</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 4084, p. 23.

<sup>15</sup> Weiner, p. 366-367.

bearers of this essentially military mentality, with its prerogative style of leadership, entered the ranks of civil service, they tended to trample under foot the fledgling notion of legality. In Weiner's study, the former Lieutenant-General, Mykhailo Stakhurskyi, who had most likely gone through the same school of face-pummeling described by Suvorov, became First Secretary of Vinnitsa Regional Party Committee and "cultivated the image of an ideal-type Bolshevik: an iron-fisted general, defender of the motherland, and electrifier of the countryside."<sup>16</sup> In his bombastic speeches, Stakhurskyi attacked "spinelessness and liberal approach to any deficiencies" on the part of his party colleagues.<sup>17</sup> People like Stakhurskyi set the tone for the lower ranking party and Soviet officials in the countryside, for whom being on good terms with the iron-fisted Stakhurskyis was more important than complying with the legislation on cults or heeding decisions of the recently formed CARC. For the kolkhoz or village soviet chairmen, religious minorities were simply a trifle in the big scheme of things, and herein lies the explanation of the phenomenon of abusiveness that did not seem to fit in with any officially sanctioned forms of antireligious work.

In 1951, the Chairman of the Council for the Affairs of ROC, Karpov, found it necessary to report not only to Secretary of CC CPU, Mel'nikov, but also to G. Malenkov and N. Bulganin in Moscow that "Chairman of the village soviet in village Ostrovnoe, Dimchev, while being drunk, grabbed priest Belinskii by the throat, threatened to beat him up, and told him to leave the ecclesiastic service and depart from the village."

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 51.



Karpov further reported that the same drunk Dimchev often summons another priest, Nazarenko, to the village soviet where he insults the latter in the presence of believers and “calls him a liar, a miser, and a Romanian whore.” The kolkhoz Chairman in village Dmitrievki, Novoivanovskii region, a member of VKP(b), Ganchev, according to Karpov’s report, summoned priest Lovchiev to the village soviet where he pressed him in a rude form to stop services in the church and leave the village “while he was still in one piece.” The Chairman of another kolkhoz (named after Dmitrov), Chapkin, called the aforementioned priest Belinskii to the village soviet and held him there from 7:00 p.m. until 4:00 a.m., took the cross off of this priest’s neck, hit him in the face, demanding that the priest signed up for whatever sum of money toward the State Bond that Chapkin would tell him to.<sup>18</sup>

The same year, another state official for the affairs of ROC, Korchevoi, reported:

The believers from village Rogovichi, Polonskii region, Kamenets-Podolsk oblast, submitted a complaint in which they write that on June 28, the village soviet Chairman, Panasiuk, demanded from the church elder a key to the church, because the grain had to be stored in it. When the elder replied that the key was in the possession of the priest, Panasiuk said: ‘I will drive you and the priest into Siberia. The places have been long waiting for you there.’ Then he locked up the elder in the village soviet, broke the church lock, and filled the church with grain. On August 3, when he was in the church, Panasiuk broke ecclesiastic accessories, smoked in the altar while saying: ‘I am the master here, not the priest.’<sup>19</sup>

In 1947, Vil’khovyi included the following abuses of Protestant believers in his report:

During subscription to the Bond in village Klishkovtsy, Khotinskii region, the Chairman of the village soviet, comrade Babliuk and the Bond Upolnomochennyi, comrade Nesterov, suggested that a [religious] community subscribe for 11,000 rubles. When the presbyter S. Nepiivoda objected and said that all believers had

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<sup>18</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 783, p. 263-265.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 358.

already subscribed to the Bond and that the community did not have such sum of money, he was threatened with the closure of a prayer house while the drunk head of Regional Department of Finance, Abramov, who was present there, struck Nepiivoda in the face.

An even more outrageous incident occurred in the same village Klishkovtsy with an SDA preacher, Kostomskii, who had 1.8 hectares of land. During the grain procurement campaign, the village soviet annulled Kostomskii's initial grain quota and handed him a different one calculated for 4 hectares of land. Kostomskii thought it was unjust and traveled with his complaint to the Regional Ministry of Procurements. Upon his return, he was arrested by the head of Militia, Ivanov, and held in custody from 11<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> of October.

Releasing Kostomskii from custody, comrade Ivanov stated: 'We are releasing you from custody on the condition that you turn in 700 kilograms of grain in 3 days. Otherwise, you will be prosecuted.' When Kostomskii objected that it was unlawful, comrade Ivanov replied: 'You can look for justice later.'

All materials concerning the aforementioned individuals were transferred to the Procurator's Supervisory Office with the intent of bringing the culprits to justice.<sup>20</sup>

In 1950, Vil'khovyi reported, "the village soviet Chairman in village Gardyshevka, Berdichevskii region, Zhitomir oblast, a member of VKP(b), Ishchuk, arbitrarily closed down the prayer house of a EKhB community, stating: 'I will scatter you like dogs and will not allow you to pray.'"<sup>21</sup>

Such examples of antireligious activism in their crudest form, directed indiscriminately against registered and legally existing religious communities, could in part be viewed as merely accidental inversions or even transmogrifications of the original intent, attributable solely to personal qualities of some undisciplined or drunk local party and state officials. After all, drunkenness and hooliganism were quite common in the USSR. According to the data compiled by the Senior Inspector of the Department of Service at the Administration of Militia of Ukrainian SSR, Major A. Izarov, of the 1,985

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<sup>20</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 5069, p. 22-23.

<sup>21</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 783, p. 24.

drunks picked up and processed in the detox facility in Sumy oblast in 1962, there were 145 CPSU members and 179 VLKSM members. In Ivano-Frankovsk oblast, of the 1,280 people prosecuted for minor hooliganism during the same year, 345 were VLKSM members. Among violators of public order there were 109 Communists and 16 teachers and employees of educational institutions, “that is, persons whose calling it is to educate others.”<sup>22</sup> Aside from these cultural idiosyncrasies, however, people like Panasiuk, Nesterov, Ivanov, or Ishchuk both fell back in their actions on precedents of religious persecution in the 1930s and reacted in their own way to the ongoing antireligious propaganda that misrepresented and vilified believers, and did not allow for the position of indifference or neutrality towards them. The Soviet propagandist exposure of believers and the unregulated nature of the Soviet campaign against religion, with its loose or non-existing definitions of what was legally permissible, contributed to the vulnerability of religious communities and individuals and left a lot to the imagination of self-styled combatants of religion, who could easily construe this publicly cultivated prejudice as an additional excuse for indulging their violent habits.

## **2. State Bond Drives as Pretexts to Harass Protestants**

Protestants and their communities were especially vulnerable during the State Bond drives when the local officials looked for quick ways to fulfill the state-imposed subscription quotas. The EKHB Senior Presbyter for Ternopol oblast, Tesliuk, described the following incident in his letter to Andreev:

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<sup>22</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5787, p. 29.

On May 3, 1949, the chief of Finotdel [Department of Finance], Makhovich and Upolnomochennyi for the State Bond, V.A. Karchevskii, came to the house of presbyter of the EKbB community in village Vlashchintsy, Lanovetskii region, Pavel Kononovich Pyzh, born in 1881, and his wife, born in 1885 (a childless couple, both kolkhozniki since 1948, who have their own house, 0.28 hectare of garden, no cow). [The officials] suggested that Pyzh give 300 rubles towards the State Bond. The presbyter pleaded that it was difficult for him—a person unable to work—to give that much money, but agreed to sign up for less. Makhovich began to yell, dumping dirty hooligan-type words on the presbyter and demanding that the presbyter now gave 500 rubles. He then began to do a revision of the house, but there was no money and he found nothing. Telling the presbyter that he was under arrest and taking him to the village soviet, Makhovich physically abused him, striking him on the head with his fist. The wife tried to say something in defense of her husband, but he [Makhovich] called her dirty names and added: ‘I do not want to waste bullets on you. Otherwise, I would have shot you all.’

The presbyter’s wife got scared, went to the neighbors, borrowed 300 rubles, gave money [to the officials], and the presbyter was released. And all this was taking place when the able-bodied were signing up for 50 or 100 rubles in state bonds. Please take note of this statement. There were other incidents of which I do not write this time.<sup>23</sup>

These types of abuses were so numerous, especially in the rural areas where the local officials were more remote from supervision by higher bureaucracies, that they constituted a permanent backdrop of Protestants’ existence during the 1940s-1960s. With respect to the periodic State Bond drives, the evidence suggests that the government officials specifically singled out believers and religious communities as targets for illegal extortion. Instead of broadening the social base of state bonds purchasers and investing more time in educating the public about the purpose and necessity of this measure as a means of boosting the postwar Soviet economy, the State Bond Upolnomochennye and their retinues chose to fulfill the state quotas so much quicker by coercing believers to purchase state bonds twice, as state employees and as members of religious communities.

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<sup>23</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 75, p. 14.

Besides, the state officials operated on an assumption that individual believers and religious communities in general were incredibly wealthy and, therefore, could be fleeced with impunity. Underlying this malpractice was a notion that the atheist state would not come to the rescue of believers, or at least would look aside.

In 1952, the abuses of State Bond Upolnomochennye reached a magnitude that forced the EKKhB Senior Presbyter for Rovno oblast, M. Nichiporuk, to appeal to his superiors at the VSEKhB in Moscow and Kiev. In his letter, Nichiporuk described problems that many parish presbyters routinely experienced with respect to the State Bond drives:

This is how it happens: a community presbyter is summoned to the village soviet by the State Bond Upolnomochennye and is told that his community is required to contribute a certain sum of money (it could be from as much as 5,000 rubles to 500 rubles) which he must pay within 10-15 days. A presbyter usually responds: 'We will, with pleasure, collect and submit as much as we can, despite the fact that each member of our community participates in the State Bond individually.' But the Upolnomochennye demand that a presbyter immediately subscribe to the specified sum of money and go and collect money from members for this collective community's contribution to the Bond. If a presbyter does not agree to this and says that it is beyond his capability, the Upolnomochennye hold him in the village soviet for two or three days and demand that he subscribe to such and such bond. All along, they insult him and threaten him, and treat him quite rudely.<sup>24</sup>

Nichiporuk further reported that presbyters often ask him how they should cope with such situations, to which Nichiporuk could only say that they should by all means settle this issue with the Bond Upolnomochennye, contributing from the whole community as much as possible besides the personal contributions of members to the Bond. About the

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<sup>24</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 135, p. 4.

time of Nichiporuk's writing this letter, two presbyters arrived at his office. One of them said:

Brother, what will happen? We [his family] are the three souls, and we are all unable to work. And I, as a Shtundist [\*] priest, (that was the expression they used), am already required to sign up for a sum of 1,400 rubles. And this is when other able-bodied people in our village, who have the same number of people in their households, are only asked to contribute from 200 to 300 rubles. They tell me that I should have this sum ready, so when they come I could instantly give it to them. And this is only for me personally, but the community will also be required to contribute, and just as much. In the previous year, it was obligated to pay 3,000 rubles, but we could barely collect 2,176 rubles. I do not know what we are going to do this year. I can only say that it scares me already.<sup>25</sup>

In conclusion, Nichiporuk hoped to get some advice from his superiors who “live in the center [capital city] of our respected state,” who “understand this question” and, hence, could “give their explanation,” so that he, in his turn, could pass it on to presbyters in his oblast.<sup>26</sup>

The Senior Presbyter of VSEKhB for Ukraine, Andreev, in fact, responded and wrote in his letter to Vil'khovyi:

There is confusion in our communities concerning subscription to the State Bond. This happens because the local organs of authority in charge of subscription disregard the fact that members of a community have already subscribed earlier at their places of employment, and demand that a community subscribed again to the Bond in a compulsory manner. These kinds of demands for a second subscription to the Bond are applied especially widely in Rovno oblast, which is evident from the attached letter of the Senior Presbyter for Rovno

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\* An artificial term frequently applied to German Baptist colonist by the tsarist officials. Since Bible lessons were central to German Baptist prayer meetings and were referred to simply as *Stunden* (German for lessons), the Russian officials began calling German believers *shtundits*. The term clearly bore a pejorative and xenophobic connotation and the Russian/Soviet Evangelicals-Baptists never used it with reference to their denomination.

<sup>25</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 135, p. 4.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

oblast, Nichiporuk. Considering this practice totally abnormal, I ask you to give instructions to the appropriate organs of authority, stating that making such demands towards our communities...is impermissible.<sup>27</sup>

Judging by Vil'khovyi's red pencil marginal remarks, copies of this correspondence were sent to the Assistant to the Minister of Finance and to the Secretary of Obkom of CP(b)U in Rovno oblast. It is unclear, however, whether the intercession of CARC succeeded in restraining the presumptuous State Bond Upolnomochennye.

The story of the EKhB community in village Mirofino, Zdolbunovskii region, Rovno oblast, revealed that its prompt compliance with impositions of the State Bond Upolnomochennye did not earn it any credit with the local authorities, and that abuses of believers simply metamorphosed into something else. In a letter to the Chairman of CARC at the CM of USSR, Polianskii, the community's presbyter A.A. Aleksandruk, writing on behalf of all members, described a predicament in which the believers found themselves in 1951 as a result of their generous contribution to the State Bond. The EKhB prayer house in Mirofino was built in 1912 by a mixed community of Czech and Ukrainian believers on their own money. Both Czechs and Ukrainians used this house until 1947 when the Czechs moved back to Czechoslovakia. The remaining Ukrainians renewed their registration with the Upolnomochennyi of CARC for Rovno oblast and continued their prayer services without any obstructions until the following events began to unfold:

During this time, our prayer house required some moderate repairs, which we decided to do in May [1951]. However, when the 5<sup>th</sup> State Bond was announced, comrade Upolnomochennyi of the Regional Committee of CP(b)U and of Raiispolkom in village Mirofino, Ivan Ivanovich Yakovets, who was also the

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

State Bond Upolnomochennyi in Mirotino, advised us that we should first take care of the Bond and postpone the repairs for a while. We gave 1,600 rubles from 60 members in a contribution to the State Bond, not counting that each member also gave to the Bond individually for himself and his business. On May 24, an inspection sent by the Raiispolkom of Zdolbunovskii region arrived to look over our prayer house. The inspection discovered some defects in our prayer house and compiled a protocol with the purpose of having something against our prayer house [*chtoby pristat' k domu*].

On June 2, comrade Upolnomochennyi, I.I. Yakovets, arrived in Mirotino's village soviet and sent a secretary to summon me, the church's presbyter A.A. Aleksandruk... When I arrived, comrade Yakovets handed me the decision of Zdolbunovskii Raiispolkom and the protocol of inspection, asking me to open the prayer house. I did just that. Together with Yakovets, there were also the village soviet Chairman, Joseph Tsiriniuk, the village soviet Secretary, Nikolai Koshak, the school director, Nikolai Motrenko, the mill's director, Aaron Leifer, and the club director, Dmitrii Chermenin. They all entered the prayer house and instantly began taking the texts down from the walls [framed biblical verses] and disassembling them. They kept frames and glass to themselves and gave the texts to me. But since some texts got torn while being taken out of the frames, I refused to take them, even though they told me: 'Take them, they are yours!' While the framed texts were taken off the walls, the two other texts were inscribed directly onto the walls with oil paints: one inside, above the pulpit, and the other—outside, above the doors. Since they could not erase them, they began scraping them off with a metal shovel, first on the inside, and then—outside...

When the text above the door had been scraped off with the shovel, together with plaster [underneath], D. Chermenin ran to the club, took off the club's sign and mounted it above [the church's] door where the text used to be. After this, they began dismounting the cross that was above the front door of the prayer house. They applied different methods to it: they tied together two ladders, and comrade Chermenin climbed up there and, having not succeeded in doing it with his bare hands, tried to knock it down, equally unsuccessfully, with a metal shovel. Subsequently, comrade Yakovets ordered to find a thick wire [with which to pull the cross down]. At that time, I left to bring back a portable organ [*fizgarmonia*] because comrade Yakovets ordered to bring it. The *fizgarmonia* was under repairs at the house of our choir conductor, Ilarion Adamchuk, whom I entrusted to bring the instrument back to the prayer house. When the choir conductor, Adamchuk, brought back the *fizgarmonia*, the cross was no longer above the prayer house, and the Bible, which used to be on the pulpit, laid on the floor with its covers torn off. Adamchuk asked that it was given to him and comrade Yakovets allowed him to take it. On June 3, Sunday, the church-goers came to the prayer house, but since it was locked up and they could not have a prayer service, they left in sadness.



Having described this incident, we ask you to issue a statement in defense of our rights according to the laws of our Country, which are often ignored by the local officials among us, rural people.<sup>28</sup>

The evidence of this premeditated pogrom shows that the regional party boss, in cahoots with Mirotino's officials, deliberately used the State Bond to achieve their long-term goal of depriving believers of their place of worship and simultaneously acquiring an additional space for a village club. The purportedly defective or unsafe prayer house, once requisitioned by the village authorities, became a perfectly operable building for the staging of secular activities.

### **3. Arsons, Unfair Taxation, and Other Illegal Forms of Combating Religion**

Although the CARC adamantly opposed the hitherto cited abuses of believers by local authorities and regularly reported such violations of legality to the party bosses, the self-styled antireligious zealots in the localities devised new ways to harass believers while the central government continued to lack a uniform approach to combating these numerous perversions of its official policy on religion. In 1951, Vil'khovyi wrote:

Undoubtedly, the ideological education of working citizens from among sectarians, especially in rural areas, is a very complicated and difficult sector of our work. This work must be carried out according to a defined plan, patiently, persistently, and systematically, without ever permitting rude forms insulting the religious feelings of believers.

It is necessary to by all means avoid and suppress the vulgar, blatantly administrative methods of work on the part of local organizations, such as those that occurred in village Kostiukovka, Dzhulinskii region, Vinnitsa oblast:

[In this village], the kolkhoz chairman, comrade Babiichuk, the school director, comrade Yakimchuk, and inspector of district militia, comrade Maistrenko, entered the prayer house of Evangelicals-Baptists during the prayer service. They interrupted the prayer service and began conducting 'antireligious

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<sup>28</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 117, p. 14-15.

propaganda.’ The kolkhoz chairman, Babiichuk, began his speech with the following statement: ‘This is opium, and you are listening to Britskii (presbyter) who deceives you...’ The school director, Yakimchuk, said: ‘You must busy yourselves not only with the prayer service but also with the international situation and so forth...’ Yakimchuk then stood at the cathedra and delivered a report on the international situation. The militia inspector, Maistrenko, began checking people’s documents and prayer books. He confiscated two issues of the ‘Brotherly Messenger’ magazine.

I informed the Obkom of CP(b)U and the Oblast Soviet of Workers’ Deputies about this incident. The Dzhulinskii Raikom of CP(b)U carefully studied the material about the crude violation of the Soviet legislation on cults by the kolkhoz and village leadership in Kostiukovka and imposed an administrative penalty on culprits.<sup>29</sup>

The local abuses, however, were so frequent and ubiquitous that the CARC’s efforts could barely put a dent on the problem.

In 1952, Vil’khovyi’s assistant, Sazonov, informed the Procurator of Ukrainian SSR, R.A. Rudenko, the head of the CARC in Moscow, Polianskii, and Secretary of CC of CP(b)U, I.D. Nazarenko, about a fire that completely destroyed the SDA prayer house in village Pozharki, Rozhishchenskii region, Volynia oblast. Characterizing this SDA community, numbering 250 people, Sazonov stated that it acted “in full compliance with the existing legislation on cults.” The Upolnomochennyi of CARC for Volynia oblast, whom Sazonov quoted, reported: “On March 13, at 7:00 in the morning, one of the two nationalized houses in Pozharki had gotten burned. The fire broke out inside the house, and the building was burned to the ground. The cause of fire and the culprits have not yet been identified by the investigative organs.” Sazonov also attached a copy of an anonymous letter received by CARC and “signed by the ‘eye witnesses,’ residents of kolkhoz ‘Beria’ in village Pozharki,” in which the latter “are trying to disclose the

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<sup>29</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 1572, p. 85-86.

supposed real arsonists.” Concluding his report, Sazonov wrote: “Taking into account the seriousness of some issues mentioned in this letter, we ask for your interference in this matter through organs of Procuracy subordinate to you.”<sup>30</sup>

The anonymous letter, purportedly written by a disinterested party—the non-SDA villagers, represents the most interesting and telling evidence concerning the destruction of this old, historical SDA prayer house which, until 1941, served as the center of the SDA Church in Western Ukraine and Eastern Poland. Due to the intriguing and somewhat puzzling nature of this letter (written in Ukrainian) as well as the flavor of the local environment that it conveys, I take the liberty of quoting it here in its entirety:

How do you do, comrade Superior for Religious Affairs,

We turn to you with this statement because on March 13, this year, about 6 o'clock in the morning, the state-owned building in village Pozharki, Rozhishchenskii region, Volynia oblast, which until then was used by Adventists (Sabbath-worshippers), was burned down. We, as the eye witnesses of this crime, wish to expose the criminals, who were:

1. The divisional inspector of MGB in our village, comrade Polevoi
2. The kolkhoz chairman, comrade Teshchuk
3. The head of the club, comrade Galan
4. The club's guard, comrade Makovskii, and others

In order to help the investigation to expose these criminals, we wish to tell, for the orientation of the investigative organs, what we had seen with our own eyes:

While we were walking down the road on March 13, just before daybreak, we noticed some persons that were messing around the mentioned building, making some knocking noises. We wondered what that could be, and so we began to quietly get closer to these people. Among the spotted persons we recognized the aforementioned individuals who were prying open windowpanes in one of the windows. We were overwhelmed with fear as we watched how they broke inside and started the fire, after which the divisional inspector Polevoi headed for his house in the direction of the village soviet (for that's where his house is) while the others had taken cover behind the other buildings. For a few minutes we did not know what to do, but one of us immediately ran to the village soviet to make a phone call to the region [regional authorities]. On my way, when I [apparently, the person mentioned in the previous sentence] had almost reached the village

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 114-115.

soviet, I encountered Polevoi and the kolkhoz chairman, Teshchiuk, who were hiding behind the neighboring buildings, looking out and waiting for the fire to take effect. The sight of them scared me to death and I froze in my tracks. Once the fire reached the top of the building, Polevoi made a dismissive gesture with his hand and said: ‘That’s it! I am going to go get some sleep now.’ And he went, while comrade Teshchiuk instantly mounted his horse and galloped off towards village Noviz (his home village) as if he had never been in Pozharki when the fire broke out. However, some people who knew him, such as citizens Volodimir Zui and Vasil’ Adamovich Antoniuk, encountered him riding home that early morning, and they asked him about the fire that broke out in Pozharki. He answered that he was not coming from Pozharki and, therefore, did not know anything. But comrade Teshchiuk abundantly betrayed his own involvement.

These criminals perhaps think that they harmed the Sabbath-worshippers, but in fact they caused injury to us, to our village and our kolkhoz, because that building in time could have been used for other cultural applications in our village. Since this ill-conceived crime is also a crime committed against our state, an act of subversion, we cannot remain carefree and confident in our kolkhoz until these criminals are brought to justice. Although they are trying to evade, the truth is clear. Bewildered by the local investigative organs’ not taking notice of these criminals, we turned with an analogous petition to the head of MGB for Volynia oblast on March 16, this year. But how would the investigative organs of our region take action against these criminals, if the Procurator of our region, comrade Grigoriev, himself repeatedly proclaimed at meetings: ‘I will wipe this synagogue off the face of the earth’? Now, we turn to you, as the Sabbath-worshippers’ supervisor, in hope that you would take measures so that these criminals and subversives could hide no longer.

Awaiting for your cooperation,

Respectfully,

Eye witnesses—kolkhoz workers of kolkhoz ‘Beria’ in village Pozharki.

P.S. It should be noted that the head of the club, comrade Galan, has already run away from the village. The others [culprits], feeling insecure, have also stolen away from the village.<sup>31</sup>

Despite the provincial simplicity of its style and presentation, this letter is carefully crafted. The authors maintain an air of indifference or neutrality towards the plight of the SDA believers in Pozharki, and refer to the latter as “Sabbath-worshippers” [*subbotniki*]. Although the term bears some pejorative connotation, it has been widely used by ordinary people as a substitute for a more cantankerous and foreign-sounding

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 116-117.

“Seventh Day Adventists” and, therefore, in itself, is not an expression of ill-will or contempt. At the center of the authors’ argument is not the tragedy that befell the SDA community but the wanton destruction of valuable kolkhoz and state property that could have been used for other needs of the village community as a whole. While clearing themselves of any sympathies towards sectarians, the authors focus on the crime and its perpetrators—the heads of regional administration—whom they incriminate in this premeditated arson and indicate that there are enough witnesses in the village who could testify to the official’s involvement in this wrong-doing. By mentioning the regional Procurator’s open expression of his anti-Adventist sentiments, the authors suggest that the local investigative organs—the Procuracy and the MGB—may be sympathizing with the perpetrators (one of whom, after all, was an MBG operative) and intentionally stalling the investigation. The petitioners, therefore, want to bring the big guns of the republican-level authorities to bear on the investigation of this case—not to set things right for the Adventists, but to restore the villagers’ confidence in their kolkhoz as a safe and law-abiding community.

The anonymity of this letter, especially in the absence of any documented follow-up to this case, compels one to treat it with a grain of salt. Although the SDA old timers,<sup>32</sup> who grew up in Volynia and neighboring Zakarpatie and with whom I conversed on account of this document, had no doubt that the arson was intentionally staged by the local Soviet officials, they expressed suspicion that the anonymous letter may have been written by some members of the SDA community in Pozharki as a means

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<sup>32</sup> I refer here to an interview with Ivan and Marta Khimenets, Kiev, 2008.

of attracting the attention of central authorities to their plight. If this is true, the Pozharki Adventists were quite skilled in pulling the strings that would strike the right accord with the government.

The letter, in fact, is not entirely anonymous, for it indicates by name the two non-Adventist witnesses of Teshchiuk's equestrian flight from Pozharki. Why would the anonymous authors expose the names of these two witnesses while concealing their own? At the same time, the position of anonymous eye-witnesses is quite understandable, for at any local investigation, conducted by people sympathetic to the perpetrators, the word of purported eye-witnesses would simply be pitted against the word of well-connected party members. In the absence of any further evidence, the fire department could easily attest that the fire originated on the inside of the building and, therefore, was merely an unfortunate accident.

All speculation aside, the letter suggests that the perpetrators were made to feel quite uncomfortable in Pozharki, which could be attributable to the spread of a certain rumor throughout the village community that there were witnesses of the arson and that the central authorities were alerted. Whether or not the government covered up this case, the eye witnesses' activism contributed to a more or less acceptable denouement of this case for the Seventh Day Adventists: they were allowed to rebuild their prayer house in Pozharki on a larger scale.

The Pozharki case was not the only instance of arson as a means of shutting down a religious community. In 1960, the EKhB community in village Staroe Selo, Rokitnovskii region, Rovno oblast, wrote to the chairman of Rovno Oblispolkom, the

Procurator of Rovno oblast, the Upolnomochennyi of CARC for Rovno oblast, and the Senior Presbyter of VSEKhB for the oblast:

The arrival in our village of the kolkhoz chairman Morozov marked the beginning of hostile actions toward our community. Thus, in 1958, Morozov began to deliver speeches in which he pledged to do whatever it would take to disperse believers, and [soon] took steps toward the fulfillment of his dream. He began issuing directives that the prayer house could not be open without his permission and trained a select group of people to carry out hostilities towards us. This group repeatedly spoke about removing the prayer house one way or the other and made attempts several times to set it on fire during the night. However, the [prayer house] guards prevented it. And then, having found convenient time, on June 12, 1959, at 5:00 p.m., when all our people were cutting grasses 6-8 kilometers away from the village, they [Morozov's supporters] succeeded in burning down the prayer house after threatening the guards with weapons and dispersing them. Members of this group [arsonists] wore camouflaged outfits, but our guards definitively recognized Sergei Nikolaevich Pukas and Vasiliï Efimovich Sviridovich. We informed regional, oblast, and republican authorities and investigative organs about this and told them about all these occurrences and illegal actions of local authorities, thinking that this would put an end to hostilities against our community.<sup>33</sup>

The Council's Upolnomochennyi permitted this community to register at a different location, in the house rented from A.A. Vakulich. However, Morozov's hostility did not cease. He began harassing Vakulich for allowing the community to rent from him. Morozov's group procured an anonymous letter which was read to Vakulich at the village soviet. The unnamed author(s) of this letter stated: "When the prayer house on khutor Saryi got burned, we were very satisfied, but since the EKhB have now registered their prayer house at Vakulich's, we suggest to call him in and warn him that unless he kicks out the EKhB from his building...it will be burned down." The village soviet chairman, according to believers' letter, "advised Vakulich to expel [the EKhB], and if not, to ask

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<sup>33</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 309, p. 70.

the presbyter to place guards to watch that the building was not burned down.” The believers concluded their letter with the following statement:

We, members of the church, are greatly outraged by the unlawful actions of the local authorities. When we have peace everywhere in our country and all our people are engaged in calm and peaceful labor, our village authorities instigate a harsh struggle against our community. Isn't it true that in the Soviet Union there is no religious persecution and that all believers are free to practice their religion? But the local authorities, paying no attention to Soviet law, act outside the law, do whatever they please, introducing their own legality and acting in accordance with their own laws.<sup>34</sup>

Such applications of a lynch law in defiance of the existing state legislation originated, it seems, in either a personal prejudice of some local officials against the unconventional—anything that did not fit in with their idea of normalcy—or in their ignorance or willful misinterpretation of the official state policy on religion. Whatever these officials' motivation may have been, their violent preying on believers compelled the latter to become more legally aware and confront the government judicial and law enforcement agencies with arguments that stressed the gap between the letter of the law guaranteeing believers certain rights and the de facto lawlessness to which they were subjected by of local authorities. The believers of the EKhB community located in the regional center, the town of Rakitno, Rovno oblast, prefaced their petition to the CARC by references to the Constitution of USSR, certain Lenin's comments, statements made by Khrushchev, and also some recent newspaper articles. “In *Pravda*, from 8-21-1959, Number 233,” they wrote, “there were remarks made against administrative bullying and interference, and against insulting the believers' feelings. The party warned some violators who acted arbitrarily. This was also noted in *Izvestia*, from 12-10-1959—about

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.



those great rights of citizens of our Motherland, among which the freedom to confess and practice religion was mentioned.”<sup>35</sup> The members of this registered community...”were extremely upset” by the behavior of First and Second Secretaries of Rakitnovskii raikom of Komsomol, Vasiliev and Radchinskii, and a group of people that they had brought along:

On January 19, 1960, at 7:00 o’clock in the evening, when we gathered for a prayer service and, as we usually do in the beginning, kneeled down for a prayer, suddenly...a knock on the door was heard and angry yells ‘shut up,’ ‘stop,’ and other much ruder words. Having walked up to the table, comrade Vasiliev pulled the table cloth and intentionally overturned the lamp. The aforementioned comrades were drunk. They started a debauchery and disrupted the service. The believers had to leave the prayer house and were walking out of the prayer house greatly saddened. In order to cause us even more pain, to humiliate our dignity still further, and to justify their extremely rude, illegal behavior, comrade Vasiliev and his company called the militia.

Before the militia car arrived, they were assaulting people who were walking home in the darkness by their hooligan actions—they grabbed people and tried to beat them up. Women interfered and defended those who were being assaulted. One comrade, Pyotr Sakhno, who had recently undergone a surgery, was punched in his sides by Vasiliev. The other one, comrade Avram Dubovets, also received some painful blows. The non-believing women, for example, Ksenia Ruban, Khristina Kornitskaia, and a number of others, seeing all this, began to holler and scream, trying to somehow defend those men. When the militia car arrived, they [Vasiliev and company] stopped their hooligan behavior and everyone went home.<sup>36</sup>

According to the believers, Vasiliev and his buddies had disrupted the service in the same manner a year earlier, while “the Second Secretary, sent by Vasiliev on 12-20-1959, took a hymnal book which has not yet been returned.” The community asked the CARC to

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

take measures against Vasiliev who “repeatedly and rudely violated the constitutional rights of Rakitnovskaia community.”<sup>37</sup>

In village Sokolovochka, Tal’novskii region, Cherkassk oblast, authorities applied a wide array of illegal measures to dislodge the local EKhB community. In 1960, Maria Zmazhenko, whose house served the EKhB community as a place for prayer meetings, wrote a compelling letter to Andreev in which she described the actions of local authorities as harmful to the Soviet efforts to enlighten the backward countryside and offensive to her dignity as an honest Soviet citizen. Stressing her background as a kolkhoz laborer since 1930, Maria wrote:

Presently, I do not have a single violation of labor discipline in the kolkhoz or even the slightest reprimand for some petty theft of insubordination to a brigadier [head of the kolkhoz labor crew]. I honestly contribute with my labor to the welfare of Motherland. Besides, I represent the family of my dead husband who was killed during the Patriotic War, defending the Motherland as an officer of the Soviet Army.

Today, I am a believer, and a small EKhB community, legally registered by the Soviet authorities, gathers in my house. But the local authorities have a problem with this prayer house and insult me in every way. Thus, on September 10, 1959, on orders of the kolkhoz head, comrade Martiniuk, the electricity was cut off to my house. I felt so happy that the time of the light of culture and technology had arrived... Now, this joy is taken away from me.

My son, an orphan, whom I raised for the glory of Motherland, is presently serving in our dear Soviet Army. He wrote me a letter in which he suggested that I listened to the news of peace—that as a sign of peace, the government is reducing the army by 1.2 million soldiers. I would be glad to listen to this message, but while the loud speaker hangs on a tree branch, the wires to it are also cut. And so, while the culture moved forward, I remain in the darkness: I have neither the light nor radio. Besides, on December 26, 1959, there was a general assembly of the whole village at which the local authorities raised the issue of levying a tax on me in the amount of 150 rubles instead of 20 rubles... The head of village soviet, Grigorii Yakovlevich Khutorovii, and secretary, Antonia Ostapovna Necheporenko, came to my house and demanded that I paid the said

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

tax and the income tax for 1960. But I could not pay, because I had no money. Besides, the tax notification has not yet been handed to me.

So, I would like to know, where do these abuses come from? In the Constitution, it is written that the freedom of conscience and confession are granted to citizens of USSR, and I understand it literally. And now, I would like to ask you, as a senior brother: if there is a governmental decision for this, then everything will become a law for me and I will stop complaining; and if there is no such decision, then I ask you to intercede on my behalf before the authorities, so that my civic dignity is no longer insulted.<sup>38</sup>

The Sokolovochka believers' petitions, however, brought only a temporary reprieve followed by the next round of abuses. In February of 1960, the presbyter of this community, S.I. Sorochinskii, wrote to Andreev:

We inform you that in response to our petition the electricity was turned back on, but after three days, it had been cut off again. We use a simple kerosene lamp and are quite satisfied with it...

On Wednesday, the 10<sup>th</sup>, the village soviet chairman, G.Y. Khutorovyi, and assistant to the kolkhoz chairman, D.I. Slavnyi, who is also the secretary of party organization in our village, came to our prayer house. Comrade Slavnyi behaved worse than a street hooligan... First, he tried to forcibly kick community members out of the prayer house, but they did not obey him. Seeing that it was not working, he began abusing them. Comrade Slavnyi started smoking cigarettes in the prayer house. He filled the house with smoke. The owner of the house and community members asked the secretary of the party organization to stop smoking, but comrade Slavnyi dismissed the people's requests and said: 'I will continue smoking intentionally until I smoke you out of the house.' Members of the community asked him: 'Why are you treating us so disrespectfully?' Comrade Slavnyi grinned angrily and said these words: 'Wait a little longer and you will be worse off than all those priests and servants of the cult were sometime ago.' He did not explain any further what would happen to us, but it became clear that it would be something bad. These words were especially noticed, since it was not an ordinary kolkhoznik who said them but the secretary of party organization himself. We would like to know whether we could write a complaint about it to the Upolnomochennyi.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

On a different occasion, when the bewildered Sokolovochka believers asked Khutorovyi and his gang who gave them the right to terrorize this religious community, the officials answered: “We received [such a right] from the chairman of Raiispolkom—to check on you and agitate you.”<sup>40</sup> At the height of Khrushchev’s antireligious campaign the grassroots officials interpreted such ambiguous messages according to their own imagination. While the kolkhoz head, Martiniuk, thought that cutting off electricity and radio to the EKhB prayer house was a good way of “agitating” believers, the secretary of the village party organization, comrade Slavnyi, “agitated” believers with the smoke of his cigarettes and a threat of resurrecting the sanguine ghosts of the 1930s.

Reporting on the activism of Khutorovyi-Slavnyi gang to the Council’s Upolnomochennyi for Cherkasskaia oblast, Kostandoglo, the EKhB Senior Presbyter for this oblast, Kaliuzhnyi, wrote:

They show up in groups at prayer meetings, treat believers in a hooligan manner, cuss at prayer meetings, smoke cigarettes, insult believers with dirty inappropriate words and disperse believers from the prayer house. Lately, they do not allow prayer meetings at all. They demand that members of the community acquire permits from village soviets, allowing them to visit prayer services. No one gives such permits. As a result, the Pentecostals from village Krasnoe, who had [earlier] joined the EKhB, stopped visiting the prayer house in village Sokolovochka and reverted to their illegal meetings in village Krasnoe. Besides, the owner of the prayer house and other members are taxed as servants of the cult. The registration certificates issued by you are not considered valid. Recently, they [officials] said that if believers continue to gather, they would be required to pay 3,000 rubles in taxes. The officials impudently made a decision to take away the room rented out by the owner to the community as a prayer house and use it as an agitation post. They decided to hang portraits of our Soviet leaders in the prayer house.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

The unlawful taxation of prayer house owners (to which I will return elsewhere) as servants of the cult, mentioned by Kaliuzhnyi, became a wide-spread practice during the Khrushchev antireligious campaign and originated in a misinterpretation of Paragraph 5 of the Directive Number 263. In a vague language, not differentiating between peculiarities of various religious denominations, the directive called for the taxation of income acquired from the lease of buildings by servants of the cult (perhaps applicable to clergy in charge of monasteries or other large architectural/agricultural complexes), not for taxing as servants of the cult of those ordinary citizens that rented out their houses to religious communities.<sup>42</sup> Maria Zhmazhenko, for example, who rented out a part of her house to the EKhB community, could not be construed, under the provisions of Directive 263, as a servant of the cult. Besides, the local authorities began harassing her in 1959, almost two years prior to the issuance of Directive 263.

The Sokolovochka style “agitation” was counterproductive on two counts—it not only undermined the believers’ faith in the sincerity of any Soviet promises, but also worked against the government scheme of taming the Pentecostals by merging them with the EKhB. The state could not expect the Pentecostals to be members of registered EKhB communities and deprive them of the possibility to visit those communities at the same time. This latter problem, encountered by Kaliuzhnyi, did not originate in the Khrushchev persecution. Rather, the Khrushchev persecution amplified the problem that had already existed. In 1954, Ponomarchuk, who temporarily substituted as the Senior Presbyter of VSEKhB for Ukraine, related to Vil’khovyi the nature of a complaint

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<sup>42</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 374, p. 1-3.

received from the legally registered EKhB community in village Gorodishche of the eponymous region of Cherkassk oblast:

On September 12, [1954], the Second Secretary of Gorodishchevskii regional party committee, Duplii, together with the head of militia and one militia officer, entered the prayer house during the prayer service and wrote down names of all those who were present—members of the community, candidate-members, and unaffiliated visitors. Afterwards, the people, whose names were written down, were called in and warned: ‘If you continue to visit the EKhB prayer services in the future, we will run you out of your places of employment.’ For example, in order to scare believers, they ordered to fire Natalia Berkut, and also summoned the presbyter’s daughter, Maria Pavlovna Skal’ga, and many others and categorically warned them that ‘if they are found at a prayer meeting one more time,’ they ‘would be punished.’

In the same village, there is an illegal Pentecostal sect that has been so active that its membership rose to 50 people. And this sect is being ignored. After such administrative antireligious propaganda, many believers stopped visiting prayer services in the registered building and decided to go underground. Some people are planning to move while others are gearing up for a persecution. Such administrative antireligious propaganda stirs up an unnecessary panic among believers, distracts them from carrying out their civic responsibilities and may prove useless.<sup>43</sup>

Ponomarchuk’s letter certainly betrayed his confessional bias—he chose to defend the EKhB community at the cost of exposing the illegally gathering Pentecostals. Yet, he made a valid point: the government could not expect to lure the underground sectarians into registered communities by making life in such communities so unattractively precarious and unrewarding. In 1960, presbyter of the EKhB community in village Poliany, Bereznovskii region, Rovno oblast, I.A. Babak, described the same problem in much starker colors in his response to the VSEKhB’s inquiry about the progress of unification<sup>44</sup>:

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<sup>43</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 182, p. 72.

<sup>44</sup> It is unclear whether the letter implies unification between the EKhB and KhEV or between the legal and illegal EKhB.

1. On unity. The unity cannot be and is not foreseen in our region. Why? Because in 1959 our sisters asked for a one-year trial period [for baptism], but baptism was not allowed. We need to wed our children, but to do so means to act illegally [meaning, perhaps, that the young people to be wed had to be illegally baptized first].
2. Prayer houses are being closed. People wander off to private houses to pray, and I have an order from the local authorities to kick out children from the prayer house and youth from the choir. We are expecting the closure of our prayer house, but we have no right from either God or people to run believers out of the prayer house. The illegally gathering believers pay special attention to it. In other words, we cannot travel very far on someone else' wagon (Revelation 9:10, Hebrews 13:13). We are dragged all the time to either the oblast [authorities], or the Upolnomochennyi, or to the regional department of militia, or to the village soviet, as if we did not have the registration...One feels like turning in documents. We have to pray at home. Such are results of unification in our oblast.<sup>45</sup>

The government's inability to provide adequate protection to registered communities not only undermined the attractiveness of the institutional model, so crucial to the overall success of the Soviet long-term objective vis-à-vis religion, but unwittingly empowered supporters of the resistance model epitomized by the Initiative Group.

#### **4. Khrushchev's Antireligious Campaign and Its Counterproductive Impact**

As was stated earlier, Khrushchev's Decree Number 263, issued in 1961, only formalized the adoption of a harder line towards religion that the government had been communicating downwards through the party channels since 1959. This new outburst of revolutionary idealism—arguably the last broad-scale attempt to dislodge religion by legal strictures, intimidation and public ostracism—certainly delivered a powerful blow to the fragile legal status of Protestant communities in Ukraine and elsewhere in the

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<sup>45</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 309, p. 110.

USSR and involved all forms of abuses described in previous sections. Presented officially as a measure to boost the vigorous enforcement of strict observance of Soviet legislation on cults by religious communities, the decree prompted a staggering number of violations of the same legislation by the local officials. Towards the end of Khrushchev's antireligious campaign, in 1963, the head of CARC in Ukraine, Litvin, assessed this problem in the following words:

Some local workers understand legality one-sidedly, as a requirement applicable only to religious organizations and clergy, and exempt themselves from the responsibility to observe the Soviet legislation on cults. Some [officials] even assume that the provision of freedom of confessing religious cults is a requirement that is not compatible with the tasks of Communist upbringing of working citizens.<sup>46</sup>

While it remains a moot point whether the party ideologues behind Khrushchev's antireligious campaign intended to exploit this inherent policy flaw when they mobilized an army of legally untrained local officials to serve as enforcers of some obscure legislation on cults, the intricacies of which were hard to grasp even for the better trained Upolnomochennyye, or whether the lopsided observance of law, noted by Litvin, occurred as an unintended consequence—a mere result of the grassroots officials' low political culture and infantile legal consciousness, the suspension of legality that ensued was acutely felt by all believers. The unusually high number of complaints received by the VSEKbB, CARC and other government agencies in 1960, as well as the increasingly more desperate tone of these complaints, suggest that during this year the harassment of believers, especially in rural areas, reached its peak.

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<sup>46</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5908, p. 94.



In March of 1960, the EKhB Senior Presbyter for Khmel'nitskaia oblast, E.A. Mazin, described travails experienced by believers in village Lesovody, Gorodokskii region, to his superior, Andreev:

On March 6...after the prayer service, the prayer house was visited by two kolkhoz brigadiers, both members of CPSU: Nikolai Fedorovich Lupinchuk—sober, and Grigorii Nikitovich Antoniuk, an assistant to the secretary of the village party organization—drunk. First, G.N. Antoniuk tried to persuade the prayer house owner, Aleksandra Danilovna Ivashko, to kick the community out of her house so they would not be gathering in it. When sister Ivashko categorically refused to do so, Antoniuk cursed her out rudely and pushed her. N.F. Lupinchuk, who was there and saw what Antoniuk was doing, tried to talk him out of it and calm him down. But Antoniuk became even angrier, grabbed 11 books that belonged to the community and walked away with them. Namely, these books were: one table-size Bible; two copies of *Gusli* [the 1920s edition of hymnals], one with musical notes; two copies of the new collection of hymnals [postwar]; one Ukrainian collection of hymns—*Arfa*; and 5 copies of the collection *Rodnye napevy* with musical notes.<sup>47</sup>

When the community's presbyter, I.V. Magola, complained about this impromptu confiscation to the village soviet chairman, the latter did nothing to help believers to get their books back. Magola then turned to a deputy to the Supreme Council of USSR, G.I. Tkachuk, who was also a kolkhoz chairman, but the latter spewed out the following tirade: "It is not true that Antoniuk was drunk. I know him very well—he does not drink. He also did not go to your prayer house and wasn't there. The owner of the house, Ivashko, herself took those books outside and said: 'Take them, I don't need them!' And to you, *shtundy* [a generic term often used by Soviet officials to designate Baptists], I say—you have been riding long enough on Soviet shoulders! An end to all of you is coming soon!" Continuing his report, Mazin wrote:

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<sup>47</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 309, p. 50.

A very difficult environment has been created here for our brothers and sisters. An assistant to the kolkhoz chairman, Ivan Vasilievich Probityi, who is also a secretary of party organization, summoned a number of brothers and sisters and asked and demanded that they denounced their faith by making statements in the local newspaper. He interferes in the affairs of community and forbids its members to attend prayer meetings. If any brothers or sisters come to the kolkhoz administration to get some hay or something else, then either a tedious red tape ensues or they are flatly denied...And none of this happened before...Even at the village post office, the department head makes scenes. When our brother—treasurer of the community—comes to the post office to send the mission money to Moscow, Kiev, or Khmel’nitkii, he is asked: ‘What are you doing? Are you sending money for subversive work?’<sup>48</sup>

Eager to answer the party’s call, the local authorities increasingly used taxation to put pressure on the owners of buildings rented out to registered Protestant communities, employed various forms of coercion to force believers to renounce their faith, and did what they could to create a social atmosphere in which believers would feel like outcasts, despair, and abandon religion. For the local combatants of religion, a directive of the regional party boss took precedence over the constitutional rights of believers and registration documents issued by the CARC. In village Chudnovka, Zhitomir oblast, the EKHB community was raided by representatives of Raikom, village soviet chairman, the head of militia, and the head of post office. The officials interrupted the prayer meeting and wrote down the names of everyone in the congregation. When the community presented to them its registration documents, the officials ignored them and dispersed the congregation. “All this occurred,” wrote believers, “due to the instruction of the Second Secretary of the Regional Party Committee, comrade Kolosov.”<sup>49</sup> The next day, the head of the post office gave instructions to fire two of the post office employees who were

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

members of Chudnovskaia EKhB community. These fired believers, whose only fault was that they belonged to a religious group, “appealed with their complaints to the oblast [authorities], to Kiev and Moscow, but their petitions were returned to be resolved by the local authorities.” One victim of this firing, “a widowed sister, who does not have squat and whose only son serves in the army, submitted her case to the court,” but “the People’s Court turned down her petition, left it without satisfaction.” Determined to shut down this community, the local authorities disregarded its registration documents and applied the following methods of coercion to the owner of a room that the community rented as a place for its prayer meetings:

First, the village soviet chairman told her to pay a 2,000 ruble fine. When this failed to work, the Regional Financial Department [RFO] inspector told her: ‘You will be paying income tax for as long as they are renting from you.’ We have been renting for 4 years now and paid 50 rubles a month [to the owner], and such a small income cannot be taxed. So, this [tactic] did not work either. They then tried the third approach: ‘Your daughter [the owner’s] works as a teacher. We will fire her... Your other daughter studies at an institute in Kiev. We will expel her... Your son will lose his job... You will be kicked out of the kolkhoz and your garden plot will be taken away...’ and so forth. So we had to abandon [the prayer house] building, although we had a lease until 1962. Since then, the people are so afraid that despite the availability of other vacant buildings, they do not want to rent another one for prayer meetings.<sup>50</sup>

A presbyter of the EKhB community in village Piliava, Kanevskii region, Cherkassk oblast, P.I. Proshak, reported to the Council’s Upolnomochennyi for this oblast, Kostandoglo, that on January 10, 1960, the chairman of Stepanskii village soviet, Shepotin, “levied a tax of self-taxation in the amount of 140 rubles on the EKhB believers and set February 15 as a deadline for payment.” Should believers fail to pay the

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

said tax, “their cases would be transferred to the People’s Court.”<sup>51</sup> If taxing incomes earned by Protestant parish presbyters, preachers and deacons from their work as servants of the cult (under Article 19 of the 1943 Decree of the Presidium of Supreme Council of USSR) remained a subject of perennial controversy in the 1940s-1950s, since most of these parish level servants received no remuneration from communities for their services and relied for income on their day jobs at factories, plants, or in kolkhozes, applying this article to ordinary members of Protestant communities meant taxing them merely for being believers. This practice represented a further misconstruction of the Soviet taxation law—a crude weapon of combating religion, hastily improvised and arbitrarily applied by the local officials. The use of taxation law as a means of exerting extra pressure on Protestant ministers will be discussed later in this study. Proshak’s letter, however, brings to the foreground the emergence of a wholly different phenomenon during the Khrushchev’s antireligious campaign when the solemn task of collecting revenues for the state became subordinate in some places to the task of combating religion and used alternately by the local officials as a sort of antireligious carrot or stick along with other bargaining chips of economic character:

On January 13, 1960, the librarian of village Poliava, Tatiana Grigorievna Nazarenko, came to the deaconess, Serafima Kharitonovna Kravchenko, offered her to denounce God, told her orally the text of denunciation, and said: ‘If you do so, then you will not be paying taxes in the amount of 1,053 rubles.’ But she [Kravchenko] refused to do so. Kravchenko has been sick for a long time. She is an old woman, 68 years old, helpless and single. She experienced a great need in fuel [firewood, coal?] and wrote a petition to the kolkhoz chairman, Dmitrii Afanasievich Lost, asking for some fuel. At the meeting of kolkhoz administration, all three of her petitions were reviewed and the kolkhoz chairman, D.A. Lost, told to all present to relate to S.K. Kravchenko: ‘If she brings the

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 75.

community's documents and the Bible and gives those to us, we will provide her with everything, plough her garden plot with a tractor, give her white flour and fuel; and if she does not submit the documents and the Bible, we won't give her anything. When she dies, we won't even give her boards for a coffin. Let her be buried in a sack.<sup>52</sup>

Proshak further reported that while the mentioned librarian went from house to house, trying to persuade believers to denounce God and offering as a bribe the dismissal of their taxes, the kolkhoz chairman, Lost, summoned to his office another believer, Anna Kirilovna Nazarenko, and said in the presence of school director who was also in the office:

I will not allow you to work at the farm unless you take down those texts [on walls] in the prayer house and lock all doors so that believers would not be gathering and praying in your mother's house. If you do not do this, I will cut down your garden plot and leave you with only ½ of a hectare. I will do so not only to you, but to all believers.<sup>53</sup>

In a separate letter to the EKhB Senior Presbyter for Cherkassk oblast,

Kaliuzhnyi, members of this beleaguered community wrote:

Dear brother in Christ!

At this hour, a great grief and sadness befell our community due to the local authorities. In February, the head of the village soviet levied 140 rubles in self-taxation on us, on every member of the community; and then, 27 rubles of taxes on every 100 square meters of land [*sotka*] were added. Afterwards, the village soviet head summoned us to the village soviet and took from us signed statements of our denunciations of prayer meetings. Since we, the old people, were frightened, we decided that we would give statements to that effect, that is, that we would not gather at the prayer house, and then petition the government to restore our community, so that in the future we could live out our remaining years in peaceful conditions and prayers. On the 5<sup>th</sup> of this month, the head of party organization, Nakoneshnyi, came to our prayer house and took the documents authorizing our use of the prayer house. Sister Nazarenko was forced to give them up... Dear brother in Christ, Kaliuzhnyi! We ask you to look into our

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

complaint concerning the signed statements that we gave under the pressure of local authorities... Your brothers in Piliavskaia EKhB community of Kanevskii region cry out to you in tears [*vopiem k vam*] and ask you to pray for us, so that the All-Powerful God would protect us, for we have come under the great persecution by local authorities and are unable to stand firm...<sup>54</sup>

By way of a post scriptum, the community attached written confessions, or pleas for forgiveness, from the owner of the prayer house, Khristina Nazarenko, and her daughter, Anna Nazarenko:

We are guilty of signing statements saying that we would not be gathering [for prayer meeting] anymore. But all this occurred under a great pressure from the local authorities. I, Anna Nazarenko, was not being allowed to work, and my mother, Khristia, was taxed very heavily. That is why we signed that we would not be gathering any more. We are asking to restore us [supposedly in their membership which, they assumed, they had lost as a result of their weakness].<sup>55</sup>

An assistant to the Senior Presbyter of VSEKhB for Ukraine, Mel'nikov, who Kaliuzhnyi must have informed of this incident, related the story in his letter to the head of CARC in Ukraine, Polonnik, and pleaded: "I ask you to do all you can to liquidate this conflict in Piliavskaia community." According to a note made on the margins of Mel'nikov's letter either by Polonnik or one of his assistants, "a letter has been sent [by CARC] to the Obkom."<sup>56</sup> The paper trail of this story grows cold after this remark, and it remains unclear whether the CARC's letter brought about any relief to the Piliavskaia EKhB community.

Similar abuses were registered in Zhitomir oblast. In his letter to Andreev, the EKhB Senior Presbyter for this oblast, Y. Grishchenko, wondered if the Serbo-

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 76-77.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

Slobodskaia EKhB community in Emel'chenskii region could function any further, especially after an explicit order by "the First Secretary of Emel'chinskii Raikom of the party, comrade Granevich," who stated "that should a prayer service be held on Ester, the presbyter Ovseichuk's garden plot would be ploughed under and his orchard uprooted."<sup>57</sup> The situation in Klevanskii region, Rovno oblast, was even worse. The Senior Presbyter for this oblast, P.G. Radchuk, reported in March of 1960: "In terms of local authorities' causing obstructions for the conduct of prayer services, Klevanskii region is the worst. The Raiispolkom chairman took away [registration] documents from almost all presbyters and forbids gathering [for prayer services]."<sup>58</sup> A letter, written on March 17, 1960, by a presbyter of the EKhB community in village Remizovo, Zolochinskii region, Lvov oblast, V.S. Boiko, to the VSEKhB, perhaps epitomized the content of hundreds of petitions written by believers during 1960 to various levels of spiritual and state authorities:

I inform you that a great persecution against us, Baptists, has been carried out for a long time now. We are being shamed as American spies, fired from work, denied permits to build houses, forbidden to hold meetings in a registered room for which an agreement was signed, and fined. They want to completely disperse us, so we would not hold our meetings. They are trying to scare us—telling us that they would deport us and do whatever would please them with us despite the registration documents we present... The question arises—why are we so besieged as if we were not people? We participate everywhere in all affairs of social life and fulfill honestly our obligations, trying, when possible, to do things as the best of the people would do. We are in panic, and do not know what tomorrow will bring.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

It should be reiterated here that although the methods of intimidation and coercion, employed by the local authorities to disrupt the life of religious communities and foster antagonism towards them on the part of non-believers, seemed to have been applied more frequently in 1960, they did not originate in the Khrushchev persecution of religion and both predated and outlived it. In 1948, the two SDA brothers, Chumachenko and Krasnianskii, reported to the representatives of VSASD in Ukraine, Bondar' and Yakovenko, that their presbyter and deacon were expelled from the kolkhoz for observing Sabbath. Their presbyter, moreover, was arrested for nothing at all—only “because he held the community together.” The next in line of a similar assault, Chumachenko—a deacon, and Krasnianskii—the presbyter's son, wrote: “We were summoned to the village soviet where we were warned and threatened that should we not abandon Sabbath and close down our prayer house, then what had happened to the presbyter would also happen to us. We were told to have pity on our families.”<sup>60</sup>

The presbyter of the EKHB community in village Beresta, Dubrovitskii region, Rovno oblast, T.I. Bokovets, wrote:

On June 8, 1950, a representative of authority from the region arrived in our village, gathered our whole village to an assembly, and announced that some residents of this village were ordered to taken away. Among those mentioned there was also my name. My being a presbyter of the mentioned church, and my being responsible for gathering people at the prayer house for prayer meetings, during which I agitate, were stated at the assembly as reasons for my removal. The subject of my agitation, however, was not indicated.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 51, p. 15.

<sup>61</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 94, p. 21.



The EKhB presbyter in village Mlynok, Zarechanskii region, Rovno oblast, K.Z. Kamota, wrote in his petition to Vil'khovy that since the establishment of Soviet authority in his village, he "honestly worked as a brigadier and in 1949 received 22,000 rubles as an award from the state for over-fulfilling the plan [a production quota]." However, continued Kamota, "on June 10, 1950, judge Konovalov announced at the meeting of kolhkozniki that the brigadier of a fishermen brigade, Kamota, could no longer be a brigadier and should be expelled from the kolkhoz because he read the Bible and was a believer. Although none of the kolhkozniks agreed with this, the judge told me to turn in everything related to my work."<sup>62</sup>

In the same year, presbyter of the EKhB community in village Malev, Demidovskii region, Rovno oblast, P.A. Kasian, reported to the Council's Upolnomochennyi for his oblast that during the drive for the Fifth State Bond, a representative of the regional soviet, comrade Bezuglyi, and the Central Committee plenipotentiary, comrade Pavliuk, forced him to pay 900 rubles towards the bond, after which the following transpired:

Pavliuk then told me to denounce my religion and disband the community, which I could not do... Besides...Pavliuk announced at one of the largest kolkhoz meetings that religion was most hostile to the Soviet authority, unlawfully accused me, and ordered to kick me out with a 'dirty broom,' as an enemy of the people and state, not only from the kolkhoz, but also from the village. Then he asked me, in public, to denounce religion. Due to my convictions, I could not agree to do that. Consequently, I was expelled from the kolkhoz, although in fact I was not guilty of anything. I had the only son who I gave to the Red Army where he lost his life. For the year 1950 I already have 44 labor-days, whereas the legal norm for the period up to June 15 is 30 labor-days.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

Ten years later, during the Khrushchev antireligious campaign, Kasian and his community experienced some of the same troubles, the difference being only the degree of intensity. On February 5, 1960, the chairman of Malevskii village soviet, comrade Burets, and the head of party organization, comrade Daniliuk, unbeknownst to Kasian, demanded of the community's treasurer all financial records and registration documents. They perused financial records and took them away together with the community's registration documents. The local officials subjected the old Kasian to additional and novel forms of humiliation:

Besides, they tell me the time when we can have our prayer services. On days of atheist, they call me to the village soviet and, under a threat of a fine, force me, an old man, to summon every single member [of the community] to the club for an evening of an atheist. If any one is sick, he must submit verification from a doctor... I am of an old age (70 years old), and I live with my wife only. We had the only son as a support in our old days, but he died with weapons in hands on the German soil, on the River Oder, during the Patriotic War. Despite accurate documents about his death, the Raisobes [a regional department of social provisions] for some reason does not allow me to receive his pension [a compensation for his death], and none of the local authorities pays any attention to my condition. They only demand of me what I, in my old age, have no strength to do—simply cannot do.<sup>64</sup>

As the year progressed, Kasian's problems continued to multiply. A statement written by the Malev EKhB community members and addressed to the head of VSEKhB in Ukraine, Andreev, suggests that sometime in May, 1960, Kasian suffered an even greater humiliation at the hands of government officials, and that his and his community's complaint about this disturbing occurrence to Andreev yielded a cold and insensitive response from the latter. Besides accusing Andreev, and by implication—the

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<sup>64</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 309, p. 64.

VSEKhB, of failing to serve as the perceived ombudsman for the EKhB brotherhood, the believers also committed to paper their frustration with not being able to find refuge or protection anywhere:

Your response to Pavel Afanasievich Kasian, the presbyter, and the church council of the Malevskaia community, dating from 5-20-1960...resembles the following situation. For example, you, dear brother Aleksei Leonidovich, calmly walk down a fairly desolate street in town and, suddenly, some persons known to you—two state officials, people in power, younger than you, physically stronger, and somewhat drunk—attack you, a respectable old man; take your clothes and shoes, leave you in your undergarments, laugh at you, and, before going on their way, warn you that the next time they meet you, they will do the same to you again, because they have the right to do so. What would you do then, dear brother?

Of necessity, you would inform the militia and higher organs of authority. But the head of militia, having listened to you attentively, instead of bringing to justice the violators of public order and your offenders, would tell you: ‘You are guilty yourself—you should not have given up your clothes...’ Dear brother, how would you feel hearing such a response? This is what has happened between you and us. Such an answer [as Andreev’s] could not have been given by any organs of authority in any country [except in the USSR, apparently], for in the case of a complaint as this, stern measures would have been taken and the offended party would have received help. You, however, did not do so. Instead of providing help, you accuse the offended. We are fed up with this kind of responses. Your answer is an answer not only to our Malev community, but to all EKhB communities, especially in Western Ukraine. Reading such a response, one can only weep and present all his burdens to the personal consideration of our Lord Jesus Christ, without bothering [senior] brothers anymore.

The Malev community timely petitioned the Senior Presbyter for Rovno oblast, who submitted our petition to the Upolnomochennyi. In the end, we received a reply similar to yours. The VSEKhB in Moscow did not respond at all. In Zolochevka [another village], it was even worse than in Malev. But!/? Thanks to you, brothers, for your strange response. Stay healthy.

P.S. On June 3, the local authorities, headed by the secretary of Demidovskii Raiispolkom, impudently attacked the prayer house, disassembled it, and moved it. On June 5, the believers conducted a prayer meeting on the site where the prayer house once stood. There were a lot of people. The poor old men and women, who with great difficulties had built this prayer house with their own hands, wept. The pitiless insult-makers [officials] torment them and thus provoke people against the Soviet authority. And our higher level evangelical organs, such

as those in Kiev and Moscow, do nothing. As your response suggests, there is no one we can appeal to.<sup>65</sup>

Embittered by their experiences, the believers explicitly conveyed their disappointment with both the Soviet travesty of a legal system and the VSEKhB's insouciance towards their plight. In view of this evidence, the Khrushchev crackdown on religion did little to undermine the religiosity of Malev's believers, but contributed a great deal to their estrangement from the Soviet state and their receptivity to the non-conformist agenda.

The 1961 Directive Number 263 called for the commitment of additional human resources to the task of containing religion—the establishment of local commissions of assistance to the Upolnomochennye of CARC. In effect, the directive only legitimized in law the use of the same persecution crews of local dignitaries that had been pestering religious communities for years. Such democratization of struggle against religion proved to be a mixed blessing for the CARC and made believers even more vulnerable to outside intervention. Envisioning that such commissions would be composed of “best atheist agitators, politically educated pensioners, school teachers, medical workers, and employees of cultural and educational institutions,” the head of Ukrainian CARC, Litvin, thought that “in order to attract the broad social strata to participation in the control over the activity of clergy and religious organizations,” it would be “expedient to create commissions of assistance not only at city and regional executive committees, but also at every town and village soviet of workers' deputies on the territory of which there are functioning religious organizations, including the illegal ones.”<sup>66</sup> Adjusting to

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>66</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5663, p. 80

Khrushchev's 1962 reorganization of party leadership in industry and agriculture,<sup>67</sup> which "brought to positions of leadership in city, regional and, especially, village soviets of workers' deputies new employees who are not familiar with the Soviet legislation on cults and instructions concerning its application," the CARC arranged "seminars" at the Obkom and Oblispolkom levels with the purpose of "familiarizing" incoming officials "with decisions of party and government concerning religion and church."<sup>68</sup> Litvin's implicit apprehensiveness of these newly arriving bureaucrats could have hardly come from his prior interaction with them, for it had only been several months since he succeeded Polonnik as the head of CARC in Ukraine. Rather, it must have originated in his study of abundant evidence of local officials' administrative excesses accumulated over the years in the annals of his office and appearing daily on his table.

About the time Litvin took over from Polonnik, Andreev reported to CARC about the plight of Regushovskaia EKhb community in Sazonovskii village soviet, Orzhitskii region, Poltava oblast: "The local authorities prohibit believers to gather. The village soviet chairman summons them and categorically forbids them to gather. Besides, they write that the village soviet chairman, being drunk, cusses them out and calls them a counterrevolutionary band."<sup>69</sup> In his informative report for 1962, in which Litvin optimistically called for participation of a broader social strata in the business of controlling religion, he also stated that "the on-site verification of believers' petitions and

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<sup>67</sup> Geoffrey Hosking, *The First Socialist Society: A History of the Soviet Union from Within* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 350.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>69</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 389, p. 43.

complaints reveals that in a number of oblasts and regions crude administrative bullying is substituted for a principle of systematic and painstaking work with believers, aiming at tearing them away from religion,” and that “some local organs and officials permit actions that contradict the Soviet legislation.” To illustrate this deviation from the official Soviet policy, Litvin quoted the following incident:

In village Roia, Mar’inskii region, Donetsk oblast, the town soviet chairman, D.S. Shemiakov, and district militiaman, Senior Lieutenant Gladchuk, entered the EKhB prayer house, compiled lists of all present believers, locked up the prayer building and, without the sanction of a procurator, took into custody presbyter, Y.I. Balandin, and transported him to the regional department of militia. Having interrogated him, with the use of various experiments, they locked him up in a cell for preliminary confinement. On the basis of a protocol, fabricated by the workers of militia, the People’s Judge, Sytnikov, sentenced Balandin to 15 days of imprisonment, purportedly for disobeying the local authorities. The Oblast Court overruled the People’s Court decision due to the lack of criminal content in Balandin’s actions and he was released from custody.<sup>70</sup>

In May of 1963, reported Litvin, “the village soviet chairman in village Tolmach, Shpolianskii region, Cherkassk oblast, entered the prayer house of the local EKhB community, conducted a search, and confiscated a Bible, a collection of spiritual songs, a pulpit, and wine prepared for the performance of Eucharist.” In the same year, continued Litvin, another village soviet chairman in Shpeli, Ivankovskii region, Kiev oblast, “unlawfully fired for her religious convictions N.G. Luk’ianchenko—a believer of the local EKhB community, who worked as a nurse.”<sup>71</sup> Later the same year, a presbyter of Klavanskaia EKhB community in Rovno oblast, Kantsemal, who worked as a tailor, was also fired, as well as Nadezhda Andreevna Prisiazhniuk, who worked as the chef’s

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<sup>70</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5663, p. 77.

<sup>71</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5908, p. 95.

assistant in a diner in the town of Zdolbunovo.<sup>72</sup> P.A. Sinii, a father of five and a member of the executive organ of the EKhB community in Vysokopolie, Bol'shealeksandrovskii region, Kherson oblast, also lost his job at the local butter plant because of his religious convictions. Before firing him, the plant director, G.N. Guliakin, humiliated Sinii at the workers' meeting and "called him a spy and a person unworthy of Soviet citizenship."<sup>73</sup> "In village Parievka, Kamenets-Podol'sk region, Khmel'nitsk oblast," continued Litvin, "the village soviet chairman, the kolkhoz brigadier, Gasiuk, and militiaman, Mel'nik, stopped at the EKhB prayer house and conducted a search. During the search, they discovered an issue of "Brotherly Messenger" magazine and burned it on the spot. They tore down from the walls all religious texts, grabbed the pulpit and took it to the village soviet office."<sup>74</sup>

During the 1940s-1960s, the local authorities contrived some truly innovative pretexts to disperse religious communities. In 1956, when the EKhB community in the town of Molochansk was in the process of relocating to a different prayer house (a mere change of address), the local authorities, according to Vil'khovyi, "looked for a number of unnecessary pretexts to postpone the new building's passage of technical, sanitary and fire department inspections, and demanded that a lightning rod had to be mounted on the building." This silly and uncalled-for requirement, in Vil'khovyi's opinion, served no other purpose but "provoked discontent among the believers and the filing of new

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 96.

complaints.”<sup>75</sup> An assistant to the Raiispolkom chairman in the town of Orekhovo, Zaporozhie oblast, comrade Ulitov, tried to pass his efforts to stunt the growth of the local EKhB community under the guise of environmental concerns: “he demanded that candidate-members, whom the community prepared for baptism, provided statements from a physician and X-rays certifying that the baptized would not contaminate water in the river.”<sup>76</sup>

In 1962, Litvin reported that “in the city of Ternopol the local authorities, in cooperation with sanitary inspection workers, closed the prayer house of the local EKhB community for 378 days under the pretext of preempting the spread of typhus. Only after an interference of the Ministry of Health Defense of Ukrainian SSR, this ‘quarantine’ was reduced to 45 days and, ultimately, cancelled.” The EKhB community in village Rukshin, Khotinskii region, Chernovtsy oblast was shut down under the same pretext. “An investigation, triggered by the believers’ complaint, determined that no one [no legal authority] issued any ‘quarantine’ in this village, and that it was all contrived by the village soviet chairman for the sole purpose of shutting down the sectarians’ prayer house.”<sup>77</sup>

In his memoirs, N.A. Zhukaliuk provided a more detailed account of how the local authorities in village Kleban’, where Zhukaliuk served as a pastor, tried to use a similar pretext to shut down an SDA prayer house. A village soviet chairman summoned Zhukaliuk and “informed him of the decision of regional authorities to close the prayer

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<sup>75</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 4263, p. 69.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5663, p. 7-8.



house on the grounds that it had supposedly become a hotbed for the spread of tuberculosis.”<sup>78</sup> Looking for a pretext to settle their old scores with the “stubborn pastor” [Zhukaliuk], the local officials “reclected that fifteen years ago, an owner of the prayer house, Ivan Begas (then still a juvenile), caught cold, got sick with pleurisy, and spent several months at the hospital.” In the years that followed, Begas, who certainly did not contract any tuberculosis, became a father of four healthy boys. Nevertheless, the village chairman requested that Zhukaliuk stood at the doors of the prayer house and personally prevented parishioners from entering. When, disregarding the chairman’s threats of arrest, the pastor refused to comply, a crew of epidemiologists arrived at the prayer house and “performed the disinfection of a prayer hall” with “some stinky liquid.” The undeterred parishioners, however, wiped off the traces of this disinfection, with its attendant pungent odor, and continued with their prayer services.<sup>79</sup> The local authorities were also undeterred by believers’ stubbornness and kept sending sanitary commission members who interfered with the prayer services. Knowing that the local authorities were determined to shut down their prayer house, the community members resorted to a simple but clever maneuver—they quickly arranged an exchange of houses between Ivan Begas (the purported source of contagion) and his father. Ivan now lived in his father’s house, several kilometers away.

In the meantime, Zhukaliuk was summoned to the regional soviet where the entire leadership of Tul’chinskii region, about 30 people, confronted him. “When I entered a

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<sup>78</sup> N.A. Zhukaliuk, *Cherez krutye perevaly*, p. 155.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156.

huge conference hall,” reminisced Zhukaliuk, “I encountered all eyes directed at me and faces distorted with ire... When almost all present, interrupting each other and sending in my address the most insulting words, called upon the law enforcement organs to arrest me on the spot, I asked for an opportunity to speak.”<sup>80</sup> As calmly as he could, the assailed pastor disarmed the angry congregation of regional notables with a two-fold argument: “Firstly, Ivan Begas, who, you surmise, is sick with tuberculosis, no longer resides at the prayer house because he has exchanged houses with his father; and secondly, I can be prosecuted only if it has been officially proven that the prayer house was a hotbed of infection.”<sup>81</sup> Even though the SDA community in Kleban’ won a reprieve for itself, the local officials did not relent and, shortly after, “the chief Communist of Tul’chinskii region,” the party secretary, Tsybul’ka, requested that the most advanced up-to-date diagnostic and X-ray equipment was brought to Kleban,’ with the help of which tuberculosis among Adventists could be detected.”<sup>82</sup> The results of this sophisticated medical inspection revealed that “none of the Adventists was sick with tuberculosis,” and that “the lungs of the prayer house owner, Ivan Begas, who was inspected with extraordinary meticulousness, turned out as clean as those of a new-born baby.” The other, non-Adventist residents of Kleban’ were not as fortunate, for the inspection discovered 30 cases of tuberculosis among them.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 159-160.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 160.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 164.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

Although Tsybul'ka's campaign to shut down the SDA community in Kleban' failed, the local authorities elsewhere were certainly not short of ideas. According to Litvin's report for 1962, "the leadership of village Kamennaia Krinita, Ulianovskii region, Kirovograd oblast, set up posts of voluntary guards [*druzhinniki*] along the roads on the approaches to a prayer house, with the purpose of preventing believers from going to prayer meetings."<sup>84</sup> In the same year, the EKHB presbyter in village Tagancha, Kanevskii region, Cherkassk oblast, Doroshenko, reported to his superior, Kaliuzhnyi, about what the local authorities did to the Pentecostals: "As for the Pentecostals, to each one of them an individual agitator was assigned to dissuade them and to watch their comings and goings, so that they would not be gathering even in pairs. But they are not afraid and say that those are not Christians who fear men."<sup>85</sup> Doroshenko's own registered community, however, was also in dire straits since the MGB detected that two unlisted worshipers (visiting Pentecostals) were present at one of its prayer meetings. Besides, Doroshenko added: "Sister Liuba, in whose house we gather, is being assailed by everyone. The head of cooperative, where she works as a baker, tells her to denounce faith, or she will be fired."<sup>86</sup> Finding themselves in such predicaments, some believers at least must have wondered whether there was any advantage in belonging to a registered community.

The evidence shows that the Council's Upolnomochennye were not blind to the potential danger of such indiscriminate harassment of believers. Already in 1948, the

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<sup>84</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5663, p. 78.

<sup>85</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 389, p. 67.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

Council's Upolnomochennyi for Zhitomir oblast, Shevchenko, commenting on the desirability of registering the former Pentecostals from diverse villages as a new EKhB community in village Serdiuki (Olevskii region), wrote to Vil'khovyi:

If the community is denied registration, it would be forced to go underground, having broken up into 6 active groups, which, in my opinion, would not only be inappropriate, but detrimental in every way, especially from the point of view of the work against the mystical perverted sect of Pentecostals, since it is easier for the Pentecostals to work underground...The illegal status of such a large group may also be easily exploited by the hostile elements.<sup>87</sup>

In 1962, the increased harassment of the registered churches by the local authorities portended even more trouble for the CARC in view of the parallel widening of a schism within the EKhB brotherhood. These concerns became quite salient in Litvin's assessment of unlawful closures of registered prayer houses since the issuance of Directive 263:

Serious violations of legislation on cults occurred in Dnepropetrovsk oblast. For example, in 1961-1963, in violation of the order established by the USSR government, three large EKhB communities, combining 668 believers, were closed in the city of Krivoi Rog. The confiscation of prayer houses from these communities increased the number of functioning illegal groups that regularly conduct prayer meetings in private apartments. Taking advantage of the situation created in the city, supporters of the 'Orgcommitte' of the EKhB schismatics became more active...On a concocted pretext and under the guise of purported dying down of EKhB communities in Dnepropetrovsk oblast, 14 EKhB prayer houses were recently closed without the permission of appropriate organs. Such attitude of local organs of authority towards religious communities of the EKhB arouses discontent in believers and contributes to the widening of sectarian underground.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 47, p. 78-79.

<sup>88</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5908, p. 44-45.

Realizing that many local Soviet functionaries could not or did not care to comprehend that a prayer house was not the cause but rather the consequence of a religious community's existence, Litvin remarked:

Some workers of local Soviets of workers' deputies continue to think that closure of a prayer house would lead to the break-up of a religious community, cessation of its activity and, ultimately, to the withdrawal of believers from religion. Guided by these considerations alone, they, under various pretexts and administratively, initiate a preliminary closures of a prayer house, do not allow believers for a long time to rent or adapt for religious purposes private houses, and then enter a proposal for the termination of community's registration on the grounds that 'it has fallen apart and ceased its activity'... We demanded from the oblast Upolnomochennye of CARC...to prevent attempts of some employees of local Soviets of workers' deputies to artificially reduce religious networks, since such measures do not bring about the desired results and contribute to the growth of unregistered but actually acting communities and groups of believers that become a recruitment pool for pervert sects.<sup>89</sup>

The similar signals, emitted by the central office of CARC in Moscow, resembled a rather typical Soviet preachment against "dizziness with success" usually issued in the aftermath of a major political excess and portended the rolling back of the Khrushchev antireligious campaign. In March of 1963, Chairman of the Council for the Affairs of ROC, V.A. Kuroedov, who would soon become the head of reorganized Council for the Affairs of Religion (overseeing all religious denominations in USSR), wrote:

The Council underscores that the practice of unlawful closures of churches that still exists in some places is nothing but a perversion of the policy of our party and Soviet government in relation to religion and the church, and that it causes great harm to the cause of education of the laboring masses in the spirit of Communism. It is necessary to remember that the clergy uses each case of arbitrariness and administrative bullying towards the church or of insult of believers' feelings to flair up religious fanaticism, agitate believers, and strengthen its hold over the backward part of our population.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>89</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5663, p. 83-85.

<sup>90</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5778, p. 43-44.

Despite the implicit recognition in both Litvin's and Kuroedov's comments of the essentially counterproductive effect of practices tacitly encouraged during the Khrushchev campaign, cases of violation of believers' rights by the local authorities occurred even after the publication in 1964 of the Decree of CC CPU "On Facts of Rude Administrative Bullying of Some Organs of Authority towards Believers." In 1965, for example, the Council's Upolnomochennyi for Donetsk oblast, M. Bal'chenko, reported to the head of CAR in Moscow, Puzin:

The local authorities look for various pretexts to requisition prayer houses rented from private persons. Citizen Kal'chenko, residing in Petrovskii region of the city of Donetsk, rents out a part of his house for prayer meetings of the EKHB community since 1949. The representatives of authority of this region have had numerous talks with him, trying to persuade him to terminate the lease agreement and deny the rent of the building to to the community. Kal'chenko did not agree to that. As a result, on March 18, 1965, due to a law suit filed against him by the Raiispolkom, the People's Court of Petrovskii region of Donetsk requisitioned without compensation the part of Kal'chenko's house used as the EKHB prayer house and transferred it to the fund of Petrovskii regional soviet.

It should be noted, that Kal'chenko is a 2<sup>nd</sup> group invalid of the Patriotic War. He works as a stone mason, is married, and has 5 family members as his dependents. He is a believer himself and is no idler. There is no evidence showing that he acquired his house on unearned income...<sup>91</sup>

Bal'chenko then turned to obstacles artificially erected by local authorities in order to complicate the registration of prayer houses by believers, and to the local authorities' disregard of the government's 1964 decree and corresponding decisions of the oblast authorities (Obkom):

Despite the ruling [of Oblispolkom against causing problems for registration] and other instructions, the Leninskii Raiispolkom of Donetsk causes all sorts of obstacles for the performance of prayer services of the SDA community whose registration was restored in November 1964... In May of this year, they [SDAs]

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<sup>91</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 450, p. 5-13.

signed a private agreement for the lease of the building with a citizen Anna Yakovlevna Lyskovich...Because there are only few SDA prayer houses in Donetsk oblast, this community is visited by believers from other regions. [Due to over-crowdedness and stuffiness inside], it is necessary to open windows during prayer services. As the Raiispolkom chairman, comrade Negrobov, argues, Lyskovich did not notarize the lease agreement for the rent of her house to the community (the law does not require this) and, therefore, the Raiispolkom do not recognize this lease (this is not required of the private house owners). Comrade Negrobov finds 'gross violations of Soviet legislation on cults' in all the mentioned actions of the community and the owner, Lyskovich.

When I tried to clarify this issue to comrade Negrobov, he accused me of being the believers' defender and, moreover, declared that...Lyskovich and presbyter of the SDA community would be severely punished for the said violations of Soviet legislation. I implored comrade Negrobov not to apply to them any unlawful measures of violence and, especially, not to involve militia...<sup>92</sup>

Ignoring Bal'chenko's professional advice as a plenipotentiary of CAR, Negrobov appeared in Lyskovich's house accompanied by militiamen, took away her lease agreement with the SDA community, and "demanded that she terminated an agreement with the community under the treat of requisitioning her building and firing from work her daughter who worked as a cashier at one of Donetsk colleges (her daughter is not a believer)." Lyskovich also told Bal'chenko that the militiaman who visited her again later "recommended that she evicted believers and called them obscurantists who supposedly go to a clearing in the woods after a prayer service, wallow in grass, nibble on trees and break them."<sup>93</sup> Seeing Negrobov's actions as gross violations of Soviet legislation, Bal'chenko tried one more time to reason with the Raiispolkom chairman. The latter responded, reported Bal'chenko, "by insulting me, calling me the defender of

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

sectarians who contributed to the free practice of their cult,” and concluded “that he and I had different types of party certificates.”<sup>94</sup>

The instances of violation of believer’s rights continued to occur sporadically in the late 1960s. In 1968, in “A Note about some Facts of Administrative Bullying toward Believers and Religious Communities on Territory of Ukrainian SSR,” Litvin informed Kuroedov:

Administrative measures have been especially widely applied in Rovno oblast... The believers of village El’no, Rokitovskii region write in one of their complaints: ‘In 1965, the village soviet chairman, comrade Yatskevich, dispersed a prayer meeting and unlawfully took away Bibles and collections of religious hymns from believers. In 1966, some believers were fined the cumulative sum of 100 rubles. In 1967, 6 people paid fines in the excess of 300 rubles. Their household possessions were itemized and appraised by the People’s Judge, village soviet chairman, the district militiaman, and other officials. Toward the payment of their fines, a heifer was taken away from citizen P.Y. Kirilovich, a pig—from F.G. Kirilovich, a cow—from A.G. Basich, and a couch was taken from one of the fined people...’<sup>95</sup>

Although it admitted errors committed during the Khrushchev campaign, the 1965 decree did little to prevent the recurrence of the same mistakes in the future. For as long as the CAR remained underpowered and the interpretation of the Soviet policy on religion depended on a current government decree, believers would be vulnerable to the whimsy of local authorities.

## 5. Conclusion

While confirming the central arguments advanced by the earlier scholars of this subject, such as Michael Bourdeaux and Walter Sawatsky, the evidence presented in this

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 82, p. 75-79.



chapter allows for a more nuanced reevaluation of Protestants' plight in the postwar Ukraine by shifting focus from the official pronouncements of Soviet policy on religion and select examples of its impact on religious communities to the local social and cultural mechanisms that predetermined the various, and often conflicting, forms of this policy's implementation. An examination of the relationship between the local authorities and Protestant communities in the 1940s-1960s reveals that the gap between the theory and practice in fact existed, and that, moreover, it constituted a persistent trait also noted by scholars of Soviet antireligious policy during the early Bolshevik period. "Literally every directive from central to lower authorities," asserted William Husband, "involved at least a tacit renegotiation of power at this time, and the gap between the intent of directives and their implementation could be great. In this formative period of the Soviet state, even local authorities inclined to obey the center could not simply compel obedience among the rank and file."<sup>96</sup> According to Husband, the choice of rank and file Soviet citizens to either accommodate or circumvent the government directives depended on a variety of motivational factors, from "the vicissitudes of party power struggles, factional differences, and various mobilization campaigns,"<sup>97</sup> to "shades of religious and antireligious commitment within the full spectrum of personal and collective concerns."<sup>98</sup> In a society where "every choice between belief and nonbelief now required justification," "the critical mass" of Soviet citizens, in the gray area separating committed

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<sup>96</sup> William B. Husband, *"Godless Communists": Atheism and Society in Soviet Russia, 1917-1932* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2000), p. 38.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xv.

militant atheists from those striving to preserve religion, “maneuvered among multiple priorities, and the extent of their attachment to atheism and religious belief depended above all on how they chose to integrate spiritual and nonspiritual concerns.”<sup>99</sup> In other words, the Soviet antireligious agenda did not evenly split the population into conformists and non-conformists but forced people, both believers and non-believers, to look for modes of survival that would allow them “to reconcile their personal agendas with the constraints imposed by the social, political, economic, legal, and moral environment.”<sup>100</sup>

The lack or underestimation of the human dimension in earlier historiography of the subject tended to produce a black and white image of the relationship between authorities and Soviet Protestants, with the former being almost always robotic executors of the government policy and the latter—undifferentiated victims. Viewing the Soviet antireligious campaign through the lens of personal motivation conveys a much more diffused spectrum of responses to it on the part of both Protestants and government officials. The evidence presented in this chapter makes it difficult to explain the diverse attitudes of state officials to the task of combating religion strictly in terms of Soviet legislation on cults or periodic government decrees. The local officials’ violent or rude behavior towards believers often occurred for reasons extraneous to the cause of atheism: the wartime habits of former Red Army officers turned civilian bureaucrats, the generally low level of education and legal awareness of local officials, traditional xenophobia

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<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130-131.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150.

towards the non-indigenous religious confessions, the pressure of fulfilling the State Bond quotas that prompted some officials to prey on vulnerable minorities, alcoholic intoxication, abuse of authority for self-empowerment, acting on a hint by superiors in hopes of obtaining promotion, and other mundane reasons. Khrushchev's ill-conceived mobilization of broad strata of Soviet society to the task of combating religion, with its lack of coherence and functional regulatory mechanisms (the CARC being physically unable to supervise or monitor the activity of countless grassroots activists), effectively suspended the existing legislation on cults and prompted some of the worst abuses of believers. The brutish vulgarity characteristic of Khrushchev's own public behavior and pronouncements, from his notorious shoe banging at the United Nations to his obscene treatment of Soviet liberal writers and artists,<sup>101</sup> could not but set the tone for many similarly inclined local bureaucrats. The old generation believers in Ukraine and Russia still vividly remember Khrushchev's remark made during his 1961 television address: "I promise that soon we will show you the last priest on television." V.A. Alekseev referred to a similar pronouncement made by Khrushchev towards the end of his political career: "In 1980 [the Khrushchev deadline for the construction of Communism in USSR] I will show you the last priest."<sup>102</sup> In December of 1961, the secretary of CC CPSU, Il'ichev, concluded his address to the All-Union conference on ideology with the following remark: "Religion, which has always been an anachronism in modern conditions,

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<sup>101</sup> William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company: 2005), p. 588-592.

<sup>102</sup> V.A. Alekseev, *Shturm nebes otmeniaetsia: Kriticheskie ocherki po istorii bor'by s religiei v SSSR* (Moskva: "Rossiia Molodaia," 1992), p. 210.

presently becomes an intolerable obstacle on our way to Communism.”<sup>103</sup> Such remarks certainly inspired the imagination of upwardly mobile oblast and regional party officials, many of whom were already predisposed to view the postwar shift toward legalizing religion as only a temporary dalliance. As Walter Sawatsky observed, “Khrushchev had a natural leaning toward *administrirovanie* [administrative methods], although in the antireligious campaign his spokesmen, as well as he himself, repeatedly condemned *administrirovanie* and urged educational methods.”<sup>104</sup> In the ensuing confusion, many local party officials interpreted Khrushchev’s militant language as the de facto nullification of legal norms protecting the rights of believers and communicated this distorted view to their subordinates at the grassroots. Many kolkhoz and village soviet chairmen, preoccupied with the daunting task of the postwar economic reconstruction, kept antireligious agenda very low on their priority lists. The party’s urgent demands to give this agenda greater attention often annoyed the already burdened local administrators, struggling to fulfill various procurement quotas on time. Unable to allocate proper resources and attention to antireligious propaganda, the grassroots officials looked for the quickest way of solving the problem of religion and, habitually, resorted to the familiar administrative methods.

Instead of clearing the Soviet landscape of last vestiges of religious worldview, the Khrushchev campaign deepened believers’ religiosity, increased their legal awareness, popularized the cause of non-conformists and, ultimately drove a wedge

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<sup>103</sup> Aleksandr Pyzhikov, *Khrushchovskaia “Ottenel”* (Moskva: “OLMA-PRESS,” 2002), p. 143.

<sup>104</sup> Walter Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II*, p. 135.

between the Soviet state and many registered communities that initially embraced conditions of legal existence in USSR. As more and more embittered believers reverted to the clandestine realm of the underground and subscribed to its internal logic of survival and its apocalyptic mental outlook, they were often irretrievably lost to the Soviet secularizing agenda. By indiscriminately attacking the law-abiding registered communities, the state undermined its own power base within the realm of religion. The CARC Upolnomochennyye, Vil'khovyyi, Polonnik, Litvin, each in his turn repeatedly warned the party bosses that monitoring or directing the activity of religious underground was nearly impossible, and that administrative measures contributing to the growth of these intractable networks were clearly counterproductive. As a public place, a registered prayer house could be entered by any government official. The CARC could also regulate the life of registered religious communities via frequent meetings with communities' presbyters and executive organs. An illegal gathering of believers at someone's private house or apartment presented a challenge even for the legally unscrupulous Soviet authorities. Under the Soviet law, entering a private home or conducting a search there required obtaining a warrant from the Procuracy. Even though many local officials ignored such procedural formalities and often substituted a uniformed militiaman for a Procurator's warrant, a legally aware house owner could resist such unlawful intrusions. In 1968, Litvin included the following incident in his report to the First Assistant to the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Ukrainian SSR, V.Y. Semichastnyi:

On April 14, 18, and 20, illegal gatherings of supporters of 'the council of churches of EKHB' were detected in the town of Sumy. On April 22, schismatic

activists from Sumy provoked certain believers to resist representatives of organs of authority. When a deputy of the city soviet's Ispolkom, Y.N. Kovaleva, and a district militia upolnomochennyi, A.I. Nesterenko, approached the house on 45 Shchorsa Street, the house owner, A.K. Ignatenko, met them at the gate. When the aforementioned officials attempted to enter the house, where an illegal gathering was taking place, the owner released a dog from the chain...<sup>105</sup>

Unlike the registered believers, who were wary about losing their privileges and constantly restrained by their spiritual centers, the underground dwellers had no privileges to be revoked and did not hesitate to inform public opinion domestically and abroad about their plight, costing the state additional expenditures in counterpropaganda.

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<sup>105</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 82, p. 104.

## CHAPTER V

### ANTIRELIGIOUS PROPAGANDA AND PROTESTANTS

#### 1. Oscillations of the Party Line on Religion and Their Impact on the State of Antireligious Propaganda in the 1940s-1960s

Historians of atheism in the USSR have commented on the virtual disappearance of antireligious rhetoric in all official Soviet pronouncements after the outbreak of the Second World War—a lull that persisted almost undisturbed until the death of Stalin in 1953, with only minor ripples in the late 1940s. Daniel Peris, who researched the activity of the Soviet League of the Militant Godless in the 1920s-1930s, wrote:

The German attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941 brought an immediate end to the public activities of the Militant Godless. The Central Council ceased publication of various journals, and most local League councils disappeared for the final time... While the central Komsomol apparatus took an increasingly aggressive stance toward religion in the late 1940s, the tenor and scope of official antireligious propaganda efforts remained muted as long as Stalin lived.<sup>1</sup>

Working with Komsomol archives concerning ideological-educational work among youth, V.A. Alekseev noted the virtual absence of such terms as “antireligious struggle” and “atheist education” from documents produced in 1945-1946. Alekseev saw in their disappearance “a change of course, a different policy with respect to the church and,

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Peris, *Storming the Heavens: The Soviet League of the Militant Godless* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 1998), p. 221-222.

hence, a different line towards the antireligious agenda.”<sup>2</sup> By 1947-1948, however, this new party line had already undergone certain adjustments:

Stalin began to receive information that not everyone among the party cadre correctly understood the meaning of new state-church relations; that some party members did not approve of such ‘fraternizing with the priests’ and criticized, from dogmatic standpoints, ‘the oblivion of VKP(b) position concerning the necessity of decisive antireligious struggle.’ Stalin...decided not to make the antireligious issue as salient in the activity of the party as in the 1920s-1930s, rightly assuming that it would undermine the new church-state relations. At the same time, he could not ignore disagreements on this issue even among one segment of the party cadre. That is why, Stalin, having promoted M.A. Suslov...to the post of Secretary of CC VKP(b) in 1947, advised him ‘not to forget about atheist propaganda among the people’ and, at the same time, made it clear that the issue was not of paramount importance at the present time.<sup>3</sup>

Finding himself in a precarious situation, facing the task of assuaging the antireligious zeal of some party members without significantly altering Stalin’s chosen course of action, Suslov proposed opening a limited antireligious front that would focus mainly on the atheist upbringing of the younger generation of Soviet citizens. “Such a maneuver,” commented Alekseev, “which diverted the leadership of party and country from criticizing the ‘abandonment of struggle against religion,’ was approved by Stalin,” since “it gave no grounds to religious leaders to doubt the change of climate in the state-church relations—the atheist propaganda in this case did not have the all-inclusive, totalitarian character akin to the ‘godless offensive’ [of the 1920s-1930s].”<sup>4</sup>

The evidence reviewed in Chapter III confirms that from 1948 to 1953 the government focused primarily on impeding the influx of youth into religious

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<sup>2</sup> V.A. Alekseev, p. 199-200.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 200.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.



communities by prohibiting children and school age youths from attending religious services and by changing the age criterion for baptism from 18 to 25 and, later, to 30 years of age. Moreover, the Soviet authorities implemented these measures not via a visible public campaign, but inconspicuously, by applying pressure on denominational spiritual centers, that is, by integrating the leadership of religious denominations into the state apparatus of control and containment of religion. Daniel Peris argued that “except during the years from 1959 to 1964, the regime’s antireligious propaganda was less virulent [in comparison with the 1920s-1930s] and focused on long-term development rather than immediate social transformation.”<sup>5</sup> Alekseev, however, pointed out that Khrushchev attempted to alter the Soviet postwar policy on religion already in 1954, almost immediately after Stalin’s death. As a new party leader, Khrushchev instigated the passage of the Decree of CC of CPSU from July 7, 1954, “On Serious Defects in Scientific-Atheist Propaganda and Measures Towards its Improvement.” Assessing this new development, Alekseev wrote:

Essentially, this decree represented a revision of the former policy of party and state on religion that was implemented under Stalin’s leadership during the 1940s-1950s. Moreover, the decree condemned this policy as ‘conciliatory,’ stated that the atheist work within the party and in the country was in the state of neglect, [and] stressed that ‘the church and various sects had considerably revived their activity, strengthened their cadre and, supplely adapting to modern conditions, intensively spread religious ideology among the backward segments of population, paying special attention to attracting into their fold women and youth’ ... The decree proposed a return to the old style ‘offensive against religious holdovers’ practiced in the 1930s... In the spirit of former militancy, the decree rigidly prescribed... to decisively break with passivity in relation to religion, to expose the reactionary nature of religion and the harm that it causes distracting a

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<sup>5</sup> Peris, p. 222-223.

number of citizens of our country from conscientious and active participation in Communist construction.<sup>6</sup>

This decree, crafted on Khrushchev's instigation by his close ideological supporters D.T. Shepilov, A.N. Shelepin, and M.A. Suslov, "provoked a strong negative reaction on the part of clergy and believers of all confessions" and was not accepted unreservedly by some members of Soviet political leadership, such as G.M. Malenkov, K.E. Voroshilov and, especially, V.M. Molotov, who had "participated in Stalin's policy of integrating the church into the structure of state system" and were worried that a new "war with the church" would lead to undesirable consequences within the country and abroad."<sup>7</sup> In order to fix complications that arose in the state-church relations as a result of this hasty decree, the members of Khrushchev's antireligious think-tank—Suslov, Il'ichev, Pospelov, Shepilov, Shelepin and Furtseva—resorted to a tested palliative. They shifted the blame for excesses and errors caused by the decree on "head-bashers and hacks...among the atheist activists who by their sloppy and rude actions discredited the vitally important work."<sup>8</sup> On November 10, 1954, on Khrushchev's initiative, the CC of CPSU speedily passed a new decree—"On Errors in the Conduct of Scientific-Atheist Propaganda among the Populace."

Reprimanding abusers and postulating the sound principles of atheist propaganda, the November 10<sup>th</sup> Decree called for a differentiated and sensitive approach to religion in

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<sup>6</sup> Alekseev, p. 210.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 212.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 213.

the postwar Soviet context. Chiding perceived perversions of Soviet policy on religion, the decree stated:

Instead of developing regular, painstaking work in propagating natural-scientific knowledge and instead of waging an ideological struggle against religion, certain central and local newspapers, as well as speeches of certain lecturers and reports, are permitting offensive attacks against clergy and believers participating in religious observances. There are cases of ministers of religious cults and believers being represented—without any basis in fact—in the press and in propagandist’ speeches as people who are not politically trustworthy. In a number of ‘rayons’ [an administrative district] there have been cases of administrative interference in the activities of religious associations and groups, as well as coarseness towards the clergy on the part of local organizations and certain individuals. Such errors in anti-religious propaganda are fundamentally contrary to the Program and policy of the Communist Party with respect to religion and believers and are a violation of repeated instructions by the Party concerning the inadmissibility of offending the feelings of believers.<sup>9</sup>

The decree also pointed to the inadequacy of the atheist cadre preparedness:

The Central Committee considers it incorrect that many Party organizations have divested themselves of day to day leadership of scientific and atheist propaganda and do not concern themselves with careful selection of propaganda personnel. Frequently people who are ignorant of science and questions of atheist propaganda, and at times even hacks, knowing mainly anecdotes and stories about the clergy, are permitted to publish in the press and give lectures and reports.<sup>10</sup>

Stressing that “offensive actions with regard to the church, the clergy, and citizens who are believers are incompatible with the line of the party...and contrary to the Constitution of the USSR, which accords freedom of conscience to Soviet citizens,” the decree presented the task of elimination of religious holdovers as a long-term project requiring patient persuasion and systematic education as its preferred operative tools:

...One must not fail to keep in mind that there are also citizens who, while actively participating in the life of the country and honestly fulfilling their civic

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<sup>9</sup> James Thrower, *Marxist-Leninist ‘Scientific Atheism’ and the Study of Religion and Atheism in the USSR* (New York: Mouton Publisher, 1983), p. 397.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

duty to the homeland, are still under the influence of various types of religious beliefs. The Party has always demanded...a tactful and attentive attitude toward such believers. It is all the more stupid and harmful to consider certain Soviet citizens politically suspect because of their religious convictions. Profound, patient and properly conceived scientific and atheistic propaganda among believers will help them ultimately to free themselves from their religious errors. On the contrary, all manner of administrative measures and offensive attacks against believers and clergy can only do harm and result in a consolidation and even reinforcement of their religious prejudices.<sup>11</sup>

Reneging on their earlier undifferentiated assessment of “reactionary nature of religion” (July 7<sup>th</sup> Decree), the framers of this new decree tried to shield believing citizens of suspicion of political disloyalty by providing a historical analysis of the changed status of religion in an established socialist society:

In conducting scientific and atheistic propaganda, it should be kept in mind that one cannot equate the situation of the church in a socialist country with the situation of the church in an exploitative society. In bourgeois society the church is a support and weapon of the ruling classes, which utilizes it for the purpose of enslaving the workers...At the present time, as the result of the victory of socialism and the liquidation of the exploitative classes in the USSR, the social roots of religion have been sapped and the base on which the church supported itself has been destroyed. Today, the majority of the clergy, as facts testify, also take a loyal stand with regard to the Soviet government. Therefore, the struggle against religious prejudices today must be regarded as an ideological struggle of the scientific, materialist world view against the anti-scientific, religious world view.<sup>12</sup>

Despite the decree’s clear and unequivocal statement of the Soviet new approach to the problem of religion—an approach that the government continued to reaffirm until the collapse of the Soviet Union—the recurring disagreements on the issue within the party ranks perpetuated an uneven and cyclical nature of the Soviet campaign against religion, with its alternating periods of relaxation and mobilization. The rampant

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 398.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 398-399.

succession of conflicting decrees created confusion within the ranks of party and Komsomol antireligious activists and fostered the old militant attitudes towards religion rather than eliminated them. If in the practice of the 1930s, as Husband observed, “terms such as anti-Soviet, kulak and bourgeois...became self-serving tautologies that linked the perceived enemies of the party to contemporary problems”—a generalized association of kulaks with support for the church, for example, could lead, in the Bolshevik political shorthand, to the perception of anyone engaged in pro-religious activity as a kulak<sup>13</sup>—the same guilt by association continued to victimize believers in the 1940s-1960s. Instead of eloquently presenting scientific evidence that could challenge religious precepts, the antireligious activists of the postwar era frequently resorted to either arguing against a straw man or labeling believers American spies, traitors, thieves, shirkers, or perverts, hoping that such crude forms of social ostracism would evoke in believers a thirst for uniformity, for being like everyone else, and make them quit religion.

The lack of an adequately trained cadre and the increasing bureaucratization of the Soviet antireligious apparatus constituted yet another continuity that could be traced back to the 1920s-1930s. Assessing a set of problems that plagued the League of the Godless, Peris wrote:

The world of official rhetoric was expressed in an endless series of resolutions, investigations, charges of deviation, criticism of other institutions, and other everyday political communications—all of which formed a comprehensive internal discourse. In this world, challenges were defined and redefined, policy was developed and reversed, battles were won and lost...all within a closed bureaucratic circle and with few tangible effects on the outside world. Antireligion offered not only the Potemkin organization of the League but

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<sup>13</sup> Husband, p. 37.

also a Potemkin political process masking division, competition, and the pursuit of ulterior interests...The Party may have been adept at exercising political control, but this approach did not extend as well to the propaganda realm, where the goals were more intangible and difficult to conceptualize and achieve. Thus the regime defined and offered its utopian aims as structures and forms that were ultimately hollow.<sup>14</sup>

Ultimately, the same set of problems that plagued relations between religious communities and local authorities in the postwar Ukraine undermined the quality and purpose of the atheist propaganda in the 1940s-1960s. The CARC continued to blame the local party and Komsomol organizations for poor and inadequate staging of atheist work while the local authorities, whose direct task it was to disseminate the natural-scientific knowledge among the populace, exhibited the lack of properly trained cadre and motivation. Given such conditions at the grassroots, any pressure from above to carry out antireligious work notwithstanding could not but generate crude and ludicrous forms of atheist propaganda and cause the degeneration of the proposed campaign of persuasion and education into a campaign of coercion and interventionist reeducation.

## **2. The Challenges of Atheist Propaganda**

Experience proved that the greatest challenge for atheist propaganda in the postwar decades consisted not so much in defining and articulating its objectives or in choosing appropriate methods of its implication but in mustering the necessary enthusiasm for the cause in the projected educators and in step-by-step oversight of this enlightenment project. As the impetus generated at the center began to diffuse towards the periphery, it became increasingly difficult to control the quality of antireligious

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<sup>14</sup> Peris, p. 227-229.

education or enforce the uniform methods of its propagation. The success or failure of the entire project ultimately depended on such elusive factors as preparedness, dedication, discipline and, most importantly, motivation of thousands of involved human agents.

Even the Upolnomochennye of CARC—people directly involved in the long-term Soviet project of reducing religion—were poorly prepared to cope with the variety of religious denominations and their peculiar doctrines, while the local authorities, who were to serve as their support groups, showed little concern for the task facing the Council. With the dissolution of the League of the Godless, for almost two decades there was no central agency that dealt with theoretical issues of antireligious propaganda, and the League's successor, the All-Union Society for the Dissemination of Political and Scientific Knowledge (also known as the Knowledge Society), created in 1947, had a rather broad mandate and “did not at first pursue antireligious propaganda vigorously,” at least not until it began publication of *Nauka i Religiia* (Science and Religion) in 1960, “a journal near in spirit to [the prewar] *Bezbozhnik* and *Antireligioznik* [The Godless and The Antireligious].”<sup>15</sup> In order to train its own personnel, the CARC had to fall back on the theoretical legacy of the previous years and classics of Marxism-Leninism, supplying its employees with a long list of literature that every Upolnomochennyi was expected to read—a daunting challenge, given that most Upolnomochennye hardly had any time to deal with their direct everyday duties (see Chapter II). In 1947, the head of CARC in Moscow, Polianskii, dispatched a letter to all Upolnomochennye, accompanied by a list

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<sup>15</sup> Peris, p. 222

of suggested literature for their self-education. Among 74 items on this list, there were articles on dialectical materialism and worldview of the Marxist-Leninist Party, featuring works by Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin. Besides, the list offered works on the origin of religion in general and specific studies on major religious denominations—Islam, Catholicism, various sectarian branches, Judaism, Buddhism and Lamaism. In his letter, Polianskii impressed it upon his subordinates that their work presupposed “urgent necessity to study Marxist-Leninist teaching on religion and mastery of Marxist-Leninist theory,” for only in the light of this theory, he maintained, “can a Council’s Upolnomochennyi be capable to really grasp processes associated with the activity of religious cults and correctly solve tasks placed before him.”<sup>16</sup> Polianskii further warned that “an apolitical, narrow-minded and utilitarian approach toward the performance of an Upolnomochennyi’s duty may lead to undesirable mistakes,” and trusted that his subordinates “would take up the business of elevating the level of their ideological-theoretical education in clear consciousness of unconditional necessity of fulfilling this important task.”<sup>17</sup> However, as evidence in Chapter II revealed, the actual conditions of the Upolnomochennyi’s life and work made it physically impossible for them to live up to Polianskii’s expectations.

In 1951, the Upolnomochennyi continued “to ask to help them in the selection of Marxist literature on the question of overcoming religious prejudice,” which prompted Vil’khovyi to compile a shorter list of 25 items and send it to all of his subordinates in

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<sup>16</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 26, p. 16.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.



Ukraine so that they could familiarize themselves with these works. Besides traditional classics, the list featured contemporary works by A.P. Gagarin *On the Class Character of Religious Morality* (1950) and P. Palevkin's *Religious Superstitions and Their Harm* (1951).<sup>18</sup> Even perceived professionals, such as the Council's Upolnomochennyye, had difficulty orienting themselves in the available antireligious literature and finding quick answers to specific questions that confronted them. The situation could become even more complicated if they needed such literature in one of the national languages. In 1960, the head of the Department of Propaganda and Agitation at the CC of CPU in Kiev received a letter from the head of the Political Department of Dubravnyi Correctional Labor Camp (ITL) of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, B. Pridachin. According to Pridachin, this camp, located in Mordovian Autonomous SSR, held "a significant number of people sentenced for especially dangerous crimes against the state—people who before their incarceration lived and committed their crimes in various oblasts of Ukrainian SSR." The Political Department of this camp asked the Ukrainian party leadership to "to give instructions to the lecturers' groups at the CC and Obkoms of CPU and to the administration of the Society for the Dissemination of Political and Scientific Knowledge to periodically forward to" the camp's address "lectures, reports and political publications containing materials about nationalist, religious-sectarian and other manifestations for the use in political-educational work with the aforementioned contingent of prisoners."<sup>19</sup> The response of the assistant to the chairman of the Ukrainian branch of the Knowledge

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<sup>18</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 109, p. 14-15.

<sup>19</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5205, p. 29.

Society, I. Kuzovkov, and his selection of literature in Ukrainian make it clear that Dubravnyi ITL in Mordovia was full of believers, most likely from the least russified Western Ukraine. Kuzovkov's shipment of lectures and brochures to Dubravnyi ITL (28 in all) included the following items: I.G. Batiuk's "The Freedom of Conscience in the USSR," D.L. Pokhilevich's "Contemporary Catholicism," I.M. Shimko's "Religious Sectarianism and Its Ideology," I.N. Uzkov's "Contemporary Religious Sectarian Organizations," Y. O. Levada's "The Irreconcilability of Science and Religion," P.P. Moskvina's "Scientific Views and Religious Prophecies," and other works.<sup>20</sup>

The western oblasts of Ukrainian SSR, which had been incorporated into the USSR in 1944-45, presented a particular challenge for the Soviet antireligious agenda. While practicing a more cautious "affirmative-action" approach to these territories, alongside brutal suppression of the wartime nationalist movements, the government could not ignore the fact that Zakarpatie, for example, was a hotbed of religiosity exporting religious zealots to other parts of Ukraine and the country as a whole. In 1948, Secretary of the Central Committee of VLKSM for Lvov oblast, N. Mikhailov, reported to Khrushchev:

While studying the organization of atheist propaganda in Lvov oblast, the VLKSM workers encountered numerous facts of manifest activity on the part of clergy and sectarians, attempting to influence the youth. Part of the youth, especially rural youth, observes religious rituals and systematically visits the church. A certain segment of students of rural schools, institutions of higher education, technical schools, FZO and trade schools does not attend classes on religious holidays and visits churches. Some teachers and school principals, and even employees of departments of popular education go to church and observe religious rituals instead of doing explanatory work among students and parents and enforcing the students' attendance of schools on religious holidays... There

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 30-31.

are frequent cases in the oblast when Komsomol members visit churches, arrange church weddings and baptism of their children. Almost all Komsomol members of the 10<sup>th</sup> Polish school in Lvov go to kostel [Roman-Catholic church]...

There are 48 communities of the sect of Evangelical Christians-Baptists in the oblast. 25% of the 6,000 people constituting these communities are young people. In the Baptist community in Lvov, there are students of the Medical Institute, the Light Industry Technical School, and students of trade and FZO schools...The sect is visited by teachers and military service men. The sect focuses its efforts on induction and direct recruitment into its fold of students of schools and institutions of higher education...The Baptist communities educate youth in a reactionary spirit...They are being infused with religious fanaticism and negative attitude toward the study of social and natural sciences. A consciousness of 'love towards one's neighbor' is being impressed upon them...

An illegal sect of Jehovah's Witnesses..., acting in the oblast, numbers about 1,000 people, 80% of which are youths. The sect is hostile towards the Soviet order. Jehovah's Witnesses categorically reject participation in elections to central and local organs of Soviet authority, speak against the kolkhozes, and evade paying taxes...<sup>21</sup>

Mikhailov supported his assertions by providing examples of sectarians' success with the Komsomol and party members:

O.I. Rybenko, born in 1926 in Sumy oblast, a VLKSM member and a student of Lvov Institute of Cooperation, submitted a petition to a Baptist community: 'I ask for your permission to begin the trial period necessary to become a member of your church, because I wish to break all ties with the Komsomol and always live with the Lord.'

A former student of Lvov Institute of Economics and Planning and a member of VKP(b), Z.K. Rastopyrina, tried to turn in her Party membership certificate to presbyter of a Baptist community because 'she has come to know God and wished to exit the VKP(b).'

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In conclusion, Mikhailov offered his diagnosis of the problem that afflicted the Lvov area schools and institutes:

Atheist propaganda is not organized properly among the Lvov oblast youth. Lectures disclosing the reactionary nature of religion are seldom read... The Komsomol leadership does not pay serious attention to working with students of

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<sup>21</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 5069, p. 40-43.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

schools, teachers and school Komsomol and Pioneer organizations. The Pioneer and Komsomol organizations are few and weak, and the growth of their ranks is negligent. Of the 984 oblast schools, 483 do not have Pioneer organizations...<sup>23</sup>

Later the same year, an assistant to the head of Administration for the Inspection of Party Organs at CP(b)U, E. Babenko, informed the secretary of CP(b)U, L.G.

Mel'nikov:

The head of Vinnitsa oblast Administration of MGB, comrade Kasatkin, reported that 70% of weddings, funerals and births in the oblast are accompanied by religious ceremonies. Numerous facts have been registered when sectarians conducted active work among youth, with communities keeping track of each person being indoctrinated... There are cases of participation in religious rituals of secretaries of grassroots party organizations and other responsible workers. In village Litopovka, Tomashpol'skii region, a party member, Lezhankov, baptized his child, and the village's entire party organization participated in the baptism celebration... In village Yazvinki, Nemirovskii region, a secretary of grassroots party organization, Gorenko, went to a confession with his fiancé... In village Galaikovtsy, Mur-Kirilovetskii region, a VKP(b) candidate-member, Raifil,' organized a church choir and, together with its participants, went from house to house, singing prayers...

During the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 1948, the Obkom reviewed 411 personal cases of Communists, of which 138 cases had to do with Communists performing religious rituals. The Radomyshl'skii Raikom expelled 27 people from the party, including 15 people expelled for the performance of religious rituals... In village Solodyri, Volodarsko-Volynskii region, a Komsomol member, Maria Torbich, entered a religious sect after 10 years of membership in Komsomol. The Komsomol members in kolkhoz 'Pravda,' Brusilovskii region, visit the church and participate in the church choir. In 1947, there were 34,345 children born in the oblast, and 19,130 of them were baptized... In Reutinskaia 7-year school [Sumy oblast]... 50% of students observed Lent. Teachers and Komsomol organizations of this and a number of other schools do not fight against the spread of religious influence among students.<sup>24</sup>

In 1947, the Upolnomochennyi for the Affairs of ROC in Lvov oblast reported along the same lines: "The church is visited by professors, prominent physicians,

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 241-245.

lawyers, and students of institutions of higher education. It is a common occurrence.”

Vil'khovyi's report for 1948 presented a similar picture:

The study of organization of work in religious communities brings us to a conclusion that almost every community, especially Roman-Catholic and Uniate [Greek-Catholic] in Zakarpatie, and also the EKhB and Reformed-Calvinist communities (in Zakarpatie), one way or the other conduct work among women, young men and girls, children, candidate-members and new converts. The practice of decisive regulation of their activity, applied by us, does not allow them to unfold their work in a form desirable to them. Therefore, in none of the communities will you find a written plan of work in these directions. Such a plan is in the head of a presbyter, pastor, ksendz [Catholic priest], priest, executive board member, and in the head of every sectarian.<sup>25</sup>

Numerous similar reports certainly exaggerated the success of religious propaganda, especially during the time when the government virtually suspended the registration of new religious communities. Nevertheless, the incoming data from Komsomol and party organizations could not but alert Khrushchev, Suslov and other zealots of decisive struggle against religion. More importantly, these reports reaffirmed the continuity of processes of accommodation and circumvention of antireligious agenda observed by scholars of Soviet atheism during earlier periods. Quite in line with Husband's argument, the “nonmilitant majority” of Soviet citizens in the 1940s-1950s, including members of grassroots party and Komsomol organizations, also “tried to fashion some palpable accommodation” for the state-sponsored atheist agenda, factoring into their responses “issues of personal conscience, family harmony, community opinion, potential impact on their well-being, and prospects of retribution.”<sup>26</sup> Many Soviet citizens were apparently quite capable of reconciling their membership in demonstrably antireligious

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<sup>25</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 5070, p. 2, 13.

<sup>26</sup> Husband, p. 131.

organizations with deep-seated sympathies toward religion. The presence of such crypto-believers in the grassroots Soviet agencies certainly accounted for the willy-nilly and ineffectual promotion of atheist agenda in villages and towns throughout Ukraine.

In one of his more colorful and unconventional reports, written in a journalistic style and conveying a sense of immediacy of his encounter with rural Ukrainian Evangelicals-Baptists, Vil'khovyi illustrated difficulties impeding the progress of the Soviet antireligious propaganda in the countryside. Vil'khovyi previewed his report by a general statement of the problem, amounting to the lack of competitiveness on the part of Soviet institutions in charge of propaganda:

Each religious EKhB community has a group of preachers conducting religious propaganda. Notwithstanding a number of measures we took with the purpose of reducing the scale of the EKhB activity and weakening the impact of their propaganda, such propaganda continues, taking on new and more flexible forms, quickly adapting to circumstances, and skillfully using to its advantage either the lack or, more often, weakness of scientific-educational and popular-cultural work in locations. The old sectarians tell their trainees, that is, candidate members: 'Every Baptist is a propagandist. Having learned the truth yourself, allow others to know it. Bring the Word of God to every creature...' And they aspire to put this into practice.<sup>27</sup>

Hoping to find a place that would serve as an example of properly organized scientific-educational propaganda, Vil'khovyi selected kolkhoz "Zapovit Il'icha" (Lenin's Legacy) in Arbuzinskii region, Nikolaev oblast. Besides over-fulfilling the grain production quotas, this kolkhoz featured 11 heroes of socialist labor, including the kolkhoz chairman, P.E. Kislitsa, and 89 people who received medals:

And certainly, out of all places, I hoped to see in this kolkhoz an exemplary organization of popular-cultural work. But, regrettably, Pyotr Egorovich Kislitsa is quite stingy when it comes to popular-cultural work. The Arbuzinskii regional

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<sup>27</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 783, p. 5.

Party Committee also did not help him with this work. In other words, clubs and libraries in this region have not yet been turned into centers of cultural-educational and political outreach for the masses. The club [in kolkhoz “Zavit Il’icha”] is poorly furnished (the wealth of this kolkhoz notwithstanding), unpainted, cold and uncomfortable. Lectures are seldom read in the evenings and, more often, there are but 2-3 young couples dancing to the accompaniment of an accordion. As for the middle-age kolkhozniks (and old folks), they never come. The library, as far as the number of books, is quite rich (over 1,500 books): it has classics and contemporary literature, works of Lenin and Stalin, magazines and newspapers; but all this is dumped behind a partition wall... The kolkhoz chairman, P.E. Kislitsa, has his office in the same building. By the way, it is a very nice office, befitting a Raikom secretary (and this is good). It is wrong, however, that the library’s reading room has only what we call in Ukrainian, ‘oslin’ [a crude bench] and an old cupboard filled with junk.<sup>28</sup>

Trying to assess the intellectual potential of this kolkhoz for the task of counteracting the spread of religious influence in the region, Vil’khovyi inquired the librarian whether or not the local party and Komsomol members, kolkhoz leaders and heroes of socialist labor—theoretically, educators—invested any time in educating themselves by checking out books from the library. He found out that of 11 heroes of socialist labor, only one took books from the library, and of the 12 party members, only 2 showed any interest in the library books. “If the kolkhoz chairman has a home library,” observed Vil’khovyi, “and can get by without the library books, the same cannot be said of the village soviet chairman... who does not have a home library and says that he only occasionally glances at newspapers, and not daily at that.”<sup>29</sup> In his conversation with school director Vil’khovyi established that an attempt had already been made to organize a kolkhoz university “with the purpose of elevating the cultural level of ... poorly educated crew leaders who received high governmental awards,” but when “teachers of a

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 6-7.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

kolkhoz university convened several times to offer lessons, not a single listener showed up—they were too busy with the field work and household duties.” When Vil’khovyi observed that with 19 available kolkhoz teachers, one could surely be assigned to each one of the decorated crew leaders and brigadiers “to help them, individually, work on their self-improvement,” he received an answer: “No one has ever suggested it to us.”<sup>30</sup>

The head of Ukrainian CARC then cast his eyes on the state of affairs in a large EKhB community of the neighboring village Mar’ianovka:

The prayer house has been recently remodeled: it is clean and warm, and its library of religious literature is in order. The presbyter, Frol Dorofeevich Krykليا, works as a bee-keeper in the kolkhoz and earned 550 labor-days. He has 30 years of experience as a preacher and tries to adapt to Soviet reality: ‘On Sundays, when all kolkhozniks are in the field,’ says presbyter Krykليا, ‘I do not open the prayer house and tell everyone: Go to the fields. We work honestly, and that is why we are respected. I tell everyone: First, we need to fulfill our civic duties before the state, and our personal duties—afterwards. I was the first to subscribe to the State Bond, and I was the first to sign the Stockholm declaration of the defenders of peace.’ This community has 5 preachers who have ‘a gift of word.’ Among them is manager of the village store, G.A. Mel’nikov. He is such a ‘popular personality’ that he is called not by his last name, but simply ‘Grisha—the preacher.’ In order to get to know him better, I decided to spend the night at his house. It turned out that all visitors to Mar’ianovka spend the night at his house. He has a nice house. His wife, although not a member of the community, actively visits prayer meetings and is a good kolkhoz worker... They have a cow, a pig, fowl, and a nice garden. They also have a home library consisting mostly of religious books, some of which should have been long requisitioned as harmful. One of such books, ‘Leaves of the Tree of Life’ (for thoughtful readers of the Bible and workers in the Lord’s vineyard) picked and collected by Filbrandt (translation from the German), I requisitioned.

...Mel’nikov regularly reads newspapers, follows international events, and conducts lively conversations with shoppers at the village store. And right next to the village store—stands a club. It does not have an agitator on duty, and its floor is covered with cigarette butts and sunflower hulls. It is damp and cold inside,

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.



and only in one tiny room functions a small library visited from time to time by school children who actively dig through piles of books.<sup>31</sup>

The poor state of Soviet propaganda and agitation in Arbuzinskii region did not represent a singular occurrence but reflected a pattern observable in other regions of rural Ukraine prior to Khrushchev's empowerment of local authorities. In 1949, Vil'khovyi cited from the report of the Council's Upolnomochennyi for Kiev oblast who recently returned from his tour of such cities as Smela, Cherkassy and Uman': "Usually, I hear one and the same thing from our comrades: 'Yes, we either barely spend any time on educating the population and tearing it away from religious communities, or we don't do anything at all.'"<sup>32</sup>

Many kolkhoz and village leaders and dignitaries simply did not see struggle against religion as a vital component of socialist construction, first of all for utilitarian reasons of being preoccupied with other immediate economic tasks. Many nominal non-believers among the kolkhoz and village administrators established good working relations with Protestant communities and individuals and, had it not been for the state intervention on behalf of antireligious agenda, a peaceful and fruitful coexistence between believers and non-believers would have most likely prevailed. At the same time, without state interventionism, the more ideologically motivated and energetic Protestants, as Vil'khovyi discovered and the post-Soviet experience confirmed, would have certainly increased their influence and presence throughout the Ukrainian landscape.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 8-9.

<sup>32</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 5667, p. 216.

### 3. Crude and Compulsory Forms of Atheist Propaganda

A great mover of human and material resources, the Soviet state found it quite difficult to evoke an adequate and uniform response to such a delicate aspect of its social engineering project as atheism, with majority of responses tending to fall into three general categories: negligence, formalism, or excess. In 1953, the Council's Upolnomochennyi for Dragobych oblast, Burik, reported to Vil'khovyi an embarrassing incident that occurred at Borislav industrial enterprises during the antireligious lecture delivered by a professional lecturer, Slavko. In his lecture, presented at the work site where some oil well equipment was being overhauled, Slavko purportedly targeted the Roman-Catholic church. Among the 40 workers, along with several trade union and party officials present, there were several Evangelical-Baptist employees. According to one of the witnesses, Revtsiv, whom Burik quoted, Slavko "really let the Baptists have it; they will not forget it soon."<sup>33</sup> In Burik's own assessment, "Slavko did not read the text of the lecture but spoke in his own words." As a result, Slavko, who "later admitted himself that he could not distinguish very well between various sects," confused the EKhB brotherhood "with some other anti-state religious sects." When Burik exposed Slavko's incompetence and tried to make him answer for the insults he leveled at Baptists who attended the lecture, the Obkom, supposedly, accused Burik of misinformation and gave him a stiff warning that went on his record. Slavko, however, reported Burik, "was not invited to the Obkom bureau, and was not reprimanded in any way."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 149, p. 5-6.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

In response to Burik's somewhat controversial report—Burik held that the EKHB presbyter, V.Y. Bursuk, who attended the lecture, “was hysterical during a conversation between him and lecturer Slavko,” and suggested the presbyter's replacement on the grounds of the latter's “lack of discipline”<sup>35</sup>—Vil'khovyi sent the senior inspector, Voloshchuk, to Borislav to investigate the incident and figure out whether the believers' claim “that Slavko during his lecture insulted the believers' sensibilities and also those of the EKHB presbyter, V.Y. Bursuk,” was true. Having compared different stories, Voloshchuk determined:

...that indeed, during the lecture, entitled ‘The Vatican at the Service of American Imperialism,’ Slavko said that Baptists were agents of American imperialism and, since the Baptists' center was located in Washington [D.C.], it followed that those Baptists who lived on the territory of USSR were also agents of Washington. The people who were present at the lecture confirmed that Slavko did not follow the lecture's text.<sup>36</sup>

Voloshchuk also found out that Slavko's enthusiasm did not subside after the lecture. Knowing that the EKHB presbyter, Bursuk, was attending the event, Slavko wished to have a talk with him. Bursuk declined, saying that the break was over and he had to return to work. Slavko persisted and tried to summon Bursuk through the shop master, and when that failed, he went to Bursuk's work place himself. When Slavko and Bursuk first met, the latter, supposedly, took off his hat and said: “Lord, give me strength to endure this trial also.” “During a brief talk that transpired,” reported Voloshchuk, “Slavko asked Bursuk about the number of members in the [EKHB] community, Bursuk's

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 7-9.

personal life, pointed out Bursuk's delusions, and advised Bursuk to get some education and part with his religious convictions."<sup>37</sup>

His investigation led Voloshchuk to form a rather positive opinion of Borislav's Baptists:

As for the performance of the EKhB community members and presbyter himself at work, the representatives of local Borislav authorities stated that they did not have anything bad to say about the Baptists' work. The presbyter...received a bonus for his good work—a trip to a resort. In 1951, he served as an agitator at the election polling station, and presently serves as a trade union group organizer and attends a circle for the study of party history.<sup>38</sup>

Voloshchuk concluded his report by stating that “Slavko, who permitted inaccuracies in reading his lecture—drawing parallels between the EKhB and Pentecostals (he admitted that he did not see any difference between them)—and insulted the attending believers by calling them spies and agents of Washington, was not given any punishment,” whereas Burik [Upolnomochennyi] received a stiff warning...”for misinforming the higher authorities.” The inspector's investigation proved that “the accusation of misinforming the higher organs, brought against comrade Burik,” was “inconsistent with the real state of affairs.”<sup>39</sup>

The Borislav incident confirmed that neither the general party guidelines concerning the official Soviet policy on religion nor the availability of printed literature (however tendentious) and approved lectures on specific topics of antireligious propaganda could ensure a responsible approach of even some paid lecturers to their

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

duties. According to his own admission, Slavko's understanding of religious diversity in Ukraine remained rudimentary. Instead of ensuring the quality of atheist propaganda in their region, the local party authorities, who tried to cover up for Slavko afterwards, most likely suborned the unprepared Slavko to somehow work Baptists (and Pentecostals) into his lecture on Vatican (written by someone else). The resultant counterproductive effect of such poorly planned and executed antireligious propaganda was a combined product of Slavko's ignorance and local authorities' negligence.

The atheist propaganda became even more mishandled when the untrained rural officials were entrusted with its dissemination on the basis of no other educational criteria than their membership in the Communist party or VLKSM. In 1959, Vil'khovyi reported to the CC of CPU and the Council of Ministers of Ukrainian SSR on the progress of such mishandled enlightenment in village Vas'kovtsy, Iziaslavskii region, Khmel'nitsk oblast:

On March 13...a school director, comrade S.P. Sholota, entered a [EKhB] prayer house (after the prayer meeting was over) and began lecturing believers on decisions of the XXI congress of CPSU. The believers asked Comrade Sholota to have a conversation about the...congress in a different building, but comrade Sholota said: 'You people are old and do not go anywhere besides the prayer house, and I have an assignment from the party organization to conduct a conversation with you at the place where you gather.' On March 19, a teacher, comrade Shakhranskii, held a conversation with the same believers in their prayer house on the topic of Soviet satellites orbiting the Earth.<sup>40</sup>

A year later, presbyter of the EKhB community in village Grigorovka, Mogilev-Podol'skii region, Vinnitsa oblast, F.D. Yanushkevich, mentioned in his letter to Andreev the best scientific argument against religion, mustered by a local school director: "The next time...at the end of a [prayer] service, they began to persuade us. The director said:

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<sup>40</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 266, p. 12-13.

‘I am a pilot, and I flew very high. There is no God up there!’ Thus, a discussion of sorts ensued. They were presenting different kinds of wisdom of this age, but we told them that we were not the wise men but people who believed in God...”<sup>41</sup> As this evidence suggests, even a Soviet school director, presumably an educated person, subscribed to the most primitive idea that human religiosity had no deeper roots than the medieval peasants’ belief in a white-bearded elderly God-figure reposed on the cushion of clouds in the upper regions of Earth’s atmosphere.\*

One did not have to be an obscure village official lacking simple tact, educational prerequisites, or the knowledge of legal norms to convert the officially conceived campaign of enlightenment into a campaign of coercion and vilification of believers. In June of 1960, Andreev wrote to the head of CARC in Ukraine, Polonnik, that a member of the EKHB community in the city of Rovno, F.T. Podranetskii, visited his office in Kiev and told the following story:

On June 9, ...many believers in Rovno were summoned to the KGB [office], including the presbyter of Rovno community, Maksiutinskii, members of this community, Belitsa, Beshtynarskii, Shkurskii, an old man Bashkur, Shilo, and others. Some members of the illegal KhEV group (their leader included) and the elder of the Orthodox Church were also summoned. They were held at the KGB office for about 3 hours and then driven to a summer club in the park in Rovno where an atheist report targeting the Rovno believers was delivered. In his report, the lecturer spoke mostly against the EKHB and Catholics, and people—those

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<sup>41</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 309, p. 63.

\* Unfortunately, such caricature-like simplification of religious beliefs, originating in the Yaroslavskii-era of “militant godlessness,” persisted well into the 1970s. As a child of staunch Seventh Day Adventists, I could not hide my faith in God when I entered the Soviet education system in 1969, and I still remember my school teachers leveling same argument at me: “Our cosmonauts have circled the Earth hundreds of times now and haven’t seen any God up there. How can you still continue to believe in God?” My shy attempts to rebut this argument by suggesting that God could reside somewhere deeper in space did nothing to undermine the intellectual megalomania of my educators. [A.K.]

who were held by the KGB—were shown there at the club to everyone as people detrimental to our state. All sorts of discrediting stories not backed by any facts were told about them. The accused did not have a chance to say anything in their defense.

According to Podranetskii, the reporter tried to show believers in the worse possible light, whereas many believers in Rovno work hard and honestly to benefit the state with their labor. However, this wasn't even mentioned. Two days later, administrations of different organizations and industries in Rovno began to summon believers and persuade them in conversations to either denounce faith or leave their jobs. Podranetskii told that many believers and even non-believers were quite upset by such approach to atheist education.<sup>42</sup>

Podranetskii further implicitly remarked that such indiscriminate mistreatment of registered and unregistered believers could cause complications not only domestically but also hurt the USSR's image abroad:

...The community's leadership knows that many tourists from abroad may be passing through Rovno. They may be interested in the life of believers and wish to visit the Rovno community, that is, the prayer house, which, unfortunately, has not had electricity turned on for almost two years and the community has been forced to hold two of its evening services [weekly] by the light of a simple kerosene lamp. This alone is already causing unhealthy talks, which may penetrate beyond the limits of Rovno oblast.<sup>43</sup>

By 1960, the crude and unscrupulous atheist propaganda, unfolding against the backdrop of the more and more vocal and contagious EKHB internal opposition against both the VSEKHB and state policies, compelled even the timid believers of registered communities to look for new ways of negotiating with the state: if the state wished that registered communities continued to serve as Potemkin villages for foreigners, it should do something to restrain its ideological warriors. It is unclear what sort of conclusions Polonnik drew from Podranetskii's hint, but a pencil note, scribbled at the bottom of

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

Andreev's letter, stated: "One copy has been given by comrade Polonnik to a worker of KGB."<sup>44</sup> For as long as Khrushchev remained in power, however, the attendance of atheist lectures by believers was not a matter of choice but of compulsion. In 1962, for example, the chairman of executive board of the EKhB community in the town of Smela, V.A. Serbinovskii, complained to Andreev: "The Knowledge Society at the Gorispolkom summoned me and impressed it upon us, as an obligation, to listen to 5 lectures per month..., making it my duty to announce about these lectures and to gather the community."<sup>45</sup> Serbinovskii did not say anything about the quality of these new lectures arranged by the Knowledge Society, for the earlier available evidence of antireligious work in this town certainly left much to be desired. In his 1954 report to the VSEKhB, the Senior Presbyter for Cherkassk oblast, Kaliuzhnyi, wrote:

Presbyter of the EKhB community in the town of Smela, N.N. Kosenko, reported that the antireligious agitators in Smela insulted believers' sensibilities. 'In their lectures they tell people not to go to the EKhB prayer services, because 3 times a year the EKhB have services during which they turn off the lights and engage in prostitution—have sex with a random partner. Not only believers but even non-believers said that they would not go to such lectures anymore.' I [Kaliuzhnyi] also personally think that this was a rude insult of believers who defended their Motherland with weapons in hands and have always been fulfilling their civic duties.<sup>46</sup>

Having invested sizable human and material resources into the operation of Knowledge Society, training of thousands of lecturers and agitators, and publishing on a large scale of antireligious books and pamphlets, the government expected to see tangible results from this massive secularization campaign, that is, the return of believers into the

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 389, p. 40.

<sup>46</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 182, p. 73.



mainstream secular Soviet culture. This expectation exerted additional pressure on all involved agencies and obligated them to periodically demonstrate the success of their efforts. In 1959, the CARC Upolnomochennyi for Kiev oblast, A. Oleinikov, reported on the progress of popular-cultural and scientific-atheist propaganda in Rzhishchevskii region, Kiev oblast:

A thematic evening ‘Religion—An Enemy of Science and Progress’ was arranged in Romashkovskii village club. During the same evening, a drama circle performed a play called ‘Darkness’ (of an atheist content)... In Grebenianskii village club there was a thematic evening ‘Science and Religion are Irreconcilable.’ 5 universities of culture were organized in the region, to which youth is being attached with the purpose of preventing the influence of religionists on the young generation. In a number of villages, the party and Soviet organizations prepared and held assemblies of village residents who agreed not to celebrate religious holidays. Materials and resolutions of such assemblies were published in a regional newspaper. The regional newspaper often publishes articles about the origins of religion and about the rejection of religion by clergy and citizens.

In village Demovshchina, where there are Evangelical Christians-Baptists and Pentecostals, lectures, conversations, and evenings of interesting content have been systematically organized for the duration of 2-3 months. As a result, three believers parted with the sect. Among them, was Mikhail Stepanovich Tabachnyi, born in 1940, who said: ‘What sort of faith is it, if it forbids singing, studying in schools, going to movies, dances, and so forth?’<sup>47</sup>

Oleinikov described similar developments taking place in Boguslavskii region:

In most villages of the region, especially in those where sectarians are active, 15 lectures were read by a former sectarian, Prad’ko, on the topic ‘Why I Parted with Religion.’ He also held individual conversations with believers. In order to improve antireligious propaganda, ‘Corners of an Atheist’ have been created in all schools, which gives an opportunity youths of school age to vividly see the harmful impact of religion on the masses and learn how to propagate about it...

Thus, in the town of Boguslav, citizen Prokofii Evtikhovich Kal’naus, who has for a long time been a sectarian, broke his ties with the sect and conducts antireligious work. The Seventh Day Adventist, citizen Zaitsev, also broke all his ties with the sect. Thanks to significant educational work among youth that is being carried out in village Poberezhka, sisters Olga Dvorova, Maria Dvorova,

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<sup>47</sup> TsDAVO, F. 1, Op. 2, D. 279, p. 3.

and Ivan Verimii broke their ties with sectarianism and selflessly work in the kolkhoz.<sup>48</sup>

In Fastovskii region, according to Oleinikov, a small Pentecostal group was successfully dislodged:

In village Yaroshevka, a group of Petecostals-Shakers was organized. It numbered 12 people and consisted mostly of members and relatives of 4 families. At the initiative of Ispolkom of the village soviet, individual conversations were held with the sect's members, after which the former Pentecostal, A.A. Karasevich, spoke in the village club to the youth and village residents. Karasevich provided his characteristic of this Pentecostal group and described the harm that it causes. The people who attended (about 150, including some Pentecostals) condemned the group's activity with contempt. Afterwards, members of the Pentecostal group gave their word that they would break with the group. The group later dissolved of its own accord.<sup>49</sup>

In Zheleznodorozhnyi district of Kiev, “the prolific newspaper of the textile factory ‘Trikotazhnitsa’ began publishing materials under the rubric ‘Antireligious Lectorium,’” featuring such articles as “‘With a Cross and a Knuckle Piece,’ ‘The Catchers of Souls,’ and others.” The newspaper’s vigilance helped expose the activism of some sectarians employed at the factory:

The factory worker, [Galina] Yarmolenko, used to visit the sect of Baptists and bring religious literature to her dormitory. The newspaper published an article—‘This is not Galina’s Personal Business.’ The factory’s collective also exerted influence on Galina Yarmolenko, and she quit the sect. The Baptist, M. Donets, tried to carry out religious propaganda in her factory shop. The newspaper exposed her actions, publishing an article—‘Stealthily Digging a Sap.’ The workers supported the newspaper’s initiative, and M. Donets was forced to stop her religious propaganda.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 4-5.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 8-9.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

Similar reports from various regions and oblast of the republic, regularly received by the CPU's Department of Propaganda and Agitation, catered to the party's expectation that its goal of gradual reduction of religion through systematic dissemination of education and atheism was being achieved and the money and energy invested in this project were being well spent. Most reports, such as Oleinikov's and others, however, told nothing about the level of coercion and compulsion involved in organization of atheist lectures for believers and certainly did not question the sincerity of occasional sectarian conversions to secularism. Many sectarians, who, as reports' authors claimed, "have broken all ties with religion," only temporarily stopped visiting prayer services or turned into crypto-believers, whereas religious communities described as "dissolved of their own accord" were in fact dissolved administratively or under severe pressure by local authorities. "Former sectarians" who agreed to participate in antireligious campaigns as lectures and agitators were quite often people who had only been candidate-members, or had membership in religious communities for only a brief period of time, or, lastly, came from a category of members who had been reprimanded or expelled by a community for some sort of religious transgression or moral deprivation and, hence, held a grudge against their fellow-members, as the former SDA preacher, Miriuka, mentioned in Chapter III. The state organs in charge of antireligious propaganda, and also the KGB, specifically targeted such categories of undecided, disappointed or disgruntled believers as a recruitment base for different aspects of anticlerical and surveillance activities. Moreover, the renegade sectarians often made damning public statements about their former religious affiliations not of their free will

but under pressure from antireligious activists. As a simple textual analysis of the following antireligious article shows, the purported author of its text, an ex-believer, E. Balakova, most likely provided only some personal information about herself and her family to a newspaper reporter who used her name and information she provided to produce a stereotypical, inaccurate, and highly generalized piece of antireligious slander.

Published on October 7, 1962, in a local newspaper, *Kochegarka* (Donetsk oblast), this article, provocatively called “To Tear the Fetters of Religious Delirium: How the Baptists Maim People,” opened with a victim’s confession:

I perpetually lived in an oppressed emotional state, as if I had stolen something from somebody or committed a nasty crime which is about to be exposed. Each time I had to go to the sect, my heart would contract in pain. At the sectarians’ gatherings, I also could not calm down. The preachers constantly impressed the fear of God’s retribution [upon believers]. This continued for four years.<sup>51</sup>

Having made such an emotionally compelling intro, Balakova explained that she first encountered the EKhB during her husband’s illness and became drawn into the sect due to sectarians’ skillful playing of the role of “comforters.” However, standing on her knees, “praying until her knees were bruised,” brought her little comfort. Eventually, she succumbed to sectarians’ urging and received baptism, which they promised “would free her soul from the cares of this world.” According to the article, Balakova did not have any other reservations about baptism besides the embarrassment of getting into the water:

To receive baptism? In order to do that, a middle age woman, like myself, ...had to undress and get into the water where the preacher stood. He had to immerse me. Even though I received baptism, the feeling of loathing persisted. I attend sermons, and at each prayer service the same message is repeated. The preacher inculcates: ‘In the other world, sinners, a life of paradise is prepared for

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<sup>51</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 389, p. 178 (b-g).

you. So, let us pray to the Lord!’ And I think to myself: ‘What sort of sin have I committed? There is no sin.’ The preacher begins to read a prayer. He mumbles something incoherently [*sebe pod nos*]; it is hard to understand him. Many people are dozing off.<sup>52</sup>

The second half of this quote betrays the author’s ignorance of a conventional Protestant sermon—something quite unlikely of Balakova who claimed to have spent four years in the EKHB community. Anyone familiar with a Protestant sermon and terminology commonly used to describe it knows that Protestants, and Evangelicals-Baptists in particular, do not “read prayers” [the Orthodox Christians do that] but “say them” spontaneously, in their own words. The author’s paraphrase of a preacher’s inculcation is also very uncharacteristic of the EKHB and resembles a typical supra-confessional reductionist cliché plucked from some poorly written atheist brochure. The “incoherent mumbling,” attributed to the EKHB preacher by the author, was yet another borrowing from the atheist standard jargon used to depict an Orthodox priest reading a prayer in ancient Old Slavonic, whereas a Baptist preacher would have delivered his sermon in plain and simple vernacular Ukrainian or Russian. At the same time, the author did not mention, even in passing, such a salient component of any EKHB prayer service as communal and choir singing, but focused instead on the collection of voluntary offerings supposedly pocketed by the preacher (“The preacher’s treasury is his pocket.”). In fact, every EKHB community had an elected treasurer, revisional commission, and an executive board to oversee the proper accounting and allocation of community’s funds.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

Ignoring these communal mechanisms of fiscal accountability and a variety of utility expenditures that any religious community had to cover, including contributions to its spiritual center, the author surmised that the preacher, who, supposedly, “was recently prosecuted for theft,” singlehandedly appropriated all communal money for himself. According to the author, preacher Lysenko...”has two houses,” one of which he rents out, collecting exorbitant rent from his tenants.<sup>53</sup>

Lysenko’s wife profiteers [*spekuliruet*]\* on the sale of flowers at the bazaar, ripping people off. When people reprimand her, she yells rudely and impudently: ‘Flowers are a luxury. You don’t have to buy them if you can’t afford them!’ At the bazaar, Lysenko’s wife is a sharp peddler, but at the sect’s gathering—a righteous person, preaching love towards the neighbor. For these speculators and pilferers, God is a good cover for fooling honest people.<sup>54</sup>

Balakova expressed gratitude to “her daughter, a Komsomol member, Lida Shalimova, working at the construction shop of S.M. Kirov machine plant,” for helping her “to shake off the dirty fetters of obscurantism.” On the next page, however, Balakova wrote: “My son got married. My daughter-in-law, Lida Shalimova, working as a conductor on a bus, is a good woman.” Had the article been in fact written, or even proof-read, by Balakova, she most likely would not have allowed her son be represented in the story as marrying her daughter. Having permitted such a major blunder, the author proceeded to accuse Baptists of ruining the marriage of Balakova’s son to Lida Shalimova (the bus conductor) whose father, I.A. Fomenko [?]-“an active Baptist”—suggested to Lida: “If your husband dose not listen to you, chop his head off.” “And this is stated by the Baptist

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

\* In the Soviet jargon, this generic term, “speculation,” meaning profiteering on the resale of rare commodities, was often applied indiscriminately to people selling products of their own labor at the market.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

believers who preach love towards their neighbors!” wrote the article’s author in indignation. “How can one live next to such people without putting straight jackets on them?” In conclusion of her story, the liberated Balakova supposedly made the following statement:

I firmly know that there is no God; that preachers only fool and maim people and fill up their own pockets and build houses at the expense of those whom they deceitfully draw into their sect... At every gathering, they [preachers] select two or three ‘sinners’ whom they ask to repent and ask forgiveness from God before the whole congregation of sectarians-Baptists... This should have been reversed long time ago: preachers themselves need to be brought before the court of people and forbidden once and for all to cripple simple and honest Soviet people...

Abandon sects, become active builders of Communism, live your life to the fullest, do not allow a handful of parasitic preachers to enrich themselves at your expense! This is my word to all those who are still delusional. We have a wonderful life ahead of us, and we need to apply all our efforts to make it even better, to hasten the arrival of our bright future—Communism.<sup>55</sup>

Balakova’s article did not offer any scientific arguments refuting certain presumptions of a religious worldview. The closest approximation of scientific antireligious argumentation, found in Balakova’s article, came from her daughter (the Komsomol member) who posed the same notorious question to the EKHB preacher: “How should one understand an assertion that God created heaven if satellites and cosmonauts are flying there?”<sup>56</sup> The primary purpose of Balakova’s and similar articles was not to engage readers in a serious discussion of religion or science, but to slenderize believers and fuel prejudice against them. The believers, however, became increasingly more daring in challenging their intentionally slanted representation in Soviet press. On October 14, 1962, Lysenko wrote a complaint concerning the untruthful depiction of his

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

family in the *Kochegarka* article and sent it to the secretary of Gorlovka's Gorkom of CPU, V.V. Petrov. Drawing on facts and figures available to the Gorlovka authorities, Lysenko showed that the purported riches, ascribed to him and his family, were largely a product of the article author's imagination:

I, Y.A. Lysenko, born in 1899, reside in Gorlovka since 1936. I have been working at the produce farm of the Gorlovka Coal Trust since 1946 in different capacities. Presently, I work at the vegetable storage Number 11 as a crate repairer. My family consists of 3 people: my invalid wife and our daughter... I have a private house, 7x8 meters [672 square feet], and a shed. I have a garden plot—seven hundredths [7 *sotok* equal to 700 square meters, or 0.15 acre], 16 fruit trees, and 40 grapevines. In between the fruit trees, various flowers are planted. My wife grows them and takes care of them. She has awards from the Raiispolkom for growing flowers... My wife sold some bouquets of flowers at the market. Neither my wife nor I have ever been warned against growing flowers or selling them...

On October 7, 1962, the newspaper *Kochegarka* published an article—'How the Baptists Cripple People.' I was horrified by all the injustices in this article: Firstly, I do not have 2 houses, but one. I do not have any tenants since 1958, and I have documents to prove the real state of things. I do not deny that I am a member of the EKHB community, and that in 1961 I was elected a presbyter of this community. As for collecting offerings from community's members, I have nothing to do with it and I am only responsible for the correct order of prayer services. The issue of collecting money for the needs of community is in the competency of the revisional commission and community's treasurer. This can be clarified by checking the community's financial records. With respect to [my] remuneration—I do not receive any pay from the community, and this also can be confirmed by community's records and by all members of the community.<sup>57</sup>

Far from being a parasite taking advantage of the benighted but honest Soviet citizens, Lysenko, a 63 year old man, had a regular day job to support his family, lived in a tiny house (two-thirds of an apartment that I can afford as a graduate student) and, in his spare time, helped his invalid wife to intensively work a small garden plot and serve as a non-paid presbyter (a common practice) of the local EKHB community. Having

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 180 (g).



recounted this easily verifiable information, Lysenko questioned the validity of assumptions made about him by the article's author:

I did not know at all the article's author, citizen E.M. Balakova, and only subsequently found out that she was expelled from membership in the community two years ago. I do not know, with what evidence can the article's author confirm that I have two houses and have renters whom I rip off? How can she justify calling me a petty criminal and a thief—made up words or real evidence? That is why, I ask you to create an authoritative commission, conduct a careful investigation, and find out where the truth resides—in reality, or in a newspaper.<sup>58</sup>

In a separate letter, addressed to the chief editor of *Kochegarka*, comrade Sin'ko, Lysenko explicitly expressed his disappointment in this newspaper's abandonment of high standards of journalism:

I subscribe to newspapers regularly, and I read them. When I read an article 'How the Baptists Cripple People,'...written, supposedly, by citizen Balakova, I was horrified by the untruthfulness of everything presented in it. Reading newspapers all my life, I felt confident that articles were checked before publication. However, having read this article in *Kochegarka*, I wondered whether there was anything true in it...<sup>59</sup>

Lysenko's wife, Ksenia Petrovna, who happened to be illiterate, asked her daughter to write a letter on her behalf to the Upolnomochennyi of CARC for Donetsk oblast, comrade K.R. Guz,' in which she described a recent change of attitude towards her flower-growing on the part of the local authorities:

I, the wife of presbyter of the EKhB community, being 60 years of age and an invalid, love toil and am involved in growing flowers on a garden plot of 100 square meters. For my labor as a grower of good flowers, and for my contribution to making our city look nicer through participation in the city's flower exhibitions, the Ispolkom of the city soviet...repeatedly presented me with honorary certificates and valuable presents. I have been involved in this noble toil for some time now and, on occasions, sold bouquets of flowers at the Gorlovka

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 180 (v).

market to compensate for my expenses. But in 1961, my husband...was elected a presbyter. In the beginning of 1962, the attitude of city soviet towards me changed dramatically. Instead of being a participant in an exhibition, I was taxed as a person receiving 1,238 rubles in income from selling flowers. The amount of money I had to pay in taxes for such an income was 294 rubles and 60 kopeks. Not only I, an elderly invalid woman who has no helper, could have such an income from 100 square meters of land, but even the most experienced able-bodied workers. When I petitioned against these unjust actions...and argued that it was impossible to gain such income from my labor, my husband and I were told: 'But you are a presbyter,' or 'But your husband is a presbyter,' etc. They were getting it across to us, that if my husband were not a presbyter, there would not be any tax. When I was taxed for growing flowers, I stopped all my work, caring for flowers...<sup>60</sup>

These bold and informative rebuttals to a typical antireligious newspaper article of the era demonstrate that this local attack on the Gorlovka EKhB community and its leader constituted a part of a broader assault on religion during the Khrushchev campaign that specifically instructed the local authorities to look for possible pretexts to levy additional taxes on anyone involved in religious activities, which instantly transformed presbyter Lysenko into a petty bourgeois parasitizing on his flock, and his wife, a former award winner, into a greedy profiteer. In order to discredit the EKhB community in Gorlovka, the article's author intentionally blew out of proportion Lysenko's economic standing in the community, thus making his household the target of social envy. Unlike the Soviet antireligious activists who had access to various mechanisms of altering and manipulating the public opinion, believers like Lysenko could do little to defend themselves even against personal attacks on their character, not mentioning attacks against their belief systems. Lysenko's and his wife's letters to different officials ascended through non-public channels and could not publicly vindicate them in the eyes

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 180 (b).

of Gorlovka residents. *Kochegarka*'s editors would never publish Lysenko's rebuttal or issue a public apology to him, for in doing so they would be undermining the cause of atheism. This inequality between the rights of believers and atheists was firmly entrenched in the USSR's Constitution (both Stalin's and Brezhnev's), granting believers only the "freedom of confessing religious cults" (and that only in the confines of a church or a prayer house) while reserving for non-believers "the freedom of atheist propaganda."<sup>61</sup>

It should be noted that the CARC attempted to monitor the treatment of antireligious issues by the local newspapers. As early as 1948, Vil'khovyi's assistant, Sazonov, sent the following request to all Upolnomochennye:

In conjunction with intensification of propaganda of scientific-natural knowledge calling on mobilization of the working masses for active and creative participation in the construction of Communist society, the oblast newspapers began paying attention to issues of struggle against religious atavisms and superstition, placing on their pages articles targeting activities of the clergy. We ask you to continuously send to us all issues of local newspapers with publications of the nature described above. To facilitate this, contact the editorial boards of local newspapers.<sup>62</sup>

The CARC's interests in the local newspapers' contribution to antireligious work, however, proved to be nominal, and the Council's records did not show any substantial analysis of this issue until 1963 when the Council's Upolnomochennyi for Zakarpatie oblast, M. Salamatin, included a brief but very critical evaluation of local atheist journalism in his report to Polonnik. Pointing out certain persistent flaws in atheist propaganda, Salamatin wrote:

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<sup>61</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 322, p. 12.

<sup>62</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 42, p. 9.

In 1959, 1960, and 1961, there were a lot of messy mishaps in Zakarpatie oblast press. Dethroning religion and criticizing religionists and sectarians, newspapers often committed many errors: they mixed up different sects, called Knopp—the leader of Baptists, lumped together all *subbotniks* (Sabbath-worshipping Pentecostals, SDAs, Adventist-Reformists), confused teachings of various sects, etc...Speaking of deficiencies in covering issues of atheism in press, I would reduce them to the following:

An overly superficial approach to religious holdovers and superstitions can still be seen. In particular, the most revealing of this tendency was a very large article in *Zakarpatskaia Pravda* from August 31, 1962, entitled ‘A Word of Truth to a Man.’ The author, a secretary of Partkom in kolkhoz ‘31 Anniversary of October’ (Perechinskii region), A. Serbin, wrote among other things: ‘Only half a year passed since our party organization had energetically taken up the cause of atheist education of the artel workers, but results are already visible. The Zarechevskaia sect has gotten quiet, and one cannot see youth at the church. Even many elderly kolkhozniks have forgotten the path to church. The path to the ‘temple of god’ is getting increasingly grown over with grass.’ This is how much, the article claims, can be achieved in just six month. But this is all pretty words, a show off [*pokazukha*]. True, many people have parted with religion, but not in six months, as the author claims.

The article talks a lot about a sect and sectarians, but the sect’s name is not mentioned. The author, and with him—the newspaper, do not name the sect, and do not say that the Pentecostals and Jehovah’s Witnesses have been active and continue to act in this kolkhoz...Not understanding differences between sects, and not knowing their names, the regional newspapers sometimes use only such words as ‘a sect,’ or ‘sectarians,’ piling all sects into one heap...Big approximations are still being permitted in press, when authors drift away from facts and chastise churches and sects for beliefs that do not pertain to them.<sup>63</sup>

The Soviet government continued to sporadically issue decrees calling for intensification of antireligious work until Khrushchev’s ouster on October 13, 1964. In October of 1962 and in January of 1964, in response to the decrees by CC of CPSU and the Council of Ministers of USSR, the Ukrainian Council of Ministers issued its corresponding republican decrees “On the State of Scientific-Atheist Upbringing of Working People in Ukrainian SSR and Measures for its Improvement” and “On improvement of Atheist Work Among Workers Who Are Under the Influence of

<sup>63</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 403, p. 1-2.

Religious Sectarians,” respectively. However, on May 14, 1964, just six months before Khrushchev’s removal from power, the Central Committee of CPU issued a harbinger of the brief post-Khrushchev relaxation of struggle against religion—a decree “On Facts of Rude Administrative Bullying of Some Organs of Local Authority Towards Believers.” On January 27, 1965, a decree of the Presidium of Supreme Council of USSR “On Some Facts of Violation of Socialist Legality with Respect to Believers” would add the weight of all-union authority to the Ukrainian initiative.

These latter decrees, however, targeted only excesses of antireligious propaganda, not its continuous expansion and swelling of its supporting apparatuses. The following data from a report by the Secretary of CC of CPU, N. Sobol,’ to the Ideological Department at the CC of CPSU, submitted on June 1, 1964, demonstrate the immense resources at the disposal of antireligious propaganda in Ukraine alone:

Lectures for believers, evenings of questions and answers, cinema lectures, peripatetic clubs and antireligious photo exhibitions, universities and faculties of atheism acquire greater circulation in the republic. 350 houses of atheist, antireligious museums and mobile planetariums operate on a social basis...Presently, 90,000 agitators and propagandists of atheism conduct individual antireligious work in the republic...In 1963-1964 school year, 150,000 students study questions of scientific atheism in circles, schools, theoretical seminars of the *politprosvet* [political education] network, and evening universities of Marxism-Leninism...One million students in Ukraine have taken ‘The Basics of Atheism’ course...In the new year of 1964-65, a mandatory course ‘The Basics of Scientific Atheism’ will be introduced in universities, pedagogical, medical and agricultural institutes. This course will require passing exams, preparing seminars, writing course papers, and receiving pass/no pass for practical atheist propaganda work...In 3 years, 300 books and brochures on antireligious topics were published, their cumulative issue being 5 million copies.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5908, p. 109-117.

Realizing that many non-believers, including some Komsomol and party members, were culturally attached to such highly ritualized and time-honored traditions as church weddings and baptisms of new born babies, the Soviet antireligious establishment in the 1960s began to underscore the importance of cultivating an alternative secular ritualism. In his report, Sobol' mentioned that "800 palaces and rooms of happiness" were opened in the republic as alternative places where people could celebrate important events in their lives in an equally festive and stylized but secular atmosphere. The party ordered the Soviet artistic and cultural elites to incorporate folk traditions and customs in the creation of new rituals to mark the birth of a child, reaching the age of maturity, weddings, initiation into the workforce, draft into the Soviet Army, funerals, and other events. According to Sobol,' in kolkhozes "Shevchenko" and "Russia" of Donetsk oblast, a "Day of Watering" was celebrated in a non-traditional secular way, that is, without a priest and religious paraphernalia.<sup>65</sup>

Despite the government's massive infusion of resources and personnel into atheist propaganda, as Sobol's report suggests, the quality of antireligious work on the ground left much to be desired. In his 1964 report to the CC of CPU, the head of Ideological Department at the CC of CPU, Shevel,' complained that the reigning attitude of formalism and negligence toward atheist education characterized the work of all involved agencies even in the capitol of Ukraine, Kiev:

The inspection determined that in the city of Kiev little attention is given to the preparation of atheist cadre. The conduct of antireligious work is sometimes entrusted to occasional people who do not have appropriate theoretical and

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 113-115.

practical training. Thus, in the regional committee of CPU in Darnitsa [a suburb of Kiev], pensioner Kovalev for a long time figured among its best atheists, to whom in fact it was entrusted to conduct all atheist work in the district. He visited gatherings of Prokofiev's followers [members of the EKhB opposition to VSEKhB] in Darnitsa forest and, for the purpose of gaining their trust, performed together with them a ritual of 'brotherly kissing,' and so forth.

In their work with ordinary sectarians, the city's party organizations rarely or hardly ever use trade union and Komsomol organizations, women soviets, cultural-educational institutions, organizations of the comradeship 'Knowledge,' and commissions for enforcement of legislation on cults at regional executive committees. The work with Prokofievites' children, who attend schools, is not being conducted assertively and systematically. Secretaries and heads of ideological departments at regional party committees are not interested in work with schismatic Baptists in locations. Moreover, in a number of cases, they shift the burden of responsibility for this important sector of work entirely to non-cadre activists who, due to their inadequate preparedness, cannot provide atheist work that yields results.<sup>66</sup>

To illustrate his point, Shevel' included specific examples of near abandonment of antireligious work at some of Kiev's industries and businesses that employed believers:

As the inspection revealed, most secretaries and activists of party organizations have a very superficial notion of who [the EKhB] schismatics are, and do not know anything about the shameful and sinister activity of their leaders. An assistant to the secretary of party organization at the Lepse plant, comrade Kodetskii, and secretary of party organization at the Darnitsa range of buildings and structures, comrade Brichko, could not even name sects to which the believing employees of their enterprises belonged. And this is when such active Prokofievites as Zhurilo and Koptilo work at these enterprises. There are facts testifying that even certain secretaries of party organizations display pessimistic disposition concerning the possibility of ideological victory over sectarians. Characteristic of such attitude is the position of secretary of party organization at the factory of offset printing in the Podol district, comrade Leontovich, who said: 'The party organization at our factory does not have any Communists who could competently talk to a Prokofievite, Turubova.' It should be noted that two years ago serious defects in the work of atheist upbringing of workers were detected at this party organization. Disregarding this circumstance, in two years not a single atheist has been prepared here, who could dismantle a peculiar legend about the 'ideological invincibility' of sectarian Turubova.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5908, p. 160.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

Shevel's report lends additional credence to a thesis I reiterated throughout this chapter—that the Soviet atheist agenda, especially its theoretical aspects, continued to be of marginal interest to many grassroots party and Komsomol organizations in the 1940s-1960s. The state-sponsored atheism retained its non-voluntary, mandatory nature, and moving it to the top of the priority lists of the local Soviet officials continuously required pressure from above (in the form of periodic decrees) that at best produced cyclical outbreaks of persecution, at the cost of distorting and transmogrifying the educational thrust of the postwar Soviet policy on religion, but never a decisive victory over religion. Most Soviet administrative and professional cadre continued to view atheism through a prism of expediency and utility of this compulsory requirement to their ambitions and career goals rather than accepted it conscientiously as a philosophical conviction. In fact, the compulsory nature of Soviet atheism, I argue, contributed to its gradual transformation into a dead formality—an uninspired and unreflective repetition of beaten clichés. While the government dedicated more and more funds to training professional atheist lecturers and publication of theoretical works on scientific atheism, the basic methods of antireligious propaganda remained essentially unchanged. Departing from the most primitive perception of religious faith as a collection of antiquated superstitions, and unable to tap into resources of healthy and un-politicized skepticism that could restrain the arrogant absolutism of their own assertions, many Soviet propagandists of atheism invariably resorted to making a mockery of believers or publicly humiliating them. Refusing to accept the fact that a profound religious faith could comfortably exist



in the light of the most advanced scientific evidence, some experts of atheism often succeeded only in displaying their own ignorance.

In her acclaimed book *One Day as a Thousand Years*, a novel about the remarkable life journey of her Seventh Day Adventist parents, Svetlana Volkoslavskaja, a successful Moscow journalist, depicted a meeting that took place sometime in the 1960s between her father, Rostislav Volkoslavskii and a university professor of scientific atheism, Igor Gorokhov, whose book was presented to Rostislav by one of his acquaintances prior to his meeting with the professor. The narrator (and main character) in Svetlana's novel is her mother, Nina Grigorievna. Characterizing Gorokhov's method of scientific investigation, Nina commented:

The author quoted statements of some believers, known to him alone, and then refuted these statements like so: 'A believer from Saran,' Ivan Ivanov, asserts that thunder and lightning in the sky during a storm are nothing other than a procession in a fiery chariot of Elijah-the Prophet.' A critique of such an illegitimate interpretation of physical phenomena followed. A chapter, dedicated to the dismantling of biblical myths, contained a description of various contradictions in the Holy Scripture. 'The biblical narrative informs that Jesus was interrogated at Herod's. A question arises: How could Herod, who died four years before the birth of Jesus, interrogate him?' Or: 'A biblical myth about Jonah being swallowed by a whale is groundless. The scientists ascertain that the diameter of a whale's esophagus equals...', and so forth.<sup>68</sup>

When Rostislav and Gorokhov finally met in an informal setting, in the house of one of their mutual acquaintances, an eccentric female artist and a non-conformist thinker eager to find out how Gorokhov's arguments would fair in an open debate, the professor inquired whether Rostislav had read his book. Rostislav's response reflected the sentiments of many believers of that era. "In your book," he said, "you made a scare

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<sup>68</sup> Svetlana Volkoslavskaja, *One Day as a Thousand Years* (Zaokskii: "Istochnik zhizni," 2007), p. 267-268.

crow out of believers, and you destroyed only this scare crow, nothing more. Where could you even find the people you are quoting?” In the ensuing conversation the following exchange took place:

‘Are you suggesting that if I chose you for a model, I would have nothing to say?’—inquired Gorokhov... ‘Explain it to me, for example, where would a herd of swine come from—a herd that was supposedly cast into the sea [Luke 8:32-36]—if Jews were strictly forbidden to consume pork?’

‘This event took place in the country of Gadarenes,’ calmly replied Rostislav, ‘that is in the vicinity of a Hellenistic town of Gadara, on the western coast [of Lake Galilee] entirely inhabited by heathens. The Jewish laws did not apply there.’ In principle, every granny in our church was familiar with such trifles.

When a conversation drifted to ‘an inconsistency’ with Herod who died four years prior to his meeting with Jesus, I began to feel uncomfortable. To tell a professor about the existence of a dynasty of Herods...but he could find out about it in any reliable historical source! ‘It was Herod the Great who died in the fourth year before the Common Era, and it was his son, Herod Antipas who interrogated Jesus,’ said Rostislav. ‘In my dictionary, only one Herod is mentioned,’ muttered Gorokhov with aversion. While writing his book, he referred only to a dictionary!<sup>69</sup>

The discussion eventually moved on to the more scientific issues, such as the origin of life, with Gorokhov insisting that life emerged from “an inanimate matter”:

Rostislav objected, arguing that nowhere and never was it experimentally verified and demonstrated how the single cell organisms turn into the multi-cell ones; that nowhere and never has it been shown how the simplest sensations and consciousness first emerged and how cognition and speech were born. How would one explain a variety of dead ends, and missing links in the celebrated evolutionary ‘chain,’ beginning with a monkey and ending with a human being? If the evolutionary theory is scientific, he asserted, then scientific requirements must be applied to it—facts, and only facts. And if it is a sort of religion, then one can simply accept all Darwinian constructs on faith.

‘Well, you and I are students of humanities,’ said Gorokhov with an air of conciliation. “It’s hard for us to make sense of theories of natural sciences. I prefer to trust what the scientists say.’

‘Then perhaps you should listen to Pasteur, Virchow, Dubois, and Raymond who proved experimentally that a living cell stems only from a cell, and that there

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 269-270.

is no spontaneous generation of life. Or, consider the arguments of a biologist, Mendel,' persisted Rostislav.

'Bourgeois science is not an authority for me,' followed a reply.<sup>70</sup>

S. Volkoslavskaia's belles-lettres rendition of a conversation between her father (a university graduate who came from the Russian Orthodox background and eventually became a prominent figure in the SDA church) and Gorokhov (perhaps a cumulative portrait of an atheist agitator) accurately conveys an atmosphere of occasional debates between representatives of these opposing ideologies, occurring usually in some informal and private setting—the only safe setting in which a believer's defense of his/her ideas could not be construed as religious propaganda punishable by Soviet law.

Vokoslavskaia's depiction of this conversation also implicitly reveals the strengths and weaknesses of both parties. Soviet atheism, accustomed to sheltered conditions of state protectionism, grew increasingly more complacent and ill-prepared to face challenges of an open debate. Its arrogant bearers, with their cushy government jobs, cared little to understand the deep-seated roots of religiosity or stay abreast of the contemporary religious thought. Blinded by the inaugural success of the era of space exploration, people like Gorokhov treated atheism as an unquestionable dogma (with the state's vigorous encouragement) and deliberately shunned the healthy skepticism that could have informed them of the infancy of human science in relation to both cosmic time and the great unknowns of the yet unexplored infinite universe—circumstances that continued to nourish the believers' claim to an alternative faith-based worldview.

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 271.

As a result of state protectionism, the atheist discourse in the postwar USSR turned increasingly into a boring monologue. Forgotten were the public debates of the 1920s on such topics as “Did Christ Live?” and others, during which the “regime activists and representatives of the Church,” such as the Commissar of Enlightenment, Anatolii Lunacharskii, and the Renovationist leader, Aleksandr Vvedenskii, would cross swords in a series of “highly publicized meetings.”<sup>71</sup> Sometime in the late 1970s-early 1980s, the government book stores offered what seemed to be a reprint of debates between Lunacharskii and Vvedenskii, which I hastily purchased on the spur of a moment, just to find out later that the book contained only Lunacharskii’s statements and not a word of his opponent. The more the state –sponsored atheism encased itself inside its own ideological cocoon, welcoming no public discussion of its tenets and rejecting out of hand the evidence of “bourgeois science,” the greater number of ordinary Soviet citizens lost their penchant for this entirely institutionalized doctrine. The tempting “forbidden fruit,” promising the knowledge of good and evil, was no longer found in the garden of Communism.

The believers, in their turn, especially the inquisitive younger generation, began to view atheism as a doctrine of scientific obscurantism, the outright rejection of which gave them a sense of liberation. Viewing themselves as the new bearers of the banner of spiritual-intellectual liberation from the stifling official doctrine, many enthusiastic and often well-educated believers feverishly combed pages of samizdat and smuggled literature as well as of surviving prerevolutionary publications tucked away in libraries

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<sup>71</sup> Peris, p. 178.

and antique book stores for extra-scriptural authoritative evidence in defense of their beliefs, compiling and disseminating the homemade anthologies of religious thought. In doing so, however, they were shutting themselves inside the ideological cocoon of their own, selectively reading only what reinforced their religious convictions and dismissing all evidence to the contrary, be it found in the Soviet publications or in the works of westerners, such as Voltaire, Nietzsche, Mark Twain, or Camus. The atmosphere of Soviet intellectual constraint caused a growing polarization of the opposites that effectively ruled out the possibility of any fruitful dialogue between atheism and religion. Both opposing parties jealously guarded their respective dogmas from any exposure to a synthesizing dialectical thought, thus lending credence to Nietzsche's laconic maxim: "One is most dishonest to one's god: he is not allowed to sin."<sup>72</sup>

#### **4. Correcting Errors in Atheist Propaganda: A Differentiated Approach to Religion**

The tapering out of the large-scale Khrushchev campaign against religion, marked by the passage of 1964 and 1965 decrees, brought some relief to believers. The government now exercised more discretion in applying administrative measures and criminal charges to believers and monitored antireligious press more closely to avoid embarrassing blunders of the earlier years. Moreover, the government ordered the Procuracy to review all criminal cases brought against believers during the Khrushchev era and reverse the unjustly passed sentences. In his "Information about the Course of Fulfillment of the Decree of Presidium of Supreme Council of USSR from January 27,

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<sup>72</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), p. 79.

1965, ‘On Some Facts of Violation of Socialist Legality with Respect to Believers,’” the Council’s Upolnomochennyi for Chernigov oblast, V. Lototskii, reported to his superiors, Litvin (Kiev) and Puzin (Moscow), the following instance of recently corrected unjust prosecution of a believer:

...In the process of revision, one case of unfounded application of Article I of the Decree of Presidium of Supreme Council of Ukrainian SSR from June 12, 1962, ‘On Intensification of Struggle with Persons Evading Socially Beneficial Labor and Leading an Anti-Social and Parasitic Lifestyle’ was encountered. The Repkinskii People’s Court prosecuted a Baptist believer, Pyotr Afanasievich Voronenko, born in 1935, a resident of the town of Liubech, Repkinskii region. Disregarding that P.A. Voronenko lived in a working class family and personally worked since 1958 as a carpenter..., he was deported as an idler [*tuneiadets*] for a period of 2 years and 6 months. In response to the Procurator’s protest, Voronenko’s case was reviewed on September 26, 1964, by the Presidium of Chernigov’s Oblast Court and the decision of Repkinskii People’s Court from January 8, 1964, was repealed.<sup>73</sup>

The Upolnomochennyi of CARC for Donetsk oblast, M. Bal’chenko, submitted the following information in a similar report on the fulfillment of the 1965 decree:

Already on May 13, 1964, long before the enactment of the decree..., the Donetsk Oblast Court, at the protest of Procuracy of USSR, reviewed one case of a group of EKHB believers (supporters of the Orgcommittee) from the town of Gorlovka, Nikitovskii region, who were accused of crimes circumscribed under Article 209, Part I, of the Criminal Code of Ukrainian SSR: Aleksandr Grigorievich Popov, Evgenia Nikolaevna Khloponina, Raisa Tikhonovna Pigareva, Nikolai Mikhailivich Bazbei, and Vasilii Georgievich Rybalko. All accused in connection with this case were sentenced in January of 1964 by Nikitovskii People’s Court to 3 to 5 years of imprisonment. They were released in May of 1964 and, shortly after, found employment at their places of residence.

After their release, Popov, Rybalko, Khloponina and Pigareva became involved again in active religious work on the side of the Orgcommittee, while Bazbei and his wife continue to visit the EKHB prayer house...<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 450, p. 136-137.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

In a separate report to Moscow, the same Upolnomochennyi for Donetsk oblast, Bal'chenko, made reference to a continued problematic performance of atheist activists of the Gorlovka local newspaper *Kochegarka* (mentioned earlier in conjunction with Lysenko's case). If in 1962, this newspaper could get away with publishing inaccurate and discrediting information about the local EKhB community, in 1965 its irresponsible journalism did not go unnoticed:

The Gorlovka local newspaper, *Kochegarka*, published an article on February 20, 1965, under the title 'The dark Deeds of a Prayer House.' Its author, comrade Cherven,' having mixed up different cults, permitted a number of errors which insulted the feelings of EKhB believers...The Gorlovka Gorkom of CPU subjected the article's author, comrade Cherven' and the assistant to this newspaper's editor, comrade Skubko, to party penalties...<sup>75</sup>

At the basic human level, the unjustly imprisoned believers certainly valued their early release and an opportunity to return to their families. The government imposition of higher standards of journalism on local newspapers' editorial boards also eased the social pressure on formerly demonized believers. However, as the case of released supporters of the Orgcommitte from Gorlovka exemplified, the state's attempts to undo the damages caused to its relationship with the church during the Khrushchev era had only limited success. The government's sudden admission of errors committed during Khrushchev's antireligious campaign, including the passing of many unjust sentences, only reaffirmed believers in their conviction that they did not do anything wrong in the first place, and that the present relief from the more outrageous abuses against them did not mean that the state was somehow unaware of these abuses earlier and would be

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

henceforth committed to the observance of constitutional norms. For many believers, the period of relaxation, initiated by the 1964-1965 decrees, represented only another swing of the pendulum in the state's hypocritical policy of carrot and stick. The Khrushchev persecution that inflicted so much suffering and humiliation on registered and unregistered religious communities indiscriminately served as a turning point in the attitude of many believers towards the Soviet state and its religious policy. The ongoing schisms within the EKhB and SDA churches, as well as the broadening network of religious underground, provided an outlet for all those who had lost faith in the benefit of negotiating with the state, whereas the less radical segments of believers in registered communities learned how to serve the government its own medicine by emitting the formal signs of compliance with its initiatives but tacitly resisting their actual implementation.

The 1960s closed with yet another swing of the Soviet antireligious pendulum in the direction of mobilization. On July 11, 1968, the Politbureau of the CC of CPU issued a decree "On Serious Defects in the Work of Party Organizations in Ivano-Frankovsk Oblast with Respect to Atheist Education of Population." On April 1, 1969, the Council of Ministers of Ukrainian SSR followed with a general decree "On the Increase of Control over the Observance of Legislation on Religious Cults," and a more specific decree "On intensification of the Work of Party Organizations in the Area of Exposure of the Hostile Activity of the Sect of Jehovah's Witnesses" (August 12, 1969). The latter decree, in particular, marked a noticeable shift in the Soviet approach to the problem of religion. Instead of initiating a full-scale Khrushchev-style crackdown on religion that



would generate an upsurge of complaints and attract a lot of unwanted publicity, the government now found it more expedient to authorize localized and low-profile campaigns targeting specific oblasts or individual religious denominations. A report, submitted by the Secretary of Ivano-Frankovsk Obkom of CPU, O. Chernov, reveals the flurry of antireligious activity in the oblast in response to the July 11<sup>th</sup> decree:

...15 regional schools of atheism lecturers were created in the oblast, in which almost 600 people are studying. In the system of party education, 76 theoretical seminars on the topic 'The Construction of Communism and Atheist Education of the Working Masses' are functioning, with 1,120 listeners attending. A department of scientific atheism has been opened at the Evening University of Marxism-Leninism at the Ivano-Frankovsk Gorkom. It prepares the cadre of atheists for the oblast center. About 2,300 lecturers and 4,500 agitators now take part in the propaganda of scientific atheism in the oblast. 11,540 lectures on atheist topics were read for the population in 1968, and 2,500 lectures in the 2 months of 1969...The scientific atheism section of the oblast organization 'Knowledge'...prepared and sent to the aid of atheism lecturers the following methodological materials: 'The Reactionary Nature of the Uniate [Greek-Catholic] Church,' 'Jehovah's Witnesses—the Preachers of War,' 'Religion and A Woman,' and 'The Irreconcilability of Communist and Religious Morality.' More lectures are being prepared, such as 'The Orthodoxy and Modernity,' 'The Role of Contemporary Traditions in Atheist Education,' and 'The Pentecostals and their Ideology.' During 1968, in the towns and villages of the oblast, 550 theoretical conferences were held, at which the issues of criticism of ideologies of those religious currents that are spread throughout the oblast's territory were discussed. In Galitskii region alone, 52 atheism conferences, focusing on such themes as 'From Darkness to Light,' 'Science and Religion,' 'Jehovah's Witnesses—Enemies of Peace and Progress,' 'The Harmful Nature of Religious Holidays and Rituals,' etc., were held.<sup>76</sup>

Chernov also mentioned 9,897 lectures on natural science and atheism that were read at clubs and libraries, and boasted that if in 1967 the oblast libraries had 303,437 books on antireligious topics, in 1968, the number of such books increased to 327, 843,

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<sup>76</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 185, p. 26-28.

which represented 4.4 % of the entire number of books in the oblast libraries.<sup>77</sup> If the first part of Chernov's report conveyed a sense of a large-scale enlightenment project—a free of charge educational facility for the masses, the second part of his report described the Soviet enlightenment's accompanying coercive/re-educational component:

In order to conduct individual work with sectarians, agitators-atheists are assigned to every family of believers. For example, the bureau of party organization of the Dolinskii [natural gas] refinery created from a number of Communists a group of organizers to conduct atheist agitation among the plant's workers, and assigned them to believing workers and their families.<sup>78</sup>

In village Deleva, Tlumatskii region, continued Chernov, where a sect of Pentecostals had taken root, “the party organization of kolkhoz ‘Komsomolets’ decided to help believers to understand the harmfulness of their views’ and affixed an agitator to every believer to hold private conversations with them. “In the oblast towns and villages,” according to Chernov, “the teachers constantly work with school age children whose parents are sectarians. Individual conversations are arranged with them and their parents...In places where Jehovah's Witnesses, Pentecostals and Uniates [Greek-Catholics] live, special groups of patrolmen [*druzhinniki*] are organized. These groups prevent illegal gatherings of sectarians...”<sup>79</sup> Such methods of antireligious work differed little from those widely implemented during the Khrushchev campaign. In 1962, for example, the Upolnomochennyi of CARC for Kharkov oblast, P. Slavnov, dispatched the following suggestions to the Kharkov Ispolkom:

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 31-32.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 32-33.

--To affix members of support groups to individual religious organizations in such a way that all religious societies and illegal groups in the region are under constant surveillance...; that none of the violations of legislation permitted by them is left unnoticed and unpunished. Special attention should be paid to the prevention of the school age children's and adolescents' involvement in religious ceremonies.

--To systematically study contents of the cult servants' homilies, especially those of sectarian preachers. Should there be comments against measures promoted by the party and government, or against atheist work among the believers, the leading party organs and Council's Upolnomochennye must be informed about such facts.

--To increase surveillance over the activity of religious groups that are not eligible for registration, with the purpose of timely stopping their illegal activity, exposing the political profile of their leaders and isolating them from ordinary sectarians...<sup>80</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

While some attempts were made in the mid-1960s to smooth out the roughest edges of atheist propaganda—improve the training of antireligious activists and tone down undifferentiated and uninformed attacks on believers in Soviet press—its interventionist and compulsory character remained unaltered. The Soviet enlighteners of the late 1960s showed little respect for believers' freedom of conscience (granted in the Soviet Constitution) and thought that by shoving atheism down the throats of their unwilling listeners they could somehow make it more palatable to them. Uncritically following the lead of previous generations of social engineers, the masterminds of Soviet atheism stubbornly believed they could re-inscribe the mental slates of believers with what they considered the undeniable conclusion of Reason. In the process of this unprecedented micro-level intervention into the private lives of believers, the Soviet state

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<sup>80</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 374, p. 37.

brought thousands of its superficially trained nominal atheists into close contact with people prepared to die for their convictions. Nietzsche's warning—"Do not gaze into the abyss, for the abyss is also gazing upon you"—was entirely lost on them. While regularly entering in official reports the data showing both the occasional success of atheist propaganda in tearing certain individuals away from religion and the persistent attraction of religion (or at least of its ritual aspects) not only for ordinary Soviet citizens but also for members of party and Komsomol organizations, the people in charge of the Soviet antireligious establishment gave little thought to the long-term consequences of interaction between believers and non-believers that it had initiated, namely, to the disparity between the levels of believers' and non-believers' convictions.

Besides being earnest and consistent students of the Bible, most Soviet Protestants, for example, adhered to their religious worldview in spite of the government persecution and in full awareness that their convictions would cost them certain professional and educational opportunities and expose them to a lifetime of mockery and harassment. The atheist agitators, on the contrary, risked nothing for their convictions and, as bearers of the official Soviet doctrine, could count on the full support of the regime, periodic promotions and other attendant material perks. The numerous close encounters with believers certainly intrigued at least the more conscientious among the atheist propagandists who could not but develop a tacit sympathy, or even respect, for the tenacity and studiousness of their unprivileged opponents. For many Soviet atheists of the postwar era, atheism was not a deeply felt conviction at which they arrived as a result of their own negative experiences in religious communities or their personal intellectual

frustration with the Christian God (as in the case of Nietzsche or Mark Twain), but a mere unreflective adoption of certain Soviet clichés about religion that came in the package with Marxist-Leninist ideology.

The proclaimed establishment of a classless socialist society in the Soviet Union deprived atheism of a large swath of its traditional application—the criticism of religion as an ideological buttress of the exploiting classes.\* A preacher of godlessness in the 1960s faced a much more daunting task—convincing a simple housewife, a kolkhoznik, or an industrial worker that his/her personal religious views were incompatible with the findings of contemporary science—a task that could hardly be accomplished even if the Soviet atheist agitators had the necessary patience, tact, adequate training and, most importantly, motivation. Instead of cultivating these qualities in atheist agitators, however, the Soviet state encouraged their intrusion into the private lives of believers, which only radicalized the latter and precluded their receptivity to the atheist agenda.

Ultimately, the Soviet style antireligious propaganda trivialized atheism by turning it into one of regime's ideological props similar to that played by the ROC during the tsarist era. The longer atheism acted in this capacity, the more it undermined its own appeal for critical thinkers. The state's harassment of sectarians, for instance, only propelled them from relative obscurity to the forefront of public attention where they were soon recognized by other non-conformists and dissidents as fellow-fighters for the freedom of conscience. While heroically bearing the brunt of ridicule and misrepresentation the Soviet believers were making a long-term investment in their

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\* Ironically, the persistence of religion in a classless society proved erroneousness of a Marxist assumption that religion was no more than a byproduct of a socially stratified society.

future—an investment that would handsomely pay off when the primary force sustaining atheism, the Soviet state, would ultimately collapse.

The numerous excesses and inconsistencies that occurred in the field of practical application of the government policy on religion in the 1940s-1960s rendered this policy ineffective and even counterproductive primarily due to the government's own unwillingness to consistently pursue the established long-term objective with respect to religion. Vil'khovyi outlined this objective concisely even before its more theoretical explication in the decree of November 10, 1954. In his 1951 report, he pointed out:

Some representatives of party and Soviet organs at the grassroots, apparently, do not understand to this day that the struggle for the overcoming of [religious] holdovers must be conducted in a way that would not alienate believers but draw them closer to our ideology and reinforce the moral-political unity of Soviet people... That is why we need to act not through administrative measures, not by means of prohibition or offending believers' religious feelings, but only by means of propaganda, education, and persuasion.<sup>81</sup>

Such an approach clearly necessitated patient and tactful work over an extended period of time and willingness to accept insignificant and incremental gains. The government, however, continuously interfered with this process by periodically setting short-term result-driven objectives that essentially undermined its long-term campaign to win the hearts and minds of believers. The government's impatience, as a rule, was a reaction to believers' attempts to circumvent the various restrictions intended to prevent any further growth of their communities. As believers, Protestants in particular, developed a number of effective survival techniques that enabled them to counteract the impact of antireligious restrictions, the church and state became deadlocked in a battle of attrition.

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<sup>81</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 783, p. 332.

The outcome could hardly have been different because of the inadequacy between the regime's goal and means applied towards its achievement. Such moderate means as education and persuasion, applied patiently and consistently, could have been effective had the state limited its objective solely to the elimination of the more radical and fundamentalist tendencies among believers and instilling in them a more secular outlook. The state's actual objective, however, was a complete elimination of religion in the near future—an objective that proved to be unattainable even by the draconian means of the 1930s.

Most notably, the Soviet antireligious establishment undermined atheism's purported scientific basis by blocking all avenues of debate and treating atheism as an axiom rather than a theory that needed to be proven. In a long run, this anti-scientific attitude towards atheism would prove counterproductive and alienate the more inquisitive minds. The following comment, submitted to the party organs by a cooperative and well-wishing ROC Metropolitan Grigorii in 1954, fell on dead ears. Reflecting on the humiliation and mockery of law-abiding believers in the Soviet press, Metropolitan Grigorii wondered:

It is not unreasonable to ask whether it is expedient from the state's point of view to artificially divide people according to the principle of religious discrimination, treating convinced religionists as citizens of malicious kind to whom all sorts of restrictions should be applied, instead of caring about uniting into a monolithic and tightly consolidated whole of all citizens of our multiethnic state...From a scientific point of view, such negative attitude towards religion is unconditionally and principally impermissible. The problem of God's existence cannot be solved either way using a strictly SCIENTIFIC approach. Strictly SCIENTIFIC methods neither prove nor disprove God's existence. One can only believe in either one of these outcomes, and this faith would be irrefutable and not at all contradicting either logic or empirically assessable facts. But it cannot be turned into proven knowledge. Therefore, both scientific inquiry and belief in the

possibility of God's existence presuppose FAITH, not knowledge, and subsequently, neither atheism nor faith has the right to impose its views as if it were science.

For the lack of truly scientific proofs, supporters of atheism often quoted superstition or the discrepancy between believers' perceptions of nature and the latest findings of natural sciences. But making a mockery of someone does amount to a scientific proof that there is no God...A belief in God's existence or non-existence is a phenomenon of a psychological order—an individual peculiarity of a human being's spiritual life...If Marx's economic theory was freed of its atheist underpinnings, both atheists and believers could subscribe to it without reservations. Atheism would have then become a peaceful philosophical teaching as it had been before the emergence of Christianity...In such a way, a simultaneous coexistence of atheism and religion could have been reached in our country. The apologists of either philosophical current could have continued to debate their different points of view, maintaining respect towards their opponent's convictions, avoiding insults, and striving only towards finding the truth in a dispassionate and objective manner.<sup>82</sup>

In the coming decades more and more members of Soviet intelligentsia would openly and tacitly embrace this pluralist conception of a peaceful coexistence of the two competing worldviews. The ruling Communist Party could have re-legitimized its authority by setting itself up as a champion of this process. Instead, it would remain blind to the fact that its continued inflexible enforcement of the status quo only led to the growing subterranean fragmentation of the Soviet society and its estrangement from the government. Religion, however, patiently exploited the opportunities that this estrangement presented. When in the summer of 1991 the CPSU would finally adopt what Metropolitan Grigorii had suggested decades earlier, it would do little to salvage the party's crumbling image.

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<sup>82</sup> *Vlast' i tserkov' v Vostochnoi Evrope*, vol. 2, p. 1161-1162.



## CHAPTER VI

### LEGAL PRETEXTS FOR SHUTTING DOWN COMMUNITIES AND PRAYER HOUSES: THE “QUANTITATIVE REDUCTION”

In the 1940s-1960s, Protestant communities in Ukraine lived within a tight encirclement of numerous governmental restrictions designed to contain and, ultimately, reduce all manifestations of religiosity in the republic both quantitatively and qualitatively. Aware of these strategies of containment and their purpose, Protestants devised a variety of survival techniques that allowed them, when possible, to sabotage the stifling effects of containment and ensure the preservation of religious traditions and their transmission to the next generation. Previous scholarship on Soviet Protestantism during the postwar period, most notably works by Michael Bourdeaux and Walter Sawatsky, written between the 1960s and early 1980s, paid significantly more attention to state persecution of believers and the protest movements that it provoked than to the relationship between the regime’s constriction of religious life and Protestant survival tactics. The story of Protestants in the postwar USSR, however, was not only one of suffering and internal schisms but also one of believers’ remarkable adaptability to Soviet conditions and, ultimately, a success story. The examination of Protestants’ responses to specific elements of the government’s policy of containment provides insight into

religious communities' routine concerns and how these concerns shaped believers' family and communal lives, their identity, and how they perceived role in Soviet society.

The Soviet policy of containing religion consisted of a set of strategies that will be discussed in detail in the following cluster of chapters. For convenience, I group these strategies into four major categories: quantitative reduction of religious communities, prohibition of any form of religious proselytism, emasculation of communities' spiritual-organizational core, and depriving religion of its reproductive capability by preventing the exposure of children and youth to the influence of religion. Each one of these general strategies employed a set of specific legal and extra-legal tools to achieve a desired result. The strategy of quantitative reduction, widely applied from the late 1940s, relied on a variety of pretexts that allowed the CARC to shut down scores of religious communities and prayer houses throughout Ukraine.

### **1. The Seizure of Prayer Houses Returned to Ukrainian Protestants by the German Occupation Authorities**

Among the first pretexts employed by the CARC, Oblispolkoms, Raiispolkoms, and village soviets under the strategy of quantitative reduction was the seizure of all prayer houses into which religious communities moved during the German occupation and their transfer to those Soviet institutions that had them in their possession before the war.<sup>1</sup> Between 1941 and 1944, survivors of the prewar religious communities emerged from the underground, often in response to the German authorities' propagandist

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<sup>1</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 5667, p. 211.

encouragement of religion in occupied Ukraine, and moved back into their former prayer houses and churches that had been requisitioned from them by the Soviets during the 1930s. In 1949, chairman of the Council for the Affairs of ROC, Karpov, reported to the CC of CPU:

Of the total number of 8,847 churches and prayer houses in Ukraine for 10-1-1949, 52%, or 4,625 churches were opened during the German occupation in 16 eastern oblasts of the republic (Vinnitsa, Voroshilovograd, Dnepropetrovsk, Zhitomir, Zaporozhie, Kamenetsk-Podol'sk, Kiev, Kirovograd, Nikolaev, Odessa, Poltava, Stalinsk, Sumy, Kharkov, Kherson, and Chernigov). At the war's outbreak, 66 active churches remained in these oblasts, of which 20 were in Kamenetsk-Podol'sk oblast. The number of churches and prayer houses opened in Ukrainian SSR during the occupation was greater than the number of them for 10-1-1948. Many churches were closed right after the occupants' expulsion or later after the war. Approximately 1,500 of such churches were closed... Many church buildings, closed during collectivization and strengthening of kolkhozes in 1930-1938, were adapted and used for social purposes (as clubs, schools, hospitals, institutions for children, etc). The fascist invaders, who suddenly intruded on the territory of Ukraine, sacked the hearths of culture created by the efforts of Soviet people and in every way supported the mass reopening and restoration of churches. Thus, in Vinnitsa oblast, for example, 848 churches were opened, of which 772 were opened in 1941... The occupants' interest in reopening and restoration of churches was characterized, for example, by the following fact: in order to restore the Tul'chinskii cathedral (city of Tul'chin), the occupation authorities mobilized the local population, and in order to restore the iconostasis, they selected the best masters. Not only the former churches were reequipped to serve as prayer houses, but also such social-purpose buildings as clubs, schools and hospitals that have never been used as churches before.<sup>2</sup>

After the return of the Red Army in 1944, the tables had turned once more and many Roman-Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant believers found themselves evicted for the second time. According to Karpov's report, some of these re-appropriated buildings, however, were not utilized by the Soviet institutions to which they were transferred:

In village Trilesy, Fastovskii region, Kiev oblast, the religious community uses 1/5 of the former church building which before the war had been adapted to

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 32-34.

be a club, while 4/5 of the building is still considered a club. The religious community maintains its part of the building in good order, whereas the club part is in a ruined state: no roof, no glass in windows—only the bare walls. The village soviet collects rent money from religious community, projecting to use this money to repair the club section of the building... In village Teplik, Vinnitsa oblast, a former club building was reclaimed from the religious community in 1948 [supposedly to reopen a club in it]. In reality, this building is being used for storage, which evokes discontent among believers. In village Leviak, Zhmerinskii region, a club building was taken away from a religious community and given to a kolkhoz. Instead of organizing club work in this building, however, the kolkhoz chairman, comrade Bessaraba, rented it out to the religious community for performance of church services and rituals...and gave the community a certificate stating that he did not mind the transfer of the building back to the religious community and its use as a prayer house.<sup>3</sup>

Vil'khovyi also confirmed the marked growth of religiosity “during the days of temporary occupation of the territory of Soviet Ukraine by the German-fascist hordes,” and in particular, of “the cult of Evangelical Christians-Baptists” which “did not only spring back to life, but significantly flowered and spread its roots ‘downwards’ and ‘outward,’ especially in Dnepropetrovsk, Zaporozhie, Kherson, and Nikolaev oblasts.”<sup>4</sup> In 1946, Vil'khovyi assessed, there were 237 EKhB communities in these oblast. By the end of 1950, Vil'khovyi claimed, the number of EKhB communities in these oblasts dropped to 158 “as a result of our regulation of the activity of religious formations..., directed at gradual limitation of their influence on the masses and quantitative reduction of their prayer houses.”<sup>5</sup> Vil'khovyi's data for Kamenets-Podol'sk oblast illustrated the growth of EKhB communities during the war years even more convincingly. Before the October Revolution, there were 6 EKhB communities in the oblast. Before the war's

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 783, p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 4-5.

outbreak, their number rose to 27. “During the years of German-fascist occupation,” 94 communities “were organized.” In 1948, after at least two years of active registration by the CARC of the de facto existing EKHB communities in this oblast, their number climbed to 129, with the combined number of believers standing at 5,103.<sup>6</sup> If in three years of occupation 67 new EKHB communities were established in this oblast, only 35 more were added in three years of peace since the war’s end.

For many Protestants in the German-occupied Ukraine, moving back into prayer houses that they had built during the 1920s-1930s and lost only for a brief period of time in the late 1930s, did not seem preposterous or treasonous vis-à-vis the Soviet state, since the Soviet state was not technically in charge of the occupied territories. It appears that the returning Soviet authorities also understood that prosecuting believers for taking what was theirs from the occupying Germans was untenable and felt vindicated by a mere restoration of the prewar status quo. The re-appropriation of the EKHB prayer houses in villages Pul’mo and Zales’e, described in 1946 by the Council’s Upolnomochennyi for Volynia oblast, Prokopenko, typifies this effective technology of quantitative reduction. According to Prokopenko, the prayer houses “were built in 1935-1936 by the efforts of believers, and were used for prayer meetings until September of 1939.” After the Soviet invasion of Volynia (then a part of Poland) in 1939, to which Prokopenko refers as “liberation of Western Ukrainian oblasts from Polish pans [landed gentry],” “the leader of the Pul’mo religious community fled to Germany,” and the people’s assemblies of the aforementioned villages decided to use the prayer house in Pul’mo as a village club, and

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<sup>6</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 5069, p. 160.

the one in Zales'e as a village soviet office. The religious communities' members had little choice but to conduct their prayer services in private homes.<sup>7</sup> "During the German occupation," continued Prokopenko, "religious communities moved back into these houses and used them until February of 1944" when the approaching Soviet offensive forced the population to temporarily move away for safety. When the Germans were expelled from Shatskii region in July of 1944, "the population returned and instantly began the reestablishment of all [Soviet] institutions and organizations in villages," with the Pul'mo village club and Zales'e village soviet reclaiming the EKHB buildings. The believers were again forced to conduct their prayer services in private homes.<sup>8</sup>

## **2. Mixed Pretexts: the Case of a Prayer House Closure at 53 (a) Lenin Street in Kiev**

The story of a protracted struggle of the Evangelicals-Baptists in Kiev and vicinity to rescue their historical prayer house, centrally located at 53 (a) Lenin Street in Kiev, left a long paper trail and was perhaps most dramatic. In the wake of this prayer house's re-appropriation by the state, Vil'khovyi requested that the EKHB Senior Presbyter for Ukraine, Andreev, provide him with a brief history of the building. Writing in terse and cautious terms, Andreev conveyed that the building on 53 (a) Lenin Street had been occupied before the Revolution by Ushinskii's institute. When the EKHB had been allowed to take over the building in 1926, only the walls had remained [due, most

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<sup>7</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 12, p. 71.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

likely, to the Civil War fighting in Kiev]. The EKhB community invested 48,000 rubles over the next two years to make the building usable again. All unskilled work was done voluntarily and without remuneration by the community members. The community used the building until 1932 when “due to circumstances for which the community was not responsible,” as Andreev camouflaged the mass closures of churches in the 1930s, the believers’ access to their prayer house was interrupted until 1941. The building was in fact requisitioned and handed over to the Kiev Aviation Institute. During the temporary German occupation of the city of Kiev, Andreev continued, the building housed a German military unit that had caused damages to the building and brought it into a state of disrepair. Seeing how their prayer house was being damaged by “the German occupiers,” those of the community members who remained in Kiev had appealed to the housing department of the Kiev Uprava [an organ of German occupation authorities in Kiev] and asked that the building be vacated and turned over to the EKhB community for the purpose of religious services. The Uprava had granted them permission on October 8, 1941.\* Since then, the building had been used as the EKhB prayer house. When the Soviet Army and the city authorities returned, the official documentation for the building’s exploitation had been issued. The repair of damages caused by the Germans—a complete renovation of the building, including the installation of a new water heating system—had cost the community additional 65,000 rubles.<sup>9</sup>

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\* That the German authorities were so forthcoming in accommodating the EKhB, even at the cost of relocating their own military unit, testifies to a deliberate policy on the part of the Third Reich to appease those segments of Soviet population that had been mistreated or dispossessed by Stalin’s regime before the war.

<sup>9</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 75, p. 1-2.

Shortly after, Andreev, the Senior Presbyter for Kiev oblast, Mitskevich, and other officials of the Kiev EKHB community wrote a petition to Khrushchev (then Secretary of the CC of CP(b)U) in which they expressed their befuddlement at the sudden closure of their prayer house at 53 (a) Lenin Street:

On March 31 [1949], the Upolnomochennyi of CARC, Vil'khovyi, suggested, without any reason or an offer of an alternative, that we vacated the prayer house at 53 (a) Lenin Street used by the two combined EKHB communities—a house that the community built on its own money. Attached is our petition to the CARC at the CM of USSR. We urgently ask You to issue an appropriate directive that would allow us, the EKHB communities in Kiev, to retain our prayer house.<sup>10</sup>

The Kiev EKHB community did not take its eviction lightly and continued to bombard the highest state and party officials with petitions. A slew of correspondence that had accumulated in the archives over the years allows us to trace challenges that this numerous community faced in the 1950s and reveals reasons behind the government's decision to dispossess the Kiev community of its historic prayer house. In his 1949 report to the Ukrainian party authorities, Vil'khovyi unequivocally explained that the prayer house at 53 (a) Lenin Street was being closed not only in compliance with the law enforcing the prewar arrangement with respect to requisitioned prayer houses, but also due to the employment of yet another pretext in the service of strategy of quantitative reduction, namely, the removal of all centrally located prayer houses to the outskirts of towns and out of sight of the general public:

The quantitative reduction of prayer houses in Kiev was motivated firstly by the fact that the prayer houses closed by us were located in the central part of the city, next to either the central Soviet institutions or schools, which provided us with a plausible pretext of a legal nature to evict communities from buildings occupied by them and relocate them and their activity to the outlying parts of

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<sup>10</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 64, p. 1.



Kiev. One of the oldest EKhB communities on Zhilianskaia Street was next to the Kiev TETs [Heating-Electrical Power Station] and a secondary school Number 137, and situated in a residential house with a single entrance to both the prayer house and apartments. The building has already been adapted to serve as the regional children's library...

The EKhB community at 53(a) Lenin Street was essentially a 'central' one, since such spiritual leaders of the EKhB as the Senior Presbyter for Ukraine, Andreev, and his assistant, Ponomarchuk, were closely associated with the life of this community. The community's neighbors were the Ministry of Agriculture of Ukrainian SSR and a trade school...The community's activity is now transferred out of the central part of the city to Podol—to 6 Spasskaia Street...

The SDA prayer house stood on one of the central arteries of Kiev, Komintern Street, connecting the railroad station with the downtown area. It was next to the Political Department of South-Western Railways and in the same building with the sanitary inspection unit [*sanpropusknik*]. We detected a number of serious violations of the legislation on cults in this community's activity. The prayer house is temporarily closed. We are suggesting the utilization of this building as a cultural-educational institution for the railroad district.<sup>11</sup>

According to Vil'khovyi's report, similar fate befell the EKhB and SDA prayer houses in Lvov. Both communities were removed from the center of Lvov to its outskirts.<sup>12</sup>

Vil'khovyi's report also reveals that the CARC had a variety of plausible legal pretexts at its disposal and could use them simultaneously to achieve its objectives.

The terse bureaucratic language of Vil'khovyi's report, with his casual assurance that the evicted communities were offered an alternative place of worship, conveyed nothing of the emotional drama and purely physical complications that these evictions had caused the believers. In 1953, three and a half years after their eviction, the Kiev EKhB community, now gathering at 6 Spasskaia Street in Podol (away from Kiev's center, but still within the city limits), penned a petition addressed to the chairman of the Council of Ministers of Ukrainian SSR, D.S. Korotchenko. In framing the account of

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<sup>11</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 5667, p. 177.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181-182.

their grievances, the EKhB believers manifested both their ability to exploit the government's insecurities (preoccupation with making a positive impression on foreign visitors) and their awareness of certain limitations that worshipping God in Soviet conditions entailed (the required relative isolation of a prayer house from the city's congested areas). First, the petitioners stressed an extraordinary significance of the prayer house at 53(a) Lenin Street for all Evangelicals-Baptists in Ukraine, since its reconstruction in the 1920s had been their collective effort:

It should be noted that the Kiev community was helpless to undertake such a serious reconstruction and, therefore, many EKhB communities from all over Ukraine participated in it by contributing money and individual labor. As a result, the EKhB believers in Kiev and in all of Ukraine had grown accustomed to seeing this prayer house...as a sort of their Ukrainian cathedral.<sup>13</sup>

Second, the petitioners mentioned other recently evicted EKhB communities in Kiev and showed their understanding of government's concerns that had prompted one of such evictions:

From 1923 to 1948, the EKhB community had a large beautiful building in the city's center, at 14 Krasnoarmeiskaia Street (seventh building from Khreshchatik). The prayer house was on the second floor, right above the sidewalk. The singing of our choir attracted the attention of pedestrians who congregated on the sidewalk [purportedly to listen to the choir]. This circumstance urged the local authorities and the City Council to ask us to take steps toward the relocation of our community to a quieter place. We understood the necessity to do so ourselves...

In the central part of Kiev there existed for 40 years yet another EKhB community at 104 Zhilianskaia Street. At the suggestion [?] of the Upolnomochennyi of CARC for Ukrainian SSR, this community's leadership consented on March 19, 1949, to vacate the building, handing it over to the district children's library, taking into account that believers [of this community] could still be accommodated at 53(a) Lenin Street. But entirely unexpectedly, on the very next day, the Upolnomochennyi of CARC for Ukrainian SSR [Vil'khovyi] demanded an immediate vacation of our last cult building at 53(a)

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<sup>13</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 155, p. 47 (a-g).

Lenin Street. Consequently, the believers of three communities, who had three separate prayer houses..., and who comprised 1,000 people, found themselves completely without a prayer house.<sup>14</sup>

The petitioners pointed out that the suggested accommodation of 1,000 additional believers at the last remaining EKhB prayer house (within Kiev city limits) at 6 Spasskaia Street—“a small space in the lower floor of a six storey residential building” or, more precisely, “an area of 110 square meters” with a capacity to seat only 170 people—was highly improbable, and that attempts to do so had already proved hazardous to worshippers’ health:

The area of the mentioned building is clearly insufficient to accommodate 1,000 people (in addition to the Podol community). The over-crowdedness, heat, and stuffiness cause fainting and deprive believers of the opportunity to normally satisfy their religious needs. It does not seem possible to distribute all these members among other EKhB communities in Kiev’s suburbs (Kurinevka, Darnitsa, Sviatoshino) because those communities’ prayer houses consist of small private rooms barely capable of accommodating the existing members. The believers of four joint communities [now on Spasskaia Street] have taken all necessary measures to find an appropriate building, but all their efforts were in vain. The repeated petitions to the City Council and CARC also brought no results.<sup>15</sup>

The believers clearly implied that a hazardous congestion of over 1,000 people in a small room on Spasskaia Street—a violation of both sanitary and fire codes—would not have occurred had it not been for the simultaneous closure of three of their largest prayer houses by the CARC. In fact, Vil’khovyi repeatedly reported to the party bosses that the

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

CARC “significantly raised the sanitary-technical and fire-code requirements with respect to buildings in which it is projected to open the EKhB prayer houses.”<sup>16</sup>

Besides being inconsistent in enforcing these requirements, the CARC and the city authorities, the petitioners believed, left the numerous EKhB community in Kiev at a disadvantage “at the time when the Orthodox believers have sufficient number of churches in the city of Kiev and on the periphery.” Even their own fellow-believers in the oblast centers, petitioners argued, “have well-equipped prayer houses.”<sup>17</sup> The appalling conditions at their present prayer house on Spasskaia Street, they politely hinted, could potentially hurt the USSR’s image:

Considering the possibility of coming to Kiev of foreign delegations of believers ( as the recent visit of Quakers) and probability of their wanting to visit our prayer services, as it happens in the Moscow community, our leadership is troubled by such a prospect, since we lack an appropriate prayer building.<sup>18</sup>

[The Soviet official who read the petition (Korotchenko, or perhaps Vil’khovyi, to whom the petition was forwarded) heavily underlined this paragraph and scribbled the following remark on the margin: “What! Need to discuss this. There is some ground here for the revision of the decision made by the Council earlier.”<sup>19</sup>] In view of these circumstances, believers argued, the only reasonable solution to the problem, capable of meeting both the needs of the Kiev EKhB community and the government requirements, would be the return to them of the prayer house on Lenin Street: “The building at 53(a) Lenin Street

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<sup>16</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 4556, p. 127.

<sup>17</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 155, p. 47(a-g).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

satisfies all criteria for the EKhB worship and can accommodate the entire joint community. Located at the far end of a courtyard in a desolate section of the street, it meets all requirements in this sense also [it does not attract attention of passersby].” In believers’ opinion, such a solution would be “in accordance with the Decree on Separation of State and Church” and reinforce still further the long-standing patriotism of believing citizens and their good rapport with the Soviet government:

The EKhB believers, as Soviet patriots who, during the Patriotic War, stood together with other citizens at the defense of their beloved Motherland and Soviet Government, and who are ready in the future to defend the Motherland’s sacred borders, think that they have equal rights along with other denominations, and that the Great Stalin Constitution should also be applicable to them.<sup>20</sup>

The believers did not limit their efforts to petitioning the Ukrainian authorities only, and in the course of 1953-1954 sent a delegation to Moscow and a series of letters to the highest Soviet officials—Chairman of the Council of Ministers of USSR, G.M. Malenkov, Secretary of the CC of CPSU, N.S. Khrushchev, Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of USSR, K.E. Voroshilov, and the all-union CARC in Moscow.<sup>21</sup> In July of 1953, it appeared that the return of their “Ukrainian cathedral” was at their grasp. In a letter to the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Ukrainian SSR, executive officials of the Kiev EKhB community, Ponomarchuk and Mitskevich, wrote:

Attached is a photo-telegram Number 33, received on July 22 from the Senior Presbyter of VSEKhB in Moscow, about the final decision of CARC at the CM of USSR, concerning the transfer to the Kiev EKhB community of the building at 53(a) Lenin Street...The data, received from the CARC at the CM of USSR and the VSEKhB, indicates that this decision has also been sent to you...On the basis

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 174, p. 48-49.

of this information, we ask you to expedite the transfer of the aforementioned cult building in response to our petition submitted earlier.<sup>22</sup>

While there is no reason to doubt that the Moscow CARC indeed approved the transfer of the building back to the Kiev community, it apparently had no knowledge of what had happened to the building between 1949 and 1953. As the Kiev authorities continued to procrastinate over the building's transfer, Mitskevich and members of the Kiev community's founding "dvadtsatka" wrote yet another petition to the Council of Ministers of Ukrainian SSR, in which they stated:

Because 4 months passed since our petition's submission and no response had been received, the community members are disturbed and wonder why their petition had been left unanswered. Members of the Kiev community, who meet in a building that gives no possibility for normal satisfaction of their religious needs, express their discontent with the leadership, with its passivity, and demand a second visit to Moscow, especially since they have learned from their delegation about the positive resolution of this issue by the CARC at the CM of USSR...<sup>23</sup>

Only in December of 1953, to its great disappointment, the Kiev community learned during its delegation's meeting with Vil'khovyi that the return of their building "was complicated by such circumstances" as its occupation by "a serious organization—"Ukrsel'elektroproekt"\* and subsequent "extended remodeling of the building" by this organization, "in which a large sum of money had been invested," making it "inexpedient to destroy what had already been done."<sup>24</sup> A separate document—an itemized estimate of remodeling and its description submitted to Vil'khovyi by "Ukrsel'elektroproekt"—shows

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<sup>22</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 155, p. 47(e).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 96.

\* An institution in charge of projects concerning electrification of the Ukrainian countryside.

<sup>24</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 174, p. 2-3.

that not one, but four organizations, acting under the aegis of the Ukrainian Ministry of Agriculture, had radically altered the interior of the EKhB prayer house on Lenin Street, having turned its spacious prayer hall into a bee hive of offices and corridors. The cost of this remodeling, according to the document, exceeded 185,000 rubles.<sup>25</sup>

The Ukrainian CARC anticipated that the extensive alterations to the building made by “Ukrsel’elektroproekt” and the large lump of money spent on its remodeling by the Ministry of Agriculture—money that would have to be compensated by the community, should the building be transferred back to it—would serve as deterrents to any further claims to the building on the part of the Kiev EKhB believers. Compensating the EKhB brotherhood in Ukraine for the money it had invested over the years in the reconstruction of this building was never a concern for the Kiev city authorities, for the government’s belated statement of its position with respect to such investments by religious communities made it clear that the municipal authorities, not religious communities were the ultimate owners of all cult buildings. Religious organizations could acquire and adapt certain buildings for purposes of the cult, but only “with the subsequent transfer of these buildings to the municipalized funds of the local soviets.”<sup>26</sup> The half-ruined and dilapidated buildings, which believers so often transformed into their prayer houses, could be (and, in fact, were) requisitioned by the state without any monetary compensation to religious communities for the improvements that they might have made to such structures. At the same time, a religious community could not register a ruin until

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<sup>25</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 155, p. 47(g).

<sup>26</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 4263, p. 133.

it was transformed into a usable space satisfying all sanitary-technical and fire code requirements. As a result, believers often spent their time and money on reconstructing buildings (and becoming sentimentally attached to them in the process) that would ultimately be taken away from them and used as clubs, libraries, or offices for some state bureaucracy.

As a strict legalist, Vil'khovyi knew that by law (Section 1, Paragraph 10 of the 1929/1975 Legislation on Religious Organizations<sup>27</sup>) the CARC and Kiev municipal authorities were to assist the Kiev EKhB believers in finding a suitable building that could serve as a replacement for their lost prayer house. Several options were offered to the Kiev EKhB community by the CARC, but each proved inadequate and potentially capable of making matters worse by flaring an inter-confessional antagonism—a circumstance that the Kiev community skillfully exploited to reinforce its standing argument. In June of 1953, the CARC suggested that the community adapt as its prayer house the semi-basement of a Jewish synagogue at 29 Shchekavitskaia Street and mediated during negotiations between the leaders of Jewish and EKhB communities. However, as soon as the EKhB began initial repairs of the basement, they “quite unexpectedly encountered the most negative and even hostile reaction towards them on the part of the Jewish population of Kiev”:

We heard all sorts of insults and accusations in our address from the Jews—that we robbed them, that we lost our conscience by taking over their building, etc. It gave rise to an extreme antagonism leveled at the EKhB believers by religious and even non-religious Jews. When we submitted our application, we had in mind that the semi-basement would be completely emptied. But there is still in it a ritual washer, ‘mikva,’ which is an inalienable accessory of the Jewish

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<sup>27</sup> *Zakonodatel'stvo o religioznykh kul'takh*, p. 11.



ritual. Its removal would provoke an even greater escalation of Jewish hostility towards us... The mentioned circumstance forces us to announce the termination of our agreement to move into the semi-basement of the Jewish synagogue despite the money (8,000 rubles) we have already invested [in repairs]. We simply do not find it possible to conduct our prayer services in a hostile environment.<sup>28</sup>

In 1954, the CARC tried to pass on to the EKhB community either one of the two requisitioned Russian Orthodox churches. Taught by their prior experience, the EKhB turned down this offer on the following grounds:

Based on its dimensions, the former ROC church in Sviatoshino [then a suburb of Kiev] could have satisfied our community. But this building is not suitable for us because it is the only cult building for the people of Orthodox confession in Sviatoshino. It was taken away from them comparatively recently, and its transfer to the EKhB community could provoke an unhealthy reaction on the part of [the Orthodox] population and cause antagonism and excesses similar to those that occurred when the lower part of the synagogue in Podol was transferred to us.<sup>29</sup>

Besides, believers argued, the Sviatoshino church was too far away (12-18 kilometers) “from residences of the overwhelming majority of our believers, a significant portion of whom are elderly people” who would not be able to travel such a distance and “normally visit prayer meetings and satisfy their religious needs.”<sup>30</sup>

The adaptation of another Orthodox building—the Voskresenskaia church—presented an even greater problem in believers’ assessment since it was “located next to the Kievo-Pecherskaia Lavra [Kiev’s famous Cave Monastery], which is the great sacred site for the Orthodoxy.” The believers anticipated that the transfer of this church to them “could also cause undesirable reaction of the Orthodox population.” Moreover, believers

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<sup>28</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 155, p. 36-37.

<sup>29</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 174, p. 2-3.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

argued, the church's interior layout, with its Greek-cross floor plan and a small usable area of only 120 square meters, "cannot satisfy our community numbering 1,100 members (10 people for every square meter)," since the community "would find itself in a situation similar to that in our current building—in the same overcrowded and stuffy environment," not mentioning the repair of this building which, according to believers' estimate, "would require 300-350 thousand rubles."<sup>31</sup>

The fourth option offered by the CARC—the former Lutheran Kirche, located on Engels Street, "would have completely satisfied us," believers wrote, "but...comrade Vil'hkovyi, who initially recommended it to us, later stated that this building could not be given to us because a high voltage cable for a cinema studio was laid there, the removal of which would be quite costly."<sup>32</sup> Having described these complications, the Kiev EKhB community made one more appeal to the chairman of the Council of Ministers of Ukrainian SSR, Korotchenko:

On the grounds of mentioned facts and guided by the existing legislation, we have to appeal to you once again on behalf of 1,100 members of the central Kiev EKhB community and ask you to return to it the building at 53(a) Lenin Street, which was raised from ruins in the past by the efforts of believers and properly documented in accordance with the decree on separation of state and church to be used by the community perpetually and free of charge. This building meets all requirements that the satisfaction of religious needs of our community implies. Our petition...is also based on the fact that taking the building away from us involved a violation of the existing legislation. For example: according to comrade Vil'khovyi, the closure of our prayer house was carried out on the basis of the decision of the Council of Ministers from April 6, 1949 (Protocol 9), whereas the eviction notice was handed to the community on March 31, that is, considerably earlier.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

If the return of the house at 53(a) Lenin Street is only complicated by the necessity to compensate the money spent by 'Ukrsel'elektroproyekt' on the remodeling of this building, members of our community and all EKhB believers od Kiev are ready to make such a compensation from their own means. We address you not only as members of a religious organization, but also as workers, Soviet citizens and patriots of our Motherland...<sup>33</sup>

The believers' unrelenting petitioning certainly agitated officials at the Council of Ministers who, in their turn, applied pressure on Vil'khovyi, expecting him to resolve the situation that seemed to be getting messier and had already attracted publicity. In his letter to Korotchenko's assistant, M.S. Grechusia, Vil'khovyi calmly explained that the CARC only strictly followed the Soviet laws and the Ukrainian Council of Ministers' own directives. He further reasoned that since "in May of 1952, 'Giprosel'elektro' undertook an overhaul of the building that had cost it 500,000 rubles of state funds, it does not make sense now to turn over this building back to the religious organization."<sup>34</sup> Vil'khovyi's estimate of Giprosel'elektro's remodeling expenditures appears grossly exaggerated, since Giprosel'elektro's own estimate of its remodeling expenses, submitted to Vil'khovyi in July of 1953, quoted only 85,000 rubles, whereas the overall cost of remodeling undertaken by all four organizations occupying the building did not exceed 185,000 rubles (which the EKhB community was willing to compensate). By deliberately inflating the cost of the building's remodeling in his report, Vil'khovyi, it seems, tried to prevent the humiliating possibility of his decision's reversal. And yet, something had to be done about the cramped conditions on Spasskaia Street. Since the city could not offer any other municipal buildings besides those turned down by the

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 48-49.

EKhB community, Vilkhovyi thought that the community should “find privately owned buildings with spacious halls suitable for prayer meetings.” The CARC, Vil’khovyi promised, would not object to registering such buildings as prayer houses.<sup>35</sup> From the standpoint of strategy of quantitative reduction, the latter solution could not be but counterproductive. Had the CARC allowed the Kiev community to retain its prayer house on Lenin Street, it would have had one large, easily monitored and thankful congregation of believers under a close watch of such cooperative leaders as Andreev and his retinue. Now, the CARC faced a perspective of having several smaller aggrieved communities scattered throughout Kiev and vicinity, whereas the goal of quantitative reduction was shutting down smaller communities and integrating them with the larger ones.

The Kiev community’s petitioning campaign did not relent even when it became clear that the recovery of its prayer house on Lenin Street was no longer a realistic prospect. In their letters to authorities, believers continued to emphasize that the government’s failure to provide their community with an appropriate building had a negative impact on believers’ perception of the government and undermined their faith in the Soviet legislation. Should the situation remain unresolved for much longer, it would become increasingly difficult for the community to hide the miserable conditions of its existence from the international community. The believers’ reiteration of this latter politically charged concern never failed to attract the CARC’s attention. In 1956, reporting to the First Assistant to the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Ukrainian

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

SSR, Grechusia, and Secretary of the CC of CPU, Nazarenko, Vil'khovyi wrote that the Kiev community's efforts to recover their lost building on Lenin Street became especially persistent after the publication of the decree by the CC of CPSU "On Errors in the Conduct of Scientific-Atheist Propaganda Among the Population":

It should be taken into consideration that Kiev is more and more often visited by delegations and tourists from abroad, and that among these visitors there are those who want to go to Protestant churches... There is only one such [Protestant] church in Kiev—that of the EKhB. Since the EKhB in Kiev do not have an appropriate building suitable for receiving representatives of different religious organizations that come to Kiev from abroad, it would be expedient to transfer to the EKhB religious community (formerly located at 53(a) Lenin Street) the building of a former Karaim kenasa\* that is located at 7(a) Voroshilova Street. Due to the lack of an owner, this building had not been repaired for a long time, fell into ruin, and presently is not used by anyone.<sup>36</sup>

According to Vil'khovyi's notes, during the German occupation, the Kiev SDA believers moved into this kenasa and used it as a prayer house until the city authorities evicted them from there in 1947. [For a couple of years, the SDA community gathered in a building on Kominterna Street in the downtown area, but was again evicted in 1949 under the pretext of being too close to Soviet and educational institutions.] In subsequent years, the kenasa was used as storage and a shop for manufacturing stage decorations by the Ivan Franko Theater—a usage that must have brought the building into a state of disrepair.

The paper trail reflecting the Kiev community's struggle to find an appropriate prayer building abruptly ends with the latter document. The evidence from the late

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\* A place of worship of a religious community of Karaites—an offshoot of Judaism. Ethnically non-Jewish but Tatar (purportedly descendants of ancient Khazars), Karaites recognize only the Torah. During WW II, the Nazis defiled Karaim kenasas, including the central one on Yaroslavskii Val (now the Ukrainian House of Actor).

<sup>36</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 4263, p. 120.

1950s, however, indicates that the kenasa option did not work out either, possibly for the same reason the Jewish synagogue and the Orthodox church options had not worked out earlier. While the reconstruction of this ruined building would have required massive investments of the EKhB community's money and labor, the Karaites could potentially contest the occupation of their sacred site by a Protestant denomination. Ultimately, the Kiev EKhB found their new home in a building at 70 Yamskaia Street. In fact, the CARC sanctioned the use of this building by both the EKhB and SDA communities as their central Kiev prayer house. Both communities gathered at this location alternately, on different days, for the remainder of the Soviet era, mirroring the pattern established at the joint EKhB/SDA prayer house on Malovuzovskii Lane in Moscow. Judging by the number of foreign guests that visited the prayer house at 70 Yamskaia Street from the late 1950s onward, the building was spacious and imposing enough architecturally to be shown to the outsiders without embarrassment. Ironically, after a decade-long ordeal of having no adequate place of worship, these two Protestant communities found themselves gathering again in a relatively central district of Kiev, not far away from their former requisitioned prayer houses on Krasnoarmeiskaia Street (EKhB) and Komintern Street (SDA).

Although the EKhB believers ultimately failed to recover their historic prayer house on Lenin Street, their bold petitioning campaign served as a valuable learning experience—an improvised school of legal awareness that helped them develop useful diplomatic and negotiating skills that could be studied and employed by other Soviet Protestants as a survival strategy. Far from any legalistic presumptuousness, the

believers simply made it known to the government that they understood the Soviet law quite literally. They did not do so because they were unaware of the existing disparity between the purely rhetorical properties of Soviet legislation and its practical worth, but because they knew that their literal reading of the Soviet law was precisely the reading the government wished to project abroad. In the upcoming years, the Protestant minorities would increasingly use their improved understanding of Soviet legislation to exploit regime's insecurities to their advantage by making inoffensive arguments "from the government's point of view"—arguments that would question not the Soviet policy on religion as such, but only its certain counterproductive measures leading to no other consequence but alienation from the Soviet state of good and patriotic believing citizens. The believers' petitions informed a wide range of the high-ranking Soviet officials of the abnormality of treating requisitioned confessional buildings as mere effaced entities in the municipal housing fund. Each of these structures was laden with religious-cultural, historical and sentimental significance for a specific religious group. An act of requisitioning by the state did not strip an Orthodox church or a Jewish synagogue of its indelible cultic markers or the attachment to it of a religious community to which it formerly belonged. The story of the EKhB community in Kiev vividly illustrated to the authorities that the Soviet practice of requisitioning and redistributing religious buildings without any regard for their cultic markers only offended believers and fomented inter-confessional antagonism, but did little to eradicate religious communities. Ten years after their eviction from the downtown area, both the EKhB and the SDA communities were again lodged in one of the central districts of Ukraine's capital.

The cited evidence illustrated that the government used a combination of pretexts to reduce the number of Protestant prayer houses in Kiev: unauthorized appropriation of the formerly requisitioned prayer buildings during German occupation, proximity of prayer houses to Soviet and educational institutions, merging smaller communities of the same confession with larger ones, and forcing communities of unlike confessions to alternately use the same building. The ultimate goal of such measures was not only the self-evident numeric reduction of religious sites throughout a given town or city, but also altering the quality of a religious experience for believers.

Instead of gathering in a convenient downtown location in the festive and comfortable atmosphere of a properly designed prayer house, the government would often leave believers with no choice but to travel long distances to an obscure part of town just to spend two hours of prayer service in cramped conditions in a non-descript private house. In 1962, for example, the Chernovtsy city authorities, with the approval of CARC, made a decision to take the EKHB prayer house at 7 Krasnoarmeiskaia Street and give it to the Technical School of Culture and Enlightenment, having offered the dispossessed believers only one option—to make arrangements with the SDA for the alternate use of their prayer house located in the settlement of Zhuchka on the city's outskirts. Still hoping to reverse this decision, the upset members of the Chernovtsy EKHB community wrote in their petition to the head of CARC in Ukraine, Polonnik:

When this was announced to the community, the old men and women broke into a mass wailing, while others expressed their outrage and discontent. That is why, we, members of community's *dvadtsatka*, decided to turn to you and ask you to pay attention to our social group of 500 people. We think that it is quite possible to leave us in this building, for it is not located on a populous street, but on a tiny lane. Besides, it is deep inside the yard and is hardly noticeable from the



lane. There are no educational institutions, or state offices, of child-care facilities nearby. We do not interfere with anyone there, and we have been gathering there for over 15 years.<sup>37</sup>

The SDA prayer house, the EKhB argued, would be hard to reach for most of the elderly members of their community, since there was no adequate transportation between Zhuchka and Chernovtsy. “None of our believers live in the region of Zuchka,” they continued. “Thus the main mass of our members... would have to cross the distance of 10-12 kilometers to get to the SDA prayer house.”<sup>38</sup> Under quantitative reduction, getting a replacement prayer house never meant a fair trade, but always a step down in terms of space, quality and location.

### **3. The Government’s Selective Enforcement of Sanitary and Fire Codes as Pretexts for the Closure of Prayer Houses**

In January of 1962, authorities in the city of Rovno suddenly appropriated the prayer house of a local EKhB community “for the needs of the state.” According to believers’ petition to Polonnik, the community members built this prayer house in 1925 with their money. During WW II, the German bombing raids partially destroyed the house, but the community rebuilt it after the war. The petitioners specifically emphasized that “the mentioned house has never been nationalized either before or after the war, and has always been used exclusively for prayer meetings.”<sup>39</sup> The latter circumstance indicates that the Rovno city authorities appropriated this building on no other legal

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<sup>37</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 389, p. 145.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

pretext but to remove the EKhB community from the city's center. As a replacement, "the community was given a village hut (50 square meters)—a house of a repressed man on the outskirts of the city in Basov Kut." Besides the coincidental return from imprisonment of the owner of this house (now residing elsewhere in Basov Kut), who still had claims to this property and could potentially cause problems for the community, the building was simply too small. "The community numbers 349 people," complained believers, "whereas the space offered to us in exchange is only 50 square meters and cannot accommodate even 30% of community's members." "...The impossibility of fitting all members in the new space," believers argued, "may, of necessity, force people to hold prayer meetings in unregistered private apartments, which would be extremely undesirable." The community asked Polonnik "to consider all these possible complications, revoke the Gorispolkom decision, and allow them to retain their prayer house at 41 Dimitrov Street in Rovno."<sup>40</sup> The believers hinted to Polonnik that they were aware of the sanitary and fire code requirements and of the consequences of unauthorized gatherings in private apartments, the implicit message being that the government enforced its own regulations selectively and inconsistently. When the government's objective was to drive Protestant communities from the downtown areas, it deliberately overlooked flagrant violations of sanitary and fire codes inherent in crowding large numbers of believers in inadequate replacement prayer houses provided by municipal authorities. In fact, by leaving the dispossessed religious communities in such precarious

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

circumstances the government secured for itself legal pretexts on the basis of which it could harass these communities in the future.

The EKhB community in Evpatoria (Crimea), for example, gathered for 15 years in a building at 44(a) Metallistov Street and, in accordance with the agreement, not only maintained this building “in a fully operational condition” but preserved its architectural style as “an object of museum significance.” In January of 1960, however, the fire department inspection determined that the community would have to undertake a serious reconstruction of the building, which the community knew would contradict “the direct meaning of legislation on preservation of monuments of the old culture,” or vacate the building on the following grounds:

In view of the norms and requirements of the fire and sanitary codes, the area and volume of the building are not equivalent to the number of worshipers who number 130 people. The commission finds that due to the aforementioned problems, the performance of religious rituals in the building is impossible...<sup>41</sup>

Finding itself between the rock and the hard place, the community had no other recourse but to point out to the city officials that it could not satisfy one legal requirement at the cost of violating the other and express its bewilderment at such a sudden invocation of the fire and sanitary code requirements that seemed perfectly satisfied during the prior 15 years of community’s use of this building.

The government’s enforcement of these regulations was clearly selective and motivated not by any objective concerns for believers’ safety but by the ideology-driven exigencies of its operative strategy of quantitative reduction. The government clearly did not enforce these regulations at the EKhB replacement prayer house on Spasskaia

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<sup>41</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 309, p. 9.

Street in Kiev, where 1,100 believers were forced to congregate in a room capable to accommodate only 170 people, or at another replacement prayer house in Basov Kut, capable of absorbing only 30% of the Rovno EKhB community. The evidence suggests that the Soviet authorities intentionally pushed believers out of the properly equipped religious buildings into the makeshift prayer houses in the private sector, for the latter structures were more likely to be in violation of one or the other of numerous safety requirements and, most certainly, could not expand to accommodate the natural growth of religious communities. The following table (Table 2) incorporating data on registered EKhB and SDA prayer houses, submitted by Vil'khovyi in 1951,<sup>42</sup> reveals a striking disparity between the prayer houses rented from private sector and acquired from other housing funds:

Table 2

*Provenance of the EKhB and SDA Prayer Houses*

Religious cult	Total # of prayer houses	From nationalized fund	From municipal fund	Private houses
SDA	121	24	6	91
EKhB	1,409	174	27	1,208

It is quite clear that the bulk of all registered prayer houses used by these two Protestant communities came from the private sector.

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<sup>42</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 783, p. 202.

In 1962, Andreev informed Polonnik that two prayer houses of the EKhB communities in Kharkov oblast had recently been closed “because of supposedly insufficient area [*kubatura*].” Seeing a dangerous pattern in the recent use of this new pretext by the local authorities, Andreev employed an argument from universalizability to convince the head of Ukrainian CARC that a broad application of this pretext could leave most registered EKhB communities out on the street:

Recently, we encounter more and more often the facts of prayer houses’ closure by the local authorities precisely on the grounds that the buildings do not have sufficient area [*kubatura*]. It is well known to you that at the present state of property in the private sector none of our communities can have a building that has an appropriate area. Therefore, all of them can be easily shut down on the basis of this requirement.<sup>43</sup>

The Kharkov SDA community gathered in an outbuilding on the property belonging to citizen N.E. Gutnik at 53 Sushchinskaia Street. In 1959, an inspection, conducted by commissions of both regional and city soviets, determined that the outbuilding was “unsafe and in the need of a capital repair of the ceiling.” The SDA community would have gladly undertaken all necessary repairs, had it not been for another determination made by the same commissions. “Since the auxiliary building is surrounded by other buildings,” the inspection concluded, “and does not have a convenient driveway to it, and since the fire breaking intervals between it and adjacent buildings were not observed [at the building’s construction], the capital repair of the building is prohibited.”<sup>44</sup> Appealing to Polonnik on behalf of this community, the SDA Senior Presbyter for Ukraine, Parasei, wrote:

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<sup>43</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 389, p. 196.

The Kharkov SDA community numbers over 200 members who need to satisfy their spiritual needs according to their confession. These members are now left without a prayer house for reasons unrelated to them. I ask you to allow the SDA community in Kharkov to hold its prayer services on certain days in the prayer house of the EKhB...<sup>45</sup>

In large cities, with sizable religious communities, the Council's Upolnomochennye and municipal authorities at least tried to provide the dispossessed believers with alternative places of worship. In fact, the law required that if the local authorities for some reason needed to evict a religious community from its prayer house, the believers should be given ample opportunity to rent another building. Addressing the frequent neglect of this legal norm by the Soviet officials, the head of the all-union CARC, V. Kuroedov, remarked in 1963:

The Council's Upolnomochennyi for Odessa oblast, comrade Arbuznikov, supported an Oblispolkom's request to appropriate a church building belonging to a religious community in the town of Balta. In the past, this building was in the possession of a social organization. The Oblispolkom's letter stated that this religious community, as numerous, would have the right to rent a different building. Taking this into account, the Council [CARC] agreed with the Oblispolkom's proposition. However, having expropriated the church building, the Oblispolkom did not provide the religious community with an opportunity to rent another building, which caused the believers' outrage and a flow of complaints from them to central [government] institutions. This illustrates that some Upolnomochennye of the Council not only fail to correct the aforementioned violations but themselves embark on the path of lawless actions.<sup>46</sup>

Kuroedov made this remark in 1963, towards the end of the Khrushchev antireligious campaign, during which the local authorities widely used the sanitary and fire codes as preferred means of reducing the number of religious communities. In 1955, according to

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<sup>44</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 309, p. 2(a), 2(b), and 3.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5778, p. 43-44.

Vil'khovyi, the EKhB community in the town of Molchanks needed to change its prayer house's address (a rather simple procedure). The local authorities used this circumstance "to look for a number of unnecessary pretexts to slow down the issue of sanitary-technical and fire code clearances to the community."<sup>47</sup> In fact, Directive Number 2-52, issued by the all-union CARC as early as 1952, clearly stated that "the submission of an act on the sanitary-technical condition of a building is not necessary in cases of address changes of registered prayer houses."<sup>48</sup> The Council's Upolnomochennye in oblasts, however, either failed to stay abreast of every directive dispatched to them by their superiors or, more likely, intentionally concealed such legal intricacies from believers, knowing that an invocation of a specific legal statute would have more weight in any litigation than a mere reference to some loosely defined constitutional pronouncement.

In 1958, Andreev reported that "the local authorities in village Kolodezhnoe, Dzerzhinskii region, Zhitomir oblast, refuse to give the [local EKhB] community permits for the performance of technical and sanitary inspections of the [prospective prayer] building," thus leaving believers with "no possibility to conduct prayer services."<sup>49</sup> In 1963, the head of Ukrainian CARC, Litvin, stressed in his report to the CC of CPU the persistence of this form of abuse of believers:

In Semenovskii region of Chernigov oblast there are four registered and functioning EKhB communities. All of these communities were shut down by the local Soviets of workers' deputies under a pretext that the prayer houses of these communities did not meet requirements of sanitary and fire codes. Two of these

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<sup>47</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 4263, p. 69.

<sup>48</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 127, p. 9.

<sup>49</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 246, p. 15.

communities have already been taken off registration and their believers adjoined to the Kostobobrovskaia community whose prayer building was also closed under the same pretexts. Similar examples of artificial reduction of religious network could also be quoted for other oblasts. Therefore, it is not accidental that we register an increase in the number of unregistered but de facto functioning groups in a number of oblasts, and in certain places—a growth and revival of sectarian underground...<sup>50</sup>

In his other report for the same year, Litvin again emphasized the counterproductive effect of such artificial quantitative reduction:

Recently, under a bizarre pretext and under a guise of purported fading away of EKhB communities, 14 prayer houses were closed in Dnepropetrovsk oblast without the decision of appropriate organs. Such attitude of local organs of authority toward religious communities of the EKhB elicits great discontent of believers and contributes to the widening of sectarian underground.<sup>51</sup>

In order to illustrate what sort of pretexts, including the sanitary and fire codes, the local authorities were using to justify these numerous prayer house closures, Litvin quoted an incident that occurred in village Mar'inskoe, Apostolovskii region Dnepropetrovsk oblast, where the EKhB community rented a building from a pensioner, Shapoval. Striving to shut down this community, the kolkhoz chairman, Krasnobai, and the head of party organization, Bondarenko, repeatedly tried to coerce Shapoval to terminate the lease agreement with the community. When Shapoval, “being a believer of this sect, refused to honor their demands, they held back the payment of his pension for three months and revoked this measure only upon the Oblispolkom’s interference.” The aforementioned officials then “demanded that a Notary Public checked the validity of all documents concerning the building and found some pretext to terminate the lease

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<sup>50</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5663, p. 84.

<sup>51</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5908, p. 97.



agreement,” but the inspection “confirmed that Shapoval’s and community’s actions were in compliance with the law.” Having failed in their initial attempts, Krasnobai and Bondarenko decided it was time to bring in the heavy artillery—the fire department. The head of State Fire Safety Inspection, Captain Kazachenko, issued an order obligating Shapoval to do the following: “to install emergency exit to be used in the case of fire; to remove the heating device, that is, a stove that provides heating for the entire house; to install a fire extinguishing kit; and to re-roof the adjacent building, presently under a thatched roof, with a fire-proof material—ceramic tiles, roofing slates, or sheet metal.” When Shapoval fulfilled all of these requirements, except for the last one, Captain Kazachenko confronted him with a new list of far-fetched requirements:

to rewire the entire house; to install next to the prayer house a tank capable of holding 50 cubic meters of water for extinguishing fire; to equip the prayer house with a telephone; to evict residents from a room adjacent to the prayer house (that is, to evict Shapoval himself and his wife); to tear down and remove a shed standing between the prayer house and a temporary house [*vremianka*]; and to make a paved driveway to provide access of the fire trucks to the prayer house in bad weather.<sup>52</sup>

Litvin took this particular case seriously and reported these facts to both the Minister of Defense of Public Order of Ukrainian SSR and the leadership of Dnepropetrovsk oblast. His efforts as an ombudsman paid off and “Shapoval was left alone.” As for Captain Kazachenko, “administrative and party penalties were inflicted upon him,” but the initiators of this venture, Krasnobai and Bondarenko, complained Litvin, “were left unscathed.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 97-98.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 98.

The significance of the Council's forthrightness in rescuing Shapoval and the EKHB community in village Mar'inskoe should not be overstated, since throughout the 1950s the CARC repeatedly demanded that the sanitary and fire code requirements for prayer houses be toughened and openly viewed these requirements as effective means of reducing the number of Protestant communities. The CARC's occasional condemnation of excesses committed by people like Krasnobai, Bondarenko, or Kazachenko did not help to establish clearly defined and realistic criteria of sanitary and fire safety that could be uniformly applied and observed by both believers and local authorities. In reality, the fire safety situation in most rural areas was such that any strict and universal enforcement of the fire safety norms would have resulted in the mass closure of not only Protestant prayer houses but of many Soviet institutions and offices. In 1960, the EKHB Senior Presbyter for Khmel'nitsk oblast, E.A. Mazin, reported to Andreev that the local authorities recently closed the prayer house in village Savintsy, Yarmolinskii region, "without any reason, except that the roof was unsafe fire wise, the solution being to find another house that has a better roof." In Mazin's opinion, this suggestion amounted to an "actual liquidation of the community," for it would be impossible to find a better roofed house in village Savintsy. "In conditions of our oblast," Mazin reckoned, "where no less than 75% of all prayer houses have either straw or wooden roofs, the situation may become catastrophic. I ask you to keep this in mind and take possible intercessory measures towards reopening the prayer house of the mentioned community."<sup>54</sup> The unrealistically stiff sanitary and fire safety requirements became a true scourge for an

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<sup>54</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 309, p. 68.

ever widening range of EKhB communities in the early 1960s. In 1962, Andreev addressed this issue quite bluntly in his letter to Polonnik:

The matter is that in 1961, 10 EKhB communities in Chernigov oblast were liquidated ...on the pretext that their prayer houses were not meeting the sanitary and fire code requirements. We now have letters from other communities..., and we can see that the thing is taking such a spin that many more EKhB communities in Chernigov oblast may be closed this year on the grounds that their houses do not meet some requirements. We ask you to pay attention to this, for if all prayer houses situated in rented private houses were evaluated on the basis of strict technical requirements, none of them would be found suitable. Hence, they could also be closed on the same basis. All of this, in many cases, gives rise to illegality and bitterness. The believers develop a grudge against the local authorities, since the believers think that such measures pursue the goal of depriving them of the opportunity to gather and pray.<sup>55</sup>

Andreev explicitly called Polonnik's attention to what was widely known to anyone in the USSR—that most private houses in the early 1960s differed little from the primitive peasant huts of the late 19<sup>th</sup>-early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and that the postwar culture of scarcity and deficit of the most basic supplies and necessities made it impossible for majority of owners to make any significant improvements to their houses. At the same time, the lack of available municipal buildings and CARC's conscientious policy of driving Protestant communities to the towns' outskirts forced believers to rely increasingly on prayer houses rented in the private sector. The Protestant communities' ability to pool their financial and labor resources allowed them in many cases to significantly improve the private houses adapted by them for religious purposes. An unrealistically strict scrutiny of such adapted structures by the state sanitary and fire

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<sup>55</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 389, p. 5.

inspectors, implied Andreev, would result in outlawing of the bulk of the EKHB brotherhood and virtual return to condition of the 1930s.

Since adapting a private house for purposes of holding religious services often required serious modifications—removing partition walls to make more room, isolating residential area from the prayer hall and making a separate entrance for the owner’s quarters (something that many owners were unwilling to undertake), and since the local authorities routinely harassed the prayer house owners, attempting to coerce them into terminating their lease agreements with religious communities, the Protestants developed an effective strategy of countering this threat. They rented their prayer houses preferably from members of their communities, who were prepared to bear the burden of inconveniences and harassment not for money, but out of religious conviction and solidarity with their fellow-believers. Having fellow-believers as prayer house owners also allowed Protestant communities to quietly make structural adjustments to their prayer houses in order to accommodate the growing number of members. “In 1955-1956,” reported Vil’khovyi, “some SDA communities put a lot of work into a thorough reconstruction, remodeling and, hence, considerable expansion of their prayer houses. This occurred in Odessa, Kiev, Belaia Tserkov, Lvov, and Mukachev.”<sup>56</sup> In 1956, Vil’khovyi also complained that “some religious communities circumvented the legislation on religious cults and purchased buildings to be used as prayer houses through proxies with whom they later signed lease agreements.” Vil’khovyi made it quite clear that under the Soviet law a religious community could not own private property, and that

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<sup>56</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 4608, p. 78.

such an illegal maneuver as giving communal money to a private person for a purchase of a building that would later become a prayer house could cost dearly to a religious community—its prayer house could be requisitioned and transferred to the municipal fund.<sup>57</sup> However, proving that such machinations in fact did take place was quite difficult when the proxy owners were members of religious communities who could claim that they were only renting out their own private houses. In the case of SDA communities in Kiev, Kharkov, Poltava, Vinnitsa, Simferopol, and other places, this survival tactic ultimately backfired. In 1959, Polonnik reported that all prayer houses purchased by these communities through proxy owners and estimated cumulatively at 100,000 rubles were requisitioned and transferred to municipal funds of the local Soviets of Workers' Deputies.<sup>58</sup>

#### **4. Long Lease Agreements as a Means of Depriving Communities of Prayer Houses, and the Lack of Prayer Houses as a Pretext to Shut Down Communities**

To further limit the Protestants' chances of finding suitable buildings, the CARC ruled that "leases for the rent of privately owned buildings for purposes of prayer meetings must be signed for the duration of no less than 3-5 years."<sup>59</sup> In the 1950s and early 1960s, the Protestant communities were constantly preoccupied with securing long-term leases for their prayer houses or quickly obtaining new leases upon the expiry of the

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<sup>57</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 4263, p. 67.

<sup>58</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5205, p. 81.

<sup>59</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 12, p. 74.

old ones, for not having a prayer house for any period of time, from several months to two years, depending on the whimsy of a local Upolnomochennyi, gave rise to a new pretext for the liquidation a community. In the annals of the Ukrainian CARC there are many thick files full of protocols similar to Protocol 1 from January 4, 1950, stating: “Termination of registration of the SDA community in village Voroshilovka [Vinnitsa oblast] due to the lack of a prayer house during a period of 7 months.”<sup>60</sup> Vil’khovyi’s Informative Report for the second quarter of 1951 contains this telling admission of the deliberate use of the aforementioned pretext by the CARC: “The not so numerous sectarian communities are under a constant observation by our Upolnomochennye, and at the slightest signs of absence in these communities of such elements as the necessary quorum of believers [at least 20 members], a prayer house, or a cult servant [presbyter] the question is raised about the dissolution of such communities and termination of their registration.”<sup>61</sup>

Although Vil’khovyi’s comment indicates that the CARC specifically targeted the non-numerous communities, presumably those that did not have twenty members required by law, a number of actual closure cases reveals that the Council’s Upolnomochennye interpreted the term “non-numerous” quite loosely and had no scruples about shutting down communities numbering anywhere from 20 to 300 people. In fact the application of the pretext presupposed a deliberate entrapment by the Upolnomochennye of communities whose leases for the rent of prayer houses expired. In

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<sup>60</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 83, p. 3.

<sup>61</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 783, p. 322.

1954, the EKHB community in the town of Chuguev, Kharkov oblast, described how it had fallen victim to the pretext of not having a prayer house. The community had existed since 1914, and in the late 1940s had rented space in a privately owned residential house. “The fire inspection,” according to believers, “determined that it was inappropriate to hold public meetings in this building, instructed the house owner not to allow the conduct of prayer meetings in the future, and threatened to fine him [her]. As a result, on August 15, 1948, the community, consisting of 130 members, stopped carrying out prayer services until an appropriate building meeting technical requirements would be found.”<sup>62</sup> The Council’s Upolnomochennyi, comrade Pereslavskii, suggested that the community began looking for such a building, without establishing any deadlines and only saying—“Look for a building, and whenever you find one, come to me.” The believers’ search, however, became instantly complicated by the following circumstance:

Since our town suffered greatly during the war, we could not quickly find an appropriate building before the end of 1948... The difficulties finding a new building persisted, and the search was further complicated by the necessity to have a three year lease with a technical clearance from the sanitary and fire inspectors—conditions with which people who had buildings for rent were unwilling to comply. So the search dragged on into the 1950. Only in May of 1950 the building was found.<sup>63</sup>

The sanitary and fire inspections found the building well-equipped and suitable for the purpose. And all necessary documents were prepared and submitted by to CARC through the oblast Senior Presbyter, P.A. Parchevskii on July 1, 1950. When on July 12 the community sent its representative, brother Pas’ko, to Pereslavskii to find out whether

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<sup>62</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 174, p. 52-55.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

its application for registration was approved, the Upolnomochennyi said that the “community had lost its right to exist, but promised to review” its “case and respond, not earlier than September.” In September, the believers wrote, the Pereslavskii again gave the community no more than “a promise that he would talk about our case with the Oblispolkom and would try to satisfy our request, and promised to come and look at our building.” He did not come, leaving the community without any definitive answer. In December, 1950, Pereslavskii got sick and did not get better until May, 1951. On May 24, 1951, when the community’s representatives, accompanied by Parchevskii, went to see the Upolnomochennyi, he told them that the community was taken off registrations, and that he had the Oblispolkom decision to prove it. However, when the community’s representatives asked him to read this decision to them, “he had grown angry and began yelling, accusing us of thinking him a liar because we did not believe his words.” Later on, the believers found out from Vil’khovyi why Pereslavskii did not want to read them the Oblispolkom’s decision—“precisely because he formulated his conclusion as if we had self-liquidated.”<sup>64</sup>

That turn of events left the community in a really awkward situation, paying 75 rubles a month for the rent of the building in which it could not legally gather. “From that point on,” complained petitioners, “we have been deprived of our legal rights provided in our Soviet Constitution—that is, to conduct our prayer meetings as usual.”<sup>65</sup> The community’s subsequent petitions to Vil’khovyi, the VSEKhB, the all-union CARC,

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.



Supreme Council of USSR, and CC of CPCU were all turned down on the grounds of the initial decision of Kharkov Oblispolkom informed by Pereslavskii's intentionally slanted version of community's problem. Vil'khovyi's response to an inquiry by the CC of CPU about this case sheds light on precisely how the CARC chose to interpret the Chuguev community's situation. Bluntly ignoring Pereslavskii's intentional procrastination, his prolonged illness, and the objective condition of the postwar paucity of the available private houses for rent in Chuguev, Vil'khovyi wrote:

In 1948, this religious community's lease for the use of a prayer house expired, and for two years the community did not register a new building as a prayer house...Despite numerous warnings by the Upolnomochennyi of CARC at the Kharkov Oblispolkom [Pereslavskii] concerning the registration of a [new] prayer house, the leadership of this religious community did not take the necessary measures and did not find a new prayer house. Taking into consideration that over the past few years the Chuguev religious community had fallen apart due to not having a prayer house and joining religious communities of the same cult in Kharkov and Rogan', the Ispolkom of Kharkov oblast Soviet of workers' deputies...took this community off registration as self-liquidated.<sup>66</sup>

In Vil'khovyi's opinion, the believers of this "self-liquidated" Chuguev community "merged with religious communities of the same cult in Kharkov and Rogan,' regularly visit the prayer houses there, and participate in religious rituals." Disregarding the fact that the believers had to travel close to 50 kilometers to get from Chuguev to Kharkov (far beyond the 8-10 kilometer criterion established for merging communities of the same cult) and the difficulty of making such a journey for elderly believers, Vil'khovyi concluded: "The transport communication between Chuguev and Kharkov satisfies the needs of workers, including believers. Therefore, we think that it is neither well-founded not expedient to revise the decision of Kharkov Oblispolkom and CARC and restore the

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 50-51.

registration of this religious community.”<sup>67</sup> From the believers’ point of view, their fully intact religious community was given no choice but to join other functioning EKhB communities far from home.

The CARC and local officials continued to exploit this pretext into the 1960s. In 1962, the EKhB community in the town of Kadievka, Lugansk oblast, wrote to the head of CARC in Ukraine that its prayer house “was torn down...due to the construction of multistory buildings” at that location. The city soviet allowed believers “to rent a [different] building on certain indicated streets from private persons.” The community then described an entrapment scenario similar to that in Chuguev:

When we found appropriate buildings in several locations, the city soviet, in the presence of the Upolnomochenni of CARC for Lugansk oblast, refused to allow us to rent in the said houses, saying: ‘Find such a building where no one lives, and which would be appropriate for your community numbering 300 people.’ Clearly, we could not find such a building and will not be able to...Later on, we were denied an opportunity to have a prayer house in Kadievka altogether, since there was another community in the nearby mining town 9 kilometers away where, we were told, we could pray. The mentioned mining town...is called Kirovsk. The community there numbers 150 members and its building can only accommodate them.

After protracted petitioning, we have finally acquired the Upolnomochenni’s permission to hold services in Kirovsk in the prayer house of the local community on different days...The bus route [between Kadievka and Kirovsk] is not serviced by a sufficient number of buses. The buses are constantly overloaded. Many of our members cannot come because they are frail [to cope with the overloaded buses]. We ask the Council for Religious Cults to review our statement and tell us why were the Kadievka believers forbidden to have a prayer house and conduct services when there are prayer house in every town and services are held there?<sup>68</sup>

Ten years after the Chuguev case, the new head of Ukrainian CARC, Litvin, who had recently replaced the much harsher Khrushchev-era Upolnomochenni, Polonnik, faced

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 389, p. 48.

the problem of rampantly expanding religious underground and clearly saw that the continuous entrapment of registered communities on a pretext of not having prayer houses was becoming counterproductive. In his Informative Report for 1963, Litvin provided additional details depicting the mistreatment of Kadievka believers at the hands of local authorities. Having mentioned in a nutshell the circumstances of the prayer house closure due to construction of new buildings in Kadievka and the EKhB community's initial attempts to register a new prayer house, Litvin focused on the detriment of the local authorities' uncalled-for harassment of believers:

However, later it was suggested to the [Kadievka] community to join the Golubovskaia EKhB community. The local organs of authority in Golubovka [possibly a suburb of Kirovsk] did not permit such a merger due to the limited area of the prayer house. For over two years believers of the Kadievka EKhB community, numbering 274 members, gathered in small groups at private apartments while continuing to seek the opening of [their own] prayer house. On December 15, 1963, a group of voluntary guards [*druzhinniki*] detected one such gathering, took 9 of its participants into custody and delivered them to the city's department of militia where they were accused of resisting authorities, insulting officials, and sentenced to 10 days of incarceration each. The arrested persons' heads were shaven and they were placed into jail cells to serve their time. We reported this incident to the CC of CPU and informed the secretary of Lugansk Obkom of CPU, comrade Ponomarenko. However, the issue of Kadievka EKhB community remains unsolved to this day. The organs of authority of Lugansk oblast also have not yet resolved problems with Dolzhanskaia and Rubezhanskaia EKhB communities whose prayer houses were requisitioned several years ago and whose believers continue to gather illegally in private apartments, unceasingly writing complaints about the unjust actions of local organs and seeking to open prayer houses.<sup>69</sup>

In his earlier report, previewing his assessment of problems afflicting

Dolzhanskaia and other communities, Litvin commented:

Some workers of local Soviets...continue to think that the closure of a prayer house would lead to the break up of a religious community, cessation of its

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<sup>69</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 42, D. 5908, p. 99.

activity and, ultimately, to the believers' departure from religion. Guided by these considerations alone, they, under a variety of pretexts, preliminarily close prayer houses in an administrative fashion, do not allow believers for a long time to rent and adapt private buildings for religious purposes, and then submit proposals about taking a religious community off registration because it 'fell apart and ceased to exist.' This is practiced in some regions of Dnepropetrovsk, Zaporozhie, Rovno and Chernigov oblasts.

In the settlement of Dolzhanka, Sverdlov region, Lugansk oblast, the Raiispolkom annulled in 1960 the lease of the EKHB community, closed its prayer house, and did not allow the rent of a different building for the use as a prayer house. A year later, Raiispolkom solicited the termination of this community's registration on the grounds that it did not have a prayer house for a long time, dissolved organizationally, and ceased its activity. In reality, the community did not break up at all. It retained the same number of believers, the content of its *dvadtsatka*, an executive organ and a presbyter, and it is stubbornly seeking the reinstatement of its registration.<sup>70</sup>

Litvin's 1962-1963 evaluation of the standard methods of quantitative reduction, promoted earlier by Vil'khovyi and Polonnik—looking for the slightest signs of the lack of prayer house, presbyter or believers' quorum to dissolve a religious community—clearly suggests that in the aftermath of Khrushchev's antireligious campaign the CARC realized that the mere numeric reduction of religious communities had produced results that were superficial and did not indicate a substantive decrease of religiosity in the republic. Even though the CARC initiated the use of these pretexts in the early 1950s, Litvin now explicitly shifted the blame for the failed practice on the local organs of authority. The believers' unrelenting petitioning of all levels of state authority and their refusal to accept such artificial dissolutions of their communities proved to be an effective survival technique and led to a considerably less frequent application of the mentioned tactic of entrapment from the mid 1960s and onward.

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<sup>70</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5663, p. 83.

### **5. Other Pretexts: the Lack of Presbyters or Believers' Quorums**

The discussion of strategy of quantitative reduction would be incomplete without at least a brief review of the other pretexts frequently employed by this strategy—a religious community's lack of a presbyter or of believers' quorum. In order to shut down a community on the pretext of not having a presbyter, the CARC had to make sure that a community functioned without a leader for an extended period of time. Employing this pretext, therefore, invited the use of the same predatory technique of "entrapment" described earlier. The CARC artificially created obstacles preventing a community from acquiring a new presbyter. If a community's presbyter died, became arrested, or lost his registration due to some violation of the legislation on cults, his community could instantly become vulnerable, since the CARC often exploited such circumstances opportunistically. In 1947, the presbyter of Poltava EKHB community, D.F. Salo, was relieved from his post for making an "unauthorized trip to Bashkiria." According to Salo's apologetic letter to CARC, he did not inform the local Upolnomochennyi about this trip because he thought that "it was a private matter of financial need" having nothing to do with church affairs. From the government's point of view, however, an ordained presbyter ceased to be a private person: he was affixed to his community and had to inform authorities about any projected trips, private or not. Humbled by this experience, Salo concluded his letter with a following plea: "I implore you to restore me to the position of presbyter of Poltava EKHB church. I promise you that such things will

never happen with me again...”<sup>71</sup> In 1948, presbyter of the SDA community in Odessa, D.S. Lukashenko, “received travel permit Number 235 from the VSASD [in Moscow] to travel to Kherson and Izmail oblasts to conduct the ceremony of Eucharist.” Due to his inexperience, as the head of the SDA Church in Ukraine, Yakovenko, explained to Vil’khovyi, Lukashenko “did not contact the SDA spiritual center in Ukraine whose duty it was to discuss this question with the Upolnomochennyi of CARC for Ukraine.” As a result, Lukashenko lost his registration as a servant of cult in Ukraine. Yakovenko asked Vil’khovyi “personally” not to take Lukashenko off registration as a minister for Ukraine and a presbyter of Odessa SDA community, “taking into account that Lukashenko’s case served as a warning to the rest of the SDA ministers and to VSASD.”<sup>72</sup>

In 1948, the EKHB community in village Lishniivki, Manevichskii region, Volynia oblast, wrote a letter “to whom it may concern” (it found its way to Vil’khovyi’s desk) informing that its presbyter, Lushchik, who lived with his son, was arrested under Article 58(1) for failing to fulfill the state quota for timber procurement [*lesozagotovka*]. In fact, the community argued, it was the presbyter’s son who was liable to fulfill the quota. The 56 year old presbyter should have been relieved from such labor mobilization as were the [ROC] priests. Since the community had no one to care for it, it asked for assistance.<sup>73</sup> In 1951, the EKHB Senior Presbyter for Dnepropetrovsk oblast reported to the oblast Upolnomochennyi of CARC:

I hereby inform you that the EKHB community in village Posun’ki, Piatikhatskii region, does not exist, because after the death of its presbyter, A.N.

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<sup>71</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 37, p. 47.

<sup>72</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 76, p. 1.

<sup>73</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 51, p. 6.

Ovcharenko (d. October, 1950), another presbyter had not been elected, and there is no possibility to elect one. I am personally giving instruction to this community to merge with the Lazovatskaia community, located 10 km away, where there is a presbyter.<sup>74</sup>

The EKhB presbyter in village Regushevks, Orzhitskii region, Poltava oblast, I.P. Garan, lost his registration in 1960 because he visited some sick old people who lived in neighboring villages and could not come to prayer services.<sup>75</sup> S.N. Batov, presbyter of the EKhB community in Donetsk, lost his registration in 1962 because while wedding a couple of believers he told the following words to the bride: “Dear sister! Tomorrow, you will be not only a wife, but also a mother. It would be nice, if you raised your child not only physically, but also in the spirit of the Gospel. This responsibility lies on all of us, brothers and sisters.”<sup>76</sup> Someone among those present at the wedding instantly informed the Upolnomochennyi about this mild encouragement of religious upbringing of children implicit in Batov’s wedding sermon, which led to the termination of his registration.

In 1960, both the presbyter and the executive organ of the EKhB community in Zhdanovo-Port were taken off registration because they failed to convince two young men—children of believing parents—to serve in the Soviet Army with weapons in hands.<sup>77</sup> In 1957, Vil’khovyi reported that some SDA leaders, “with the purpose of increasing their influence on youth, permitted youth gatherings at private apartments and

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<sup>74</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 118, p. 1.

<sup>75</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 309, p. 128.

<sup>76</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 389, p. 165.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 100-101.

suburban dachas where, under the guise of promenades and parties, they conducted Bible studies, rehearsed spiritual songs, created string orchestras, and organized inter-communal mutual visitations by youth groups, choirs, etc.” By way of addressing this problem, Vil’khovyi wrote, “we terminated the registration of the Upolnomochennyi of VSASD in Ukraine, F.V. Mel’nik, Senior Presbyter for Chernovtsy oblast, citizen Vovk, presbyter of the Kharkov community, citizen Yarmolenko...”<sup>78</sup> The government also used taxation to force parish presbyters to quit serving their communities. Most Protestant parish presbyters received little or no remuneration from communities and relied on their day jobs for income. The presbyter of the EKHB community in village Komarovka, Korsun—Shevchenkovskii region, Cherkassk oblast, A.N. Zabolotnyi, did not receive any “wages from the community” and worked in the kolkhoz. He had “the same size garden plot as the other kolkhozniks” and “was exempt from taxes.” In 1958, the Financial Department, wrote Zabolotnyi to Andreev, suddenly “demanded that I paid 1,200 rubles in taxes because I bear the rank of a presbyter.” “When I stated to the...Financial Department that I could not pay it,” continued Zabolotnyi, “they suggested that I resign from my post as a presbyter and then the taxes would be nullified.”<sup>79</sup> In the same year, the EKHB Senior Presbyter for Poltava oblast, Tesliuk, reported to Andreev that the community in Poltava paid a 300 ruble salary to its presbyter, N.S. Barabash. Recently, Barabash “received a tax notification to pay almost 2,000 rubles. He got scared, wrote a resignation letter and refused to serve. Poltava is

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<sup>78</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 4608, p. 80.

<sup>79</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 246, p. 23.



now without a presbyter.”<sup>80</sup> To circumvent this government tactic, the VSEKhB leadership attempted to rescue the overtaxed presbyters by suggesting that their taxes be paid from communities’ treasuries. However, only the relatively large communities could bear such additional financial burden. In 1959, the head of Ukrainian CARC, Polonnik, observed: “Small communities that do not have sufficient means are unable to pay taxes levied on their presbyters. In such cases, we win: presbyters refuse to serve, turn in their registration documents, and communities gradually cease to exist. We will continue to apply this policy of increased taxation of presbyterian cadre in the future.”<sup>81</sup>

As the evidence suggests, there were many ways for a Protestant community to lose its presbyter. Since the government forbade Protestant presbyters to serve more than one community, a leaderless community could not count on being served by a presbyter from a neighboring community and could only appeal to its oblast or central leadership to provide it with a new ordained minister. Given the rate at which the CARC terminated the registration of presbyters, the EKHB and SDA leaderships had rather limited pools of available ordained ministers to cover the needs of all registered communities in villages and towns. The chances of promptly finding a replacement presbyter were narrowed down still further by the necessity to obtain the CARC’s approval of his candidacy. The CARC reserved the right to reject any candidates whose reliability was questionable or whom it had blacklisted earlier. The selection process could easily take months, or even a year, thus giving the CARC ample opportunity to shut down a community or merge it

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>81</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5205, p. 78.

with the neighboring one on the pretext of it not having a presbyter for an extended period of time. In 1962, the VSEKhB representative in Ukraine, Andreev, described the case of such intentional “entrapment” of several EKhB communities in his letter to the head of CARC in Ukraine, Polonnik:

With this letter I appeal to you regarding the abnormal conditions of many communities in Dnepropetrovsk oblast, which, for reasons that have nothing to do with them, have no possibility to conduct their prayer services. As the Senior Presbyter for Dnepropetrovsk oblast, G.G. Ponurko, informed us, of the 44 EKhB communities that existed on 1/1/1962, 19 do not conduct their prayer services. Ponurko informed us that representatives of the aforementioned 19 communities asked him to visit them and help resolve their difficulties, especially those concerning the election of ministers in communities, since the communities are not allowed to gather unless they have presbyters. However, the Council’s Upolnomochennyi for Dnepropetrovsk oblast, comrade P.S. Zuev, does not allow Ponurko to go there each time the latter asks for permission...

Concerning the remaining 12 communities, in which either presbyters are lacking or new buildings need to be officially registered—issues that require the involvement of a Senior Presbyter—the Upolnomochennyi said that the Senior Presbyter did not need to go there since it was possible that those communities would fall apart due to the lack of presbyters and prayer buildings, and that the Senior Presbyter must not play the role of an organizer and assist them in solving their problems.<sup>82</sup>

The Soviet legislation on religious cults, in fact, does not make the registration of a religious community contingent on whether or not it has a presbyter. This extralegal requirement was most likely necessitated by the hierarchical structure of Protestant spiritual centers and the function they were to fulfill as internal enforcers of the government agenda concerning religion. These hierarchies simply could not function effectively without such a vital link of authority at the grassroots level as a parish presbyter. A compliant parish presbyter both ensured his community’s observation of all directives and instructions emanating from its spiritual center, and jealously guarded his

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<sup>82</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 389, p. 180(e).

domain from the influence of all sorts of itinerant preachers and non-conformists. While this concern certainly accounted for CARC's meticulous selection of parish presbyters, it did nothing for its other objective—the quantitative reduction of religious communities. In order to achieve this latter objective, the CARC intentionally made the legal existence of Protestant communities dependent on their having presbyters, and further compounded the questionable legality of this requirement by unquestionably illegal practice of “entrapment.”

In comparison with the other pretexts for the closure of religious communities, the so-called “quorum” or “*dvadtsatka*” law represented the heavy artillery of the strategy of quantitative reduction and proved to be a true scourge for a multitude of small Protestant communities whose borderline membership (20-25 people) made them especially vulnerable. Technically, the “quorum law” was not an artificially construed pretext but a legal requirement clearly stated in the acting Soviet legislation on cults. “Not a single religious organization,” the legislation stipulated, “can begin its activity without registering with the organs of Soviet authority. The believers’ petition about the registration of a religious organization or opening of a prayer building...has to be signed by no fewer than 20 adult citizens\* from among local residents and submitted to the executive committee of regional (or city) Soviet of workers’ deputies, with all the necessary documentation attached...”<sup>83</sup> However, by a mere shift of accent from the

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\* An SDA historian, D. Yunak, remarked that during the 1930s, when a Protestant community could only be registered, under the 1929 legislation, if it had at least 20 adult founding members, the grassroots party or Komsomol organizations could be legally formed with just three founding members who were expected to “instantly begin active agitation work towards induction of new members into their ranks” (D. Yunak, p. 320).

spirit to the letter of this law, the CARC could effectively turn this legal requirement into an instrument of entrapment. In 1949, Vil'khovyi reported: "...we orient the Council's Upolnomochennye to achieve greater results in the business of reduction of the number of active EKhB communities: to act more forcefully and systematically check the quantitative content of communities with the purpose of stopping the activity of those that do not have the legally required quorum of believers."<sup>84</sup>

Many Protestant communities with only marginal membership realized that any sudden reduction in their ranks would make them susceptible to closure. The older community members could die while others could decide to move to a different town or become expelled from a community for some religious transgression. Moreover, the CARC could insist on the removal of certain uncooperative or contrary members from any quorum of believers.<sup>85</sup> Anticipating such developments, some small communities tried to merge together and thus increase their membership. Ordinarily, the CARC not only approved but forcefully facilitated such mergers if they led to the disappearance of strong and vibrant religious communities from certain strategic locations. If, however, an attempted merger was but a survival strategy on the part of two numerically weakened communities, the CARC had no qualms reversing its official strategy. In another report for 1949, Vil'khovyi elucidated this strategic flexibility of the Council: "Small EKhB communities strove to unite with the neighboring ones, so that afterwards they could work 'deeper and wider' [Vil'khovyi refers here to one of the EKhB mottos detected

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<sup>83</sup> *Zakonodatel'stvo o religioznykh kul'takh*, p. 83.

<sup>84</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 5667, p. 228.

<sup>85</sup> *Zakonodatel'stvo o religioznykh kul'takh*, p. 81-82.

earlier]. However, we did not always agree to the integration of small communities into large ones, preferring to give the former an opportunity to ‘wither at the root.’”<sup>86</sup>

In order to illustrate precisely how the CARC’s prodding in fact helped certain small communities to ‘wither at the root,’ Vil’khovyi quoted the following examples:

The EKhB community at the farmstead [*khutor*] Veselyi, Krasnopol’skii region, Sumy oblast, numbered 21 believers. Since 1945, there has been no growth here. The [EKhB] spiritual center leadership attempted to enliven the activity of this community in order to boost its growth. But since the community had some violations, we did not allow its ‘strengthening’ by means of transferring there of better activist cadre or by means of equipping it with a ‘quality’ presbyter. Here are some violations permitted by this community: at the height of the harvesting season, prayer services were conducted at the prayer house, which detracted believers from working at the kolkhoz fields on Sundays; and, besides, deserters, that is, persons who refused to serve in the Soviet Army, were detected here—two sectarians, M.G. Kosolapenko and Sereda, refused to take up arms, supposedly because of their religious convictions. As the result of applied measures, both of them were taken out of the community and sentenced. Another sectarian left the village for some unknown destination. Only 18 members remained in the community. With its quorum [*dvadtsatka*] fallen apart, the community was taken off registration and its prayer house in khutor Veselyi closed.<sup>87</sup>

The EKhB community in village N. Pokrovka, Kherson oblast, according to Vil’khovyi, was organized in 1941 during the German occupation. In 1945, this community merged with the neighboring community in village Gromovka. “The merger revitalized the work of this community and they baptized 14 new candidate-members. The Council’s Upolnomochennyi for Kherson oblast began studying the internal life of this community...and took a number of measures to prevent its missionary activity. During 1946-1947, there were no baptisms in this community, but 5 people were expelled for

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<sup>86</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 12, p. 61.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

‘unworthy behavior.’” In 1948, Vil’khovyi continued, the N. Pokrovka community baptized only 2 people, including Evgenia Zaitsev, born in 1924, who had completed a limited secondary school program [*nepolnaia sredniaia shkola*]. “We paid attention to this occurrence,” wrote Vilkhovyi. “Local organizations got involved with educating Zaitseva, and in 1949 she broke her ties with the EKhB community. Besides, 7 more people parted with the community and have not attended prayer meetings during the past two years. Towards the end of 1949, only 19 members remained in the community.” The EKhB Senior Presbyter for Kherson oblast tried “to rescue this community from disintegration” and petitioned about merging this community with the neighboring community in village N. Troitskoe. “But we declined this petition,” wrote Vil’khovyi, “on the grounds of absence of quorum [*dvadtsatka*] in the N. Pokrovka community, terminated its registration and closed its prayer house.”<sup>88</sup>

The CARC, therefore, exercised considerable flexibility in applying its own strategy of reducing the number of small Protestant communities by means of integrating them with the other communities of the same confession. If such integration allowed small and numerically dwindling communities to stay afloat and even revamp their operations, the Council opposed mergers and took decisive steps to artificially bring the number of believers in such communities to that below the required quorum of twenty, which provided a legal pretext for their closure. The evidence shows that a number of simple mundane reasons could land a small community in the numeric risk zone. The Council’s Upolnomochennyi for Vinnitsa oblast, I. Shumkov, reported in 1948:

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 61-62.

At the time of its registration, there were 32 members in the EKHB community in village Cherepashintsy, of which [up to date] 3 died, 2 moved to Tarnopol oblast, 8 former KhEV [Pentecostals] stopped visiting prayer services, and 5 people, who used to come from village Chervonnyi Step,' switched to the community in village Zalivanshchina of the same region. The '*dvadtsatka*' does not exist anymore. The community has only 14 members. I came to the conclusion that since there are only 14 members in village Cherepashintsy, the prayer house should be considered closed, community disbanded, and its registration documents requisitioned.<sup>89</sup>

As referred to earlier in passing, some small communities could find themselves within a risk zone due to the strict observance of their own denominational codes of ethics—a conundrum that required a community to either be dangerously lax towards certain misbehaviors of its members for the sake of maintaining the necessary quorum of believers, or uphold its high moral standards and expel all delinquent members at the cost of risking the community's closure by the CARC. One presbyter, V.V. Marseniuk, who headed an SDA community in the town of Letichev, Kamenetsk-Podol'sk oblast, opted for the latter solution in the case of another SDA community that he used to serve in village Berezovki. In 1948, Marseniuk reported to the Council's Upolnomochennyi for the oblast that the Berezovki community had 20 members. However, "during 1945-1946, more than half community's members were expelled for various violations of religious law." The presbyter attached a detailed list of expellees and their transgressions, ranging from cussing, drinking, and going to dances and movies, to theft, sexual promiscuity, hooliganism, and fighting with one's mother. "Since 10 members of the founding '*dvadtsatka*' were expelled," stated Marseniuk bluntly, "the community had practically fallen apart. I, as a presbyter, do not conduct services in this community...Based on the

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<sup>89</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 47, p. 5.

facts I provided, I suggest that this broken-up community should be closed and taken off registration.”<sup>90</sup> Although this case of ostensible self-liquidation was rather atypical, and most presbyters would not indulge the CARC with such nonchalant honesty, expulsions of members for various infractions of religious law were quite common and the Council certainly monitored such natural reductions quite closely and used them not only to shut down numerically depleted religious community, but also as evidence of people’s disenchantment with religion. Whomever the church expelled as a delinquent, the atheist state embraced as its new convert. In many cases, however, religious delinquents tended to repent and reenter their religious communities.

While the pattern of closures associated with the application of the quorum law remained fairly consistent throughout the 1940s-1960s, the Khrushchev persecution gave rise to some truly paradoxical cases, such as the one described by the presbyter of Novo-Astrakhanskaia EKhb community, Kremensk region, Lugansk oblast. In 1961, the presbyter of this community wrote to Andreev:

Our community has 40 members. We rent a prayer building. The Upolnomochennyi for religious cults, Likhovodov, summoned me and said: ‘I am taking your community off registration due to the small number of members [by law, the community only needed 20 members!]. The other reason is that you have a rented house in which you occupy only one room. But look—your own brotherhood regulates (he pointed at paragraph 29) that believers conduct their services in cult buildings.’ I began to object, saying that even if we had a rented house and occupied only one room, it was a good room having a separate entrance. ‘If you think this is not the right room,’ I said, ‘allow us to find a house that would be appropriate for services in your understanding.’ He said: ‘No, now you have no right to either rent or buy.’

Therefore, we turn to you for advice—tell us what to do. Should we join some other community? But it is impossible. We live in a place that is 30 km away from the railroad, and the nearest communities, either in Starobel’sk or

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<sup>90</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 51, p. 10.



Rubezhnoe, are both 35 km from us. There are no paved roads and, besides, almost all of us are elderly...<sup>91</sup>

An even more ridiculous case was reported to the EKHB Senior Presbyter for Rovno oblast, P.G. Radchuk, by the community in village Sergeevka, Goshchansk region. According to the presbyter of this community, Yancharuk, the Council's Upolnomochennyi, comrade Demchenko, summoned representatives of this community on October 23, 1962, and asked them whether they had any candidates for baptism. "I replied," wrote Yancharuk, "that we neither had any candidate-members this year nor performed any baptisms." The Upolnomochennyi responded: "Since you do not have any growth in your community, I dissolve it and take away your documents. You are now free to go."<sup>92</sup> While the Soviet experience prepared believers to anticipate the possible closure of their communities for manifesting steady growth and increase in baptisms, Demchenko's bizarre motivation for shutting down the Sergeevka community must have left believers in a profound shock, for even though the logical extension of Demchenko's rationale suggested that the community may have been spared had it been growing, the believers recognized all too well the naïveté of such wishful reasoning. Khrushchev's hijacking of the Soviet postwar policy on religion pressured the CARC and its satellite institutions to accelerate the quantitative reduction of religious communities—a task that required a more relativist interpretation of the legislation on cults. While coping with this challenge, the less imaginative of the Council's Upolnomochennyi, such as Demchenko, could easily exhaust the standard repertoire of plausible pretexts and introduce some

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<sup>91</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 389, p. 76.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171.

awkward pretext of their own making. Since the EKhB community in Sergeevka presently had the necessary quorum but no manifest growth, Demchenko indulged his wishful thinking and shut it down on the grounds of its potential loss of quorum.

The report compiled in 1962 by the Council's Upolnomochennyi for Poltava oblast, I. Alekseev, also demonstrates that the state did not discriminate between fecund and stagnant communities, and that the strict observance of the quorum law was only binding on religious communities, not the state. "In the town of Kremenchug," reported Alekseev, "two registered EKhB communities are acting: one on 43 Chkalov Street, and one on 36 Dzerzhinskii Street. They are within 800-1,000 meters of each other. The first numbers about 100 people, the second—about 90. In both communities about 20-30 people attend services on regular days." For the purpose of his argument, Alekseev did not mention the more important attendance on Sundays, and built his argument around the following circumstance:

The community on Dzerzhinskii Street (presbyter V.A. Slobodianik) is the most active...Along with the presbyter, who is one of the more experienced preachers, there is a solid group of other trained preachers from among fanatical sectarians who exercise negative influence on believers. The community grows from year to year. Over the period from 1945 to 1961, 45 people received full immersion baptism and were accepted into the community. Among members of this community, there are 20 people in the category between 24-32 years of age. The community has a strong religious choir numbering 24 people. Among its participants there are youths under the age of 25. In its activity, the leadership of this community permitted violations of legislation on religious cults: attendance of prayer services by children, and sermons by visiting preachers.

Considering that the number of believers in Kremenchug does not require more than one prayer house, and in order to limit the activity of sectarian enthusiasts of the community on Dzerzhinskii Street, it would be expedient to take the latter off registration and close its prayer house. The believers of this

community can satisfy their religious needs in the prayer house of the community on Chkalov Street.<sup>93</sup>

Alekseev's reasoning shows that Soviet antireligious concerns took precedence over the minimum quorum law and, in fact, many other precepts of the legislation on cults, since, with the exception of children's attendance of prayer services, all violations incriminated to this community by Alekseev had no basis in the Soviet law and were only violations of the Council's extra-legal demands reflecting competing interests of the Soviet antireligious agenda. Any vibrant religious community was vibrant precisely because it succeeded in circumventing these extra-legal demands and, therefore, it could potentially be shut down regardless of its satisfaction of the quorum law.

As with the pretexts discussed earlier, the CARC plenipotentiaries could entrap communities whose *dvadtsatkas* experienced a loss of a member by imposing arbitrary deadlines for submitting paperwork for a replacement candidate or by keeping a community uninformed of such deadlines. In 1960, Andreev informed Polonnik that according to Senior Presbyter for Chernovtsy oblast, the EKhB community in village Babino, Kel'menetskii region, numbering 32 people, lost its registration "due to the untimely submission of application for the replacement of a deceased member of its *dvadtsatka*." The Council's Upolnomochennyi for Chernovtsy oblast, related Andreev, "considered it a serious violation that the *dvadtsatka* was not replenished in 14 days and refused to register the new member after the aforementioned time limit expired."<sup>94</sup> Since the Soviet legislation on cults did not provide any deadlines regarding the replacement of

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<sup>93</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 373, p. 34-36.

<sup>94</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 309, p. 147.

a *dvadtsatka* member, but gave the Council's officials the right not to endorse any potential *dvadtsatka* candidate whose background, character or orientation did not satisfy them, the replacement process could easily take longer than any agreed-upon time limit.

Moreover, the CARC's decision to temporarily halt or reduce to a bare minimum the registration of any new or de facto existing Protestant communities, from 1947 and at least through mid 1950s (there were no provisions for such arbitrary move in either the Soviet Constitution or the legislation on religious cults), made the acquisition of legal status by religious communities dependant not so much on the formation of quorum but on a variety of other less tangible issues. In 1947, the head of the all-union CARC, Polianskii, responded to a query by the Upolnomochennyi for Stanislavsk oblast in Western Ukraine, Serdiuchenko, who had a difficulty deciding whether or not the SDA communities in the town of Kolomia and villages Oslavi-Vili and Gutsulovka should be granted registration. Although each of these three communities numbered from 21 to 23 people (enough to form *dvadtsatkas*), Polianskii thought that they were rather small in numbers. His main reservations about registering these communities and their prayer houses, however, had to do with issues of political loyalty, as his recommendation to Serdiuchenko vividly suggested:

It is necessary to thoroughly investigate what sort of people these believers are: their attitude towards military service, Soviet authority, socio-political campaigns, collective labor and, in particular, towards working on Sabbaths (Saturdays). Keeping in mind the strong influence of Adventist-Reformists in Western Ukraine, pay special attention to this question...The Council asks you to think again about the appropriateness of opening these prayer houses.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 26, p. 14.

Meeting these unofficial requirements proved much more difficult for believers than merely forming the officially required quorum of twenty adult local residents of a village or town. In 1950, the presbyter of the SDA community in village Pol'nyi Aleksenets, Gorodotskii region, Kamenets-Podol'sk oblast, informed the Senior Presbyter of the SDA church in Ukraine, Yakovenko, that his community submitted documents for registration to the Upolnomochennyi in January of 1949. The Upolnomochennyi took the documents and told the community's representatives "to wait until he summons them." "A year has already passed," complained the presbyter, "but he has not yet summoned us or given us any documents."<sup>96</sup> Six years later, in his "Informative Note on the Character of Complaints and Petitions Received by the Upolnomochennyi of CARC at the CM of Ukrainian SSR from Believers and Servants of the Cult in 1955 and First half of 1956," Vil'khovyi wrote:

The SDA religious groups in Dnepropetrovsk, Kherson, Nikolaev, Cherkassy, Dzhankoi, Melitopol and certain settlements in Chernovtsy, Khmel'nitsk and Dragobych oblasts stubbornly demand registration. Considering that the mentioned groups consist of negligible number of believers—20 to 30 people in each group—we do not find it possible to raise before the government the question of these groups' registration.<sup>97</sup>

A religious community seeking registration thus faced a number of extra-legal demands and conditions not prescribed in the Soviet legislation but arbitrarily imposed by CARC as part of its bifurcated agenda to observe legislation on one hand, and to contain religion on the other. If the CARC could not deny registration to a relatively large community on the grounds of its reportedly negligible membership, as in the previously

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<sup>96</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 94, p. 6.

<sup>97</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 4263, p. 132.

cited document (an illegal denial, since by law a community only needed 20 members to register), the Council had other means up its sleeve to thwart such community's pursuit of registration. In his recent autobiography, M.P. Kulakov described his attempt to register a 100 member strong SDA community in the capital of Kazakh SSR, Almaty, which he served as a pastor in the 1950s-1960s:

I was sitting across the desk from the commissioner of the Council for Religious Affairs at the Ministries of the USSR in Kazakhstan...and I was on a mission. 'I would like to request an official permit to openly conduct worship services,' I told him. 'Very well,' he said. 'But in order to receive your permit, you must provide us with names, addresses, and places of employment of all your members, and of all nonmembers who come to visit you.' 'Might I quote a line from our Soviet constitution?' I asked. 'The church is separated from the state.' 'Quote as much of the constitution as you wish,' he said sharply. 'But you know as well as I do that there are unwritten laws.' We gazed at each other in silence for a moment. Finally, I rose, said goodbye, and left the office. I knew the danger our members and friends would be exposed to if I agreed to his demands. So our 100-member Almaty church continued to conduct its services in secret, because we were still considered illegal.<sup>98</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

The strategy of artificial prevention of registration of any new communities beyond those registered during the first postwar years and of closure under various pretexts of a multitude of small or non-compliant communities did not remain unaltered and its application closely mirrored oscillations of Soviet antireligious pendulum between the modes of mobilization and relaxation. In the wake of Khrushchev's Thaw, on February 17, 1955, the Council of Ministers of USSR issued Decree Number 259 "On

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<sup>98</sup> Mikhail P. Kulakov, Sr., *Though the Heavens Fall* (Hagerstown, Maryland: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2008), p. 110.

Changes in the Order of Opening the Prayer Buildings.” “This decree,” according to Savinskii, “extended to CARC the right to resolve issues of registration on its own, without submitting them for approval by the government. Moreover, it was suggested in the decree that the CARC registered the de facto acting but not registered religious communities that had prayer buildings.”<sup>99</sup> Although the effect of this decree lasted for only four years, until the beginning of Khrushchev’s crackdown on religion in 1959, many religious communities took advantage of this short-lived opportunity and became legal. The next opportunity came in 1965 with the passage by the CM of USSR (in the form of a Circular Letter Number 21) of “Elaboration on Registration of Religious Communities.” The letter specifically stressed: “When addressing issues concerning registration, the organs of authority must take into consideration that the open and legal activity of religious organizations, being under control of state organs, is preferable to the activity of illegal ones which, as a rule, are not controlled by state organs.”<sup>100</sup>

The Protestant responses (survival tactics) to CARC’s stretching and bending of the quorum law took a variety of forms. Firstly, the “entrapped” communities questioned decisions of local Upolnomochennye in their petitions to CARC’s republican and union-level offices and complaints addressed to the highest Soviet and party authorities in the country. By employing all available avenues of legal recourse, the believers placed the activity of the Council’s oblast Upolnomochennye under the scrutiny by the central authorities. This simple tactic did not always prove effective, but it certainly reminded

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<sup>99</sup> Savinskii, p. 195.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 198.

the Council's subordinates in the provinces that their sloppy work could make them subjects of inter-institutional discourse and recipients of negative publicity and even reprimands. Secondly, some Protestant communities lacking a quorum, especially in far-away villages, could employ deception and doctor their *dvadtsatka* lists by entering members who were not residents of a village in which a community was registered. Given that an oblast Upolnomochennyi, often appropriated by an Obkom or Oblispolkom to do unrelated work (see Chapter II) could not always stay abreast of all current developments in every rural community, such deception could remain undetected for years. In 1947, the earlier mentioned Upolnomochennyi, Serdiuchenko, now in charge of Kamenets-Podol'sk oblast, wrote to Vil'khovyi about the EKHB community in village Golozubentsy, Dunaevskii region. When this community was registered in 1945, it had 23 people. Two years later, when Serdiuchenko came to inspect it, he discovered the following:

The inspection determined that between 1945 and 1947, 7 members left the community for various reasons and, as of March, 1948, there were only 16 members left. In order to prevent this community's dissolution, its leadership arbitrarily listed 9 EKHB believers from village Malye Potany, Minkoevskii region, as members of their community. Malye Potany is located 18 km away.<sup>101</sup>

Since the Golozubentsy community did not have enough members to form *dvadtsatka*, Serdiuchenko thought it "necessary...to close the community's prayer house, dissolve the community, and terminate its registration."<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 47, p. 91.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.



Thirdly, the more numerous and vibrant Protestant communities actively tried to rescue small and stagnant communities from “withering at the root,” as Vil’khovyi would like to have it. The Council’s Upolnomochennyi for Zaporozhie oblast provided an example of such patronage by the EKhB community in Zaporozhie, numbering 434 people. In his report for 1952, he pointed out that this community’s activist core had 7 ordained presbyters, 3 deacons, and about 10 preachers. Noting the frequent trips of this community’s choir to a number of villages, supposedly for creating a more festive atmosphere at the wedding ceremonies held there, he commented: “But in reality, it is a wholly different matter. Firstly, all three communities, to which the choir travelled, were falling into decay, since two of them did not have any youth at all. Therefore, the choir’s traveling to other communities is a form of religious propaganda aiming at reviving these disintegrating communities and attracting new members for them.”<sup>103</sup> Although it was extremely important during this time of registration difficulties to keep stagnant communities from potential loss of registration, in doing so the patron-communities ran the risk of being shut down themselves.

Among the various pretexts for shutting down religious communities, employed under the strategy of quantitative reduction, the quorum law accounted for the greatest number of closures. Although the data I was able to collect is not sufficient to generate a consistent year-by-year count of closures per pretext in all of Ukraine, the following table (Table 3), compiled on the basis of data from 18 oblasts for 1949,<sup>104</sup> and only 14 oblasts

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<sup>103</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 1572, p. 193-194.

<sup>104</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 60.

for 1951,<sup>105</sup> clearly reveals the preponderance of the quorum law as the leading cause for communities' dissolution in these years:

Table 3

*Most Common Pretexts for the Dissolution of Communities*

	Quorum law	Merged with other communities	No prayer house	Ceased to exist	Other violations of legislation	Went over to the KhEV	Total
EKhB closures, 1949	83	17	20	6	5	0	131
SDA closures, 1949	8	0	0	0	0	0	8
EKhB closures, 1951	10	5	13	2	0	4	34
SDA closures, 1951	3	0	1	0	0	0	4

The general progress of quantitative reduction (without specifying closure pretexts) is significantly easier to assess on the basis of regular informative reports submitted by the CARC to the Ukrainian party bosses. The first massive wave of closures was mostly attributable to the repossession by the Soviet state of all prayer houses into which Protestant communities moved during German occupation. “The war certainly elicited, and could not but elicit, the upsurge of religious moods in the masses,

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<sup>105</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 108.

especially in regions exposed to prolonged enemy occupation,” wrote Vil’khovyi in his 1946 report. “But the final count shows that the number of presently registered communities is smaller than their number in the beginning of 1944.” Referring to the data provided by the VSEKhB, Vil’khovyi stated that if in 1944 there were 2,174 EKhB communities in Ukraine, in 1946 the number of registered communities of this denomination dropped to 1,866.<sup>106</sup> In just two years, the state closed down 308 EKhB communities. The following table (Table 4),<sup>107</sup> compiled in 1964 by the head of Ukrainian CARC, Litvin, provides perhaps the most comprehensive reduction data for the registered EKhB and SDA in terms of both communities and membership between the years 1947 and 1964.

Table 4

*Communities and Membership: Quantitative Fluctuations, 1947-1964*

## Evangelical Christians-Baptists

## Seventh Day Adventists

Years	Communities	Believers	Communities	Believers
1947	1875	95457	154	6385
1948	1787	94069	141	5741
1954	1380	92628	116	6909
1957	1351	99458	115	8279
1958	1344	102300	82	8600
1959	1330	104940	114	9240
1961	1208	101000	97	8421
1962	1138	94850	90	7735
1963	1055	90410	84	7476
1964	1025	89000	81	7400

<sup>106</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 4555, p. 45.

<sup>107</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5908, p. 58-59.

The table shows that from 1947 to 1964, there was a net reduction of 850 EKHB and 73 SDA registered communities. Litvin, however, was far from delighted when he wrote in his commentary to this table:

The data confirms that one should not draw conclusions about religious situation in the republic on the basis of number of registered churches and prayer houses alone. Despite that religious communities are closed and taken off registration by the Soviet organs, many of them continue to function and conduct prayer services illegally. This is especially characteristic of sectarian religious organizations. Of the religious communities that are unregistered or taken off registration, 422, comprising approximately 20,000 believers, continue to function *de facto*.<sup>108</sup>

Unfortunately, Litvin did not specify the confessional makeup of these 422 illegally functioning groups. In fact, the Council's figures concerning religious underground remained vague and inconsistent throughout the entire postwar period. For example, in 1955, Vil'khovyi estimated that there were 839 unregistered groups in Ukraine, with the combined number of 20,000 believers. The Pentecostals who refused to join the Evangelical-Baptist brotherhood constituted the bulk of religious underground—400 groups numbering 7,400 believers.<sup>109</sup> According to Polonnik's 1959 report, the underground swelled to 1,100 unregistered groups numbering 22,000 of believers, including 12,271 Pentecostals and 5,888 Jehovah's Witnesses.<sup>110</sup> Only a year prior to submitting his aforementioned 1964 report, which placed the number of unregistered believers at 20,000, Litvin claimed that the religious underground contained 9,800 unregistered believers pertaining to confessions eligible for registration and 24,000

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 4263, p. 71-72.

<sup>110</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5205, p. 59.

pertaining to cults ineligible for registration.<sup>111</sup> Although Litvin apparently began differentiating between the two categories of believers inhabiting the religious underground, it remains unclear what happened to 13,800 followers of illegally functioning groups in the span of just one year. This numeric disparity notwithstanding, Litvin made the following important admission in his 1963 report:

The analysis of accountable data and its comparison with data for the previous year reveal that the reduction of network of religious cults occurred primarily on the account of registered communities and did not touch at all the unregistered groups, the number of which during the year under review increased by 27, from 208 to 235. The network of sectarian underground did not experience any changes.<sup>112</sup>

If in 1963, the number of unregistered but technically eligible for registration groups reached 235 (numbering perhaps as many as 9,800 believers), then in 1964, the number of such groups rose to 422 while the number of believers in them reached 20,000. If such an increase indeed occurred, then Litvin's 1963 assessment—that the quantitative reduction only rechanneled believers from registered communities to religious underground—was pertinent a fortiori and, perhaps, contributed to the issuance in 1965 of Circular Letter Number 21 that gave preference to legalizing religious communities rather than driving them underground.

In 17 years of applying the strategy of quantitative reduction, especially during Khrushchev's crackdown on religion between 1959 and 1963, the Soviet state succeeded in reducing the number of registered EKHB communities by 850 (from 1875 in 1947 to 1025 in 1964), and the number of SDA communities by 73 (from 154 to 81)—a roughly

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<sup>111</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5663, p. 89.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

40% decrease in communities for both of these Protestant denominations in Ukraine. The most numerous Christian denomination in Ukraine—the Russian Orthodox Church—did not fare any better. While it temporarily swelled between 1945 and the mid 1950s from absorbing the entire material infrastructure of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic church, outlawed by the Soviet state, from 1959 to 1963, according to the report of the Council's Upolnomochennyi for the Affairs of ROC, Pinchiuk, to the Ideological Department at the CC of CPU, it lost 3,146 churches, which constituted 37% of all ROC churches in Ukraine before 1959. In some industrial oblasts, the impact of reduction was even more devastating. "During this period," reported Pinchiuk, "the network of Orthodox religious communities was reduced in Kharkov oblast by 45.2%, in Crimea—by 59.5 %, in Dnepropetrovsk oblast—by 82.5%, and in Zaporozhie oblast—by 85 %..."<sup>113</sup>

While these figures indicate that the government delivered a powerful blow to various religious confessions indiscriminately, the same figures testify that the general reduction of registered ROC, EKhB and SDA communities did not exceed 40%, which means that roughly 60% of these denominations' registered communities continued to function legally even throughout the terrible four years of Khrushchev's proclaimed war on religion. To these 60% of legally functioning religious communities should be added thousands of illegally functioning communities and groups. Focusing exclusively on areas of greatest devastation and relying on honest but statistically non-representative personal accounts of religious memoirists led to the development in the scholarship of 1970s and early 1980s of a certain meta-narrative according to which the religious

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<sup>113</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5778, p. 47.

situation in USSR during the 1950s-1960s differed little from that of the 1930s. The now available evidence, however, shows that the Soviet government's postwar commitment to curtailing religion via vigorous enforcement of legislation (however flawed and inconsistent this commitment may have been) made the repetition of the 1930s virtually impossible.

At this point, it is useful to return to Litvin's table introduced earlier, for it helps to segue to the next strategy widely applied by the CARC during the 1960s. The data for the years 1958-1959 in Litvin's table indicates a significant increase in membership in both EKhB and SDA churches, and at the same time registers a considerable drop in the number of communities in these denominations in comparison with 1947. While the number of EKhB communities dropped by 545 between 1947 and 1959, the number of members in these communities increased by 9,483. During the same period, the SDA church lost 72 communities but increased its membership by 2,855 people. In fact, the discovery of this pattern should not have come as a big surprise for Litvin, since his predecessors, Vil'khovyi and Polonnik, noticed a marked disjunction between the ultimate goal of the Soviet antireligious effort and the rather questionable results produced over the years by the strategy of quantitative reduction. As early as 1951, Vil'khovyi, looking at the SDA communities in Chernovtsy oblast, deduced: "At the slight decrease of the number of acting registered communities, one may observe a gradual and systematic growth of the number of SDA believers." To back up his deductions, he provided figures presented in the table below.

Table 5

*Correlation between Communities and Membership: SDA Church in Chernovtsy Oblast*

Year	Number of communities	Number of believers
1947	21	1,151
1948	23	1,409
1950	21	1,511
1951	19	1,741

In four and a half years, Vil'khovyi calculated, “the growth of membership in communities on the account of drawing in new people” equaled to 590 people.<sup>114</sup>

In 1951, Vil'khovyi still thought that the sects grew exclusively “on the account of people who had some kind of familial ties with sectarian families,” and believed that “regardless of the form it takes, sectarian activity in Soviet society, under the conditions of the victorious socialist order, does not have any social basis or social roots engendering religious prejudices in the masses and contributing to the growth of religious communities on the account of new converts.”<sup>115</sup>

In 1956, however, Vil'khovyi's optimism began to wane. Reporting on the growth of the EKhB brotherhood in Ukraine, he wrote:

The number of believers increases primarily on the account of recruited candidate-members. For comparison between the number of recruited candidate-members and those who had in fact received the full-immersion baptism, we provide the following data on the EKhB communities [Table 6]:

<sup>114</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 783, p. 330.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p. 314.



Table 6

*The Growth and Rejuvenation of EKhB Communities, 1951-1956*

Year	Recruited	Baptized	Youth included
1951	2,497	1,988	358
1952	2,581	2,038	301
1953	3,190	2,265	443
1954	3,337	2,258	496
1955	3,622	2,690	561
1956	4,229	3,326	920

Thus, in the course of six years, sectarians of this religious denomination created a reserve of 19,500 people, on the account of which they have been annually replenishing their natural losses and increasing the number of their followers. The comparison of 1951 and 1956 data shows that the number of people, recruited by sectarians as candidate-members, increased twofold. The number of people who received full-immersion baptism had also doubled. Persons who for some reason were unable to receive baptism, in their predominant majority, do not break their ties with sectarians and, in subsequent years, still undergo this ritual...Our study of data on candidate-members in religious communities in 17 oblasts between 1951 and 1956 shows that 50% of people constituting the sectarian reserve are persons engaged in socially beneficial labor at industrial enterprises, institutions, and kolkhozes, among whom there are high-qualification workers and office employees. The number of recruited youths and persons with secondary or incomplete secondary education also continues to grow annually.<sup>116</sup>

K. Polonnik, who replaced Vil'khovyi as the head of Ukrainian CARC in 1959, also noticed the rather hollow success of quantitative reduction and backed his conclusions by a set of figures that slightly differed from Litvin's, but translated into the same sense of failure of quantitative reduction alone to put a stop to the growth of Protestant denominations. Referring to both SDA and EKhB, he wrote:

The picture with this religious organization [SDA] is the same as with the EKhB: the network of communities during the past years decreased significantly

<sup>116</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 4608, p. 68-69.

while the number of believers, on the contrary, significantly increased. 12 years ago, in 1948, there were 135 registered SDA communities comprising 5,035 believers, whereas today there are 106 communities comprising 10, 103 people. As is known, in 1948, 1,638 EKHB communities were registered and they combined 74,777 people. Presently, only 1,292 communities remain registered, but the number of people in them is 104,354.

Only during the past three years (1957-1959) the SDA sect recruited 1,729 people, of which 1,426 received full-immersion baptism. One-third of these newly baptized are young people. The data analysis shows that during the past years some SDA communities increased their numeric strength several times over. Thus the SDA community in the suburb of the city of Stalino, Nesterovka, had 21 members at the moment of registration, but as of January 1, 1960, it had 152 members. In 10 years, 107 people were recruited, including 31 industrial workers, 16 office workers, and 19 pensioners. Among those recruited, 23 are between 18 and 25 years of age, including 8 medical workers, 1 miner, 2 tunnel buttressing installers, 3 instructors of courses of clothing design and tailoring, and one master of the sewing factory. This community is headed by a young and energetic presbyter, Y.F. Tomenko, who has secondary education...

The SDA community in the town of Ilovaisk, of the same Stalinsk oblast, increased its numeric strength six times over. And these are not singular examples. The sect's leadership seeks to appoint as heads of its communities well prepared and educated young people... The facts of recruitment into the SDA sect of representatives of intelligentsia also deserve attention. For example, in Kharkov SDA community there has been for a long time among candidate-members a former docent of the medical institute, Olga Semeniuk... In the town of Makeevka, Stalinsk oblast, the hospital's nurse, Y.I. Vertylo, joined the SDA community... In Cherkassk oblast, a Komsomol member, Vera Tishchuk did the same...<sup>117</sup>

The strategy of quantitative reduction failed because it was predicated on an erroneous assumption that religiosity and the physical space the Protestant communities occupied throughout the Ukrainian landscape were somehow linked, and that the reduction of this space would translate into decreased number of believers. While the shutting down of nearby prayer houses and communities certainly complicated the life of believers by forcing them to make longer trips to communities that were still open, it did not affect believers' disposition towards religion, for the latter had little to do with

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<sup>117</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5205, p. 79-81.

material manifestations of religiosity. Moreover, believers often used their long journeys to the still functioning prayer houses as opportunities to evangelize. The overcrowded prayer houses were in violation of the Soviet sanitation and fire codes, and the state eventually had to either register additional prayer houses or permit oversized communities to build extensions to their existing prayer houses. In either case, religion was regaining its lost physical space.

## **CHAPTER VII**

### **“THE WORSE, THE BETTER”: AN ASSAULT ON CAPABLE PROTESTANT LEADERS**

Depriving communities of effective leadership—eloquent preachers and good organizers—entailed governmental interference in the internal life of communities through careful screening by the CARC of candidates to positions of presbyters, preachers and members of communities’ executive organs. Besides, the government agencies kept a close eye on the activity of competent religious cadre with the purpose of detecting anything that could be construed as a violation of Soviet legislation on cults, thus providing the CARC with a pretext to remove uncooperative leaders from their posts.

Far from dismissing the failing strategy of quantitative reduction, Polonnik proposed to reinforce it by attacking capable Protestant leaders. The most vocal proponent of this new strategy, he nevertheless advanced it with considerable caution. His following comment reveals that even at the height of Khrushchev’s persecution of religion the Soviet government had reservations against the open violation of legal norms:

As the cited data reveals, the religious situation in the republic is quite complicated. It demands from us not only its meticulous study but obligates us to devise such tactical approaches to relations with our ideological adversary which, on one hand, would produce the maximum decrease of activity of religious

organizations and, on the other, would not give causes for justified complaints about the actions of the Council's Uponomochennye in oblasts...<sup>1</sup>

Since Polonnik saw the continuous growth of Protestant communities as dependent on the strength of their young, energetic and capable leadership cadre, the "tactical approach" he proposed consisted in yet greater state interference in the internal life of religious communities, namely, in the selection of presbyters and preachers. In 1960, reporting to the head of the Department of Propaganda and Agitation at the CC of CPU, M.M.

Khvorostianyi, Polonnik wrote:

We have established and strictly enforce the following order of appointment for servants of the cult: not one of them can be officially authorized by the spiritual center to serve a given community until we summon him to our office, have a long conversation with him, and form our opinion about him. And if the parish is small and inactive, but the proposed servant of the cult is a good organizer and capable preacher, we do not give our approval for his appointment.<sup>2</sup>

Polonnik thus proposed to shift the focus of antireligious work to systematic enfeeblement of religious communities' organizational-spiritual core. Later in his report, he propounded this idea even more bluntly:

That is why, the weakening of spiritual leadership of communities by means of replacement of experienced organizers and capable preachers by less prepared ones, using any plausible pretexts to do so, has become our task. We conveyed this task to all provincial Uponomochennye of the Council and obligated them to personally examine the entire corpus of servants of various cults and strive to weaken it, employing all available means (within the boundaries of law, of course), and having this formula as a guide: the weaker the servant of the cult, the better.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 59-60.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

In order to illustrate the effectiveness of this new operative strategy, Polonnik quoted the following examples of its application:

The SDA community in Simferopol was headed by a strong eloquent presbyter, Kostomskii. We found him guilty of involving youth in the community's choir and replaced him with a less prepared presbyter, Makarov, who, some time later, was also taken off registration. Left without leadership, the community began to fall into disorder. In the first quarter of 1960, we will select an even less prepared presbyter for this community with the purpose of bringing it to a collapse...At the head of Tul'chin SDA community in Vinnitsa oblast stood an excellent organizer and eloquent preacher, presbyter Vlasiuk, who was sent there by the spiritual center [VSASD]. We terminated his registration for working with the youth and appointed as a presbyter one of the unprepared members of the community, from among local residents. The growth of the community has stopped. One of the prominent leaders of the sect of Adventists, Belinskii, headed an SDA community in Chernovtsy. Under his leadership, the community worked energetically to increase the number of its members. Due to several violations of legislation on religious cults, Belinskii was taken off registration and the community was soon shut down. A strong organizer and capable preacher, Zhurilo, led the Darnitsa EKhB community in Kiev. Under a plausible pretext, we terminated his registration. Left without an organized leadership, the community lost its prayer house and is about to collapse.<sup>4</sup>

The main task of the Council's Upolnomochennyye, reiterated Polonnik, was to "decrease by any means the activity of clergymen of all cults; ... to meticulously control and contain their comings and goings, and not allow their visitations of other communities." "But," insisted Polonnik, "this has to be done subtly, inconspicuously, without giving cause to justified complaints and protests."<sup>5</sup>

Two years later, during his 1962 inspection tour of Lugansk oblast, Polonnik discovered more evidence confirming the veracity of his initial assessment of the driving

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 64-65.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

force behind the Protestant communities' remarkable activism. Reporting to the head of the Department of Propaganda and Agitation at the CC of CPU, G.G. Shevel', he wrote:

The Lugansk SDA community already has 180 members. This community is served by presbyter F.M. Sirotkin, born in 1925. He has secondary education and is a fanatic and a remarkable orator and good organizer. He organized at the prayer house a choir of 20 singers and selected and trained several capable and eloquent preachers. We visited this community's prayer services and listened to sermons by Sirotkin and two other preachers whom he had trained—Lida Golovkova, born in 1935 and working at the Lugansk infant-feeding center, and 22-year old Nina Tkachenko—a plasterer of the Lugansk building administration. All three propagated biblical texts skillfully and emotionally. The believers listened to them with admiration. In order to weaken the leadership of the SDA community in Lugansk, we have sought out several violations of the order of delivering sermons and charged our oblast Upolnomochennyi to take presbyter Sirotkin off registration.<sup>6</sup>

It should be mentioned here, for fairness' sake, that Polonnik was not the architect of this strategy of enfeebling religious communities' organizational-spiritual core, but rather its more vocal advocate. In fact, this strategy had been evolving under his predecessor, Vil'khovyi, and continued to be applied under his successor, Litvin. In the 1940s-1950s, Vil'khovyi and other Council officials noticed that Protestant communities' internal cohesiveness, dynamism and growth were often attributable to the organizational skills, oratory talents and personal charisma of certain energetic and bold Protestant leaders who could not only sustain and nourish their own communities but keep afloat a number of other stagnant communities and small unregistered groups scattered throughout the a region or province. In doing so, such leaders drew on the entire human and material potential of the more fortunate, large and youthful communities. The government initially reacted to this "problem" with a three-pronged policy. First, in the

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<sup>6</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5589, p. 63.

years immediately following the war, the CARC subjected the entire corpus of Protestant presbyters to a screening, with a purpose of filtering out all those presbyters who had stayed on the German-occupied territories and determining their political profile. In his 1948 report, Vil'khovyi stated the following as one of the Council's objectives:

To dedicate time daily to the study of presbyterian cadre with the purpose of removing persons hostile to the Soviet authority, paying special attention to persons who resided in territories temporarily occupied by the Germans and also to those who completed the 'bible courses' in Germany during the Patriotic War.<sup>7</sup>

In 1949, Vil'khovyi requested that all his subordinates in oblasts added "an extra column" to their informative-statistical reports on each Protestant community, and indicated in it "what was the presbyter doing during the German occupation." Moreover, Vil'khovyi wanted to know what any person delivering sermons was doing during the German occupation.<sup>8</sup> A good example of such information appeared in Vil'khovyi's report for 1950:

A member of the EKHB religious community in village Strizhevka, Goncharuk, 25 years old, received full-immersion baptism in Germany and has in her possession the following certificate:

'This certificate testifies that Vera Pavlovna Goncharuk indeed received the EKHB full-immersion baptism in the Ruhr River in Essen, Germany, which is hereby confirmed by the minister's signature.

V. Menshikov  
5-7-1945'

In a conversation with the Council's Upolnomochennyi, a member of the EKHB community in village Lipno, I.M. Yakimets (born in 1923), who received baptism in a camp of Soviet citizens in Breslau (Germany), stated that sectarian preachers in the camps freely propagated the EKHB teachings, and that two preachers, known to him from the camps, presently reside in Shepetovskii region, Kamenets-Podol'sk oblast, and carry out sectarian activity. This group of

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<sup>7</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 5069, p. 36.

<sup>8</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 61, p. 21-22.



sectarians will now be studied from the point of view of determining their practical activity in communities, their attitude to military service, etc.<sup>9</sup>

Another example (among many) of such information appeared in Vil'khovyi's earlier 1948 report:

Already in 1944, the spiritual center confirmed G.Y. Luk'ianchuk as the Senior Presbyter of EKHB for Kamenets-Podol'sk oblast. Born in 1912 in village Nesvich, Volynia oblast, a Ukrainian with 7 grades of education, he studied for over 3 years at the theological courses. During the German occupation, he preached in the region of Lutsk, from where, in 1942, he was transferred to Kamenets-Podol'sk. As a prominent missionary, he strives all the time to conduct active sectarian work.<sup>10</sup>

On the basis of such evidence, and in the manner resembling the postwar party purges described by Amir Weiner, the CARC removed not only a number of capable presbyters but also many members of communities' executive organs, revisional commissions and *dvadtsatkas*.

Second, the CARC prohibited the oblast presbyters and republican members of the all-union spiritual centers to visit parish communities without a special authorization. For example, in 1947, the head of the Moscow CARC, Polianskii, informed Vil'khovyi that since according to the SDA teaching only the ordained ministers can carry out such ceremonies as Eucharist, weddings, and baptisms through full immersion, and since in Chernovtsy oblast the number of ordained SDA ministers was fewer than the number of communities, those communities that did not have their own ordained minister could, upon informing the Upolnomochennyi and only for the performance of one of the aforementioned rituals, invite one of the ordained ministers. "Traveling of ordained

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<sup>9</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 12, p. 204.

<sup>10</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 5069, p. 160.

ministers to other communities for any other reason,” added Polianskii, “is not permitted.”<sup>11</sup> In the same year, a group of SDA presbyters in Volynia oblast petitioned Vil’khovyi:

Not long ago, we demanded from our Upolnomochennyi of VSASD for Ukraine [Yakovenko] to immediately visit our communities for the purpose of settling certain issues concerning the internal order of our organization and its protection from an invasion by the hostile elements—reformists and others, wandering around under the guise of Seventh Day Adventists. Such a visitation by our VSASD Upolnomochennyi had never occurred. Therefore, we ask you...to help bring about such a visitation.<sup>12</sup>

Obtaining a permit to travel, however, was a multi-tiered procedure associated with considerable red tape, while a slight procedural mistake on the part of a traveling presbyter could easily cost him his job. In 1948, the head of VSASD in Ukraine, Yakovenko, reported to Vil’khovyi that the preacher of the Odessa SDA community, D.S. Lukashenko, received travel permit Number 235 from VSASD in Moscow (stage 1) to travel to Kherson and Izmail oblasts to conduct the ceremony of Eucharist. However, due to his inexperience, he did not contact the SDA spiritual center in Ukraine (stage 2) whose responsibility it was to discuss this question with the Council’s Upolnomochennyi for Ukraine (stage 3). As a result of this mishap, Lukashenko was taken off registration as servant of the cult within Ukraine.<sup>13</sup> In this particular case, due to Yakovenko’s and Odessa community’s passionate pleas, Lukashenko’s registration was restored. In fact,

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<sup>11</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 26, p. 11.

<sup>12</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 37, p. 8.

<sup>13</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 76, p. 1.

the process required even more stages to make a presbyter's trip fully legal. In 1953, the new Upolnomochennyi of VSASD for Ukraine, Mel'nik, petitioned Vil'khovyi:

Since the Kharkov SDA community did not have Communion for almost a year, and since believers of this community constantly write and ask for someone to come and perform the religious ritual of Communion, it is necessary that I go to Kharkov...

In the Piatigorka community, Zhitomir oblast, a schism is taking place over the fanatical views on military service. The presbyter of this community writes that I need to come and settle the debate.

In Vinnitsa oblast, it is necessary for me to meet with certain presbyters who could be commissioned to go to neighboring communities that do not have ordained ministers for the performance of religious rituals. Besides, in communities Bakhny, Shpikovskii region, and Uladovka, Khmel'nitskii region, Vinnitsa oblast, some disagreements took place. The news of these debates has already reached VSASD, and they need to be settled.<sup>14</sup>

Mel'nik also needed to visit the Pozharki community in Volynia oblast and the Chernovtsy community. Vil'khovyi's red-pencil resolution on Mel'nik's petition reveals how the travel permits were obtained and how the CARC monitored the traveling presbyters:

Attention: Shvaiko [Vil'khovyi's assistant]

Send letters to the Council's Upolnomochennye: comrade Slavnov (Kharkov), comrade Zavernin (Zhitomir), comrade Shumkov (Vinnitsa), comrade Prokopenko (Lutsk), comrade Yatsenko (Chernovtsy), informing them that a representative of the SDA spiritual center, citizen F.V. Mel'nik, is coming to visit the SDA communities in their oblasts.<sup>15</sup>

Upon arrival in these provinces, Mel'nik, naturally, would have to contact the aforementioned comrades and keep them informed about his whereabouts. It would not be unusual for a local Upolnomochenni to summon a visiting presbyter to his office and pump him for some information about the communities he visited.

<sup>14</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 156, p. 1.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

The same permit-obtaining routine persisted into the 1960s. For instance, in 1960, the Senior Presbyter of SDA for Ukraine, Parasei, wrote to Polonnik:

In Nikolaev oblast, we have unregistered groups and individual members, considered ‘scattered’ members of the Odessa community. They need to have access to religious rituals as do the rest of the SDA believers. They have repeatedly written to the presbyter of the Odessa SDA community, D.S. Lukashenko, about it. He, in his turn, wrote a statement to me, asking to send him a travel permit to visit the sick and the elderly in the mentioned oblast.

I ask you to allow presbyter...Lukashenko to visit Nikolaev oblast and service the sick and the elderly in the following places: [a list of names and addresses followed].<sup>16</sup>

The implicit intent of this policy was to isolate religious communities and prevent any attempt on the part of central or regional spiritual leaderships to alter the fate of weak communities or coordinate and consolidate the entire denominational network of communities. While this policy equally affected the EKhB parish presbyters, many of whom lost their registration for making unauthorized visitations of scattered groups of their fellow believers, the CARC usually encouraged frequent inspection tours of communities by representatives of the EKhB institute of Senior Presbyters. Unlike the SDA spiritual leaders, the EKhB Senior Presbyters were exempt from performing religious rituals and served primarily as functionaries enforcing the observance of VSEKhB Statutes and other unpopular instructions of their spiritual center (see Chapter III). In the case of the SDA church, with its rather uncooperative spiritual center (disbanded in 1960), the government, on the contrary, strove to isolate parish communities from their central leadership. Already in 1950, Vil’khovyi reported: “The internal life of SDA communities is more autonomous than that of the EKhB

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<sup>16</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 309, p. 58.

communities due to our restrictive measures that liquidated the superstructure of spiritual leadership in the persons of [SDA] oblast-level preachers.”<sup>17</sup> Since “the main function of SDA servants of the cult,” in Vil’khovyi’s opinion, “was propaganda of the impending ‘coming of Christ to earth,’ of the ‘nearing end of the world,’ and the attraction into the sect of new ‘people of god’ who would enter the coming ‘millennial kingdom of Christ,’”<sup>18</sup> the CARC found it more expedient to limit contacts between SDA parish communities and their influential provincial and central leadership to a bare minimum.

In 1963, Litvin reported:

The observation of the activity of the SDA sect reveals that the former leaders of the all-union center and former Senior Presbyters, Parasei and Bondar’ in particular, try to retain their influence over the local communities—they maintain correspondence with their presbyters, meet with them and give recommendations directed at boosting the activity of communities. The repeated visits of communities in Chernovtsy oblast by the former Senior Presbyter, Bondar’, noticeably revived their activity and, as a result, the number of new recruits in these communities increased...The former Senior Presbyters who had been removed from leadership, Parasei, Bondar’, Komarov, Vasiukov and others, were warned by us that if they did not stop interfering in the affairs of communities and continued to lead them, we would be compelled to raise the issue of bringing them to justice.<sup>19</sup>

The SDA church was apparently not alone in the category of religious denominations deemed for artificial decentralization and diffusion into autonomous communities headed by parish pastors with severely limited prerogatives. In 1949, Vil’khovyi made the following telling comment concerning the Council’s stance toward the Hungarian Reformats of Zakarpatie:

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<sup>17</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 783, p. 80.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>19</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5663, p. 96.

Having in mind the established traditions of the Reformat Church—its outward democratic orientation in the area of administration of the economic life of a parish—we have decided to push the believers' organs of self-government in the direction of assuming authority over the entire activity of a parish, to guide the activity of [community's] executive board not in the direction of spreading the influence of a pastor, but in the direction of internal church governance, so that these organs of self-governance could become masters of a parish, reducing the role of a pastor to mere performance of religious rituals.<sup>20</sup>

Essentially, this measure constituted the third component of the three-pronged strategy of internal enfeeblement of religious communities and aimed at decentralization of certain religious denominations at the parish level through instituting a diarchy that would work towards reducing a presbyter or a pastor, already deprived of the freedom of traveling, to a mere figurehead incapable of serving as an organizational and spiritual center of a community. Moreover, the government could exploit this diarchy to manipulate a community by pitting its executive board against its presbyter.

The Protestant communities were quick to realize that the loss of their capable presbyters not only portended potential closure of their communities, but also left their members leaderless, uninspired, disoriented, and susceptible to squabbles and divisions. In order to protect their presbyters and make them less conspicuous to authorities, the parishioners—members of executive boards, revisional commissions, *dvadtsatkas*, deacons and deaconesses, and ordinary members—began to take upon themselves the task of carrying out such prohibited activities as missionary work, religious education of children and candidate-members, visitations of sick and elderly fellow-believers in far away villages, communication with other communities, etc. For a while, the CARC

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<sup>20</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 12, p. 78.

hoped that by encouraging Protestant presbyters to quit their day jobs and become full-time servants of the cult in the pay of their communities, it would turn these restless zealots into complacent functionaries and confine their activity to prayer houses alone. However, these so-called “freed from productive labor” presbyters, even those who had already done time in the camps, could not suppress their inner calling to evangelize and build strong communities. In 1947, analyzing the corpus of EKhB presbyters in Dnepropetrovsk oblast, Vil’khovyi specifically focused on the former prisoners: “That they are not going to abandon their ‘spiritual work’ soon is confirmed by the fact that those of them who had done 3-8 years in the ITLs [Correctional Labor Camps] resumed their former work as soon as they had been released.” The attitude of presbyters who quit their day jobs to serve their communities full time, according to Vil’khovyi, did not alter either:

29 of the total number [81] of presbyters do not work in either kolkhozes or industries. In part, these are retired kolkhozniki and invalids of labor who are, in their majority, professionals [professional preachers]. It should be noted, that of 380 people baptized in 1946, 263 were baptized in communities with freed [full-time] presbyters, that is, in communities that had the cadre to indoctrinate novices... Therefore, I have to pose the same question again: will it really be easier for us to implement our work through freed presbyters? I do not mean that a presbyter’s participation in productive labor would alter his presbyter’s ideology—‘only a grave can straighten a hunchback’—but he would have less time and opportunity to recruit new members and would depend less on the community. If Shokalo—the presbyter of Karnavatskaia community...asked the community for help and subsequently bought a cow and 4 beehives, then he will apply all his strength not to lose the community’s trust and to make it stronger and larger.<sup>21</sup>

Having expressed his frustration with the ineffectiveness of the Council’s strategy to tame the presbyters, Vil’khovyi also observed a change of strategy on the part of the now

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<sup>21</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 4555, p. 248-249.

closely monitored full-time servants of the cult: “The freed presbyters are...not so much engaged in the immediate work of ‘educating’ believers and recruiting new members as in organization of cadre who would be doing this work.”<sup>22</sup> The head of CARC was thus quick to detect the emergence of a new Protestant survival strategy.

Already in 1946, during his tour of Elanetskii region, Nikolaev oblast, Vil’khovyi noted:

Here, in Elanets itself, in plain sight of the regional leadership, so-to-speak, serves as a presbyter of the EKHB community, Pyotr Grigorievich Lugovskoi, who works as an elementary school teacher in village Feodor-Mikhailivki [near Elanets]. In village Feodor-Mikhailovki, where Lugovskoi teaches, there is also a EKHB community. But here, Lugovskoi promoted Evtushenko as a presbyter while having listed himself formally as a secretary of the church council. However, in reality, Lugovskoi leads this community, and it has already grown to encompass 78 people. Thanks to the teacher Lugovskoi, this community has a lot of youth—students of his school...When the Council’s Upolnomochennyi, comrade Kaporin, told about this teacher-presbyter to the head of the Department of Cadre at ObLONO [Provincial Department of People’s Education], comrade Slovachevskii, the latter was surprised and said: ‘We had no clue that Lugovskoi was a not only a religious person, but also a religious leader...’<sup>23</sup>

In 1948, Vil’khovyi observed a similar pattern in the EKHB communities in Oryninskii region, Kamenets-Podol’sk oblast. Having noted that most of religious activists in this region were either formerly repressed or dekulakized and joined religious communities “with the arrival of German hordes,” he commented:

The leadership cadre and executive boards of the EKHB communities in Oryninskii region were not randomly selected. Sometimes, a presbyter, or a community’s leader serves only as a façade, whereas in reality, a community is lead by ‘trained’ persons. In village Zalis’e-1, the community is essentially headed by a deacon, A.M. Vishnevskii...During the German occupation, he went to Germany and spent 3 years there. While in germany, he maintained close

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 383-384.



relations with German missionaries. They supplied him with religious literature in Ukrainian, which he brought back with him and is now sharing it with others. In village Niverki, the EKHB community is actually headed by the leader's assistant—A.P. Gumeniuk... Or take the EKHB community in village Privorot'e, for example. It does not have an ordained presbyter. The community is headed by A.V. Koval', but the believers consider him 'barely literate.' That is why, when the Germans still occupied this territory, the community selected and sent to the bible courses in Kamenets-Podol'sk, Antonina Vasilievna Shcherban', born in 1915 and baptized in 1929. She is well educated and descended from the stratum of middling [*seredniak*] peasants. In 1938, her husband was repressed while she was deported from the border zone. Presently, she works as a crew leader at the kolkhoz, but, essentially, heads the *dvadtsatka* of religious community. She is assisted in this work by Valentina Mikhailovna Boiko, born in 1924 and baptized in 1942 under Germans. Boiko has 7 grades of education, a former VLKSM member, currently working as a nurse at the regional children's clinic.<sup>24</sup>

Since, in the Council's assessment, the problem of religious activism and community-building encompassed a much wider Protestant social strata and could not be solved by the mere profiling and removal of trained and energetic presbyters on the account of their activity during German occupation, former convictions or some current violations of legislation on cults, and since many religious communities intercepted the government intentions and protected their presbyters by delegating the more dangerous tasks to deacons, members of executive boards and *dvadtsatkas*, who were not accountable as servants of the cult and, hence, could not be easily removed or prosecuted under the Soviet legislation, the CARC adjusted its strategy and, on August 27, 1958, issued Instruction Number 24-31 that required to "register all deacons and deaconesses in religious communities of the EKHB and SDA as servants of the cult."<sup>25</sup> All Council's Upolnomochennye were obligated to collect and enter data on deacons in their statistical

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<sup>24</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 5069, p. 162-164.

<sup>25</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 246, p. 12.

reports. This was a preparatory step for the next measure designed to make life quite difficult for these middling ranks of communities' leadership. On September 30, 1958, the Ministry of Finance of USSR issued "an elaboration (Number 25-50) on the order of taxing servants of religious cults (presbyters and deacons) in the rural communities of the EKhB and SDA, who are kolkhozniks and receive no income from the performance of religious rituals." Commenting on this new development, Vil'khovyi wrote to his subordinates:

In conjunction with this, provide financial departments with data on registered presbyters and deacons of religious communities. Also, inform financial departments about leaders of the underground groups of believers (presbyters and deacons)..., in particular, Pentecostals, JW's and others, with the purpose of taxing them also on the same uniform basis as people carrying out de facto responsibilities of presbyters and deacons in their groups of believers.<sup>26</sup>

The measure clearly intended to tax deacons into submission in the same way as taxing presbyters earlier drove many of them to resign their posts due to the inability to pay excessive taxes. In his 1959 report, Polonnik restated the necessity of this counter-strategy in the following words:

Experience has shown that if a community that does not have a permanent minister, it withers. Therefore, we set a goal for ourselves—to maximally lower the activity of servants of the cult...The matter is more complicated with sectarian communities. If a Catholic or Reformed Church community is left without leadership with the removal of a priest or a pastor, in a sectarian community, almost any believer can carry out responsibilities of a cult servant.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>27</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5205, p. 66.

The government's levying excessive taxes on deacons certainly undermined the ability of Protestant communities to protect their presbyters and forced the Protestant leaders to devise a counter-strategy of their own, of which Polonnik complained:

The leaders of religious organizations, including the EKhB, surely do not lack flexibility. For instance, almost all EKhB communities used to have deacons. We included the latter into the category of servants of the cult and began, through appropriate organs, to levy taxes on them. The VSEKhB then liquidated positions of deacons, having preserved them only in the largest communities. The former deacons became preachers, and preachers, as is known, are not considered servants of the cult and are not subject to taxation. Thus, over 1,000 EKhB deacons (and they de facto continue to be deacons) escaped from taxation.<sup>28</sup>

Far from being passive victims of state oppression, the Protestants engaged the state in constant jousting of strategies and counter-strategies. As the government continued to widen the target group of religious activists, religious communities began to delegate more and more responsibilities to the mid and low-ranking members of communities, preferably to younger and better educated people. This process of internal democratization clearly contradicted the government's initial plan of transforming Protestant communities into rigidly structured hierocracies and made the work of surveillance so much more difficult for the CARC. Already in 1949, Vil'khovyi listed the following perceived methods of sectarian work:

- periodic sending to communities of 'qualified' preachers
- striving to increase membership in communities on the account of intelligentsia; attempting to recruit wives of Communists and even young Communists, in particular from among students
- focus on quality when selecting the cadre of presbyters; replacement of physically weak and feeble old-timers with educated youths<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>29</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 12, p. 62.

In 1952, Vil'khovyi reported that "in order to strengthen their communities organizationally, the EKhB 'promote' youth to positions of presbyters and preachers," and provided examples of "the use as preachers of persons with completed secondary and college education." Here is just one of such examples:

In the EKhB community in the city of Aleksandriia, Kirovograd oblast, there is someone named Ivan Semenovich Gnida, born in 1920 and a Baptist since 1943. He finished a pedagogical institute and works as an engineer at the rate-setting research station Number 9. He plays the role of presbyter in the community, enjoying respect among the believers.<sup>30</sup>

Litvin's 1962 report conveyed the same sense of alarm and even frustration with the CARC's inability to effectively curb this tendency and also revealed the scope of the government interference in the internal life of registered religious communities:

In order to retain believers under their influence, to prevent the breakup of withering communities and to disseminate religious propaganda among the population, and first of all among the youth, the clergy and sectarian activist core employ diverse forms and methods. They pay special attention to the preaching activities and try to mould communities' executive organs in such a way that they include educated and eloquent preachers, young people in particular, who have secondary or incomplete secondary education. It requires great efforts not to allow these youths firstly to receive the full-immersion baptism and, secondly, to be elected into executive organs of communities. Using the right to object, provided in the legislation on religious cults, the local organs and Council's Upolnomochennye rejected many attempts by sectarian leadership to replace elderly, barely educated and uneducated presbyters and members of executive organs in communities with trained youths having organizational skills and eloquence.<sup>31</sup>

According to Litvin, the Council worked hard to "lower the quality of presbyters and preachers," "removing, under various pretexts, a part of experienced and active servants of the cult and also members of executive organs, among which there were influential

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<sup>30</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 1572, p. 238-239

<sup>31</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1 Op. 24, D. 5663, p. 90-91.

and popular preachers.”<sup>32</sup> During the year under review (1962), Litvin claimed, “88 servants of religious cults, mainly presbyters of the sects of EKhB and SDA, and 328 members of executive organs were taken off registration for violations of Soviet legislation; in 64 communities, executive organs were taken off registration entirely and in 11 communities, *dvadtsatkas* were disbanded.”<sup>33</sup> The vigorous implementation of this strategy “reduced the number of preaching personnel in registered EKhB and SDA communities by 50%.” Moreover, the Soviet authorities’ meddling resulted “in the leadership of the overwhelming majority of communities being composed in such a way that in many, especially rural, communities not all members of executive organs and revisional commissions were capable of delivering sermons at prayer meetings.”<sup>34</sup>

The believers’ numerous petitions, of which I select just few, not only confirm the application of this strategy, but vividly illustrate the impact of governmental meddling on their communities. In 1960, the EKhB Senior Presbyter for Dnepropetrovsk oblast, Ponurko, complained to Andreev that the implementation of the VSEKhB New Statutes in communities was complicated by the following circumstance:

In paragraph 36, it is stated that the election of servants of the church, including the executive organ and revisional commission, is carried out by the community. However, in our situation, those whom the church elects, the Upolnomochennyi disapproves and enters his own candidates—those who cannot conduct affairs wisely and beneficially and who can only occupy the place...<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>35</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 309, p. 115.

In the same year, the presbyter of the EKhB community in village Regushevka, Orzhitskii region, Poltava oblast, I.P. Garan, lost his registration because he visited a couple of sick elderly believers living in other villages and not being able to come to Regushevka for prayer services. Describing this incident to Polonnik, he wrote:

Having accused me of this guilt, the Upolnomochennyi took away my registration certificate and appointed, personally and without consulting the Senior Presbyter, the new leader of our community—A.M. Khil’chenko. Neither the church council nor dvadtsatka participated in this election. He was appointed by the Upolnomochennyi. Although a member of our community, this Khil’chenko has no experience of preaching and has very strange ideas about the Holy Scripture, which may lead the community into an unhealthy state...<sup>36</sup>

In 1962, the EKhB Senior Presbyter for Vinnitsa oblast, D.D. Shapovalov, reported to Andreev that the local authorities “arbitrarily closed the prayer house” in village Sloboda Gulivskaia. After the believers’ appeal to the Upolnomochennyi and regional authorities, it was agreed to reopen the prayer house on the condition of reelecting the community’s executive organ. However, when the community submitted the list of its promoted candidates, the Raiispolkom Secretary “declined the candidatures of two brothers who did not reside in village Sloboda Gulivskaiia.” The community conducted a second election and submitted the list of alternative candidates. This time, “the Raiispolkom Secretary declined all brothers, even those residing in Sloboda Gulivskaia.” The rest of Shapovalov’s letter illustrates precisely how the government strategy described earlier by Litvin incapacitated this particular religious community:

Thus, we were left with an option to elect the executive organ exclusively from sisters who had no gift of serving with the word [preaching]. However, it is stated in our Statutes that members of the executive organ and revisional

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 128.

commission have the right to preach. But, it turns out, that although we have the executive organ, we have no one capable of preaching... That is why, I ask you to contact the Upolnomochennyi of CARC for Ukraine, comrade Polonnik, so that he could provide an explanation as to what could serve as a pretext for the decline of candidates for the executive organ. I assume that such arbitrariness as that practiced by the Raiispolkom Secretary goes against the laws of the Soviet state and forces believers to violate the VSEKhB Statutes. Only those who have the gift of preaching can preach. But such people are not allowed to be elected to the executive organ...<sup>37</sup>

In 1961, The EKhB Senior Presbyter, Mel'nikov, described an even more telling incident of governmental interference in the internal life of religious communities in Zhdanov, where the EKhB community numbered 457 people. The Upolnomochennyi took this community's executive organ off registration, "because in 1960 several young believers, who were not members of the community, were illegally baptized by an unknown person." The community's leadership apparently did not know about it and, hence, could not take any measures to prevent it. Nonetheless, the Upolnomochennyi suggested that the community elect a new executive organ and revisional commission. When the list of candidates—3 members for the executive organ and 3 to the revisional commission—were submitted, "the Upolnomochennyi instantly declined 2 people, namely, Kurchenko, because he supposedly favored the illegal groupings [in Zhdanov], and Barko on the account of his young age." The remaining 4 candidates were not registered likewise. "I.V. Batanov—the former member of the revisional commission," continued Mel'nikov, "was placed into the position of a substitute presbyter." Mel'nikov provided a brief characterization of this Upolnomochennyi-promoted substitute presbyter:

Batanov is an old man, a half-paralyzed invalid who walks with great difficulty. He sometimes experiences seizures during which he completely loses

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<sup>37</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 389, p. 94.

consciousness...Batanov declares that he cannot perform spiritual ceremonies, especially the Communion and baptism, since he cannot even hold bread, much less break it. Batanov also announced that he could not supervise the community's members or participate in the work of executive organ, since he suffers from clotting of brain vessels and doctors told him to avoid anything that may upset him. The only thing he can do is to lead prayer services in the community [to say a few words introducing speakers].<sup>38</sup>

The other "government-approved" candidates for various executive-spiritual positions in this community, Mel'nikov opined, were hardly any better:

Trofimov, whom the Upolnomochennyi approved as a member of the executive organ, almost cannot preach and certainly cannot substitute as a presbyter, since he has never done any service. V.A. Matiash, who was approved as a member of revisional commission, has poor health and rarely attends prayer services. A.T. Dudiuk, a member of revisional commission, whose candidacy the Upolnomochennyi approves, is one of the more capable for service among all four. However, he does not have any authority in the community because he was expelled 2 or 3 times in the past for different transgressions. Thus, the community finds itself now in the most difficult situation, since it has no spiritual servants. And those who could carry out service do not get the Upolnomochennyi's consent for two reasons: either they have been noticed by the Upolnomochennyi as favorably disposed toward the illegal groupings [pro-Orgcommittee], or simply because they are not members of the dvadtsatka. The Upolnomochennyi demands that the new leadership is elected only from members of dvadtsatka. But there is no one in the dvadtsatka who could be elected. The leadership headed by Batanov does not keep an eye at all on anything or anyone, which is to the advantage of various persons who organize the illegal groupings in Zhdanov.<sup>39</sup>

As Mel'nikov illustrated, in this particular case, the government's meddling in the affairs of this registered EKhB community certainly succeeded in weakening it, but only at the expense of making it more vulnerable to the influence of more radical underground groups.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.



Despite his own statistical figures, purportedly indicating the CARC's success in weakening Protestant communities, Litvin could not but admit in 1962 that "these restrictive measures, unfortunately...do not always fully pay off and do not provide positive results." Aside from explaining this failure by a rhetorical and routinely invoked "unsatisfactory conduct of antireligious work and weakly carried out control over the activity of religious communities," he also mentioned some objective factors that contributed to the remarkable perseverance of Protestant communities:

Those presbyters and preachers whose registration documents were revoked continue to stay with the same communities and, undoubtedly, exercise some degree of influence on the leadership of these communities and believers. Thus, in the SDA community of village Piatigorka, Zhitomir oblast, a very active and influential presbyter was taken off registration. Instead of him, the community elected, at the Council's Upolnomochennyi's insistence, a hardly literate, inexperienced and docile sectarian. As it later turned out, this community continued to be de facto led by the presbyter whose registration was terminated. He delivered sermons, performed rituals of Eucharist and baptism, and engaged in religious propaganda outside the prayer house.<sup>40</sup>

Polonnik's strategy of undermining and weakening the Protestant communities' organizational-spiritual core was the government's reaction not only to the continuous growth of the already registered communities but also to the emergence of new groups of believers in various locations—groups that constituted kernels of potentially new communities. The energetic presbyters and eloquent preachers along with the whole array of their young and better educated trainees served as religious communities' representatives in the wider world and, naturally, stood at the forefront of missionary work. Any believing kolkhoznik or industrial worker, whose professionalism, work ethic

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<sup>40</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5663, p. 87.

and high moral standards earned him/her the respect of the non-believing fellow-workers, or any believing student, whose secular education did not conflict with his/her religious worldview, posed a threat to the Soviet state, for such a person challenged the assumption of Soviet ideological gurus that religion was the abode of largely illiterate grandpas and grannies or of profiteering crooks and social parasites. Therefore, the CARC's next strategy—combating any form of religious proselytism—often targeted the category of believers who were already under attack as eloquent preachers and energetic community organizers.

**CHAPTER VIII**  
**PREACHING THE WORD OF GOD**  
**IN SOVIET CONDITIONS**

The ban on proselytism targeted not only direct forms of evangelism, such as engaging non-believers in religious conversations, inviting them to religious services, sharing religious literature with them, or providing material assistance to the needy, but also any attempts on the part of vibrant, dynamic religious communities to patronize their stagnant counterparts elsewhere, usually in distant villages, by sending out groups of activists, choirs or orchestras. Such inactive but lingering communities, in Vil'khovyi's words, were to be given an "opportunity to wither at the root."<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the government considered it an indirect form of proselytism if a religious community's active participation in the economic life of a kolkhoz or the renown of its members in a village for their healthy and morally upright lifestyles turned such a community into a local attraction and served as a positive example of religion's transformative powers.

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<sup>1</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 12, P. 61.

## **1. Protestant Work Ethic and Exemplary Lifestyles as Forms of Religious Proselytism**

In 1951, Vil'khovyi complained: "Despite our restrictive measures directed at the reduction of their activity and weakening of their religious propaganda, the EKhB continue to engage in the latter, adapting to modern conditions of Soviet reality..." More specifically, the EKhB leaders were culpable of the following:

A lot of attention is dedicated by them to the educational-spiritual work among the ordinary mass of believers and candidate-members: to strengthening of their discipline, to regular attendance of prayer meetings and observance of rituals, to the exercise of self-control in all daily activities, family life and personal behavior. At the same time, by way of adapting to conditions of Soviet reality, the leaders strive to instill in their members exemplary attitude towards social labor in industries and kolkhozes. All of this represents one of the methods of attracting attention to the sect and elevating its status among the adjacent population. But this is a secondary and subordinate task. The main objective of sectarians' activity is the work of drawing new members into their ranks, accompanied by proselytism.<sup>2</sup>

Vil'khovyi was certainly correct in detecting a connection between Protestant lifestyles and proselytism. Many believers used their work ethic and high moral standards as non-verbal forms of missionary work:

The Adventists strive to reinforce their religious propaganda by examples of believers' solidarity and their 'productivity' at work. For example, the presbyter of the SDA community in village Mar'ianovka, Korninskii region, Zhitomir oblast, N.F. Sibrenko, organized two weeding and mowing work crews from believers. The local authorities did not object this initiative but instead lavishly praised the sectarians' work at the kolkhoz assemblies. Only the Council's Upolnomochennyi's interference put an end to this sectarian work [in the sense of sectarian propaganda].<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 783, p. 313-314.

<sup>3</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 4555, p. 68.

In 1948, concluding his protracted narrative describing the recruitment into the Pentecostal community in village Fedorovka, Malinskii region, Zhitomir oblast, of the former Komsomol member, Senia Lysenko and a number of prominent workers, including the wife of a party member, Vil'khovyi remarked bitterly:

The chairman of administration of the kolkhoz 'L.M. Kaganovich' in village Fedorovka, Cherniak, a member of VKP(b), maintains close ties with sectarians, striving by all means to elevate their status. In a conversation with the Council's Upolnomochennyi, Cherniak, in the most undisguised fashion, tried to asperse the kolkhozniks and praise sectarians, stating: 'If all of my kolkhozniks were believers, I would have fulfilled and over-fulfilled every assignment.'<sup>4</sup>

In the town of Uman', Kiev oblast, reported Vil'khovyi in 1949, "due to the efforts of a 'prominent' young man—a second year student of a pharmaceutical school, citizen Skirda—a youth choir of 20-25 people was created at the EKHB religious community." When the Council's Upolnomochennyi approached the Second Secretary of the Uman' City Committee of VLKSM, the former happened to know that Skirda served as a choir director at the local EKHB community and had the following to say about him and other sectarians:

Ah, you are talking about the guy who leads the choir over at the Baptists—we know him very well. This is student Skirda. He is not a bad guy in our book. He is the best student and an excellent editor of a wall newspaper at [the pharmaceutical] school. When the students' practical abilities were tested, he was given the most backward drug store. In just one and a half months, he turned it into an advanced one...And what can be done if the youth does not succumb to our influence? Besides, even if they consider themselves believers, the young people who come from the Baptists are good students and workers. We don't have any problems with them.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 5069, p. 176.

<sup>5</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 5667, p. 218.

In 1951, Vil'khovyi quoted the following passage from an article "On the Service of Women in the Church" that appeared in the VSEKhB official publication, *The Brotherly Messenger*: "There is no doubt that a Christian woman can do for the kingdom of God more than several men." The head of Ukrainian CARC interpreted this passage as the EKhB spiritual center's intentional calling on women to become more involved in religious activism, and provided proof of this calling producing actual results:

Sectarian women are just as effective in the capacity of EKhB preachers as presbyters of this church. The church attributes special significance to women who distinguish themselves at their places of employment, particularly to women from the working intelligentsia. In this respect, a sectarian from the Zolotonoshskaia EKhB community, Galina Ivanovna Davydenko, serves as a characteristic example. This is how the Council's Upolnomochennyi for Poltava oblast describes her: 'G.I. Davydenko was born in 1924, completed 9 grades of secondary school, and works as a master of 6<sup>th</sup> rank at the clothing manufacturing factory in the town of Zolotonosha. She is among the leading workers of this factory, fulfilling production norms up to 150-160%.'<sup>6</sup>

In the same report, Vil'khovyi also noted that "the chairman of the kolkhoz 'Road to Socialism,' comrade D.K. Ostrovskii, asked presbyter of the EKhB community in the settlement Novaia Odessa, Dunduk, to organize a crew from believers to weed out the cotton fields."

The presbyter honored the kolkhoz chairman's request and put together a brigade from believing house wives, craftsmen and any believers who could work. He headed this brigade himself, and they did a good job... Comrade Ostrovskii was summoned to the Raiispolkom with respect to this issue, where it was explained to him that his actions were incorrect.<sup>7</sup>

"The presbyter of the Novo-Moskovskaia EKhB community, Liapichev," reported Vil'khovyi in 1952, "working as a plasterer at the construction bureau, is a Stakhanovite

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<sup>6</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 783, p. 395.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 398.

who taught his craft to over 100 people of his brigade. He fulfills his assignment to 170%. The local newspaper published an article about the work of this presbyter as a plasterer.”<sup>8</sup> Another presbyter of the EKHB community in the town of Marganets worked as a hewer in a mine, “fulfilling his labor assignments to 150-160%” and enjoying “great authority among the workers.”<sup>9</sup> During a routine visit to the Council’ Upolnomochennyi, the presbyter of Elizavetokhoroshevskaja EKHB community, Myrshavka, proposed “to construct, by the efforts of believers, a brick factory where only the members of his community would work.” When the Upolnomochennyi asked Myrshavka why the believers only wished to undertake this business, the latter replied: “Our kolkhoz chairman does not care about it, but the believers would work honestly.”<sup>10</sup>

In the same report, Vil’khovyi also paid attention to the attraction of Protestant communities for young non-believing women:

Presbyter of a community in the workers’ settlement ‘Krupskaia,’ citizen Tsokur, stated the following about the reason of young girls’ gravitation towards sectarians:

‘The girls say: A believer does not drink or smoke, and leads a sober life. I will become a believer, marry a believing person...he will not leave me in the future...’

Presbyter Druzhchenko (Boguslavskaja community) states:

‘We are propagandists through our actions and behavior. We lead a Christian life: we do not drink, smoke, cuss, or steal...Everyone likes this, and we gradually draw them in and explain the gospel to such people. If everyone brought up children the way we do, there would be no hooliganism and children would study well. My children are good students, and they go to the library and movies...’<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 1572, p. 19.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 20-21.

According to Vil'khovyi's earlier report to Khrushchev (1949), the assistant to the Senior Presbyter of EKhB for Chernovtsy oblast, Ponomarev, attributed the recruitment of new members for communities to simple interaction between ordinary believers, especially women, and other villagers. While visiting with their fellow-villagers, believers often have conversations of the following nature: "Your husband drinks, smokes, swears, and goes with the other women. But to our church members, all this is forbidden by God. You need to come to the prayer house where you will learn everything."<sup>12</sup>

In Vil'khovyi's opinion, all aforementioned facts of sectarians' success were counterproductive to the Soviet antireligious agenda. He criticized the complacent attitudes of the local Soviet and Komsomol authorities for not trying hard enough to tear believers away from religion and for being quite content with their upright behavior and excellent performance at work. Such approach was certainly "incorrect," for it unwittingly advanced the cause of religion. By allowing sectarians to enjoy a good reputation and elevated status in the Soviet society, the local authorities in fact condoned a tacit form of religious proselytism demonstrating the positive transformative power of the competing Christian ideology. In many places, complained Vil'khovyi, the local authorities turned a blind eye to the advancement of believers to positions of responsibility at work, and also saw a conscientious strategy in the Protestant communities' election of presbyters from among members well-known and respected among their non-believing co-workers or fellow-villagers. Such presbyters and church

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<sup>12</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 5667, p. 87.



activists, Vil'khovyi reasoned, certainly exploited their general renown among the local population for purposes of evangelization. In 1947, he reported:

The influence of servants of the cult on believers is undoubtedly great, and it is explained by the following: a presbyter is elected by the community from persons most authoritative at work and tested in the affairs of the faith. Thus, the Iziumskaia EKhB community (Kharkov oblast) elected citizen Borshch as a presbyter, who before the war served for 4 years as an assessor at the People's Court. The local population knows him very well, and he commands authority. In village Roven'ki, the presbyter is the former miner-hewer, currently working as an accountant... The Krasnopol'skaia EKhB community elected as presbyter citizen Soloviev, who for 32 years worked at the mine as a hewer. The presbyter of the EKhB community in village Grud, Yarunskii region, Zhitomir oblast, is Zinchiuk—a Stakhanovite blacksmith. Citizen I.Y. Kaliuzhnyi, an MTS metal craftsman-mechanic, serves as a presbyter in Buzovskaia EKhB community (Kiev oblast). This presbyter made several rationalization proposals and also invented several instruments accepted by the Department of Rationalization and Invention at the Ministry of Agriculture of Ukrainian SSR. The overwhelming majority of presbyters lead sober and humble lives, working in kolkhozes, industries, or institutions, constantly interacting with the masses and influencing them with examples of their personal behavior. Many of these presbyters are fanatics of sectarian teachings.<sup>13</sup>

In some places, observed Vil'khovyi, the Protestants not only occupied prominent positions in Soviet institutions, but also tended to create all-Protestant collectives. In 1947, he reported:

In village Salikhi, Tarashchanskii region, Kiev oblast, the EKhB community distributed its activists to all decisive sectors of the kolkhoz. The two old Baptists, Feshchenko and Polishchiuk, who work at the cattle farm, picked youths [from among their fellow-believers] as their helpers: Aleksandra Riaba, born in 1925, and Aleksandr feshchenko, born in 1924. The old Baptist, Kas'ianenko, who works as the kolkhoz accountant, picked Anna Polishchiuk (a believer), born in 1921, as accountant's assistant, and Anton Krivoruk (also a believer), born in 1923, as an accounting clerk.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 4556, p. 120-121.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

Moreover, noted Vil'khovyi, five field brigades in this village were also headed by young Baptists. In 1951, the Council's Upolnomochennyi for Zhitomir oblast reported that the secretary of party organization in village Skakovka, A.I. Patsalo, decided to "give the non-sectarian kolkhozniks some rest" in the midst of the harvesting season and create an all-SDA threshing brigade, since the SDA believers did not mind working on Sundays. Patsalo summoned presbyter of the SDA community, E.P. Sviatetskii, who worked as the chief accountant in the kolkhoz, and entrusted him to organize the threshing. 23 believers joined Sviatetskii in the fields on Sunday and in one day threshed 7,500 kg [75 centners] of grain. It was later overheard that the believers reportedly bragged that they were able to thresh more grain in one day than the non-believers. Besides, it was discovered that in Skakovka's kolkhoz "Lenin's Legacy" "3 field crews...were formed, consisting primarily of the SDA sectarians" and headed by the SDA believers. Commenting on this information, Vil'khovyi wrote: "Analogous attempts by sectarians to create in kolkhozes the all-sectarian crews were made not only by the SDA, but also by the EKhB. However, due to measures taken by us through the Senior Presbyters, such crews were timely liquidated."<sup>15</sup>

In 1951, analyzing the visible revitalization of Protestant communities in Western Ukraine, Vil'khovyi postulated that the probable cause of such spiritual upsurge lay in the presence in these communities "of intelligentsia and...certain persons from among leadership of the grassroots Soviet organs of authority."<sup>16</sup> "Promoting candidates to the

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<sup>15</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 783, p. 83-84.

<sup>16</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 1572, p. 82.

local organs, the leadership of Rava-Russkii region [Lvov oblast],” complained Vil’khovyi, “apparently did not take into consideration peculiarities of this location, thanks to which several fanatically desposed church activists were elected as deputies of local organs of authority.” Vil’khovyi backed his assertion with facts provided in the report of his subordinate in Lvov oblast:

In certain villages and kolkhozes, members of the EKhB church strive to occupy dominant positions. For example, in village Giiche, Rava-Russkii region, the chairman of the Executive Committee of the Soviet of Workers’ Deputies, Mariia Anastas’evna Zbyshko, is also a deputy of the provincial, regional and village Soviets. She, her husband and her son are members of the EKhB church. Also members of the EKhB church are the following:

Anna Petrovna Tanchik—deputy of the Giiche village Soviet  
 Agafiia Danilovna Geichuk and A.M. Mel’nik—members of administration of the kolkhoz ‘Kirov’ in village Giiche  
 I.I. Dikii—chairman of the revisional commission in the kolkhoz ‘Kirov’<sup>17</sup>

Vil’khovyi was especially outraged by the oversight permitted by the Lvov Oblispolkom and Obkom with the election of “active sectarian, Mariia Anastas’evna Zbyshko, to the oblast, regional and village Soviets.” Reflecting on this major blunder, he wrote:

A significant period of time has passed since the day of election to the local organs of Soviet authority, but, unfortunately, the deputy of oblast, regional and village Soviets, comrade M.A. Zbyshko, remains in the hands of sectarians and is used by them for the strengthening of ‘prestige’ of the EKhB church.<sup>18</sup>

## **2. “Growing into Socialism” as a Protestant Survival Strategy**

In his reports, Vil’khovyi repeatedly referred to the aforementioned tendencies as “sectarians’ peculiar ‘growing into socialism’ by way of embedding their activists in the

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 83-84.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 84-85.

more responsible sectors of work in kolkhozes, with attempts to seize the general leadership into their own hands.”<sup>19</sup> In other places, he describes the same tendencies as “adaptive tactic of sectarians using all means to ensure the possibility of their further existence in conditions of Soviet power.” The relative success of this Protestant survival strategy was predicated, in his opinion, “on the poor understanding of this tactic” by some local Soviet officials “often permitting liberal attitudes towards such underhand plotting of sectarians.”<sup>20</sup> Whereas the Soviet conditions certainly forced believers to develop a number of survival strategies, Vil’khovyi’s rigid interpretive model, rendering all Protestant initiatives as mere Darwinian adaptations, precluded him from seeing some of these initiatives as genuine attempts on the part of registered religious leaders and their communities to establish good rapport with the Soviet state and find a suitable socially beneficial function for themselves in the Soviet society. Perceiving believers’ attempts to be socially useful as underhanded intrigues of religionists undoubtedly provided Vil’khovyi with an easy explanation of religion’s longevity, but it also led to the continuous exclusion of believers from playing any significant social role, undermined their sense of citizenship, prevented their integration with the mainstream Soviet society and, ultimately, alienated them from the Soviet state. In 1949, Vil’khovyi reported to Khrushchev:

As a means to strengthen communities and raise their prestige, some presbyters try to use Soviet activities to their advantage, manifesting their adaptability to contemporary circumstances under the conditions of Soviet rule and existing legislation on cults. For example, each Sunday during the harvesting

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<sup>19</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 5069, p. 4.

<sup>20</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 783, P. 83.

campaign, when the kolkhoz could not afford any days off, the presbyter of Volchanskaia EKhB community, Sinel'nikovskii region, Dnepropetrovsk oblast, Korchevskii, who is also an assistant to the brigadier of the kolkhoz vegetable farm brigade, sent all believers gathering for prayer meetings back to work, saying: 'Don't you know where your place is today? We will always have time to pray, but the work cannot wait. Go to work!' With this instruction, Korchevskii redirected those believers who were showing up at the doors of their prayer house. Conversing with the Council's Upolnomochennyi, Korchevskii stated: 'We honestly worked in the kolkhoz and, therefore, we are respected. We also earned a lot this year: we received so much bread that it will last us 2 years, and enough vegetables to bury everyone in them.'<sup>21</sup>

With the harvest gathered, Korchevskii's community held the traditional Protestant "Harvest Festival" during which the community's best workers were honored and the worst reprimanded. In doing so, the EKhB appropriated a tradition that had originated in the Soviet collectives. It was, therefore, yet another manifestation of a dangerous fusion religion with socialism.<sup>22</sup>

In 1947, Vil'khovyi treated the Protestants' social activism during the election campaign with the same grain of suspicion and distrust:

With respect to sectarians' reaction to the upcoming elections to the Supreme Council of Ukrainian SSR, we observe that members of communities visit study groups organized by agitators in villages, carry out certain tasks entrusted to them by the village electoral commissions and village Soviets, and express readiness to vote for candidates of the bloc of Communists and non-partisans. In village Rakitino, Novoselitskii region, the community leader, Grigorii Bordier, said the following about the upcoming elections: 'We, the Evangelical Christians-Baptists, will help the village Soviet in its preparation for the elections, because our denomination is obliged to help the Soviet authority, since we have been given the opportunity to pray freely and live without oppression.' Analogous expressions have been registered also in other communities.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 5667, p. 85-86.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 4555, p. 239-241.

Such expressions of good will on the part of Protestants, however, did not earn them any lasting credit with the Soviet authorities. The government stubbornly interpreted Protestants' manifestations of political loyalty and their outstanding economic performance as disguised forms of religious propaganda and made every effort to undermine their prominent standing among the local population. No other example perhaps epitomizes the myopia of this government policy better than the case of *khutor* [farmstead] Dolgii in Nezhinskii region of Chernigov oblast. Although Vil'khovyi's long and detailed report (1948) about this case to Khrushchev began with the familiar preamble crediting the CARC with the discovery of "an active tendency of sectarians toward a peculiar 'growing into socialism by way of infiltrating the more responsible sectors of work in kolkhozes,' Vil'khovyi's concentrated focus on the economic achievements in Dolgii betrayed his concealed admiration for the EKhB believers who constituted the backbone of the kolkhoz "Svoia Pratsia" [One's Own Labor] attached to the farm settlement of Dolgii. "The total number of able-bodied members of the kolkhoz 'Svoia Pratsia,'" wrote Vilkhovyi, "is 80, of which 68 are members of the local EKhB community. Only one household of the *khutor* (consisting of 25 households) is not sectarian."<sup>24</sup> The community's presbyter, Ruban, who served in the Red Army from 1918 to 1920 and from 1943 to 1945, "works as a night guard watching over the cattle and barns" while the other community members occupied the following posts:

The community member, Mikhail Shevchuk, is the head of the farm. The community member, Yatsko, is in charge of the storage, while the other member, Bondarenko, is in charge of the horses. The crew leaders of three of the field

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<sup>24</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 5069, p. 128-132.

brigades are also community members. The kolkhoz executive board and revisional commission, with the exception of these agencies' chairmen, are also composed of sectarians. The present kolkhoz chairman is a former member of the EKhB community, who was expelled, supposedly for drinking. His wife currently visits the EKhB community's prayer meetings...

The attitude of sectarians, members of the kolkhoz 'Svoia Pratsia,' to work in the kolkhoz and to different economic and political campaigns is worth noting. The community's presbyter, Ruban, earned 300 labor-days, and his family members earned another 300 labor-days and received a combined amount of 50 *puds* [800 kg] of grain cultures. On an average, each kolkhoz household received from 20 to 30 *puds* [320 to 480 kg] of grain cultures. The kolkhoz has completely fulfilled all state tax obligations ahead of time as well as all grain quotas and payments in kind. The plans of winter crop sowing and autumn plowing are over-fulfilled, and the kolkhoz seeding stock is fully supplied. The kolkhoz has a sheep farm, a bird farm, and a dairy farm. The cattle yard is maintained in good order. The livestock is supplied with feed for the entire winter season... The kolkhoz does not have have a single member who has not earned the minimal number of labor-days. There are no violations of the kolkhoz discipline.

During the elections to the Supreme Council of Ukrainian SSR and to the local Soviets, all members of religious community participated in elections.<sup>25</sup>

Having described this ideal Soviet kolkhoz sustained by the hard labor and discipline of politically harmless and compliant EKhB believers, Vil'khovyi, nonetheless, found the existence of religious community in Dolgii threatening to the Soviet antireligious agenda. First of all, the community had 24 people in the age category of 25 years or younger and a "permanent choir of 13 people, consisting mainly of young people below the age of 25." Due to the frequent visits to this community of experienced preacher and missionary from the Kievo-Sviatoshinskaia EKhB community, Dobrenko, "its choir represents a wholly developed vocal unit whose singing the community uses as a bait to attract the youth."<sup>26</sup> Second, the patronage of this community by such "qualified" presbyters and missionaries as Dobrenko and Ostapenko (presbyter of

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

Nezhinskaia EKhB community) contributed to the overall attractive image of believers in Dolgii. Third, the EKhB community in Dolgii reigned unchallenged, since the local village Soviet and party organization “did not do any work” and “no one in the kolkhoz subscribes to a newspaper.” Moreover, “during the past year,” bemoaned Vil’khovyi, “not a single lecture on natural-scientific topics was read at *khutor* Dolgii.” The head of CARC, therefore, concluded that “such state of affairs...created quite favorable conditions for the unchallenged influence of sectarians in the kolkhoz and among the *khutor* population, especially among the youth.”<sup>27</sup>

In order to fix this problem, Vil’khovyi unleashed a whole slew of correspondence to alert various Soviet and party agencies and summon them to organize “systematic mass-agitation and propagandist work” in Dolgii. The head of CARC, however, could not stop at such sensible solution to the perceived problem and brought to bear the heavy guns of his own agency:

For systematic violations of the existing legislation on cults, expressed in periodic visitations [of *khutor* Dolgii] and sermons by presbyters Ostapenko and Dobrenko, the community [of *khutor* Dolgii] is to be dissolved and joined to the EKhB community in village Pashkovo [the seat of the local party organization]. The registration of the community’s presbyter, Ruban, is to be terminated as well as that of the presbyter of Nezhinskaia community, Ostapenko. The Council’s Upolnomochennyi for Chernigov oblast is given instructions to further observe and study the inner life of members of the religious community in *khutor* Dolgii.<sup>28</sup>

The EKhB community in Dolgii certainly hoped that its praiseworthy economic performance would appease the Soviet state and keep it at bay, thus allowing believers to quietly engage in an indirect form of religious proselytism—preaching the gospel through

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.



one's lifestyle. In the end, the plight of this community reaffirmed the primacy of ideology over economy in the Soviet Union. Despite their best efforts to fulfill their obligations to the state, the believers had fallen victim to the Soviet paranoid fear of competing ideology.

### **3. Religious Choirs and Festivals as Forms of Religious Propaganda**

As the case of *khutor* Dolgii illustrated, the CARC considered the use by Protestant communities of trained choirs, and also of musical orchestras, a form of religious propaganda and obligated its subordinates in oblasts to take account of all existing Protestant choirs and orchestras, their members, the number of musical instruments and their ownership (see Chapter II). Since it is in the nature of any group of trained performers to seek wider audience, the Protestant singers and musicians found it difficult to confine themselves exclusively to communities of their origin and wished to share their gifts with their fellow-believers in other less fortunate communities. The mentioned "Harvest Festivals" as well as weddings, baptism ceremonies, youth gatherings and other appropriate occasions attracting guests and visitors from far and wide provided an excellent opportunity for such religious musical groups to make themselves known and, at the same time, contribute to the work of evangelization and popularization of their denomination among the populace. In 1948, Vil'khovyi reported:

On September 26, a 'Harvest Festival' was arranged in the Dnepropetrovsk community. Approximately 500 people attended the prayer meeting, primarily women of different ages, among whom there were many at the age of 25-30. About 30 to 40 children of school age were also present. Some of them came with their parents, and some on their own. Various fruits (apples, pears, grapes) as well as bread and vegetables were displayed before the cathedra. The walls

were decorated with corn cubs and religious slogans dedicated to this occasion. A choir composed of 35 young men and women performed a hymn about the harvest. Specialists on ‘theoretical’ theological questions, capable of influencing the feelings of believers with their words, delivered sermons dedicated to the harvest.<sup>29</sup>

In 1951, Vil’khovyi observed that “besides attempts to conduct missionary work via any available means,” the Protestants’ “aspiration to spread their influence among the populace is also expressed in the desire to impart greater festiveness to their prayer services via the use of musical instruments.”<sup>30</sup> As an example of this tendency, Vil’khovyi used the brass band of the Pozharki SDA community and quoted the following from the report of his subordinate in Volynia oblast:

The musicians perform during the conduct of religious rituals at the prayer house and at funerals of deceased Adventists. At the invitation of the kolkhoz and village Soviet workers, the [SDA] musicians performed at the village club on holidays, during elections and other festivities that took place in the village. They performed the state anthem, a march and a waltz, but not the dance music, since they do not believe in dances...<sup>31</sup>

Despite this orchestra’s participation in the non-religious social activities of the Soviet village, the CARC’s fear of these musicians’ contributing to the popularity of the SDA community was too great to allow this mingling of believers and non-believers to go on unchecked. “At our recommendation,” wrote Vilkhovyi, “the SDA Senior Presbyter, Yakovenko, issued an appropriate directive about the dissolution of this orchestra.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 5667, p. 18.

<sup>30</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 783, p. 331.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

In 1952, reporting on the activity of the EKhB community in Zaporozhie, numbering 434 members, Vil'khovyi remarked that “the church activist core consists of 7 ordained presbyters, 3 deacons and about 10 preachers. With the purpose of widening its influence, the community systematically uses its choir for visiting other communities,” and quoted the following information from the report of his subordinate in Zaporozhie oblast:

Three of such visits or tours have been undertaken...According to the community's leaders, this action was prompted by the invitation of a couple to be wedded, with the purpose of imparting greater festiveness to the wedding ceremony, but in reality, it is a wholly different matter. Firstly, the three communities to which the choir traveled are withering communities, since the two of them do not have any youth. Therefore, the choir's trips to other communities are a form of religious propaganda employed for the uplifting of the spirit in disintegrating communities and for the attraction of new members.<sup>33</sup>

In 1956, the SDA and EKhB arranged the rent of large spaces in Soviet schools for wedding receptions—a step prompted most likely by the lack of space in their prayer houses to accommodate numerous guests and the CARC's ban on conducting any religious or semi-religious ceremonies or gatherings outdoors, in the prayer houses' backyards. In Vil'khovyi's interpretation, however, these weddings instantly acquired a more menacing connotation:

Also noteworthy are the attempts of clergy to use for their purposes the space of cultural-educational institutions. In the city of Chernovtsy and in village Rakitna, Chernovtsy oblast, the SDA and the EKhB organized wedding parties in school buildings, during which religious rituals were performed.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 1572, p. 193-194.

<sup>34</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 4263, p. 64.

In reality, the CARC targeted any extracurricular Protestant activities—any festive or special events that attracted larger than usual attendance and overstepped the boundaries of carefully censored and sterile religious services confined to the walls of a prayer house. The Protestants, on the contrary, sought every opportunity to do the opposite, for special occasions gave them not only the joy of visiting with members of other communities but also a chance to show their non-believing friends and acquaintances the brighter uncensored side of Protestantism. In 1947, Vil'khovyi remarked that although many communities toned down their celebration of the harvest or skipped it altogether, “the Piatikhatskaia [EKhB] community conducted a very festive service and decorated the prayer house with vegetables, fruit and ears of grain.” The Sinel'nikovskaia EKhB community of the same Dnepropetrovsk oblast “went even further and arranged a dinner for 25 guests”:

The guests came from the neighboring communities of Sinel'nikov region and 5-6 people from Zaporozhie. Although the presbyter tried to persuade the Council's Upolnomochennyi that they had to organize a dinner because the people were waiting for the train and had to be fed, it is perfectly clear that all this was planned ahead of time. Already in 1945, at the registration [of this community], the presbyter received instructions that the prayer house must not serve as either a dining hall or a hostel for the traveling ‘brothers and sisters,’ as it was practiced by some communities. The Sinel'nikovskaia community arranged the dinner not inside the prayer house but in the prayer house's yard. Of course, this was just as bad.<sup>35</sup>

In Lvov oblast, the EKhB communities were culpable of inviting to their harvest celebrations “poor people, orphans and widows,” while the presbyter of the community in

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<sup>35</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 4555, p. 243-252.

Rava-Russkaia was guilty of inviting “not only orphans and widows, but also soldiers and officers of the local garrison.”<sup>36</sup>

In 1947, Vil’khovyi reported:

The EKhB communities use their rituals (baptism, funerals, Communion) for evangelical propaganda. In Lanovskii region, Ternopol oblast, presbyters organized the full-immersion baptism for the new converts to the sect. 15 presbyters participated and approximately 2,000 spectators watched it. In Kiev, the EKhB communities baptized 40 people. The Council’s Upolnomochennyi recommended that this ceremony be conducted on the other side of the Dnepr River, far away from human residences and traffic. However, the communities’ leadership ignored this instruction and performed baptism at the central part of Dnepr, at a populous place, which attracted about 2,000 curious spectators.<sup>37</sup>

In 1950, a similar incident took place in Nikolaev, where the EKhB community obtained permission from the city council to conduct baptism of 17 candidate-members in the Ingul River on the condition that the ceremony would take place early in the morning at a place far away from the city. “But the community leadership, headed by presbyter Rudoi,” complained Vil’khovyi, “chose a more favorable spot and arranged baptism at a populous place, in Slobodka, where 200 people gathered. The baptism ceremony was thus turned into a tribune of visual religious propaganda.” This baptism ceremony, it seems, went well beyond being a mere visual propaganda and prompted Vil’khovyi to comment:

It was not accidental that preacher Bozga was selected to deliver a sermon. He is from former kulaks and spent time in exile for anti-Soviet activity. Now, having acquired a tribune for religious propaganda, he called upon all present at the baptism: ‘Denounce the sinful life of this world...Follow us! We, believers, must bring the teaching of our Lord to every creature...’ The Presbyter Rudoi

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<sup>36</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 4556, p. 123.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

also sermonized at the baptism, knowing all too well that preaching outside the walls of the prayer house was not permitted.<sup>38</sup>

In the same report, Vil'khovyi pointed out that many EKHB believers residing in 14 different villages around the growing town of Kakhovka, Kherson oblast, travelled 35-40 kilometers on foot to attend prayer services in Kakhovka. These pilgrims, he complained, used their long trips to the prayer house “for religious propaganda at rest stops, night lodgings, etc.”<sup>39</sup>

As early as 1948, the CARC uncovered yet another form of unsanctioned expression of religiosity serving not only as an outlet for believers' creativity but also as a powerful and very elusive vehicle of religious propaganda. “In many EKHB communities of north-western regions of Zhitomir oblast,” reported Vil'khovyi, “a wide circulation of hand-written poems and songs, some of which are composed by local authors, is taking place.” Commenting on several examples of this religious folklore, provided in his report, Vil'khovyi wrote: “Some of these documents transcend the boundaries of religiosity and have an anti-Soviet character.” One such poem, he thought, was “directed against service in the Soviet Army and defense of the Socialist Motherland.” Entitled “The Non-Worshiper” [*nepoklonnik*] which, in the context, could also mean both “the non-conformist” and “one impervious to certain attractions,” the poem contained the following verses:

I do not bow to worldly riches,  
And I am not a warrior who kills people,  
But I am a warrior of the heavenly city

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<sup>38</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 783, p. 11-12.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 9-10.

Who saves souls from sin.

Everyone holds me for an enemy.  
I am left to rot in hungry jails  
And the rulers forbid me  
To herald Jesus.

I crave the holy freedom,  
Freedom for which Jesus himself suffered.  
Dying on the cross  
Our Christ set an example for us.

Now, as a warrior for the truth,  
I do not seek carnal freedom,  
But I only crave  
Spiritual freedom.

Neither the prison shackles, nor fears  
Will take away this freedom.  
I believe the great day will come  
When the fetters will disintegrate into dust.

And the free evangelical word  
Will awaken the deceased from their sleep,  
And we will then sing the song of freedom,  
And it will flow like a river.

The other poems instructed religious parents not to leave their children behind, but bring them along to the prayer house, and called upon religious girls not to marry the non-believers. This type of religious folklore seriously alarmed Vil'khovyi and compelled him to write the following in conclusion of his analysis:

Most of this 'literature' has an exclusively detrimental political content, and it is in the hands of believers, especially the youth. It does not seem feasible to requisition it through the organs of Glavlit [the main Soviet agency in charge of approving publications]. The only way to requisition this literature may be our recommendation to the [EKhB] spiritual center in Ukraine about sending to locations a special circular letter prohibiting communities and believers to use literature unapproved by the spiritual center.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 5667, p. 23-25.

There is evidence showing that the CARC did not throw its words to the wind and made the reading of unauthorized poems during prayer services a punishable offense. In 1957, the EKhB community in the city of Amur N. Dneprovsk, Dnepropetrovsk oblast, allowed one of its members to declaim a poem entitled “The Prodigal Son.” The CARC considered it a “violation of the order of prayer services,” disbanded the community’s administration and forbade the community to hold prayer services until the election of the new administrative organ. In its letter to both Vil’khovyi and his subordinate at the Dnepropetrovsk Oblispolkom, the community wrote: “We ask your permission to hold a meeting of the newly elected *dvadtsatka* for the purpose of electing the new administrative organ. We promise the Upolnomochennyi that from now on no violations of the order of prayer services will be permitted.”<sup>41</sup>

Despite the government’s best efforts to suppress the mentioned indirect forms of religious proselytism and various unsanctioned expressions of religious life, the Protestant communities continued to engage in these banned activities throughout the 1940s-1960s. In 1959, Polonnik reported:

Such family festivities as name-day celebrations, weddings, New Year’s parties, and even the draft of family members to the Soviet Army are widely used by them [Protestants]. At these festivities, psalms are sung, religious poems are declaimed, speeches on biblical topics are delivered, and the Bible is read...In a number of oblasts...activists of certain EKhB communities were caught traveling to other regions with the purpose of popularization of their religious beliefs. The entire groups, equipped with youth-packed choirs and string orchestras, traveled to other regions and even oblasts.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 235, p. 183-184.

<sup>42</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5205, p. 76.



The EKhB schismatic groups were even bolder in ignoring the government restrictions.

In 1969 Litvin complained:

The leaders of schismatic groups organize mass gatherings not only in Kiev, but in many other locations throughout the oblast...In 1968 alone, 50 illegal gatherings, attended cumulatively by 10,000 people, took place in Kiev and Kiev oblast. Only in 5 cases the administrative organs applied measures to prevent them. Not a single organizer of these gatherings have been subject to criminal responsibility for his unlawful activity...For example, on September 24, this year, at the private residence of an active participant of the illegal sectarian formation, Draga, residing in Dneprovskii region of Kiev, at 17 Cheremshin Street, an illegal gathering was organized, in which 500 people participated. Some of them arrived from different oblasts of Ukraine and other republics. The meeting went on for 10 hours and featured brass and string orchestras, a youth choir, and solo performances...Although the local organs of authority had timely received information about this gathering, no appropriate measures to prevent it were taken.<sup>43</sup>

#### **4. Aiding the Needy as a Form of Religious Propaganda**

The CARC did not limit its efforts to contain the spread of religion to merely detecting and combating specific methods and forms of religious propaganda, but tried to understand the underlying reasons of Protestant communities' appeal for the general public. Already in the late 1940s, Vil'khovyi observed that Protestant communities tended "to turn their prayer house into a special 'refuge' for rest after the war."<sup>44</sup> The years of war and occupation indeed left behind thousands of torn families, widows, orphans, and invalids whose individual material and emotional needs could not be easily addressed by the central government struggling to reconstruct the republic's main economic infrastructure. The believers naturally tried to respond to these postwar

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<sup>43</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 185, p. 20-21.

<sup>44</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 4555, p. 382.

challenges and often pulled on their communal resources to lend material and emotional assistance not only to their fellow-members but to their needy non-believing friends and acquaintances. In other words, Protestant communities served as support groups for all those who somehow fell through the cracks in the Soviet social care system or became disenchanted by the sort of drunk and rowdy social interaction available at local village and factory clubs. The government, however, predictably described the believers' acts of charity and moral support exclusively as "aspirations of sectarian activists to unfold philanthropic work among the non-believing population as a means of drawing it into their ranks."<sup>45</sup> For this reason, the postwar Soviet legislation on cults strictly forbade religious organization to extend material assistance not only to non-believers but even to fellow-members.

In 1946, having visited the EKHB prayer house in Novaia Odessa, Nikolaev oblast, Vil'khovyi instantly interpreted its clean and welcoming atmosphere as a bait designed to lure the town's young people to whom the local authorities had little to offer:

That is why sectarians meticulously maintain the cleanliness and orderliness of their prayer house. The prayer building is painted and neat, and one can see everywhere a thrifty master's touch: the trees are cared for, the walkways are strewn with sand, and the chairs and benches are arranged in a certain order. The windows have clean curtains and potted flowers on windowsills. The walls are decorated with texts from the Holy Scripture, written in large and clear script. Even a barely literate person can easily read and memorize them. There is no cussing or smoking here. The people sing decorously, rest, exchange greetings, and engage in wholehearted conversations. One has an opportunity here to sing a solo, read an excerpt from the gospel or a poem, deliver a sermon and thus attract the attention of the present brothers and sisters. And this is not difficult, given

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<sup>45</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 5069, p. 3.

that there is no set standard of a prayer service and one can improvise according to 'God's speaking to his soul.'<sup>46</sup>

In his reports, Vilkhovyi repeatedly pointed out that Protestant communities, with their democratic organization, inclusiveness, and attention to personal needs of members and visitors, provided especially favorable environment for women. Women were involved in the upkeep and preparation of the prayer house for services as well as in its decoration for religious holidays. The head of CARC specifically noted the salient role of women in "theatricalization of prayer meetings" which the clergy and activists of sectarian religious communities employed "with the purpose of generating a greater psychological impact on the masses of believers."<sup>47</sup> Moreover, Protestants did not exclude women from delivering sermons. Describing the paschal service in the Kharkov EKhb community, the oblast Upolnomochennyi wrote:

About 2,000 people were present at the paschal prayer meeting. The people inside the building stood on their feet; the benches were removed, doors opened, and about 300-400 people who could not fit inside congregated in the yard. Besides the presbyter, two men and a woman preached... When a woman delivered her sermon, there was absolute silence inside the building as well as in the yard. She uttered her sermon with a dramatic voice, and midway through her sermon invited everyone to kneel. When everyone kneeled, she continued to deliver her sermon in a nearly crying voice. Many people also wept, whispering their prayers. Against the backdrop of general whispering, her voice was making special impact on believers. At the end of sermon and at her request, a choir of 60-70 people began to sing, with everyone present joining.<sup>48</sup>

The Protestant individualized form of praying served many women as an outlet for expressing their grief, while the congregation welcomed such an outpouring of their

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 1572, p. 236.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 236-237.

souls and functioned as a sympathy group. Vil'khovyi did not fail to note the therapeutic effect of such cathartic experiences on women:

The presbyter addresses believers: 'Brothers and sisters, voice your needs' ... A woman, about 40 years old, prays aloud about her abusive children. For about 3-4 minutes, the mother prays loudly and articulately, without tears, but in a voice full of sorrow and her sight streaming upwards, saying something to this effect: 'My children offend me; they behave badly and do not listen to god advice. But I love them. They are good, but they have a very difficult life...I could not make them happy. They abuse me, but I love them. Oh God, you alone can see it. I gave them my entire life. I lived through them only, but their life is hard. They are not to blame, and I love them...' This mother's 'tragedy' makes quite an impression on everyone present. Four women sob, two or three quietly brush off their tears, and all worshipers pray quietly, standing on their knees and casting their eyes to the ground. The other 'needs' are voiced in the same fashion... This feature of a prayer meeting, when people publicly turn their soul inside-out, serves as a tough cement that bonds together all members of a community. Therefore, it will be very difficult to tear people out of such communities, and that is why it is necessary, first of all, to shield them and prevent their entry into religious communities.<sup>49</sup>

In his 1949 report to Khrushchev, Vil'khovyi stated that extending material aid to believers and non-believers helped sectarian communities to maintain their influence on the surrounding population and quoted the following as an example:

In the EKHB community in village Orynino, Oryninskii region, Kamenets-Podol'sk oblast, this form of work, as a bait to lure people into the community, was especially strongly developed under the leadership of a prominent activist, M.P. Burkovskaia. Under her guidance, an 'assistance fund' had been created to help people with money, food-stuffs and clothing. 1,000 rubles of money, 80 kg of bread, 32 kg of corn, 24 kg of flour, 70 kg of potatoes, 25 liters of milk, 3 kg of butter, and 21 sets of clothing were given away. Along with such 'philanthropic' activity, Burkovskaia systematically arranged individual conversations with widows and the elderly and readings of religious literature in the hospital and ambulance through other activists—the hospital's nurse, M.I. Benderovskaia, and care-givers, Vishnevskiaia and M.S. Burkovskaia.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 4555, p. 52-53.

<sup>50</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 5667, p. 89-90.

The CARC retaliated to such “violations” by raising the issue about the removal from his post of the EKHB Senior Presbyter for the oblast, Luk’ianchuk, and by a temporary closure of the EKHB community in village Orynino. Despite these stiff measures, the philanthropic drive remained quite strong and wide-spread in Kamenetsk-Podol’sk oblast. “During the second half of 1947,” reported Vil’khovyi, “10 people in village Niverki received material aid, of which 6 were non-believers. 100 kg of corn, 90 liters of milk, 50 kg of rye, and 20 items of clothing were distributed. Besides, the community built, free of charge, 2 village huts for its members.”<sup>51</sup> In village Varenki, Letichevskii region of the same oblast, “the leader of EKHB community, Revutskii, gathered from members 8 kg of flour and gave it as aid to an invalid of the Patriotic War.” “In village Maidan-Aleksandrovscoe, of the same oblast,” reported the Upolnomochennyi, “presbyter Matkovskii periodically gathers from the believers food-stuffs and money for the needy. For example, 30 kg of bread and 3 meters of fabric were given to a mother of three, Yulia Maskalenok, and 200 rubles to Anna Tzeliuk, etc.”<sup>52</sup> Although providing such help was not a Protestant invention and had a deep-seated radix in the Slavic village tradition of mutual assistance (*krugovaia poruka*), made even more pertinent in the postwar conditions of destruction, near famine, and drastic shortages of the most elementary goods, the CARC “categorically demanded from the EKHB spiritual center to take immediate measures towards the termination in Kamenetsk-Podol’sk oblast of missionary

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<sup>51</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 5069, p. 165.

<sup>52</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 4556, p. 124.

work and all forms of ‘charity.’”<sup>53</sup> The charity tradition, however, proved to be ineradicable as instances of it in almost every oblast indicated. In 1949, the Council’s Upolnomochennyi for Vinnitsa oblast reported:

In village St. Oratov, Oratovskii region, the community engages in charity and helps the sick. For example, a believer or a ‘sister,’ as sectarians would refer to her, goes to a sick person and cares for him. The community pays for medicines and buys groceries for the sick. With the help of community, the sick is transported to a hospital. The community does the sick people’s laundry and provides all sorts of material and moral support to community members, candidate-members and non-believers.<sup>54</sup>

In 1956, Vil’khovyi’s assistant, R. Shvaiko, forwarded to the head of the Department of Propaganda and Agitation at the CC of CPU a long excerpt from the information collected by the Council’s Upolnomochennyi for Crimea oblast on the activity of Pentecostal groups. Among other examples of Pentecostal missionary work through deeds of charity, the information contained a detailed story of conversion of the former Komsomol member, A.N. Feoktistova:

During a conversation at the office of the 1<sup>st</sup> Secretary of Feodosia City Committee of Komsomol, it has been established that Feoktistova came to Feodosia at the end of 1954 from Ivanov. She did not have any relatives or acquaintances in Feodosia; her mother and sisters stayed in Ivanov. Feoktistova...found herself in difficult housing and material conditions. No one would register her as a resident and, without residency documents [*propiska*], no one would hire her. One day, while wandering around a market place, Feoktistova met a little old ‘compassionate’ man, Egorov. Feoktistova told him about all her troubles and the latter invited her to his apartment, offered her food, registered her as a permanent resident, and helped to find a job at the tobacco factory. For 4 months Egorov allowed Feoktistova to stay in his apartment free of charge and helped her to find a plot of land to build a house. In 1955, the believers of Egorov’s group assisted Feoktistova in building a temporary two-room shelter [*vremianka*]. Also in 1955, Feoktistova’s mother and 3 sisters

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<sup>53</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 5069, p. 165.

<sup>54</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 5667, p. 225.

arrived from Ivanov to live with her. Egorov and his group helped Feoktistova's family in every way. Feoktistova told the following about it: 'Vassa Egorova [Egorov's wife] helps us—she makes clothes for my sisters for free, and I wash floors [for Egorovs] for free once a week, three times a month. They are very good people.'

In the same fashion, Egorov and his group recruited Lidia Vsevolodovna Borisenko, and now the latter works on converting her own sister...<sup>55</sup>

As the cited document reveals, the Protestant grassroots social networking often proved more effective in fixing some people's lives than the distant corporate socialism of the Soviet state. Protestant communities served as extended families for many unfortunate, lost and lonely individuals, providing them first with a sense of belonging and, in the process, offering them an alternative, spiritual vision of reality. Such unprepossessing form of religious proselytism proved to be quite captivating for people like Feoktistova. Although the government's view of Christian charity as a mere means of recruitment was biased and intentionally ignored the essentially humanitarian impulses behind the good deeds of many compassionate believers, from the point of view of the ongoing ideological competition, the government's fears of Christian charity were certainly grounded, for it proved to be the most effective and resilient form of religious proselytism throughout the entire Soviet period and beyond. For instance, at the height of Khrushchev's persecution of religion, Litvin reported:

At the connivance of workers of village Soviet, the leaders of EKhB community in village Bliazhevo, Sarnenskii region, Rovno oblast, widely practiced the legally prohibited charity and regularly distributed three rubles to every believing widow. While recruiting into the sect their sympathizers, they promised to provide everyone with the necessary material aid.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 4377, p. 30-33.

<sup>56</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5663, p. 75.

The numerous CARC reports deposited at the CPU archive indicate that the combination of charity and individual conversations enabled Protestant to establish lasting relationships with potential converts. Unlike Protestants' earlier attempts to organize collective group studies of religious doctrines for novices—an easily detectable and prosecutable offence—the one-on-one form of dissemination of religious ideas, carried out usually by ordinary believers, was much harder for the government to track down. Prosecuting believers for merely sharing their beliefs with their acquaintances in some private setting also presented a legal challenge and prompted Polonnik to state: “Wherever we work, there also works our ideological enemy...Sectarians (not only the EKhB, but also others) are very persistent in their recruitment of new members and skillfully take advantage of any opportunity for individual indoctrination of their selected victim.”<sup>57</sup> In this context, the creation by the state in the early 1960s of groups of support to the Council's Upolnomochennyye and assignment of individual atheist agitators to each believer or person leaning towards religion could be viewed as the state's adoption of a tested and effective Protestant technique.

The Protestants also tried to support their imprisoned fellow-brethren and their families. In 1947, Vil'khovyi reported that “presbyter of the EKhB community in village Bashuki, Vishnevetskii region, Ternopol oblast, Gusak, gathered food-stuffs under the patriotic guise of sending them to the Red Army” and even “received a railroad car for transporting the collected food.” As it turned out, he planned to ship these provisions “to

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<sup>57</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5205, p. 75-76.



the railway station Sukhobezvodnaia...for imprisoned sectarians.”<sup>58</sup> In 1962, members of the group of support to the Council’s Upolnomochennye found out that the EKhB community in the town of Zmiev, Kharkov oblast, “gathered money from sectarians to provide material aid to the family of an arrested leader of the illegal sect—‘Young Baptists.’” Such understandable human impulse cost the presbyter and executive organ of this community the loss of their registration.<sup>59</sup>

### **5. Protestants’ Adaptation to Challenges of Modernity**

Another set of adaptive techniques that ensured the Soviet Protestants’ survival and success during the postwar decades had to do with the believers’ responses to challenges of modernity—the continuous industrialization and urbanization of Soviet society, the growing level of literacy and education of the general population, and the availability of such new information technologies as short wave radio receivers and tape recorders. Due to the segregationist policies of the late imperial government, protecting the traditionally Orthodox Slavic population from the influence of foreign-born faiths, the Protestant communities historically sprang up in the Russian Empire’s frontier regions and other primarily rural agricultural areas specifically designated for them. Consequently, peasants and other agricultural workers were quite dominant in the social composition of Protestant communities. The liquidation by the early Bolsheviks of the state-sponsored religion allowed for a more even distribution of Protestant communities

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<sup>58</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 4556, p. 120.

<sup>59</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 374, p. 34-35.

throughout the country, including the large cities and industrial regions. However, even in the 1920s and 1930s, the majority of Protestants lived in villages and worked in the agricultural sector. The collectivization era inhibition of the mobility of rural populations<sup>60</sup> only perpetuated this skewed demographic makeup of Protestant communities. Although peasants/kolkhozniks were not issued standard passports and equalized in status with the other Soviet citizens until 1974,<sup>61</sup> the postwar era opened new possibilities for village residents, especially the youths, to obtain passports and escape their insular existence in the countryside through “military service” or “embarking on some form of specialized or higher education.”<sup>62</sup> Moreover, the postwar reconstruction and development of new industrial regions throughout the Soviet Union provided additional opportunities for kolkhozniks to relocate to urban centers via labor recruitment. The Protestants also took advantage of these new possibilities, in part for purely economic reasons, and in part as a conscientious effort to spread their message to new regions and bolster their already existing communities in the cities. As a result, within the course of two decades, they radically altered the Soviet preconception of sectarianism as a largely rural phenomenon and decisively shifted the epicenter of their activity from the countryside to urban areas, gaining most of their following from among industrial workers.

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<sup>60</sup> Moshe Lewin, *The Making of the Soviet System: Essays in the Social History of Interwar Russia* (New York: The new Press, 1994), p. 183-184.

<sup>61</sup> Geoffrey Hosking, *The First Socialist Society: A History of the Soviet Union from Within* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 392.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 376.

In 1946, Vil'khovyi noted: "If we look at the large industrial centers of Ukrainian SSR and analyze the distribution of religious communities, we will see the tendency of the [EKhB] sect to take root in industrial regions...For example, of the 40 regions of Stalinsk oblast, 18 have the EKhB communities."<sup>63</sup> The Council's Upolnomochennyi in the heavily industrialized Dnepropetrovsk oblast confirmed Vil'khovyi's suspicions:

A closer inspection confirmed that the main mass of sectarians resides in industrial centers and regions connected with them. Thus, in Dnepropetrovsk, Krivoi Rog, Dneprodzerzhinsk, Nikopol', and regions included in their orbit (Sinel'nikovskii, Novomoskovskii, Piatikhatskii, Chkalovskii), there are 40 EKhB communities with combined membership of 3,417 people, that is, 60% of all EKhB. The overwhelming majority of the former KhEV [Pentecostals] are also among members of these communities.<sup>64</sup>

The Upolnomochennyi for Voroshilovograd oblast provided similar data: "Sectarian communities, in their majority, are organized in industrial regions of the oblast. Of the total number of 36 [EKhB] communities, 29 are located in industrial regions and only 7 in agricultural."<sup>65</sup> A year later, Vil'khovyi stipulated that "up to 40% of all EKhB communities" were found "in industrial regions of Ukrainian SSR."<sup>66</sup> In 1949, Vil'khovyi reported: "Analyzing the dynamics of religious communities of the EKhB located in industrial regions of Ukrainian SSR, we have come to the conclusion that the EKhB spiritual center concentrated in these regions the best preaching forces for the 'catching of souls' from among the contingent of people arriving to work in Donbass and

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<sup>63</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 4555, p. 373.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 374.

<sup>66</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 4556, p. 115.

Krivorozhie.”<sup>67</sup> In 1950, in the wake of construction of a new canal and hydroelectric dam at Kakhovka—an operation that required a massive concentration of labor force—Vil’khovyi personally visited a number of oblasts adjacent to this construction site “with the purpose of assisting the oblast Upolnomochennye of CARC and the study of certain religious communities, EKhB in particular, located in regions of the dam and canal construction.”<sup>68</sup> Vil’khovyi’s agenda included “the taking of more decisive measures directed at enforcement of the unswerving observance of legislation on cults by communities’ presbyters and, first of all, the inspection from this angle of the presbyterian cadre of communities located in proximity to the construction of the canal and Kakhovka hydroelectric dam.”<sup>69</sup>

The CARC also attempted to keep track of Protestants’ relocations associated with enrollments in various schools and labor recruitments. “Certain young sectarians,” reported Vil’khovyi in 1951, “strive to change their places of residence under the pretext of moving to educational institutions in other oblasts or signing up as recruits for work in Donbass. At a new location, they establish connections with the local EKhB communities and begin active [missionary] work among the young people around them.” This was precisely the case with I.S. Artemenko, I.I. Zabelo, N.D. Kopiaia, and A.N. Kurochkina who all arrived in Voroshilovograd oblast from the city of Sumy.<sup>70</sup> In his

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<sup>67</sup> TsDAGO, F.1 Op. 24, D. 12, p. 63.

<sup>68</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op, 24, D. 783, p. 4.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

1952 report, Vil'khovyi specifically focused on young people and students trained by their home communities as missionaries and then sent to Dnepropetrovsk:

Belousov—a fifth year student at the Dnepropetrovsk Medical Institute; trained for a ‘preaching’ career in Kherson. Igor Lokh—a student of Dnepropetrovsk Metallurgical Institute; trained for sectarian activity in Kirovograd. The Piatikhatskaia EKHB community trained Nadezhda Gordaia, born in 1929. She is now studying at the Dnepropetrovsk Industrial Technical School together with I. Diachenko, born in 1930 and trained by the Starokadatskaia EKHB community.<sup>71</sup>

Vil'khovyi clearly connected the fast growth of religious communities in industrial regions with the increased concentration there of young and well trained missionary cadre arriving from elsewhere:

In three years (1949-1951), the EKHB religious communities in Dnepropetrovsk oblast baptized 550 people... Only a part, approximately 60%, of those who had received the full-immersion baptism came from sectarian families. The rest did not even have relatives among members of religious communities. Besides... each religious community has groups of believers preparing to receive baptism, the so-called ‘candidate-members’... Communities located in large industrial centers have the greatest number of candidate-members... In a personal conversation with the Secretary for Propaganda at the Dneprodzerzhinsk Gorkom of CPU, comrade A.V. Morzhov, I mentioned that according to our data, sectarians are recruiting into their ranks workers of the DGZ plant. For example, they have already recruited:

D.S Androshchuk, born in 1932, a blacksmith; A.V. Belokobylka, born in 1930, a clerk from the railroad shop; A. Dolinchuk, born in 1931, a carpenter from the construction and assembly shop; V. Lebed', born in 1927, working in the electrical repair shop; O. Pelipas, a machinist; P. Tarasov, a metal worker from the rail and beam shop; M. Telezhinskii, born in 1933, from the transportation shop; and P. Voitenko, working at the DGZ plant cafeteria.

It is evident even from this insufficient data that the missionary work is carried out according to a certain prepared plan aiming at encompassing all shops of the plant.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 1572, p. 18.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 18-19.

In 1951, Vil'khovyi observed again that “the largest religious communities” were located “precisely in the largest industrial centers of the Ukrainian SSR”<sup>73</sup> and planned a more thorough study of “sectarian migrants and believers’ activists who under the guise of labor recruitment moved from the western oblasts to the large industrial centers in eastern oblasts.”<sup>74</sup> Not only the number and size of religious communities in large industrial cities alarmed Vil'khovyi, but also their strategic locations in proximity to factories and plants from which the believers drew most of their new recruits. The industrial city of Zhdanov noticeably stood out among the examples quoted in Vil'khovyi's report: “In the city of Zhdanov, there are five EKhB communities: the one in the city's center numbers 334 people; the one near the ‘Il'ich’ plant has 136 people; another one near the port area has 94 members; the one in the workers’ settlement numbers 79 people; and the last one in the suburb (village Naidenovka) has 77 members...An analogous situation exists also in other industrial oblasts.”<sup>75</sup>

In his 1956 and 1957 reports, Vil'khovyi allocated considerable space to the discussion of rampant growth of Protestant communities in industrial centers and to the changing social composition of Protestant membership:

In the course of the past three years, only in 17 oblasts [of Ukraine], sectarians recruited into their fold 2,409 industrial workers, 3,442 kolkhozniks, and 513 clerical employees, which constitutes over 50% of all candidate-members approved for baptism by religious organizations. Religious communities located in cities and workers’ towns continue to occupy the leading place in terms of quantity of recruited candidate-members. Religious communities in Stalinsk,

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

Zaporozhie, Dnepropetrovsk, Kharkov and Odessa oblasts are responsible for over 50% of the total number of recruited.<sup>76</sup>

In Stalinsk oblast, for example, the social composition of Protestant communities changed even more drastically in favor of young urbanites and qualified industrial workers, many of whom had no familial connections with believers:

In three years, religious organizations acting in Stalinsk oblast prepared for baptism 1,573 people, of which only 615, or 51 %, had familial ties with sectarians. 33 % of the recruited are youths, 40 %--workers, 9 %--clerks, and only 1 %--kolkhozniks...Some sectarian communities located in the cities of Stalinsk oblast increased their memberships several times over. Thus, a community in the city of Shakhtersk has six times more members now, in 1956, than it had in 1946.<sup>77</sup>

Vil'khovyi's statistical analysis of the incoming data also revealed that the urban communities had much greater success recruiting new converts than their rural counterparts. "Between 1954 and 1956, the EKhB communities acting in Kiev oblast," he commented, "recruited and baptized 584 people, of which 258 are listed in 10 urban communities. At the same time, 71 rural communities recruited only 328 people."<sup>78</sup> A comparative analysis of the annual growth of religious communities in an industrial-urban and primarily agricultural oblast, such as Stalinsk and Sumy oblasts, for instance, validated Vil'khovyi's conclusions a fortiori:

Stalinsk and Sumy oblasts have an almost equal number of religious communities. Of the 78 communities in Stalinsk oblast, 61 are in cities and workers' towns, the rest being in the countryside. Of the 72 communities in Sumy oblast, only 10 are located in cities. At the same time, there is a big difference between the number of believers and candidate-members. Religious communities in Stalinsk oblast comprise 9,077 sectarians, but in Sumy oblast—

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<sup>76</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 4608, p. 70.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 72.

only 4,900. During the period between 1953 and 1955, religious communities in Stalinist oblast recruited 1,709 candidate-members, whereas communities in Sumy oblast—only 289.<sup>79</sup>

The same stark disparity in the rate of recruitment held true for a number of other sampled pairs of oblasts. Moreover, the influx into Protestant communities of young people and qualified industrial workers and clerks, many of whom had secondary and even higher education, continued to raise the general level of literacy and sophistication in Protestant communities and indicated their rejuvenation rather than aging. This process of rejuvenation affected not only the EKhB brotherhood. Between 1953 and 1955, the SDA communities in Chernovtsy oblast, for example, doubled the number of recruited youths.<sup>80</sup> These observations must have been quite disconcerting for the CARC, for they clearly contradicted the reigning Soviet assumption that religion appealed primarily to illiterate parochial rustics of the old generation. For the record, however, the CARC attributed this unexpected development to “the insufficient mass-political work among the youth, due to which sectarians have the opportunity to exercise their influence over the former and recruit young people into the ranks of their followers.”<sup>81</sup> Throwing more money and resources at the “mass-political work” hardly altered the ongoing rejuvenation of Protestant communities, as is quite evident from Polonnik’s report submitted in 1960:

The analysis of lists of people wishing to officially enter the [EKHB] sect via the full-immersion baptism reveals that in some oblasts of the republic the sect grows primarily on the account of young and middle-aged people. For example,

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<sup>79</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 4263, p. 54-55.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>81</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 4608, p. 72.



among candidate-members...of the EKHB communities in Chernovtsy oblast, youths under the age of 25 constitute 70 %, in Rovno oblast—60 %, and in Volynia and Ternopol oblasts—50 %. As in the past years, the predominant number of recruited are listed in communities located in cities and industrial centers of the republic. Among the recruited, there are qualified workers, clerks, and persons with secondary and even higher education.<sup>82</sup>

To illustrate his latter point, Polonnik provided a long list of recruited students and people with college degrees occupying important positions in Soviet institutions.

Here are several select examples:

Kiev oblast:

P.S. Overchuk, born in 1932, a shop master at the regional industrial company; has college education.

N.K. Velichko, born in 1937, an engineer-chemist working in Kiev at plant 754 [*pochtovyi yashchik*—one of secret research facilities that were referred to as “mail boxes” in Soviet parlance]; has college education.

Lvov oblast:

I.I. Kochmar, born in 1933, an expeditor of the wine processing plant; has the highest technical education.

Zaporozhie oblast:

N.S. Bazhan, born in 1907, a pharmacist at the drugstore Number 4 in Zaporozhie; has the highest medical education.

Odessa oblast:

L.M. Pavlida, an economist of the oblast Administration of Consumer Goods. Shimanovskii, the chief accountant of Metal Marketing and Sales.

Stalinsk oblast

F.G. Borisenko, born in 1905, a member of CPSU since 1939, works as a kindergarten director.

Sumy oblast:

A.I. Zhukov, born in 1916, a former member of CPSU (expelled for murder) and operative Upolnomochennyi of the oblast MVD.

Bulgakov, a member of CPSU, a veteran of the Patriotic War and recipient of 4 governmental awards.<sup>83</sup>

Polonnik also commented on the high attendance of prayer services in cities and workers' towns. “As a rule, prayer services in these prayer homes are held 4-6 times a week, and

<sup>82</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5205, p. 73.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 73-74.

on Sundays and holidays—twice a day.” “Sectarian communities in cities and workers’ towns,” he added, “have experienced preachers, choirs, pump organs, and use various musical performances in framing their prayer services. All this attracts visitors and contributes to the influx of new members.”<sup>84</sup>

Reporting in 1963, towards the end of Khrushchev’s antireligious campaign, Litvin essentially reiterated Polonnik’s earlier observations. “The study of the composition of the recruited,” he wrote, “shows that there are 24 % of industrial workers among them in cities and 43 % of kolkhozniks in villages, the rest being housewives, dependents and pensioners. 843 of the recruited have 7-10 grades of education. In some oblasts, the percentage of workers is even higher.”<sup>85</sup> Litvin certainly tried to downplay the Protestants’ rather successful survival of recent persecution and convince the party authorities that the strategies of containment, applied by the CARC and other involved agencies for years, produced some tangible results. Most of all, Litvin de-emphasized the ability of Protestant communities to reproduce on the account of educated non-believers. The bulk of the people recruited by Protestant communities, he argued, were women, “the majority of whom do not work anywhere, do not participate in social life, and many of whom are barely literate.” In order to somehow mask the disappointing data reappearing here and there in his report—an approach that the CARC/CAR officials would increasingly use from the mid 1960s and until the USSR’s collapse—Litvin made an assertion that reflected his wishful thinking rather than the true state of affairs: “It should

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>85</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5663, p. 89.

be noted that the sects' reproduction [in the sense of replacements of natural and other losses] occurs mainly on the account of children and relatives of believing sectarians. Persons who earlier did not have anything to do with sectarianism account only for an insignificant percent [of the new converts]."<sup>86</sup> This assertion sounded quite odd next to the following information, entered by Litvin in his report just a page earlier:

But the activity of the EKhb and SDA sects does not die down and remains very high. The sectarian leaders and their activists do everything they can to slow down the process of believers' departure from religion, to prevent the organizational breakup of communities, and to replenish the losses within their ranks. Despite the efforts...to limit the influence of sectarians on society, the influx of new recruits into their ranks, unfortunately, does not stop. Many communities, especially of the EKhb sect, annually recruit significant number of new members. Only during the year under review, 3,000 recruits, including 700 people under the age of 25, were prepared for the full-immersion baptism...There is not a single oblast in the republic where the influx [of new converts] into religious sects has ceased.<sup>87</sup>

To make matters worse, Litvin could not quote any figures showing specifically how many believers "broke ties with religion and became atheists under the influence of scientific-atheist propaganda and individual work with them."<sup>88</sup>

Besides confirming that Protestants in Soviet Ukraine successfully adapted to challenges of modernity, the evidence of Polonnik's and Litvin's reports reinforces my argument that despite very real hardships experienced by believers between 1959 and 1963, the Soviet government's self-imposed constraints of legal nature and its concerns about the USSR's image abroad prevented the Khrushchev antireligious campaign from delivering the sort of paralyzing and crippling blow to religion that Khrushchev himself

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

may have favored and that earlier historiography on the subject believed to be the case. The evidence suggests that the Khrushchev campaign not only failed to seriously cripple religion's reproductive capability, but it could not even maintain the reproductive status quo of religious communities that existed in the late 1950s. The majority of registered Protestant communities not only survived the persecution, but continued to grow in membership, whereas the unregistered religious communities certainly increased in number as a result of persecution. The state's last massive attempt to undermine religion (its total annihilation in the postwar Soviet context could only be but a wild dream of an erratic individual, such as Khrushchev) caused a lot of pain to many individual believers and communities and produced frightening statistics indicating the quantitative reduction of religious communities by a third across the entire confessional spectrum, but it failed to eliminate believers themselves—they simply joined either other registered communities or underground groups and intrepidly continued the work of evangelization and recruitment of new converts.

The Protestant denominations' shift of the center of their activity to the more sophisticated urban environment and their noticeable success in converting people with secondary and higher education, accompanied simultaneously by growing into adulthood of the new generation of Protestant children whose education was considerably better than that of their parents, presented Soviet Protestants with yet another challenge. Many of their leaders and activists felt that in order to sustain the appeal of their message in the new environment, they had to refashion the antiquated Protestant image by expanding the narrow confessional boundaries of intellectual discourse in communities and establishing

some form of dialogue with the mainstream Soviet culture. The new converts from the better educated and cultured strata of Soviet society also needed to have a voice in Protestant communities. They contributed greatly to translating the Protestant message into terms more understandable to people of their own frame of mind, thus further breaking the artificial isolation of Protestant communities in Soviet society.

L.I. Kovalenko studied philosophy at the university in Kiev. When the administration divulged his association with the EKhB, he was expelled, but continued his education via correspondence at the Odessa University. In 1947, Vil'khovyi personally listened to a sermon delivered by this student at the EKhB community in Kiev (on Zhilianskaia Street) and included the following comment in his report:

This student-preacher (with a certificate in his pocket from the dean's office of the Department of Philosophy at Kiev University) supported his sermon on 'Samaritan wells' with the following excerpt from a philosophical novel of the French writer Etienne Cabet *Voyage en Icarie*:

'And our conviction becomes unshakable when we see that almost all philosophers and savants proclaim equality; when we see that Jesus Christ, a herald of the greatest reform, the founder of a new religion, who is worshiped as a god, proclaimed equality in order to liberate humanity...'

The urban youths, perhaps students who attended the prayer service (apparently on Kovalenko's invitation) discussed Etienne Cabet's book...among themselves after Kovalenko's sermon. They were clearly interested in this book. Unfortunately, no one conducts literary-critical evenings among students, with the purpose of critical analysis of utopian writers...Etienne Cabet, however, argued in his *True Christianity* that Jesus' goal was the establishment of Communist order on earth. Sectarian students employ the writings of utopian authors to do 'certain work,' while our civil society abstains from interfering with it, as if there was nothing reprehensible in it.<sup>89</sup>

Vil'khovyi also felt perturbed by believers' incorporation into their ethos of the ostensibly Soviet authors. For example, he worried about how the Soviet students and

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<sup>89</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 12, p. 67.

school children would respond to the following passages from Gorky's novel *Mother*, quoted by believers in support of the democratic and proletarian image of Christ:

...in the novel of A.M. Gorky, *Mother* (second part of Chapter VIII), it is written that the mother of Pavel Vlasov 'knew through pictures portraying Christ and from stories about him that he was the friend of the poor' ... In a conversation with a simple woman, Tatiana, the novel's heroine (a positive example) states: 'I don't know about God, but I believe in Christ...and believe his words—love thy neighbor as yourself...' Many readers would ask a question: 'Why did A.M. Gorky...portray agitators as people summoning the working masses, especially peasants, to a fight against the tsarist regime 'with the help of quotes from the gospel'? For example, Rybin (one of the novel's heroes) stated the following about his methods of propaganda: '...I mostly use the Bible—there is some good stuff in it. It is a thick official book, printed by the Synod. One can trust it...' <sup>90</sup>

According to Vil'khovyi, "some contemporary EKbB leaders" attempted to vivify "the myth" about the "democratic nature of Christ" initially brought to Russia from Western Europe by "the petty bourgeois Populist intelligentsia of the 1870s." The head of CARC interpreted this tendency as the EKbB "flirtation with the working class and kolkhozniks," an attempt to "adapt and gain trust...by placing the equation sign between the teachings of Jesus Christ and Soviet reality." Vil'khovyi instantly dismissed this believers' search for some common language with the regime as just another adaptive strategy and a dangerous encroachment on the state's ideological monopoly. "Our [social] order, in which religion is dying out," he wrote, "does not need the services of religion and church for its buttressing and preservation."<sup>91</sup>

In 1957, Vil'khovyi again brought it to the attention of party leadership that "Senior Presbyters employ in their training of preachers not only the Bible and magazine

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

‘Brotherly Messenger,’ printed by the spiritual center, but also the classical literature.” It especially piqued Vil’khovyi that “preachers were recommended to carefully study the ingenious work of the Czech pedagogue John Amos Comenius, *Didactica Magna*.”<sup>92</sup> A pastor and a follower of Jan Hus and Calvin, Comenius “wrote his pedagogical work in a religious form reflecting the epoch of XVII century.” For this reason, Vil’khovyi surmised, “sectarian leaders try to obtain this book and use it in their work among the youth.”<sup>93</sup> Vil’khovyi’s conversations with the EKhB Senior Presbyters, Ponomarchuk, Mel’nikov, Eniukov, and Ponurko, revealed that “each of the latter purchased several copies of Comenius’ *Selected Works* (Uchpedgiz edition, 1955).” Mel’nikov even complained about a very limited edition of “such a good book”—only “20,000 copies...for the entire USSR.” Knowing that there was really nothing the state could do to prevent believers from buying this officially approved publication, Vil’khovyi still felt compelled to include the following comment in his report: “It is desirable that the Soviet book-selling network moved the writings of John Amos Comenius into the hands of pedagogues and scientific workers, and not into the hands of sectarians.”<sup>94</sup>

Although Vil’khovyi timely detected and accurately described the new emerging trend among the Protestants towards refashioning and modernizing their image and, by implication, the image of religion in general by means of anchoring the evangelical message more firmly in the universal cultural legacy of humanity, he had only a remote idea of the scale of this Soviet Protestant renaissance and its appeal for thousands of

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<sup>92</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 4608, p. 75.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

young and motivated believers. While the state continued to inundate the Soviet book market with antireligious literature and carefully screen all proposed publications for messages challenging the dominant Marxist-Leninist ideology, it could not utterly sterilize volumes of available Russian and western classics or effectively enforce the official materialist interpretation of such highly spiritual works as Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* or Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*. As the state tried to persuade the educated public that religion was but an outmoded phenomenon of the past, the believers drew on the intellectual-cultural legacy of posterity and selected thoughts of great luminaries to convince the same public of the eternal appeal of religion, transcending social classes and political systems. Svetlana Volkoslavskaia vividly described this Protestant counterstrategy in her novel *One Day as a Thousand Years*. One of the novel characters, an SDA believer, reminisced:

My husband often did not return home even by night and stayed somewhere until very late, at Feodor Bush's for example...His house [Bush's] was transformed into a mini-studio where the underground tape recordings of religious programs were made. We read into a microphone the sayings of famous thinkers, writers and scientists about God and faith, and used classical music as a background for such recordings. In order to collect such sayings, Nikolai and Marysia spent hours in libraries, where they flicked through various collections of literary works and prerevolutionary publications. The reels of such recordings were distributed among the interested people in the city and even delivered to villages, workers' settlements and railroad stations. They were kept there by reliable people as an on-site audio library.<sup>95</sup>

Such efforts helped believers to dispel the Soviet-projected image of religious people as benighted ignoramuses, question the Soviet assertion of the putative irreconcilability of religion and science, and overcome the narrow dogmatism and

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<sup>95</sup> Volkoslavskaia, p. 296.



aesthetic blandness of the Protestant message inside and outside the prayer house. Instead of bombarding the often uninformed secular prayer house guests or personal acquaintances with arcane biblical texts, the young Protestant activists increasingly employed broader arguments of a moral and existential nature that allowed them to engage their listeners and interlocutors at a more familiar level of general knowledge. The recitation during religious services of spiritual poems by such Russian classics as Lomonosov, Derzhavin, Pushkin, Lermontov, Tiutchev, Fet, Nikolai Gumilev, or Boris Pasternak made the gospel message more graspable for the occasional prayer house visitors while supporting certain homiletic statements with quotations from the universally recognized authors helped the Protestant preachers to underscore the unfading pertinence of spiritual questions in the context of modernity and enriched the prayer service experience for everyone. One of the present day bearers of this tradition, a literature instructor at the SDA Theological Seminary in Zaokskii, Russia, and a compiler of the acclaimed anthology of universal spiritual thought on a variety of topics, Victor Liakhu, provided an eloquent articulation of what had been recognized and practiced by many educated Christian activists in the postwar USSR:

It was often necessary to remind students during the live classroom discussions that in the system of spiritual education ‘the queen of sciences’ (theology) must not, and cannot, abolish or marginalize the belles-lettres. From the standpoint of Christian worldview, the belles-lettres undoubtedly reflects in its multidimensional layers the eternal conflict—the dramatic contest over moral self-determination between the human being and God, between an individual and the world in which he/she lives. Moreover, it is evident for every serious researcher that the great Russian literature, when it turns to problems of social reality, not only models its imagined world on the striking truth of the mundane, but also looks towards the absolute biblical ideals and values... The Holy Scriptures and theology offer an undoubtedly important, but rather dogmatic knowledge, whereas literature offers the knowledge of everyday life, with all its

perturbations and multidimensionality...The correct understanding of the purpose of literature in this world can, and ought to, determine a great deal in the missionary strategy of Christianity...The belles-lettres, with its spiritual-moral objectives, joins the mission of Christianity as an ally in the struggle for the rebirth of the human soul...In our vast country, literature, anchored in the metaphysical meanings of the Holy Scripture, is a peculiar bridge that connects the two continents—the religious and secular realms.<sup>96</sup>

Such open-mindedness towards the rich trans-denominational spiritual legacy of mankind was not always embraced without reservations by the more doctrinaire Protestant authorities during the Soviet era, and yet the trend towards greater cultural amelioration, as Litvin observed in 1963, prevailed: “In the past, the church authorities in many EKHB communities prohibited members from reading newspapers or secular literature, watching movies and listening to radio programs. All of this was considered not from God and, hence, sinful. Now, it is no longer prohibited.”<sup>97</sup> The CARC certainly interpreted the Protestants’ interest in non-dogmatic issues not as a natural consequence of believers’ growing literacy, political awareness and broader education, not as their search for integration and a specific social role in the Soviet society, but as a mere attempt to ensure religion’s survival in the technologically advanced Communist country. The periodic analyses of Protestant sermons convinced Litvin of the following:

In order not to ultimately lose their influence among believers, religious theoreticians and clergy speak more and more often about the common basis of religious and Communist worldviews, about the compatibility of the norms of religious and Communist morality. Religionists, who had previously spoken openly against the materialist worldview, are now beginning to state their positive attitude towards Communist principles...’Christianity and Communism have a lot in common. The principles of Communism were first proclaimed by Christ the Savior’ (Zhitomir). ‘Christ wished to build life on Earth in such a way that there

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<sup>96</sup> *Simfoniia idei i obrazov: na materialakh russkoi i zarubezhnoi klassiki i dukhovnoi literatury*, compiled by V.S. Liakhu (St. Petersburg: “Bibliia dlia vsekh,” 2002), p. 5-7.

<sup>97</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5908, p. 86-87.

would be no paupers or rich and people would be fused together by brotherly love and live well. The CPSU program is quite compatible with the spirit of this [Christ's] teaching' (Lugansk)...Religious morality is one of the most prominent topics in religious sermons. 'Christ was the first socialist—the spiritual father and precursor of the Communist Party.' 'The principles placed in the foundation of the October Revolution were very close to the words and teaching of Christ.' 'God not only established but strengthened the Soviet state.'<sup>98</sup>

Having established the close affinity between the Communist and religious moral codes, the Protestant preachers, observed Litvin, worked hard to encourage members of their communities to be competitive—to attain and hold the high moral ground and, in doing so, prove to the bearers of secular values that there could be no morality without religion. The EKhB presbyter, Isaichenko, for example, stated the following in his conversation with the Council's Upolnomochennyi for Zaporozhie oblast: "We are presently educating members of our communities on examples drawn from the moral code of a builder of Communism. I read this code—it is very well written. We cultivate in our members the spirit of fraternity, mutual assistance, respect for all people and other good qualities. Is this bad? Of course, it's good."<sup>99</sup> The preacher of Kirovograd EKhB community, Torban', reported Litvin, focused in his sermon "on the moral cast and virtuous behavior of believers" and "repeatedly stressed the so-called moral superiority of a believer over the non-believer and the necessity to act commendably among the latter": "That is why, dear brothers and sisters, conduct yourselves diligently always and everywhere, so that people from the surrounding sinful world saw you as worthy of his [Christ's] grace. In doing so, you will set an example for them and show them how to

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<sup>98</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5909, p. 79-80.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

make the first steps towards the truth.”<sup>100</sup> In his sermon in the town of Uman’, an SDA preacher, Zadnepruk, said:

The Word of God ennobles a human being and makes him/her useful for the society. It could be read at home, but it brings greater benefits [when it is read] in a prayer house. Here, we carefully study how one must conduct himself/herself in the society. There are also people among the non-believers who strive to act well in the society, but they do not believe in God, do not visit our prayer meetings, and do not know how to act decently. So, instead, they behave badly.<sup>101</sup>

The presbyter of the EKhB community in village Lysianka, Cherkassk oblast, Nikitenko, told the Council’s Upolnomochennyi: “We listened, with great pleasure, to the explanation of materials of the Plenum of the Central Committee, since one must study everything but hold on to the good thing (i.e. faith in God). Faith in God cultivates the love of labor, and this is how we help the party...”<sup>102</sup> A Pentecostal preacher and a skilled metal worker, Kormchevyi, reported Litvin, offered the following argument in his sermon:

I have carefully read all materials of the July Plenum of the CC of CPSU, and I fully agree with the party’s educational program. But in order for a man to achieve complete perfection, the Plenum’s decisions have to be supplemented with exhortations from the Bible. If everyone was at such a stage of perfection as we are (Pentecostals), then Communism would be ninety percent built. The most important thing for Communism is not what one believes in, but the creation of the material-technical foundation...<sup>103</sup>

The presbyter of the EKhB community in village Chapaevka, Zaporozhie oblast, Kotsenko, offered a similar argument: “Communists and Baptists fight for the same

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 81-82.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

ideals. We all wish that our people lived well. We do not pursue any other interests when we confess the Word of God.”<sup>104</sup> I.I. Tartsı, the presbyter of the EKhB community in the city of Mukachev, Zakarpatie oblast, articulated this idea with even greater verve: “Christ was the first Communist. We and the party are headed towards the same objective, and it is a pity that Communists reject religion, since we, the Baptists, also cultivate lofty and pure moral standards in people.”<sup>105</sup> The former SDA presbyter, M.F. Sidorkin, speaking of the moral stature of a believer, “concluded that believers would reach Communism first, since they already had fraternity, equality, and were free from the vices of drunkenness and swearing.”<sup>106</sup> The EKhB presbyter, Biriukov (Lugansk oblast), inculcated in his sermon “that believers served everywhere and always as an example...whether you stand in line or ride on a bus, or being at work.” “We, the believing Baptists,” he proudly claimed, “do not smoke or drink; we do not cuss and are meek. All of us live honestly and work hard. We in fact fulfill the moral code of the builder of Communism.”<sup>107</sup>

The underlying premise, implicit in these arguments, strikingly resembles the Evangelical-Baptist aspirations of the 1920s. In a new round of wishful thinking, some postwar Protestants hoped to convince the Soviet government of a certain socially beneficial division of labor, with the state providing for the material welfare of the Soviet

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

society and Protestants taking upon themselves the task of its spiritual-moral regeneration on the basis of mixed Communist-biblical principles. In the light of quarterly and annual Procuracy and MVD reports and other data<sup>108</sup> revealing a sustained high rate of murder, domestic violence, hooliganism, theft, corruption, malfeasance, alcoholism and breakup of families, the Protestants' urge to participate in the moral reconstruction of the Soviet society did not seem unreasonable or far fetched. Despite its beautifully articulated principles, the moral code of the builder of Communism remained an abstraction, unable to endow many rank-and-file Soviet people with the necessary fortitude, discipline and will to achieve the high moral standards it prescribed. The Protestants, the argument implied, succeeded in the moral upbringing of their community members not because the Christian ideals were radically different from those of the builders of Communism, but because the requirement to live morally was psychologically intertwined with their faith in God and the entire matrix of spiritual rewards and punishments serving as an invisible disciplinarian while communities themselves functioned as immediate networks of social control and moral correction. Despite their ostensibly model behavior in the general social milieu, the strong religious underpinning of their morality blocked the Soviet Protestants' access to any unfortunate or delinquent social groups, such as orphans, juvenile criminals, alcoholics, invalids, terminally ill, and prisoners, until perestroika. In the eyes of the Soviet regime, the Protestants were delinquents themselves.

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<sup>108</sup> For example, Elena Zubkova's *Poslevoennoe Sovetskoe obshchestvo: politika i povsednevnost, 1945-1953* (Moskva: Rosspen, 2000) and V.A. Kozlov's *Massovye besporiadki v SSSR pri Khrushcheve i Brezhneve, 1953-nachalo 1980-kh godov* (Novosibirsk: Sibirskii khronograf, 1999).

The Soviet Protestants' attempt to find common ground between Christian and Communist morality occurred simultaneously with their effort to reconcile science and religion. In 1963, Litvin reported:

A peculiar feature of religious propaganda in the modern era is the tendency to reconcile religion and science, to convince believers that science and religion not only do not contradict, but compliment each other. The clergy departs from the biblical precepts presenting science and knowledge as notions abhorrent to God and derivative of the devil [\*]...In order to preserve the authority of the faith in God and to retain believers, the clergy drags out of the closet the so-called theory of the two-fold truth, claiming that there is no impassable chasm between science and religion, and that the difference between them consists only in that science studies the world of senses while religion has to do with the invisible spiritual world...<sup>109</sup>

In order to illustrate this tendency in action, Litvin quoted a number of excerpts from the Protestant sermons delivered in various communities throughout the Soviet Ukraine. Thus, the presbyter of the EKhB community in village Zubary, Vasil'kovskii region, Kiev oblast, I.O. Tereshchenko, "used achievements of chemical science and materials of the December Plenum of CC of CPSU" to postulate "that god exists, although we cannot see him." "A great attention is dedicated in our country to the development of chemical industry, in particular, to the production of fabrics and other materials from gases," quoted Tereshchenko from the materials of the plenum. "Although we do not see gas," he reasoned, "it nevertheless exists. So it is with god—we do not see him, but he exists."<sup>110</sup> The preacher Vozniuk of the Shumskaia EKhB community, Khmel'nitsk

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\* There is no basis for such a categorical statement in the Bible.

<sup>109</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5909, p. 79-80.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

oblast, offered a more engaging argument in defense of reconcilability of religion and science:

...During the patriarchal period of faith, people envisioned the following picture: our Earth is spread on a flat tray, and the tray is supported by three elephants standing on a huge tortoise. But already 1,800 years before the Common Era, the prophet Job had a dream that our Earth represented a sphere which God suspended in the air. In the middle of the Earth, there was a red-hot mass. Many years passed since then, and now God enlightens the minds of scientists and they prove the reality of what had been recorded in the Holy Scripture many years ago. We did not know our universe, and now its structure and mysteries are known to everyone...<sup>111</sup>

The presbyter of the EKhB community in the city of Cherkassy, Kucherenko, spoke against the Soviet practice of ascribing to contemporary believers the outmoded anti-scientific perceptions of their medieval predecessors:

I often attended atheist lectures at which all of us, believers, were represented as backward people who supposedly perceived the Earth as flat. But I must say that none of us has such perception of the Earth. We and our children study the same sciences in school as atheists who read their lectures to us. We acknowledge science and believe in God. God becomes known with the help of science...<sup>112</sup>

Sermonizing “On the Second Coming of Christ,” the EKhB preacher in Kharkov argued that belief and disbelief as well as fiction and reality were separated by essentially the same ephemeral line owing its seeming impenetrability only to the limitations of human knowledge in any given time:

Many people do not believe in the second coming of the son of god, Jesus Christ, as they did not believe that a human being would be able to ascend to the stratosphere and travel to other planets. But you and I are the living witnesses of the human ability to rise into the stratosphere in a spacecraft. We now believe

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p. 86.



that a human being will fly to the moon and other planets. God opened the way for the human being to create spaceships for such flights. The second coming of Christ will also occur just as the man's flight to the stratosphere occurred...<sup>113</sup>

Far from rejecting or questioning the achievements of modern science, the Soviet Protestants strove to incorporate the evidence of science, whenever they could, into their own cosmogony of purpose and design, in which faith and reason were not mutually exclusive but complementary, with religion providing the moral guidance for scientific endeavors. In one of the Protestant communities of Crimea, the preacher Tempfer instructed believers: "Only under the influence of sublime divine ideals humanity undergoes a moral reorientation, improves itself, science and technology. The more a human being delves into the word of god, the less he/she is susceptible to idleness, drunkenness and other human vices."<sup>114</sup> Contrary to the expectations of the Soviet antireligious establishment, the era of space exploration did not implode the believers' spiritual universe. The Protestants continued to look at the immense hodge-podge of stellar matter, toxic gases and rocky projectiles traveling at incredible speeds as their spiritual home whose mind-boggling vastness could be traversed by means other than *Sputnik* or *Vostok*. As mentioned earlier, during the Soviet era the Protestants composed and sang many unauthorized religious hymns that reflected the challenges they met in their everyday lives. One of such uncensored songs, which I recreate from my memory, was especially popular among the SDA youth and contained the following words:

I am but a transient on Earth,  
Immeasurably estranged from this world.

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<sup>113</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5663, p. 92.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

The people crave for a flight in space,  
But I am in a hurry to get home [i.e. heaven].

Without spaceships or powerful rockets,  
We travel into the world of our longings and joyful dreams.  
We pass distant planets on our way,  
Together with us is our reliable fellow-traveler [*sputnik*]—Christ.

Such songs, especially when performed by the young people who were expected to live under Communism, frustrated the Soviet authorities. The CARC's close screening of Protestant sermons for references to science testified that even the simplest arguments for compatibility of science and religion were not brushed aside as mere manifestations of believers' naïveté but taken as a threat to the Soviet antireligious agenda and dutifully reported to the party authorities. The Soviet Protestants certainly did not stop at making only occasional passing references in sermons to the compatibility of religion and science but composed and circulated the more formal arguments designed to provide believers with heavier intellectual ammunition to be used in defending religion against the challenges of modernity. However, the authors and distributors of such arguments ran the risk of attracting the attention of KGB. On November 13, 1962, Polonnik sent the following note to the head of the Department of Propaganda and Agitation at the CC of CPU, comrade Shevel:

I hereby report that on October 26, this year, a CPSU member and a pensioner, comrade Shakhov, appeared at the Oktiabr'skii Raikom of the party in the city of Zaporozhie and turned in a type-written brochure entitled 'God and Nature' (signed I. Bondarenko), which he obtained from the resident of Zaporozhie, Maiboroda. This brochure represents an example of typed religious propaganda illegally disseminated by sectarians. The investigation determined that Anna Lukianovna Maiboroda (born in 1934; resides in Zaporozhie at 20 Arkhitekturnaia St, has secondary education and works as a nurse at the city psychiatric hospital) is one of the leaders of sectarian underground in Zaporozhie oblast. The Zaporozhie oblast KGB, to whom the brochure 'God and Nature' has

been forwarded, presently works on establishing the identity of the author, I. Bondarenko. A copy of Bondarenko's brochure is attached for your information.<sup>115</sup>

From the point of view of a present day researcher, the reaction to this brochure of all involved Soviet parties, from the pensioner Shakhov to the KGB, seems supererogatory, since Bondarenko's brochure contained a fairly innocuous variant of the old "clock and clock-maker" argument employing simple syllogisms and set against the Russian background of an occasional conversation between an ordinary believer and a professor both traveling by train towards some destination. The believer, of course, defeats the professor with primitive but convincing arguments. The learned professor is at least puzzled by a new perspective propounded by his interlocutor, the overarching point of the entire brochure being that science does not rule out religion but, on the contrary, proves its credibility. The believer, for instance, advances the following argument:

But faith in nature is founded on nothing but an awkward proposition that nature created itself. This proposition does not stand any criticism and is worse than any superstition or fanaticism because it cannot give a man anything in life and cannot console his sorrow at the moment of death. Such faith brings only harm. It destroys the moral foundation of family, society and state: it produces godlessness—the root of all evil and misfortune. Various crimes occur as a result of it, and these crimes lead to more prisons, courts and superintendants, but, mainly, such faith in nature kills the people's faith in higher justice...<sup>116</sup>

By drawing examples from the physical world and skillfully manipulating Kantian philosophy, the believer demonstrates, towards the end of the brochure, that his home-grown rationale and essentially existentialist postulates make more sense than professor's

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<sup>115</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5589, p. 138.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144.

generalizations a la “It’s ridiculous nowadays to be a believer.” For many Soviet Protestants, who accepted God’s existence a priori at the first place, reading such brochures was both comforting and reassuring. As for the non-believers, they were often drawn towards religion not because of the scientific veracity of believers’ arguments, but because they hungered for an alternative to the institutional Soviet doctrine.

In 1968, Litvin forwarded to the mentioned Shevel one of the multiple copies of “Biblical Answers to various Questions’ that were apprehended among believers of the sect of Pentecostals” in Kirovograd oblast.<sup>117</sup> Containing 37 questions and answers and a whole slew of quotations by famous scientists in defense of religion, this document represented a more elaborate supplement for believers’ conversations with skeptics and reiterated many arguments advanced by western creationism. For example, in response to question 34—“What did the believers do for the development of state and science?”—the provided answer stated:

The role of believing people in these areas is priceless, colossal. Christianity brought literacy to the ancient Rus’: the monks Cyril and Methodius composed the first set of grammar. The share of believers in science up to 1928 constituted 92%, and included Lomonosov, Eiler, Kulibin, Mendeleev, Popov, Ohm, Pirogov, Pavlov, Michiurin, Tsiolkovskii, and others. They believed in God and contributed to the glory of their Motherland. True believers are always faithful to their nation, and this is the main condition for the well-being of the state.<sup>118</sup>

In response to question 32—“Is it true that religion is a remnant of capitalism?”—the following answer was offered: “It would be wiser to say that religion is a remnant of primeval Communism, not capitalism, since capitalism appeared recently, 200 years ago,

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<sup>117</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 82, p. 20-36.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

but religion exists since the creation of man. Since mankind remembers itself, it also remembers religion.”<sup>119</sup> The authors of these questions/answers clearly intended to reassure believers by demonstrating that faith in God was not antithetical to a scientific mind but, on the contrary, immanent in human beings. To add greater weight to their assertions, the brochure’s authors lavishly quoted from acknowledged luminaries of the scientific world, such as the following, for instance: “The great physicist and mathematician, V. Ramsay [?], said: ‘The majority of the leading people of science are not against religion and Christianity... True science and true religion are not, and could not be, against each other,’ or “The great chemist and physiologist, Pasteur, said: ‘I studied nature for a long time, and that is why I believe as an ordinary Christian .’”<sup>120</sup>

While some Protestants sought dialogue and accommodation with both Communism and science, trying to convince the state and general Soviet public that they were not the anecdotal remnants of the medieval era but loyal patriotic citizens whose faith in God did not stop them from keeping pace with modernity, other believers, especially members of unregistered groups and religious underground, lived lives of perpetual struggle and isolation in the milieu of clandestine meetings, police round-ups, house searches and prosecutions—a milieu that strikingly resembled that of illegal parties and political dissenters of the tsarist era, the difference being that the formerly outlawed Communist party now acted as a gendarme. As this study has so far demonstrated, even for the registered Protestant communities the Soviet experience was that of intermittent

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., p. 35

harassment and tribulation, which could not but cultivate in believers apocalyptic forebodings and enhance their millenarianism. In his sermon, delivered in Dnepropetrovsk, a preacher, named But, exhorted: “We live in the midst of an atheist world; we are surrounded by atheism, even at work. But we must stand firm in the faith, so that they would not be able to push us off our chosen path. We must read the Bible more, delve into the Word of God, and pray assiduously.”<sup>121</sup> This sense of encirclement and confrontation with the hostile world (in parallel with the dominant Soviet motif of the Cold War era) found its artistic expression in believers’ appropriation of the Bolsheviks’ own revolutionary lore—in creation of pastiches that combined melodies of famous revolutionary songs with ostensibly Christian lyrics. In 1963, Litvin reported to the Central Committee:

The emotionally charged psalms to the tunes of revolutionary songs are sung at prayer meetings. For example, believers of the SDA community in village Semenovka, Cherkassk oblast sing a psalm, entitled ‘The Warriors of Christ’s Host,’ to the musical motif of ‘Varshavianka.’ This psalm contains the following words: ‘The grim days have arrived; an ordeal is awaiting us.’<sup>122</sup>

While working in the archive of CARC/CAR in Kiev, I ran across two versions of a Christian psalm written to the tune of the famous Communist hymn, the “International” and one version of a psalm written to the melody of USSR’s national anthem. All these pastiches retained some of the originals’ lyrics. Here are some samples of Protestant renditions of the “International”:

Rise up, burdened by the sin,  
The world of slaves of disbelief!

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<sup>121</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5663, p. 92.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

Rise up for the uncompromising fight  
 And be always prepared to die.  
 Refrain:  
 This will be the last and decisive battle.  
 Liberated by Christ, the human race will rejoice.

No one will rescue us,  
 Only God's hand will save us.  
 Jesus' blood flowed like a stream,  
 Granting deliverance to everyone.

We are the workers of the worldwide,  
 Great army of Christ.  
 We, the Christians of the universe,  
 Must always be exemplary.<sup>123</sup>

A different version of the Christian "International," forwarded by Litvin to the CC of CPU on 12-29-1967, was composed by members of the Baptist schismatic movement but conveyed the same sense of uncompromising apocalyptic struggle between the forces of good and evil:

Rise up, enslaved by sin,  
 The whole world of helpless slaves!  
 Our mind, enlightened by God,  
 Is ready to cross swords with sin.

Christ will destroy the sinful  
 To its foundation, and then  
 He will establish peace on the planet,  
 And God will permeate everything everywhere.

Refrain:  
 This is our last and decisive battle.  
 With Emmanuel, the humankind will rejoice.

In order to overthrow the thralldom of the power of sin  
 And overcome death forever,  
 We must be faithful to the grave,  
 And preserve our faith in Jesus.

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<sup>123</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 454, p. 20-21.

Only we, the workers of the worldwide  
Great army of Christ,  
Have the right to own Earth,  
But the lawbreaker—never [has the same right].

And should the great thunder rumble  
Above those who reject God,  
Christ would become our salvation,  
Since he summoned us to life.<sup>124</sup>

The Protestant version of the USSR's national anthem contained the following passages:

The indestructible union of great liberty  
Was galvanized forever by the holy love,  
And Christ's shed blood washed us  
—People entrusted to God alone.

Through the lightning and storms of life's sea  
We will sail ahead, fearless of the enemy's forces.  
Christ will help us—he is our strength after all,  
Since he, the first-born, paved the way for us.

Our way to heaven, to Christ, is a battle  
—A battle against our own flesh, sin, and evil.  
But at a difficult moment, we will, undoubtedly,  
Call upon Christ, and God will help us.<sup>125</sup>

In all three of the quoted excerpts the Protestants preserved the central motif of these known revolutionary hymns—that of a titanic apocalyptic struggle between the two opposing forces. In the Protestant versions, however, the Marxist historical inevitability of a final clash between the bourgeoisie and proletariat that would result in a predictable dénouement of a socially just Communist society is replaced by the tropes reflecting the same deterministic belief in Christ's final victory over the forces of the godless.

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<sup>124</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 72, p. 148.

<sup>125</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 454, p. 20-21.



Although the Communists' struggle unfolded in the tangible realm of economic relations while the struggle depicted in the Protestant adaptations took place in the invisible spiritual realm, the Soviet ideological gurus had a healthy respect for the power of ideas, especially alternative ideas propounding the same deterministic outcome of human history, and, therefore, took all available measures to discourage the use of millenarian rhetoric or imagery in Protestant sermons without taking into account that the Soviet conditions of active struggle against religion, translating into constant harassment and social ostracism of believers, fostered the Protestants' apocalyptic mentality. In 1963, Litvin reported:

In one of sectarian prayer houses of Cherkassk oblast, the following inscription was made below the painting *The Last Day of Pompeii* [by Karl Briulov]: 'A terrible judgment will come, and only those who believed in God would be saved.' Underneath the painting *A Storm in the Mediterranean* [by Ivan Aivazovsky], detected in another prayer house, it was written: 'They believed in God, and he rescued them.'<sup>126</sup>

Due to both their protracted isolation from the West during the Soviet era and the force of tradition in the predominantly patriarchal Slavic culture, many Soviet Protestants, especially their old-generation leaders, retained a very strict and denominationally narrow interpretation of Protestantism brought to tsarist Russia by western missionaries during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Competing against the artistically rich tradition of the ROC, with its veneration of icons and lavishly frescoed church interiors, Protestants in Russia/USSR often acted as the living supporters of the centuries-old Melanchthonian iconoclasm and limited the décor of their prayer houses to framed biblical texts alone (quite in line with the Reformation's slogan of *sola scriptura*).

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<sup>126</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5663, p. 94.

In this context, the evidence of Litvin's report indicated only a marginal use by some Protestant communities of select artworks (usually depicting catastrophic events) for exclusively didactic purposes of furthering the millenarian agenda. For the same reason, it can be argued, the heroes of Volkoslavskaja's novel and prominent SDA leaders of the 1970s-1990s, Nikolai Libenko and Rostislav Volkoslavskii, created in their younger days an elaborate illustrated chart of prophetic human history reflecting the evidence from the books of Daniel and Apocalypse and featuring artistic renditions of "winged lions, fanged bears, and the notorious 'little horn' that would bring so much misfortune upon the mankind." Supplied abundantly with historical dates and references, the chart was clearly designed to intrigue the non-believers, spark conversations with them about either the finitude of great empires of the past or the rise of the new world order in the future and, ultimately, lead them to the recognition of God's predetermined plan for the salvation of humanity and the establishment of the only lasting kingdom—that of Christ:

Listen to how Hegel writes about the fall of the Babylonian Empire: 'What's left today of this once powerful people? A pitiful skeleton! What's left of the great kingdom? The palaces of kings are inhabited by wild animals...Is this the outcome of human affairs? Is this how the states and peoples pass away?'<sup>127</sup>

In the 1950s the CARC began pressuring the Protestant leaders to embark on the project of secularizing their communities. The notorious "Instructional Letter," issued by the VSEKhB in 1960, stipulated:

The Senior Presbyter must remember that his duties also include the struggle against the incorrect views on art, literature, radio, television, and other forms of culture—views that still have place among our brothers and sisters in the faith. He must never stop explaining to presbyters, preachers and ordinary members of

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<sup>127</sup> Volkoslavskaja, p. 220-221.

communities that it is necessary to systematically elevate and develop their cultural level.<sup>128</sup>

The experience of the 1960s and following decades proved that the Protestants succeeded in turning this governmental strategy into a counter-strategy by selectively familiarizing themselves with artworks and literature that reinforced their faith, sharpened their arguments and helped translate their religious message into the language of the present-day cultural discourse. However, it would be a mistake to assume that the Soviet Protestants' interest in the artistic and literary legacy of humanity stemmed from strictly utilitarian concerns of proselytism or moral instruction. The generation of believers who came of age in the 1960s lived in a much broader cultural/intellectual world than their parents. An excerpt from the following letter, written to his sister by Rostislav Volkoslavskii from Magnitogorsk in 1963, reveals a very complex cultural makeup of a young SDA believer and his genuine interest in the issues of the here and now:

Is it difficult to live here? Yes, at times, it is very difficult... It is hard to bust the frozen soil or weld at extreme heights. But every morning people go to Magnitka. This place will only become livable when people have traversed this land—people wearing soiled uniforms, rubber boots and coarse gloves. These people are builders... I'll be honest, Valechka, the reality of a Komsomol construction project can often be quite nasty, but this is not what I'd like to talk about. Rather, I would like to tell you about how great it is to go forward, overcoming the blizzard that is trying to knock you off your feet...

In my opinion, your poems are very realistic. Such realism—not classical, but contemporary, special—can be seen only in the works of some poets and writers of the past two decades. I sensed this in Remark, Kobzev, Paustovskii, and felt it in books *The Tibo Family* and *The Wind Promises the Storm*. A whiff of something similar emanates from the postwar paintings of Deineka. The everyday routine is present in all of this in certain soft and natural colors. Perhaps, it is an attempt to do away with the 'classical salience,' artistic lacquer, and flawlessness of the 19<sup>th</sup> century masters. Undoubtedly, this is the product of the 1940s, the product of our century. Not the bare naturalism, but a certain

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<sup>128</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 454, p. 49-58.

sincerity of expression...It is an aspiration to go beyond the boundaries of artificiality of art itself—to give light as nature itself gives it; to sound as the natural sound sounds, to suffer and rejoice as ordinary people do it...It seems to me that the Italian cinema, which I value as the most perfect, went farther than others in this direction. Do you remember us watching the film ‘Machinist’ with mama? Or that Czech movie—‘The May Stars’? They certainly possess that ‘quintessence.’ Very little is said or written about it yet, but it is already accepted as something incorruptible and real. It has humanism, and this means that it will survive. Clear the way for it!<sup>129</sup>

While some Puritanical hardliners frowned upon the occasional timid attempts to brighten the austere and sterile interiors of Protestant prayer houses with a purely symbolic cross or a painting of Jesus carrying the lost sheep on his shoulders, and opposed the use of secular (non-denominational) literature and poetry as illustrative or support material in Protestant sermons, arguing that such encroachments of worldly sophistication and eloquence somehow diluted the apostolic simplicity of a Protestant rite, people like Rostislav Volkoslavskii, Nikolai Libenko, and countless others continued to build their immense libraries, spending their meager earnings on collecting and absorbing the treasures of world literature, art, history and philosophy. From the perspective of such people, the artistic renditions of biblical themes by Gustav Dore, Alexander Ivanov, Nikolai Ge, Ilia Repin, or Ivan Kramskoi were not the temptingly wrapped packages of competitive denominational doctrines (Catholic or Orthodox), but spiritually charged reflections upon timeless and universal existential truths. In this sense, the postwar generation of Soviet Protestants did not only reinterpret the government secularizing agenda to fit the purposes of religion (as a survival strategy), but moved independently towards embracing the rich universal spiritual heritage of

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<sup>129</sup> Volkoslavskiaia, p. 210-212.

humanity. It was this authentic and conscientious move towards well-rounded, liberal, and uncensored self-education that epitomized, more than anything else, the Soviet Protestants' response to the challenges of modernity.

Unlike the more conservative Orthodox Church, Protestant denominations were quick in adapting modern technologies, such as tape recorders, short wave radio receivers and, later, VCRs, for the purpose of propagating their teachings. The tape-recording of sermons by influential preachers, of musical performances by religious orchestras and choirs, and of religious radio programs transmitted from abroad provided the Soviet Protestants with a portable storage of information on reels and its relatively easy distribution to faraway communities that often could not be visited by closely watched eloquent preachers or large and conspicuous musical groups. Such practices boosted the sense of togetherness in believers living in various geographic locations throughout the republic, informed them of what their fellow brethren were doing in other parts of the country and abroad, and made them aware of the international, global scale of their denominations' operations. Lastly, the use of modern technology enhanced the perception of Protestants by the mainstream Soviet society, as people who, contrary to official propaganda, welcomed rather than shunned these tempting features of contemporary civilization. It is not surprising that the Protestants' use of tape recorders and short wave radios came to the attention of CARC as soon as these technologies became generally available and affordable in the Soviet Union. Predictably, the CARC responded by banning the use of these new technologies for purposes of religious propaganda.

One of the first references to this new phenomenon of Protestants' adaptability to modern conditions appeared in the 1962 report to Polonnik of the Upolnomochennyi for Cherkassk oblast:

On November 24, 1961, the Society for the Dissemination of Political and Scientific Knowledge organized an antireligious evening for believers...to which members of the SDA and EKHB communities were invited...The society's presenters...used materials collected by atheists, namely, examples from Sumy and Odessa oblast...Comrade Pidoprigorshchuk provided examples of sectarians' use of tape recorders, as in the case of the former SDA Senior Presbyter, Shul'ga, who, in his time, used this technology...<sup>130</sup>

A year later, reporting to the Department of Propaganda and Agitation about the recent visit of Kiev Baptists by a representative of the American missionary society "Gospel for Reference," a US citizen of Russian descent, Daniil Nikolaevich Paisty, Polonnik linked the proliferation of tape-recorded religious materials in Ukraine with the work of foreign religious radio stations and implored the party authorities to take drastic measures and eliminate this new challenge to the state's ideological monopoly. Characterizing the activity of Daniil Paisty and his associates, he wrote:

Daniil Paisty speaks perfect Russian and, as he himself admitted, is engaged in the propaganda of Baptist teachings among the youth and children in the European countries. 'Gospel for Reference' conducts its activity in close cooperation with another American organization—"Trans-world Radio"—which has a powerful radio-transmitting station in Europe, in Monte Carlo—the capital of the Duchy of Monaco. In his conversations with the Kiev Baptists, the American guest strongly advertized religious programs from Monte Carlo, especially sermons by his brother, Jarl Paisty, who usually delivers them after 6 o'clock in the evening on Saturdays. Jarl Paisty also speaks perfect Russian, and his sermons are addressed to Baptists in the Soviet Union.

The reception of the Monte Carlo Baptist radio programs is excellent. This was confirmed by a special listening session which the American guest attended. There were absolutely no noises interfering with the reception. In the light of this,

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<sup>130</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 373, p. 1-2.

it becomes clear from where our sectarians acquired a significant number of high quality tape-recorded sermons and choir and solo musical performances in 1962. They were all taken from foreign radio programs. During 1962, several dozen reels with recorded religious sermons and singing were requisitioned. We have forbidden all registered EKHB and SDA communities to use tape recorders in their prayer houses. But this is not enough. In order to increase the efficiency of our atheist work among sectarians, it is necessary to make it technically impossible for them to listen and record foreign radio programs of religious nature... We need measures that would bring religious radio programs from abroad to naught.<sup>131</sup>

On February 19, 1963, one of the sector heads of the Department of Science and Culture at the CC of CPU, Yarovenko, responded to Polonnik's alert. Although a special surveillance of Monte Carlo radio programs, conducted recently, confirmed that the "Trans-world Radio" was "subsidized by imperialists of the USA," that the "clarity of their reception in Kiev" was "exceptional," and that Paisty in his sermons encouraged Soviet youths "to invite acquaintances to listen to his religious programs and write him letters" and, moreover, promised to send Bibles to anyone "free of charge," the Special Department, according to Yarovenko, considered the Monte Carlo radio stations "not subject to suppression" and, therefore, politely declined Polonnik's request "to organize their blockage by technical means." Yarovenko further informed Polonnik that the head of the sector for radio and television broadcasting of the Ideological Department at the CC of CPSU, O.M. Yakovlev, who was also consulted, "does not advise at this time to organize the suppression of Monte Carlo religious programs in Ukraine."<sup>132</sup> Such a cautious and reserved reply of the central Moscow authorities to the urgent alarm sounded by the Ukrainian CARC could be explained, on one hand, by Khrushchev's

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<sup>131</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5778, p. 3-4.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p. 1-2.

waning power and the negative publicity that the recent religious persecution created for the USSR abroad. On the other hand, the central authorities' cool response to this republican-level official's request serves as another illustration of the frequent lack of congruity in the perception of religious policy by the central and local authorities. Despite Moscow's reluctance to suppress certain religious radio programs from abroad, one's listening to these programs or attempts to communicate with foreign broadcasts did not go unnoticed by the KGB. One could become blacklisted and terminate his/her chances of traveling abroad.<sup>133</sup>

Banning the use of tape-recordings and foreign radio broadcasts as vehicles of religious propaganda also provided the CARC with yet another pretext for terminating the registration of presbyters, preachers and entire communities. Despite the repercussions, the Protestants increasingly employed these banned technologies throughout the remaining decades of Soviet rule. The portable reels with recorded sermons and religious music became valuable additions to the believers' limited resources of spiritual nourishment. Some Protestant activists kept entire audio libraries of recorded sermons on a variety of topics. In his 1963 report, Litvin again brought the government's attention to the proliferation of tape-recorded sermons in Protestant communities and stressed the difficulty of controlling this new and elusive form of religious propaganda:

In a number of places, sectarian leaders are now employing in their preaching activity sermons recorded on tapes. The availability of a tape recorder makes it unnecessary for an experienced and eloquent preacher to personally visit another

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<sup>133</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 6241, p. 94-97.



community or a gathering of believers in an unregistered prayer house. He assumes that the local organs of authority and the Council's Upolnomochennyi cannot accuse him of violation of legislation on cults and terminate his registration. Such a [recorded] sermon, accompanied by the appropriate music and singing of a church choir, is listened to wherever there is a need for it, and it reaches its objective.

In order to put a stop to this unlawful activity, we have prohibited the clergy and leaders of religious communities from carrying out tape-recordings of sermons, performances of church choirs and foreign religious programs as well as from organization of collective listening of such recordings in prayer houses or believers' apartments. We have given instructions to the Upolnomochennyye of the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults to terminate the registration of those community leaders, presbyters and preachers who would engage in the tape-recording of sermons and their distribution among believers.<sup>134</sup>

While the crafty adaptation of new technologies for purposes of religious instruction certainly contributed to Protestants' survival during the postwar era, the bulk of believers' spiritual nourishment came in the form of type-written or otherwise produced samizdat publications. However, since the phenomenon of religious samizdat was largely a byproduct of internal schisms in Protestant denominations and closely associated with the activities of religious underground, it will be discussed in more detail in subsequent chapters.

Preaching the Word of God essentially amounts to communicating ideas, which could take a variety of verbal and non-verbal forms, from mass-communicating ex cathedra or via a radio broadcast to a quiet conversation in a compartment of a railroad car, to a model lifestyle that could evoke people's curiosity. In the post-Stalin conditions, the Soviet state could not fully block these numerous avenues of evangelization. Attempts to do so only forced believers to perfect their communication techniques, modernize their message, and look for innovative ways of delivering it. While the state

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<sup>134</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5663, p. 92-93.

could prosecute believers for organized forms of religious proselytism, it could not legally prohibit them from sharing ideas with their friends or co-workers, just as it could not effectively monitor and evaluate the legality of every twist and turn of such an elusive phenomenon as a human conversation.

**CHAPTER IX**  
**THE BATTLE FOR THE HEARTS AND MINDS**  
**OF THE YOUNG GENERATION**

*The issue of children is the issue of life and death for the church. The church will die if it does not succeed in taking hold of the souls of the young generation.*

*Most believers are religious from childhood. It is difficult to turn an adult into a religious person.*

V. Puzin, Chairman of the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults at the Council of Ministers of USSR

The battle for the hearts and minds of children and youth represented the Soviet government's most urgent concern during the postwar decades. This concern gave rise to the more salient of the four governmental strategies of containment of religion—the concerted effort of all party and Soviet agencies to segregate the growing young generation from the old believing folks, to drive a wedge between religious parents and their children, to break the continuity of religious tradition and, in this manner, deprive religion of the ability to reproduce itself and ensure its gradual dying out of natural causes. The secularization of youth certainly constituted only one aspect of the party's grand effort to produce an ideologically uniform and internally galvanized society of Soviet men and women in the aftermath of WW II. Zhdanov's campaign against pro-Western cosmopolites targeted Western influences spread during the war and aimed at boosting Soviet patriotism, which V. Zubok and C. Pleshakov termed as “nothing but a secularized version of the czarist myth about ‘god-bearing people’” portraying Russians

as “‘senior brothers,’ the leaders of all Slavs as well as all other ‘smaller’ peoples of the Soviet Union.”<sup>1</sup> This statist form of patriotism, with a depersonalized iconic image of a Russian soldier-liberator at its center, served as a powerful ideological prop for the Soviet integrationist policy in the recently incorporated western-most parts of Ukraine where the state was actively involved in stamping out the remnants of Ukrainian nationalism (the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists), dismembering the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, and collectivizing the agriculture.

On a broader plane, the Zhdanov campaign aimed to reassert the party’s firm control over the intellectual and artistic life of the country. A renowned Soviet writer, Zoshchenko, was accused by Zhdanov of “‘preaching a rotten ideological nihilism, vulgarity and apoliticism, designed to lead our youth astray and poison its consciousness,’” while the “‘very personal lyrical poetry” of Anna Akhmatova was “‘branded as ‘imbued with the spirit of pessimism, decadence...and bourgeois aristocratic aestheticism.’”<sup>2</sup> Ludmila Alexeyeva and Paul Goldberg reminisced that “‘the libraries had been purged of books by non-Marxists and ‘enemies of the people’” and that “‘books that mentioned non-Marxists or ‘enemies of the people’ without condemning them were pulled off the shelves, too.’”<sup>3</sup> In 1949, a 17 year old philology student, Ilia Shmain, came to a conclusion that “‘dialectical materialism, or any materialistic philosophy for that matter, was inadequate to explain fundamental existential questions.’” A number of

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<sup>1</sup> Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 123-124.

<sup>2</sup> Hosking, p. 306.

<sup>3</sup> Ludmila Alexeyeva and Paul Goldberg, *The Thaw Generation: Coming of Age in the Post-Stalin Era* (Pittsburgh, Pa: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1990), p. 38.

students joined Shmain and formed a circle for the discussion of art, philosophy and religion. Although “politically they were still totally loyal to the Soviet system,” rejecting Marxism only as a philosophy, but not as a social doctrine, the government swiftly arrested members of Shmain’s group and sentenced them under Article 58 (anti-Soviet propaganda and agitation) “to terms of eight to ten years of hard labor.”<sup>4</sup> Any expression of non-conformism and artistic experimentation, be it the lovers of American jazz or young people wearing western-style clothes (*stiliagi*), was publicly denounced and vilified. Khrushchev’s thrashing of Soviet intellectuals and artists and the Brezhnev era trials of Siniavsky and Daniel, who dared to challenge the official Soviet literary doctrine of socialist realism, manifested that despite some liberalization of Soviet society after Stalin’s death the proper ideological upbringing of Soviet population, especially youth, remained at the forefront of the ruling party’s attention. The struggle to bring up the postwar generation of young people in the spirit of atheism, therefore, fell within the spectrum of the Communist Party’s larger campaign to consolidate and preserve its exclusive right to control and direct the intellectual life of the country.

While the established literati, artists and musicians constituted a small percentage of the Soviet population and entirely depended on the employment by the corporate state—a circumstance that gave the government great leverage in controlling the livelihood of this group of people by means of extending or withdrawing certain material benefits and professional opportunities<sup>5</sup>—members of religious organizations and tacit

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<sup>4</sup> Dmitry V. Pospelovsky, *A History of Soviet Atheism in Theory and Practice, and the Believer*, Volume 2 (London: Macmillan Press, 1988), p. 94-96.

sympathizers of religion represented a much larger and more elusive category of people nurtured by communities that retained a significant degree of self-organization and complete financial independence from the state. Not being able to directly and legally manipulate the economic life of these hotbeds of religiosity, the government used its monopoly on education as a pretext to interfere in the internal life of religious organizations and even private family circles of believers on behalf of ensuring the secular upbringing of children and youth.

The existing scholarship of religion in USSR provides a somewhat uneven coverage of the diverse aspects relevant to my research, with studies offering either a survey-type adumbration of the impact of Soviet religious policies on believers across the entire denominational spectrum, or a detailed examination of select denominations within a narrow time frame. As a consequence, the subject of this chapter—the struggle for youth as experienced by Protestants in the postwar Soviet Union—requires further research. Walter Sawatsky, Dmitry Pospelovsky, V.A. Alekseev and A.N. Marchenko dedicated short but illuminating sections of their studies to a competition between believers and atheists over the allegiance of children and youth. Other scholars treat this subject either in passing or concentrate on one or the other of its aspects. William C. Fletcher's work, *Soviet Believers: The Religious Sector of the Population*, for example, is an impressive sociological study of religiosity in the USSR, reexamining the findings of Soviet statisticians and including valuable quantitative data on the attitude of youth towards religion. According to Fletcher, the Soviet statisticians' interest in the subject

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<sup>5</sup> Vladimir Shlapentokh treats this topic in his *Soviet Intellectuals and Political Power: The Post-Stalin Era* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

stemmed from “the atheistic preoccupations of the ideology”: “If religion is doomed to disappear, then—so the reasoning goes—concrete data concerning the age of believers will provide a useful predictive tool for projecting the rate and timetable of this disappearance.”<sup>6</sup> The Soviet researchers naturally paid serious attention to the younger generation as the segment of society that would “determine the future” and on which, from the point of view of ideology, “the greatest antireligious effort should be focused.”<sup>7</sup> The Soviet sociological studies of religious groups by age generally pointed to “the preponderance of the elderly” in religious communities and interpreted it as “a symptom of the decay of religion.” In Fletcher’s opinion, these studies were rather inconclusive and skewed to suit the following a priori assumption:

It is axiomatic to the Soviet ideology that religion must disappear from the socialist society; the advanced age of the religious believers indicates that the process has progressed a long way and that as soon as these few remaining old people are gone, religion will vanish. Soviet scholars tend to utilize data regarding age to predict the length of time remaining to the congregation or religious group being studied.<sup>8</sup>

The Soviet atheists have been making similar observations since the 1920s. “In view of this history,” Fletcher argued, “it is difficult to remain satisfied with the facile assumption that the observed age patterns are harbingers of the demise of religion. It seems much more likely that some process of replenishment of the ranks of these elderly religious believers is taking place.”<sup>9</sup> Fletcher correctly averred that the Soviet scholars

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<sup>6</sup> William C. Fletcher, *Soviet believers: The Religious Sector of the Population* (Lawrence: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1981), p. 75.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

based their surveys on observable believers and did not include members of numerous unregistered Protestant groups. Furthermore, the Soviet sociologists did not account for the following important circumstance:

In a society that is consciously organized against religion, there is every incentive for an individual to avoid or perhaps conceal an interest in religion, at least until he has achieved enough security to be able to tolerate whatever risk is entailed. Therefore, a young person, who is still completing his education or is developing his working career, will tend to avoid the church, entering it only later on in life.<sup>10</sup>

Despite its incompleteness and bias, the Soviet data indicated the generally higher percentage of youth in Protestant communities, with some communities having only 20% of members who were over the age of 60. The number of youth among believers also varied from one geographical area to another. There were typically more young believers in Ukraine, especially in its western regions.<sup>11</sup>

Ultimately, Fletcher argued, “the religious sector of the population [in USSR] has declined only from 56% in 1937 to 45% today [1981]” while “the absolute number of religious citizens...has actually increased from an estimated 90 or 95 million to an estimated 115 million people,” which led him to conclude that “these astonishing results are extraordinarily difficult to reconcile with the ideological prediction that religion must disappear with the demise of capitalism.”<sup>12</sup> The post-Soviet researchers of the subject confirm Fletcher’s assessment. A.N. Marchenko, for instance, argued: “The combined

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 212.



data of a number of researchers largely refute the thesis about a complete victory of atheism in USSR and the overcoming of religiosity among the youth. Approximately 30% of all children in the country between the ages of 7 and 17 experienced some degree of religious influence in families... The consistency of statistical indices testifies that contrary to the predictions of antireligious ideologues of ‘the approaching Communism,’ there has been a demand for the social institute of the Church among the young generation.”<sup>13</sup>

In 1984, closely following in Fletcher’s footsteps, the Soviet sociologist V.K. Arsenkin published a book entitled *The Crisis of Religiosity and the Youth*. Despite its heavy ideological bias, Arsenkin’s study is valuable as an unintended testimony to a more ostensible crisis of the Soviet antireligious establishment desperately looking for “objective” causes that could explain the persistent attraction of religion for youths in the country of advanced socialism. Arsenkin attributed the persistent hold of religion on some segments of population to certain unevenness in the development of Soviet society still retaining residual traces of “social contradictions and social diversification,” such as differences between the rural and urban modes of living, between intellectual and manual labor, the de facto inequality in the consumption of material and spiritual wealth of society, gender inequality, the specific status of each generational cohort in the society as well as the differentiation of various groups within the young generation.<sup>14</sup> Since the Soviet atheists traditionally viewed rural folks as more susceptible to the influence of

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<sup>13</sup> A.N. Marchenko, “*Khrushchevskaia tserkovnaia reforma*”: *Ocherki tserkovno-gosudarstvennykh otnoshenii, 1958-1964* (Perm: Permskii Gosudarstvennyi Universitet, 2007), p. 176-177.

<sup>14</sup> V.K. Arsenkin, *Krisis religioznosti i molodezh* (Moskva: Izdatel’stvo “Nauka,” 1984), p. 77-78.

religion, the migration of villagers to cities and towns, where they felt lost and became easy prey for sectarian preachers, argued Arsenkin, accounted for the growth of urban religious communities. Young women who felt oppressed by their authoritarian fathers or husbands, according to Arsenkin, also sought refuge in religion, as did adolescents from dysfunctional families. The well-educated members of the intelligentsia often fell prey to religion as they embarked on their personal quest for truth, for “even the deep theoretical analysis of the epoch’s contradictions..., of the problems of ‘science and morality,’” surmised Arsenkin, “does not save an intellectual, however paradoxical it may seem at first sight, from the purely intellectual mysticism...”<sup>15</sup>

Implicit in Arsenkin’s argument was an assumption that once the remaining social dislocations and contradictions of Soviet society were eliminated and an even distribution of social benefits extended to everyone, religion, feeding on people’s discontent, would lose the last patch of fertile ground and the Soviet citizens would unanimously subscribe to the same uniform materialist worldview. The evidence left behind by a wide array of Soviet ideological dissenters, however, speaks to the opposite: it was precisely the ossified uniformity of the mandatory Soviet doctrine that prompted many young men and women in the Soviet Union to look for alternative and existentially more nuanced interpretations of reality. Many such inquisitive young seekers turned to religion precisely because religious activists proved more flexible in adapting their message to the challenges of modernity, as Arsenkin himself admits:

The apologists of religion are not afraid to touch the most urgent problems of science... Religious propaganda targeting the young generation specifically

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 82-83.

stresses the issues of interest to the young audience...Contemporary theologians and clergymen of all religious currents strive to make their teachings consonant with the ideals of Soviet youth, to convince young men and women that religion is purportedly called to play a positive role in the construction of new society...<sup>16</sup>

In his analysis of religious families as main engines powering the reproduction of religion, Arsenkin remained loyal to the a priori assumptions of Soviet ideology and simply could not see the upbringing of children in families of “honest and reputable” believing parents as positive socialization only because such socialization usually resulted in these children’s induction into religious communities.<sup>17</sup> Aside from its methodological flaws, Arsenkin’s work provides evidence of both the growing inaptness of the Soviet antireligious establishment to explain the phenomenon of religion’s longevity and the utmost seriousness with which the Soviet government continued to treat the issue of youth’s ideological orientation.

Other works relevant to the subject of religion and youth in the Soviet Union, such as, for instance, John Dunstan’s article, “Soviet schools, atheism and religion,” Catherine Wanner’s study *Communities of the Converted: Ukrainians and Global Evangelism*, or Heather Coleman’s *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution, 1905-1929*, are illuminating, but focus on either the prewar era, the perestroika period, or the post-Soviet developments. This chapter’s objective is not so much a comprehensive analysis of theoretical and policy issues underlying the struggle for youth (these issues have been adequately discussed by Michael Bordeaux, Walter Sawatsky, V.A. Alekseev, V.A. Vojnalovych, Dmirty Pospelovsky, John Anderson, Paul Froese, A.N. Marchenko,

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 106-107.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 92-93.

and others) as a micro-level investigation of specific strategies used by the Soviet state and Protestants to ensure the growing generation's allegiance to their respective ideologies. What did it take for Protestant parents to raise their offspring in the spirit of religion? What challenges did the believing children and youths face in Soviet schools and universities? What accounted for the continuous rejuvenation of Protestant communities?

### **1. The Battle for Youth in the Context of Soviet Antireligious Agenda**

As mentioned earlier in Chapter V, M.A. Suslov revived the state-sponsored campaign against religion shortly after the war under the guise of his and other party hardliners' concern for "the atheist upbringing of precisely the growing generation" of Soviet youths who were expected "to live under Communism."<sup>18</sup> The struggle for the hearts and minds of youth quickly moved to the center of the Soviet antireligious agenda and remained there until the late 1980s. In 1948, the Secretary of the CC of VLKSM in Ukraine, N. Mikhailov, reported to Khrushchev:

The illegal anti-Soviet sect of Jehovah's Witnesses,...acting in the oblast [Lvov], numbers about 1,000 people, 80% of which are youths...The clergy and leadership of sectarian organizations use religious services and prayer meetings to disseminate and imprint their religious worldview in the consciousness of young people and children and to draw the latter to their side...The churchmen and sectarians succeed in pushing a part of youth and even Komsomol members off of the right track by subjecting them to their influence and by directing them onto the criminal path...<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> V.A. Alekseev, p. 200.

<sup>19</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 5069, p. 40-43.

Reporting in 1963, the Council's Upolnomochennyi for Lugansk oblast, V. Mesilin, reiterated Suslov's concern almost verbatim: "The presence among candidate-members [for baptism] of youths, that is, of that part of population that will get to live in the Communist society, evokes special discontent."<sup>20</sup> On October 31, 1963, during the session of the Ideological Commission at the CC of CPSU, another VLKSM Secretary, S.P. Pavlov, informed L.F. Il'ichev and other watchdogs of ideology of the new methods employed by clergymen in their efforts to attract the youth:

In order to indoctrinate the youth, religionists organize evenings of questions and answers, musical contests, studies in circles of artistic self-expression, sports clubs and excursions—in other words, everything that the Komsomol members do. Sometimes, the Komsomol members do it worse than clergymen. They [religionists] actively arm themselves with the most contemporary methods of work with the youth.<sup>21</sup>

A year later, in his letter to the CC of CPSU, Pavlov called for the revision of certain articles of the Criminal Code and the inclusion of new clauses that would allow the prosecution of clergymen and parents for any activity associated with the religious upbringing of children. The party dismissed Pavlov's request because Article 142 of the Criminal Code of RSFSR already had provisions addressing the aforementioned violations.<sup>22</sup>

In the early 1960s the Soviet government found itself in a precarious situation, conducting a vigorous campaign against religion domestically and refashioning its old Stalinist image internationally—something that required a public acceptance of certain

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<sup>20</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 411, p. 19-21.

<sup>21</sup> A.N. Marchenko, p. 164.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

international norms, including those concerning religious freedoms and the rights of believing parents to provide appropriate upbringing to their children. In June of 1961, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukrainian SSR, Palamarchuk, informed Polonnik that “in April of 1961, at its 17<sup>th</sup> session, the United Nations Commission for Human Rights began discussing the issue of ‘Discrimination concerning religious rights and customs.’” Since Ukraine, as a member of the UN, also received a copy of this project for review and acceptance, Palamarchuk needed some feedback from the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults. “The Ministry of Foreign Affairs,” he wrote to Polonnik, “asks you to provide your assessment of the project’s principles from the point of view of the possibility of their acceptance, and also to send propositions as to how the content and form of these principles could be improved.”<sup>23</sup> The CARC’s evaluation of this UN project, which also included the discussion of discrimination in the field of education, shows that the Soviet legislation on religion conflicted with international norms, and that despite this circumstance the Soviet government hypocritically accepted a number of such international norms, without, of course, giving these new legal developments any wide publicity domestically. The Convention against Discrimination in the Field of Education, ratified by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on July 2, 1962, was quietly printed in the very narrowly circulated *Messages of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR* from November 2, 1963, Number 44 (1131). Its publication, however, did not escape the attention of the increasingly more litigious EKhB schismatics who instantly

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<sup>23</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 322, p. 5.

made use of the following excerpt from the Convention in defense of the right of believing parents to provide religious instruction to their own children:

Parents and, in appropriate cases, care-givers/guardians must, first, have an opportunity, within the boundaries determined by the legislation of each state, to freely send their children not to the state but other educational institutions meeting the minimal requirements established by competent organs of education, and, second, provide religious and moral upbringing of children in accordance with their own convictions. Religious education irreconcilable with one's convictions, as an individual or a group of people, should not be forced upon anyone...<sup>24</sup>

The actual implementation of this legal clause was a clear impossibility in conditions of Soviet reality since it infringed upon the state's monopoly on education and amounted to granting religious parents the right to home-school their children or send them to private religious schools. In its preliminary assessment of the projected Principles of Freedom and Impermissibility of Discrimination against Religious Rights and Customs, the Ukrainian CARC promptly remarked that "the project's propositions concerning convictions in which a child is to be brought up essentially contradict the legislation of Ukrainian SSR, according to which the church is fully separated from the state, and school from the church."<sup>25</sup> The CARC also objected to the project's propositions according to which "the parents have the priority to determine religion or convictions in which a child is to be brought up," since the Legal Code of Ukrainian SSR on Family, Guardianship, Marriage, and Civil Acts stated that "parents are obliged to care about the persons of minors, their health and physical development, their upbringing in the direction corresponding with the goals of the state and the state's objectives of

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<sup>24</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 413, p. 47.

<sup>25</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 322, p. 12.

education,” while certain believing parents, the CARC argued, “often force children to perform religious rituals and try, by all means, to shield them from the atheistic influence of the school...”<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, the Soviet jurists argued that the inclusion in the Convention of the clause “within boundaries determined by the legislation of each state” protected the Soviet state’s monopoly on education. In his 1984 publication *Religion and Church in the Soviet Society*, the Chairman of the Council for the Affairs of Religion, V.A. Kuroedov, invoked of this clause to refute believers’ claims that the Soviet Union did not observe the Convention’s provisions:

Picking out isolated statements from this document [Convention], the organizers of religious schools assert that the Convention allows the creation in USSR of special schools for religious education of children. They intentionally overlook at that the part of the Convention where it is stated: ‘within boundaries determined by the legislation of each state.’ Soviet laws, as is known, do not permit the creation of religious educational institutions for children; in our country, we only have state schools for children...Therefore, references to the Convention, in this case, are clearly groundless. The Soviet legislation on cults perceives an organized religious instruction of minors in circles, schools, etc, as interference in the affairs of the state and as a violation of law.<sup>27</sup>

Although it is unclear whether the Convention’s framers overlooked the implications of this clause for the Soviet believers, or the Soviet jurists insisted on the inclusion of this specific clause as a condition for the USSR’s signing the Convention, its Soviet interpretation contradicted the very essence of this document and rendered it useless for believers.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>27</sup> V.A. Kuroedov, *Religiia i tserkov’ v Sovetskom obshchestve* (Moskva: Izdatel’stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1984), p. 131-132.



The CARC officials naturally did not consider the counterargument: that the Soviet education system, with its strong ideological bias and ever-present atheist component, was a compulsory establishment through which the government exercised its power over the minds and bodies of children, shielding them from the influence of religion, treating them as property of the Soviet state, and molding them into docile instruments of its policies. Itself an instrument of the state, the CARC certainly could not endorse the project's proposition granting each individual "the right to observe what is prescribed...by his/her religion or convictions and withdraw from actions incompatible with precepts of his/her religion or convictions" on the grounds that such "formulation contradicts the legislation of Ukrainian SSR which, while acknowledging the freedom of confession, rules that 'no one can, invoking his/her religious convictions, refuse the fulfillment of his/her civil duties.'"<sup>28</sup> For the same reason, the CARC could not condone the project's postulate that "no one must be forced to take a military oath if it contradicts to the precepts of his religion or convictions."<sup>29</sup>

The inter-institutional discussion of the UN projects in Ukraine reveals that despite certain steps to appease the public opinion abroad (the USSR's government never cared to explain how could the international norms, to which it subscribed, work effectively within the matrix of the existing Soviet legislation on cults), the Soviet government continued to build its relations with believers on the basis of the old legislation that, among other things, disregarded the rights of religious parents to pass on

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<sup>28</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 322, p. 14.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

their religious convictions to their own children. The Soviet government and the party, therefore, continued to see the perpetuation of the Soviet status quo, in fact their own perpetuation, as hinged upon their firm ideological control of the young generation. In 1967, Litvin wrote in his “Note on Some Facts of Religionists’ Influence on Children and Youth on the Territory of Ukrainian SSR”:

The clergy and sectarians, in their turn, continue to do all they can to retain certain part of the population under their influence, and especially count on children and youth. They think that the fate of their religious ideology depends first of all on its acceptance by the following generations, that is, by youth. An attempt to take possession of the souls of children, adolescents and youth constitutes, at the present stage of social development, one of the main aspirations of all religions. Today, the family—religious parents of other relatives—increasingly becomes the center of religious upbringing of the young generation. That is why, the clergy, in their sermons and conversations with believers, constantly underscore the education of children in the spirit of religion.<sup>30</sup>

Litvin’s assessment proved to be remarkably accurate. Knowing that the Soviet state’s rhetoric of protecting children and youth from religious indoctrination was but a veil draping the regimes’ long-term goal of complete eradication of religion in the USSR, the Protestants threw their energies into securing the future of religion by turning their homes and family circles into improvised schools of religious instruction. A prominent leader of Ukrainian Seventh Day Adventists and a veteran of work with the youth, N.A. Zhukaliuk reminisced:

The Communist ideologues expected that religion would die along with the older believers who were permitted to pray. As for the young people and children, they were not allowed in churches and prayer houses...However, we also understood that if we did not succeed in retaining the youth, the church would wither. A bitter struggle thus ensued between the two forces over the influence on the souls of children. One force relied on the violence of authorities, laws, and state ideology; the other—on the power of prayer and Holy Spirit, the

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<sup>30</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 33, p. 88.

Christian parental education in the family, and pastoral instruction in the community. Educational topics had to be first taught to parents, so that they, in their turn could offer lessons to their children in family circles. Communities selected teachers of children's and youth groups from among people who were able to show initiative and find the necessary [teaching] materials. It is important to note that those communities where appropriate attention had been given to the work with children and youth remained alive, youthful and dynamic, growing spiritually and numerically.<sup>31</sup>

Litvin's insightful note did not go unnoticed by officials in the CAR's main office in Moscow. The next year, an assistant to the Chairmen of CAR, V. Furov, dispatched to Litvin "A Tentative Plan of Studying the Content, Form, and Methods of Religious Organizations' Influence on Children and Youth and the Proposed Recommendations Concerning the Shielding of the Growing Generation from the Influence of Religion." In particular, the plan emphasized the unifying and coordinating role of CAR in the multi-institutional effort to protect children from religion:

The problem of shielding children from religion is being solved and can be solved only as the result of efforts of many social organizations. In this respect, contacts and connections of the Upolnomochennyi with social organizations and his coordination of their activities are of great significance. It is important to show the role and place of the Council's Upolnomochennyi...in realization of the decree of the CC of CPSU from January 2, 1964, calling for the protection of children and youth from religion.<sup>32</sup>

Although in its official rhetoric the Soviet antireligious establishment consistently referred to religion as a mere atavistic survivor of the past, the massive resources the Soviet government dedicated to combating religion's influence on youth indicated that religious worldviews continued to challenge the Marxist materialist conceptions, and that the two competitive ideologies were in fact fighting to secure a place for themselves in

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<sup>31</sup> N.A. Zhukaliuk, *Cherez krutye perevaly*, p. 213-214.

<sup>32</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 82, p. 10.

the future. The battle for the hearts and minds of the young generation thus remained permanently at the top of the Soviet antireligious agenda.

## **2. Preventing Children and Youth from Attending Prayer Services**

From the early 1950s the state addressed this problem by means of coercing the Protestant spiritual centers into endorsing measures of baptism control (see Chapter II), granting baptism only to persons above the age of 25-30, and by forcing communities to select from among their members special face-controllers, dubbed “Egyptian midwives” by believers, who would stand at the entrance to a prayer house and prevent children of their fellow-believers from entering. In 1960, the EKhB community of the town of Stalino complained to Andreev about this disturbing practice:

Our Upolnomochennyi demands that members of community’s administration would not permit children of pre-school and school age as well as young people under 18 years of age into the prayer house and asks that we place at the doors of the prayer house brothers who would inquire every young man and girl, as they enter the prayer house, whether or not they study somewhere, and how old they are and, should he or she be under 18, not allow them into the prayer house. What concerns children of pre-school and school age is clear to us—that according to human rules of our time, they cannot be allowed in the prayer house. But what about the young people who have been working since they received their passports at the age of 16, and who think that they have the right, of their own will, to go to a prayer house or any other house for entertainment? We, the believing people, go to a prayer house not to watch everyone who enters it but to pray to God and serve him. What the Upolnomochennyi demands us to observe is not among the rules listed in the New Statutes for our brotherhood...<sup>33</sup>

There was in fact nothing in the VSEKhB New Statute indicating age limitations for visiting a prayer house. However, since the 1950, the EKhB spiritual center informed presbyters and communities through oral messages and instructional letters of the

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<sup>33</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 309, p. 121.

preferred practice of not allowing school age children in the EKhB prayer houses. While the VSEKhB naturally equivocated passing on information about this humiliating and illegal government requirement, the local Council's Upolnomochennye and Soviet officials simply demanded that no children and youths be allowed in prayer houses, without making any distinction between adolescents and young people who had reached the legal age of 16. That this illegal requirement was not a novelty introduced during the Khrushchev campaign can be confirmed by multiple letters from parish presbyters and religious communities. For example, in 1953, the presbyter of the EKhB community in village Vinogradovka, Bolgradskii regon, M. Cheban, inquired in his letter to the Senior Presbyter for Izmail oblast, M. Lipovoi:

From what age can children be allowed in the prayer house? I know that children of the school age are not permitted by law [?], but our village soviet chairman absolutely forbids adolescents to come to our prayer meetings. Until what age one is considered an adolescent? I reiterate it once again: please write to me what age categories of people are allowed in the church. Type your letter on a type writer, and I will take it with me to the village soviet and show it to our chairman.<sup>34</sup>

The evidence from the Informative Note of the Council's Upolnomochennyi for Zakarpatie oblast, M. Rasput'ko, submitted in 1956 to Polianskii (the all-union CARC), Vil'khovyi, and the Secretary of Zakarpatie Obkom, V.S. Povkh, reveals that some parish presbyters only paid lip service to the instructions of their spiritual center and the demands of CARC. Describing the EKhB prayer meeting in village Lipetskaia Poliana, Rasput'ko wrote:

Among the believers who attended the meeting there were 22 women, 7 youths and, besides, 9 youngsters under 15 years of age. The Senior Presbyter,

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<sup>34</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 156, p. 61.

Mocharko, often boasted in conversations with me that the EKHB did not permit children to visit prayer houses: ‘Let them grow, study, and then decide whether they want to attend prayer houses or believe in God.’ But, as it is evident, the believers follow Mocharko’s personal example and examples of their other presbyters. He [Mocharko] often brings his children to the prayer house and, on June 3, presbyter Sheveria’s children, including his son, who is in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade in school, took active part in the worship ceremony. His [Sheveria’s] son came to the prayer house much earlier than the presbyter Sheveria himself, perhaps with a purpose of setting an example for the other believers.<sup>35</sup>

In fact, by showing up at the prayer house on his own, Sheveria’s son protected his father from a likely accusation of using parental power to instigate the children’s attendance of prayer services.

As indicated earlier in this chapter, the CARC strictly enforced the observance of this requirement by communities and often used the presence of children and youth in prayer houses as a pretext to shut down communities. The Kriukovskaia EKHB community in Poltava oblast was closed and taken off registration in 1962 because “children under the age of 16 attended prayer services.” In his petition to Andreev and Mel’nikov, the community presbyter, V.A. Slobodianik, argued that the accusations brought against them were groundless:

Until no one had warned us regarding children, the latter on occasions visited prayer services, without, of course, taking any part in services. But when comrade Alekseev [the local Upolnomochennyi] warned me personally, as a presbyter, I conducted the necessary explanatory work with parents and, since then, no children have appeared at prayer services. Even if some of them did appear at times, they were adults who have turned 16, finished the 8 year school, received passports and acquired employment while continuing to study in the evening schools for working youths...<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 4263, p. 143-144.

<sup>36</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 389, p. 169.

While the absence in the Soviet legislation of any clear definition of this “unwritten” requirement certainly made its observance very difficult for Protestant communities, the local officials took advantage of this very circumstance to achieve quick victories over sectarians, and contrived accusations that bordered on absurdity. In 1962, in his letter to Polonnik, Andreev complained that the executive organ of the EKhB community in village Shuliaki, Zhaskkovskii region, Cherkassk oblast, was taken off registration “because one breast feeding woman brought her infant with her to the prayer house.”<sup>37</sup> Even those Protestant communities that took serious measures to enforce the government requirement that struck at the heart of their survival strategy did not escape harassment by the fault-seeking local officials. The following statement, submitted to Polonnik in 1961 by the presbyter of Pervotravenskaia EKhB community, E. P. Levitskii, shows that despite its best efforts this law-abiding community simply could not turn itself into an old folks’ home permanently barricaded against any approaches by the youth:

I, citizen E.P. Levitskii,...state that I asked all believers to stay in the prayer house after the prayer service and informed them that the local authorities required of me that there would be no children of school age in the prayer house. A protocol was composed on March 4, 1961, and all believers who had children of school age signed it. And then, on April 6, two girls of school age—children of believing parents—came to the prayer house during the evening service. At the same time, the school director and the village soviet chairman also came in, saw the girls and told me that I should have run them out. But I could not do that in the middle of the service, and it did not cross the community chairman’s mind to do that. And now we are accused of inviting children. No one invited them, and to this day, there are no children in the prayer house. The community has a duty to send children outside, should they come.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 197.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

Polonnik also received the following explanatory note from one of the girls involved in this violation:

From the citizen Sofia Zinovievna Levitskaia residing in village Petrotravnevoe... and born in 1945. Having entered school in 1952, I graduated from it in 1960 and, hence, I am not a school child [*shkol'nitsa*]. On April 6, 1961, when I was at the prayer house with my mother, the school director... was also there, saw me, and sent a statement to the village soviet in which he described me as a school child.<sup>39</sup>

Sofia's statement suggests that she did not like being referred to as a *shkol'nitsa*, since, under the Soviet law, the legal age of 16 entitled any young woman like her to watch movies of mature content, get married and have children of her own, or join as a volunteer one of the big Komsomol construction sites where political indoctrination co-existed with irresponsible sex, drinking, hooliganism and pitch battles between the locals and Komsomol recruits arriving from other parts of USSR.<sup>40</sup> When it came to matters of religion, however, the Soviet authorities could not relinquish their tutelage of the young generation and treated as immature youngsters not only the 16 year old Sofia, but even the 24 year old demobilized soldiers who were denied access to baptism on the grounds that they were not yet 25, that is, not mature enough to make a conscientious decision.

Sofia's statement also served the purpose of deflecting the heat from the presbyter and illustrated believing youths' inevitable involvement in their communities' legal struggles. A similar statement was also submitted with reference to the same case by a pupil of the third grade, V.P. Cheban. In his statement, Cheban explained a purely

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>40</sup> V.A. Kozlov provides a vivid portrayal of such conflicts and lifestyles of the Komsomol volunteers throughout the Soviet Union in his *Massovye besporiadki v SSSR pri Khrushcheve i Brezhneve, 1953-nachalo 1980-kh godov* (Novosibirsk: Sibirskii khronograph, 1999).



accidental visit to a prayer meeting. According to this child, he accompanied his father on a trip to the village [Pervotravnevoe] to see his uncle who was severely injured in a tractor accident and was about to die. However, their injured relative was not yet brought back from the hospital and they had to wait. In the meantime, Cheban's father decided to stop at the prayer house. "Since it was late, 9 o'clock in the evening," wrote the third-grader, "I was afraid to go home by myself and went [to the prayer house] with my father." As it follows from Cheban's rendition of the events that unfolded, the local village officials, who apparently closely monitored the prayer house for some violation, misconstrued his accidental presence in the prayer house as regularity:

At that time, teachers, Daniil Rodionovich and Semyon Makarovich entered the prayer house, walked to the presbyter and asked: 'Why do you allow school kids in the prayer house?' The presbyter replied: 'We do not have any children.' My father informed them that I was his son and that we stopped at the prayer house while waiting on the news about our dying relative. They told him not to interfere and that they were going to have a talk with him separately. Afterwards, they made a statement at the village soviet that the presbyter invited children to the prayer house.<sup>41</sup>

Even if Cheban wrote his statement on the encouragement and with the help of his parents, it nevertheless serves as evidence of the believers' children early involvement in their families' and communities' struggles for survival that could not but enhance their awareness of the rules of the game and the necessity to take sides. The mere absence of children and youth in Protestant prayer houses was hardly indicative of the state's winning the battle for the hearts and minds of the young generation.

In imposing such strict age restrictions on children and youths' attendance of prayer meetings, their participation in church choirs and orchestras, and their induction

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<sup>41</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 389, p. 59.

into communities through baptism, the Soviet state pursued the goal of limiting to a bare minimum the young people's exposure to the competitive religious ideology, of postponing their indoctrination by parents and religious communities during the formative childhood and adolescent years and of securing for itself the maximum opportunity to counter-indoctrinate them and turn them, ideally, into the staunch supporters of the regime and its ideology. Whereas Soviet youth activists (the Octobrist, Pioneer and Komsomol organizations) in schools and institutions of higher learning made every effort to involve children of religious parents in all sorts of fun and entertaining social activities or lured them to the cause of the state with promises of educational and professional opportunities\* (all hinged upon one's loyalty to the dominant Marxist-

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\* As a first-grader in the Soviet school (in the town of Blagoveshchensk), I soon blew my cover of an ordinary kid and exposed my religious background by not showing up in school on Saturdays in observance of Sabbath, as I was taught by my Seventh Day Adventist parents. My teachers instantly set out to reeducate me and, at times, resorted to methods that resembled bribery. One day, my fellow first-grader, a son of party members, Yura Gagarin (named after the first man in space, Yuri Gagarin), brought to school his new toy—a portable military radio. I was fascinated with this gadget. The next day, Yura, on the instigation of my teachers, offered the military radio to me as a gift on the condition that I would denounce my faith in God. Some years later, when towards the end of my fifth year in school (now in the city of Tula) I was facing a boring prospect of spending my summer pulling out weeds in our family garden and watering countless tomato and cucumber plants, the school administration approached me with a tempting offer of sending me to a prestigious Pioneer summer camp “Artek” on the Black Sea coast in Crimea, on the condition that I would join the Pioneer organization and part with my parents' religious ideology. During my service in the Soviet Army, I spent most of the available free time studying for college entrance exams, hoping that some Soviet institution of higher learning would overlook my religious background and admit me. The officers of the KGB branch in the Military, who proudly called their organization “Counterintelligence” (in reality this “Counterintelligence” presided over a small collection of icons, crosses, religious pamphlets, books of foreign origin and pornographic pictures requisitioned from soldiers), were quite aware of my academic aspirations. They frequently summoned me for interviews that resembled poorly disguised interrogations and pursued the goal of sounding out the possibility of recruiting me as an informant. During one of such “interviews,” a KGB Major, who startled me by beginning our conversation in English—to show that the Big Brother knew all about my private activities, offered me a rare opportunity to go to a law school in Moscow which would open a brilliant career for me afterwards. The only things that stood between me and this brilliant career, said the Major, were my religious beliefs and, even more so, my refusal to serve the Motherland by providing occasional “little help” to his agency. In all three cases, the non-statist religious values, instilled in me from the early childhood and upon which

Leninist ideology), religious parents and church youth activists worked hard to impart to children from an early age the metaphysical concepts and moral values of religion that would affect the children's psyche at the most profound level and serve as restraints and a powerful ideological alternative during their exposure to the secular world.

### **3. Reeducation of the Believing Children and Youth in Soviet Institutions**

The struggle for the hearts and minds of the young generation left many believing children in a conundrum. Both of the competing ideologies lay claims to unswerving loyalty. The Soviet schools taught believing children patriotic values and loyalty to the state and Motherland. At the same time, these children owed loyalty to their families, communities and, most of all, God. In a normative state, these loyalties are easily reconciled, since most Christian denominations pride themselves on raising hard working, honest and loyal citizens. The syndrome of split loyalty, from which many believing children suffered in the Soviet Union, resulted not from their refusal to be loyal to the state, but from the state's demand that they embrace the Marxist-Leninist ideology (especially its atheist component) that simply could not be reconciled with their religious beliefs. Since the state maintained a monopoly on education (no private schools or home-schooling allowed) and enforced the ideological uniformity of education throughout the country (virtually every academic discipline was taught from a materialist point of view), believing children tended to become black sheep in Soviet schools, harassed, mocked, discriminated against, and used as examples of backwardness.

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my entire cosmogony and my conception of right and wrong rested, served as an enchanted protective circle whose boundaries I simply could not overstep.

The CARC/CAR certainly discountenanced such hostile treatment of believing children and youths in Soviet educational institutions, repeatedly denounced such measures as counterproductive, and insisted upon the use of strictly pedagogical forms of influencing the young believers. In his 1946 report, Vil'khovyi vented his frustration with the attitude of the Kiev State University administration towards a protestant philosophy student:

If the Department of Philosophy at the Kiev University employed with respect to the young sectarian Kovalenko not the method of scientific persuasion from the stance of materialist worldview, but simply 'cut him off' during the first session [semester] with the goal of subsequently removing him (although he was accepted because he passed the entrance exams), it means that the faculty at this university does not yet care sufficiently about the improvement of educational work among the student youth. We think that this is a question of cardinal importance, and our struggle with sectarianism depends on how we resolve this question. If for the staff of the Philosophy Department...just one student-sectarian turned into a bugbear, it follows that there also we have, unfortunately, the incorrect attitude to our work, and their 'decision' to expel this sectarian only made our work more difficult.

It is desirable that Department of Propaganda at the CC of CPU explained to the leaders of party organizations at educational institutions that they must not expel children of sectarians and other such persons from institutions of learning but, instead, make them objects of consistent and patient propaganda of scientific materialist worldview which, in contemporary conditions, is the surest means of struggle against religious holdovers and superstition.<sup>42</sup>

Whether or not Vil'khovyi's suggested approach would have worked in the case of Kovalenko is pure speculation, but his assertion that the rash actions of the Kiev State University's administration only made things worse for the cause of winning over sectarian youths—proved to be accurate. In the years that followed, Kovalenko not only

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<sup>42</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 4555, p. 55-56.

succeeded in receiving a degree from a different university, but became a leading figure in the EKhB opposition movement.<sup>43</sup>

Anticipating that the present attitude of party organizations in Soviet schools and universities, concerned predominantly with upholding the image of their institutions as one hundred percent atheist, would contribute nothing to the long-term campaign of luring young believers away from religion, Vil'khovyi bombarded the CC of CPU with recommendations reflecting his and his agency's understanding of how this important campaign should be run:

To surround with appropriate attention students who come from religious families (sectarians, Catholics) and those who fell under the influence of religious communities. It is desirable to draw such persons into social student and sports organizations, attract them to active participation in creative discussions, theoretical conferences, show interest in their everyday lives, involve them in culture exploring excursions, and also find out in what sort of environment they lived before entering the institutions of higher learning.

To bring it to the attention of party organizations involved in mass-agitation work in certain buildings that they should carry out their work in the form of individual conversations in those houses and families where the unlawful underground gatherings of groups of believers take place...or where sectarian religionists reside, in particular those who rent out rooms to students...It is necessary to keep in mind that this work is in the highest degree labor-intensive, painstaking, and associated with a number of complications that could be overcome only as the result of patient, day-to-day, systematic struggle.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> In 1963, Litvin reported: "Amidst schismatics there are persons who openly express their dissatisfaction with the Soviet legislation on cults. There are believers with higher education among them. For example, the leaders of schismatics in Kiev and Kiev oblast—Vins, Overchiuk, Velichko, and others—graduated from Soviet institutions of higher learning during the postwar period, and their spiritual mentor, Leonid Kovalenko, graduated in 1952 with a degree in philology from the Odessa State University" (TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5908, p. 65.)

<sup>44</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 1572, p. 23-24.

To illustrate that sometimes a mere elimination of the grounds for close interaction between believers and non-believers may lead to success for the state agenda, Vil'khovyi included in his 1955 report the information submitted to him by one of his subordinates:

The Council's Upolnomochennyi, comrade Shumkov, who works in Vinnitsa oblast, rites that the SDA community (in Vinnitsa) recruited a student of the medical school, citizen Nina Korzh. This occurred because the school's Komsomol organization did not pay appropriate attention to the work with students, was not interested in the everyday lives of students. Citizen Korzh rented a room from the family of sectarians who eventually recruited her. When the appropriate measures were taken—citizen Korzh was moved to a student dormitory and surrounded by the appropriate attention of the Komsomol organization—she stopped visiting the SDA prayer house.<sup>45</sup>

Although on occasions the Komsomol organizations could draw certain youths away from religion by surrounding the latter with “appropriate attention,” the compulsory nature of all Soviet young Communist organizations (notwithstanding their statutory adherence to voluntarism) whose members often only formally and unenthusiastically attended the required meetings, rendered these organizations susceptible to having believers in their own midst. In 1948, a Soviet official of an unknown rank, P. Moskatov, submitted to the Secretary of the CC of CPU, K.Z. Litvin (the future head of the Ukrainian CARC) materials pertaining to the investigation of the case of V. Kurdiumov—a student at the Kiev Industrial Technical School and a Komsomol member who, at the same time, happened to be a member “of the sect called ‘The Brotherhood of Shtundists.’” Kurdiumov, who earlier visited the EKhB prayer house at 53 (a) Lenin Street, became a member of the said brotherhood due to the efforts of Olga Dobrinova, a graduate of the Odessa Trade School who was sent, upon her graduation, to the Kiev

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<sup>45</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 4263, p. 60.

Technical School to continue her education. “I became personally interested in this case,” reported Moskatov, “...and had a long conversation with these students. As a result of this conversation, I formed a firm opinion that our youths, especially students, are being inducted [into sects] in an organized manner by special people from these religious sects.”<sup>46</sup> Moskatov then unleashed a vehement invective against sectarians:

Apparently, our appropriate organs do not pay the necessary attention to this question. As a result, religious sects of different shades grow like mushrooms. In Kiev, there are 10 prayer houses: ‘Baptists,’ ‘sectarians,’ ‘Shtundists,’ and other such garbage [*drian*]. These prayer houses, regrettably, are visited by quite a few of students of our institutions of higher learning. In other words, the power hostile to us spiritually and ideologically corrupts our youth...All this is the evidence that either the permission to open these prayer houses is carried out by ignorant people—political ignoramuses—or these organizations harbor people who are hostile to us.<sup>47</sup>

Despite his visceral dislike of sectarians, this party official shared Vil’khovyi’s conviction that a mere expulsion of believing students from Soviet schools would do nothing for the cause of tearing them away from religion. “I forbade the technical school’s administration to expel the aforementioned students,” he wrote, “because such a measure could provoke an undesirable reaction, and entrusted the party and Komsomol organizations to try and engage these students in political and social life of the technical school, so that these students could be gradually drawn away from religious psychosis.”<sup>48</sup> Ironically, Moskatov entrusted Kurdiumov and Dobrinova to the care of the same organizations that for a long time knew nothing about these students’ religious leanings, showed little interest in their lives and, clearly, could not address their spiritual needs.

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<sup>46</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 23, D. 5070, p. 5-6.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

An attached protocol of the Komsomol organization's discussion of Kurdiumov's case (Dobrinova was not a Komsomol member) resembles a stenographic report of an intense interrogation during which he had to answer 33 tough questions. The nature of these questions and the meeting's format and agenda ("Kurdiumov visits a prayer house, and he is a member of the Brotherhood of Shtundists. In doing so, he does not observe the VLKSM code and disgraces the title of a Komsomol member") left little room for the long-term task of his gradual extraction from the grips of religious psychosis, suggested by Moskatov. Having failed to dissuade Kurdiumov on the spot, the Komsomol organization simply purged itself of the undesirable non-conformist. The questions posed to Kurdiumov aimed primarily at establishing his guilt and reflected a rather minimalist resource of arguments upon which the Technical School's Komsomol organization could effectively draw:

Q: Is this true that you visit a prayer house?

A: Yes.

Q: Do you believe in God?

A: Yes.

Q: How can you prove God's existence?

A: From the books I had read, the gospel, for example...

Q: How will you, with your views, be bringing up the youth? [an allusion to Kurdiumov's future pedagogical career]

A: According to the way I understand it.

Q: What do you value more: Komsomol or the prayer house?

A: I will not stop visiting the prayer house...

Q: What is your opinion on whether or not you have the right to carry the certificate of a Komsomol member while believing in God and visiting a prayer house?

A: You'll have to decide it yourselves. I personally think that I have no right to carry the certificate.

Q: What do you plan to do in the future? You will not be allowed to instruct the youth.

A: Then I will not be instructing the youth. I will work...

Q: Where did you get religious literature?



- A: Dobrinova gave it to me and helped understand it—explained the confusing parts.
- Q: What was the year of that Bible’s publication? [an attempt to establish whether Dobrinova was passing around prerevolutionary or government-sanctioned publications or literature smuggled from abroad—a punishable offense]
- A: I do not remember. I can tell you tomorrow.
- Q: If you follow the history of the old ages and analyze the unearthed artifacts, you will see that the name of Jesus is never encountered. How would you prove that he existed?
- A: The name of Jesus is preserved in the gospel.
- Q: Why did you so fast and so blindly believe what was written in the gospel?
- A: I have read it and became convinced that it was true. I do not agree with the rejection of religion.
- Q: Do you realize that you alone stand in opposition to all Soviet youth? Do you recognize the policy of our party as a correct one?
- A: It is said in the gospel that we should obey every authority. I share this opinion...
- Q: Would you have defended the Soviet people with arms in your hands? Would you have fought the enemy for the happiness of the Soviet people?
- A: I would not have killed. I would have rather allowed myself to be killed...
- Q: What is the most important thing for you in life?
- A: God is above all else for me.
- Q: Can’t you stop believing in God?
- A: I am convinced, and it is impossible to dissuade me.
- A: How will you be training the youth?
- Q: In the spirit of my faith in God.<sup>49</sup>

The committee of the Komsomol organization found that “Kurdiumov’s ideological convictions” were “not compliant with the requirements of the program and code of the VLKSM” and ruled that he was “to be expelled from membership in the VLKSM.”<sup>50</sup>

Although believing students in Soviet institutions of higher learning continuously ran the risk of being exposed and expelled before finishing their studies, a number of them succeeded in earning various degrees due to either their ability to conceal their

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 7-9.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

religious beliefs or the tolerant attitude of those school administrators who took Vil'khovyi's advice seriously. The future leader of the SDA church in the RSFSR, M.P. Kulakov, for example, managed to graduate from an art school after the war and even taught art for a brief period of time in a Soviet secondary school until the KGB arrested him.<sup>51</sup> The leader of Ukrainian Seventh Day Adventists, N.A. Zhukaliuk, became admitted to the evening section of the Department of Journalism at the Leningrad State University while serving in the Soviet Army in the 1950s and earned a degree in journalism. One of the army officers, Major Lvov, whose recommendation eased Zhukaliuk's admission, in fact practiced the attitude towards believing youths suggested by Vil'khovyi. In his memoirs, Zhukaliuk preserved warm memories of this officer:

Major Lvov was a very sincere Communist. It seemed all of his being was permeated with Marxist-Leninist ideology. He loved Stalin senselessly... Being a good man by nature, Major Lvov often conversed with me late into the night. He honestly believed that I was a victim of delusions and tried, using all possible means, to 'pull' me, as he would say, 'out of the swamp of obscurantism.' He often defended me from the bad-mouthing of the other instructors of the [sergeants'] school, who accused him of not being able to convince me to become a Komsomol member. I respected this brave man, if not to say—loved him, and tried to be useful to him.<sup>52</sup>

Major Lvov consciously abstained from applying any pressure or administrative measures to Zhukaliuk and only asked him to read certain atheist books that he personally selected for him. Such unprepossessing approach did more to seriously test Zhukaliuk's faith than threats and mockery often employed by the other proponents of atheism. In the atmosphere of tolerance, created by Lvov, Zhukaliuk was able to write articles for the

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<sup>51</sup> M.P. Kulakov, Sr., *Though the Heavens Fall* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2008), p. 14-16.

<sup>52</sup> N.A. Zhukaliuk, p. 92-93.

local newspapers about the lives of cadets and officers of the sergeants' school. Moreover, Zhukaliuk repaid for Major Lvov's kindness by proposing a number of improvements to the existing artillery range finders, which resulted in Lvov's promotion to the next rank of lieutenant-colonel.<sup>53</sup> This and other instances suggest that even with minimal concessions on its part the Soviet state could have engaged young believers in a more meaningful discourse and, at least, prevented their alienation. In reality, however, people like Major Lvov were all too few, while the state proved unable and, arguably, unwilling to uniformly enforce the methods of work with believing youths, proposed by Vil'khovyi.

The believers' children, as the most vulnerable and inexperienced, often took the brunt of excesses committed by school teachers, principles, representatives of the city department of people's education, Commissions for the Affairs of Minors, and other party, Komsomol and state officials. In 1961, during the Khrushchev campaign, when the local authorities looked for pretexts, real and imaginary, to shut down religious communities, the following statement found its way to Polonnik's desk:

I, a pupil of the 6<sup>th</sup> grade of the secondary school in village Pervotravnevoe, Izmail region, Odessa oblast, E.S. Pavlenko, state that one time a detective appeared in school, summoned me to the principal's office straight from the history lesson, and began to interrogate me. The interrogation lasted for the duration of three lessons. He wanted information from me about the Baptists' prayer house and their leader, Erofei Levitskii, of which and of whom I had no knowledge. They threatened to take me to the correctional facility—to arrest me and take me away. In the end, I could not stand the interrogation, became upset emotionally and started crying. They let me go.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

On the second day, I was again summoned from the lesson of Ukrainian literature. Without reading to me the entire protocol, they forced me to sign it. I signed it.

1961, Evgenia Sidorovna Pavlenko.<sup>54</sup>

#### **4. Depriving Religious Parents of Their Parental Rights**

The invocation of a correctional facility used by a detective to coerce the 6<sup>th</sup> grader Pavlenko to sign a protocol containing, most likely some damning information about presbyter Levitskii or the EKhB community was not a mere intimidation tactic. Although the cases of actual reeducation of children of believing parents in the government run foster homes and closed boarding schools resembling prisons for juveniles were not numerous, the fact that the government on occasions resorted to such cruel methods subjected many religious parents and their children, especially members of the underground religious groups and supporters of the rebellious Orgcommittee or the EKhB Council of Churches, to a life in an atmosphere of constant fear of separation. In 1962, 330 members of the autonomous EKhB community in Kiev wrote in their letter to the Chairman of the Constitutional Commission, L.I. Brezhnev, Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of USSR, and the Council of Ministers of USSR:

In violation of the Convention on Struggle against Discrimination in the Field of Education, many of us are threatened with having our children taken away for receiving religious education. Our children are forced to join the Pioneer organization. Our young men and women are expelled from institutions of higher learning and specialized technical schools for their faith in God...<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 389, p. 55.

<sup>55</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 454, p. 117-119.

In 1964, members of the Temporary Council of Relatives of the EKhB Prisoners in USSR, sentenced for the Word of God, mentioned the plight of the following family in their Appeal to the EKhB believers in the country:

Children taken away from the EKhB parents for religious upbringing, in addition to list Number 1 [unavailable to me]:

Sisters—Liubov' Sirokhina (14 years old), Nadezhda Sirokhina (11 years old), Raisa Sirokhina (9 years old). Taken away in April of 1964 on the decision of the court in village Sokolovo, Zmievskaia region, Kharkov oblast. Their father, the 1<sup>st</sup> group invalid of the Patriotic War, blind to both eyes, was sentenced for Christian upbringing of children and leadership of the EKhB church in village Sokolovo to 3 years in labor camps.<sup>56</sup>

“In 1966,” reported members of the Temporary Council in one of their protest statements to the government, “by the decision of Verkhnedvinskii court, the children of residents of village Dubrava, Ivan and Nadezhda Sloboda, the eleven year old Galia and nine year old Shura, were taken away for being brought up in the spirit of religion... The Sloboda children ran away twice from the boarding school back to their parent's house.” Despite the parent's appeals to different levels of authority, demanding that their children were left alone, the Procuracy not only validated the Verkhnedvinskii court's decision to deprive Slobodas of their parental rights, but initiated a case against these children's mother. “Nadezhda Stepanovna [Sloboda] was arrested and sentenced to 4 years of imprisonment,” regardless of the fact that she had “three more little ones” to care for at home, “the youngest being only 3 years of age.”<sup>57</sup>

Many Protestant children in USSR grew up with the bogeyman of the Soviet state that could unexpectedly appear and snatch them from their familiar home environment to

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<sup>56</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 435, p. 52-53.

<sup>57</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 138, p. 58.

be raised by strangers in prison-like conditions of a closed boarding school (*internat*).

The Protestant also lived with recurring nightmares of losing their children, if not due to the next centrally orchestrated campaign against religion, then due to a personal initiative of some atheist activist, a co-worker's envy or a neighbor's grudge. In a novelistic reconstruction of the life of her SDA parents, Svetlana Volkoslavskaja described how her parents' religious convictions made them vulnerable to the irrational hatred of their non-conformism in a professional milieu. When her father, Rostislav, an accomplished engineer who had a hard time finding any employment due to his religious convictions, finally secured a job as an ordinary metal worker at the production-technical department (PTO) of one metallurgical plant in Kazakhstan, the PTO's head a young woman, Alla Robertovna Chaplinskaia hardly noticed him. Eventually, someone in the plant's administration noticed Rostislav's abilities and promoted him to the position of PTO's chief engineer. In a brief period of time, Rostislav proposed several technical improvements (*ratsionalizatorskie predlozheniia*) and received a bonus (*premiia*). In doing so, Rostislav unwittingly challenged Alla Robertovna's cushy position. "It appeared that her subordinate surpassed her in both education and understanding of the production process." Alla Robertovna soon detected Rostislav's weak spot—his sectarian background—and tried to use it to rid herself of the unwanted competition. When her argument that "a believer is being kept at the plant, and in a leadership position at that" was thwarted by the "capitalist logic" of a higher official to whom the only thing that mattered was Rostislav's ability to perform well, Alla Robertovna decided to hit Rostislav where it hurt the most:

The next day, having met the hated engineer at the door of her office, she angrily hissed at his face: ‘Tell your wife to have the diapers ready!’ ‘What diapers?’ he replied in confusion. ‘You know...I filed a petition about depriving you of parental rights. Your child will be raised by the state. The last thing we need is to allow another sectarian to grow up.’ Alla Robertovna proudly raised her head and stormed down the corridor...Rostislav remained standing by the wall...His face turned gray and large drops of sweat perspired on his forehead. Chaplinskaia’s threat was quite in the spirit of the time—in the believers’ milieu, stories about just such incidents were passed around by the word of mouth.<sup>58</sup>

Although the local authorities chose to ignore Chaplinskaia’s petition, Rostislav’s family, as many other Protestant families, continued to live in the shadow of fear that next time they may not be as fortunate.

Believing parents who instructed their children to observe the precepts of their faith in any social setting were painfully aware that the wellbeing of their families often depended on the ability of children to cover up for their parents and act as independent agents professing religion of their own will, and not because of parental instruction. In 1963, Litvin reported that after the administration of Vysokopol’skii butter plant in Bol’shealeksandrovskii region of Kherson oblast fired its employee, P.A. Sinii, a member of the executive organ of the local EKhB community and a father of five, having vilified him at the workers’ meeting as “a spy and a person unworthy of being a Soviet citizen,” the local authorities turned their ire on one of Sinii’s children:

In December of the same year, teachers of Vysokopol’e’s secondary school, N.G. Malaia and L.N. Zarivna, held for over two hours after classes the son of Sinii, Sergei, a pupil of the 4<sup>th</sup> grade, born in 1953. They began asking him questions about his parents raising him in religious spirit, treated him rudely and upbraided him, telling him that although he was a Pioneer, he wore a [Pioneer] tie only as a cover up, as spies would do.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Volkoslavskaia, p. 279-281.

<sup>59</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5908, p. 95.

The teachers Malaia and Zarivna apparently hoped that the sheer weight of psychological pressure they exerted on the still gentle and unseasoned Sergei would force the latter to yield information about his upbringing at home—information that could later be used as ammunition against his father. Such crude methods, routinely employed by many Soviet pedagogues, usually led to the opposite results. By subjecting Sergei to virtually the same treatment his father received at work and dismissing the value of his membership in the Pioneer organization—a significant sacrifice for any believing child—Malaia and Zarivna destroyed a fragile bridge between themselves and Sergei and unwittingly pushed him still further into the camp of their purported enemies. If winning the youth over to the cause of the state depended on driving a wedge between the old and young generations of believers, the actions of Malaia and Zarivna contributed only to creating a stronger bond between Sergei and his father.

The fear of losing their children to the state pursued many Protestant parents into the early 1970s. In 1973, the Upolmomochnyyi of CAR for Crimea, A. Glukhov, wrote about a persisting failure of Soviet organizations in his domain to drive a wedge between believing parents and their children. Some children of Seventh Day Adventists, complained Glukhov, consistently skipped going to school on Saturdays in observance of Sabbath. “The school directors and workers of party and Soviet organizations,” he reported, “often inquire us about what sort of administrative and criminal punishments could be applied to parents whose children do not attend school on Saturdays, given, as comrades state, that measures of persuasion have been exhausted by them without bringing about positive results.” To illustrate his point, Glukhov referred to the family of



Vladimir and Valentina Vetrinskii residing in village Traktovoe, Krasnogvardeiskii region. Three of their four children—the 7<sup>th</sup> grader Nadia, 6<sup>th</sup> grader Lena, and 1<sup>st</sup> grader Sasha—apparently skipped school on Saturdays. “Having exhausted all measures of social pressure,” narrated Glukhov, “the local comrades resorted to the help of the regional procurator who summoned V.T. Vetrinskii [the father] and warned him that if his children did not start coming to school on Saturdays, he and his wife would be deprived of their parental rights.” In response to this threat, continued Glukhov, “Nadia Vetrinskaia appeared in the office of the head of the Oblast Department of People’s Education [OBLONO] and stated that her parents did not prompt her to perform religious rituals, that she believed in God on her own, and that it was illegal in our country to deprive people of parental rights for providing religious instruction to children.”<sup>60</sup>

Statements like Nadia’s often undermined the court cases being built against parents who encouraged their children to observe Sabbath or other religious precepts. Ultimately, Glukhov did not have a definitive answer as to how the problem families, such as Vetrinskiis, should be approached and only stated that the Crimean OBLONO “is now summarizing data about all school children living in families of believers for the purpose of implementing measures shielding school children from religious influence,”<sup>61</sup> and that “the Department of Scientific Atheism at the State University is preparing materials for the conduct of sociological studies of SDA communities in Crimea.”<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 359, p. 55.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

## **5. Abuses and Unfair Treatment of Believing Children and Youths in Soviet Schools**

More often than being forcibly taken away from their parents, the believers' children were routinely tormented and publicly humiliated by the purported guardians of their rights in Soviet schools. In 1967, the EKhB schismatics wrote in their letter addressed to the General Secretary of UN, the International Committee for the Defense of Children and the top members of Soviet government:

It is impossible to describe difficulties experienced by children. They are subjected everywhere to interrogations aiming at acquiring information that could lead to the accusation of their parents and other believers known to them...Because of their religious sentiments, children are being ridiculed and tormented in schools. In the city of Shakhty, the daughter of I. Mel'nichenko was ordered by her teacher to stand on top of a school table as an object of ridicule for her faith in God. Encouraged by their teacher, the children surrounded the girl and laughed at her. The girl left behind her winter coat and school bag and ran home. In Pruzhanskaia school N 1, Brest oblast, the teacher told first graders Nadia and Galia Tserkasovich to stand on their feet for 4 class periods as a punishment for not wearing the Octobrist's star [a pin]. In response to Galia's father's demand that these torments were stopped, the teacher again ordered Galia to stand on her feet for three hours. As a result of such attitude of teachers towards believing children, other students do not hesitate to beat up our children.<sup>63</sup>

In a different letter, dispatched to a number of Soviet government officials and judicial institutions, schismatics complained that their children were being unlawfully exposed in Soviet schools to methods of psychological pressure by professional interrogators, not members of the school staff:

On December 17, 1964, a 12 year old pupil...of school N 32 in Zhitomir, Veniamin Storozhuk, was subjected to an interrogation. The interrogation lasted for over 2 hours. It is worth noting that for most of this period the interrogation

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<sup>63</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 72, p. 115.

had been conducted by a KGB officer without the presence of the school's principal. The 13 year old Vita Storozhuk, a pupil of the 5<sup>th</sup> grade at the same school, was also subjected to interrogation. During these interrogations, the children were asked questions about their religious upbringing in the family and about their parents' religious convictions.<sup>64</sup>

Besides being frequently subjected to public derision and threats of losing their parents, the believers' children were on occasions cheated out of their honestly earned grades and diplomas. In 1961, Polonnik submitted the following petition to the Minister of Education of Ukrainian SSR, comrade I.K. Bilodid:

Two students of the Chernovtsy evening school for working youths, sisters Yachmensky, residing at 95/1 Chervonoarmeiskaia St. in Chernovtsy, wrote a complaint about their teachers and sent to CARC. Sisters Yachmensky, Bulgarians by nationality, come from the family of Baptist believers. Having learned about this, the school teachers began to cause these sisters various troubles, coercing them to make public statements that there was no God. Since they refused to do so, their grades were lowered and diplomas of school's completion were not given to them. Sisters Yachmensky petitioned the Chernovtsy city and oblast Departments of People's Education, concerning this issue, but no one there paid any attention to their complaints. I ask for your interference.<sup>65</sup>

In 1971, an assistant to the head of CAR for Ukrainian SSR, M. Gladarevskii, reported to the CC of CPU:

...In some schools of Ukrainian SSR, especially in Odessa oblast, incorrect methods of atheist education of students were permitted. Thus, in the Usatievskaiia school, Beliaevskii region, Odessa oblast, the children of atheists were set against the children of believers. In 1968, the third grade of this school took the first place in academic achievements and good behavior. This was the grade in which the children of believers Timoshenko and Micuruk were studying. The pedagogical council, however, did not confer the first place on this grade only because 5 children of sectarians were studying in this grade. The director of the 2<sup>nd</sup> evening school of Odessa warned the believer Umnove that the latter would not finish the 10<sup>th</sup> grade because he was a sectarian...<sup>66</sup>

<sup>64</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 456, p. 376.

<sup>65</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 322, p. 37.

The stories of surviving Protestants corroborate the archival evidence of discrimination against believers in the sphere of education during the Soviet era. An SDA believer, Anatolii Andreevich Dyman', born in 1930, reminisced:

It was difficult in those days for believers to become educated. I do not speak of all believers inclusively, just Adventists. Because I observed Sabbath while attending the secondary school in Skvir, I could not finish the eighth grade. I was not permitted to take the final exams only because I skipped school every Saturday. Naturally, I was paraded before the entire school. 'These sectarians,' they would say, 'obstruct our movement towards Communism, and they do not deserve to study in our educational institutions.' So, they kicked me out, out of that school.<sup>67</sup>

The EKhB believer, Vitalii Dmitrievich Tkachuk, grew up in the 1940s-1950s in a mixed family, with a believing mother and a father who only "considered himself a believer, but neither attended prayer services nor read the Bible." Vitalii's father, who worked as a steam locomotive engineer—a "prestigious profession" at that time, frequently ran into problems with his superiors over the religious affiliation of his family. Vitalii Dmitrievich reminisced:

As soon as his superiors found out that his parents, wife and children were believers, they began to chide him, saying: 'Your relatives are all sectarians, Baptists, while you occupy a position of responsibility, transporting members of government. Recently, Voroshilov rode in your train... You cannot occupy such an important post. He would come home, pound at the table, and demand: 'You can be believers, but no one must know about it. Do not go to prayer services.' At the same time, the father provided for us. So, I grew up between the rock and the hard place. On one hand, I wished to serve God, but on the other, the father was an authority for me also.

Nevertheless, I continued to go to church, and when I was in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade (it was the graduation year), the school director summoned me one time and said: 'All your class-mates are Komsomol members. You alone are not a member.

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<sup>66</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 236, p. 83.

<sup>67</sup> Interview with A.A. Dyman', 2008.

And your parents: mother is a believer. We want to affix a special instructor to you and reeducate you, so that you could be as everyone else—an atheist. And if you do not submit to reeducation, you can be kicked out of school. You are like a black sheep here. I came home and related this news to my mother. My mother told me: ‘You are already an adult. You are 16, and must decide for yourself.’ The next day, I went to school and announced to the director: ‘I will remain a believer, and if I am not wanted in school, I will have to take back my documents.’ Although I studied very well, loved studying, and maintained good relations with my fellow-students, I had to go. I finished the first quarter of 10<sup>th</sup> grade and left, in hope of completing my education in an evening school...<sup>68</sup>

Although the CARC did not condone such “incorrect” methods of atheist upbringing of believers’ children in Soviet schools, the general atheist rhetoric, persistently explaining away the still lingering religious holdovers by the poor education of the older generation and promising that the much better educated young generation would be entirely free of religion, encouraged radicalism on the part of school officials directly involved in achieving this objective. The CARC’s statistical analyses, showing the steadily increasing level of education among believers, contradicted the expectations of atheist prognosticators and alerted the party officials, who, in turn, urged the local Departments of People’s Education to ensure that 100% of the Soviet schools’ graduates were atheist. By conferring the secondary education diplomas on believers, the school principles effectively admitted their failure to achieve the party’s objective. Fearing to be singled out as failures, some school administrators resorted to various means that allowed them to discard believing students as dropouts rather than permit the existence of such an oxymoron, in the Soviet perception, as an educated believer. Since the state explicitly treated religion as an emblem of backwardness, some Soviet pedagogues presumed that as bearers of backward religious ideology the believing students simply could not be on

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<sup>68</sup> Interview with V.D. Tkachuk, 2008.

par academically with their non-believing counterparts.\* The following quote from the report of the Council's Upolnomochennyi for Dnepropetrovsk oblast reveals that some Soviet officials could not help viewing believing students as somehow inferior—an anomaly that could not be explained in terms of Marxist-Leninism:

How is it possible at this time, when our Soviet people is building Communist society under the leadership of the Communist party, that certain representatives of our youth, of our student community, the builders of tomorrow, are in the sect of Baptists? How do they reconcile their religious convictions with the teachings of Marxism-Leninism? I cannot keep quiet about an occurrence that took place in Dnepropetrovsk. We were able to ascertain that the prayer house of the EKhB community in Dnepropetrovsk is being visited by some ideologically backward students of our institutions of higher learning. According to the data obtained by the appropriate organs, there are about 40 such people.<sup>69</sup>

V.D. Tkachuk did succeed in completing his secondary education in an evening school, but when he graduated, the school principal, a woman, told him: “How much did I have to endure because of you, because I accepted a sectarian! I received phone calls from people telling me that I must not accept you...But I simply saw a boy and told to myself: ‘Let him study.’” According to Tkachuk, this brave woman “took it [this uneasy responsibility] upon herself.”<sup>70</sup> Tkachuk wished to continue his education, “but the Cadre Department at my place of employment [he had to get a job in order to study in the evening school for working youths] wrote such a letter of recommendation—that I was a sectarian, as well as my parents—that no institution [of higher learning] would

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\* As an 8<sup>th</sup> grade student in the Soviet school (1977-78), I could not get a better grade than a C in my sociology class (built entirely on the Marxist-Leninist interpretation of social relations). When I once confronted my sociology teacher and asked her why, despite my satisfactory answers to her questions and my good understanding of the material, I could not get a better grade, she replied: “Because I know that you actually do not believe in what we are talking about in this class.”

<sup>69</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 783, p. 215.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

accept me.”<sup>71</sup> After being kicked out of the secondary school, A.A. Dyman’ somehow managed to enter a school of fashion designers where he continued to observe Sabbath. Naturally, he could not conceal his identity as a believer for too long, but attributed his survival in this school to a rather strange circumstance—the fact that the rector and several teachers of this school were Jews:

When the rector summoned me for a conversation and asked—‘Why are you never in school on Saturdays?—I replied: ‘This shouldn’t be difficult to explain, since many teachers in this school are ancestors of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, all of whom, as you know, observed Sabbath.’<sup>72</sup>

Although Dyman’s arguments made little impression on the rector during the conversation, the latter, Dyman’ observed, “always greeted me when we ran into each other in school, and no one messed with me.”<sup>73</sup> Implicit in the old Adventist’s interpretation of his survival in the Soviet school of fashion designers is his firm belief that the school’s primarily Jewish instructors paid at least residual homage to their biblical ancestry and, therefore, exercised some degree of leniency towards him.

Since the Soviet government did not take concrete steps to enforce a uniform policy concerning the treatment of believers in Soviet schools and institutions of higher learning, the ability of Protestant youths to pursue their education often depended on such subjective factors as sympathy or animosity towards them on the part of individual school administrators. Many believing youths encountered more animosity than sympathy. As late as 1968, Litvin reported to the Chairman of CAR in Moscow, Kuroedov:

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Interview with A.A. Dyman’, 2008.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

In violation of the Soviet legislation on cults, various pretexts were employed in 1967 to prevent religious youths from entering institutions of higher learning...Such facts were registered in Rovno oblast (the leadership of Rovno medical school did not allow G.F. Shparliuk to finish this educational institution), in Dnepropetrovsk oblast (the student A.N. Romaniukha was expelled from the Dnepropetrovsk economic-technical school), in Ternopol oblast (the fourth-year student of the Ternopol medical institute, M.Y. Klopot-Makarchuk was forced to quit studying in this institution), and in Kiev oblast (citizen M.V. Sukhovei was not accepted into the Kiev medical institute). In Chernovtsy oblast (Chernovtsy, school # 23), Vinnitsa oblast (Aleksandrovskaia 8-year school in Trostianskii region, Gulivskaia secondary school in Barskii region, and Katsmazovskaia secondary school in Zhmerinskii region), the organs of People's Education gave their school graduates letters of recommendation in which the graduates' religious affiliations were indicated.<sup>74</sup>

While the CARC repeatedly condemned the use of derision, public humiliation, and academic discrimination against believers' children as counterproductive and detrimental to the Soviet atheist agenda, it shared the other Soviet agencies' disapproval of those school teachers who chose not to forcibly feed atheism to their believing students for as long as their behavior in public did not betray their inner religiosity. In 1964, the Chairman of the Supreme Council of Ukrainian SSR, V. Zaichuk, reported to the CC of CPU:

The testimony of the witness, comrade M.S. Vodopianova—a teacher of the school # 67 of the city of Donetsk—who was questioned in conjunction with the case of Zhdanov and others [recently prosecuted believers], reveals that the staff of some schools ignores instances of students' becoming religious and does little to educate such children:

'Elena Zhdanova [said Vodopianova] studied in my class. I can only say good things about her. She is very quiet. Only on one occasion she went to a movie with her class. She never participates in culture appreciation excursions [*kul'tpokhody*]. I knew that her parents were believers. Leva never told me anything concerning her parents prohibiting her from going to the movies.' At the same time, Lena Zhdanova told the court:

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<sup>74</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 82, p. 75-79.



‘I am a Pioneer, and I study in the third grade...At home, I pray in the following manner: I stand on my knees and ask God to help me to study well. When I go to bed, I pray, and I also pray before taking my meals.’<sup>75</sup>

In the other cases quoted by Zaichuk, the believers’ children expressed their religiosity in a more visible manner. Referring to the children of the prosecuted “leader of the sect of Jehovah’s Witnesses, Bukhovets, heard by the People’s Court of Primorskii region of the city of Odessa,” Zaichuk commented:

In conjunction with this case, it was determined that the pedagogical collective of school # 4 acted leniently towards the conduct of the 5<sup>th</sup> grader, Valentina Bukhovets, and the 7<sup>th</sup> grader, Victor Bukhovets, who became sectarians under the influence of their mother and religiously inclined father, V.V. Bukhovets—a reserve Captain, presently working as a dispatcher at the Odessa bus depot, and a former CPSU member expelled from the party for belonging to a religious sect. Due to the school teachers’ incorrect attitude to the education of children, the aforementioned pupils completely abandoned the school’s social life and the Pioneer organization while Valentina Bukhovets even began spreading among her fellow-pupils—Kocharian, Ostroverkhova, and others—the reactionary premises of the JW teaching.<sup>76</sup>

The evidence shows that such high-ranking party officials as Zaichuk clearly held teachers responsible for the reeducation of religious children in Soviet schools:

The depositions of the director of Novoselitskaia school (Kel’menetskii region, Chernovtsy oblast), comrade A.D. Zavaletskii and teachers of the same school, comrades M.A. Nozheni and T.N. Mosiants, who were interrogated in connection with the case of the leader of sectarian underground, Burlaka, revealed that the school’s director and teachers knew that the parents of the 5<sup>th</sup> grader, Larisa Burlaka, insistently imposed their religious convictions on her, and that it was under their influence that she stopped studying the [school] program materials mentioning V.I. Lenin, CPSU, and the Soviet state. She became secretive and her performance worsened. She refused to join the Pioneer organization, carry out extracurricular assignments, visit the cinema and library, and participate in morning vigils [*utrenniki*] and other school activities. The teachers, however, did not conduct the appropriate educational work with this

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<sup>75</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5908, p. 139-140.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 137-138.

pupil and did not take measures to increase the atheist propaganda among students.<sup>77</sup>

The Soviet teachers thus faced a daunting task of active reeducation of believers' children, but without resorting to the "incorrect" methods discussed earlier. Neither the party nor the CARC, however, cared to establish a specific timeframe for such a delicate and protracted process or suggest the appropriate course of action for teachers to follow should they encounter reluctance on the part of religious children to submit to reeducation. Since most Protestant children remained rather steadfast in their convictions while the party was eager to see tangible results of their reeducation, "inappropriate methods of atheist education" proliferated. The government's black-and-white vision was poorly equipped to register the multiple transitional shades of color. In Zaichuk's report, a timid believer and a Pioneer, Lena Zhdanova, and a much more conspicuous and proactive believer, Valentina Bukhovets, appear equally unacceptable. The government thus unwittingly communicated to the believing parents that even such a significant effort on their part to accommodate the Soviet agenda as allowing their children to join the Pioneer organization was ultimately meaningless. The believers' children also learned that wearing a Pioneer's red tie, earning good grades and keeping their religious beliefs to themselves did not always save them from public humiliation.

## **6. Illegal Religious Education of Youth and Government Responses**

Despite the apparent risk of prosecution, many Protestant parents not only taught religion to their own children at home but dared to establish clandestine private schools

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 139-140.

where children of several families could receive a more systematic religious instruction.

This type of parental networking became especially popular among members of

unregistered Protestant communities. For instance, in 1965, the Council's

Upolnomochennyi for Zhitomir oblast, I. Gerashchenko, informed the Secretary of

Zhitomir Obkom of CPU, O.S. Chernobrivtseva, and Chairman of Zhitomir Oblispolkom,

A.I. Botvinov:

...Schismatics increased their influence on children of school and pre-school ages. According to the data at our disposal, they organized a circle for the study of religion by children, offering classes every Sunday. On big holidays, they arrange morning vigils for children, at which children perform—recite religious poems, sing psalms, play musical instruments, etc. Such a morning vigil was held by them on January 1, on the occasion of New Year. It has been determined that the following parents-sectarians send their children to this circle [a list of 8 parents, their residence addresses and the number of children each one of them sends to this improvised religious school follows].<sup>78</sup>

Although Gerashchenko admittedly could not establish the identity of all participating

parents and children, it is clear from his report that at least 18 children routinely attended

religious classes and activities of this peripatetic underground school:

The studies with children are organized in believers' houses, every time at a different location. Such studies took place in houses of Vinogradskii, Linnik, Dovbysh, and Larisa Afanasievna Vdovichenko... The leader of this circle is Nelia Leonardovna Shimanskaia, born in 1937, education—10 grades, unmarried. The schismatics plan to have their next morning vigil on January 7, this year, at one of the mentioned addresses. For this purpose, the children were prepared to perform, and presents—toys, things, etc—were acquired for them. Due to this detrimental influence of sectarians on children, some pupils began to behave negatively in school... They bring to school religious poems and familiarize other students with their content... I think it is necessary that the Gorispolkom took note of these illegal gatherings of schismatics, especially their work with children, and took the necessary measures to stop this activity...<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 450, p. 20-21.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

In 1967, Polonnik reported that the EKhB sectarians-schismatics organized in Kiev a school for religious education of children in which 100 children ranging from 6 to 17 years of age and divided into 4 groups studied.”<sup>80</sup> Polonnik apparently summarized in his report the information about this school, provided to him by the Council’s Upolnomochennyi for Kiev oblast, V. Sukhonin. According to Sukhonin, the pupils of this underground school “were grouped by age: one group for mature youths, two—for children of school age, and one—for children of pre-school age.” The school’s principal, so-to-speak, “Maria Grigorievna Kuprienok, born in 1942, came from a sectarian family, had 10 grades of education, good preaching and organizing skills, and could also play accordion, draw and do artistic crocheting.” Kuprienok was assisted in her work by three other women, also descendants from sectarian families.<sup>81</sup>

The Soviet organs of authority certainly paid attention to the activities of unregistered religious groups. The earlier mentioned Zaichuk’s report contained stunning statistics of believers’ prosecutions and arrests in the early 1960s. However, it is difficult to determine how many believers were sentenced on specific charges of instructing children and youth, although a number of cases involving arrests of the believing children’s parents, quoted by Zaichuk, and the multiple charges brought against them, including the broad charges of religious proselytism, suggest that the actual figure of religious parents’ arrests is buried in the following general arrests statistics:

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<sup>80</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 33, p. 89.

<sup>81</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 72, p. 123.

Altogether, 295 people—leaders and active participants of illegal sectarian organizations—were sentenced in 1962 for committing criminal acts infringing upon the person or the rights of citizens under the pretense of preaching religious teachings or performing religious rituals. In 1963, 80 people were sentenced, and 30 more were sentenced in 1964.<sup>82</sup>

It should be kept in mind that these figures indicate the scale of believers' arrests only in one of the 15 Soviet republics.

Usually, the Soviet courts heard cases of believers behind closed doors or allowed very few specially selected people in the court room. On occasions, however, the government chose to turn these court hearings into a social event and a powerful tool of antireligious propaganda, and staged big public trials of believers, involving coverage of the court proceedings on radio and television. One of the most notorious of such show trials in Ukraine, involving religious upbringing of children and youth, was the 1963 case of the SDA activists Tal'pa and Didenko. According to the Informative Note submitted to the heads of CARC in Moscow and Kiev, Puzin and Litvin, respectively, by the Council's Upolnomochennyi for Nikolaev oblast, B. Shlepenkov, the oblast authorities pursued the following objective in approving this rather unusual form of prosecuting believers:

For the purpose of disclosing the reactionary ideology of sectarians and the criminal activity of Tal'pa and Didenko, the court process was held, with the approval of party organs, as a show trial [pokazatel'nyi sud] from June 27 through June 29, 1963 at the House of Culture in Novaia Odessa. Two public accusers participated in this trial. The workers of press, radio and television were invited to the trial. The trial attracted a lot of public attention and was held in an overflowing hall in the presence of other sectarians.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5908, p. 135.

<sup>83</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 403, p. 25-30.

The trial contained all the typical elements of public demonization characteristic of the show trials of the Stalin era, short of the stiffness of sentences meted out under Stalin. In blatant violation of civilized judicial norms, the prosecutors permitted a deliberate attempt to influence the public opinion before any evidence against Tal'pa and Didenko was presented: "Before the court convened," reported Shlepenkov, "antireligious films were shown—*The Truth about the Holy Places, In the Shadow of the Cross*, and others."<sup>84</sup> While the bulk of the prosecution's evidence against Tal'pa and Didenko encompassed the usual violations of the legislation on cults such as "gathering their fellow believers for illegal meetings" (no one explained to the court on what grounds the registration of an SDA community of 75 people, "initiated" by Tal'pa, was "denied"), "recruiting new people into the sect, paying special attention to the sectarian indoctrination of children of pre-school and school ages," and collecting tithe from believers (a standard SDA practice then and now), the orchestrators of this show trial clearly counted on the children's statements in court to generate the sort of public outrage that could be exploited for propaganda purposes. "The evidence of children whom the defendants involved in the sect," remarked Shlepenkov, "evoked particular outrage of the audience at the activity of leaders of the SDA group."<sup>85</sup>

The children in question, however, constituted a diverse group in terms of age, their background (some were apparently from mixed families), and the degree of their involvement with the SDA community. Their evidence, therefore, ranged from the bold

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

statements in defense of their personal beliefs to complaints about pressure exerted upon them by their believing parents or defendants themselves:

The children, Tamara Borushko, Aleksandr Borushko, Vitalii Didenko, and Vera Budinskaia, being under the influence of sectarians, perversely spoke about the Pioneer and Komsomol organizations and were in fear of the ‘impending end of the world’ propagated by sectarians. A characteristic example of the negative impact of sectarians on youth is a statement by the Komsomol member Borushko who became involved in the sect. She said before the court: ‘...I entered the sect to become a good person and observe the Word of God. Had I known that the Komsomol members were atheists, I would have never joined the Komsomol organization. Do not consider me a Komsomol member anymore. I do not need it...’<sup>86</sup>

The aforementioned young witnesses were evidently either raised in families of long time SDA believers or at least familiar with the rules of the game. Therefore, they did not incriminate their parents or spiritual mentors, but stressed their personal convictions. The Pioneer Kartashev, however, evoked “discontent with sectarians” by telling the court “about his being abused by his mother—a sectarian, and about being threatened by the prosecuted Tal’pa who tried to raise him in the sectarian spirit”:

My mother often punished me, beat me and made me stand in a corner for 2-3 hours because I did not want to pray to God... In 1962, when I was getting ready to go to school on the day of my acceptance into the Pioneer organization, my mother found out about it. She locked me up at home and did not let me go anywhere all day. When the Pioneers of my class collectively bought me a Pioneer’s tie, my mother burned it. Once, my grandfather bought me a radio, but my mother threw it out of the house, so I would not listen to it...

...Uncle Tal’pa\* forced me to memorize religious verses and tested how I memorized them. Besides, he told me not to listen to anyone in school, since everyone in school was a non-believer who would die, whereas we would go to Paradise...<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

\* “Uncle,” *diadia* in Russian, is a respectful way for children to address adults and, in this context, does not necessarily indicate familial relations between Tal’pa and Kartashev.

The absence of any additional evidence about Kartashev's family and circumstances of his upbringing as well as the undeniable orchestration of this trial by the authorities make it difficult to evaluate Kartashev's statement. The lack of any references to his father, however, indicate that he may have been raised by a single mother, an SDA believer, perhaps a recent convert, who tried to bring up her son in the spirit of her own convictions as a safeguard against the negative influences of the street. She may have solicited the help of the more experienced Tal'pa who became Kartashev's spiritual mentor. The issue of disciplining and educating children is a tough task for any parent in any society. In conditions of Soviet Union, where the state jealously guarded its exclusive right to indoctrinate youths, the challenge of raising children according to parents' conception of right and wrong was even more formidable. While compulsory Marxist-Leninist indoctrination and the use of psychological and physical pressure (interrogating and holding believing children in principal's office for hours) to reeducate the non-conformists were a common place in Soviet schools, an attempt on the part of believing parents to do the same could instantly land them in a courtroom. During the 1962 trial of members of the Pentecostal underground in Krivoi Rog, one of the prosecuted parents, V.F. Ermakov, who was sentenced to "3 years in correctional labor camps of high security," advanced the following argument (I offer it here in Polonnik's paraphrase):

The prosecuted Ermakov declared at the trial that he, as a believer, found it incompatible that his children were Pioneers. The Pioneer oath states that a Pioneer must observe everything that the Communist Party teaches, and the Communist Party teaches that there is no God and assails religion. Therefore, he,

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.



as a believer, cannot agree to that and does not allow his children to join the Pioneer or Komsomol organizations, because he intends to raise his children as believers.<sup>88</sup>

As many believing parents, Ermakov simply could not allow his children to be raised in the ideology that clearly contradicted the dictates of his own conscience and attacked the very foundation of Christian morality that he, as a parent and believer, felt obligated to impart to his offspring. With the corporate state acting as an ultimate parental authority, the children could easily manipulate the resulting parental diarchy to avoid certain strictures imposed on them by their religious parents. It is all the more surprising that very few believing children took advantage of this circumstance and implicated their own parents in the manner of the famed Pioneer hero, Pavlik Morozov.

These sensible arguments, however, were not taken into consideration by the prosecutors in Novaia Odessa. On the contrary, Kortashev's statement was deliberately used to generate "the wrath and outrage" of the 400 people present in the courtroom. The rest of this show trial unfolded according to the well-tested scenario of the 1930s:

On the second day of trial, the court received a number of letters and statements from schools and enterprises, demanding severe punishment of the prosecuted. At their meeting, the workers and clerks of the building materials plant [where the defendants worked] condemned the activity of sectarian leaders and addressed to the following statement to the court: 'Having learned at the court about the vile and low-down activity of Adventists in Novaia Odessa, we cannot tolerate living under one roof of our Soviet society with Tal'pa, Didenko and others, and allow them to eat our bread, wear our clothes and breath our air. We ask the People's Court to apply to them the most severe measures of punishment in accordance with the Soviet law.'<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5589, p. 147-153.

<sup>89</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 403, p. 25-30.

The final blow to the defendants was delivered, according to Shlepenkov, by a number of “Adventists [most likely fresh candidate-members sufficiently intimidated and worked over by the appropriate organs]” who “spoke in the court as witnesses, condemned the reactionary activity of Adventists, and openly announced their breaking ties with sectarians.” The court sentenced Tal’pa and Didenko “to 3 years of imprisonment in the high security ITK [Correctional Labor Colony] ...under Article 209, Part I.” The sentence, Shlepenkov added, “was met by the public approval.”<sup>90</sup> As Shlepenkov implicitly admitted in his report, this highly publicized show trial pursued a much broader objective than the mere rescuing from the clutches of sectarians of children like Kartashev. Concluding his report, he wrote:

As the result of applied measures, the organized activity of SDA sectarians in Novoodesskii region has ceased, which created favorable conditions for pulling ordinary believers away from the sect. This is what the party and Soviet organs in the locations focus on.<sup>91</sup>

The Article 209 of the Ukrainian Criminal Code (equivalent of Article 227 in RSFSR’s Criminal Code) was specifically created by Soviet jurists to provide additional legal grounds for combating religious activists and parents without making religion as such a subject of criminal prosecution. Part I of this article stated:

The organization or leadership of a group whose activity, carried out under the guise of propagation of religious teachings or performance of religious rituals, is associated with causing harm to citizens’ health or other encroachment on the person or rights of citizens, or with prompting citizens to abstinence from social activity or fulfillment of their civic duties, as well as with induction into this

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

group of minors—is punishable by imprisonment up to five years or exile for the same period of time, with or without the confiscation of property.<sup>92</sup>

The article purportedly targeted “persons who conscientiously use religious teachings and rituals only as a means of masking their criminal goals,” and explicitly placed the burden of responsibility for such actions on leaders and organizers of the said groups.<sup>93</sup> “Causing harm to citizens’ health,” the Soviet jurists stipulated, “means that as a result...of the said group’s activity, the citizens died, sustained bodily injuries, committed a suicide or attempted to commit a suicide, became mentally ill, or developed some form of nervous-psychic disorder, etc.”<sup>94</sup> While the “criminal goals” were left undefined in the article and could range from material gain to deriving personal maniacal satisfaction from harming group members, “causing harm to citizens’ health” was defined broadly and encompassed both physical injuries and the less tangible disorders of mental nature. Since the Soviet state viewed some religious denominations, such as the Pentecostals and Jehovah’s Witnesses, for example, as “pervert sects,” the induction of new followers into these sects could easily be construed as a deliberate attempt to expose Soviet citizens to mentally damaging practices.

The ramifications of this article could be indeed far-reaching and capable of implicating religious groups and their leaders for a mere ripple effect of their activity on Soviet citizens. In 1964, the Chairman of the Supreme Court of Ukrainian SSR, V. Zaichuk, quoted the following incident:

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<sup>92</sup> *Ugolovnyi Kodeks RSFSR*, red. S.N. Chikhalova (Moskva: Yuridicheskaiia literatura, 1983), p. 94-95.

<sup>93</sup> *Kommentarii k Ugolovnomu Kodeksu RSFSR*, red. Y.D. Severin (Moskva: Yuridicheskaiia literatura, 1984), p. 475.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

Someone M.I. Timoshenko, whose wife, daughter and son-in-law had been inducted into a religious sect by a resident of *poselok* [a town-type rural settlement] Ol'shany, I.V. Burda, took very hard this dislocation within his family. The relatives began to treat him badly and occasionally beat him up. Consequently, M.I. Timoshenko began to consume a lot of alcohol and, on May 25, 1963, committed suicide.<sup>95</sup>

Since the application of Article 227/209 presupposed the establishment of “causal connection” between a suicide attempt, for example, and the activity of a religious group and its leaders,<sup>96</sup> Timoshenko’s suicide could be traced back to the activity of a believer Burda who was instrumental in inducting into the sect of Timoshenko’s relatives. Timoshenko’s alcoholism, therefore, could be interpreted by the prosecution not as a direct cause of his death, but only as a manifestation of his tortured mental state caused by his believing relatives and, ultimately, by Burda and the religious group he represented. With alcoholism thus becoming peripheral to the prosecution’s case, Timoshenko’s relatives’ likely attempts to restrain the raging alcoholic could be construed as deliberate beatings of a Soviet citizen who tried to rescue his family members from the clutches of religion.\*

Of a much greater consequence for Protestant parents, mentors and youth group leaders, however, were the article’s clauses concerning “the induction of minors” into a religious group and “prompting citizens to abstinence from participation in social activity

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<sup>95</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5908, p. 134-135.

<sup>96</sup> *Kommentarii k Ugolovnomu Kodeksu RSFSR*, p. 476.

\* This is not to say that there were no cases when certain religious practices in fact caused physical/mental harm to the health of citizens. In 1953, one Pentecostal “prophetess,” Maria Korytko, a resident of an obscure village Zherdia, Oryninskii region, Kamenets-Podol’sk oblast, had a vision during which “the spirit supposedly told her that she had to sacrifice her left hand for her sin.” The spirit also told her that “her hand had to be chopped off by an angel in the person of Justina Didik”—another member of Korytko’s small group consisting of exclusively women. Justina “took an axe and chopped off four fingers on Korytko’s left hand” (TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 156, p. 48). Such cases, however, were extremely rare.

and fulfillment of their civic duties.” The Soviet jurists defined the first as “actions inclining minors toward participation in the said groups, turning minors into followers of a religious creed, rituals or mystical teachings practiced in the said group; the induction of minors into concrete types of specific activity of a religious sect or other religious organization the activity of which has a character indicated in Article 227 [209],” and second—as “psychological or physical impact on a citizen, having as its goal to incline him/her to refuse participation...in [Soviet] gatherings and meetings, membership in social organizations, service in the Soviet Army, etc.” The article’s framers interpreted “prompting” towards the aforementioned actions as “persuasion, a promise to provide certain bonuses or privileges, threats of religious punishments, etc.”<sup>97</sup> In the Tal’pa-Didenko case, Kartashev’s mother’s opposition to her son’s membership in the Pioneer organization and her alleged use of physical force to that effect, as well as the rigorous religious instruction provided by Tal’pa to Kartashev along with the attempts to dissuade this minor from participation in certain school activities, were all crimes punishable under Article 227/209. The article’s definition of “prompting” did not distinguish between influencing an impressionable minor and a grown adult fully responsible for his/her actions. Once the content of a “crime” was established, believers of the officially recognized SDA church, for example, could instantly become members of a pernicious group targeted by Article 227/209. The Soviet Protestants, therefore, could exist legally only for as long as they did not engage in proselytism and did not attempt to ensure the survival of their belief system by passing it to their offspring.

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<sup>97</sup> *Kommentarii k Ugolovnomu Kodeksu RSFSR*, p. 476.

## 7. The Protestant Youth Leaders and Challenges of Bringing Up Youth in the Spirit of Religion

The religious upbringing of children and youth certainly involved the observance of much stricter moral-behavioral codes affecting all aspects of youngsters' lives, from the clothes they could wear to the forms of amusement and entertainment in which they could safely engage. Although these restrictions ideally aimed at producing healthy, thoughtful and disciplined individuals dedicating their energies first and foremost to spiritual tasks, the modernity constantly challenged the Protestant conceptions of propriety. While some Protestant youth leaders realized that the single-minded focus on the enforcement of puritanical and inflexible behavioral and dress codes alone made the worldly temptations only more appealing for the vibrant, inquisitive and sexually aware youths and complicated the task of retaining the young generation in the fold of religious tradition, some geriatric Protestant elders, brought up in the authoritarian patriarchal traditions of the old days, simply could not register the evolution of modern Protestantism. In his book, entitled *The Church, Pastors, and Snitches* (a novelistic rendition of memoirs of Baptists from Soviet Kazakhstan), Hermann Hartfeld reconstructed a vivid portrait of one such gerontocrat, a Baptist pastor of German descent, brother Geller:

Before every prayer meeting, he, as 'God's guard dog,' inquisitively scouted the rows of seated believers, making sure that no female creature dared to leave her head uncovered. Whenever it had some bearing on his sermon's topic, he often declared that at his second coming Christ would not accept a single woman with an uncovered head. The men did not escape either: it was meticulously monitored whether or not the fountain pens—an embodiment of worldly predilections—disappeared from the breast pockets of men's jackets. Woe to anyone who dared to even slightly deviate from his rescripts! ...Once, I [a young

generation personage in Hartfeld's narrative] could not stand it anymore and he had to listen to my objections concerning the head coverings for women. I tried to explain it to him that for the Greeks a female head-dress was considered an attribute of a married woman, by means of which she distinguished herself from women of promiscuous behavior or courtesans. Today, a married woman is distinguished from prostitutes not by her head-dress but, for instance, her wedding ring. My words provoked brother Geller's outrage... 'A heretic!' he exclaimed.<sup>98</sup>

In 1960, the CARC came into possession of a copy of a brochure circulated among the EKHB and entitled "A Brotherly Advice to Young Christians." Written in a didactic genre and richly interspersed with biblical texts, the brochure primarily focused on issues of youth's vulnerability to carnal temptations and provided a set of prescriptive rules the strict observance of which, the authors believed, would help the young Christian men and women to effectively combat these temptations:

While interacting, the Christian youths must strictly hold themselves at a distance from each other. Strolling arm in arm, kisses, hugs, even if only facetious, are nevertheless a form of flirtation. Any such flirtation develops sensuality, inflames flesh and, at the same time, weakens one's spiritual strength and leads to sin...If a lad and a maiden are betrothed to each other, they can spend time together (alone), but not in secret from parents...not in the bushes or dark nooks, but in the brightly lit rooms of parental homes. There can be no talk, of course, of any premature sexual relations, that is, before the wedding...

If the youth permits itself some light entertainment in the form of games of a gymnastic nature, then even here one must control himself/herself, so that the likely closeness would not cause to the temptation of the flesh...

Unfortunately, the devil so blinded the people's minds that even the garments are placed by him at the service of lust, the visual lust in particular...The naked arms, legs enveloped by tight stockings of a particular color, half-exposed breasts, shoulders and necks, bodies in snug outfits, various hairdos and multi-color cosmetics—all these paraphernalia are indicative of shamelessness, not culture...To all the listed perversions in clothing we must add one more—that is when our clothes shame our bodies and sows temptation among people who surround us. This occurs in cases when we see our women-sisters in men's clothes...According to the law of Moses, this was considered detestable...You [women] must know that God gave you breasts to feed babies; legs—to visit the

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<sup>98</sup> Hermann Hartfeld, *Tserkov', pastory i stukachi* (Cherkassy: Smirna, 2003), p. 29-30.

house of the Lord; hands—to do deeds of compassion; and bodies—to serve as temples of the Holy Spirit, not as objects of voluptuousness for sensualists.<sup>99</sup>

Many Protestant youth leaders felt that their contest with the Soviet state for the hearts and minds of the young generation could not be won with such antiquated sermonizing and, despite the risk involved, worked hard to create a more stimulating environment in which the Protestant children and youths could freely interact and express themselves.

Besides circles for children where the latter could not only sharpen their biblical skill but sing, play musical instruments, participate in various contests and receive prizes, the Protestant activists periodically organized a semblance of summer camps where children could live in tents and enjoy outdoor activities. “For children who are successfully mastering the biblical science,” reported Polonnik in 1967, “a camp was organized near village Cherevach, Chernobyl’skii region, Kiev oblast. The camp comprised three tents, and 30 children between the ages of 8 and 17 were brought there.”<sup>100</sup> Polonnik evidently referred here to the extracurricular activities of the same underground school headed by Kuprienok. His source, Sukhonin’s report, indicates that this camp meeting was organized to reward the children’s outstanding performance:

The activity of this sectarian school for children, it appears, has acquired a wide-spread fame among the EKHB sectarians-schismatics of the Soviet Union, since in June of this year, one of the leaders of the ‘Council of Churches,’ purportedly came [to Kiev] specifically to familiarize himself with this school and was thrilled by its work and its organizers. In response to the visit of such a high-ranking guest, or inspector, Kuprienok and her assistants...decided to take those children who excelled in biblical science to a dacha, where they could combine studying with relaxation... We do not know what was the daily schedule at the camp and how the children were fed. The administrative organs learned about

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<sup>99</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5205, P. 389-392.

<sup>100</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 33, P. 89.



this camp only on August 5. When the workers of administrative organs arrived at the camp site, they found everything already rolled up and ready to be transferred back to Kiev. For this purpose, sectarians booked a special bus at the Chernonyl bus station. During the search of Kuprienok's and her assistants' belongings, four thick notebooks full of psalms, spiritual songs and poems were found, as well as several albums of religious nature, large quantities of children's drawings reflecting religious topics, an accordion and a guitar supposedly belonging to Kuprienok. The apprehended adults, headed by Kuprienok, refused to provide any information and tried to conceal their identities. No identification documents were found on them. Only after the representative of Militia stated that all apprehended children would be put into a juvenile detention facility until everyone's identity was established, did the adults provided some identification data not only about themselves but also about children...A protocol was compiled at the scene of apprehension, but sectarians refused to sign it. The aforementioned protocol, together with the requisitioned notebooks, albums and children's drawings, were turned over to the Procurator of the city of Kiev.<sup>101</sup>

Despite the potential danger of exposure, such camp meetings, often attracting hundreds of Protestant youths, were arranged quite frequently. N.A. Zhukaliuk's memories of the first camp meeting of Adventist youth of the West Ukrainian region, organized in Carpathian Mountains, emit a mixed sense of pride and nostalgia:

A suitable area for a tent town was found on the outskirts of a near-Carpathian resort city of Yaremcha, in a luxurious pine forest. Not far from this location, there was a dilapidated abode of the only member of the SDA church in this city—the grandma Paulina, where we could establish a decent improvised kitchen for hundreds of young people who never complained about the lack of appetite...It was a drizzling rain, so we had to erect tents in a hurry, and here my army experience in setting up camps proved useful. The tents were ready in one hour and, after a delicious supper outdoors, prepared by experienced chefs—deaconesses from Lvov, the tired but happy young men and women fell asleep in their sleeping bags cushioned by bundles of fresh pine boughs...<sup>102</sup>

The next day, following a fortunate break in the weather, “the campsite resonated with laughter and songs; various games were arranged and, at sunset, a white flag with three

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<sup>101</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 72, p. 123-124.

<sup>102</sup> N.A. Zhukaliuk, p. 214.

letters ‘SDA’ embroidered on it went up the tall makeshift mast.” “As twilight descended,” reminisced Zhukaliuk, “a large bonfire illuminated the campsite, around which all inhabitants of the camp gathered. Never again, perhaps, this clearing, the forest and mountains have heard such wonderful melodies of Ukrainian folk and spiritual songs that continued to echo long past midnight.”<sup>103</sup> A few days after the SDA youths broke their camp and left, the grandma Paulina observed how a large detachment of militia scouted the vacated campsite. “Although ‘our’ clearing bore traces of tents,” wrote Zhukaliuk, “there was no direct evidence showing that it was a religious camp. During her interrogation, sister Paulina only confirmed that there were some youths who sang songs and played, as all youngsters do, and that she ‘did not know’ whence they came from or whither they went.”<sup>104</sup>

The organization of such large camps, with equipment and provisions for “hundreds of young people,” required serious preparation, resources and, most importantly, had to be carried out in absolute secrecy. Any accident or medical emergency, requiring immediate medical attention, could instantly expose the camp and implicate its organizers who could then be prosecuted under Article 227/209 for “organization or leadership of a group whose activity, carried out under the guise of propagation of religious teachings or performance of religious rituals, is associated with causing harm to the health of citizens.”<sup>105</sup> The SDA youth camp in Yaremcha barely escaped such exposure. According to Zhukaliuk, the abundance of edible mushrooms (a

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 215.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 217.

<sup>105</sup> *Ugolovnyi Kodeks RSFSR*, p. 94.

common supplement in Slavic diet) around the campsite prompted some of his young charges to incorporate them into their supper one evening. Unfortunately, a few poisonous mushrooms slipped into the pot, making several young men and women, including Zhukaliuk, violently ill. Luckily, one of the camp inhabitants was a nurse who immediately flushed the convalescents' stomachs and they began feeling better within hours.<sup>106</sup> Had it come to calling an ambulance, the religious nature of this camp meeting would have been easily established and the local authorities and atheist activist would have most certainly inflated the unfortunate incident to proportions of a premeditated Jim Jones-type attempt at poisoning innocent Soviet youths by the millenarian fanatics like Zhukaliuk.

Since camp meetings could not always suit everyone's schedule and entailed serious costs and risks, they were special bonuses rather than routine forms of interaction for Protestant youths. More often, the youth leaders sought opportunities to arrange informal clandestine meetings for their young charges closer to home. In 1952, the Council's *Upolnomochennyi* for Nikolaev oblast described the following incident:

On June 1, 1952, after the evening prayer service, 18 people, including youth, church members and children of believing parents, left the EKhB prayer house in Nikolaev and headed for Ingul River where two boats were prepared for them ahead of time by M.G. Stanov... They got into boats, crossed the river to a little island near the opposite bank, disembarked and began to sing psalms. After the singing, Stanov posed the following questions to the present: 'Why did Christ come to earth? What is the Bible's significance?' and so on. Then they resumed singing psalm—'You know of my suffering, God' and 'The merciless time is fleeing.' A former Komsomol member, Lidia Goludets, was also a part of this company.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> N.A. Zhukaliuk, p. 216.

<sup>107</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 1572, p. 237-238.

Several years later, in 1957, Vil'khovyi informed the party authorities about other forms of work with the youth widely practiced by the SDA church:

With the purpose of increasing their influence on youth, the leaders of this cult permitted youth gatherings in private apartments and suburban dachas where, under the guise of recreational walks or parties, they conducted biblical studies, rehearsed spiritual songs, created string orchestras, worked out plans for reciprocal visits by youth groups and choirs, etc.<sup>108</sup>

It especially alarmed Vil'khovyi that the SDA “presbyters and parents of believing youths” strove to make a lasting impact on their children “before sending them to work or study in other cities, or to serve in the army” and seal the impact of religious training by “giving them the full-immersion baptism and securing an oath from each person being baptized that he/she would strictly observe the cult’s doctrines.”<sup>109</sup>

Due to the employment of these clever techniques, combining religious instruction with such innocuous and fun activities as New Year’s and birthday parties, weddings or farewell parties for draftees to the Soviet Army, the Protestant parents and youth leaders successfully competed with the state in the struggle for the allegiance of their own progeny, attracted a number of youths from the outside, and provided opportunities for believing young men and women, often coming to such events from other republics of the Soviet Union, to interact, meet their future spouses, and find outlet for their energies and creativity within the parallel Christian culture. In her study of Soviet Evangelicals in Ukraine, specifically the home-based youth activities, Catherine Wanner asserted that “having eliminated the standard diversions for leisure,” such as

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<sup>108</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 4608, p. 80.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 79-80.

“secular forms of entertainment and mass media,” evangelical communities “countered with participatory musical performances, either in the form of choirs or small musical groups as well as regular face-to-face meetings for the purpose of Bible study.” In Wanner’s assessment, “the home not only became a sacred place, but it also functioned as something of a total institution, the hub of social, leisure, often professional, and, of course, spiritual needs.”<sup>110</sup>

## 8. Conclusion

Despite the government measures to curb the influx of youth into Protestant communities, between 1954 and 1956, for example, the number of young converts under the age of 25 constituted in some SDA and EKHB communities one third, or even one half, of the total number of new converts.<sup>111</sup> In 1959, Polonnik openly admitted that the state was not succeeding in breaking the generational continuity of religious tradition in Protestant families: “The sectarians are especially insistent in religious indoctrination of their family members, and first of all—children. As a rule, the children of sectarians, with rare exceptions, replenish the ranks of sectarians.”<sup>112</sup> Although Polonnik claimed that there were isolated cases when children “stubbornly refuse to follow in their parents’ steps...and become atheists,” the example he provided—that of the 10<sup>th</sup> grader, Liuda Shepelenko, who “broke ties with her family consisting of active adherents of the sect of

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<sup>110</sup> Catherine Wanner, *Communities of the Converted: Ukrainians and Global Evangelism* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2007), p. 77.

<sup>111</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 4608, p. 72, 79.

<sup>112</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5205, p. 76.

Pentecostals”—hardly supported his claim, since “the party organs made sure” that Liuda was “transferred to a boarding school [*internat*],” that is, separated from her family.<sup>113</sup>

After almost five years of intense pressure on believers, from 1959 to 1963, Litvin boasted in one of his reports:

The Council’s Upolnomochennye and local Soviet organs pay special attention to the issue of shielding children and adolescents from the influence of religion and church. Today, the religious instruction of children and adolescents in prayer buildings and priests’ apartments, practiced earlier by the clergy of Catholic, Baptist and other churches, has been completely eliminated.<sup>114</sup>

However, in his other report for the same year (1963), Litvin clearly undermined the validity of this optimistic assumption when he wrote: “Despite the measures being implemented in the locations to curb the influence of sectarians on the surrounding environment [population, in Soviet jargon], the influx of new converts, unfortunately, does not cease...During the year under review alone, 3,000 people were prepared for baptism, of whom 700 were under 25 years of age.”<sup>115</sup> In 1970, the Secretary of the CC of CPU, F. Ovcharenko, expressed the same concern that preoccupied the party authorities throughout the 1950s-1960s:

With the purpose of raising children in the spirit of religion, the Adventists illegally create children’s and youth circles. In violation of legislation, in Kiev, Vinnitsa and Chernovtsy oblasts, the so-called Sabbath Schools function where certain sections of the Bible and Adventist literature are being studied. In Kiev, the Adventist prayer meetings are organized in the manner of school lessons, during which notes are taken. The children are assigned homework involving the study of biblical themes.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 76-77.

<sup>114</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5908, p. 54.

<sup>115</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5663, p. 88.

<sup>116</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 369, p. 4.

In 1973, the Council's Upolnomochennyi for Chernovtsy oblast, P. Podol'skii, noted that "in order to revamp their work among the youth," the SDA communities in his domain "created orchestras... which they use not only as accompaniment during prayer services," but also as an added feature "during the performance of wedding and funeral rituals in their fellow-believers' homes." Podol'skii further observed that "during the traditional wedding season in the Summer and Fall, the reciprocal travels of youth and musicians from one oblast to another become more frequent, generating an atmosphere of a mass following and creating conditions for interaction."<sup>117</sup> Although these Protestant methods of engaging the youth have been observed and studied by the CARC/CAR since the late 1940s, Podol'skii and his crew still tried to gauge "the impact of these new forms of youth activities (orchestras, music, performance-filled youth meetings, contacts, big weddings, etc) on the surrounding secular milieu" and, especially, their "attractiveness for the non-believing youth." It was already clear to Podol'skii that "sectarian preachers skillfully accounted for the trends of modernity and the growing needs of contemporary youth," and that "Adventists (as well as all other sectarians) paid particular attention to the religious education of their children from the pre-school age and throughout the school years."<sup>118</sup>

As a secular historian, I tend to discuss the Protestant minorities' struggle to retain their children and youths in terms of the preservation of specific religious traditions in the context of an atheist regime. However, the Protestant parents, youth leaders, and

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<sup>117</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 359, p. 62.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

presbyters saw this struggle in a much broader context. They risked fines, prosecution, imprisonment and the loss of parental rights not merely to ensure the survival of a particular set of religious doctrines in the same sense as that other minority groups strove to preserve their language, literature, culture, or ethnic identity. In human history, people have often lost their cultural heritage, became utterly assimilated by this or that dominant culture, but ultimately lived their lives in relative comfort. As people for whom the terrifying awe and glory of the eschatological events predicted in the Bible were a reality, the Protestant parents viewed the loss of their children to the world as an eternal loss, and this ultimately explains the tenacity and bravery with which they fought for their children. Brought up in this millenarian milieu, the Protestants, young and old, also lived with an obligation to save as many non-believers as they could, not from the atheist ideology of the Soviet state, but from the eternal death at the end of time. The Soviet struggle against religion only enhanced their determination and animated their millenarian forebodings.

The plight of believing children in Soviet schools and institutions was ultimately predicated on the orientation they received from their parents and spiritual mentors. Some parents instructed their children to keep a low profile in school and become members of Octobrist and Pioneer organizations whereas others trained their offspring to openly admit their faith in God, if provoked, and defend their religious principles. As a result, some believing children sailed through their school experience with relative ease while for others the Soviet school became an ordeal that turned them into hardened fighters and experienced conspirators. The lack of tact and pedagogical skills on the part of some Soviet teachers contributed to the growth of this latter category of believing



youths. The atmosphere of Protestant clandestine circles and schools for children, participation in something “forbidden,” in fact appealed to the youths’ natural radicalism. Reminiscing about such covert schools organized by almost every parish SDA community in Ukraine, N.A. Zhukaliuk wrote:

Parents and teachers of various age groups of children were prepared and knew how to behave in the case of exposure. Quite often, while the children were offered lessons, special sentries took their stations of forewarning outside. Children even liked this peculiar mysteriousness. From the first grade they were told stories in schools about the underground Communist activists and conspiratorial flats. These early revolutionaries were presented to children as heroes of their time, so [our] children wished to repeat their exploits, although not in the name of Communist ideals.<sup>119</sup>

Clandestine religious youth circles, however, were offshoots of the main vehicle of religious instruction—the Protestant family. The government hoped that the mandatory education of believers’ children in Soviet schools would effectively counteract the influence on them of religious families and communities. Vested with enormous powers and constantly harassed by the party to expedite the process of tearing the youth from religion, some Soviet school teachers and administrators abused their powers and instead of patiently persuading religious youths subjected them to public humiliation, lowered their grades, and often denied them their honestly earned diplomas. “The growth of religiosity among the young,” argued Pospelovsky, “was at least partly caused by their disillusionment with the official doctrines, particularly after Khrushchev’s condemnation of Stalin and his inability to substantiate in practice his claim that there was a truly attractive alternative model of Marxism-Leninism. Failing in this, the only other alternative open to the regime to prevent the increase of young churchgoers was the use

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<sup>119</sup> N.A. Zhukaliuk, p. 286.

of coercion.”<sup>120</sup> The believing youths’ simultaneous exposure to both opposing views—Marxism in schools and universities, and religion in families and communities—in fact empowered them. One author of an atheist article complained that while many Soviet students claim to be atheists, when questioned, they “would not be able ‘to gain a victory in a discussion with believers.’”<sup>121</sup> The more aggressively the state enforced the atheistic curriculum in schools and universities, the more ossified and lifeless atheism became in the eyes of many Soviet youths, prompting them to question this official Soviet doctrine and seek answers to important existential questions elsewhere. The Protestant activists certainly capitalized on this spiritual-intellectual hunger of the young generation and proved to be more flexible in adapting their message to the needs of youth than the geriatric leaders of the Soviet state. Contrary to the predictions and efforts of Soviet antireligious establishment, the number of young people in Protestant communities continued to climb, and the increasing level of education among believers did not indicate the decline of their religiosity but rather encouraged them to seek accommodation with science and embrace the challenges of modernity. Ultimately, religious parents and their children proved to be better believers in their ideals and greater risk-takers than their atheist opponents.

By the end of the 1960s, the Soviet government came to realization that its crackdowns on religion contributed to the existence of a strong, legally aware and vocal religious underground eliciting considerable support from abroad and damaging the

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<sup>120</sup> Dmitry Pospelovsky, p. 131.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

USSR's image. In order to counter western critics and prevent the further swelling of the underground, the Soviet authorities had to enlist the help of registered religious communities for purposes of counterpropaganda and, hence, needed to treat them with more difference. In effect, it was a tacit admission of the Soviet state's failure to break the back of religion.

## **CHAPTER X**

### **THE EK**h**B OPPOSITION MOVEMENT**

The origins of schisms that began to rip the EK**h**B and SDA communities apart around the 1960 were examined in Chapter III. Since this chapter picks up the discussion of these schisms in medias res, it is expedient to briefly review the assertions I made earlier about the causes and nature of the Protestant opposition movements. As I argued in Chapter III, the evidence suggests that, contrary to the assumptions of some church historians, fostering schisms within Protestant communities along the lines of the classic divide et impera principle was not a conscientious control strategy applied by the Soviet government during the postwar era. The CARC and other Soviet agencies realized that the fragmentation of any Protestant denomination eligible for registration into opposing factions invariably led to the formation of conspiratorial underground groups of believers whose activities could not be easily monitored and directed via the central mechanisms of control, such as the EK**h**B and SDA all-union spiritual centers (VSEK**h**B and VSASD, respectively). Moreover, the existence of such underground groups of dissenters undermined the authority of these spiritual centers and, in the case of VSEK**h**B, counteracted the government's attempts to integrate the diverse Evangelical branches into a single, centrally controlled, institutionalized entity.

At the same time, the abnormal conditions under which the VSEKhB and VSASD were formed (by appointment and in violation of the established Protestant practice of electing spiritual leaderships at congresses of communities' representatives) and the government's insistence on turning these illegitimately formed bodies into rigid anti-democratic hierarchies whose main task would be to enforce the observance by communities of government-dictated statutes and regulations could not but provoke the believers' discontent and opposition. The Khrushchev persecution severely tested the VSEKhB's and VSASD's ability to resist government impositions. The VSEKhB reaffirmed its utility to the state by adopting the notorious "New Statute" and "Instructional Letter." These highly unpopular documents, however, caused the VSEKhB's shaky prestige among the communities to plummet and provided the nascent opposition (the Initiative Group or *Initsiativniki*) with powerful ammunition to openly challenge the authority and integrity of the incumbent EKhB leadership. Since both the government and the VSEKhB blocked the opposition's attempts to elect the new leadership by means of convoking an all-union congress of communities' representatives, the schism within the EKhB brotherhood became inevitable.

Whereas the EKhB schism occurred, arguably, as a revolt against an overly authoritarian pro-government leadership, the SDA church began to fragment into opposing camps not because it distrusted its central leadership, but because the government disbanded the uncooperative SDA central leadership. Left without a single unanimously recognized spiritual center, the parish SDA communities began to group around different former VSASD members who, in their turn, aggravated the

fragmentation by engaging in a power struggle for influence. Unable to convoke a congress that could reconcile its warring factions, the SDA church gradually succumbed to a full-blown schism. Although the fissures that split the EKhB and SDA communities occurred along different fault lines, governmental interference constituted a common background for both schisms and, in a sense, served as a catalyst for one or the other form of internal division. Had the VSASD, for example, listened to the advice of the more cautious brothers and vigorously enforced government regulations, it might have saved itself, but the SDA church might have still experienced a schism similar to the one that afflicted the EKhB brotherhood.

Due to the numerical strength of the Evangelical-Baptist brotherhood in the USSR, especially in Ukraine, the EKhB opposition movement proved to be larger and more spectacular in its public manifestations than any of the SDA factions. While the SDA schism never went beyond a strictly internal internecine warfare between leaders of opposing factions and their followers, the EKhB opposition underwent a certain evolution. It initially emerged as a movement for internal reform and purification of the Evangelical-Baptist brotherhood, led astray by its corrupt leadership. Since the state instantly took the side of the VSEKbB and shielded it from the attacks of perceived schismatics and extremists, the EKhB opposition eventually turned the ire of its criticism from the VSEKbB to the intransigent Soviet government. Humble appeals and petitions gave way to bold and legally articulate demands for constitutionally guaranteed but often violated human rights. In the process, the EKhB reformers adopted the language of socio-political discourse and forms of public protest used by other dissident movements.

The amount of correspondence they generated, the frequency of their public confrontations with various Soviet agencies, and the number of their prisoners made them quite conspicuous domestically and abroad. For these reasons, the EKhB schism has attracted considerably more scholarly interest than the SDA schism.

Between the 1960s and the 1990s, scholars in the West produced sufficiently informed and insightful studies of religious dissenters in USSR, drawing on evidence of religious persecution smuggled out of the Soviet Union as well as the coverage of believers' trials in Soviet press, materials of various VSEKhB congresses and, eventually, the archival evidence that became available after the Soviet Union's collapse. In his pioneering work *Religious Ferment in Russia: Protestant Opposition to Soviet Religious Policy*, published in 1968, Michael Bourdeaux examined the then available evidence of the EKhB schism and traced the evolution of this initially religious dissent into a form of social protest that raised issues that were "basic to the question of the struggle for human rights in the Soviet Union."<sup>1</sup> The contributors to the 1975 publication, *Dissent in the USSR: Politics, Ideology and People*, especially Barbara Wolfe Jancar, analyzed the character of religious dissent in USSR and argued that the schismatic Baptists' exceptional ability to self-organize made them most prominent in the general chorus of religious dissent. "By far the largest input into samizdat," asserted Jancar, "has come from the dissident Baptists."<sup>2</sup> Jancar attributed this epistolary fecundity not so much to

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Bourdeaux, *Religious Ferment in Russia: Protestant Opposition to Soviet Religious Policy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1968), p. 182.

<sup>2</sup> Barbara Wolfe Jancar, "Religious Dissent in the Soviet Union" in *Dissent in the USSR: Politics, Ideology, and People*, edit. Rudolf L. Tokes (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1975), p. 195.

the schismatic Baptists' intellectual prowess as to their remarkable ability to self-organize, their youthfulness, and sincerity of their quest for truth. Jancar described "the Baptist dissent movement" as "primarily a movement of people under forty" belonging to "an unhappy generation for whom religion is part of its passionate search for truth."<sup>3</sup>

In 1981, Walter Sawatsky produced a voluminous study of Soviet Evangelicals in the postwar USSR, providing the most comprehensive analysis of issues of contention between the VSEKhB and the opposition in the context of Evangelical theology and Protestant traditions of democratic self-organization. Sawatsky's study also sought answers to a number of moral questions that stemmed from the abnormality of state-church relations in USSR, with believers often left in a conundrum between the options of "selective conscience" and imprisonment.<sup>4</sup> Similar issues of resistance and accommodation were also raised by Herbert Schlossberg in his 1991 study *A Fragrance of Oppression* in which he argued that "Christians have a transcendent loyalty that relativizes everything that Communism teaches is absolute" and criticized westerners for associating with the collaborationist Soviet church leaders, attributing this "myopia of mainline Protestantism" in part to its "propensity for the left."<sup>5</sup>

Significant contributions to the study of the fusion of state and church in USSR—a salient issue in the EKhB dissenters' criticism of the VSEKhB—were made by William C. Fletcher and Rebecca V. Storde whose respective works focused on religion and

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 205.

<sup>4</sup> Sawatsky, p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> Herbert Schlossberg, *A Fragrance of Oppression: The Church and Its Persecutors* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1991), p. 58, 194-195.



Soviet foreign policy during the 1940s-1970s. Fletcher, for instance, averred that in the aftermath of WW II, the Soviet state “granted certain minimal concessions to the Church, marginally sufficient to ensure its continued survival in the country, in return for the Church’s unswerving support in political activities, primarily on the international scene.”<sup>6</sup> The Soviet clergy’s participation in such international organizations as the World Baptist Alliance and the World Council of Churches rendered valuable services to the Soviet state, “particularly in building a favorable image for the USSR..., inhibiting adverse reactions to domestic religious policies..., and influencing points of view in the West” which were “compatible with interests of Soviet foreign policy.”<sup>7</sup> More specifically, the Russian Orthodox and Protestant delegates participating in such international congresses could “prevent, or at least delay, Western awareness of the scope and intensity of the antireligious measures being employed within the country, thereby reducing the danger of an outcry in the West such as had arisen during similar periods of pressure against the Church before the war.”<sup>8</sup> The VSEKhB delegates to the WBA or WCC congresses did what they could to suppress “strong protests...issued in great abundance by the *Initsiativniki*, decrying the allegedly supine acceptance of State interference by the Baptist leadership, and demanding of the State that it terminate its unjust policies and abide by its own laws on religion.”<sup>9</sup> Far from admitting the true conditions of believers

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<sup>6</sup> William C. Fletcher, *Religion and Soviet Foreign Policy, 1945-1970* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

back home, “the Russian churchmen were careful to state that their Churches enjoyed excellent conditions in the USSR, and at no time offered any public criticism or equivocation which might detract from the State’s desired image of complete religious toleration.”<sup>10</sup> While the VSEKhB’s involvement in Soviet disinformation campaigns actively contributed to “the continuation of a degree of ignorance among Western Christians concerning the actual religious situation in the USSR,”<sup>11</sup> the reformers’ criticism of their denomination’s leadership and their prolific protest statements, smuggled out of the country and made available in the West, eventually swayed the public opinion abroad in the direction of taking a more decisive stance towards violations of believers’ rights in the Soviet Union.

The most recent 1994 work by John Anderson, *Religion, State and Politics in the Soviet Union and Successor States*, reexamined some of the issues stressed in earlier studies—reasons for Protestant dissent, the EKhB schismatics’ legal awareness, etc—but paid greater attention to the impact of religious opposition movements on the evolution of Soviet religious policy during the Brezhnev years in the direction of a more moderated and nuanced approach to the dissenting religious minorities, with political arrests “directed less against religion as such, than against non-conformity in general.”<sup>12</sup> Despite their varied angles of approach to the subject, the mentioned authors commonly placed

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 126.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>12</sup> John Anderson, *Religion, State and Politics in the Soviet Union and Successor States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 135.

greater emphasis on Soviet religious policies, state-church relations and Soviet Protestant leadership (mainstream and schismatic) than on the experience of schisms by the ordinary believers in communities. The samizdat journal *Chronicle of Current Events*, launched in 1968, opened its pages to personal stories of persecuted believers. It not only “provided a regular channel through which the communication of political information and protest messages could be conducted to a developing journal audience within the USSR and abroad,”<sup>13</sup> but also served as one of the main databases for researchers of Protestant dissenters during the era when access to the government archives was unfeasible. A capacious repository for cases of religious persecution, the *Chronicle*, however, was not a social history of religious dissent in the USSR.

Compared to the EKhB opposition movement, the SDA schism has received only marginal attention in the existing historiography. The SDA schism also left a much thinner paper trail in the government archives. Since the story of Protestant schisms constitutes only one aspect of the present study, the purpose of this chapter is to examine these internal divisions in the context of broader social history of Protestants in the postwar USSR (more specifically, Ukraine) and fill in the blanks of the previous research of the subject, paying special attention to the less researched impact of these internal divisions on ordinary believers as they tried to articulate their own responses to the crisis of leadership in their respective denominations. The earlier research, especially that of the 1960s—1970s, was complicated by insufficient or one-sided data—for example,

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<sup>13</sup> Howard L. Biddulph, “Protest Strategies of the Soviet Intellectual Opposition” in *Dissent in the USSR*, p. 109.

reports of the EKhB dissenters' struggles published in their samizdat magazine, *Brotherly Leaflet*, or copies of the Orgcommittee's statements submitted to the government—on the basis of which a researcher had to assess, often by way of surmising, the validity of dissenters' claims, the extent of the EKhB leadership's collaboration with the government, the state's and communities' responses to the Orgcommittee's appeals, and other related issues.

Some of the documents I examine in this chapter represent the EKhB dissenters' classics that were available to earlier researchers. The main contribution of this chapter to the study of Protestant schisms and opposition consists in the introduction of new archival documents that reveal the complex multidimensional context of these internal divisions: the behind-the-scenes collaboration of VSEKhB with the state agencies in suppressing dissenters and undermining their influence on communities, the state's strategies for tracking down and isolating dissenters, the government statistics on dissenters' arrests, the CAR's varied approach to the management of the EKhB and SDA schisms, the heated debates and squabbles in communities over the conflicting messages received from the opposing centers of spiritual authority, and the impact of domestic and international protests against religious persecution on the evolution of the Soviet policy towards the unregistered Protestant groups. The evidence also suggests, I argue, that the Protestant schisms (especially the EKhB schism) were fueled by both the generational continuity of non-conformism (ex-prisoners' influence on youths) and a generational revolt of action-seeking and assertive youths against the cautious and authoritarian old-generation leaders. Although the Soviet government flatly refused to negotiate with the

EKhB dissenters and the cautious VSEKhB rendered their proposals audaciously dangerous and unrealistic for the time, the dissenters' unrelenting pursuit of their reform agenda and their growing influence among the masses of believers convinced the government that unless the VSEKhB overtook the reformers' initiative, its prestige in the EKhB brotherhood would continue to plummet. A number of government sanctioned EKhB congresses of the 1960s and the adoption of the revised VSEKhB Statute of 1963, incorporating most of the reformers' suggestions, were small but welcome changes to the stifling status quo of the postwar arrangements and should be credited to the dissenters' activism. Far from receiving any credit, the dissenters either languished in prisons or were systematically excluded from any active participation in the process of change initiated by them. The reformers, to be sure, sought not mere palliatives from the Soviet government, but genuine separation of state and church and the removal of the incumbent collaborationist EKhB leadership. In conditions of state protectionism of the VSEKhB, the pursuit of these radical objectives left reformers with no other option but to blaze a separate trail.

Although salient in the government reports and frequently used by believers of registered EKhB communities to describe their counterparts in the underground, the terms "schism" and "schismatics" were artificial and somewhat misleading epithets that did not reflect the dissenters' initial agenda and misrepresented their objectives. The EKhB dissenters neither entertained the idea of a schism nor proposed any doctrinal changes and innovations that would justify the formation of a separate branch of Evangelical-Baptists. Rather, they proposed a number of measures that would reform the

church from within, reorganize it in accordance with the established Evangelical-Baptist customs, and rid their brotherhood of the anomalies introduced and fostered by the Soviet state. A different set of more neutral terms—“supporters of the Initiative Group,” or “of the Orgcommittee,” or “of the Council of Churches of EKhB” (CCEKhB henceforth)—both made allusions to the respective stages in the evolution of dissenters’ agenda and did not carry the negative connotation with which the word “schismatic” (*raskol’nik*) is traditionally associated in the system-centered Slavic/Russian culture. Both sets of terms, however, were often used interchangeably in the government and VSEKhB documents and, as the schism became a *fait accompli* in the late 1960s, the preference was given to more pejorative epithets. Since the EKhB schism developed in distinct stages during which the dissenters sought and failed to find accommodation of their increasingly more demanding proposals by the VSEKhB and the Soviet government, I will discuss each stage separately.

### **1. The “Initiative Group” Stage, 1961-1962**

Although discontent with the EKhB central leadership brewed throughout the 1950s and became pandemic after the VSEKhB’s passage in 1960 of the “New Statutes” and “Instructional Letter,” the idea of voicing this discontent belonged to a group of EKhB brothers from RSFSR who suggested, during a meeting with representatives from Ukraine, to form the Initiative Group for the Convocation of the Extraordinary All-Union Congress of the EKhB Church in USSR.<sup>14</sup> Besides its first leader, A.F. Prokofiev, the

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<sup>14</sup> Savinskii, p. 213.

group included G.K. Kriuchkov, S.T. Golev, B.M. Zdorovets, A.A. Shalashov, G.P. Vins, and others. The brief biographies of the more outstanding members of this group reveal both the troubled background of the *initsiativniki* (as they were frequently referred to in the Russian colloquial) and the diversity of their age. Born in 1915 in Western Siberia, Prokofiev “came to God in 1945 while being in prison (in 1941 he was sentenced under Article 58 for anti-Soviet activity).”<sup>15</sup> Before his imprisonment, he worked as a teacher, got married, and in 1940 began his university studies in geology. After the war, Prokofiev joined the EKhB community, but around 1954 was again sentenced, this time to 25 years for missionary activity. Stalin’s death led to the revision of his sentence term and his early release in 1958. In 1961, he became the first leader of the Initiative Group. “In 1962,” according to Savinskii, “a new arrest interrupted his activity: he was sentenced to 5 years of imprisonment and 5 years of exile.” While in exile (village Makovskoe, Krasnoarsk province) he continued to cooperate with the EKhB dissenters and, apparently, got involved with another woman, since “in 1969 the CCEKhB excommunicated him for adultery.”<sup>16</sup>

G.K. Kriuchkov was born in 1927 into the family of a member of the Moscow EKhB community, who also served as this community’s choir conductor. In 1929, Kriuchkov’s father was sentenced to 3 years and in 1933—deported from Moscow, which had a profound affect on the young Gennadii Kriuchkov. As relative of a *lishenets* (person stripped of rights), Kriuchkov “spent his childhood and adolescence constantly

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 212.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 213.

relocating with his family...throughout the USSR's periphery (Ashkhabad, Astrakhan', Kalmykia)."<sup>17</sup> After serving in the Soviet Army, from 1944 to 1950, Kriuchkov joined his family, this time in the town of Uzlovaia, Tula oblast, and found employment as an electrician at a local mine. In 1952, he converted, joined the Tula EKhB community and, as his father, became a choir conductor. After his marriage, the Tula community elected him a deacon and, a short time later, he became presbyter of an unregistered community in Uzlovaia.<sup>18</sup>

Born in 1896 into a poor peasant family in Riazan' oblast, S.T. Golev converted in 1910 and received baptism in 1917. After service in the army, from 1914 to 1924, he became a missionary, traveling from village to village. This activity led to his arrest in 1937 and a 10 year sentence, which he served in labor camps in Karelia. He left behind his wife and five children. Having served his time, Golev relocated his family to Pskov, where "he for the first time encountered the 'activity' of the Senior Presbyter of VSEKHB for this oblast, M.S. Kapustinskii, who etched a dark imprint on the life of Sergei Terentievich [Golev]: he was arrested again and sent into a lifelong exile."<sup>19</sup> The amnesty that followed Stalin's death liberated Golev. Although the EKhB leadership repeatedly offered Golev a position in the All-Union Council, "encounters with the VSEKHB leaders and familiarity with what transpired in the EKhB brotherhood alerted Golev and convinced him to decline the honor." He preferred to serve an unregistered

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 213-214.



community in Riazan'. As soon as he received the first appeal of the Initiative Group, he joined the group "as a spiritually experienced brother."<sup>20</sup>

Not much is known of B.M. Zdorovets, except that he had been an active member of the Initiative Group since its creation and, for this reason, happened to be among the first people arrested in 1962 in conjunction with this group's activity. Having spent 5 years in labor camps and 5 years in exile, he returned in 1972. However, just months later, he was arrested again and sentenced to 4 years of imprisonment. After his release in 1976, he, for a short time, continued to participate in the activity of CCEKhB, but soon vanished from the scene. "According to some data," surmised Savinskii, "he disagreed with the leadership of CCEKhB on a number of issues."<sup>21</sup>

A.A. Shalashov, in Savinskii's opinion, also belonged to the category of "spiritually more experienced brothers" in the composition of the Initiative Group. Born in 1890, Shalashov converted in 1914 and served as an evangelist at the Volga-Kama department of the EKhB Union. During the 1930s, he fell victim to Stalin's repressions and "spent 19 years in prisons and exile." From 1950s and until his death in 1963, he worked as presbyter of an unregistered EKhB community in Cheliabinsk, where he acquired the reputation of "an uncompromising servant of God."<sup>22</sup>

Although Georgii P. Vins rose to prominence in the EKhB dissent movement only around the time the Initiative Group's reorganization into the Orgcommittee, Walter

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 214.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

Sawatsky includes him in his discussion of the *initsiativniki*. Georgii was born in 1928 into a family of believers. “Vins’ father,” commented Sawatsky, “was an active evangelical leader in Siberia and the Far East,” and “was first arrested in Moscow in 1930 at a conference of Baptists when Georgi was only two. Young Georgi saw his father for short intervals a few years later between two other arrests, but after the final arrest in 1937, he never heard from his father again.”<sup>23</sup> Georgii converted in 1944 while attending the EKhB community in Omsk, Siberia, and received baptism in 1945 at the age of seventeen. After the war, Georgii and his mother moved to Kiev where he “started to preach in the registered church located on Spassky Street” while continuing to study, “graduating in 1954 from the Kiev Polytechnical Institute as an electrical engineer.”<sup>24</sup> In 1952, he married Nadezhda Lazaruk. By late 1961, Vins, together with the other church members, began speaking out in support of the *initsiativniki*’s call for a congress, and in May of 1962 “was present for the first time at an extended meeting of the *Orgkomitet*,” which led in the following month to his expulsion by the registered church in Kiev. Vins and his local followers responded by organizing a separate unregistered church where he was elected an evangelist. In August of 1963 Vins “left his job in an institute and began to work full time for the *Orgkomitet*, having been elected secretary in September 1963.”<sup>25</sup>

Characteristic of this sample group of prominent *initsiativniki* as well as of many less known followers of the movement was the shared experience of either their personal

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<sup>23</sup> Sawatsky, p. 235.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 236.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

imprisonment or that of their parents and relatives. Although the Khrushchev amnesty brought about the release of many believing prisoners, the years of labor camps and exile left some of these freed believers disillusioned with the Soviet system and emboldened by the liberalization suggested in Khrushchev's de-Stalinization rhetoric. In 1957, the head of the Ukrainian CARC, Vil'khovyi, observed:

Most servants of the cult and religious activists who have returned from places of imprisonment, after having served their terms or as a result of amnesty, behave loyally and have found employment. But a number of these persons continues conducting active, detrimental and, in some places, hostile work under the guise of religious propaganda among the population... Assuming the role of organizers of groups of believers, they enflame religious fanaticism, suborning believers not to observe the Soviet state legislation on religious cults, or striving to induce unhealthy moods in believers with respect to organs of authority.<sup>26</sup>

Far from keeping a low profile, these experienced fighters trained a new generation of non-conformists, and their removal from the scene—the new term of imprisonment—brought but little relief for the government. In 1963, Litvin reported: “Unfortunately, the sentencing by the People’s Courts of sectarian leaders not always and not everywhere paralyze the activity of religious organizations. Others take the place of the sentenced and they continue their unlawful activity as usual.”<sup>27</sup> In his autobiographical account *Three Generations of Suffering*, published in the West in the 1970s, G.P. Vins stressed this “connecting link between the old generation of faithful servants of the Evangelical-Baptist brotherhood, who for the most part had laid down their lives in the camps, and the new generation, called by the Lord to serve in the ‘sixties.’”<sup>28</sup> This generational

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<sup>26</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 4608, p. 59.

<sup>27</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5663, p. 109.

continuity of non-conformism is clearly manifested in the age diversity within the sample group of *initsiativniki* the oldest members of which, Shalashov and Golev, were 71 and 65 respectively at the time of the Initiative Groups' formation in 1961, whereas the youngest members of this group, Kriuchkov and Vins, were only 34 and 33, with the 46 year old Prokofiev being in the middle of the group's age spectrum. While united by their shared background of persecution and arrests, neither the old nor the young leaders of the Initiative Group had sufficient experience of leading churches under the VSEKhB's jurisdiction. "The *Initsiativniki* movement," observed Sawatsky, "crystallized out of older leaders and younger men who had one thing in common—they were unaccustomed to a church that was not free. The new statute of 1960 really shocked them."<sup>29</sup> Moreover, after the first wave of arrests in 1962 landed Prokofiev and Zdorovets in prison, the stage was clear for the rise to dominance in the movement of the two well educated, young and aggressive leaders, Kriuchkov and Vins, "a disproportionately high percentage" of whose supporters were also young.<sup>30</sup> Both of these circumstances worked against the possibility of fruitful negotiations between the cautious, gerontocratic VSEKhB leaders and their challengers.

On August 13, 1961, G.K. Kriuchkov and A.F. Prokofiev appeared at the VSEKhB office in Moscow for a conversation with members of the VSEKhB's Presidium. They informed the general secretary of VSEKhB, A.V. Karev, and his assistant, A.I. Mitskevich, that Initiative Group had formed in response to the passage of

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<sup>28</sup> G.P. Vins, *Three Generations of Suffering* (London, Toronto: Hodder and Stroughton, 1976), p. 185.

<sup>29</sup> Sawatsky, p. 177.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160.

“New Statute” and “Instructional Letter.” In adopting and enforcing these texts, the initsiativniki alleged, the VSEKhB had:

1. Destroyed the divine principles of church’s organization.
2. Practiced the appointment of servants without the participation of the church.
3. Artificially divided the church into registered and unregistered communities and circulated “The Statute” and “Instructional Letter” that contradicted the Gospel.<sup>31</sup>

Since the present VSEKhB leadership had not been elected by the EKhB brotherhood, the delegates stated, it was necessary to convoke an Extraordinary All-Union Congress to elect the new and legitimate leadership. The VSEKhB’s main spokesman at this meeting, Karev, pointed to the unfeasibility of such a congress. “How can you spread such illusions in our time throughout the churches?” he reportedly retorted. “I do not believe in this congress, since, today, the harshest policy towards religion is being implemented in our country. They [the government] decided to do away with religion in the shortest possible time...But in your program, you propose to demolish all boundaries [state-imposed limitations of religious activity]...Who would permit this? Before demolishing all boundaries, one needs first to overthrow the government and the Upolnomochennye.”<sup>32</sup>

Ten days later, the Presidium of VSEKhB received a formal letter restating the Initiative Group’s charges against the incumbent EKhB leadership delivered earlier orally by Prokofiev and Kriuchkov. The letter’s authors presented the VSEKhB as the main culprit of internal disorders that befell the EKhB brotherhood in recent years. Among

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<sup>31</sup> Savinskii, p. 210.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

other things, the authors charged the VSEKhB of complicity in the government campaign of disinformation: “On the outside, you have acquired a certain status and established good reputation for yourselves in the eyes of Christian community around the world, but since you did not have the courage and willingness to present the reality that would compromise your position, you have deceived the world Christian community and became guilty before it. Such anti-evangelical actions were primarily responsible for departure from the church of individual believers and whole groups and establishment by them of independent communities.” In the authors’ opinion, this was a deliberate “meticulously planned and diligently implemented program of overthrowing the church through the church—a program aiming at decomposing the church.” As a consequence of VSEKhB’s participation in this program’s implementation, the authors asserted, the EKhB church in USSR found itself in the following predicament: while “generally one in spirit and teaching, it is artificially divided into the two camps of unregistered and registered communities.” If “the former [camp] suffers from the lack of unified central leadership, the latter...is being assiduously decomposed by it.” The VSEKhB not only abandoned communities that the state refused to register, but contributed to their persecution by the state.<sup>33</sup> Far from acting as an agent of division, the Initiative Group proposed measures that would bring about the elimination of this pre-existing artificial schism:

All EKhB churches in USSR, regardless of whether or not they are registered, constitute a single EKhB church and must have the same status in all respects. It is necessary to have a single central leadership of all registered and unregistered

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 348.

communities of the EKhB church, elected on the basis of Scripture. The now existing central leadership (VSEKhB) of registered EKhB communities is not elected by the church. It does not lead the church but only one of its parts. It does not serve the interests of the church and God's work and has been unfaithful to God over the many years of its service.<sup>34</sup>

In order to address these problems “in the painless way of God's sensibleness, not conflict,” the Initiative Group urged the VSEKhB “to give its consent for the convocation of an Extraordinary All-Union Congress of the EKhB Church in USSR,” and also warned the Moscow elders that should they refuse or “resort to shenanigans and procrastinations,” the groups “reserved for itself the right to act independently.”<sup>35</sup>

On August 23, 1961, the Initiative Group submitted a short formal petition to CARC, requesting permission for the convocation of a congress. “The EKhB church in USSR,” wrote Prokofiev and Kriuchkov, “experiences a state of deep crisis caused by a departure of a number of church servants from the purity of the gospel teaching.” The proposed congress, promised petitioners, would only address “the agenda concerning the church issues exclusively.” They reminded the CARC that “according to the legislation,” they “had the right to conduct such congresses.”<sup>36</sup> Although the CARC did not honor this petition with a reply, it empowered the VSEKhB to relate to the Initiative Group that “the congress would not be permitted under any circumstances.” On November 26, 1961, when representatives of the group made yet another unsuccessful attempt to solicit the

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 348-349.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 349.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

VSEKhB's support for their agenda, Karev informed them of the government's "categorical refusal to grant permission for a congress."<sup>37</sup>

In the meantime, the VSEKhB began receiving disturbing news from its Senior Presbyters about the circulation in a number of communities in various parts of the country of the Initiative Group's letters. The Senior Presbyter for Rostov oblast, I.A. Evstratenko, for instance, reported in October of 1961 that the churches under his supervision were "flooded" with letters proposing the convocation of a congress and replacement of the incumbent VSEKhB leadership. "A member of the Rostov community council, D.S. Rogozhin," he complained, "conceals these letters from me, but shares them with many members of the community." In a conversation with Evstratenko, Rogozhin stated that he "fully approves the Initiative Group's actions and had no qualms about admitting it to the local Upolnomochennyi of CARC." Moreover, Rogozhin knew that the Riazan' community in central Russia "did not accept the VSEKhB Statute" and "had in his possession the instructional letter for Senior Presbyters [not intended for the eyes of ordinary believers]...the copies of which he circulated among the community members." "The Riazan' community's unanimous disapproval of the VSEKhB Statute," lamented Evstratenko, "delighted Rogozhin" who "wished to see the same single-mindedness in the Rostov community."<sup>38</sup>

The circulation in the communities of the "Message to All EKhB Churches," to which Evstratenko evidently referred, and the public exposure of such sensitive and

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 211.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 328.



ostensibly damning for the prestige of VSEKhB documents as the “Instructional Letter” indicated that the *initsiativniki*’s preliminary negotiations with the Moscow elders, aiming at solving the problem “in the painless way of God’s sensibleness,” had failed, and that the reformers resorted to their reserved right “to act independently.” They began doing so by raising the ordinary believers’ awareness of the VSEKhB’s complicity in enforcing the government-imposed and essentially antireligious regulations as well as by arming their followers around the country with arguments of legal nature and encouraging them to write letters to the highest organs of Soviet authority that would manifest the mass character of the pro-congress movement. In the last months of 1961, according to Savinskii, 272 letters were sent to the Presidium of the Supreme Council, the CC of CPSU, the Council of Ministers of USSR, and MVD of RSFSR.<sup>39</sup> At the same time, as Michael Bourdeaux noted, the *initsiativniki* took great pains to assure the government that they were “in no sense seeking to engage in anti-Soviet activity,” but were “concerned purely in a movement for putting their own house in order.”<sup>40</sup> In support of his assertion, Bourdeaux quoted the following statement sent by leaders of the Initiative Group in October of 1961 to the Chairman of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Congress of the Communist Party:

We send greeting to all the delegates of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Congress and wish them success in their work for the good of all mankind. Having read the draft of the CPSU program (for building communism in our country), we Christians also experience happiness that many of us who are writing these lines will be able to live under communism, and we, together with all Soviet citizens, are contributing our work and our knowledge so that we may more rapidly achieve in our country

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 215.

<sup>40</sup> Michael Bourdeaux, *Religious Ferment in Russia*, p. 28.

an abundance of food products, consumer goods, equipment and automatic devices, and a growth of moral qualities and culture. What a wonderful sound have the sublime words of the Party program, 'Man is a friend, comrade and brother to his fellow-man.' Finally the age-old dream of mankind, 'From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs,' will be fulfilled.<sup>41</sup>

The government simply dismissed the dissenters' statements of loyalty and forwarded all received letters of their followers to the CARC officials who, in their turn, informed believers in the locations "of the unlawful activity of the Initiative Group" while the Soviet law enforcement agencies began arresting the movement's leaders.<sup>42</sup>

The VSEKhB also responded in kind and sent its own letters of warning to all registered communities, discouraging believers from supporting initiators of the congress. This first exchange of mutual accusations, expressed by opponents not to each other's face but vicariously, through letters to communities, instantly turned the Evangelical-Baptist brotherhood into a battleground between the two rival centers of spiritual authority. On one hand, the Initiative Group provided communities with the needed outlet for their grievances but, on the other, its activism on behalf of the discontented could not but cause divisions within communities. After all, the success of the reformers' agenda depended wholly on whether or not the movement initiated by them would acquire a mass character.

Although it is clear that the reformers loathed the idea of causing a schism, there is little evidence suggesting that they seriously worked through the logistics of its prevention. Ideally, had the VSEKhB subscribed to the reformers' call for the

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Savinskii, p. 215.

convocation of an emergency congress, the threat of a schism could have been obviated and the government would have faced a united front of all Evangelicals-Baptists in the USSR. In reality, however, the government could have easily dissolved the VSEKhB as it dissolved the VSASD only a year earlier. The *initsiativniki* did not have a contingency plan in the case of this latter scenario while the manner in which they approached the VSEKhB was not even remotely suggestive of a partnership. A group of religious idealists, the reformers expected the Moscow elders to unequivocally support the convocation of a congress that would most certainly divest them of power, leaving them with nothing more than an opportunity to repent for their collaborationism with the atheist government. Faced with an organized and rampantly spreading opposition to its rule, the VSEKhB also proved incapable of taking even small steps towards defusing the crisis and ignored the urgings of the more pragmatic members of its Presidium, such as N.A. Levindanto and S.P. Fediukhin, who thought “that a congress or at least an extended conference with participation of presbyters of larger communities was necessary, at which the VSEKhB leadership that had existed for 15 years could be reelected and a report on its activity heard.” The VSEKhB, they insisted, needed to at least try to petition the CARC about the convocation of a congress. “Should we be denied,” they argued, “we would be justified in the eyes of our brotherhood.” The VSEKhB, however, “did not listen to their proposal and persistently enforced the implementation [in communities] of its Statute and Instructional Letter.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 211-212.

On January 23, 1962, the Initiative Group made “one more attempt” to call the VSEKhB leaders “to an honest cooperation in solving an extremely important church question—the convocation of a congress of the EKhB in the USSR.”<sup>44</sup> Although the dissenters invoked “cooperation” in the preamble of their letter to the VSEKhB, the substantive part of their epistle suggested submission to the already established agenda rather than cooperation in its generation. Having implicitly rebuked the Moscow elders for procrastination in determining their position vis-à-vis the measures proposed earlier by the Initiative Group, the reformers stated their new plan of action:

The force of circumstances now places the Initiative Group before the necessity of forming the Orgcommittee [Organizational Committee] for the preparation of the Extraordinary All-Union Congress in USSR. The Initiative Group intends to form it, with God’s help, in the following manner:

1. To address the CARC at the CM of USSR and ask for a permission to form the Orgcommitte...
2. To form the Orgcommittee under our leadership, with participation in its work of your representative (from the VSEKhB).

In order to provide the Orgcommittee with normal work conditions for the preparation of the congress, we suggest that the VSEKhB allow the Orgcommittee to use for the duration of its work the VSEKhB office, the *Brotherly Messenger* magazine, the technical means and statistical materials, and cooperate in the Orgcommittee’s work. We hope that You will show understanding, agree to the aforementioned cooperation, and support in the future our petition for the permission to form the Orgcommittee.

We are guided in all this work by the principles of unity not in words, but deeds, have in mind all EKhB communities, and declare that we will not resort to any separatism measures. All EKhB communities in USSR constitute One Brotherhood in Christ! Valuing time and keeping in mind that we cannot appeal to the CARC for the permission to form the Orgcommittee in the manner described earlier until we receive your permission, we ask you to hurry with your reply...Mail it to this address:

Tula oblast, town of Uzlovaia, village Rodkino, to S.D. Volodin (for G.K. Kriuchkov).

Respectfully,

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<sup>44</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 388, p. 1.

On behalf of the Initiative Group,  
Presbyters, A.F. Prokofiev and G.K. Kriuchkov<sup>45</sup>

Although Prokofiev apparently knew of the content of this letter, his actual signature was missing, which suggests that he must have entrusted Kriuchkov to pen the letter while he himself was either visited communities or was in hiding. The return address, provided by Kriuchkov, also indicates that the Initiative Group did not have an office or permanent residence, but rather represented a coterie of clandestine activists who were often on the move, communicating with each other and the wider world through reliable but inconspicuous intermediaries like the villager Volodin. Fully aware of the fact that the CARC had already rejected their earlier petition concerning the convocation of a congress and treated them as an illegal organization, the *initsiativniki* knew that the only legal avenue still open for the pursuit of their agenda required their alliance with the VSEKhB. But the VSEKhB had already made it abundantly clear to them and registered communities in the country that it would not challenge the government-established status quo. Moreover, it would be self-defeating for the VSEKhB to support reformers whose explicit goal it was to put the incumbent EKhB leadership on trial. Disregarding these serious obstacles to cooperation, the reformers now urged the VSEKhB to make itself available to them as a mere legal façade for negotiations with the government. The Orgcommittee would be formed under the reformers' leadership, with the VSEKhB being represented by one person. Besides, the incumbent EKhB leaders, currently presiding over the majority of registered EKhB

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

communities in the country, were to deliberately hand over to the reformers all material accessories of their power.

If the government had in fact allowed the congress to convene under such conditions, the reformers, as its champions and organizers, would have been in a strategic position to emerge as the likely candidates for the new leadership of the Evangelical-Baptist brotherhood. Furthermore, with the idea of cleansing the church of apostates and collaborationists figuring so prominently on the reformers' agenda, the projected congress would most likely deepen the schism rather than bring about the desired unity.\* Neither the Soviet government nor the VSEKhB were interested in such a scenario. Kriuchkov's letter to the VSEKhB, therefore, either stands as a testament to the reformers' naïveté, or it was used by them, arguably, as a clever ploy to solicit more evidence of the incumbent leaders' blatant disregard for the believers' urgent demand for a change. The following document, reflecting Prokofiev's vitriolic reaction to the VSEKhB's doubting the authenticity of Kriuchkov's letter due to the mentioned absence of Prokofiev's signature, reveals how little stock the reformers placed in the Moscow elders' support for their agenda. Having informed the VSEKhB that although he did not have the opportunity to sign the letter from January 23, he approved it, Prokofiev unleashed a tirade that could not possibly foster the spirit of cooperation:

Despite your unwillingness and resistance, the Lord will cleanse His Church... It is hard for you to kick against the pricks [ref. to Acts 9:5]. He [God] will soon open the door wide for the evangelization of the whole world. We are

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\* In 1965, the government sanctioned an SDA congress under the leadership of a schismatic branch. The congress instantly turned into a trial of opponents and their excommunication, and ruined the chances of this church's unification for years to come. This unfortunate congress (to be discussed in detail later in this chapter) serves as a likely scenario of what could have happened at the reformers-led EKhB congress.

waiting for your repentance and pray God that He would not allow you to perish in stubborn apostasy...<sup>46</sup>

Prokofiev's letter marked the end of the opposition's initial attempts to reform the EKhB church without causing a schism. For a time, Prokofiev and his followers believed they could carry out this reform from above—by convincing the incumbent EKhB leadership to embrace the reform agenda and petition the government about the convocation of an emergency congress. In their negotiations with the VSEKhB, the reformers adopted from the very beginning an attitude of moral superiority, of stern judgment and vilification of the incumbent leaders—an attitude that could not but drive these negotiations into a dead end. With total disregard for human psychology, the reformers treated Zhidkov, Karev, Mitskevich, Orlov and other VSEKhB members as people devoid of an instinct of self-preservation—people who would support the Initiative Group's proposals out of sheer guilt for the committed errors.

Arguably, the reformers could have accomplished more, had they approached their opponents in the spirit of forgiveness and with a program of small incremental steps towards amending the wrongs done to their brotherhood by the VSEKhB's abject submission to the state-imposed status quo—the ban on congresses of communities' representatives, appointment rather than election of clergy, and a number of antireligious requirements outlined in the VSEKhB-endorsed "New Statute" and "Instructional Letter." One significant circumstance, however, worked against such an approach. While both the incumbent leaders and dissenters were survivors of the 1930s, the former

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

had been in charge of the EKhB brotherhood for over ten years by the time the latter were released from prisons in the mid 1950s. The former had witnessed the revival of their church in the late 1940s and became painfully aware of the limitations under which their church had to function in the new conditions of the postwar USSR. The latter, as Sawatsky put it, “had never bowed the knee to the Caesar God...and intended to resume their preaching activities where they had left off.” Many prominent believers who fed into the *initsiativniki* movement, argued Sawatsky, shared the following characteristics:

These had also been more isolated than Soviet society generally, so that the new spirit of ecumenism and disarmament was strange to them. The more they learned about the nature of the AUCECB [VSEKhB], the less they liked it. Anybody who received permission to travel abroad they suspected as having made a deal with the secret police. When in the early 1960 Alexander Karev and Michael Orlov received state peace medals, their suspicions seemed confirmed.<sup>47</sup>

The more educated and legally aware younger generation, inspired by these ex-prisoners, had even less patience for the VSEKhB’s cautious maneuvering. Once the dissenters realized that their efforts to initiate change from above had failed, the opposition movement, now under a new name of the Orgcommittee, entered a next and more radical stage in implementing its program—a reform from below.

## **2. The “Orgcommittee” Stage, 1962-1965**

Although the reformers’ negotiations with the VSEKhB ran aground in early 1962, they could not altogether ignore the VSEKhB, even if only because it was the very reason for the opposition’s existence. The Orgcommittee’s formation marked the reformers’ decision to proceed with their program without the VSEKhB’s support. Since

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<sup>47</sup> Sawatsky, p. 159.



the VSEKhB remained the official leader of presumably all registered EKhB communities in the country, acting alone left reformers and their followers in a strategically weaker position of rebellious minority which the government could easily ignore or crush. The Orgcommittee's best chance of success, however, pivoted on its ability to speak on behalf of all registered and unregistered communities in the USSR, something that had been quite transparent in the rhetoric of reformers' earlier correspondence with the VSEKhB and the government. The dissenters, therefore, focused immediately on soliciting all sorts of anti-VSEKhB petitions and statements from as many registered and unregistered communities as possible, aiming at undermining the VSEKhB's claim to authority and isolating it from the masses of believers. The Orgcommittee further construed these petitions as both the believers' vote of no confidence in the VSEKhB and a source of legitimacy for itself as transitional leadership of the EKhB church. Strictly speaking, the Orgcommittee's legitimacy was just as problematic as that of the incumbent EKhB leadership, since no authoritative congress of communities' representatives elected either one of these rival leaderships. However, the reformers could easily stand this argument on its head: if the VSEKhB assumed all the trappings of leadership without being legitimately elected, why couldn't the Orgcommittee? If in present conditions, no legitimate church leadership could be elected, then the church should follow those leaders who upheld the evangelical principles, not violated them. If the VSEKhB authorized excommunications of those presbyters and community members who refused to comply with the anti-evangelical "New Statutes," then the Orgcommittee should be able to excommunicate those who

contradicted God's will. Within the span of less than two years, the *initsiativniki* equated their function as a self-proclaimed mouthpiece of the brewing discontent in communities with that of provisional leadership of the entire EKhB church in the USSR.

In March of 1962, the EKhB communities throughout the country began receiving letters containing the Orgcommittee's warning for the VSEKhB and its republican, regional and even some local presbyters that "unless they repent openly before God's people for their deliberate anti-church activities and declare their intention to serve God and his people faithfully in the future, they will be excommunicated from the church in fulfillment of God's will." "We recommend to communities and groups," exhorted reformers, "that you should transmit directly to the Organizing Committee lists of those churchmen who, in your opinion, should be excommunicated with an indication of the place where your community or group is located and a number of members who agreed with this decision."<sup>48</sup> On June 22, 1962, the Orgcommittee held a broad counseling meeting that produced the often quoted Protocol Number 7. The protocol confirmed "the anti-church activity of the VSEKhB" on the light of letters and resolutions received from parish communities. Brothers from Western Siberia and the Altai region, for example, remarked:

Having gone astray from the divine line of service and having departed from the truth, the VSEKhB created a vicious system of servants in the persons of Senior Presbyters who are alien to the church and God; who have entangled the church, and who deceive the hearts of the gullible with flattery and eloquence. They represent a well-organized and united core of apostates.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Bourdeaux, *Religious Ferment in Russia*, p. 36-37.

<sup>49</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 388, p. 3-4.

The believers from Zhdanov wrote that the “servants-appointees passionately persecute the true children of God, not stopping before anything and acting against the will of God,” while “brothers from Kiev” accused the VSEKhB’s Senior Presbyters of intentionally encouraging the state to prosecute the non-compliant believers:

They manifest special interest and personal initiative in the business of suppressing the truth. They do not even hesitate to depict the purely spiritual intentions of community’s members, speaking against the VSEKhB’s regulations and instructions, as statements against the state authority!<sup>50</sup>

Upon careful examination of numerous complaints of a similar nature, implicating specific representatives of the VSEKhB throughout the country, the Orgcommittee concurred with “the aforementioned demands of the EKhB church in the USSR to expel all those who apostatized” and boldly stated in the protocol that it did not recognize “the following rights of the VSEKhB workers”:

1. The right to be servants of the EKhB church.
2. The right to represent the church and communicate with [the EKhB] churches within the boundaries of USSR.
3. The right to represent the church abroad and maintain connections with the churches abroad.<sup>51</sup>

A list of 27 expellees, including 7 top VSEKhB executives and 20 Senior Presbyters, followed. Among those excommunicated was the Senior Presbyter for Ukraine, Andreev, as well as a number of his oblast subordinates. The Orgcommittee also made it clear that the list was not finite, its continuation contingent on the review of additional incoming petitions from believers. Having thus enacted the people’s will, the Orgcommittee declared its own assumed prerogatives and a set of principles that would guide its work:

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

1. Vested with powers and trust by the Church, the Orgcommittee accepts upon itself the leadership of the EKhB Church in the USSR until the congress' convocation.
2. The main guiding principle of the EKhB Church is the Word of God.
3. All counseling meetings of the all-union significance, their resolutions and documents, as well as the convocation and conduct of the congress must be considered invalid if they were carried out without the Orgcommittee's participation.
4. The Church does not recognize as valid the expulsion of believers for supporting the movement for sanctification of the Church.<sup>52</sup>

With Prokofiev and Zdorovets already arrested, the protocol was signed on behalf of the counseling meeting by Kriuchkov,\* Shalashov and Baturin.

The Protocol Number 7 represented a watershed in the *initsiativniki*'s self-perception. With numerous letters in support of their agenda, streaming in from various communities and groups of believers throughout the country, the reformers could now claim that they derived their authority from the people, not the state, and that their radical excommunication of the VSEKhB and its hierarchic elites marked the restoration of democratic principles of their brotherhood's customary self-organization. Acting on such a broad mandate, both as a chief executor of communities' will and the highest arbiter assessing the guilt of the incumbent leaders in question and the degree of punishment that should be meted out to them, posed serious canonical problems and required that the Orgcommittee demonstrated that it represented the overwhelming majority of the EKhB communities in the USSR, and that some legitimate body of communities' representatives in fact vested it with such powers. According to the prewar EKhB

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

\* Kriuchkov barely escaped arrest himself, and for some time had to live in hiding.

practice, for example, the excommunication of the aforementioned all-union, republican and oblast-level leaders should have been preceded by proper investigation and carried out by those parish communities of which these leaders were members. The Orgcommittee's peremptory decision to expel the top 27 VSEKhB officials, therefore, reeked of revolutionary justice rather than reflected the normal practice of the EKhB brotherhood. Savinskii saw this as evidence of the "inexperience of brothers who took upon themselves 'the leadership of the EKhB Church in USSR,'" and stressed that "in all previous history of the Evangelical-Baptist brotherhood, only the parish churches resolved the issues of acceptance and expulsion," and that not even the highest organ of the [EKhB] Union—the congress—had ever tackled such questions."<sup>53</sup> While the top VSEKhB officials were also members of their respective parish communities, the Orgcommittee ruled that the "parish communities only had the right 'to excommunicate the parish presbyters and servants.'"<sup>54</sup> The few older and more experienced members of the Orgcommittee, believed Savinskii, were certainly aware of the said ruling's non-conformity with the established custom but "did not timely prevent the permission of such gross error in the actions of younger brothers who constituted the Orgcommittee's majority."<sup>55</sup>

Furthermore, argued Savinskii, the very conception of "the EKhB Church in USSR," on which the reformers predicated their mandate, was erroneous. "The expulsions," he wrote, "were carried out in the name of a national church, of a church

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<sup>53</sup> Savinskii, p. 220.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

within the administrative boundaries of the state—the EKhB Church in USSR, analogical to the Russian Orthodox Church. But the Word of God does not give grounds for such a conception...and indicates only the notion of a Universal Church, of a parish church and a home church, and does not speak of any state-wide or national church.”<sup>56</sup> Whereas the Universal Church is a supra-denominational union of all Christians headed by Christ himself, a parish church is a group of believers confessing a particular creed and residing in a given geographical location. The leaders of opposition fused these two notions into something intermediate<sup>57</sup> and, consequently, envisioned themselves as intermediaries between Christ and parish communities. As a union of self-organized and self-regulated parish communities, however, the EKhB brotherhood ideally did not allow for the existence of any supreme leadership that could override a given parish community’s right to accept members or excommunicate transgressors. “In the historical practice of the Evangelical-Baptist brotherhood,” wrote Savinskii, “neither the Union’s Council nor its administration (Presidium) has ever taken upon itself the role of the governing organ of the Union. The VSEKhB did it for the first time in 1944. The Orgcommittee now repeated the VSEKhB’s mistake.”<sup>58</sup>

Although the reformers’ actions certainly invite criticism on theological grounds, there was no theologically correct way for them to dislodge the VSEKhB. Left with

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 221.

<sup>57</sup> M.T. Nevolin, “Analiz razdeleniia 1959-1963 godov v Evangel’sko-Baptistskom dvizhenii v SSSR” in *Protestantism i protestanty v Rossii: proshloe, nastoiashchee, budushchee*, editors E.V. Zaitsev and V.S. Liakhu (Zaokskii: Zaokskaia Dukhovnaia Akademiia, 2004), p. 41.

<sup>58</sup> Savinskii, p. 221.

virtually no room for maneuvering and with the odds stacked heavily against them, they could either give up their struggle altogether or adopt some of the tactics of their adversary. Besides, the vehement and assertive rhetoric of Protocol Number 7 clouds the fact that many of the VSEKhB's Senior Presbyters, appearing on the Orgcommittee's list of expellees, were repeatedly excommunicated by the parish communities before, and that far from usurping the right of parish communities to accept and expel its members, the Orgcommittee only confirmed these communities' prior decisions. On September 22, 1962, the Orgcommittee distributed to communities a report on its activity in which it provided the following background details on some of the expellees:

For example, while a Senior Presbyter for Moldavia, F.R. Astakhov was expelled by the Kishinev community in 1957. Did it trouble him? Apparently not, for by the decision of VSEKhB, he was transferred to become an assistant to the Senior Presbyter for Ukraine. However, petitions about his expulsion came from there also, signed by thousands of Ukrainian believers. And yet he remains at his post all the same.

Or take V.I. Ermilov, for example. He was expelled by the Volgograd community where he served as a Senior Presbyter. Later, a protocol has been received about his expulsion by the Kazan' community. But he was again appointed as a Senior Presbyter for Western Siberia from where a petition asking for his expulsion has also come.<sup>59</sup>

The Senior Presbyter B.A. Rusanov (mentioned earlier in this study) acquired notoriety not only in Ukraine, but also during his previous service in Transcaucasia.<sup>60</sup> Another expellee, the Senior Presbyter K.L. Kalibabchuk, infuriated the Sakskaia EKhB community in Ukraine. On May 8, 1957, reported this community's believers, Kalibabchuk, having picked as his assistants the community's expellee, Kulikov, and a

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<sup>59</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 388, p. 28.

<sup>60</sup> Savinskii, p. 201.

number of other members “who for a long time deserved to be expelled,” convoked the *dvadtsatka* meeting and announced that their “community’s leadership and *dvadtsatka* were taken off registration” and their prayer house closed on the grounds that they “did not recognize Kalibabchuk as a servant of God...and supposedly violated the Soviet law.” Complaining about this incident to another future expellee on the Orgcommittee’s list, the Senior Presbyter for Ukraine, Andreev, the believers wrote:

... We did not believe him, for we know him by his previous deeds—that he is not our brother, but a wolf that does not spare the flock...It appears that our refusal to recognize Kalibabchuk as God’s servant is, in his opinion, a violation of Soviet law. But this has nothing to do with the Soviet law and is a matter of religious order—an internal spiritual affair of the church...By his actions, Kalibabchuk trampled upon all democratic rights in the Church. In his actions, one can already see the cult of personality...arbitrariness and prevarication. The church council and *dvadtsatka* of our community were elected by the church, and if they are guilty of something, the church has to expose it. And if the church finds them guilty, removes the old leadership and elects the new, it will be lawful and we will certainly abide by the church’s decision. But we cannot agree with the arbitrary removal [of their present leadership] promoted by the lawless Kalibabchuk who does not fear God.<sup>61</sup>

Arguably, the flood of letters from communities, received by the Orgcommittee prior to its posting of Protocol Number 7, contained similar complaints and evidence of expulsions or attempts to expel the unwanted Senior Presbyters by the parish communities. Such letters stirred the opposition discourse for which the *initsiativniki* movement provided a nation-wide framework. The discourse centered on the systematic suppression by the VSEKhB representatives, working in tandem with the CARC, of the parish communities’ democratic self-organization. If the Orgcommittee did make a mistake, as Savinskii suggested, in passing a ruling that limited the rights of communities

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<sup>61</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 237, p. 34-35.



to the expulsion of parish presbyters and servants only, it did so unwittingly, not because it conscientiously wished to secure the pleasure of dismissing the top VSEKhB hierarchs for itself. The evidence of parish communities' excommunications of Senior Presbyters thus only reinforced the Orgcommittee's arguments. Besides, the Orgcommittee assumed the role of Grand Inquisitor vis-à-vis certain Senior Presbyters precisely because the VSEKhB would not recognize their expulsion by the parish communities in the first place. The VSEKhB made it explicitly clear in its Statute that it was the only agency authorized to appoint or depose Senior Presbyters. This circumstance purportedly emboldened many Senior Presbyters to act with impunity towards parish communities they visited.

The Sakskaia community believers also stressed another issue that would become salient in the opposition discourse, namely, the deliberate misconstruction by the Senior Presbyters of the parish communities' rightful efforts to settle their own internal affairs as unlawful and anti-state activity. Essentially a technology of intimidation and blackmail, such misrepresentation aimed at subduing assertive communities and turning them into powerless pawns obediently carrying out directives of their spiritual center in Moscow. In the perception of believers, however, the Senior Presbyters' willingness to unleash the punitive power of state on communities whose only fault was that they exercised their customary prerogatives stood as convincing evidence that the VSEKhB and the Soviet state were in cahoots. The Orgcommittee did not fail to capitalize on such evidence. In its aforementioned letter to communities from September 22, 1962, the reformers wrote:

Not to be groundless, we quote an excerpt from a letter distributed to communities in Belorussia and signed by presbyters K.S. Vesileichik, N.N.

Germanovich and others. Here is what they write: ‘Prokofiev and Kriuchkov, when they speak against the VSEKhB’s New Statute, in effect speak against the Soviet legislation on cults, and to speak against the Soviet legislation on cults is equivalent to resisting authorities. And those resisting authorities, states the Word of God, resist an institution established by God. Those communities that respect the Soviet state law as instituted by God, enjoy freedom.’

However, their [VSEKhB’s] activity does not stop at that. Many workers of the Council do not cease making false reports to the organs of authority and tell lies about all those who go against godless actions and lawless documents. You know it quite well, brothers, what such actions intend to do and what results they bring about...<sup>62</sup>

Besides using the power of state to suppress the opposition leaders, the VSEKhB, claimed reformers, did not allow parish communities to freely accept or reject the highly divisive “Instructional Letter” and “The New Statute” and, instead, unceremoniously restructured the dissenting communities, purging them of all those who spoke against the aforementioned documents:

In those cases when the majority of servants of a local church tried to act in accordance with the truth, not the ‘Statute’ or the ‘Instructional Letter,’ their prayer house would be temporarily closed and a different servant picked who would agree with all anti-evangelical premises of the VSEKhB and to whom it would be entrusted to select a new *dvadtsatka* out of those who, like himself, would also be ready to accept human regulations as law and depart from God’s commandments. The prayer house would then be reopened, but the church in such cases was losing God’s blessings...<sup>63</sup>

Although the reformers referred to the statement by Vesileichik and Germanovich primarily as evidence of the VSEKhB’s intentional misconstruction of the opposition agenda as anti-state agenda, a closer exegesis of this statement and its internal logic reveals that at least some of the VSEKhB’s dignitaries effectively equated the secular state legislation on religious cults and their church’s own set of internal regulations, thus

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<sup>62</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 388, p. 26.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 20-21.

fusing state and church together. If this confusion in terms is followed through to its logical conclusion, then rejection of the VSEKhB's New Statute was tantamount to rejection of Soviet laws and, hence, insubordination to authorities spoken of in Romans 13: "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established...Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves." Having blurred the demarcation line between demands of the secular and spiritual authorities, Vesileichik and Germanovich implied that one's insubordination to the VSEKhB was equally reprehensible as one's insubordination to any secular authority instituted by God. Their argument would also have repercussions for one's interpretation of another biblical precept—"Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's," as stated in Matthew 22:21. By obfuscating the qualitative difference between the state and church regulations the mentioned VSEKhB representatives essentially de-spiritualized the content of Matthew 22:21 and reduced its complexity of dual commitment to the issue of mere subordination to powers that be. Commenting on the VSEKhB's other public pronouncements concerning "the proper attitude toward the authorities," Sawatsky wrote that "the thrust" of these pronouncements "focused exclusively on the concern to give to Caesar what was Caesar's, with no recognition that this involved deciding what belonged to God and what to Caesar," and quoted the following Solzhenitsyn's remark as reflecting the common position of Soviet believers vis-à-vis the God-Caesar dilemma: "When Caesar, having exacted what is Caesar's, demands still more insistently that we render unto him what is

God's—that is a sacrifice we dare not make.”<sup>64</sup> With both the state and the VSEKhB focusing on making believers render what was Caesar's, it fell to the Orgcommittee to champion the cause of rendering what was considered God's.

Most EKhB believers in the postwar USSR were experienced enough to know that their spiritual center in Moscow operated under a great pressure from the government and could, arguably, interpret the VSEKhB's passage of the New Statute as yet another price they had to pay for the opportunity to function legally. Had the New Statute arrived in communities accompanied by a hint that its observance was optional and that the communities could try to circumvent it at their own risk, many believers would have been able both to find an appropriate way of coping with these new regulations and explain to themselves the actions of their spiritual leaders without altogether losing faith in them. Stepan Kornuta, a EKhB believer born in Zakarpacie in 1949, reminisced about his father's reaction to the New Statute: “My father, for instance, was a presbyter, and he said: ‘I do not know what happened to the brothers in Moscow: perhaps they are under pressure, or perhaps they are already giving up—I have no clue. Therefore, I am returning their letters as someone who does not understand what they want.’ And his church survived.” Kornuta further reasoned that “had all the letters dispatched by the VSEKhB [to communities] been returned to the spiritual center, it would have been a victory for all believers, since the government would have understood that it faced a unified front that could not be split.”<sup>65</sup> Operating in the aftermath of the government's

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<sup>64</sup> Sawatsky, p. 114.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Stepan Kornuta.

dissolution of the Seventh Day Adventist spiritual center, the VSASD, disbanded precisely for not enforcing the state-imposed regulations, the VSEKhB not only left no room for communities' deliberations over the New Statute, but accompanied this controversial document with a secret addendum, the Instructional Letter, designed only for the eyes of enforcers of the New Statute, Senior Presbyters, and encapsulating an additional set of secularizing measures not explicitly stated in the Statute. The evidence deposited in the government archives gives credence to the Orgcommittee's accusations of VSEKhB and reveals that the Senior Presbyters in fact treated the Statute as equivalent to a state law, implicated those who did not comply with the Statute as violators of state legislation, and actively employed the power of state to suppress dissent in communities.

In 1962, the Senior Presbyter Andreev complained to the head of CARC in Ukraine Polonnik that the Council's Upolnomochennyi for Lugansk oblast was too complacent in the face of an ongoing dissent in the Rubezhanskaia EKHB community whose *dvadtsatka* "violate the VSEKhB Statute, allow people who are not members of the executive organ to deliver sermons," including such people as "Maiboroda and Kolomiets, who carry out work on the assignment of the 'Initiative Group' and the so-called 'Orgcommittee.'" The community's presbyter, Shapovalov, according to Andreev, allowed these people "to read to the community Prokofiev's letters and their [Orgcommittee's] interpretation of the VSEKhB's Instructional Letter, portraying the VSEKhB in the darkest colors and encouraging believers not to listen to the Senior Presbyter and the VSEKhB." Andreev, therefore, asked Polonnik "to give appropriate instructions to the Upolnomochennyi for Lugansk oblast, so that an appropriate

dvadtsatka was put together and the new leadership elected; and so that the present dissolute leadership [of the Rubezhanskaia community] could no longer conduct prayer services.”<sup>66</sup> Later the same year, Andreev reported to Polonnik that when the Senior Presbyter for Lvov oblast read to the Lvov EKhB community the VSEKhB’s letter “warning all believers not to trust letters of the so-called ‘Orgcommittee,’ ...persons who favored letters of the...’Orgcommittee’ made noise in the community, condemning our letter and recommending believers not to accept our letter, since they supposedly knew brothers who were in the ‘Orgcommittee’—brothers who were supposedly on the true path, whereas the VSEKhB was in error and had to be excommunicated.” In order to illicit Polonnik’s speedier response, Andreev presented religious ferment in this community as a potential threat to Soviet legal norms: “Bringing this to your attention, we think that the present situation in the Lvov community is such that if these schismatics are treated leniently and no measures are taken against them, they will undoubtedly be capable of drawing quite a few believers onto the path of violation of the Civil Code.” Andreev ultimately proposed to rally the support of the still loyal executive organ and *dvadtsatka* of this community and get rid of persons who consciously step on the path of violation of the VSEKhB Statute and of the existing Civil Code.”<sup>67</sup> In Andreev’s peculiar interpretation, one’s non-compliance with the VSEKhB Statute amounted to violation of the Soviet Civil Code.

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<sup>66</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 389, p. 110.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

That the Senior Presbyters were actively involved in suppressing any critical discussion of the New Statute in communities and informing the government of real and potential troublemakers is also evidenced from the report to Polonnik of Andreev's assistant N.N. Mel'nikov. Having visited the EKhB community in the town of Rubezhnoe, where "Prokofiev's letters became widely disseminated," he warned "leadership of this community that if in the future it did not closely followed the VSEKhB Statute...and acted contrarily, they could bring the most undesirable consequences upon their community." In parenthesis, however, Mel'nikov inserted: "The community's leadership here will have to be replaced."<sup>68</sup> While visiting the EKhB community in the town of Parkomunna, Mel'nikov noticed that "some members, including a member of the revisional commission, G.F. Rotar', are infatuated with the illegal letters of Prokofiev." He subsequently recommended that since brother Rotar' "is young, it would be better to remove him from the revisional commission and replace him with another appropriate brother."<sup>69</sup> In conclusion of his report, Mel'nikov wrote: "On March 27<sup>th</sup> [1962], I visited the Upolnomochennyi for the oblast and conversed with him about the affairs of visited communities. I familiarized him with the condition of these communities and those questions that necessarily required his interference."<sup>70</sup> The Upolnomochennyi's interference almost certainly meant the removal and blacklisting of

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

reported troublemakers. The dissent also brewed in communities of Donetsk oblast, for instance, the EKhB community in village Khanshchenkovo, of which Mel'nikov wrote:

In this community, the former presbyter, brother Sheptalo, was taken off registration for illegal baptisms and his support of the 'Initiative Group.' Now, brother S.V. Khlamov is the community's presbyter. Unfortunately, this community remains in the most sickly state, since, essentially, brother Khlamov himself and almost the entire executive organ...do not recognize the VSEKhB Statute...It has become clear from the conversation that there are brothers in this community...who have healthy ideas about God's work, but the present leadership tries to suppress them, accusing them of subordination to human regulations.<sup>71</sup>

The anti-VSEKhB ferment also affected the EKhB community in Belaia Tserkov'. In June of 1962, Mel'nikov reported that "of the 28 members [of this community], 11 people" were "especially active in swaying others to support the Orgcommittee." He provided a list of their names. These people, according to him, did not want to talk to the church council but wished to address the entire church. The leadership could hardly bring them to order. When this community's own members calmed down somewhat, people from other communities began to encourage them to resume the struggle:

Ivan Vasilievich Piven'—an excommunicated former member of the executive organ of the community in Tarashcha—does this more than anyone else. According to some rumors, he is now a member of the Orgcommittee. He not only visits Belaia Tserkov' but also other communities in Kiev oblast. He brings and distributes the Orgcommittee's letters. Ivan Koptilo, a son of believing parents from Kiev, who officially is not a member anywhere, does the same. According to testimonies of members of the executive organ, these persons come to Belaia Tserkov', arrange illegal conversations at people's homes, and carry out agitation among the EKhB members. As a result of this agitation, some of those influenced by [the Orgcommittee's] letters and conversations with Piven' and Koptilo began forbidding their children to study in schools and wear the Pioneers'

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 79-80.



ties. Thus Georgii Babenko forbade his daughter to wear her tie, and the school teacher has already summoned him for a conversation.<sup>72</sup>

In the Rovno community, reported another Senior Presbyter, Astakhov, similar divisions occurred along the generational lines. According to Astakhov, the community's presbyter, D.Y. Novikov, urged him to take part in the conversation with the youth, because "the choir members and young believers persistently...supported the schismatic activity of the 'Initiative Group.'" Astakhov began his conversation with "such undisciplined choir members" by reading the VSEKhB's letter Number 208 from January 29, 1962, "which so beautifully characterizes [read denounces] the actions of the 'Initiative Group,'" and closed it with the following ultimatum:

I asked that all members denounced their erroneous views and stopped: (a) copying the various letters of the 'Initiative Group,' (b) giving these letters to other persons, and (c) returned all such letters that they had in their possession to presbyter D.Y. Novikov. Should there be any people who'd choose to disobey, measures of spiritual restraint would be taken against them. There were believers at this conversation who still tried to prove that the 'Initiative Group' was steering the EKhB church towards 'purity.'<sup>73</sup>

Having inspected the Left Bank EKhB community in Zhdanov, Mel'nikov reported to CARC that a nearly blind member of the executive organ of this community, A.Kucherov, "conducts work against the VSEKhB Statute and supports Prokofiev," and that "sometimes, illegal gatherings take place in Kucherov's house." It especially perturbed Me'lnikov that even though the local Upolnomochennyi knew about it, he, for some reason, thought that Kucherov could remain in the executive organ. "But it is imperative not to leave him [Kucherov] there any longer," inveighed the Senior Presbyter

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 117-119.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 92-93.

as he proceeded to expose other dissenters of this community to the government and demand tougher measures against them:

A member of the revisional commission, K.G. Makarchenko—a relatively young man, about 30 years old—also supports Kucherov and those who participate in illegal groupings. Once, he delivered a sermon against the VSEKhB Statute. No measures have yet been taken against him besides measures of persuasion on the part of community’s presbyter Kholodov. In my opinion, he [Makarchenko] should be replaced...If Kucherov is taken out, Makarchenko alone would not be able to do anything in the executive organ...The former leadership of this community in the persons of Kirilenko and someone Samoilenko...make a lot of obstacles for our work here. These two work against the VSEKhB Statute and against presbyter Kholodov. If none of their supporters are left in the executive organ, the state of this community will surely become healthier.<sup>74</sup>

A similar report implicating younger dissenters was also submitted by the Senior Presbyter Shapovalov upon his inspection of an unregistered EKhB community in one of Odessa’s suburbs, called Peresyp. It is worth noting that Shapovalov’s tour of Odessa communities began by a visit to the office of the local Upolnomochennyi: “Having arrived in Odessa, I stopped at brother Kvashenko’s, and together with him, we went to the Upolnomochennyi of CARC.” Shapovalov then proceeded to describing activities of some dissenting EKhB youths in Peresyp and their leader (soon to be arrested), Iosif Bondarenko:

On 5-30-1961, there was a wedding at the EKhB community, followed by a reception at the groom’s house in Peresyp. Here, the youths who did not join the EKhB community in town [the main registered EKhB community in Odessa] actively participated in singing and playing string instruments [activities strongly discouraged by the government and VSEKhB since the 1950s]. Iosif Bondarenko was the leader. I observed and worked out a plan to meet with the main organizers of the orchestra and choir. Iosif Bondarenko warned me not to converse with any of the youth. He agreed to come on May 3 and invite several other youths to a conversation. On May 3, we met with Bondarenko at the

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

apartment of Vera Pavlovna Logvinenko. He apparently dissuaded the others, for no one else had come. The conversation lasted from 6:00 p.m. until midnight. The main objection that Bondarenko put forth was that the New VSEKhB Statute—all 39 of its paragraphs—was not grounded in the Word of God. Speaking of Senior Presbyters and elder brothers in the VSEKhB, he quoted from Isaiah 56:10-11\* In the end, Bondarenko agreed that he would visit the EKhB community in Odessa, but without entering his name in the list of members and without participating in Communion, predicating it on the circumstance that they [he and his friends] would continue to play and sing at weddings, which might bring punishment and closure on the community...<sup>75</sup>

Shapovalov's report, as many others, reveals that the young people proved to be more susceptible to the reformers' call, not in the least due to the VSEKhB's restrictions on their active participation in the religious life of communities (choirs, orchestras), and that both young and old EKhB believers critically evaluated the VSEKhB Statute despite the Senior Presbyters' efforts to enforce its uniform observance. V.D. Tkachuk, a member and, since 1975, presbyter of another suburban EKhB community in Odessa (in a nearby settlement of Shevchenko) reminisced:

Our church did not accept the [VSEKhB's] 'Instructional Letter' but, nonetheless, remained in the union [the all-union EKhB brotherhood headed by the VSEKhB]. We freely conducted youth and children's meetings, and had a Sunday school in the basement of our church. At the same time, we maintained contacts with the church in Peresyp—they were unregistered supporters of the Council of Churches. We did not only interact with them, but allowed them to use our status of officially registered church. If they needed to hide out somewhere, they would come to us. So, they visited us quite often, and [Iosif] Bondarenko often came to us.<sup>76</sup>

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\* Isaiah 56:10-11 states: "Israel's watchmen are blind, they all lack knowledge; they are all mute dogs, they cannot bark; they lie around and dream, they love to sleep. They are dogs with mighty appetites; they never have enough. They are shepherds who lack understanding; they all turn to their own way, each seeks his own gain."

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>76</sup> Interview with V.D. Tkachuk.

Although the New Statute divided many communities, the young people on either side were generally less inhibited by these divisions and looked for opportunities to take initiative into their own hands. In 1962, reporting about his tour of communities in Kirovograd oblast, Andreev remarked:

Although as a whole the Kirovograd community is in a healthy spiritual state, it has several people who consciously do harm to the church and actively distribute letters of the so-called 'Initiative Group.' One member of the community council, A.E. Kulish is himself infatuated with these letters. He does not help with the church work and even interferes with it. A.E. Kulish had a meeting at his apartment with Prokofiev. That is why brothers expressed their opinion that A.E. Kulish should be removed from the executive organ. Among others infatuated with these letters were I.Y. Antonov, V.D. Bondarenko, and A.A. Remigailo. The continuation of a trial of disrespectful and those bringing divisions into the church was moved to June 2...All who spoke at the *dvadtsatka* meeting confirmed that these persons laugh at the community and the entire church, and have neither shame or fear. I.Y. Antonov baptized several candidate members. When asked who entrusted him to baptize these people illegally, he remarked ironically: 'God entrusted me with this task.' While talking to brothers, V.D. Bondarenko permitted witticisms and showed disrespect towards all brothers. During the conversation, we tried to convince them to abandon their harmful work and return to the church, but they remained stubborn in their support of those letters...It was suggested to A.E. Kulish to write that if he wished to remain in the council, he would not support the so-called 'Initiative Group' and would have nothing to do with them. But he refused to write such a statement. Even earlier, Kulish behaved strangely...When brother D.D. Shapovalov visited the Kirovograd community at my request...and asked all brothers and sisters to show their approval of excommunication of several persons who caused divisions in the church by standing up, everyone stood up, but not A.E. Kulish...In the evening of June 3..., a protocol...about excommunication of I.Y. Antonov, V.D. Bondarenko and A.A. Remigailo for propaganda of the so-called 'Initiative Group' and sowing disagreement and division was read. The protocol also had provisions for the suspension of membership until repentance to T.A. Bondarenko, L. Antonov, L. Remigailo, A.D. Likhoveeva, A.V. Likhodeev, and I.G. Tsuman for propagating letters among the youth and causing divisions in the church.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 389, p. 112-113.

Expelled from their registered communities, such generally young and assertive people fed into the dissent movement that provided them with more opportunities for self-expression. In his novelistic rendition of life in unregistered communities in Kazakhstan during the schism, Hermann Hartfeld wrote:

The youth called for effective political actions. It was eager to man the barricades! Communicating with the youth from other unregistered churches not only within the boundaries of the republic but much further afield, young Christians traveled to youth meetings in Ukraine and the Baltic republics. They participated in printing and distribution of appeals to the government, demanding the cessation of persecution of Christians... Young Christians organized Sunday schools, often without informing about it their communities' leaders. Since Oleg [one of such unregistered communities' leaders in Hartfeld's narrative] did not take any decisive measures to restrain the young hot-heads from the church, they soon stopped consulting him about their activities altogether.<sup>78</sup>

In 1962, Andreev reported to Polonnik about the schism brewing in the Zhitomir EKHB community. Here also the young supporters of the Orgcommittee, some of them coming from other regions, proved to be instrumental:

Brother M.L. Gzhibovskii, a member of the executive organ, said that persons who are now excommunicated have for long been known in the community as violators of peace... The first impetus for their work had been provided by someone Glebov, who arrived from the vicinity of Moscow. Then, the Zhitomir community was visited by I. Bondarenko from Odessa, and even by Kriuchkov himself... A girl, Masha Kuprienok, who comes from Kiev, visits the Zhitomir community most often. She is in constant communication with Zhanna Shapovalova and D. Vinogradskii. E. Storozhuk, E. Linnik, and also Pyotr Poplavskii actively work with them.

This grouping...stepped on the path of violating the VSEKhB Statute. For instance, at the two recent funerals, they requested that everyone sang out in the street as the procession followed the casket, and tried to do it themselves. They arrange illegal gatherings in people's homes where they not only sing psalms but play string instruments and recite poems, trying in this way to involve all youth of the community in their grouping. Now, after the expulsion of 8 initiators, they try to disrupt the order of prayer services and go from house to house, spreading their views among members of the community. Now, we need to pacify the church and

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<sup>78</sup> Hermann Hartfeld, *The Church, Pastors, and Snitches* (Cherkassy: Smirna, 2003), p. 59.

bring all members to the observance of proper order, without paying any attention to those excommunicated...<sup>79</sup>

As excommunications of non-conformists became more frequent, such groupings eventually consolidated into unregistered churches and began bombarding the government with statements and petitions. One of such petitions, signed by 44 people, was dispatched to both the CARC and VSEKhB by a group of believers headed by Grigorii Vins in Kiev. In their petition, the dissenters stressed the VSEKhB's lack of legitimacy, demanded that the government guaranteed believers their constitutional rights to worship God legally regardless of their attitude to the VSEKhB, and supported the convocation of an extraordinary all-union congress of the EKhB churches. Addressing the VSEKhB, the Kiev dissenters wrote:

The presently existing in Moscow spiritual center, bearing the name of the All-Union Council of the Evangelical Christians-Baptists, is not the one elected by the parish EKhB churches, is not vested with any powers by them, and does not represent them. The members of VSEKhB had drifted away from the masses of believers long time ago and had embarked on the path of dictatorship. They had invalidated the right of local churches to self-determination. The institute of Senior Presbyters, established by them, is incompatible with principles of Christian democracy; it gives birth to hierarchies characteristic of the nominal churches, and presents nothing but a peculiar caste of clergy lording over the laity.<sup>80</sup>

Having stated the reason for their insubordination to the incumbent EKhB leadership, the Kiev dissenters described their grievances and asked the government to acknowledge their and other dissenting believers as equally protected under the Soviet law:

Since numerous believers living in the USSR do not recognize the VSEKhB and are not united into communities, they are deprived of the possibility of

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<sup>79</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 389, p. 129.

<sup>80</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 413, p. 67.

holding prayer services. They are everywhere denied registration, which forces them to resort to illegal existence with all the negative consequences that follow...Until the mentioned congress is convoked, we ask [the Council of Ministers of the USSR] to give instructions to the Upolnomochennyye for religious cults to register communities regardless whether or not they recognize the VSEKhB leadership...Invoking the constitutional law guaranteeing citizens of the USSR the freedom of religion, we hope that our government will treat our requests humanely and satisfy them.<sup>81</sup>

Many other dissenting communities and groups of believers wrote similar letters to the government, requesting permission to convoke the congress. Such letters usually had enclosed long lists of places and signatures of individual believers as evidence of the mass approval of the Orgcommittee's initiative. One such list of people who petitioned Khrushchev in support of the congress' convocation contained 2,931 signatures of believers from 124 towns and villages.<sup>82</sup> Another list enumerated petitions to Khrushchev that came from 132 places in Ukraine. A total of 3,443 believers signed these petitions. All of these petitions were received by the government between October and November of 1963.<sup>83</sup> Besides submitting formal petitions in support of the convocation of a congress, the Orgcommittee followers composed and circulated in the communities a number of anti-VSEKhB poems representing interesting examples of Protestant folklore and providing valuable insights into dissenters' mentality. One such poem resembled a morality play and was, perhaps, performed in schismatic communities by several actors. The poem had two parts: one depicting developments in the present mundane world, and one in which the stage is transferred into the afterlife, thus establishing a retributive

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 87-90.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 58-61.

connection between human actions in the here and now and their posthumous judgment in heaven. The protagonist of this poem is implicitly a Senior Presbyter. The poem's first part, entitled "Do Not Shut the Door," is a passionate call to share the gospel message with everyone, even when "riding in the train or tram, or walking down the street," and not to exclude anyone from entering a prayer house, especially children and young people. The poem thus openly encouraged proselytizing outside the wall of a prayer house and the inclusion of youngsters in the religious life of communities, that is, actions expressly discouraged by the VSEKhB's Senior Presbyters. The poem's second part—"Will I Be Allowed to Enter?"—describes the posthumous attempts of a Senior Presbyter to enter Paradise. When a hypothetical VSEKhB's official tries to enter through the Gate of Matthew, a child accompanying the gatekeeper (an angel) says: "/Listen, angel, I know this stranger/ There was a time when he did not allow me to participate in a prayer meeting/ He shooed me, and shut the door in front of me/." <sup>84</sup> As the luckless Senior Presbyter, now joined by others of his rank, wanders from one gate to another, he is denied entrance again and again due to the testimony of a young man to whom he denied baptism back on Earth or a host of other believers "/Who lived according to the truth/ And did not kiss his hand/." The poem ends with the Senior Presbyter's bemoaning his fate:

A lot of people like myself have gathered round.  
The doors of Paradise slammed shut for us.  
We were cast out by God  
And received what we deserved. <sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 388, p. 11-11(b).

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.



Another poem, entitled “Merchants Who Have Sold the Truth,” targeted Paragraph 12 of the VSEKhB Statute, stating that “the members of VSEKhB, as well as its appointed Senior Presbyters, do not take part in the performance of spiritual rituals.” In an attached commentary to this poem, an anonymous author expressed his/her interpretation of this contemptible paragraph: “In order to avoid paying taxes on their high salaries as ‘servants of the cult’..., the VSEKhB members preferred to divest themselves of their presbyter’s right to perform baptism, Communion, etc, rather than suffer monetary losses.”<sup>86</sup> Although, arguably, the government stood behind such limitation of Senior Presbyters’ prerogatives, the author found it convenient to reinforce his spiritual disdain for the hierarchic institution of Senior Presbyters with an appeal to a more primordial human instinct, that of social envy. The author begins by stating that before learning about Paragraph 12, believers lived as if in a dream, thinking that their “elders-theologians,” those “permanent workers of the VSEKhB in Moscow,” “were prepared to die for the truth”; that “temptations and carnality of the world no longer had power over such people”; and that “there was nothing dearer to them than the rank of a presbyter of Christ’s Church.” However, “the fatal Paragraph 12, secretly composed by them,” complains the author, caused believers’ disillusionment, for it revealed that the VSEKhB workers “have sold their presbyter’s ordination” so that they could “preserve their General’s salaries, to dine and drink well, to not share their income with the state, to visit salubrious southern resorts more often,” and “to celebrate sumptuous anniversaries.”

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 15-15(b).

In order to keep these privileges, the author continued, the VSEKhB members not only “sold for money...a whole array of their personal rights, but so many yours and my rights,” such as “the collective priesthood of ordinary members, the members’ right to hold council, the Christians’ parental rights,” and “the free election of church servants.” “Having completely lost the fear of God while trading, they made people wait for years to be baptized and stripped our youths of their civil rights.”<sup>87</sup>

Another category of poems, such as the one entitled “To the Victorious,” praised the intrepid dissenters and their sacrifices:

To brothers who gave their voices in support of the truth,  
 To brothers who are suffering and those who have suffered  
 Without having conceded even an iota to sin,  
 To brothers who have written the New Testament in blood  
 I send my Christian greetings.

You have chosen a path leading to our eternal abode.  
 The name of Jesus is dearer to you than life!  
 You have given to God, without any reservations,  
 Your hearts and your lives’ destinies.

.....  
 Brothers who have abandoned Christ’s cross  
 Abused you and betrayed you...  
 But remember, brothers, the heroic feat of [Jan] Hus  
 Who laid down his life, fighting against falsehood!<sup>88</sup>

The cited poems are only isolated examples of a multitude of similar poems that came out of the cornucopia of schismatic poetic tradition of the period. Dissecting reality into the realms of light and darkness, these emotionally charged poems conveyed an apocalyptic vision of history in which there was little room for indecision or compromise. Any

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

digression from the perceived truth could result in infamy in the world of here and now and the loss of eternal rewards in the afterlife. The CARC officials, to whom such poems were routinely turned over, could not but realize that suffering arrests and persecution was part and parcel of the dissenters' mental universe in which the intensity of suffering usually translated into the intensity of religious experience. As the atheist state harassed, accused, prosecuted and sentenced dissenters, to the accompaniment of the VSEKhB's complacent silence or even encouragement, the victims and their families drew inspiration from the stubborn resolve of the early Christians persecuted by the Roman authorities. For many young idealistic dissenters, the continuity in their lives of this early Christian tradition, yet untarnished by the institutional entanglements and compromises of the later centuries, proved to be a more attractive and engaging model of Christian fellowship than a much safer but hollowed-out institutional model promoted by the VSEKhB.

In 1963, Litvin submitted to the party bosses an extensive report on the origins of the EKhB schism and its up to date scope and agenda. He openly admitted the intended antireligious thrust of the VSEKhB's New Statute:

The EKhB New Statute, adopted by the VSEKhB in 1960, limited the frequency of prayer services and the number of preachers, lengthened the trial period for candidate-members, banned the involvement of children in prayer services and the conduct of religious propaganda among children and youth, etc. The organs of Soviet authority, on their part, took measures directed at curbing the clergy's activity... The New Statute evoked negative reaction among the clergy and believers. A part of presbyters and sectarian activists spoke against restrictions on the activity of the EKhB organizations. Risking a schism in their church, believers, headed by the New Statute's adversaries, especially from among the young Baptists, began working illegally, gathering around themselves all those discontented with the Soviet legislation on cults and actions of the VSEKhB and its representatives in the locations. Schismatics formed the so-

called ‘Orgcommittee’ under the leadership of Prokofiev, Kriuchkov, Vins and others. The ‘Orgcommittee’ drew its constituency from communities previously taken off registration, unregistered groups and communities whose prayer houses had been closed...In their numerous letters to the organs of government, schismatics demanded the convocation of an extraordinary EKhB congress under the ‘Orgcommittee’s’ leadership. In Ukraine, 138 groups were organized, from which letters and statements demanding the convocation of an extraordinary congress and signed by over 4,000 supporters of the ‘Orgcommittee’ had been received...In order to stop schismatics’ illegal activity and isolate the ‘Orgcommittee’s’ leaders from believers, the prosecutorial organs sentenced the ‘Orgcommittee’s’ leaders and their followers—Prokofiev, Zdorovets, Bondarenko, and others.

However, this did not put an end to schismatics’ activity. Sectarian youths, craving for leadership and preaching opportunities in the sect, proved to be especially active. There are people among schismatics who openly express their discontent with the Soviet legislation on cults...Schismatics strive to organize on a large scale the unlimited religious propaganda among the population, especially among children and youth...<sup>89</sup>

Besides sending letters to the government in support of the Orgcommittee proposed congress, some communities, it appears, took matters into their own hands and excommunicated certain VSEKhB representatives in addition to those excommunicated by the Orgcommittee earlier. They did so, presumably, on their own authority as parish communities. One such letter, signed by representatives of the dissenting communities in Odessa oblast, found its way into archives of the Ukrainian CARC. The letter stated that the two VSEKhB officials, working in the oblast, were judged and excommunicated for enforcing the government secularization agenda and serving as state informants complicit in the arrests and prosecution in 1962 of the two prominent young dissenters:

We, the workers and servants of the Odessa oblast, numbering 52 people, reviewed cases of Senior Presbyter for the oblast, N.V. Kuz’menko and his assistant, F.A. Balaban, on the basis of several protocols from the oblast communities, and determined:

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<sup>89</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5908, p. 64-65.

1. N.V. Kuz'menko and F.A. Balaban violated Jesus Christ's commandment—'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them' (Matthew 19:14)—and placed elderly sisters at the doors who did not only hinder children from entering the prayer house, but even married sisters who had a short height (L. Korsikova, for instance).
2. They gave baptism to those souls who were permitted to be baptized by the Upolnomochennyi while dismissing the church's decision.
3. They prohibited the youth from playing musical instruments. N.V. Kuz'menko even refused to wed those couples at whose weddings musical instruments would be played.
4. Kuz'menko betrayed brothers N.P. Shevchenko and Iosif Bondarenko, having reported them to an investigator.
5. They travel across the oblast with the Upolnomochennye and rudely violate the rights of communities, disrupt the order, and demand the adoption of the VSEKhB Statute. If communities do not accept this anti-evangelical document—the VSEKhB Statute—they close prayer houses and destroy the work that had been done in the oblast for the Kingdom of God.
6. When certain brothers visited Balaban and pointed out to him his incorrect actions, he replied: 'If I ever see any of you in the oblast, I will immediately write a report on you.'

On the basis of these and other facts of the disruption of God's work and anti-evangelical activity, the meeting of workers and servants of parish communities in the oblast decided to excommunicate N.V. Kuz'menko and F.A. Balaban.<sup>90</sup>

The earlier cited reports submitted to the CARC by the Senior Presbyters, in which the latter clearly indicated the names of active dissenters, as well as the CARC's practice of sharing information with the KGB and prosecutorial organs suggest that the Odessa dissenters' accusations of Kuz'menko and Balaban as informants were not groundless. In August of 1962, Bondarenko and Shevchenko were tried in Odessa and accused under Article 209, Part I of the Criminal Code of Ukrainian SSR. It was incriminated to them that they "have subverted youth from participation in social life, made speeches against the arts (films, radio, theatre, games and literature), and travelled

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<sup>90</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 435, p. 50.

to other churches (congregations) for the purpose of agitation.”<sup>91</sup> According to Bourdeaux, “Bondarenko was arrested on a bus where he was active in religious propaganda, distributing leaflets and preaching renunciation of the arts.” He was also charged with an intention “to create a ‘Fraternal Council for Young Christians’” and organization of “young people’s groups for Bible study” and conducting exams on biblical subjects,” such as “the creation of heaven and earth, the creation of man, Abraham as hero of the faith, and the recitation of biblical verses.” Although “it was never proved that the accused had preached the ‘renunciation of art’, and this was not corroborated by any witness, I.D. Bondarenko was sentenced to five years in prison, with subsequent exile of three years,” while the other dissenter, Shevchenko, accused of making his home available for illegal meetings and baptizing young people, received “four years in prison and three years of exile.”<sup>92</sup>

The alleged “renunciation of art” in Bondarenko’s case probably had nothing to do with his rejection of the arts as such and appears to be an artificial term intentionally coined by the prosecutorial organs to misinterpret the dissenter’s reaction to the notorious secularization clause of the VSEKhB’s “Instructional Letter,” urging Senior Presbyters to struggle “with the incorrect views on art, literature, radio, television and other forms of culture still persisting among our brothers and sisters in the faith.”<sup>93</sup> Many believers, as Hartfeld described it, wondered what exactly did the Baptist leaders have in mind when they “instructed their ‘flock’ to go to theaters, cinema, called upon the youth to cooperate

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<sup>91</sup> Michael Bourdeaux, *Religious Ferment in Russia*, p. 63.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 454, p. 49-58.

with the Pioneer and Komsomol organizations” and, “to put it succinctly, become involved in the variety of cultural activities offered by the Communist ideology”? It certainly struck many believers as an ominous church-state conspiracy: “what the party did not have time to do to the Christians, the church itself was to complete.” One of the personages in Hartfeld’s book reasoned:

There is no doubt that many young people would have gladly watched a movie version of some novel, if, as in classical literature, the subject matter of a movie was just a love story, for instance. Why not? Had it not been for the party ideology...It simply trampled under foot all our convictions. And now we, Christians, had to follow these [VSEKhB] instructions? It was beyond what we could take!<sup>94</sup>

The dissenters, therefore, were far from the whole sale rejection of any form of art, and essentially detested only the explicitly antireligious “ideological content” of Soviet art. Since virtually all Soviet art was ideologically loaded, the dissenters believed that an indiscriminate exposure to it of the believing children and youth, in particular, contributed more to their secularization, than neutral amelioration. As mentioned in earlier chapters, the youth leaders in schismatic and registered Protestant communities alike realized that they could not merely hide from the challenges of modernity and sought a viable alternative to the Soviet cultural challenge by capitalizing on the rich non-Soviet artistic and literary heritage of humanity that could provide the generation of young believers with spiritual and cultural nourishment unattended by the Soviet antireligious bias.

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<sup>94</sup> Hartfeld, p. 15-16.

Bondarenko and Zdorovets were not they only victims, as the government responded to the dissenters' challenging the convenient status quo of state-church relations in the traditional way of outright repression. An enfilade of arrests in the early 1960s considerably thinned the ranks of schismatic activists. According to Savinskii, "94 people ended up behind the bars towards the end of 1962, including A.F. Prokofiev and B.M. Zdorovets." The other prominent Orgcommittee member, G.K. Kriuchkov, escaped arrest only due to a serendipitous confluence of circumstances...and was forced to live in hiding afterwards." As for A.A. Shalashov and S.T. Golev, they were spared for a time on the account of their old age."<sup>95</sup> According to the "Information about the EKhB Prisoners for the Word of God since the Introduction of the 'New VSEKhB Statute', from 1961 to June of 1964," compiled by the newly formed Council of the EKhB Prisoners' Relatives, 197 believers served 4-5 year sentences in high security camps or languished in exile. Five EKhB believers died due to abuses either during interrogations or while serving their sentences in prisons.<sup>96</sup> The most well-known of these death cases was that of Nikolai K. Khmara, a member of the Kalunda EKhB community in Western Siberia, who "had been converted only a few years before [his death] after leading a life of drunkenness." Summarizing the available information about his death, Sawatsky wrote:

His conversion had transformed him into a model husband, father, and active church worker. Two weeks after the trial, his family received word that he had died due to illness. Contrary to instructions, the Kalunda believers insisted on opening the coffin and found a brutally mutilated body. There were chain marks

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<sup>95</sup> Savinskii, p. 215.

<sup>96</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 435, p. 52-53.



on his arms, scorch marks on his hands and feet, his finger and toenails had been torn off, and there were gaping wounds in his abdomen made by a hot object. The most revolting part occurred when someone pulled the cotton stuffing out of his mouth and discovered that Khmara's tongue was missing. Other prisoners later informed them that Khmara had talked about Christ till the end and therefore his captors had torn out his tongue. Khmara had also suffered psychological torture, receiving injections to create a personality change.<sup>97</sup>

The believing youths from the nearby city of Barnaul, commented Savinskii, "having at their disposal the photo documents of what had been done [to Khmara], organized a trip to Moscow, demanding that the government ordered an official investigation of the incident. The facts of this crying injustice and sadism had been confirmed by an authoritative commission. Only in 1965, however, an assistant to the Procurator General, Anashkin, was forced to admit what had been done in the prison's torture-chambers."<sup>98</sup> Although the Soviet government flatly denied in its public pronouncements that Khmara died as a result of torture, his martyrdom as well as the scope of the state's persecution of dissenters and members of unregistered Protestant communities soon became known in the West and created a lot of negative publicity for the USSR. The VSEKhB's participation in the Soviet counterpropaganda campaign lowered its prestige still further in the eyes of many EKHB believers while the ranks of the Orgcommittee supporters continued to be replenished on the account of new and increasingly younger activists. Even before Khmara's tragic death in 1964, the government realized that repressions alone could not put an end to the EKHB opposition movement, and that a strict and insensitive enforcement of the controversial New Statute

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<sup>97</sup> Sawatsky, p. 143.

<sup>98</sup> Savinskii, p. 224.

only sparked warfare of reciprocal excommunications between the VSEKhB and dissenting communities. The begrudged expellees naturally fed into the network of unregistered communities while the state's refusal to register these communities left them with no other choice but to cling to the Orgcommittee's cause. The reformers had already proven their ability to galvanize these scattered communities and groups into a relatively organized force vehemently advocating the all-union congress as the only solution to the brewing schism within the EKhB brotherhood. The idea of a congress appealed to both radicals and moderates and, if left unaddressed, could turn into a rallying cry that would propel the Orgcommittee's popularity still further. The CARC, therefore, found it expedient to defuse the situation by permitting the VSEKhB to convoke a carefully orchestrated congress on its own terms and thus overtake the Orgcommittee's initiative. A group of select delegates to the congress, under the VSEKhB's leadership, could then revise the Statute by slightly altering or removing the more unpopular of its clauses. The measure intended, on one hand, to deprive reformers of their cause and, on the other, to send a clear message to believers that the government was not insensitive to their wishes, but it would not negotiate with schismatics. The VSEKhB's cooperativeness would thus appear as finally paying off.

In his 1963 report, the head of the Ukrainian CARC, Litvin, articulated quite clearly what the government hoped to accomplish by permitting the EKhB congress:

In order to deprive schismatics of the trust and support of the EKhB religious organization and to isolate them from the main mass of believers, the VSEKhB was allowed in 1963 to convoke in Moscow the all-union conference of representatives of the EKhB religious communities, which could have fulfilled the function of the EKhB congress. The EKhB congress convened between October 14 and 17 of 1963. Of the 400 delegates and guests, 190 were from Ukraine. The

congress adopted a modified EKhB Statute that contained a number of changes and additions depriving schismatics of their main argument—prompting believers to switch to an illegal mode of activity. The congress issued a ‘Brotherly Appeal to All Evangelical Christians-Baptists, Christians of the Evangelical Faith [Pentecostals] and Mennonites,’ calling them to unity, cohesion around the EKhB union [VSEKhB], and cessation of schismatic activity.

As the congress worked, the EKhB schismatics, including their leaders from Ukraine (Vins, Kovalenko, Overchuk, Velichko, Druzhilo, and others), tried different means to disorganize the work of the congress. They distributed among delegates instigative appeals, dispatched letters to religious communities, in which they called upon believers to neither acknowledge the congress nor heed its decisions. They sent letters to the organs of government, demanding the convocation of an emergency congress under the Orgcommittee’s leadership, the cessation of Soviet organs’ interference in the activity of religious communities, and the release of leaders of the EKhB schismatic movement, including Prokofiev...

Despite schismatics’ resistance, the majority of believers approved decisions of the EKhB congress at their prayer meetings...However, the illegal activity of schismatics did not cease after the EKhB congress. Lately, the activity of schismatics increased in many oblasts...They succeeded in attracting to their side several thousand believers, including the youth. We [CARC] and the organs of authority in the locations take necessary measures to stop the illegal activity of schismatics, using for this purpose those clergymen who are loyal to the Soviet authority.<sup>99</sup>

The government thus effectively hijacked the Orgcommittee’s idea of a congress and handed over the credit for its convocation to the VSEKhB. Whereas the reformers envisioned the congress as a culmination of the reform from below—a truly representative assembly of the EKhB believers that would dislodge the tarnished incumbent leadership and democratically elect a new leadership that would represent all registered and unregistered EKhB communities—the government opted for a safer change from above, passing a simulacrum—“a conference...which could have fulfilled the function of the EKhB congress”—for a true congress. The VSEKhB implemented this status conversion without any discussion. “Soon after the conference opened,”

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<sup>99</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5908, p. 65-67.

related Sawatsky, “vice-president A.L. Andreev declared that the conference had the legitimate rights of a congress,” and “during a break delegate tickets were changed—the word ‘conference’ was struck out and replaced by ‘congress.’”<sup>100</sup> Far from challenging the VSEKhB’s authority, the 1963 congress reaffirmed it. While relatively representative of registered EKhB communities in the USSR, the congress excluded representatives of unregistered communities and communities that had recently broken away from the EKhB brotherhood. Although the Orgcommittee officially sent three of its brothers (A.A. Shalashov, G.I. Maiboroda, and G.P. Vins) to the Congress, and 30 others arrived in Moscow of their own accord, “none of them was permitted to the congress (for the entire duration of the congress they stood outside the building),” which prompted Shalashov to exclaim: “Why aren’t we allowed at the congress? We are its initiators!”<sup>101</sup> The reformers promptly released a statement about their attitude toward the 1963 Congress, in which they challenged its legitimacy on the following grounds:

The congress was being prepared without the participation of believers of non-registered communities comprising over 300,000 of the total of 500,000 EKhB believers. Only in some registered communities delegates to the congress were elected, even though it was not really an election, since majority of delegates were appointed beforehand by the VSEKhB’s Senior Presbyters and by the Upolnomochennye of CARC. Who did then go to the congress? Certainly all Senior Presbyters...Majority of them are people who expelled from communities those believers who spoke against the anti-evangelical 1960 Statute and Instructional Letter, people who wrote reports to the state organs, perverting goals and intentions of supporters of the congress and attempting to present them before the authorities as politically unreliable, and people who spoke in courts as false witnesses in cases of prosecuted EKhB believers...Thus those who...pleaded for the convocation of the congress were sent to prisons and camps, whereas those who predominantly spoke against the congress became delegates of this

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<sup>100</sup> Sawatsky, p. 202.

<sup>101</sup> Savinskii, p. 227.

congress—the false congress...The congress' participants did not mention once the prisoners—those true delegates of the Church to the congress. Only slanderous remarks against the church's internal [reform] movement...reigned at this congress.<sup>102</sup>

Besides the expected non-recognition of the “false congress,” the reformers' statement also indicated a certain re-prioritization of the main targets of their criticism. If before the 1963 Congress reformers primarily attacked the VSEKhB, whose refusal to lend a helping hand to the Orgcommittee's initiative rendered the convocation of the proposed emergency congress impossible, now that the congress had been convoked on the government's initiative and with total disregard to conditions demanded by the Orgcommittee, the sting of their criticism turned to the state. “The chief culprit in the organization of this false congress,” declared reformers, “was the CARC.”<sup>103</sup>

Similar condemnations of the “false congress” were also issued by individual dissenting communities. In their statement addressed to the VSEKhB and CARC, believers from Zhitomir challenged the delegates of the 1963 Congress:

Delegates of the congress! Do you know that you too are not the fully vested representatives of the church? You were elected by the oblast Senior Presbyters who themselves were not elected by anyone. You will be speaking as if on behalf of the entire church, whereas the overwhelming majority of even registered communities know nothing about this congress. They did not elect you. Why is it that the convocation of this counseling meeting, which is being passed for a congress on the basis of mere number of participants, is carried out in secret? –In order that the true representatives of the Church could not enter the number of participants. And one more question: where are the representatives of unregistered communities? They are the same members of the body of Christ as you are...<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 413, p. 15-17.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

The congress' major achievement was, arguably, the adoption of the Revised VSEKhB Statute. However, its adoption was not preceded by a proper debate. One of the presidium members Levindando "simply read the statute paragraph by paragraph, and it was accepted without any significant changes."<sup>105</sup> Nevertheless, the 1963 Statute endorsed important changes, such as "a shift from a presbyterial or even episcopal form of church polity to a congregational polity" via a simple replacement of the All-Union Council with the All-Union Congress as the supreme organ of the EKhB brotherhood." In other words, "the statute granted the congress decision-making powers and reduced the council [VSEKhB] to a body that executed the decisions of the congress."<sup>106</sup> The return to the more traditional congregational form of the EKhB internal organization was meant to eliminate the reformers' criticism of the VSEKhB as a self-ordained hierarchy. Depriving the VSEKhB of its former broad prerogatives, remarked Savinskii, "naturally was not acceptable to atheists...because it is considerably more difficult to pressure the congress of the parish churches' representatives than the Union's Council (VSEKhB)." In the years that followed, "the atheists, therefore, strove to return the EKhB Union back to a centralized form of administering the Union's affairs."<sup>107</sup> Furthermore, if according to the 1960 Statute, the Senior Presbyters were mainly observers and enforcers of the VSEKhB regulations, who did not participate in church services, the 1963 Statute stressed that both the VSEKhB and Senior Presbyters had "responsibilities as spiritual

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<sup>105</sup> Sawatsky, p. 208.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 209.

<sup>107</sup> Savinskii, p. 229.

leaders, as pastors, not simply as administrators.” The Senior Presbyters now also had to “meet with congregational approval,” whereas reference to “a voluntary association of churches instead of a union of believers” in the 1963 Statute’s opening paragraph appeared as “a small recognition of the traditional Baptist claim to local church autonomy.”<sup>108</sup> The revised statute also did not restrict membership in the EKhB Union to registered congregations alone and eliminated “the two-to-three-year probation period for baptism,” “a stipulation that choir members must be church members,” and “several major restrictions on the involvement of young people in the church.”<sup>109</sup> With the Orgcommittee continuing to present a formidable challenge, it became evident to the VSEKhB that the local churches had to be now “wooed rather than dictated to.”<sup>110</sup> Aside from these welcome changes to the status quo, the composition of VSEKhB’s presidium remained virtually unchanged, with the same old leaders—Zhidkov, Levindanto, Andreev, Ivanov, Karev and Mitskevich—occupying all positions of importance. While the Orgcommitte leadership experienced rejuvenation, the VSEKhB’s General Secretary Karev only made a brief reference in passing “that they needed younger leaders,” and “then went on to argue for the status quo by using the imagery of a ship being piloted carefully into harbor: ‘We need brothers with white hair on their heads, who can calmly guide our brotherhood through many hidden reefs.’”<sup>111</sup> The congress did not really

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<sup>108</sup> Sawatsky, p. 209.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 210.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

address the burning issue of unity, of overcoming the schism, and the congress' more prominent speaker, Karev, intentionally downplayed the magnitude of the opposition movement consolidated by the Orgcommittee. The VSEKhB leadership had high hopes that the revised statute would counter the further spread of dissent.

The VSEKhB's decision to "woo" the unregistered and break-away communities back into the Union closely reflected the government's own realization that repressions and exclusion only fueled dissent. Commenting on this reluctant policy change on the part of Soviet government, John Anderson wrote:

Dissent as a whole never affected more than a small minority of Soviet citizens, yet by the mid-1960s the authorities were faced with the prospect of civil disobedience on the part of thousands of its citizens. Such actions had to be checked if other citizens were not to follow suit, but in post-terror conditions repressions and the more overt forms of control had to be handled carefully so as not to drive more people into the arms of dissenters.<sup>112</sup>

Reporting in 1963, Litvin wrote:

The existence of acting unregistered communities and EKhB communities whose registration had been revoked, as well as crude administrative bullying towards believers on the part of certain officials, create fertile ground for the anti-state activity of schismatics. The 'Orgcommittee' leaders show great diligence consolidating the illegally existing EKhB groups into a single nation-wide religious organization under the 'Orgcommittee's' leadership. That is why, the legalization (registration) of active unregistered and formerly registered EKhB communities, and complete elimination of administrative excesses towards believers considerably paralyze the activity of schismatics and reduce their influence on believers.<sup>113</sup>

The VSEKhB dignitaries, therefore, embarked on a series of tours of unregistered congregations offering registration and membership in the EKhB Union. This generous

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<sup>112</sup> John Anderson, *Religion, State and Politics in the Soviet Union and Successor States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 85.

<sup>113</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5908, p. 101.



gesture, however, was not unconditional. The communities in question had to accept the 1963 Statute and abide by it. From the reformers' standpoint, the 1963 congress, which they promptly christened the "False Congress," was a travesty of a congress they proposed and did nothing to address the problem of fusion between the church and state. They were quick to realize that the 1963 Statute and the decision to extend registration to the formerly neglected and persecuted unregistered communities represented a tactical maneuver on the part of the old leadership and CARC—a mere replacement of a stick with a carrot—aiming first of all at undermining the Orgcommittee's following. In their 1963 "Appeal to all brothers and sisters of the Evangelical-Baptist confession" the reformers wrote:

The history of Christianity testifies that the most harmful consequence for the life of God's people and shame for the Church of Jesus Christ had been brought upon through the sin of a criminal union of the church's servants with secular authorities...Our Church has not yet celebrated its 100-year anniversary (it is coming up in 1967), but it has already been dragged into the ages-old sin—union with the world, which is precisely what gave birth to the 'Instructional Letter' and 'Statute' that forbid calls for repentance and aim at reducing the number of believers...The fruits of this union already divided the Church into two parts. When one part strives to follow the Word of God and be guided by the Holy Spirit, the other does not look beyond the human powers and decrees. If one bears grief and suffering for the name of Jesus even unto death, the other is content with little privilege given to it for departing from the truth. If one side is dragged to courts for the name of Jesus and its followers lay their souls for God's cause and their fellow brethren, the other provides false witness against the truthful children of God.

Seeing that the Church decisively walks away from under the influence of servants who have united with the world, and having encountered massive resistance of believers to the implementation of the VSEKhB Statute of 1960, the VSEKhB leadership first tried to excommunicate [dissenting] believers and shut down their communities with the purpose of suppressing the movement for purification. However, having witnessed the fruitlessness of the applied measures, the VSEKhB leadership and the CARC are presently changing their tactic—they allow certain leniency and departures from the Statute, and even offer registration to those communities that had been closed down 5-10 years ago.

Both the VSEKhB and CARC noticed that the mass exodus of believers from the VSEKhB and the autonomous spiritual life of the departed communities make it difficult for them [the said authorities] to interfere in the internal life of communities, and that the unregistered communities indeed practice the principle of separation of state and church... They [VSEKhB and CARC] have become convinced that no amount of repression... could force believers to betray their Lord. The VSEKhB's Senior Presbyters travel to towns and villages of every oblast... offering registration to the unregistered communities and ready to appoint any servants as presbyters of these communities, but on one condition—the recognition of the VSEKhB and subjection to its regulations and instructions. What prompted the VSEKhB and its representatives in the locations to depart in such a way from their original plan? Certainly not the love towards God's work, but the subtle savvy with which they want to preserve their hegemonic status in the Church and, ultimately, enslave the entire Church to the world.

We are not against registration, but registration under the aegis of VSEKhB is collaboration with spiritual adulterers (Isaiah 57:9) and traitors of God's cause (James 4:4). The Church does not need prayer houses where the Church's head—Christ—is absent, where on a Sunday, during a sermon, a servant would eloquently condemn Jude's actions, and on a Monday would sit with undisturbed conscience in the office of the Upolnomochennyi of CARC and together with him weave a snare for the weakening and suffocation of God's work...<sup>114</sup>

Offering many beleaguered unregistered communities a tempting opportunity to legalize themselves was a clever strategic move on the part of the VSEKhB and CARC, for it struck at the heart of the Orgcommittee's case against the authorities. If before 1963, the Orgcommittee could champion the cause of such unfortunate communities by arguing that the government intentionally denied them their legal right to register and then penalized them for gathering illegally, while the VSEKhB turned a blind eye to the miserable plight of a large segment of its own flock, now the Orgcommittee faced a more challenging dilemma. Should it advise believers to refuse registration, the government would accuse it of promoting illegality, and should it encourage believers to register, it

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<sup>114</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 413, p. 7-13.

would lose its own following to the VSEKhB. The reformers chose to grab this dilemma by the horns and offered believers of unregistered communities the following advice:

In places where the registration of the EKhB parish church is not associated with the violation of church's independence and does not entail the violation of church's life and service according to the Word of God, there are no grounds for refusing registration. The only thing necessary is that a church, upon registration, continued to remain vigilant and preserved its lawful independence.

If conditions of registration are such that they lead to interference in the internal life of a church..., then such registration is unlawful and the church should refuse it regardless of consequences. Otherwise, by agreeing to a conscious apostasy from the Word of God, a church ceases to be the church. For it is much more important than registration or having a prayer house that the Church of Jesus Christ did not betray the teaching of Jesus Christ and remained the kind of church that it is supposed to be according to the Scripture...<sup>115</sup>

The reformers thus clearly indicated that it was not registration as such that they found objectionable, but its conditions. With registration no longer being an issue, the Orgcommittee's focus shifted to removing the unfair conditions attached to it, that is, the recognition of VSEKhB's hegemony and the 1963 Statute. Despite certain positive changes that the 1963 congress engendered, the reformers found themselves back at square one, facing the same formidable opponent and suffering consequences of their resistance. Arguably, the dissenters' criticism of the VSEKhB became even more vehement in the aftermath of the 1963 congress. In their 1964 letter addressed to Khrushchev, Brezhnev and Rudenko, members of the Provisional Council of Prisoners' Relatives stated that "repressions against the EKhB believers disagreeing with the VSEKhB continued everywhere," although this disagreement had nothing to do with violations of state laws and concerned only "the church's internal affairs." They

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<sup>115</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 72, p. 59.

characterized the VSEKhB as an “instrument of atheism... representing the interests of atheism before the church” and demanded the convocation of a true congress that would elect legitimate EKhB leadership representing “the interests of the church before the state.” “Some interested organs,” they protested, “by way of repressions rudely interfere in this internal movement within the church and wish to preserve the VSEKhB in the position of leadership. In other words, the atheist struggle [against religion] is turned, by means of violation of socialist law, into a physical reprisal against all those who speak against the VSEKhB.”<sup>116</sup>

The Orgcommittee’s continuing struggle naturally affected communities at large. Whereas some believers thought that the doctored 1963 Statute removed major obstacles for their accepting the VSEKhB’s leadership, others expected the VSEKhB to publicly renounce the older 1960 document and repent, while still others could not agree to anything short of complete removal of the incumbent EKhB leadership. As a consequence, many communities remained divided. In 1964, the VSEKhB received two entirely contrasting letters from the same EKhB community in village Denisovichi, Chernobyl region, Kiev oblast. One letter, signed simply “The EKhB community in village Denisovichi,” stated:

Our community decided to return your Statute to you, since it does not mention the termination of the ‘New Statute’ and ‘Instructional letter’ [of 1960] both of which openly contradict the Word of God and have caused great evil, schism and hostility among God’s people. You were culpable of this, and you do not want to recognize your guilt before God and His people. Oh, had you only acknowledged your guilt, it would have brought great benefit to you and the entire people of God, in terms of unity, peace and sanctification. But this has not

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<sup>116</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 435, p. 45.

happened with you even to this day. For this reason, we cannot have brotherly communion with you. Do not send your journals and letters to us.<sup>117</sup>

The other letter, signed by the presbyter and five members of the church council of the Denisovichi community, stated the opposite:

We hereby inform you that we wish to be in union with all Evangelical-Baptist brotherhood of our country and want to receive journals and letters from you. The Senior Presbyter for Kiev oblast, brother Feriupko, conducted a conversation with the church, concerning all these questions. He handed to us again the Statute of our brotherhood that was enacted by the All-Union Congress of the EKhB in Moscow on October 16-18, 1963.<sup>118</sup>

Still other supporters of the Orgcommittee wrote poems expressing their solidarity with the persecuted reformers and condemning the VSEKHB. One such poem, “dedicated to the fighters for the Church of Christ, to bearers of truth and purity,” likened imprisoned schismatics to the biblical Joseph sold by his own brothers into Egyptian captivity:

Despite his youth, he [Joseph] stood firmly,  
Even though he had shed a great deal of bitter tears.  
It hurt him that his own blood brothers sold him,  
But he dedicated his youth to the Creator.

As we read about this in the Holy Scripture,  
We see prototypes of our own time:  
How many Josephs, Pauls, and other brothers  
Suffer in prisons and in exile!

Brother Khrapov from Tashkent,  
A Muscovite Yakimenko, Prokofiev from Donbass,  
Boris Zdorovets, Shevchenko and Bondarenko from Odessa...  
When will these persecutions end?!

And how many sisters, these Christ’s little bees,  
Who carry nectar to the beehive drop by drop:  
Sisters such as Vera Tkach and Lena Zubovskaia

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<sup>117</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 454, p. 7.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

Who bravely stood in courts, defending their brothers...

Believe it, friends, their suffering is not in vain.  
Joseph also cried often in prison.  
Although he experienced many trials and saw much grief,  
He later rescued many people from ruin.

You are a soldier: a bearer of Christ's suffering.  
Whether you are a brother, a sister, an old man or youth,  
Remember, friend, that not hundreds, but thousands of pure hearts  
Mention your name in their prayers.

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Friends from the VSEKhB, didn't you also  
Make you shameful contribution to this?  
Your instructions and other little papers  
Brought tears and trouble to the church, not help.

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An atheist-fighter, we can understand him,  
He always makes war against God...  
But where are you [VSEKhB] steering, handing us your Statutes?  
Who ultimately benefits from your labors?<sup>119</sup>

As mentioned earlier, after the 1963 Congress, when the reformers realized that the VSEKhB was but a powerless puppet in the hands of the state, they gradually shifted the focus of their struggles to the main orchestrator of their misfortunes—the Soviet government. The shift became most apparent in the changed demeanor of reformers' writing: formal petitions requesting the government recognition of their movement or the permission to convoke an emergency congress increasingly gave way to legal arguments and protest statements in which the Orgcommittee leaders and supporters invoked a whole array of domestic Soviet and international norms concerning believers' rights and boldly accused the government of intentional duplicity with respect to the de facto observance of these rights in the USSR. This activity soon propelled the EKhB

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<sup>119</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 413, p. 65-66.

dissenters to the forefront of the general discourse of human rights violations advanced by other dissident groups in the Soviet Union.

Already in 1962, Polonnik forwarded to the CC of CPU a copy of a “Protest” written by “the gospel-confessing Christians” from a number of cities in the USSR and addressed to Khrushchev, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, General Procurator, and the Chairman of KGB of the USSR. Invoking Khrushchev’s de-Stalinization rhetoric and his calls to return to Leninist norms abandoned under Stalin, the authors wondered why these welcome changes did not affect millions of believers in the country:

...During the life of V.I. Lenin there was full freedom for believers...If there were abuses somewhere, he ordered immediate investigation and punishment of those responsible, as it occurred in 1921 in Kazan. The community sent a petition to Lenin who wrote the following resolution on it: ‘To Kurskii. Investigate immediately, punish the guilty, and inform me about it. Lenin. Date.’ But what happened after Lenin’s death? Yagoda, Ezhov, Beria, and Stalin went to war against Christians, accusing them of belonging to different political formations from which the Christians were far removed, for their kingdom is not of this world. It is known to you, Nikita Sergeevich, that many tens of thousands of Christians suffered in prisons, camps and exile, and that many of them were shot...And you personally spoke many times against the application of administrative measures to Christians and against offending religious sentiments of believers...But what is happening in front of our eyes? Believers are still labeled as belonging to political groups and called American spies, proponents of ignorance, idlers, and many other names. They are sent into exile, fired from work and fined only because their fellow-believers gather in their homes to pray. They are evicted from their apartments and homes are taken away from them. Who is responsible for the resurgence of all of this, and in whose head such a detrimental thought was born? Could it be your idea, dear Nikita Sergeevich, or someone else’s? If the powers that be decided to resume repressions—to persecute, exile, imprison, and even destroy Christians—then the Christians have the power to die for the truth. Even in our days, they will walk the streets of towns and villages towards persecution and even death. We live in the twentieth century—a cultured, civilized, and humane century, and, moreover, we live in the most advanced democratic state, with a truly just legal order. Why is it necessary then to return to the barbaric times of darkness and ignorance—to the primordial

times when a man was a wolf to another man? Why all these repressions and persecutions? It is useless to apply them to Christians.<sup>120</sup>

The authors concluded their “Protest” by demanding an “immediate release” of the “falsely accused” reformers’ leader A.F. Prokofiev.

In August of 1963, the Orgcommittee sent to “N.S. Khrushchev and the government headed by him” a long and elaborate analysis of state-church relations in the USSR, interspersed with numerous examples of mistreatment and repressions of believers. The reformers began by pointing out that their six previous appeals to different state agencies resulted only in greater repressions of their supporters, manifested by numerous trials of EKhB believers throughout the country. While “knowing that the EKhB Church was left in a position without any rights; that an illegal administrative and physical struggle was being waged against it, the Orgcommittee felt and continues to feel determined to work towards its goal, as much as possible, without causing unnecessary aggravations.” The reformers merely mentioned “the existence in the country of humane laws,” hoping in such a way “to tactfully remind those who commits and condones lawlessness how much their actions contradict the spirit and letter of the existing legislation, how far they have gone down the road of arbitrariness, conducting their struggle against believers.” However, “since the lawlessness persisted,” stated reformers, “the interests of the Church do not allow us to confine ourselves to fruitless petitioning alone and compel us to speak more openly about the real plight of the Church in our country.”<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5202, p. 91-93.



The reformers then dedicated the next few pages to a detailed discussion of what they viewed as the pain problem plaguing believers in USSR—the Soviet government’s abandonment of the constitutionally granted principle of separation of state and church and virtual enslavement of the EKhB Church via the co-optation of its leadership:

At present time there are no longer any doubts that the church, formally separated from the state, exists entirely under the illegal leadership of various state organs whose covert and open access to the EKhB Church was made possible by servants-apostates who have entered into an unlawful bond and collaboration with the organs of authority and the KGB for participation in the struggle against the church by means of various compulsory measures...It is well known to you, Nikita Sergeevich, that the mass repressions against believers, that had begun soon after Lenin’s death, reached such forms and proportions by 1937 that there was not a single servant dedicated to God or a zealous believer left at large in all our country, and that there was only a negligible number of communities that survived under the leadership of those servants who out of fear permitted compromises and collaborated with the organs of authority. Many of those who had been sentenced never returned from their places of imprisonment, were killed or could not survive the incredibly harsh conditions of prison and camp life, while those of the steadfast believers who had been released were soon sentenced to new terms of imprisonment.

In order to implement repressions on such a large scale, and in order not to grab believers randomly, but only the most active, the agents of GPU, NKVD and, later, KGB infiltrated every pore of the church organism where they recruited, under the pain of repressions, the more shaky and weak servants and lay believers.<sup>122</sup>

Having reviewed how this network of internal snitches decimated their brotherhood in the 1930s, the reformers turned to the nature of postwar arrangements between state and church—the illegitimate formation of the VSEKhB by the state organs out of servants willing to depart from the Evangelical teaching in exchange for an early release from prison:

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<sup>121</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5663, p. 176.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 176-177.

It is quite understandable that after such mass repressions, when the Church was permeated by a huge number of various state agents and in fact already operated under the illegal leadership of the state, the state organs could form at will, as if from clay, the Councils of parish churches, appoint Senior Presbyters for oblasts, regions and republics, selecting them from among cooperative people and subordinating them to the VSEKhB... Thus, in the previous years of the reign of arbitrariness and lawlessness, in the dreadful atmosphere of immeasurable committed repressions, was laid the foundation of the illegal bond between the state and church for the purpose of breaking up the latter from the inside and its subsequent physical destruction. The Church was directed and controlled via the two illegal channels: the more open one—the Upolnomochennye of CARC, and the more covert—thousands of strings of the thick network of uniformed and undercover agents of KGB. In your speech at the 22<sup>nd</sup> Congress of CPSU, you stated the following about this sort of practice: ‘Our duty is to conduct a thorough and all-encompassing investigation of these sorts of things, things associated with abuses of power... We can and must flesh out a lot, and tell the truth to the party and people... This must be done so that such occurrences would never recur.’ We would not mention it if these lawless acts were not repeated, if the unlawful... bond between the church and state was the thing of the past, a mere nightmarish recollection. However, this bond has been carefully transferred into contemporary norms, and is not only protected as precious heritage but is being strengthened and profitably used in the struggle against believers in our present time. The only difference consists in that before the fateful Article 58 was use..., whereas now Article 227 of the Criminal Code of RSFSR is used... as well as the May Decree on the Struggle Against Parasites.<sup>123</sup>

The Orgcommittee clearly attacked the hypocrisy of Khrushchev’s reformism condemning some excesses of Stalinism and, at the same time, leaving other abusive practices of the same era virtually untouched. To the reformers, a return to Leninist norms, proclaimed at the 22<sup>nd</sup> Congress of CPSU, also meant a return to Leninist norms in relations between church and state. The reformers, therefore, supported their assertion that Stalin’s legacy continued to thrive under Khrushchev with ample evidence of false accusations against believers and their orchestrated demonization in Soviet courts. Even though the swift summary sentencing of believers under the NKVD troikas gave way to

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p. 178-179.

“open-door” trials, the present day court auditoriums, argued reformers, were usually packed with specially selected people hostile to believers and the hearings were usually preceded by massive prepping of the public opinion:

Believers’ prayer meetings were called mob gatherings, servants—grabbers, idlers, etc. Believers were represented as a bunch of bloodthirsty people sacrificing their own children, forbidding them to study and beating children with chains for disobedience...After such psychological prep and inducement of hatred..., when people were driven into an antireligious frenzy and fanaticism, anything could be done with the believers...Believers are constantly summoned to the KGB to be either threatened or recruited...Believers are fired from work, expelled from institutions of higher learning; their apartments are searched and fizgarmonias, tape-recorders, spiritual literature, personal correspondence and diaries are being confiscated...The meetings of unregistered, and sometimes registered, communities are dispersed by voluntary guards and militia under the KGB leadership, who do not hesitate to use physical violence against believers...<sup>124</sup>

The authors then listed the beatings of believers in village Zhivotovo, Vinnitsa oblast, in Kharkov and Kiev, where 19 severely beaten believers were subsequently incarcerated for periods from to 2 to 15 days. In towns like Vladivostok, Tashkent, Brest and others, prayer houses were torn down by intentionally roused youth, voluntary guards, or simply bulldozed. In Kharkov, during the confiscation of a private, recently constructed house, a pregnant woman and her crying children were thrown out of the house into the rain and their house turned into a people’s library. In Semipalatinsk, a mother of 8 children lost her husband (he was sentenced as a believer). The court ruled to take seven of her eight children away only so that she could not exercise any religious influence on their upbringing.<sup>125</sup> To justify this violence and brutality, the government presented believers

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., p. 179-180.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p. 180-181.

as common criminals, not people persecuted for their faith in God. In using this essentially Stalinist device against believers, reformers argued, the government perverted the officially stated ideological nature of struggle against religion and reduced it to a violent crusade:

Is it legal to encourage everywhere lawlessness and repressions, including physical reprisals? To condone such practices would mean to condone the use of Article 58 in the past; it would mean that thousands of our utterly innocent brothers and sisters suffered, and many of them died, legally [in the 1930s], which would mean that they have been rehabilitated mistakenly. It would also mean that the use of Article 227 of the Criminal Code of RSFSR and the May Decree against believers, under which people are arrested, deprived of freedom, exiled and their homes and children are taken away, is legal. But everyone knows that a struggle against religion must be carried out only by means of ideological persuasion. However, prisons and camps, where the EKhB believers serve their terms, are not camps for prisoners taken in an ideological battle, and those who die in prisons and camps are not the enemy losses in an ideological warfare. The confiscated homes, fizgarmonias, tape-recorders, spiritual literature, etc, are not trophies taken as a result of ideological victories. These are all horrible violations of justice... The antireligious warriors begin to seriously think that believers are not people at all and, therefore, anything could be done to them... While literally trampling believers under foot, they do not hesitate to derisively invoke every step of the way the fashionable expression: 'we conduct our scientific-atheist struggle against religion without offending the feelings of believers.'<sup>126</sup>

The CARC, reformers observed, established for the specific purpose of “regulating relations between church and state, knows better than anyone else about the violations of laws by the state organs and all the arbitrariness,” and “yet it not only does little to correct the wrongs but itself, in the persons of the Upolnomochennye in the locations, commits the most salient violations” by “carrying out in a centralized fashion the forcible and lawless appointment of church servants useful to the Council and, acting through them, corrupts the church”:

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

On the basis of what law the Upolnomochennye receive from the church servants lists of communities, lists of those prepared for baptism, information about candidate-members, and even data on those who have repented? It is illegal. This detailed and regularly received information is needed in order to know where a believer lives, works or studies, so that an illegal struggle against him/her could be carried out, so that he/she could be pressed from every direction... We also want to attract your [Khrushchev's] attention...to the activity of the press, which is often directed at representing us as political enemies of the Soviet state...One may only wonder that in response to such hatred, systematic repressions and utter lack of rights...our attitude towards the state have not wavered, and that these actions did not give rise to any political opposition in our midst or discontent with the existing political order...The EKhB believers have been and remain, under all circumstances, model citizens of their country and active participants in all really beneficial good deeds. However, this does not mean that we are content with any circumstances in the internal affairs of our church, and that we are content with permitting the powers of this world to occupy positions of leadership in our church...Regardless of the state order, the church must remain free from interference in its internal life of the world and world authorities...<sup>127</sup>

Far from challenging the Soviet political system, reformers claimed, the gist of their agenda consisted in restoring the constitutional principle of separation of state and church—in disentangling the church from the state. Had it not been for the involvement of state authorities, the church would have easily cured itself of its ailments “by removing the unrepentant servants-traitors” at the all-union democratically elected congress. “It had become abundantly clear, insisted reformers, what sort of objective the VSEKhB is called to pursue in the church. It is not a secret for anyone that neither the government nor the party is interested in the prosperity and strengthening of the church..., and that there is such a unity between the VSEKhB and the state that both consider any statement against the VSEKhB as a statement against the state.” The reformers, therefore, became convinced that “the state needs the VSEKhB precisely to erode and destroy the church

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p. 182.

from within, and that the interests of the VSEKhB and interests of the Church are directly opposite.”<sup>128</sup> By “ignoring or violating not only the Soviet Civil and Criminal Law, the Decree on the Separation of State and Church and the USSR’s Constitution, but also the General Declaration of Human Rights, Convention on the Struggle Against Discrimination in the Field of Education, Convention on the Preemption of the Crime of Genocide and other international agreements,” reformers charged, Khrushchev’s government perpetuated the long-standing tsarist-Stalinist legacy of abuses of human and minority rights as well as the deplorable existence of laws on paper only:

It is well known to you, Nikita Sergeevich, that the entire history of the EKhB Church in Russia, except for a short period of time during Lenin’s life, has been a history of people condemned to a life-long suffering—a history of camps and prisons for fathers, children and grandchildren, a sorrowful thorny path bedewed with tears of mothers and children. It is perpetuated through tyranny and lawlessness and in full view of humane laws and constitutional principles of freedom of conscience existing in the country.<sup>129</sup>

The Orgcommittee concluded its statement with a four-point list of demands:

1. To permit the convocation and conduct of All-Union Congress of the EKhB Church under the Orgcommittee’s leadership.
2. To allow the establishment of an office for the Orgcommittee at one of the EKhB communities (preferably the Moscow community) and the staff made up of freed [not employed elsewhere] presbyters and preachers charged with preparation of the congress.
3. To give instructions to the CARC not to obstruct the conduct of prayer services by registered and unregistered EKhB communities and groups on the USSR’s territory.
4. To give orders for the release of the EKhB believers sentenced under various pretexts for their support of the congress or participation in its preparation as well as orders for the suspension of all interrogations and cessation of arrests of believers working on behalf of the proposed congress.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., p. 183-184.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p. 184-185.

After the 1963 Congress the invocation of Soviet legislation, especially Lenin's decrees and instructions, became ever more frequent in the Orgcommittee's statements. It appears, the reformers decided to take what was granted to them in the Soviet law and boldly claim freedoms to which they thought they were entitled, regardless of how the government interpreted these freedoms and discarding the government's unwritten instructions as unconstitutional. The reformers also stubbornly operated on an assumption that Lenin's decrees should have precedence over the later Stalinist decrees, and that the latter should at least not contradict the former. Holding Khrushchev accountable for his promise of reviving the Leninist norms, the Orgcommittee's supporters drew not only on their own legal expertise but also the heritage of their forerunners from the 1930s. In his book *Three Generations of Suffering*, smuggled out of the country and published abroad, Georgii Vins quoted a letter written from prison in the 1930s by a former Chairman of the Christian-Baptist Union, Nikolai Odintsov (he died in prison sometime after 1938). A witness and victim of the unbridled persecution of Christians under Stalin, Odintsov pondered the nature of legal transformations occurring in front of his eyes. Referring to the Leninist Decree on the Separation of the Church from the State and of the School from the Church of January 23, 1918, Odintsov characterized it as "the first legislative deed to define the rights of citizens of the USSR with respect to religion," and stipulated:

By this decree and by other deeds of law it is forbidden to publish any other laws or resolutions which would change the Leninist decree of 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1918 or could limit or change freedom of conscience in our land. In his article

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., p. 186.

‘Socialism and Religion,’ Lenin wrote: ‘We require that religion should be a private matter as far as the state is concerned. The state must have nothing to do with religion. Religious societies must not be connected with the state power. Religious and church societies must be completely free union of like-minded citizens independent of the authorities.’

It was a wise decision, judicious in the highest degree, which led to the creation of the Constitution of the USSR and its thirteen articles, and also the above mentioned decree...as a result of which genuine freedom of conscience was ensured in the great land of the USSR. Soon after Lenin’s death, to be precise on 8<sup>th</sup> April 1929, the Resolution of the All-Union Central Executive Committee and the Council of People’s Commissars ‘On Religious Associations’ was published. This Resolution is not the last word in the chain of the infernal scheme of atheism to force the faithful children of the living God to their knees before the god of this world, Baal-atheism.<sup>131</sup>

Although his penchant for Lenin’s policy towards religion is understandable, as the Russian Protestants experienced their “golden age” during the 1920s, Odintsov’s praise of Lenin stemmed from a narrowly denominational assessment of benefits granted in 1918. Odintsov conveniently overlooked the tremendous suffering of the Russian Orthodox Church during the same period of time when Protestants enjoyed their freedoms. Nevertheless, the postwar generation of Evangelicals-Baptists and other Protestants continued to hold the Leninist legislation, perhaps intentionally, as the only acceptable norm. It certainly made sense at a time when the cult of Stalin was being replaced by the cult of Lenin. A remarkable example of dissenters’ legal arguments and their exposure of Soviet double standards with respect to believers’ rights appeared in 1963 in the form of a “Complaint” addressed to Khrushchev by Georgii Vins’ mother, Lidia Mikhailovna. She chose an article “The Declaration of Human Rights. 15 Years,” published in the newspaper *Izvestiia* on December 11, 1963, as a starting point for exposing the gap that existed between the Soviet official pronouncements and

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<sup>131</sup> Georgii Vins, *Three Generations of Suffering* (London, Toronto: Hodder and Stroughton, 1976), p. 114.



commitments and the sad everyday reality of believers' lives in the Soviet Union. The article cited the Soviet representative at the UN, comrade Fedorenko who, speaking on behalf of Soviet delegation, stated: "The adoption of the General Declaration of Human Rights was a result of the UN's decisiveness to reaffirm faith in the basic rights of a human being, in dignity and value of a human person. The Declaration stands as a symbol that the past must not be relived again...On his part, N.T. Fedorenko stressed in the conclusion that the Soviet Union and other socialist countries would continue in the future to apply efforts in defense of the basic freedoms and rights of a human being."

Capitalizing on this public Soviet pronouncement, Lidia Mikhailovna wrote:

As you can see, the USSR announced in front of the whole world what amounts to the greatest comfort and hope for all those who have in the past experienced suffering from trampling on their basic rights. These words call upon the suffering people of our time to hope and believe in the dignity and value of a human person; to believe that the juridical obligations concerning the fulfillment of pacts on the rights of human beings would be unwaveringly observed by all states...But what is happening at the capital of Ukraine, Kiev, at the time when the USSR's representative at the UN pronounces such lofty words? I have already sent you a telegram, Nikita Sergeevich, stating that a systematic, premeditated, physical extermination of my family was taking place.<sup>132</sup>

"The badgering" (travlia) of Vins' family began from the moment of their signing a statement to the government about the convocation of an emergency congress. Lidia's daughter in law, Nadezhda Vins, was fired from work after she refused to publicly denounce God at the employees' meeting. "The cruel badgering" of her son Georgii and his wife Nadezhda continued in the press. Then, Georgii and other believers were beaten up by the workers of militia of the city of Kiev and subsequently jailed for 15 days merely for gathering to pray. This resulted in Georgii's demotion "from the post of a

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<sup>132</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 413, p. 51-52.

head of a team of engineers to that of an ordinary engineer and creation of such conditions at work that forced him to resign.” On September 3, he was announced as a person outside the law on television. This led to the badgering of his children in school which, fortunately, had stopped due to the government’s response to complaints filed by the family. Finally, as the “false congress” opened in Moscow, Vins’ apartment was subjected to a search. All their possessions were entered into a protocol and a court case against Georgii initiated on the basis of Article 209 of the Criminal Code of Ukrainian SSR. According to Lidia, this was not the end of her family’s misfortunes but rather the beginning, for, based on the combined designs of the Kiev authorities, the end would be “a total destruction of the family.” “One can no longer doubt this,” predicted Lidia, “since the consistent facts of repressions and violence reaffirmed such a prediction.” She, therefore, openly challenged Fedorenko’s pledge that “the past must never recur again.”<sup>133</sup>

In order to illustrate the continuity of violations of human rights in the USSR, Lidia connected the past and present through a series of examples from her own family history (also vividly described later by her son Georgii in his book *Three Generations of Suffering* and others):

It all began in 1931, during the cult of personality, when my husband, a Baptist presbyter, was arrested and sentenced under Article 58/10 to 3 years of imprisonment without the confiscation of property. However, the head of GPU in Blagoveshchensk-on-Amur sanctioned the arbitrary occupation of my apartment by a GPU employee. In February, in a ringing frost, with my two and a half year old son Georgii on my hands, I was thrown out onto the snow, dressed in whatever happened to be on our backs at the moment. All my things—beddings, clothes, utensils, food stuffs prepared for winter...and fuel—were taken away

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

from me. When I went to the GPU head with a complaint, he personally warned me that if I showed up one more time, I would find myself in the same place as my husband. I was 24 years old back then, Nikita Sergeevich. I found employment, but the trade union's Obkom ordered to have me kicked out from work. Without food or clothes, I arrived in Voroshilov, Ussuriisk region, where I began to work, but the GPU, through the party secretary, ordered me to renounce my husband and divorce him. When I refused to do it, they deprived me of the right to eat at the employees' dining room and of my food rations...The terror and violence of the authorities were horrific. Fear, hunger, tears and suffering became my and my son's lot.<sup>134</sup>

When her husband finished his prison term, he was given a certificate (instead of a regular passport) stating: "Prosecuted under Article 58/10. A Baptist presbyter. Irremediable." With such identification document on his hands, her husband, exiled to Siberia, could not find any employment, and neither could Lidia as a presbyter's wife. Getting temporary employment here and there, they lingered on a brink of extinction until 1936 when Lidia's husband was again arrested and, 9 months later put on trial in Omsk. The trial failed, since all of the false witnesses, who gave their initial depositions to GPU under duress, retracted their testimonies. However, only two months later (in 1937), Lidia's husband was arrested again and sentenced by a troika to 10 years under the same Article 58/10. He soon died in labor camps. "All of my life and the childhood of my son Georgii," lamented Lidia, "were spent in offices of investigative organs or at the prison's gates. Those were the hard times of the cult of personality which is today condemned. 'The past must never recur again,' states the USSR at the UN in front of the whole world."<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., p. 52-53.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

Having described her family's ordeal during the now condemned Stalinist past,

Lidia switched to the present:

But what is happening today if not the repetition or continuation of the past? My family is being destroyed...My son is under an investigation, and his wife, Nadezhda, has been deprived of work for a year...And they have three children. These children, who have been born into better times, judging by the statement of comrade Fedorenko at the UN, suffer morally from the fact that their father is to be prosecuted and their mother being out of work.<sup>136</sup>

When the authorities searched Georgii's apartment, they also searched Lidia's house and took away the deed to the house which Lidia and her second husband built on their own savings and almost entirely with their own hands. The authorities even requisitioned "55 pieces of Vietnamese soap..., belonging to two families comprised of 6 people." Lidia bought this soap in 1962 just before she retired and when her family did not yet have difficulties obtaining bare necessities. Challenging Khrushchev's and USSR's official pronouncements, Lidia inquired:

Is this not terror, Nikita Sergeevich? ...What is the problem? What horrible crime has my family committed? I worked for 30 years and have never been convicted. My son is also known as a humble laborer, and my daughter-in-law was the best pedagogue in the district [of Kiev] and did not have a single reprimand throughout her working career. All our lives we earned bread in the sweat of our brow...Sending to you my request to stop the genocidal acts against my family, I cannot focus solely on the welfare of my family, separately from everything else that is going on in our country with my fellow-believers, the Evangelical Christians-Baptists. The entire country, Nikita Sergeevich, is engulfed by grief, tears, acts of violence, threats, imprisonments, deprivations of employment and daily bread and, the most horrible, the taking away of children from parents, that is, by artificially created conditions for a complete destruction or genocide of a group of people, Baptists, who comprise approximately 300,000 people in our country.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

In Lidia's assessment, the root of the problem lay in "that the local authorities have forgotten Lenin's decrees concerning the separation of state and church;" that "the state church, the VSEKhB, has been created;" and that "everyone who refuses to accept its leadership is condemned to extermination." Quoting from a contemporary Soviet brochure "The Freedom of Personality and the Legal Status of Citizens in the Soviet All-People's State" invoking "the guarantee of separation of church and state" and promising that "no one [in the Soviet Union] is persecuted for confessing any faith," Lidia qualified these laws as merely "written laws," whereas under the "unwritten laws, over 300,000 believers are deprived of their right to congregate for prayer meetings." "Laws protecting the performance of religious rituals," she continued, "apply only to an obedient instrument [of the state] in the locations—the state church, the VSEKhB—that is prepared to abandon the Gospel for the sake of its own wellbeing... Instead of punishing local authorities who violate the USSR's Constitution and other Soviet laws, the state punishes people who demand the enforcement of these laws..."<sup>138</sup>

In order to drive her point home, Lidia further quoted from a prerevolutionary article by one of the early Bolsheviks, Bonch-Bruевич, who condemned the inhumane treatment of sectarians in the tsarist Russia and promised that "the time was near when everyone would have the right to believe in whatever he/she wished," when "the church would be completely separated from the state," and when "everyone would have the right to freely gather, speak and preach anywhere and everywhere," and proceeded to references from Lenin's works:

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

In his writings, vol. 6, p. 313-314, V.I. Lenin stated: ‘First of all, we demand immediate and unconditional recognition of the law on the freedom of meetings, freedom of the press, and amnesty for...all sectarians. Until this is done, all words about tolerance and freedom of religious beliefs would remain a petty game and a worthless lie...Any differentiation in citizens’ rights on the basis of their religious beliefs is completely impermissible...Religious societies must be completely free unions of like-minded citizens, independent from authorities. Only a consistent enforcement of these demands can ensure a clean break with a shameful and accursed past when the church was in a feudal servitude to the state; when the Russian citizens were in a feudal servitude to the state church; and when the medieval inquisitorial laws persecuting for one’s faith were applied...A full separation of church from the state is a demand that the socialist proletariat poses to a modern state and modern church.’ This is what Lenin demanded, and this is what the believers-Baptists in our country, including my son, demand...Our government, headed by you, Nikita Sergeevich, demands the same. Isn’t it true that Lenin’s decrees on religious confessions are laws of our country? However, everywhere in the locations these laws are but a historical past—something that belongs in a library.<sup>139</sup>

Lidia’s voice was only one in the ever-widening chorus of dissenters, religious and secular, who increasingly emphasized the gap between the initial Bolshevik conception of the freedom of conscience and contemporary Soviet practice still permeated with legacies of the Stalin era. The religious dissenters, in particular, made it a sticking point in their arguments that a true contest of ideas between atheism and religion could only take place if the principle of separation of church and state was fully and systematically enforced, that is, if both sides were given an equal opportunity to propagate their ideas without any state interference. In reality, the Soviet state not only significantly restricted the dissemination of religious ideas while massively sponsoring atheism, but virtually outlawed all those believers who refused to live in the *panopticon* of state-controlled registered religious communities. By defending of the freedom of conscience and basic human rights, the EKHB schismatics stepped out of the narrow

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., p. 56-57.

confines of their denominational interests and thrust themselves into the middle of an essentially political discourse kept alive by other representatives of the perennially fledgling Russian-Soviet civil society.

Despite the Soviet government's attempts to keep believers in the dark with respect to specific pieces of legislation that could be used in defense of their rights, the Orgcommittee supporters obtained and carefully studied all legislative acts concerning the rights of believers and religious communities in the USSR, as well as commentaries on this legislation by Soviet jurists, and took upon themselves the task of serving as their own defense attorneys. The EKhB schismatics tenaciously collected and documented all evidence of illegal acts on the part of Soviet agencies and promptly reported such acts to the highest governmental organs. In the aftermath of the "false congress," Kriuchkov, Vins and Shalashov wrote a letter to Khrushchev in which they argued that the 1963 Congress of the VSEKhB was illegal, since according to Articles 20 and 24 of the Decree of VTsIK and SNK from 04/08/1929 "the lawful right to convoke the all-union congress of the EKhB Church belongs to the congress' initiators, that is, the Orgcommittee" that championed the cause of the congress since August 23, 1961. Because "the CARC has lost the trust of believing citizens," reasoned reformers, "the EKhB believers' petitions concerning the congress were directed immediately to you [Khrushchev]." The government, however, merely forwarded these petitions back to the CARC. Far from considering believers' petitions, the CARC "sent them to its oblast Upolnomochennye along with the instruction to take measures to stop the lawful activity of supporters of the

church' internal movement for the convocation of a congress." The reformers then presented evidence:

We are sending to you a photocopy of CARC's document that shows that the Council considers the EKHB believers' petitioning the Head of the Government...a crime. This document clearly testifies of the unlawful activity of the CARC. The question arises: Is the CARC vested with punitive prerogatives, if it gives directions regarding the physical measures of struggle with the EKHB believers all around the country? ...Taking into consideration the mentioned facts, the Orgcommittee...appeals to you with a request to create a state commission for the investigation of abuses of power by the CARC...as well as its violations of the existing legislation on cults, its direct participation in repressions of ...believers supporting the congress, ...and its unlawful usurpation of power...The Orgcommittee considers all its prior petitions concerning the congress effective, will continue its legal activity, ...and will divest itself of its prerogatives only before the true All-Union Congress of the EKHB Church.<sup>140</sup>

The fact that schismatics intercepted and used as evidence a government document intended only for internal use certainly put the CARC into an awkward position vis-à-vis its superiors in Moscow who realized that once in the hands of schismatics this document could be smuggled out of the country and used as concrete evidence of abuse of believers in the USSR. Responding to this mishap, the head of CARC in Moscow, Puzin, wrote the following to the head of CARC in Ukraine, Litvin:

I am sending to you a copy of the statement by representatives of the 'Orgcommittee,' addressed to N.S. Khrushchev and a photocopy of a letter by comrade Shvaiko [Litvin's assistant] to the Upolnomochennyi for Kharkov oblast, which we received from the Council of Ministers of the USSR. The CARC at the CM of USSR asks you to investigate how this document was obtained by supporters of the 'Orgcommittee.' At the same time, we would like you to bring it to the attention of all Upolnomochennyye that they should exercise more vigilance in keeping documents...<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 413, p. 49-50.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., p. 48.



The dissenters' tenacity in demanding an audience with governmental officials higher than those of the CARC occasionally paid off. This did not mean, however, that the government was prepared to recognize the Orgcommittee. In his 1964 "Informative Note on the Activity of the EKHB Schismatics and Measures for Stopping Their Antisocial Activity in Kiev," the head of the Department of Ideology at the CC of CPU, Shevel, informed the party's Central Committee of the following measure:

Taking into consideration the insistent attempts of Prokofievites to be received by members of government, to entrust it to the assistant to the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Ukrainian SSR, comrade Tron'ko, to receive representatives of schismatics and warn them that the activity of the so-called Orgcommittee is illegal, and that should they continue to violate the Soviet legislation and engage in antisocial activities, they will be prosecuted on criminal charges.<sup>142</sup>

Despite the apparent intransigence of the oblast and republican-level authorities and their refusal to recognize the Orgcommittee and its agenda, the dissenters made it clear that they would not descend quietly into oblivion; that every instance of persecution of their followers would only arm them with new evidence of abuse of believers in the USSR; and that they would not stop until they have exhausted every possible opportunity of legal recourse, domestically and internationally. The local authorities were also made aware that evidence of their persecution of the Orgcommittee's supporters would not be conveniently buried in the annals of Raiispolkom or Obkom officials, but would reach the highest levels of state government. In January of 1964, the Kiev supporters of the Orgcommittee dispatched yet another letter to Khrushchev and Brezhnev, in which they wrote:

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<sup>142</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5908, p. 162.

One more crying act of lawlessness against the EKhB believers of Kiev had been committed on December 1, 1963, when militiamen headed by the chief of militia in the town of Boiarki, Kiev oblast, Kozlov, dispersed a peaceful meeting of believers, beating up women and old men in front of the gathered public. This took place 5 days before our country celebrated the Day of Constitution..., which guarantees to the USSR's citizens the freedom of conscience and religion, and 10 days before the UN festively celebrated the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption of the General Declaration of Human Rights affirming the basic human rights, the dignity and worth of a human person..., the right of human beings to freely confess religion, the freedom of information and of the conduct of peaceful religious meetings (Articles 18 and 19).<sup>143</sup>

In July of 1964, G.P. Vins, now Secretary of the Orgcommittee, informed the highest members of Soviet government, Khrushchev, Mikoyan and Rudenko:

Respected Nikita Sergeevich!

In the course of our petitioning the CC of CPSU about a meeting with you of a delegation of the Orgcommittee..., the sector head of the Department of Ideology at the CC of CPSU, comrade M.A. Morozov told us...on behalf of the CC that the CC condemned the persecution of the EKhB believers, and that it gave instructions to the appropriate organs to stop persecutions and punish persons who committed them. The Chairman of CARC at the CM of USSR, comrade Puzin, confirmed this information during the visit of his office by representatives of the Orgcommittee...However, since persecutions of the EKhB believers in our country continue and the already committed acts of lawless acts towards them are not being corrected, I forward to you a part of petitions received by the Orgcommittee from the EKhB believers and ask you to give instructions to the appropriate organs, concerning the fulfillment of the CC of CPSU's decision to cease the persecution of EKhB believers in the USSR.<sup>144</sup>

Attached to Vins' letter were four believers' petitions asking for the release of their sentenced community members and complaining about mass searches of their apartments by authorities. Unlike most petitions by registered communities, in which the believers usually humbly asked the VSEKhB or the local Upolnomochennyi to intercede on their behalf against the abusive local authorities, Vins' letter puts on the spot the highest

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<sup>143</sup> TsDAVO. F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 435, p. 1-2.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

members of Soviet government, including the Procurator General of the USSR, Rudenko. The petition deprives the government of the excuse of ignorance and holds it accountable for the promises it made.

Providing more evidence of “arbitrariness incompatible with the Soviet Constitution,” the Kiev schismatics argued that “in the course of struggle against religion, the local authorities in our country, supported by falsehoods against believers in the press, permit flagrant excesses, exceed their prerogatives, and do not bear any responsibility for their actions.”<sup>145</sup> The Kiev autonomous EKhB community not only boldly demanded that it was provided “with any of the vacant cult buildings in Kiev;” that the requisitioned “spiritual-ethical instructive literature” was returned to its owners; that discrimination of believers at their places of employment, where they were often bumped back on lists of recipients of available housing, was stopped; and that “employment was provided for their fellow believers...who had been fired for their religious convictions,”<sup>146</sup> but also made sure that the government in Moscow received instant updates on the occurring cases of believers’ harassment. On July 12, 1964, at 10:45 p.m., the Kiev autonomists dispatched the following telegram to Khrushchev, Brezhnev and Rudenko:

The persecution of EKhB believers in Kiev continues. On July 10, this year, a group of voluntary guards...rudely dispersed a peaceful meeting of believers and tried to illegally arrest some of them, which prompted believers to start singing religious songs at the Kiev railway station, since according to the Gospel teaching, we are to rejoice when we are persecuted. On July 12, the river militia of Kiev again tried to illegally arrest some believers, having postponed the

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., p. 25-28.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

disembarking of passengers from the boat [*kater*] PT-218, running it up and down along the river front for an entire hour. This caused an outrage of passengers onboard and the numerous crowd of people recreating on the beach. We ask you once again to form a governmental commission to investigate the persecution of Baptist believers in Kiev. Inform us of the results at this address: Kiev, 3 Spasskaia Street, apt. 6, to V.E. Olenich...<sup>147</sup>

In the same year, the first evidence emerged of the EKhB schismatics' subjection to the most humiliating and dehumanizing form of oppression—confinement and treatment in psychiatric hospitals. Referring to the recent repressions of dissenters by the Kharkov Oblispolkom, whose activists proved to be especially militant towards followers of the Orgcommittee, members of the Provisional Council of Prisoners' Relatives wrote to Khrushchev, Brezhnev and Rudenko:

We have not received any response yet, except for a notification...that our statement has been forwarded to the Kharkov Oblispolkom for appropriate reaction. This surprises us. Does the Kharkov Oblispolkom have so much power as to take necessary measures to restore socialist legality with respect to the EKhB believers throughout the country? ...So, what measures did the Kharkov Oblispolkom take in its own oblast? Not a single person was released. Instead, a case was opened through the investigatory organs against a member of the Council of Prisoners' Relatives, N.P. Yastrebova because she refused to answer questions concerning the church's internal structure. She, a perfectly healthy woman, has been forcibly placed into the 36<sup>th</sup> Psychiatric City Hospital, where the medical workers continued to interrogate her, which was a gross violation of the Criminal Procedural Code.

Presently, N.P. Yastrebova is released from the hospital, but without any document showing on what grounds did she spend time from 06/01/1964 to 06/30/1964 among mental patients. We most insistently ask you to give us an answer: are these the measures you instructed the Kharkov Oblispolkom to take? Repressions against the EKhB believers who disagree with the VSEKhB are continuing everywhere...<sup>148</sup>

Analyzing this new form of handling religious dissenters, Dimitry Pospelovsky wrote:

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p. 31-32.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

Psychiatric abuse in relation to religious believers, especially to those born and fully educated under the Soviet regime, is easily rationalized in terms of the Marxist doctrine of materialistic and environmental determinism...According to this doctrine, any person whose ideas and behavior deviate from the norms and values of the society in which he or she has been brought up suffers from a psychotic schizoid unadaptability to society. Obviously, this theory could most conveniently be applied to a Soviet young person, particularly with a higher education, who became a religious believer at a mature age, especially if he or she came from an atheist family...Such ‘diagnoses’...are particularly useful in dealing with such religious eccentrics as monks and nuns or those rare people with full higher education among the sectarian preachers...Even more inconvenient to the regime are young Christian intellectuals...and those well educated young priests who attract young Soviet intellectuals searching for religion.<sup>149</sup>

Although placing believers in psychiatric hospitals was undoubtedly a highly illegal form of Soviet social engineering, a “Note on the Revival of Sectarian Activity of Supporters of the So-Called ‘Orgcommittee’ Current on the Territory of Kharkov Oblast,” submitted by the Council’s Upolnomochennyi for Kharkov oblast, P. Slavnov, reveals that the Kharkov schismatics did not merely congregate quietly in their own communities, but actively disseminated their views in registered EKhB communities. Slavnov’s note also shows that the crack down on dissenters in Kharkov oblast was carried out by the authorities in close cooperation with the local VSEKhB leadership that provided the CARC with vital information on the activity of schismatics:

At receptions and during conversations, servants of the cult, such as the Senior Presbyter Aktyrov, presbyter of the EKhB community in Kharkov, Lunin, and at the station Osnova—Nemykin, as well as member of the EKhB community in the town of Yuzhnyi, Brezhnev, told us that recently supporters of the ‘Orgcommittee’ current increasingly revived their activity...On March 11, in the evening, schismatic Demina from Zmiev brought a whole basket of brochures, letters and ‘Brother’s Lists’ for distribution among members of the EKhB community in Kharkov. Members of this community’s executive organ,

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<sup>149</sup> D. Pospelovsky, *Soviet Antireligious Campaigns and Persecutions*, p. 178-179.

Medvedev and others, caught Demina and delivered her to the community's office room. Lunin, Medvedev and Kots demanded that Demina showed what was in the basket. Demina categorically refused to do so.

The specified persons, in the presence of Senior Presbyter Aktyrov, used some physical force, took the basket away, and got hold of the brochures. When they were getting these scribblings out of the basket, Demina cried out with tears in her eyes that even militiamen had no right to do that: 'You resemble policemen!' and so forth. Many choir singers were present at this [confiscation], and some of them said: 'Do not touch her!', 'Let this person do her job.' Handing over these brochures and letters [to the Upolnomochennyi], Lunin stated: 'As servant of the cult, I did not have the right to behave in this way—to take away literature, using force, to search the basket—but I knew that there was slander against the Soviet authority and our spiritual center in it. I could not stand it and took it away.' Telling how it all happened and expressing his opinion about this occurrence, Lunin wandered: 'How long will the Soviet authority put up with the activity of these unbridled [*raznuzdavshikhsia*] people? If 3 months ago they [schismatics] were still only talking, recently they have convinced everyone that they have the right to print and distribute literature; that they can gather and hold prayer meetings wherever they want; that they negotiate only with leaders of the party and government; and that workers of the Council [CARC] and local organs are not an authority for them.' Aktyrov tells that a group of schismatics in the town of Lozovaia organized and offer music classes for children. The teachers come from Kharkov. These classes are held at Sergei Poleshchiuk's apartment. Aktyrov told that while he conducted negotiations concerning unification with schismatics in Chuguev, at the end of February, 1965, Yurii Maksimchiuk declared in a conversation: 'Until you take back your sinful VSEKhB and CARC documents, there can be no talk of unity.' At the same time, he asked: 'Tell honestly, did you come here of your own accord, or the CARC sent you?'<sup>150</sup>

Slavnov's note is a telling evidence that schismatics were not content with disseminating their views in their own communities and systematically tried to involve registered communities in the ongoing debate about the state of the EKHB brotherhood. The document also suggests that some younger members of registered communities ("choir singers") did not share their leadership's antagonism towards dissenters. While the reaction of Aktyrov and Lunin is understandable—as presbyters, they tried to protect their respective domains from internal quarrels and divisions—it was in no way a demand

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<sup>150</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 454, p. 134-135.

of their Christian conscience to provide the CARC and, vicariously, the KGB, militia and other investigative and law enforcement agencies with vital information disclosing schismatics' names, whereabouts, activities, confiscated publications and, furthermore, interpreting these publications as "slanders against the Soviet authority," thus deliberately encouraging the state to prosecute dissenters. The CARC certainly appreciated such "honesty," kept presbyters like Aktyrov and Lunin on the list of loyal servants of the cult and, over the years, developed close and productive relationships with them. At the same time, however, the Soviet state used such good relationships with "loyal clergy" to undermine schismatics' claims that freedom of conscience and believers' rights were systematically violated in the Soviet Union. In fact, the existence of seemingly content registered communities in the USSR helped the state to cover up its persecution of religious non-conformists.

Slavnov's note also indicated that schismatics had a lot of faith in negotiating with the highest members of Soviet government directly, bypassing the CARC and republic-level institutions. In fact, reformers diligently informed their supporters of the ongoing negotiations with Moscow to arrange a meeting between representatives of the Orgcommittee and members of Soviet government. Most likely, Demina had in her basket a copy of "Brotherly List" Number 8 for August 1965, in which the Orgcommittee members wrote that they submitted a petition to the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, "signed by 87 people from Siberia, Central Russia, the Urals, Estonia, Belorussia, Moldavia, Ukraine, North Caucasus, Transcaucasia" and requesting an

audience with members of government. It certainly seemed that schismatics had finally succeeded in bringing the Soviet government to a negotiations table:

On August 19, the Procurator-General of USSR, comrade R.A. Rudenko, arrived at the reception room of the Presidium where 105 of us were waiting. He spoke with us for half an hour. However, he did not have sufficient powers to resolve questions listed in our statement. That is why, we applied in an additional statement for the reception of our representatives by the Chairman of the Presidium of Supreme Soviet of USSR, comrade A.I. Mikoyan. On August 20, the assistant to the head of the reception room of the Presidium..., comrade A.N. Kolenkin, informed us that our statement and our oral petitions were delivered to A.I. Mikoyan, who agreed to receive 5 representatives of our delegation on Friday, September 24, 1965...<sup>151</sup>

The scheduled meeting with Mikoyan did take place and reformers had a chance to present their concerns, “although receiving no promises.”<sup>152</sup> Despite such modest results, reformers viewed their meeting with Mikoyan as a major breakthrough—a precedent that could be exploited in the future. The sense that they had made themselves visible at the very heart of the Soviet regime at the time when the new Brezhnev government emitted promises of redressing at least some abuses of the Khrushchev era certainly emboldened the EKHB dissenters. In 1965, reporting on the “activity of Baptists-schismatics” in his domain, the Upolnomochennyi of CARC for Kiev oblast, A. Sharandak, wrote:

The Kiev schismatics conduct unbridled propaganda of religion on buses, local trains and at railway stations. The activities of sectarian so-called artistic/performing choirs and string orchestras acquire more and more of a hooligan character, which evokes a rightful outrage of the public and its discontent with the organs of authority [their passivity, it appears]. The leaders of Kiev schismatics as well as the Orgcommittee incorrectly inform believers about the content of conversation that took place in Mikoyan’s office...

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>152</sup> Sawatsky, p. 146.



Referring to their recent audience with A.I. Mikoyan, schismatics pointed out (at their Kiev oblast counseling meeting) the necessity of patient waiting for a written reply from the head of government. 'The work should not stop, regardless of what the answer might be.' The Orgcommitte's entire demeanor challenges the organs of authority... On October 10, 1965, they arranged full-immersion baptism of their followers in the Dnepr, near the Lower Gardens, at a populous place of workers' recreation. Traveling to their meeting place and back by river motor boats, they sang religious hymns in the presence of large number of passengers...<sup>153</sup>

Meeting with Mikoyan was the last of reformers' actions under the name of the Orgcommittee. In September of 1965, as they waited in Moscow for their scheduled meeting with Mikoyan, they held a secret council at which the Orgcommittee had been reorganized into the Council of Churches of the EKhB (CCEKhB henceforth).

The Orgcommittee's accomplishments are difficult to assess. It certainly proved to be a formidable organizing force in a state that made every effort to undermine the formation of unsanctioned independent associations of citizens. The reformers' ceaseless protest statements and increasingly sophisticated legal arguments laid the foundation for gradual recognition and registration of dissenting EKhB communities as autonomous. G.P. Vins' Kiev autonomous community championed this cause. Addressing the Chairman of Constitutional Commission, L.I. Brezhnev, and the Presidium of Supreme Soviet of USSR, this community wrote:

The now active Article 124 of the Constitution of USSR and the Decree of VTsIK and SNK from 04/08/1929 are unable to provide the real freedom of conscience for believing citizens of USSR, since while these legal documents existed, believers in our country have been subjected, for over 3 decades now, to systematic and centralized persecution and repressions...For the 4<sup>th</sup> year now our community consisting of several hundred people does not have a prayer house for holding its prayer services. We are forced to hold our meetings outdoors in the vicinity of Kiev during summer time and huddle in private huts and communal

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<sup>153</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 454, p. 130-131.

apartments...during winter. The registering organs for the 4<sup>th</sup> year refuse to give our community the lawful registration in violation of the existing legislation and try to interfere in the internal life of our church, attempting to forcibly subject our community to the religious center of the VSEKhB. In the course of 3 years, the workers of KGB, militia and voluntary guards many times tried to disperse our meetings, threatened us with courts and fines. And they not only threatened us but practiced group searches, raids, fines, and comrades' trials. We were beaten, hosed down from fire trucks, threatened with firearms and German shepherd dogs. They tried to run us over with cars. Our fellow-believer Zadorozhnyi was severely beaten by voluntary guards and thrown on railroad tracks before the passing train...We are constantly provoked to disobey civil authorities...Our draftees to the army are pronounced mentally sick and placed into psychiatric hospitals...Such is the underside of the so-called 'ideological struggle' with religion that is being carried out in our country...<sup>154</sup>

The Kiev schismatic community demanded "to restore the significance and former objective interpretation of Lenin's Decree 'On the Separation of State from the Church' ...and the repeal of the 1929 Decree of VTsIK and SNK...as contradicting to the main legislation on religion—Lenin's Decree." Schismatics further demanded the cancellation of "all public and secret instructions by which a systematic persecution and repression of believers in our country have been carried out" and the replacement of Article 124 of the present Constitution" with an article "that would provide absolutely clear formulation of the freedom of conscience and include...the right of believing citizens to religious propaganda, that is, dissemination of their convictions," and "full separation of church from state, without which there can be no talk of true freedom of conscience."<sup>155</sup>

The Kiev autonomists thus demand the legal recognition by the state of independent EKhB communities and introduction into the Soviet Constitution of an

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid., p. 117-119.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

article that would clearly and unambiguously define believers' rights and restore the original Leninist reading of the principle of separation of state and church. The dissenters viewed these two premises as interdependent. No true freedom of conscience could exist in the USSR as long as the Soviet Constitution had loopholes allowing for the parallel existence of extralegal governmental instructions undermining liberties granted in the Constitution. In the last months of their function as the Orgcommittee, the reformers submitted a much more detailed critique of Soviet legislation on religion to a number of state institutions involved in the preparation of a new Brezhnev Constitution. The reformers reminded to the Constitutional Commission that Article 13 of the first Soviet Constitution, adopted on July 10, 1918, stated that "in order to provide real freedom of conscience for the workers..., the freedom of religious and antireligious propaganda is granted to all citizens." Elaborating on the meaning of this historical article, they wrote:

It seemed that this article, encapsulating the true freedom of conscience and democracy, would remain impregnable. If it had to change over time, then only in the direction of the increase, not limitation of freedom of conscience, because to change this article in the direction of infringement on citizens' rights would mean to betray one's own statements and promises; it would mean a change of program; and, ultimately, it would mean to deceive people...And yet, this is precisely what happened!<sup>156</sup>

The 1929 Decree of VTsIK and SNK, reasoned schismatics, essentially hollowed out the 1918 legislation on religion by introducing paragraphs and clauses that provided opportunity for the state to meddle in the internal affairs of the church:

Paragraph 7...gave right to the registering organs to arbitrarily deny registration to religious organizations, while according to Paragraph 4 a religious

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<sup>156</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 456, p. 89-90.

organization could not function without the registration. According to Paragraph 12..., the counseling meetings of communities and groups of believers could not take place without the permission of appropriate organs of authority. Paragraph 14 gives the registering organs the right to remove members of executive organs [of communities] without any explanation, which amounts to the right of registering organs to use their own discretion in staffing executive organs [of communities]. All of this contradicts the principle of separation of state and church...<sup>157</sup>

The Soviet Constitution also had to be altered in order to become compatible with this new legislation on religious cults. Believers no longer had the right to freely compete with atheists in propagating their respective beliefs. While atheists could freely engage in “antireligious propaganda,” believers had to contend with mere “freedom of religious confession.” More changes followed, further limiting the more broadly defined “freedom of religious confession” to a narrowly circumscribed “freedom of performing religious rituals.” “The present Article 124,” claimed schismatics, “does not correspond with either [Lenin’s] Decree, or the elementary right, or the first Constitution, or previous promises and program of the party.” Moreover, it was not compatible with Articles 18 and 19 of the General Declaration of Human Rights, “adopted by the UN on 12/10/ 1948 and signed by states around the world, including our state.” Reformers, therefore, asked for the “restoration of significance and objective interpretation of the Decree ‘On Separation of State and Church,’” the repeal of the 1929 Decree of VTsIK and SNK “as contradicting to the spirit and letter of fundamental laws,” and the “annulment of all instructions and regulations incompatible with [Lenin’s] Decree.” Ultimately, the Orgcommittee asked the Constitutional Commission “to formulate the article on freedom

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid., p. 90-91.

of conscience with utmost clarity and definition...so that the article would contain the guarantee of real freedom of conscience, including freedom of religious propaganda...”

“The new Constitution,” they exhorted, “must show whether the government of our country will follow the path of freedom, equality and fraternity with respect to believers and the church, or continue on the previous path of arbitrariness and violence...”<sup>158</sup>

When the majority of Soviet population responded to the government’s formal call to participate in the working out of the new Constitution by passively approving proposals of Soviet jurists, the Orgcommittee’s critical and informed reaction reminded the government of the existence in the country of a small but conscientious civil society that would no longer accept the state dictums sheepishly and unreflectively. The reformers pointed out that the recognition of the VSEKhB as a prerequisite for the registration of a religious community was unconstitutional. By the mid 1960s, the CARC at least began pondering the option of registering the EKhB schismatic communities as autonomous. In his 1965 report to Puzin, the Council’s Upolnomochennyi for Donetsk oblast, M. Bal’chenko remarked: “All supporters of the ‘Orgcommittee’ categorically reject the VSEKhB. However, certain groups (Khartsyzsk) agree to registration, but without subordination to the VSEKhB, which in effect means the recognition of the ‘Orgcommittee.’”<sup>159</sup> The VSEKhB (apparently with the CARC’s consensus) also considered the possibility of allowing schismatics to gather in registered EKhB prayer houses at times when the latter were not in use by registered communities. Ideally, this

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid., p. 92-94.

<sup>159</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 450, p. 11.

compromise solution would have brought schismatics out of the woods and private apartments and into formal cult buildings, thus sparing them some persecution by the authorities. However, the VSEKhB's expanded Presidium that convoked in July of 1964 found this solution objectionable on the following grounds (excerpts):

--providing the *initsiativniki* with official papers and extending to them the opportunity to conduct their activity in registered prayer houses and in the spirit of their present hostility towards the VSEKhB and in accordance with their accepted methods, which are not allowed in registered communities, would strengthen them even more in their schism and opposition to the VSEKhB.

--it would give them an excuse to impose other conditions...

--it would give them an opportunity to exercise negative influence on members of registered communities and recruit them into the fold of supporters of the Orgcommittee.

--it would imbue members of registered communities with a sense that by using methods of the *initsiativniki* they could also get more and more concessions from authorities.

--it would confirm the assumption made and disseminated by the *initsiativniki* that the VSEKhB, subservient to authorities, deliberately turned down broader opportunities for its activity in the union and in the church.

--it would give them an excuse to assert even more vigorously the the VSEKhB workers were justly excommunicated by the Orgcommittee and, consequently, are not suitable for further leadership of the EKHB union and must hand over leadership to the Orgcommittee.<sup>160</sup>

The last three objections demonstrate that the option that would have provided schismatics with at least a semi-legal status was dismissed by the VSEKhB precisely for its fear of admission that a minority group headed by determined leadership could be quite effective in extracting concessions from the government.

Although the Orgcommittee failed to achieve its central objective—the convocation of the all-union congress under its leadership—its bold activity prompted the government to alter the 15 year old status quo and permit the 1963 Congress that, despite

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<sup>160</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 454, p. 23.

its questionable legitimacy, proved to be a welcome change in the life of registered EKhb brotherhood. The revised VSEKhb Statute, produced by this congress, was also the reformers' brain child. Crediting schismatics for the accomplishments of the 1963 Congress, Michael Bourdeaux asserted that they "certainly would not have happened had the All-Union Council [VSEKhb] been left to its own devices."<sup>161</sup> Ultimately, the Orgcommittee's self-sacrificial service "syphoned off the wrath of the State directly against themselves"<sup>162</sup> and forced the government to adopt a more cautious approach to registered churches, even if only to avoid the further spread of religious dissent and negative publicity domestically and abroad. Both the Orgcommittee and the Council of Prisoners' Relatives worked tirelessly for the release of the EKhb prisoners and made the reform movement quite noticeable at the highest levels of Soviet authority. The reformers certainly made their contribution to the passage of 1965 decree "On Some Facts of Violation of Socialist Legality with Respect to Believers." It ushered a period of brief but welcome respite. Commenting on this important landmark, G.P. Vins wrote: "In the second half of 1964 began the rehabilitation and release of Evangelical Christian-Baptist prisoners. At the beginning of 1965 almost all of them had been released...The Lord had answered his people's prayers."<sup>163</sup> Although the Orgcommittee channeled and amplified the voices of beleaguered unregistered communities and provided an attractive agenda for the action-seeking young Protestants, its activity finalized the schism between

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<sup>161</sup> Michael Bourdeaux, *Faith on Trial in Russia* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1971), p. 169.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169-170.

<sup>163</sup> G.P. Vins, *Three Generations of Suffering*, p. 193.

the VSEKhB-led portion of the EKhB brotherhood and dissenting communities. The longer the schism lasted, the less likely was its overcoming.

### 3. The “CCEKhB” Stage, 1965-1969

The transformation of the Orgcommittee into the Council of Churches of the EKhB marked a new stage in the reform movement’s evolution. The fact that this reorganization took place in September of 1965, when a sizable group of the Orgcommittee supporters lingered in Moscow in an expectation of a scheduled meeting with Anastas Mikoyan, suggests that the reformers shared high hopes that this meeting would likely lead to the recognition of their movement. Anticipating such outcome, they decided to form a more permanent leadership to replace the provisional Organizational Committee whose main purpose was to prepare the convocation of the all-union congress. However, the reformers-led congress of representatives of parish communities that alone could elect legitimate new leadership for the EKhB brotherhood did not yet materialize. The creation by a rather non-representative group of reformers and their supporters of the CCEKhB—a new clerical structure that challenged the VSEKhB’s claim “to leadership of all the EKhB churches” in the country—appeared as a rash decision dictated more by the tactical contingencies of the moment rather than concerns of legitimacy. The congress would still have to “settle the matter” at some point in the future.<sup>164</sup> While drawing the attention of the highest members of government to the plight of schismatic and unregistered churches was a great accomplishment, the

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<sup>164</sup> Sawatsky, p. 146.



reformers' brief meetings with Rudenko and Mikoyan produced no definitive breakthroughs for the Orgcommittee's agenda. The newly created CCEKhB was no better off in terms of its legal status than the previously existing Orgcommittee. Its emergence only evidenced the breakup of the EKhB brotherhood into two independent branches of Evangelicals-Baptists. After the CCEKhB's formation in 1965, Sawatsky has argued, the reformers no longer focused on the VSEKhB, but rather on the state. In its proselytizing activity the Council of Churches "now turned more to the unregistered communities, both unions competing during the next decade for the support of these congregations which had been untouched by the split."<sup>165</sup> Sawatsky's assertion, however, may be misleading, since both the Initiative Group and the Orgcommittee claimed these unregistered communities as their constituency throughout the early 1960s. At best, the CCEKhB merely broadened its outreach, claiming all unregistered communities as its nominal followers. In reality, especially after the 1963 Congress, these communities had a choice and could be swayed either by reformers or the VSEKhB.

The formation of CCEKhB was closely followed by the reorganization of government agencies in charge of religious affairs. On December 8, 1965, the Decree N 1043 of the Council of Ministers of USSR merged the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church (CAROC) and Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults (CARC), responsible for all other faiths, into one state organ—the Council for the Affairs of Religions (CAR), with the former head of CAROC, Vladimir A. Kuroedov becoming the chairman of this new joint entity. On January 25, 1966, a similar merger was carried

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<sup>165</sup> Sawatsky, p. 192-193.

out in Ukraine, placing the former head of the Ukrainian CARC, Litvin at the helm of the joint apparatus of the Upolnomochennyi of CAR at the CM of the Ukrainian SSR.<sup>166</sup> The “tough-minded” Kuroedov presided over the new council that “received a constitution which represented increased centralized power and increased discretionary power in the interpretation of the law.”<sup>167</sup> Although not a friend of liberalization, Kuroedov opposed thoughtless administrative bullying and was a gradualist who believed in co-optation of religious leaderships as the best way of combating religion. In 1966, at a meeting of all Upolnomochennye of the Council in Moscow, Kuroedov expressed this idea while addressing the issue of the EKhB schism:

It needs to be said that one of the main reasons for the schismatics’ defeat among the EKhB believers was our work of involving believers and clergy themselves in the struggle against the antisocial activity of the schismatics. Thus, for example, the EKhB spiritual center held meetings of communities’ presbyters in every oblast, at which reports and speeches were delivered, exposing violations of legislation on cults. Believers who formerly supported schismatics spoke at these meetings...<sup>168</sup>

Contrary to Kuroedov’s hopeful assumptions, the reformers were far from being defeated. However, the reality also spoke against the schismatics’ own hopeful expectations in the late 1965. Early 1966 marked the emergence of “a policy of resumed administrative pressure on dissidents and of intensive *vospitanie*” accompanied by “several changes in the criminal code which were approved on March 18, 1966.”<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 185, p. 57.

<sup>167</sup> Sawatsky, p. 146.

<sup>168</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 3, p. 25-26.

<sup>169</sup> Sawatsky, p. 146-147.

These changes appeared as a careful preparation for the mass framing of the unsuspecting EKHB dissenters. First of all, the Supreme Soviet gave the following official interpretation of what constituted a violation of legislation on cults:

- Refusal by religious leaders of communities to register them with state organs.
- Violating the legally-established rules for organizing and conducting religious gatherings, processions and other cult ceremonies.
- The organizing and conducting, by servants of the cult and members of religious communities, of special children and youth meetings, and also of workers,' literary and similar circles and groups, not related to cultic activities.<sup>170</sup>

Secondly, Article 142 (138 in Ukraine) of the Criminal Code, targeting violations of laws on separation of the church from the state and the school from the church, was expanded and violations were interpreted as:

- Requiring compulsory collections and taxes for the use of religious organizations and cult servants.
- The preparing for the purpose of mass distribution plus the actual mass distribution of statements, letters, leaflets and similar documents, which call on people not to observe the legislation on religious cults.
- Carrying out of deceitful acts with the purpose of awakening religious superstition in the population.
- Organizing and carrying out religious meetings, processions and other cult ceremonies which violate social order.
- Organizing and systematically conducting activities for teaching religion to under-age children in violation of established legislative rules.<sup>171</sup>

Thirdly, the state continued to apply to schismatics Article 209 (214 in Ukraine), targeting people leading a parasitic lifestyle, Article 227 (209 in Ukraine), punishing infringement on the person and rights of citizens under the guise of carrying out religious rituals, and Article 190/1 (187/1 in Ukraine)—the dissemination of apparently false

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid., p. 147.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

figments defaming the Soviet state and social orders. Besides, the state continued to condone occasional confinement and treatment of dissenters in psychiatric hospitals. Already in 1962, the Senior Inspector of the Department of Service at the Ministry of Defense of Public Order of Ukrainian SSR, Major A. Izarov, reported: “Among the settlers [in special colonies of deportees], 9 people...are former convicts, and 4 people from the sect of Baptists who refuse to work. For example, Matvienko and her brother Vasiliï have not worked a single day since March...”<sup>172</sup> Officials from Ivano-Frankovsk oblast complained in 1963:

Social organizations, village soviets...and administrative organs work half-heartedly to expose leaders of illegal religious sects and do not apply to them the Decree [on parasites]... Thus, citizen Lesniukova..., resident of village Kutuy, Verkhovinskii region, entered the sect of Baptists upon her graduation from the secondary school. She did not work anywhere and lived on the pension of her father—a pensioner. The village soviet warned her already in May of 1962...Lesniukova ignored the warning and continues to visit the illegal sect. The village soviet, however, to this day does not take measures to discipline her...<sup>173</sup>

Lesniukova’s case was rather an exception, for the same officials reported: “In places of resettlement, there are persons who are leaders and members of illegal religious sects. Their influence corrupts deportees. Taking this circumstance into consideration, it would be expedient to create a separate place of resettlement in the republic for such persons...”<sup>174</sup> In 1964, the head of the Department of Ideology at the CC of CPU, Shevel informed the Central Committee’s Secretary, Shelest of the following developments:

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<sup>172</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5787, p. 7.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

The CC of CPU received a note from the head of KGB at the CM of Ukrainian SSR, comrade Nikitchenko, about a meeting of participants of illegal Baptist groupings, which took place during the night on May 16 and 17 of 1964 in village Borovo, Vasil'kovskii region, Kiev oblast. At this meeting, the head of the so-called 'Orgcommittee,' Kriuchkov, and its secretary, Vins, agitated their supporters towards new antisocial acts and blatant violations of Soviet legislation on cults...It should be noted, that despite our repeated warnings concerning the illegal activity of the leadership of this sectarian underground, the latter mostly ignore them and, in a number of cases, chose the path of provocation and resist representatives of the local organs of authority. In order to paralyze and disrupt the antisocial activity of illegal Baptist groupings, the Department of Ideology...finds it necessary [among other things]...to allow courts and organs of Procuracy to bring criminal charges against leaders of illegal groups of Baptists-Schismatics, who lead a parasitic lifestyle and engage in prohibited activity.<sup>175</sup>

Later in 1964, the heads of Departments of Party Organs, Administrative Organs, and Ideology reported to the CC of CPU that "Vins, who graduated from the Kiev Polytechnical Institute and worked as an engineer at the Project Institute..., created the so-called 'All-Ukrainian Council' for the coordination of illegal Baptist groups on the territory of Ukraine." The department heads suggested that "on the basis of acting legislation, administrative organs should bring criminal charges against those of schismatics' leaders who lead a parasitic lifestyle and engage in antisocial activity."<sup>176</sup> More evidence of the prosecution of believers under the Parasite Law appeared in the 1965 "Informative Note on the Inexpediency of Settling Persons who Lead Antisocial and Parasitic Lifestyle in Specially Designated Locations," written by the Minister of Defense of Public Order, I. Golovenko. According to Golovenko, "1,621 people belonging to this category have been deported since the introduction of the Decree of

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<sup>175</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5908, p. 105-107.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., p. 126-129.

June 12, 1961.” In addition, he stated, “421 women practicing prostitution have been deported and 136 sectarians.”<sup>177</sup>

The Soviet officials naturally did not mention that the EKhB dissenters were being literally framed to be prosecuted as parasites, since local authorities and employers made it exceptionally difficult for the CCEKhB supporters to keep a job. Dissenters were routinely fired from their old jobs and often denied new employment elsewhere. Just several months of such artificially induced unemployment were sufficient for the state to bring charges against schismatics as persons leading a parasitic lifestyle. Moreover, the CCEKhB leaders such as Kriuchkov and Vins could not easily find a job with a flexible enough schedule that would allow them to tend to spiritual and organizational needs of communities. Unlike the VSEKhB Senior Presbyters, they were not exempt from maintaining a day job so that they could fully concentrate on their responsibilities as spiritual leaders, while the government, predictably, did not recognize their work in the dissent movement as a time consuming and lawful employment. The government thus intentionally produced delinquents, and then prosecuted them. A prominent member of the Kiev schismatic community, a graduate of the Kiev Polytechnic Institute and an accomplished engineer-chemist, N.K. Velichko, reminisced in an interview: “I was fired from work several times. I could not work at one place for more than one year. The administration would find out who I was and take measures. Between 1961 and 1966, I lost 5 or 6 jobs.”<sup>178</sup> On one occasion, when employers chose not to fire Velichko outright,

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<sup>177</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 6020, p. 355.

<sup>178</sup> Interview with N.K. Velichko, 2008.

they subjected him to the so-called Comrades' Trial and demoted him. However, contrary to its organizers' expectations, the trial did more to elevate Velichko in the eyes of his co-workers than to defame him:

After being fired many times before, I found an employment as a master of a finishing shop at the motorcycle plant. At that time, I was also one of the church leaders...One time I came to work as usual, and it escaped my attention that everywhere inside the plant there were announcements posted that a Comrades' Trial of a plant's employee, sectarian Velichko, would be held at the plant's club at a certain time. When I reached my work station, the senior master told me: 'Do not put on your work clothes, Nikolai. Did you see the announcement? We must go to the club right away.' Since it was the time of a shift change..., there were hundreds of people at the club...I did not have experience interacting with such multitude of people prior to this event. At first, I felt lonely and disoriented. I had no friends, and all eyes were turned on me. The chairman of the Comrades' Trial took the floor first and reported that the plant's working collective contained a member of a pernicious anti-Soviet sect actively recruiting children and youth. A representative of the 'Knowledge' society, an expert on the 'Initiative Group,' spoke next and characterized the known statements made by our group as antisocial, anti-Soviet, and undesirable for our society...<sup>179</sup>

When Velichko was finally given an opportunity to respond, he informed the audience about his background as a believer and stated that he and his fellow-members in the church "did not violate social order and simply wished to pray God." He admitted that he was raising his children as Christians because he thought it was beneficial for them. People in the audience were then allowed to ask him questions, and that was "the most interesting part of the trial" for Velichko. He did not sense hostility on the part of his fellow-workers but rather a change of mood in the audience in his favor. Nevertheless, the trial ended with a resolution to "condemn Velichko's antisocial activity...and remove him from the position that presupposed instructing people." "Since I was a master,"

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

commented Velichko, “I had several dozen people in my charge. So they decided to transfer me to a job that did not require socialization with other people.” Ultimately, the trial had two consequences for Velichko:

First of all, I became popular at the motorcycle plant. Each time I walked anywhere on the plant’s territory, ordinary workers and superiors stopped me and asked me questions...In short, the effect of that trial proved to be directly opposite to what was expected...Secondly, my job as a master was not that attractive and required working with pretty rough people, former prisoners, for instance. I got transferred and became a technologist and, later, a designer at the same plant. These jobs suited me better from a moral point of view.<sup>180</sup>

Despite Velichko’s focus on the bright side, the everyday life of the CCEKhB supporters was far from normal.

The newly formed CCEKhB was put to the test within months of its establishment. Frustrated by the government’s procrastination to respond to their grievances presented to Mikoyan in September of 1965 and the persistence of administrative abuses, which indicated, especially in the light of the publicized trials of Sinyavsky and Daniel in 1965, that far from moving towards greater liberalization, the new Brezhnev administration opted for a maintenance of the status quo, the reformers employed a new and yet untested form of spontaneous social protest. On May 16, 1966, without direct involvement of the CCEKhB leadership, “over 400 persons representing 130 congregations converged on the Kremlin in Moscow and conducted an unprecedented demonstration.”<sup>181</sup> The goal of this demonstration was to secure an audience with the General Secretary of CPSU, comrade L.I. Brezhnev, during which the

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Sawatsky, p. 148.



reformers' representatives could ask the head of state to permit the convocation of a congress under the leadership of its initiators—the CCEKhB, and also speak in defense of the rights of believing citizens in the USSR and demand amnesty for the EKhB prisoners and the cessation of persecution of believers.<sup>182</sup> According to the account compiled by the actual demonstrators in the aftermath of this even, the CCEKhB supporters congregated around the CC of CPSU building near the Kremlin. On the first day, demonstrators were refused entrance into the building. On the second day, the dissenters succeeded in delivering their requests to the Central Committee's reception room via 7 of their representatives, while the rest of demonstrators “calmly stood near the building.” Their calm waiting, however, was soon rudely interrupted:

First, we were threatened [verbally], and soon afterwards the military cadets jumped at us. We stood firm and began to sing the hymn ‘For the Evangelical Faith.’ The abuses ceased after that and the cadets retreated. Some time later, 28 buses had been brought and a savage reprisal against believers ensued. We again unanimously began to sing the hymn ‘The Best Days of Our Life.’ Our singing had drowned in the yells of militia and under the blows we were receiving from both militia and the KGB workers. Before our eyes was a vivid medieval scene of an ignorant, savage and furious mob, tearing apart its victim. However, in this case it was done not by a mob, but by enforcers of law and order. People were trampled under foot, thrown down on the pavement; their heads were bashed against the wall, and they were pulled into buses by their hair. One brother, an invalid of the Patriotic War with two prosthetic legs, was thrown to the ground and kicked. Our brothers, whom we elected to conduct negotiations with the government, were especially savagely beaten right by the Central Committee building. The location of some of them is still unknown to us... This suppression lasted 7-10 minutes. You, brothers and sisters, can imagine what sort of loading onto buses it was, if it was all over in just several minutes. We did not even suspect that a physical reprisal was prepared for us...<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 72, p. 116.

<sup>183</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 19, p. 78.

The reformers indeed did not suspect that the promising negotiations of 1965 could so soon turn into bitter disappointment for them and a new wave of arrests. The “Brotherly Leaflet” issue N 6 for June 1966 provides a follow-up to the fate of participants of the May 16 demonstration and leaders of the Council of Churches picked up by authorities in various locations throughout the country:

The Chairman of CCEKhB, brother G.K. Kriuchkov, was arrested on May 30, 1966, at the apartment of believers in Moscow. The [CCEKhB] Secretary, brother G.P. Vins, and the good news messenger [*blagovestnik*], M.I. Khorev, were sent by the Council of Churches on May 19 to find out about the fate of the delegation to the CC of CPSU. They did not return from this mission. Members of the Council, brothers N.G. Baturin and P.A. Yakimenkov, were participants of the delegation...and were arrested together with all other brothers by the CC of CPSU building. The old brother S.T. Golev was taken from his bed in his house in Riazan, where he lay ill. The old brother A.S. Goncharov was abducted when he was en route to the family of P.F. Zakharov, and for 3 days the believers of village Prokop’evskaia could not find him. Only later they found out that he was in custody.<sup>184</sup>

In Sawatsky’s estimate, “the year 1966 remains to the present day [1981] the peak period with 128 arrests, which also brought the total prisoner list to a high of 202.” The number of prisoners, he stipulated, “continued to clime with additional arrests in 1967 and 1968, to a high of 240. After many of those arrested in 1966 completed their three years, the total number of prisoners remained steady at around 180 till 1975.”<sup>185</sup> According to the Council of Prisoners’ Relatives’ list, however, only 76 EKhB believers were arrested in 1966. Combined with 10 other prisoners who were serving their terms since 1963 and 1965, the number of dissenters locked up in prisons in 1966 was 86 (31 of these 86 were from Ukraine). In addition, 27 believers (including 4 from Ukraine) were undergoing

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid., p. 17-18.

<sup>185</sup> Sawatsky, p. 148.

investigation in 1966. Moreover, there were 19 more prisoners, but the Council did not have full data on them available. The Council thus estimated that a total of 132 believers were either in or on the way to prison in 1966. They left behind 373 dependents and 300 orphans. Sentences ranged from 1 to 5 years of regular or high security imprisonment, with majority of prisoners serving 3 years of regular security imprisonment.<sup>186</sup> Of the approximately 400 dissenters arrested near the Central Committee building in Moscow on May 17, 1966, many spent 10-15 days in jail, others were fined, and 30 were sentenced to 2 or 3 years of deprivation of freedom.<sup>187</sup> N.K. Velichko also did not escape arrest in the aftermath of the 1966 demonstration and spent 3 years in labor camps. Altogether, between 1961 and 1988, 30 members of his Kiev schismatic community served different terms of imprisonment.<sup>188</sup>

A bad year for schismatics, 1966 proved to be a good year for the VSEKhB—a year in which a new and, as some observers claimed, “most democratic” congress of the official EKhB Church took place in Moscow. Since contrary to the VSEKhB’s expectations the 1963 revised Statute did not remove reasons for the split and the Orgcommittee influence continued to grow, the Moscow leaders hoped that making additional concessions at the 1966 Congress would persuade many break-away communities to return into the VSEKhB’s fold. Although, as Sawatsky commented, “even before the regional conferences met to discuss the congress agenda and to elect the

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<sup>186</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 72, p. 18-24.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>188</sup> Interview with N.K. Velichko, 2008.

delegates, secret police agents knocked on the doors of influential believers and discussed the candidacy of delegates with them,” strongly urging “to elect ‘safe’ delegates, many regional conferences dared elect enough outspoken persons to ensure that congregational complaints would be heard in faraway Moscow.”<sup>189</sup> Moreover, two of the CCEKhB spokesmen, G.I. Maiboroda and E.T. Kovalenko, “were permitted to read a formal statement” on behalf of their Council. Essentially, Maiboroda and Kovalenko restated the reformers’ usual charges against the VSEKhB, and announced that they were authorized only to read the statement but not engage in a dialogue. The two sides thus “exchanged accusations, one complaining about anti-evangelical documents and the other about arrogance and pride.”<sup>190</sup>

Despite the CCEKhB criticism, the 1966 Congress, Sawatsky argued, “finally completed the positive transformation” of the VSEKhB “into a growth-oriented, forward-looking free church union,” since the 1966 Statute revisions “were bolder and more thoroughgoing than those of 1963,” which “demonstrated that congress delegates had successfully exerted their pressure and the cautious Moscow leadership could only retreat gracefully.”<sup>191</sup> “Subtle word changes and additions” to the Statute, especially a brief declaration in Paragraph 13, demanding that all VSEKhB head office workers were church members, revealed that “major progress had been made in restricting state interference in internal church life” by making it difficult for the state-appointed

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<sup>189</sup> Sawatsky, p. 211.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., p. 213-214.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., p. 215.

watchdogs” to infiltrate the church administration. Furthermore, “the statute also reflected an apparent increase in the legal rights of the church, since central union, senior presbyter, and local congregation were all entitled to their own seal and stamp which usually signifies the right of juridical personhood.”<sup>192</sup> Sawatsky’s assessment of the progress made at the 1966 Congress was perhaps overly optimistic. Although the fact that congresses were now held regularly and that new Statute revisions marked, at least on paper, the gradual emancipation of the EKhB union from the intense scrutiny by the state were all positive developments, in reality the CAR continued to carefully screen the VSEKhB’s candidates for promotion, expected the EKhB clergy’s collaboration in detecting schismatics and exposing their activities, and involved the VSEKhB leadership in upholding the USSR’s image abroad through deliberate disinformation.

The leadership changes made at the 1966 Congress—G. Ivanov replacing Zhidkov as the VSEKhB’s president—also did not indicate any significant alteration of the EKhB Union’s former course, since “the four major executive positions of chairman, general secretary, assistant general secretary, and treasurer were all held by men whom the reformers held responsible for the 1960 statute and letter of introduction.”<sup>193</sup> In Ukraine, for instance, the aged hardliner A. L. Andreev, whose involvement with the state is fairly well documented in this study, was replaced by a no less cooperative N.N.

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid., p. 216.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., p. 216-217.

Mel'nikov, whom the CARC had been grooming as Andreev's replacement since the mid 1950s.<sup>194</sup>

Perhaps the most revealing evidence that neither the 1963 nor the 1966 revisions to the VSEKhB Statute ensured complete independence of the church from the state comes from a series of documents reflecting the selection of candidates applying to the Correspondence Bible Courses. In 1968, the state permitted the VSEKhB to open a trimmed down version of a theological seminary. The rare opportunity to receive a more or less formal theological education—something that the Soviet Baptists could not enjoy since the mid 1920s—was however contingent on a set of qualities that a prospective student had to have, with the CAR acting as a screening agency that ultimately determined the admission or rejection of the incoming students. In Ukraine, for instance, the oblast Upolnomochennye reviewed all candidacies of students submitted by the EKhB communities and made recommendations to the head Upolnomochennyi in Kiev to either accept or decline them. The Upolnomochennye made their determination on the basis of personal knowledge of candidates and their families or other data deposited in the CAR files over the years, the ultimate acceptance criteria being loyalty to the state, potential for cooperation with the CAR, and very moderate religiosity. Evaluating the candidacy of P.P. Boiko, the Upolnomochennyi for Volynia oblast, I. Prikhod'ko, pointed out that as a leader of a large EKhB community, Boiko “strives to maintain a dynamic religious environment in the community, makes attempts to conduct appropriate work among believing youths, involving certain persons of school age in a choir-singing

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<sup>194</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 4263, p. 108-109.

circle.” Taking into account that Boiko also had “a brother in the United States and maintained correspondence with him,” Prikhod’ko found it “inexpedient” to send Boiko to the Bible Courses, since it would only “strengthen his authority and stimulate his activism.”<sup>195</sup> Speaking of another candidate, a dynastic preacher P. Y. Tokarchuk, Prikhod’ko remarked that the community serviced by Tokarchuk and his father “conducts quite active work among believers and general population and every year increases the number of its new members.” A person with completed secondary education, “Pavel Tokarchuk,” continued Prikhod’ko, “actively participates in the religious life of the community, striving to prove himself worthy of his father” and, “therefore,” concluded the Upolnomochennyi, “it would be undesirable to arm him with theology and train him to be a leader of a religious organization.”<sup>196</sup> Another candidate, F.S. Sil’chuk, according to Prikhod’ko, was a “fanatic” striving to become “a zealous good news messenger.” Studying at the Bible Courses “could enhance his fanaticism, help him acquire certain popularity among believers and greater motivation in propagation of his beliefs.” Hence, it “would be desirable to decline his candidature and exclude the possibility of his admission to the Bible Courses.”<sup>197</sup>

I.L. Shilo, on the other hand, who, according to Prikhod’ko, served “as a secretary and assistant to the Senior Presbyter for Volynia oblast, but was removed from that post because he could not get along with the Senior Presbyter Nesteruk,” nevertheless “always maintained and is maintaining now business-like contacts with the Upolnomochennyi of

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<sup>195</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 286, p. 49.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., p. 49-50.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

the Council for the Affairs of Religions.” As a preacher in the Lutsk community, Shilo “hardly ever delivers sermons and in subscribes to moderate religious views.” Therefore, Prikhod’ko thought “it would be expedient to support his [Shilo’s] application to the Bible Courses.”<sup>198</sup> For the same reason, the Council’s Upolnomochennyi for Nikolaev oblast, V. Chiunikhin, thought that of the three candidate-students from Nikolaev oblast, P.G. Gindiuk “was the most suitable candidate.” Characterizing Gindiuk, Chiunikhin wrote: “He is not marked by religious fanaticism. He is loyal. As a member of church council at the Nikolaev EKhB community, he is not showing much enthusiasm. It is possible to establish confidentiality-based relations with him.”<sup>199</sup> V.N. Gavelovskii, however, “whose candidature, in the opinion of Senior Presbyter for Nikolaev and Kherson oblast, was indisputably more preferable (young, secondary education) in comparison with others,” and who “sought admission to the Bible Courses before,” was for that very reason utterly unacceptable to Chiunikhin:

He is precisely the person whose admission to the Bible Courses is extremely undesirable. Gavelovskii is very sympathetic to schismatics (*initsiativniki*). In 1968, he openly expressed this sympathy during the trial of a leader of a schismatic group in the town of Voznesensk, Boiko, and, later, joined a youth group influenced by the Nikolaev schismatics...In the past year, Gavelovskii emerged as one of the organizers of youth groups sympathetic to schismatics in Nikolaev and Voznesensk. These groups travel to other communities, and their visits are accompanied by performances of religious youth choirs and orchestras. I find it necessary to decisively decline the candidature of V.N. Gavelovskii...<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid., p. 50-51,

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., p. 17.



The list can go on, but even these few examples of state officials' acting as admissions boards for an ostensibly religious educational institution tend to validate the dissenters' assertion that the VSEKhB's unwillingness to take a more principled stance vis-à-vis the apparent violation of constitutional separation of state and church in the Soviet Union only emasculated the church and furthered the regime's atheist agenda.

Even though the government did make certain concessions to the VSEKhB after 1963, they were primarily motivated by the government's desire to undermine the dissenters' agenda by making the institutional alternative more attractive for the undecided and wavering believers. Moreover, as the above cited examples demonstrate, the state made its concessions with strings attached. As a part of this exchange of favors, the VSEKhB continued to collect information on schismatics and turn it over to the CAR. In 1967, the CCEKhB activists intercepted a letter sent by the Senior Presbyter for Rovno oblast, P.G. Radchuk, to all parish community presbyters in the oblast. Among other things, Radchuk asked his subordinates to provide him with the following information:

If there are any illegal groups of believers in your vicinity, provide the following information:

- a.) Name of denomination
- b.) The number of members
- c.) The full name of each group's leader

Deliver all this to us no later than December 23, 1966. If you are late with your reply, you will have to answer to the Upolnomochennyi.<sup>201</sup>

Commenting on this piece of damning evidence exposing the VSEKhB workers as state informants, the CCEKhB wrote:

As is apparent from this letter, it is required [of all presbyters] to provide information about the so-called 'illegal groups' of believers. This shameful order

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<sup>201</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 72, p. 55-57.

is enforced by a threat of accountability before the Upolnomochennyi. The authorities, including the Upolnomochennye, have the ability to collect this type of information without the participation of presbyters. In fact, they [Upolnomochennye] have this information. But they know very well that every believer who in such a manner betrays his brothers is losing the power of faith in him. It bothers us that with his order P.G. Radchuk wants to make presbyters of churches into accomplices in the persecution of our brothers and believers of other confessions, and thus lead them into the sin of treachery...<sup>202</sup>

The state also increasingly involved the VSEKhB leaders in counterpropaganda and securing the positive image of the USSR on the international arena. “On trips abroad,” remarked Sawatsky, “they always stressed that believers were imprisoned because they violated the law, not because their religious convictions were severely restricted by the law.”<sup>203</sup> However, the VSEKhB’s ability to cover up the persecution of religion in the Soviet Union significantly diminished once the West learned about the EKhB schism soon after the 1966 demonstration of schismatics in Moscow and a series of arrests that followed. In 1967, the Council of Prisoners’ Relatives (CPR) sent a detailed letter to the General Secretary of the UN, U Thant, and copied it to L.I. Brezhnev, N.V. Podgornyi (Supreme Soviet), A.N. Kosygin (Council of Ministers), the International Committee for the Defense of Children, and the World Baptist Alliance. The CPR members began by quoting all existing Soviet legislation on religion and international agreements signed by the USSR, and assured Thant that supporters of the EKhB reform movement did not violate any of these legislative acts in their activity and that they were being persecuted only because they refused to submit to the authority of the VSEKhB and recognize its anti-evangelical dictums. The CPR then presented

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Sawatsky, p. 228.

evidence—a long jeremiad of believers’ suffering at the hands of various government agencies, ranging from the loss of parental rights due to religious upbringing of children to numerous cases of imprisonment, physical abuse of believers, including the brutal dispersal of schismatics’ peaceful demonstration in Moscow, their internment in psychiatric hospitals, illegal searches of their houses, fines, and other gross violations of human rights. The Council members then stated that having exhausted all options of appeal available to them in the USSR and having received no adequate response from the authorities, they decided to appeal to the UN and ask it to form a special international commission to investigate the conditions of prisoners in Soviet prisons and camps and countless cases of abuses of believers in the USSR. “If we are in the wrong and did something punishable by death,” concluded the authors, “we are prepared to die, but if there is nothing criminal in our service to God, then no one should have the right to mistreat us in such a way.”<sup>204</sup>

Among other cases of believers’ mistreatment, the CPR mentioned that of V.D. Kolesnikov, who was interned in a psychiatric hospital, of A.I. Koval’chuk, who had been tortured during the interrogation, and that of A. Andrusenko—a mother of four, who was sentenced to three years of imprisonment for giving Christian upbringing to her children. Although these cases were not exceptional, they attracted the government’s attention and left a paper trail in the CAR archives. On July 2, 1967, Litvin’s assistant, Shvaiko, inquired the Upolnomochennyi for Dnepropetrovsk oblast, Bukhtiiarov:

In schismatics’ letter to the UN and leaders of the party and government in the USSR there are listed facts of violations of socialist legality by some workers of

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<sup>204</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 72, p. 107-118.

administrative organs. In this letter, they [schismatics] write: ‘There are cases when the EKhb believers are placed into psychiatric hospitals for petitioning the CC of CPSU about restoring their pensions revoked because of their religious confessions on instructions of the local party organs. In October of 1966, V.D. Kolesnikov from the town of Sinel’nikovo, Dnepropetrovsk oblast, was placed into a psychiatric hospital.’ We ask you to tell us what you know about this matter.<sup>205</sup>

Responding to Shvaiko’s request, Bukhtiarov wrote:

In October of 1966, V.D. Kolesnikov, the leader of a group of *initsiativniki* in the town of Sinel’nikovo..., was in Moscow at the CC of CPSU, where he behaved rudely and tactlessly. In conjunction with this, and on the instruction of the Procuracy of the USSR, Kolesnikov was placed into the Moscow psychiatric hospital for observation and treatment. Kolesnikov is really a mentally ill person. He established residency in the town of Sinel’nikovo...in 1966...and receives pension as an invalid of labor.<sup>206</sup>

Although there is no further information on the basis of which one could ascertain Kolesnikov’s mental state, it is probably safe to assume that he was no more insane than the Soviet General P.G. Grigorenko or a number of other high-profile Soviet dissidents. Kolesnikov apparently appeared at the Central Committee building in the aftermath of the May 16-17 demonstration, perhaps requiring about the fate of his arrested fellow-believers. At any rate, his alleged “rude and tactless” behavior was less of a testament of his insanity than the behavior of presumably sane cadets and KGB officers trampling under foot and kicking elderly believers in front of the same CC building only months ago. According to CPR’s letter to the UN, Kolesnikov was not the only schismatic locked up in a mental institution that year. Another believer, P. Safronov, was picked up in September of the same year in Riazan and transferred to the Serbskii Institute of

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<sup>205</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 33, p. 54.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

Psychiatry in Moscow where he still remained at the time the CPR composed its letter to the UN. “We do not know what sorts of experiments are being performed on him,” commented petitioners. One can only speculate in what sort of state he will be when we see him again, but we do know that he was arrested a healthy person.”<sup>207</sup>

The case of A.I. Koval’chuk also raised the government’s concerns. On July 7, 1967, Shvaiko inquired the Senior Referent to the Upolnomochennyi of CAR for Rovno oblast, Demchenko, whether schismatics’ claim that Koval’chuk “became an invalid in 1962 as a result of tortures applied to him” was true. In their letter to the UN, schismatics wrote that while under investigation in 1962, Koval’chuk “was subjected to torture”—“his bile bladder had been squashed... and he lost large quantities of bile and blood.” Released “due to the hopeless state of his health,” Koval’chuk underwent extensive medical treatment in the course of which “3.5 liters of blood and 20 liters of electrolyte solution were injected into him.” When he was arrested again in July of 1966, the interrogator who was torturing him made allusions to Koval’chuk’s near death in 1962 when he said: “We’ll draw back out the blood injected into you.” Fearing for his life, Koval’chuk “managed to escape from the hands of this interrogator, but to this day,” reported schismatics, “he is deprived of the right to live—neither his passport nor his pensioner’s book was returned to him” and “he is forced to hide in order to stay alive.” Demchenko was “to inform the appropriate organs about this” and provide the CAR with “a detailed report about Koval’chuk and his activity.”<sup>208</sup> Demchenko found out that as an

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<sup>207</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 72, p. 111.

<sup>208</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 33, p. 50.

employee at the Dubno textile factory, Koval'chuk one time could not account for a number of produced items, which prompted his arrest and investigation. The case against him was later dropped. "In June of 1966," according to Demchenko, "Koval'chuk was arrested again and brought to the town's hospital for the investigation of his illness. He ran away and remained in hiding with the EKhB schismatics until June 27, 1967. Presently, he is under arrest and an investigation is being conducted."<sup>209</sup> Although Demchenko's report had shed little light on Koval'chuk's case, it made an admission, perhaps unwittingly, that hospital rooms could be used in the USSR for purposes of interrogation.

The CAR also made inquiries into A.M. Andrusenko's case. The name of this mother of four first appeared in the government papers in conjunction with an underground schismatic school for children (see previous chapter), sent to the Secretary of Zhitomir Obkom of CPU by the Council's Upolnomochennyi for Zhitomir oblast in January of 1965. In 1967, after Andrusenko's arrest and imprisonment, the same Upolnomochennyi for Zhitomir oblast, Gerashchenko, submitted the following information:

During the trial, Andrusenko behaved provocatively, tried to impose her demands on the court and use the court as a tribune for the propaganda of objectives of the so-called 'Council of Churches of the EKhB.' According to the data at our disposal, Andrusenko's mood presently has not changed. In letters [from prison] to her fellow-believers, Andrusenko calls upon them to stand firmly on the side of the so-called 'Council of Churches,' stating that upon her release from prison, she will be carrying out her work even more vigorously.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

The government data thus confirms that in their letter to the UN the CPR members referred to real victims of the Soviet regime and described fairly accurately what happened to these people. For instance, Andrusenko's only crime consisted in her participation in the activity of a self-sustained underground school where her own children and children of her fellow-believers received religious instruction—something that they were entitled to under the Convention against Discrimination in the Field of Education, which the Soviet Union signed but did not care to observe.

In 1969, the CPR produced another letter describing horrible conditions of the CCEKhB followers in prisons and at large and sent it to the top government officials, Brezhnev, Podgornyi, Kosygin and Rudenko, as well as to a whole slew of Soviet agencies: the Department of Ideology (headed by Suslov), Supreme Courts and Procuracies of USSR and Belorussia, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the USSR, the Committee for the Defense of Children and Women, the Red Cross, and the KGB; to editors of major Soviet newspapers *Pravda*, *Izvestiia*, *Komsomol'skaia Pravda* and *Soviet Russia*; to editors of magazines *Soviet State and Law*, *Rabotnitsa* (female worker), and *Science and Religion*, and even to the Academy of Sciences of the USSR. The reformers opened their letter with the following statement:

Summarizing the accomplishments of this past year, the so-called international year of human rights, we present to You with great sorrow a list of 66 EKhB believers arrested and sentenced during this past year. Of these 66 people, 32 were repressed in the past quarter of the year. We cannot reconcile in our consciousness the lofty aspirations of humanity, including Your statements, advertized on an international arena, and Your enslavement and suppression of believers by the dominant atheist ideology in Your own country. As a result,

about 200 orphans deprived of fathers were again added to the list of the unfortunate.<sup>211</sup>

The bulk of schismatics' letter represented a long and detailed account of imprisoned believers, bogus charges brought against them and evidence of systematic harassment of prisoners' families and ordinary members of unregistered communities. The authors concluded their letter with a powerful indictment of Soviet duplicity vis-à-vis religious freedom and basic human rights and demanded nothing less but a repeal of the 1929 legislation on religious cults:

The experience of the past 7 years must have sufficiently convinced you of the futility of your attempts to kill faith in God via the power of the sword, oppression, prisons and fines...The believers' demands are so small—to remove everything that obstructs professing their faith according to the Word of God. If one analyzes all court trials on the basis of accusatory acts and, even more so, on the basis of protocols of interrogations, then it becomes abundantly clear that the struggle you conduct is directed only against God—you aim to tear out of the souls of believers the true worship of God. And hence, your typical suggestion that believers return into the fold of the VSEKhB whose members you have forced to observe your atheist regulations. You offer everywhere the registration of communities, but only on the condition of their observance of the decree 'On Religious Cults' from 04/08/1929—a decree whose anti-evangelical demands enslave the soul of a believer...It follows from everything mentioned above that the main cause of all suffering of the EKhB believers is the decree 'On Religious Cults' from 04/08/1929. This legislation received further strength and re-affirmation in the decree of March 1966 that gave birth to Article 142/2 of the Criminal Code of RSFSR and corresponding articles of other union republics as well as to the incorrect application to the EKhB believers of Article 227 that has nothing to do with us.

The experience of past years proved that methods of physical suppression in questions of struggle against faith in God did not pay off. It is necessary to admit that the earth, saturated with the blood of martyrs for the faith, can no longer bear the tears of children torn away from their parents..., the tears of mothers, the suffering of prisoners, and the sorrowful sighs of the persecuted.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 138, p. 57-58.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., p. 62.



Letters such as this, multiplied by the hundreds and widely circulated through the underground channels, were increasingly difficult to contain. They resonated domestically, increasing public awareness of the dissent moods among certain segments of Soviet population and attracting sympathizers to the dissenters cause. Late in 1965, following in the footsteps of the EKhB schismatics, two Russian Orthodox priests from Moscow, N. Eshliman and G. Yakunin, “wrote open letters to Patriarch Aleksii protesting against acceptance of State interference in the internal life of the Church, and to the government protesting against illegal actions taken against the Church.”<sup>213</sup> Protests of religious activists began to illicit a sense of solidarity from other non-religious dissenters who, regardless of their ideological background or ethnicity, realized that at the core of these multi-faceted protest movements lay a commonly shared outrage against suppression of freedom of conscience in the country. In 1968, in his letter to the participants of the Budapest meeting of leaders of Communist parties, a persecuted Communist dissenter, General Grigorenko, wrote: “The social protest is maturing and it is manifest in everything...The society at large sympathizes with protestants [in a secular sense]. It listens and seeks answers to questions of concern to it. The society wants to know the truth.”<sup>214</sup> Speaking to a an ethnic minority group of Crimean Tatars fighting for the right to return to their ancestral home in Crimea, Grigorenko encouraged the same course of action that the EKhB dissenters adopted in the mid 1960s:

The international law is on your side. If you do not succeed in resolving this issue inside the country, you have the right to appeal to the United Nations and

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<sup>213</sup> W.C. Fletcher, *Religion and Soviet Foreign Policy*, p. 97.

<sup>214</sup> P.G. Grigorenko, *Mysli sumasshedshogo* (Amsterdam: Fond Imeni Gertsena, 1973), p. 121.

the International Tribunal. Stop begging! Return what rightfully belongs to you...! And remember: in this just and noble struggle, you cannot allow the enemy to take out with impunity the fighters marching in the vanguard of your movement.<sup>215</sup>

Reminiscing about the emergence of this multi-faceted, loosely linked but gradually solidifying movement in defense of constitutional rights, one of the Moscow-based pioneers of the samizdat *Chronicle of Current Events*, Ludmila Alexeyeva, wrote: “Political trials...triggered considerable public outcry. Each wave of repression had created an increased number of disenfranchised intellectuals, people who had lost their jobs and social status and who now made it their life’s work to protest political persecution and demand glasnost.”<sup>216</sup> The *Chronicle* provided a much wider circulation for stories of persecuted religious and political dissenters. “Baptists,” remembered Alexeyeva, “found their way to us in December 1968, the Adventists in July 1970, Jehovah’s Witnesses in June 1971, and the Pentecostals in July 1974.”<sup>217</sup>

Aside from attracting the public attention to their plight domestically, the reformers’ prolific petitioning helped awaken the public opinion abroad, which put additional pressure on the Soviet authorities. For years, the West, systematically misinformed by the visiting Soviet church leaders, knew little about the scope of religious persecution in the USSR. The situation began to change in schismatics’ favor after their 1966 demonstration in Moscow. Assessing this shift, Fletcher wrote:

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<sup>215</sup> Ibid., p. 152-153.

<sup>216</sup> Ludmila Alexeyeva and Paul Goldberg, *The Thaw Generation*, p. 181.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., p. 207.

The *Initsiativniki* affair among the Baptists provided an occasion allowing churchmen to render a service in attempting to minimize possible Western reactions to events within the USSR. Prior to 1966 no public mention whatsoever was made of the schism, which by 1963 had assumed great proportions throughout the USSR...In the later sixties, however, Western Baptists became increasingly concerned about the *Initsiativniki*, and more energetic measures were needed to maintain control of the situation. A British student of Soviet religious affairs, Michael Bourdeaux, began serious study of the *Initsiativniki* problem, and sufficient apprehension was engendered to prompt Michael Zhidkov [the son of former president of the VSEKhB] to make a special visit to London and elsewhere in January 1968—immediately before the publication of Bourdeaux’s book on the *Initsiativniki*—to ensure that Baptist leaders in the West would be aware in advance of the contrasting interpretation of the official Russian Baptist leadership on the matter.<sup>218</sup>

Although, as Fletcher asserted, “services rendered to Soviet foreign policy by the Churches in the matter of preventing widespread opposition to Soviet internal religious policies have been extraordinarily successful,”<sup>219</sup> the CRP’s prisoner lists and other data compiled and smuggled to the West by the CCEKhB alerted the World Council of Churches whose General Secretary made the following statement in November of 1967, concerning the recently received “specific information on over 200 Baptists currently in prison”:

The World Council of Churches is studying the document closely. Because of its concern for both religious liberty and unity within its member churches, it is seeking direct contact with the competent authorities in the USSR particularly with leaders of the Baptist Church, who have been asked to comment on the document and evaluate it.<sup>220</sup>

While the WCC’s reaction was rather cautious, the response of religious communities, émigré organizations and conservative think tanks abroad was much more unambiguous.

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<sup>218</sup> W.C. Fletcher, *Religion and Soviet Foreign Policy*, p. 97.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

Around 1969, a member of the Ukrainian Diaspora abroad, Oleko Oleksa, who apparently had been receiving issues of schismatics' "Brotherly List" with some regularity, wrote the following to his fellow-brothers in Ukraine:

I dare to assure you that millions of believers around the world pray for all of you, for the entire Church of Christ. By the mercy of God, we inform the entire world via radio, television, and the English press about your heroism, steadfastness in suffering, and your uncompromising struggle for the faith...My report about it, as well as A.I. Koval'chuk's letter which I had sent to the media and the UN, have been aired by 600 radio stations. After this, 12,000 Ukrainians participated in a demonstration of protest against the persecution of believers in the USSR. You have rocked the world with your faithfulness...If earlier the Catholics and the Orthodox were ready to drown you in a spoonful of water, now they are so fascinated by your heroism that they defend you before the whole world in their press and speeches. I do not know whether you are aware of it, but you are writing the brightest pages into the history of uncompromising struggle for the fundamental principles of the New Testament Christianity which resists the influence of this world...<sup>221</sup>

The dissenters' alternative information about the plight of believers in the USSR was also quickly picked up by various Christian missions targeting Eastern Europe. One such Western missionary, for instance, Richard Wumbrand, who had himself spent some time in prison in Romania, "reported his experiences to the American Senate, took off his shirt to show scars from torture, and made headlines." Wumbrand's California-based mission, named Jesus Christ to the Communist World, along with other similar organizations, "published gruesome pictures of torture," and "of secret church meetings in the forest or elsewhere in the underground," while his paper was ostensibly called *The Voice of the Martyrs*.<sup>222</sup> In the Cold War context, the evidence of religious dissenters' persecution in the Soviet Union, readily publicized by people like Wumbrand, did not fail

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<sup>221</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 138, p. 4.

<sup>222</sup> Sawatsky, p. 396.

to find responsive audience in the West and seriously complicated the VSEKhB's function abroad. One of the VSEKhB's spokesmen, Timchenko, complained that "such false data" as the CPR's "latest appeal to all Christians in the world," opening "with the statement that 'condition of the church is worsening,'" was used by persons like Wumbrand in order "to brand" the VSEKhB leaders "as liars."<sup>223</sup>

From the late 1960s and onward, the dissenters' outreach to the international community compelled the Soviet government to dedicate greater material and human resources to counterpropaganda campaigns of which the official church leaders and registered communities were indispensable components as evidence of the purported religious freedom in the USSR. The spilling over onto the international arena of what began as a strictly internal reform movement within the community of Soviet Evangelicals turned reformers into political actors and transformed the EKhB schism into a sensitive foreign policy issue for the Soviet state. The EKhB schism not only generated negative publicity for the Soviet state but complicated the steady implementation of its antireligious agenda by forcing the state to make more concessions to the VSEKhB, which, in turn, tended to transform the latter into a more dynamic organization. In this situation, the VSEKhB only acquired more bargaining power while repressions failed to deter schismatics. The state hoped that the regular and more representative VSEKhB congresses, as well as the 1966 Statute that included most of the reformers' demands, would drive a wedge between the hardened CCEKhB leaders and the less determined majority of their followers and, ultimately, bring the latter back into

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid., p. 219.

the VSEKhB's fold, thus virtually eliminating the schism. The CAR insisted that repressions against schismatics should be applied more discretely, targeting primarily leaders and activists, and encouraged the VSEKhB to "woo" the ordinary schismatics as well as initiate a series of unity talks with their leaders. In 1966, such unity talks failed to break the ice, with schismatics' representatives refusing to greet the VSEKhB leaders with a traditional "brotherly kiss" or "regard them as brothers."<sup>224</sup>

A new and more extensive round of unity talks took place prior to the convocation of the 1969 Congress. The VSEKhB leaders hoped that these talks would finally produce positive results and prompt the reunification of both sides at the upcoming congress. However, the discussion soon ran into a dead end again, with the CCEKhB representatives (including the recently released Ktiuchkov and Vins\*) asking, among other things, that the VSEKhB "no longer regarded" the Orgcommittee's activities as "the fire of the devil," acknowledged that all (not some) EKhB prisoners languished in Soviet prisons exclusively for their religious convictions, and gave assurances that when the VSEKhB spokesmen traveled abroad, "they would not paint a false picture of the *Initiativniki*."<sup>225</sup> Not surprisingly, the VSEKhB leaders "refused to produce a document showing what they had said at the recent BWA meeting" and were even less willing to sign a written statement amounting to a full confession. Instead, they produced "a

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid., p. 229.

\* Kriuchkov and Vins participated only in the last rounds of negotiations in October and December, just before the 1969 Congress began to work in earnest.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., p. 231.

statement of mutual repentance” and asked reformers to sign it.<sup>226</sup> The unity talks failed because “throughout the negotiations each side always expected the other to make the bigger concession.”<sup>227</sup> In Sawatsky’s opinion, the 1969 pre-congress unity talks indicated that “there was both delegate and state pressure to bring the CCEKhB back into the fold, but not at the cost of total surrender.”<sup>228</sup> Ivanov’s and Karev’s letter informing the CAR of the planned congress, however, shows that the VSEKhB did not envision any meaningful participation of the CCEKhB leadership in the preparation or conduct of the 1969 Congress, and was only prepared to extend conditional participation to the reformers’ more moderate lay supporters whose controlled and harmless presence at the congress could only boost the VSEKhB’s image as a peacemaker:

The Congress should be fully prepared by the VSEKhB, without any participation in its preparation of supporters of the ‘Council of Churches’ whose leaders, according to the available data, have not changed their views at all. The participation of supporters of the ‘Council of Churches’ in Congress’ sessions is a different matter. They could be allowed to participate in sessions, but only with the right to voice an opinion [not to actually vote], if by the time of the Congress’ convocation they have not altered their views and abandoned their hostility to the VSEKhB. The right to speak at the Congress could also be extended to them, but on the condition that they submit texts of their speeches to the Presidium of the Congress ahead of time...<sup>229</sup>

Although this document is found in the CAR’s files for 1969, it lacks a specific date that could indicate whether this letter had been submitted to the CAR before the unity talks began in May of 1969 or at some point during the four rounds of negotiations

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<sup>226</sup> Ibid., p. 231-232.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., p. 235.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., p. 233.

<sup>229</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 138, p. 9.

between May and December. The common practice, however, was to inform the CAR of the upcoming congress at the earliest possible convenience. If that was the case, then the VSEKhB arranged negotiations with the rival center primarily to sound out the CCEKhB's present attitude to the Moscow leadership and whether or not it would be safe to invite reformers to the Congress. The reformers, it appears, sensed the VSEKhB agenda underlining the unity talks and made it imperative to wrest some considerable concessions from the VSEKhB that would make their participation in the 1969 Congress beneficial to the reform movement.

Although the negotiations failed, the release of prominent CCEKhB leaders imbued schismatics with optimism and prompted them to petition authorities about the convocation of their own separate congress in Tula. To their surprise, just days before the opening of the VSEKhB Congress in Moscow on December 6, they received notice of official permission from the Tula local authorities. Interpreting this surprising turn of events, Sawatsky wrote:

This may have been an ignorant mistake by the Tula city council, although it is possible that the Moscow authorities were hopeful that the last session of joint talks between the two unions...might actually lead to reconciliation. Another factor may have been that the state hoped hereby to gain more details of *Initsiativniki* activity. In any case, shortly thereafter permission was withdrawn and the CCEKhB has been treated as an illegal organization by the Soviet authorities to the present day.<sup>230</sup>

That it was "an ignorant mistake by the Tula city council" is very unlikely. In 1969, the official permission to convoke a schismatic congress was no longer unprecedented. In 1965, the Soviet authorities permitted the SDA schismatics to organize and lead not only

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<sup>230</sup> Sawatsky, p. 243.



their own congress, but an All-Union Congress of the SDA Church in Kiev. Furthermore, the Tula authorities could not be ignorant of the EKhB schismatics, since their oblast was not only a home to one of the reformers' leaders, Kriuchkov, but also a location of a sizable and active schismatic community in Uzlovaia. It is highly improbable that the Tula city authorities, expected to monitor all schismatic activity in tandem with the oblast Upolnomochennyi of CAR and the KGB, took upon themselves the responsibility to sanction a major gathering of schismatics without as much as notifying the local Upolnomochennyi who, in his turn, would have instantly alerted Moscow and the KGB. The sanctioning of the Tula Congress was, most likely, a premeditated and carefully thought-through decision approved by the Moscow CAR and aiming at either gaining more information about schismatics or causing a split within the CCEKhB leadership over the issue of participation in the VSEKhB Congress opening in just a few days in Moscow, given that the VSEKhB leaders had agreed to meet schismatics' demands halfway during the prior unity negotiations.

Although no rifts in the CCEKhB emerged during the Tula Congress and delegates unanimously agreed not to participate in the VSEKhB Congress in Moscow and “warned local communities to avoid all ties” with the VSEKhB,<sup>231</sup> in the years to come such rifts would eventually appear. “By 1969, the state officials,” as Sawatsky reported, “were actually offering registration to churches that had requested it in vain for the past several decades.”<sup>232</sup> Although in fact only as many as 15 of the CCEKhB churches

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., p. 248.

(including Vins' church in Kiev) "succeeded in obtaining registration that was not conditional on obeying state laws,"<sup>233</sup> the reformers initially "felt that the authorities were intent on permitting a large number of congregations to obtain autonomous registration" with a goal of later allowing them to form a new and legalized CCEKhB, thus leaving the old battle-tested *Initsiativniki* "without a constituency"<sup>234</sup> and, hence, the reformers treated this new wave of registration with considerable suspicion. The government certainly had little interest in registering schismatic communities as autonomous and saw the offer of registration primarily as a means to lure the unregistered communities into the VSEKhB's fold. This latter offer became increasingly more attractive to some battered unregistered communities as the VSEKhB congregations "reported increased freedom, whereas the CPR had negative news to report in spite of world pressure."<sup>235</sup>

The evidence shows that the government vigorously encouraged the segregation of the hardcore CCEKhB leadership from the ordinary members of religious underground. In 1973, at the extended meeting of the CAR, Kuroedov exhorted:

We must provide a correct and objective political evaluation of sectarianism today. It is impermissible to cast everything and everyone into one pile. Supporters of the VSEKhB, people loyal to the state and generally observing the requirements of legislation, are quite different from Baptists-schismatics who speak against the Soviet legislation on religious cults and rally for unlimited freedom of religious activity, abolition of atheist education of students in schools, creation of schools and circles of religious instruction for children, and so forth. But even these demands do not give grounds for a blanket accusation of disloyalty of all those who have deviated from the VSEKhB. The overwhelming majority of schismatic Baptists are our Soviet people who have come under the influence of

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid., p. 274.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., p. 248.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., p. 249.

their leaders—all sorts of hateful fanatics, extremists and rascals... That is why the number one task in our work with sectarians consists in tearing ordinary believers from their leaders, explaining to people who have fallen under the latter's influence the meaning of Soviet legislation and the CPSU's policy regarding religion and church. We are talking about fighting for these people...<sup>236</sup>

Kuroedov claimed that due to this differentiated approach, “over 6,000 believers broke ties with the illegal sectarian center [CCEKhB] between 1967 and 1972 and joined registered communities,” and that many believers were displaying wavering, signs of discontent with the activity of ‘the council of churches,’ and a desire to look for ways to satisfy their religious needs within the boundaries of legislation.”<sup>237</sup> Coupled with greater “resoluteness of delegates over against the cautious leadership,” manifested at each successive VSEKhB congress (for instance, at the 1969 Congress, the Moscow leadership failed to perpetuate restrictions on participation of young people in choirs),<sup>238</sup> this government policy of differentiation proved to be more successful in curbing the EKhB schism in the long run than mere repressions of the early 1960s. While the CCEKhB leaders completely abandoned the idea of unification after 1969, since they firmly believed “it was not possible to join light and darkness,” the members of local communities “were becoming tired of tension that life in the CCEKhB congregation required and became increasingly uncomfortable with the unbending attitudes of its leaders.”<sup>239</sup> With Vins arrested again in 1974 and Kriuchkov hunted down as a common criminal, by 1976 the CCEKhB leadership began to fracture into three distinct branches.

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<sup>236</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 872, p. 54.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>238</sup> Sawatsky, p. 219.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*, 249.

Iosif Bondarenko, mentioned earlier in this chapter, now promoted a more moderate approach to the VSEKhB, arguing “that fellowship and cooperation should be possible” with those of the VSEKhB congregations that “showed genuine fruits of the Spirit.” Bondarenko believed that the years of strife between the VSEKhB and CCEKhB “had led to much heartache and unchristian treatment of persons who were obviously born-again Christians but who did not think alike about their duties to the state.” He and another reformer, S.G. Dubovoi, placed “greater emphasis on the regional unions and on the autonomy of the local church” rather than on the unquestionable loyalty to the CCEKhB leadership advocated by Kriuchkov.<sup>240</sup> A third, more “extreme” and “confrontational,” grouping formed in the CPR and centered on Galina Rytikova and the church in Rostov, which experienced “severe persecution” in the 1970s. Lidia Vins, another influential figure in the CPR until she followed her husband into immigration in 1979, “felt betrayed by her congregation in Kiev which agreed to register.”<sup>241</sup> Several vivid examples of such confrontational orientation among the CCEKhB supporters were described by Kuroedov in his 1973 report:

Especially critical situation developed in the city of Barnaul where a community of schismatic Baptists, numbering about 200, consists primarily of persons of German descent, headed by elements who have a grudge against the Soviet authority—people who have been previously sentenced for political crimes and violations of legislation on religious cults. Almost at every prayer service they organize speeches on political themes, in which the USSR is depicted as a country of lawlessness and absence of freedom of conscience. On January 30, 1972, the preacher Paulus spoke at a prayer meeting: ‘In our country, the church is separated from the state, and we do not submit to the state laws; we have our own customs.’ The leaders of Barnaul schismatics stated to representatives of the

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<sup>240</sup> Ibid., p. 276.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid., p. 277.

local organs of authority: ‘We do not recognize state laws that are not based on the Gospel. If you do not allow us to live according to our beliefs, then send us to the FRG [West Germany] or the United States. You are building Communism, where there will be no room for believers. This does not suit us. We do not wish to help you to build Communism.’

In December of 1971, a group of this community’s members sent a slanderous letter to the Presidium of Supreme Soviet of the USSR, in which they alleged that severe persecutions of believers were purportedly conducted in our country. As a sign of protest against these ‘persecutions,’ they enclosed in their letter 92 passports and 26 military certificates of sectarians. 81 people to this day refuse to take their documents back. On May 9, 1972, seventeen sectarians of this group made their way into the American Embassy in Moscow with the purpose of turning in a statement about the ‘persecution’ of believers. In 1972, schismatics erected at the city cemetery a monument to sectarian Khmara who died in prison, on which they placed a provocative plaque: ‘Tortured to death for the faith. From the Christians of Russia.’<sup>242</sup>

Despite these signs of internal disagreements on the course of action, in the late 1960s-early 1970 the CCEKhB still manifested remarkable organizational skills and a broad range of programs, including the establishment of an underground press *Khristianin*, of which existence the reformers informed Kosygin in a letter composed and approved by delegates of the 1969 Tula Congress. By the early 1970s, this well-hidden underground printing press, operated by experienced conspirators, was producing hundreds of New Testaments, *Brotherly Leaflet*, and other periodicals. *Khristianin* not only supplied believers with badly needed religious literature but boosted the CCEKhB’s prestige by manifesting that the dissenters’ illegally operating spiritual center could tend better to the needs of the EKhB believers than the officially acting VSEKhB which in all its prior history succeeded in publishing only very limited amount of Bibles and hymnal books. In their undated letter to all EKhB believers in the USSR, members of the Society for the Dissemination of Gospel in our Country wrote:

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<sup>242</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 872, p. 56-57.

Everywhere throughout our brotherhood a great need is felt for New Testaments, Bibles, collections of spiritual songs, hymnals with musical notes and other spiritual literature. The old editions have become largely worn out and are disappearing, and there are no new replacements. Throughout the entire period of VSEKhB's activity, beginning in 1945, the government only twice allowed the publication in our country of Bibles and hymnal books, in 1957 and 1968. But these editions were so small that there was only one Bible available for every 50-70 EKHB believers. Besides, believers who did not recognize the VSEKhB...could not receive any Bibles or hymnal books at all.

Due to the shortage of printed spiritual literature, believers resorted to various other means of reproduction. Some of them copied Gospels by hand, others used the photographic method, while still others typed it using type-writers or multiplied spiritual literature on a hectograph. But these methods produce poor quality copies and, moreover, cannot satisfy the believers' demand for spiritual literature in terms of quantity. Hence, the idea was born to figure out a way to mass-produce the needed literature. On their own initiative, some believers got involved in studying the typographic method. It took a lot of time, great efforts, tenacious labor and incessant prayers to God...And finally, the Gospels and Psalms have been printed using this method. We are delighted by this success..., but the godless in our country fear the spread of the Gospel...<sup>243</sup>

The authors then provided an example of dangers associated with the dissemination of such samizdat literature:

On March 26, this year, when two of our fellow-believers, V.I. Pidchenko (residing in Kharkov) and Nikolai Maiboroda (residing in Zaporozhie) were transporting several hundred Gospels printed by our society, they had been stopped by a militiaman and military patrolmen and taken to the Department of Militia. The Gospels were requisitioned from them, but the brothers had been released after the interrogation. In the meantime, their case is being handled by the Procuracy.<sup>244</sup>

After 1971, most copies of the *Brotherly Leaflet*, reported Sawatsky, "were printed, and soon it became apparent that one of their printing presses was capable of printing on both sides of a sheet of paper," which "was no mean achievement," given that "the reformers were forced to construct their own printing press" since "all duplicators

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<sup>243</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 138, p. 51.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid.

and presses in Soviet Union are registered and a careful watch is kept on all paper supplies.”<sup>245</sup> Between 1971 and 1976, the *Khristianin* press reportedly printed “350,000 copies of religious literature.”<sup>246</sup>

The activity of *Khristianin* certainly annoyed the government and put considerable pressure on the VSEKhB. In 1971, the VSEKhB leaders in Moscow and Kiev received a letter penned by the council of presbyters from Zhitomir oblast, in which they complained:

The schism that occurred in our brotherhood about 10 years ago is taking on a more negative character, for which there are reasons. If the letters written by the separated brothers did not achieve the goals set by leaders of the ‘Council of Churches,’ the collection of spiritual songs and New Testaments published by them prompt believers of our churches to support the separated brothers. It is not unlikely that they will also publish pocket-size Bibles. If such energetic dissemination of prohibited literature continues, then in two years all our brotherhood will be using literature printed by the ‘Council of Churches.’<sup>247</sup>

The Zhitomir presbyters, therefore, proposed “to seriously raise the question before the appropriate organs of authority about a permission to publish 50,000 New Testaments and an additional issue of the Collection of Spiritual Songs, for which there is presently a great demand,” and also “to expedite the printing of hymnals with music notations for our choirs, of whose launched publication you so authoritatively spoke at the 1969 Congress, but which are still not available.”<sup>248</sup> The authors argued that the VSEKhB’s prestige in

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<sup>245</sup> Sawatsky, p. 247.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid., p. 276.

<sup>247</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 279, p. 74.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

communities and the progress of unification were contingent on the elimination of this drastic shortage of spiritual literature:

Our loyal attitude toward the legislation on cults and our good relations with the organs of authority are apparent, and yet we are unable to attain what does not contradict to our Soviet laws, whereas the 'Council of Churches' does not maintain any contacts with the organs of authority but publishes spiritual literature and wherewith elevates its spiritual authority when we lose ours.<sup>249</sup>

Armed with such documents, the VSEKhB leaders could easier exploit the state's fear of the CCEKhB's popularity to wrest more concessions for the registered churches.

Besides providing both unregistered and registered communities with samizdat spiritual literature, the CCEKhB activists continued to raise their followers' legal awareness by systematically publishing new evidence of violation of believers' rights by the Soviet organs of authority. In 1973, the Secretary of the Executive Committee of the Oktiabr'skii Regional Soviet of Workers' Deputies in Kharkov, E. Kashina, dispatched letters to all secretaries of party organizations and chairmen of FZMK (Factory and Plant Local Committee) at all Kharkov industries and enterprises, asking to provide her with the following information:

For the purpose of control over the observance of the legislation on cults, we ask you to submit lists of believers working at your enterprise. In these lists, a person's full name, date of birth, profession, religious affiliation, and noted violations of legislation on cults should be indicated as of December 1, 1973. It should also be indicated whether any changes in the composition employed believers have taken place during 1973. We also ask you to report separately of any possible changes with respect to the aforementioned issue that might take place during 1974. The lists should be submitted not later than December 10, 1973 to the Chairman of the Raiispolkom Commission for the Enforcement of Legislation on Religious Cults, E.P. Kashina.<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>250</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 338, p. 112.



Either due to the Kharkov officials' negligence or good detective work on the part of schismatics, one copy of Kashina's letter fell into the hands of CCEKhB activists who instantly made it a headline of their *Brotherly Leaflet* and cited it in their protest statements to the government. Soon afterwards, the Upolnomochennyi of CAR for Kharkov oblast, N. Borisko, sent a letter to the Secretary of Kharkov City Executive Committee, in which he briefly summarized the content of Kashina's letter and stated that "for unknown reasons, the unsecured text of the letter fell into the hands of Baptists-schismatics who multiplied it and disseminated it to all Baptist communities in the country." In their commentaries, attached to copies of Kashina's letter, Borisko claimed, schismatics "intentionally distort the fundamentals of Soviet legal policies concerning issues of religion and church." At the same time, however, Borisko admitted:

In this particular case, the Executive Committee of Oktiabr'skii Regional Soviet permitted a gross violation of the legislation on cults. The Regional Executive Committees have other avenues for the acquisition of information and maintenance of control over the observance of legislation on cults—avenues stipulated by our laws. In the future, all such correspondence between regional or city executive committees and enterprises, construction sites and institutions should be stopped.<sup>251</sup>

While Borisko did not care to elaborate either what specifically in Kashina's actions represented "a gross violation of the legislation on cults" or how exactly the Baptist schismatics "distorted" the fundamentals of Soviet policies on religion, the dissenters took time in their *Brotherly Leaflet* to evaluate the kind of religious profiling of Soviet citizens, attempted by Kashina as the head of a Commission for the Enforcement of

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid., p. 113.

Legislation on Religious Cults in the light of Soviet Constitution and other norms  
protecting the rights of believers:

So, by the beginning of 1974, all believers, regardless of whether they attend registered or unregistered churches, are entered into special lists...Are these actions legal? No. They are illegal regardless of whether these commissions act on a social basis or are sponsored by the state. By promoting this total (universal) espionage over all believers and by compiling special lists, they infringe upon the right of personal inviolability of citizens, guaranteed by the Constitution, and also violate the 1918 Decree, in which it is stated in Article 3: ‘All forfeitures of rights associated with the confession of any faith or the non-observance of any are abolished. All indications of citizens’ religious affiliation or non-affiliation are to be removed from all official documents.’<sup>252</sup>

Although, according to Litvin’s 1973 report to the CC of CPU, schismatics grossly exaggerated the implications of Kashina’s letter by interpreting this localized violation of socialist legality “as a country-wide government measure to detect all believers with the goal of their further persecution,”<sup>253</sup> being in the possession of an official document bearing a seal of a Soviet institution and a signature of a local coordinator of the Soviet antireligious campaign empowered schismatics and validated their claim that the information entered by them in their *Brotherly Leaflets* and other periodicals and letters was credible and not a mere medley of slanderous figments of their imagination, as the Soviet government claimed. As dissenters slowly but surely impressed upon the state that the pen could be mightier than the sword, the government called upon its local representatives to exercise more caution in applying repressive measures and build cases against schismatics on credible evidence of prosecutable offenses—evidence that could actually be presented in courts. Although in his report

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<sup>252</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 399, p. 19.

<sup>253</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 872, p. 27.

delivered at the All-Union Conference of the Council's Upolnomochennye in Moscow in 1972, V.A. Kuroedov could hardly conceal his dislike of schismatics whom he labeled as "all sorts of filthy scum [*nechist'*] suborning people to illegal activity and instilling in them hostile attitude to our reality," he felt seriously perturbed by cases "when sentences were not backed by sufficiently convincing materials for accusations...and served as excuses for statements that believers were prosecuted not for concrete punishable criminal acts, but supposedly for their faith." He cited the following case as an example: "Thus, the People's Court of the city of Nikolaev prosecuted P.I. Zaichenko, M.P. Borbunovich and A.A. Yakimenko in whose sentences it was incriminated to them that they 'drank wine from the same cup and for a long time prayed on their knees with their eyes closed.' Where is the content of a crime in all of this?"<sup>254</sup>

As the Chairman of CAR, Kuroedov certainly knew of many more similar cases. However, when schismatics made the evidence of such cases available to the West, he could not but accuse them "of fabricating and sending abroad different slanderous materials containing fabrications about 'suffering for the faith in the USSR,'" for "such materials were repeatedly used by the reactionary foreign propaganda for anti-Soviet purposes." To illustrate his point, Kuroedov pointed to Michael Bourdeaux's contemporary publication *Religious Ferment in Russia*: "In this book, the activity of Initiativniki is described in a detailed and sympathetic way. In the author's opinion, their activity represents 'a form of social protest against the existing order in the

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<sup>254</sup> Ibid., p. 15-16.

country.”<sup>255</sup> In order to better deflect the public attention from the recurring violations of religious freedom in the country, the government began to increasingly portray the CCEKhB activists as mere puppets of the reactionary anti-Soviet forces in the West, thus transforming schismatics from conscientious objectors into political actors—a Fifth Column undermining the USSR’s national security. Reporting to the CC of CPU in 1973, Litvin wrote:

The revamping of the illegal activity of the EKhB sect, and first of all, of the supporters of the so-called ‘Council of Churches is prompted by foreign connections of Baptist believers with their compatriots now living in the United States, Canada, and other countries. In 1973, a number of communities in Kiev, Rovno, Volynia, Ternopol, Vinnitsa, Chernovtsy, Khmel’ nitsk and other oblasts were visited by tourists who came with a goal of proselytizing, such as P. Y. Gorban’—a Pentecostal and a chairman of the Department of East Slavic Mission (Canada), Alexander de Shalando—a pastor of the Baptist church in France, and Gred Veitich, Kastler and Greif from West Berlin, who tried to establish contacts with the more extremist servants of the EKhB church in Ukraine, especially with supporters of the so-called ‘Council of Churches. They looked for facts distorting the real conditions of believers in the USSR, enticed sectarians to ignore the Soviet legislation on cults, and so forth. Someone Davydiuk, a member of the Ukrainian nationalist organization abroad, enticed believers and made slanderous remarks about the nationalities policy of our state. The nationalist elements abroad fabricate and spread around provocative figments of different kinds, akin to the affair of I. Moiseev who supposedly suffered for his faith, and act as defenders of ‘prisoners’ that ‘languish in prisons for the word of god.’

In October of 1973, the bourgeois nationalists in the United States convoked the so-called Congress of the All-Ukrainian Baptist Brotherhood headed by the notorious nationalist, A. Garbuziuk. This brotherhood’s objective is ‘to defend Ukrainian Baptists persecuted for their faith in Ukraine.’ The Baptist schismatics receive from their underground religious center such publications as the *Brotherly Leaflet*, the *Messenger of Salvation*, the *Bulletin of the Council of Prisoners’ Relatives*, various leaflets, and other falsifications, in which they call upon believers to disobey the legislation on religious cults, demand that the organs of authority stop the atheist education of children in schools and repeal laws pertaining to religion and church.<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> Ibid.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid., p. 4-5.

Similar to Khmara's murder, Moiseev's affair, mentioned by Litvin, acquired exceptional notoriety. Kuroedov referred to it as "dirty falsification...fabricated by 'Council of Churches,'" according to which Moiseev, "severely beaten, wounded, burnt...and still alive,' was drowned in the sea by the atheists." Kuroedov naturally supported the official version of this incident, according to which, a Baptist believer, I. Moiseev, at that time a soldier serving in the Soviet Army, simply drowned while swimming in the Azov Sea. His death was tragic, but purely accidental.<sup>257</sup> As in the earlier Khmara's case, the official version simply could not explain away why a severely beaten person, bearing bruises, wounds and burns (evidenced by a photograph of his body), would choose to allay his pain through recreational swimming in the Azov Sea, or why the government would change the official version of his death several times, if the case seemed to be so straightforward, or, finally, why the "registered churches as far away as Central Asia were fined fifty rubles for mentioning Moiseev in the service."<sup>258</sup> Realizing that its refutation of such damning evidence would be taken with a grain of salt in the West, the state increasingly relied on official statements by the VSEKhB, readily confirming the government's conclusions and condemning schismatics' allegations as lies conjured by a minority of disgruntled extremists. Even though the VSEKhB leadership would act as an indispensable component of the government's elaborate counterpropaganda machine for the remainder of the Soviet era, the CCEKhB's systematic exposure of acts of violence and injustice against believers in the USSR would

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<sup>257</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>258</sup> Sawatsky, p. 263.

keep the Soviet leaders perpetually concerned with their country's image abroad. In 1973

Kuroedov reported:

It is characteristic that in the end of 1972, during the arrest of one of the leaders of the so-called 'Council of Churches,' Yakimenkov, a letter from the emissary of the so-called 'Slavic Mission,' Clement, was found among other materials of provocative nature. The letter was addressed to the 'Council of Churches.' Clement thanks 'brothers' for forwarding to him the slanderous information about the death of soldier Moiseev and informs them that this information has already been disseminated in 45 countries. While at it, he gives them a new assignment: 'If there is more information similar to this,' he writes, 'we ask you to transfer it to a person who handed this letter to you.'<sup>259</sup>

For the ordinary believers, this Soviet fear of exposure would translate into a relative relaxation of state pressure and more bargaining power for the VSEKhB. "During the Brezhnev years," asserted Anderson, "external factors impinged on Soviet religious policy in a way they had not hitherto. Although the actions of outside powers did not in themselves determine policy or shift it in a major way, they did serve to stimulate the hopes and activities of religious believers themselves."<sup>260</sup>

The *Initsiativniki* never achieved the goal of convening an all-union congress of EKhB churches in the country under their own leadership. Neither did they succeed in dislodging the incumbent VSEKhB leadership and replacing it with legitimately elected and worthy spiritual leaders capable of taking a firm stance against the intrusive Soviet state. The Orgcommittee's activity divided the EKhB brotherhood and the formation of CCEKhB as an alternative spiritual center made the schism permanent. While accusing the VSEKhB of spiritual apostasy and unprincipled collaborationism with the atheist

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<sup>259</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 872, p. 57.

<sup>260</sup> John Anderson, *Religion, State and Politics in the Soviet Union and Successor States*, p. 100.

state, schismatics gave rise to a lot of criticism in their own address. A contemporary student of the EKhB schism, M.T. Nevolin, opines that the Initiative Group's leaders did not observe themselves what they demanded of others:

Their demand of irreproachable observance of all precepts of their religious creed, and first of all, of the principle of autonomy, deviated into its grossest violation (excommunication of members of other parish churches. A demand of democracy and uncensored publishing gave way to a relatively rigid centralization and censorship. A vanguard of struggle against the status quo gradually turned into a stronghold of resistance to any innovations and reforms...Regardless of any governmental changes and even collapse of the Soviet Union, they did not alter their position of isolation from powers that be. Quite often this appeared as isolation from the society...The VSEKhB's position, on the other hand gradually changed in the direction of acknowledgement of its mistakes and their correction.<sup>261</sup>

Although Nevolin's criticism is not ungrounded, most of it could be countered by the fact that the reformers' confrontation with the incumbent EKhB leadership was not played out on equal and fair terms but under a tremendous pressure exerted upon them by the state. When the reformers bore the brunt of persecution, the VSEKhB enjoyed the support and protection of the Soviet state. The reformers did not seek isolation from society—they were driven into it by the combined efforts of the Soviet state and the VSEKhB. It was not the society as such that they renounced but specifically Soviet society, hostile to believers. The distance that they strove to put between the powers that be and their movement was a projection of their extensive exegesis of problems that plagued institutional Christianity for centuries. Without a genuine separation of state and church, they believed, the latter could not but become corrupted through submission to

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<sup>261</sup> M.T. Nevolin, "Analiz rasdeleniia 1959-1963 godov v Evangel'sko-Baptistskom dvizhenii v SSSR" in *Protestantism i Protestanty v Rossii: proshloe, nastoiashchee, budushchee*, red. E.V. Zaitsev i V.S. Liakhu (Zaokskii: Istochnik zhizni, 2004), p. 44.

secular authorities or entanglements in worldly politics. The evidence of VSEKhB's participation in the government's counterpropaganda campaigns and its contribution to the state's suppression of non-conformism were certainly not positive examples of interaction between the church and powers that be. Whether the price the reformers paid for their uncompromising stance on this issue was justified is a separate question, but one can hardly find anything extremist in their stubborn adherence to the principle considered a constitutional norm in most democratic countries. Finally, Nevolin's implicit praise of the VSEKhB's propensity for change does not account for the fact that the Moscow leaders initially neither envisioned nor supported any alterations of the existing status quo. The evidence suggests that the positive changes began to occur within the VSEKhB's domain only when the intensity and scope of the reform movement convinced the Soviet state that it was expedient to endorse such changes in order to deprive the opposition of its cause and constituency. From 1963 and onward, the specter of the reformers' alternative spiritual center continued to vicariously benefit the VSEKhB.

The state persecution gradually transformed the *Initsiativniki* from strictly religious reformers into political dissidents who contributed a great deal to raising the legal awareness not only of their own fellow-believers, but may have engendered, as Michael Bourdeaux suggested, "a cross-fertilization of ideas from the smaller ECB [EKhB] Church into the massive Russian Orthodox Church," with priests Eshliman and Yakunin soon joining the fight for freeing the church from the state tutelage.<sup>262</sup> Having

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<sup>262</sup> Michael Bourdeaux, *Religious Ferment in Russia*, p. 185.



examined documents produced by the EKhB and Orthodox dissenters, Bourdeaux concluded:

Both reflect a broad intellectual approach to the problem of church-state relations and show that Russian Christians are now masters of a logical exposition of their rights. They are prepared to speak out in a new way, disregarding the fear of reprisal. The legal grasp of both Baptist and Orthodox documents is most impressive...In both documents the charge is brought that the state has forced the church to accept legislation which cannot be reconciled with basic guarantees of freedom contained in the Constitution. This has led to the exacerbation of the feelings of believers and could tempt them into rebellion against the regime.<sup>263</sup>

While in hindsight the last of Bourdeaux's remarks appears overly optimistic and schismatics' rebellion at best landed the more fortunate of them in Sheremetievo-II, boarding a plane taking them to the United States, Canada, or some other western country willing to take them, in the late 1960s religious dissenters generated enough publicity (certainly enough to receive support of such a well-known figure as Academician Andrei Sakharov) to justify the hopeful thinking of their sympathizers abroad. The CCEKhB supporters' activity helped organize and channel believers' discontent and sent a clear message to the Soviet state that violations of believers' rights could no longer be kept secret.

The bitter experience of the EKhB schism demonstrated that in spite of his/her best efforts to withdraw from politics, a Christian in the Soviet Union (as in any other totalitarian state) could not remain apolitical. In the Soviet Union believers were forced to either cooperate with the state or be automatically considered politically unreliable. The degrees of collaboration or resistance could certainly vary, but one could not

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<sup>263</sup> Ibid., p. 185-186.

altogether escape politics. Whether one served the state as an informant, or furthered the interests of USSR's foreign policy at the WCC conferences, or, on the contrary, refused to comply with the Soviet legislation on cults or told the world of the real plight of believers behind the Iron Curtain, he/she committed political acts in the eyes of the Soviet government and was ultimately judged on the basis of political utility to the state of his/her actions. Choosing one or the other option could mean promotion or martyrdom and often left one facing a difficult moral dilemma. Which course of action could be better justified on moral grounds? Despite the incremental relaxation of the Soviet religious policy, the moral implications of the different paths taken by the CCEKhB and the VSEKhB would continue to divide the Soviet Evangelicals throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE SDA SCHISM

As indicated in the introduction to the previous chapter, by comparison with the EKhB reform movement, the SDA schism did not stir much resonance outside the Adventist community domestically and abroad in part due to the SDA church being a considerably smaller denomination (only 1/10 of the EKhB numerical strength even in Ukraine—the area of largest concentration of Protestants in the USSR), and in part because the SDA schism did not have a pronounced political dimension. Although the unregistered SDA communities experienced the same harassment as any other communities in the religious underground and the evidence of persecution and show trials of Adventists made its way to the pages of *Khronika*, as Alexeyeva and Goldberg repeatedly remarked in their narrative, the SDA schism resembled more a family or clannish affair, with multiple centers of gravity attracting or repulsing each other in a pattern that could not be easily grasped. To complicate matters still further, the government did not seem to pursue a consistent policy vis-à-vis these centers and merely played them against each other.

Consequently, the SDA schism is a convoluted and mysterious affair that does not lend itself easily to interpretation. Whereas the SDA historians and memoirists, often active participants of events themselves, feel uncomfortable speaking of this painful

experience openly and often resort to parables or simply skip details most crucial to the understanding of the schism, the substantial data deposited in the government archives also does not translate into a clear-cut exposition of the state's position with respect to the more salient episodes of the SDA schism. If in the case of the EKhB schism the respective positions of the VSEKhB and the CCEKhB were clearly defined, with the government backing the former and persecuting the latter, the SDA schism was full of ambiguities, with the state-recognized moderates acting as reformers and accusing schismatics of collaboration with the government, and schismatics receiving the government backing and excommunicating the purported moderates for their reformism.

The most obvious reason for such confusion was that the SDA church did not have an officially recognized all-union spiritual center that the government could support against any potential rival centers. In December of 1960, the government dissolved the All-Union Council of the Seventh Day Adventists, the VSASD, for failure to enforce state restrictions and directly or indirectly encouraging missionary work, religious instruction of children, producing and supplying to communities unsanctioned instructional materials and other activities contributing to the continuous growth and rejuvenation of this Protestant denomination. In the absence of any officially recognized central leadership, the SDA communities throughout the country spontaneously rallied around the former influential VSASD leaders—P.A. Matsanov, deposed by the CARC already in 1955, and S.P. Kulyzhskii who replaced Matsanov and headed the VSASD until its dissolution in 1960. Some SDA communities chose to stir clear of either one of these equally unofficial centers and remain neutral. Both the more confrontational

Matsanov and the more timid Kulyzhskii had their representatives in Ukraine and elsewhere. Since the government clearly associated the growth of the SDA church in the 1950s with the activity of its central leadership, its “corpus of preachers” providing coordination and setting goals, the formation of the two mentioned unofficial leaderships in the early 1960s contradicted the state agenda of keeping the SDA communities as autonomous entities headed by parish presbyters who had no jurisdiction outside of their respective communities and, hence, could not provide the SDA church nation-wide with any coordinated course of action. The former VSASD leaders, however, did not lend themselves readily to this government plan and prompted Litvin to write:

The SDA communities operate on the basis of autonomy. In spite of this, the former workers of spiritual center and preachers of this sect continue to illegally lead the Adventist communities. At this time, there are actually two functioning centers: the one in Moscow comprises the former head of VSASD Kulyzhskii, Senior Presbyter for Ukraine Parasel, and their followers; the other is in Kiev and consists of presbyter of the Kiev SDA community, Kolbach, the former head of VSASD, Matsanov, preachers Vasiukov, Zhukaliuk, Khimenets, and others. Each of these illegally functioning centers has its supporters, maintains constant communication with them, and carries out spiritual and organizational supervision of communities. There are no canonical or dogmatic differences between them. Both strive to assume leadership over the Adventist church and incite supporters of one group against another, which essentially led to a schism within this sect.<sup>1</sup>

In 1963, Litvin reported of the alarming developments in his immediate domain—the Ukraine:

The former Senior Presbyter for the republic, Parasei, the former Senior Presbyter for Chernovtsy oblast, Bondar’, and their activists travel from community to community and conduct work resembling that of the EKHB schismatics. They entice believers to send letters to the organs of government, demanding the restoration of spiritual center and convocation of the SDA congress to resolve internal church issues. In doing so, the former leaders of the SDA spiritual center, in particular its representatives in Ukraine, Parasei and

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<sup>1</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 185, p. 8.

Bondar', try to ensure the support of believers, to fully rehabilitate themselves, and assume leadership of the sect in the republic. In Volynia and Zhitomir oblasts, there were instances of children refusing to attend schools and participate in school activities on Sabbath<sup>2</sup>

Under Parasei's and Bondar's tutelage, complained Litvin, the SDA communities in a number of oblasts experienced religious revival, "recruited more followers, engaged in dissemination of religious propaganda outside the walls of prayer houses, conducted religious work among children and youth and materially supported Parasei, Bondar', Vovk, and other servants of the cult taken off registration for violations of legislation on cults."<sup>3</sup> Moreover, "a plan of religious education of sectarians and their candidate-members, compiled not without the participation of Parasei and Bondar', was widely circulated among believers of the Chernovtsy SDA community." Among other subheadings, the plan contained the following: "Our path is strewn with rocks and thorns,' 'The Christian and his attitude towards the world,' 'Family and school,' 'The Christian and social life,' 'Christian education,' and others." As a result of these measures of religious revivalism, observed Litvin, "the believers' attendance of prayer meetings" remained "high," and "practically all believers, candidate-members from among the youth and, in some cases, even children of school age participated in prayer services." There were also attempts on the part of communities' activists "to get rid of presbyters observing the legislation on cults and implementing recommendations of the Council's Upolnomochnyye and local organs of authority."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 24, D. 5908, p. 68.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

The CARC thus faced a pretty tough dilemma: on one hand, it wished to keep the SDA communities isolated from influential leaders and under the direct supervision of the local Upolnomochennye, but on the other, it could not maintain the transparency of these autonomous communities without some sort of church leadership with whom the Council would liaise on the regular basis and receive detailed information about the activity of such people as Parasei and Bondar'. The Council therefore opted for a partial restoration of the republican and oblast level Senior Presbyters:

For the purpose of stopping the activity of the former SDA spiritual center and acquiring information about the internal life of communities, we find it expedient to have a Senior Presbyter of the SDA church for the republic and Senior Presbyters for the oblasts with the greatest proliferation of this sect, such as Vinnitsa, Zakarpatie, and Chernovtsy oblasts.<sup>5</sup>

In the past, before the dissolution of the VSASD, the government was certainly better informed at least about some aspects of the SDA communities' internal life. In February of 1960, for instance, the then Senior Presbyter of the SDA church in Ukraine, Parasei, submitted the following statement to Polonnik:

On February 12, 1960, the former presbyter of the Moscow SDA community, Vasili Dmitrievich Yakovenko, who was dismissed from spiritual work and expelled from membership in the SDA church for un-Christian conduct..., came to Kiev from Moscow. Presently, he is visiting the SDA communities in Ukraine. Lately, under the guise of membership in the SDA church and some special powers vested in him, he has already visited some communities in Zhitomir oblast...He also conducts the same visitations in Vinnitsa oblast...

The work he carries out in communities consists in the following:

--He spreads rumors among members that there is no spiritual center anywhere.

--That if he stood at the head of communities, then those communities that are now closed would be opened and presbyters who were taken off registration—restored.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

--He entices the local authorities against communities' presbyters, as it became especially apparent in village Skakovka where he spent a long time in the village soviet, after which the village soviet chairman...had a conversation with the community's presbyter...

Such work of his evoked extreme discontent and outrage among believers...I think that such behavior of V.D. Yakovenko is an obvious provocation, and that necessary measures need to be taken to stop it and bring him to an appropriate order.<sup>6</sup>

Now, in the aftermath of the VSASD's dissolution, the CARC wished to reestablish channels for receiving similar information and, as the earlier cited Litvin's report shows, someone provided the CARC with just such information on Parasei's recent reformism. Parasei and Bondar'-inspired reformism, likened by Litvin to that of the EKHB schismatics, is most difficult to explain, since these two influential SDA leaders belonged to Kulyzhskii's camp whose supporters were traditionally thought of as law abiding moderates in comparison with Matsanov's schismatics. That Parasei's radicalism, tacitly condoned by Kulyzhskii, surprised and disoriented some believers in Ukraine could be evidenced by a letter written by an SDA presbyter Shul'ga to a prominent representative of Matsanov's camp in Ukraine, D.M. Kolbach. In his letter, Shul'ga complained that Parasei-Kulyzhskii's supporters in Ukraine discouraged registration, called for the convocation of a legitimate SDA congress, used Kriuchkovtsy (supporters of G.Kriuchkov, leader of the Orgcommittee) as a positive example, and chided other SDA leaders for the following transgressions:

1. Abandonment of missionary work which is no longer conducted in the world and is reduced to a mere performance of religious rituals in the confines of a prayer house.

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<sup>6</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 309, p. 29.



2. Compliance with the authorities' demand that children be kept outside of the prayer house, not raised in the faith, and not taught religion in the church.
3. The preachers' collaboration with the Upolnomochennyie and authorities, including the KGB (To my embarrassment, they asked me: 'Aren't you cooperating?' According to their reasoning, I wouldn't be otherwise registered.)
4. The Bible studies, the order of prayer services, and youth meetings were all altered to please the authorities.<sup>7</sup>

"Why do we have to expose [the SDA church] to what happened among the Baptists?"

wondered Shul'ga. "We had experiences with reformers before the war, and this is the same pattern, the same methods that will yield the same results."<sup>8</sup> In another letter to Kolbach, Shul'ga informed that at one of the prayer meetings Parasei asked people to stand up and delivered a long speech, during which he inquired the congregation:

"Whom should we follow—man or God? Whom should we listen to and whom should we obey—man or God? The congregation responded: 'God!'" Shul'ga's informant, Skakun, who was present at this meeting, commented that "it was such a call to fanaticism as he has not yet encountered—'a revolutionary spirit.'" It bothered Shul'ga that Parasei's fiery speeches and radical innovations, apparently sanctioned by Kulyzhskii and Likarenko (head of the Moscow SDA community), promoted extremism. "How can the ordinary people sort this all out?" he wondered. "They see Parasei as an outstanding leader, an inspirer from Moscow..."<sup>9</sup> The government could not but share Shul'ga's concern, especially given the fact that his letters addressed to Kolbach somehow found their way to the desk of the Council's Upolnomochennyi.

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<sup>7</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 455, p. 66.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

The government addressed this problem in the most striking manner: instead of arresting Parasei, Bondar', Kulyzhskii, Likarenko and other alleged reformers, it handed them over to the judgment of their opposition—Matsanov's schismatics whose authority the Kulyzhskii's camp challenged. In an unprecedented move, especially viewed in the context of the parallel EKhB schism, the government decided to extinguish the reformism of strayed moderates by the hands of perceived extremists. In January of 1965, the CARC entrusted Matsanov's schismatics to convene under their leadership an extended meeting of SDA preachers and presbyters—a congress really—for the purpose of putting an end to the ongoing schism within their church. Years later, a prominent member of Matsanov's group at the time, N.A. Zhukaliuk reminisced:

The spiritual center headed by P.A. Matsanov was considered illegal and, therefore, experienced great persecution by the authorities. D.K. Kolbach headed the Ukrainian branch of this center. We thought of ourselves as oppressed and hunted down. Therefore, I was greatly surprised when in response to the initiative of D.K. Kolbach and P.A. Matsanov the Council for the Affairs of Religions in Ukraine permitted us to conduct in Kiev a 'congress' of all Soviet Union's preachers under the pretext of eliminating the schism.<sup>10</sup>

According to Zhukaliuk's version, representatives of Matsanov's majority group initiated the convocation of a congress to address the issue of schism allegedly exacerbated by Parasei's recent innovations and "revolutionary spirit." It remains to be explained, however, what prompted Parasei, to the tacit approval of Kulyzhskii and other prominent SDA figures, to enter his radical stage? Why would Parasei, who had worked rather well with the Upolnomochennye in his former capacity as the Senior Presbyter of the SDA

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<sup>10</sup> N.A. Zhukaliuk, *Cherez krutyie perevaly*, p. 178.

church in Ukraine, now accuse others of collaborationism and submissiveness to authorities?

The SDA sources provide no coherent explanation, and private opinions of contemporaries who knew Parasei attribute it to his rather difficult character and personal ambitions. It is quite probable that the dismissal of Parasei and other prominent VSASD leaders only stripped them of their official status with the government but could not at the same time relieve them of the deep-seated sense of mission. In the ensuing interregnum, some of them could take innovative approaches to regaining their influence over the SDA church and continuing on with their mission. There is also another nagging question: if the government considered the Kulyzhskii group's bickering for power dangerous, why would not it simply repress Parasei, Bondar' and others, as it did with the EKhB reformers, instead of authorizing an unprecedented SDA congress under the leadership of the purportedly more radical elements? The answer to this question is two-fold and derivative of the entire context of the relationship between the SDA church and the state in the 1960s-1970s. First of all, Parasei's activity, for instance, did not threaten the authority of the state-backed spiritual center, as in the case of the Orgcommittee vs. VSEKhB controversy, and could only challenge other equally unofficial contenders for the leadership of the SDA church. Second, the CARC/CAR maintained relatively good working relationship with Parasei, Kylyzhskii and Likarenko in the past (and present, in Likarenko's case) and would continue to work with them in the future. These would-be reformers were valuable assets for the state to be dismissed and estranged—something that could possibly turn them into real radicals. The state opted for a subtle and ingenious

solution. In allowing Matsanov's schismatics, whose sentiments it knew quite well, to preside over the 1965 Kiev Congress the state set up a stage upon which the ambitions of contending SDA leaders would most certainly clash, producing a number of begrudged individuals whom the government could later take under its wing, on one hand, and discrediting the entire SDA leadership in the eyes of ordinary believers, on the other. The latter outcome would be especially beneficial for the state, for it would show the ordinary believers that the SDA leaders allowed their ambitions to get the better of them and, therefore, provide the state with additional grounds for keeping the SDA parish communities autonomous. There was certainly a risk of undesirable consequences—the congress could deepen the schism rather than eliminate it. However, on the scale of state's priorities at the time, the need to prevent any one unsanctioned group of SDA leaders from gaining hegemony over the SDA church in the Soviet Union trumped all other concerns.

The congress convened on January 20, 1965, in Kiev. Most of the 69 ordained ministers present at the congress were from Ukraine—the scene of recent schismatic activity of Parasei and his supporters. However, there were ordained representatives from the other Soviet republics and 20 additional non-ordained servants from Ukraine. Matsanov's supporters were firmly in control of the congress and followed the agenda prepared in advance. Parasei, Bondar', Kylyzhskii, Likarenko and others were quickly put on trial for which none of them was prepared in advance. The congress gave Parasei and his willful wife Nadezhda a thorough thrashing. According to both the proper protocol of the congress' proceedings and additional explanatory note written by Kolbach

and dispatched to all SDA communities in Ukraine, Parasei was found culpable of “arbitrariness...committed under the guise of VSASD,” of “violations of the church manual [an SDA regulatory code],” and of “badmouthing other preachers.”<sup>11</sup> More specifically, Parasei and Bondar’ were accused of innovations such as “allowing all willing non-members of communities to participate in the Communion,” of “demanding that only their instructions were listened to as those given by the VSASD leadership,” of calling other SDA leaders “schismatics...and traitors connected with the authorities.”<sup>12</sup> “Those who doubted slanders disseminated by Parasei and Bondar’,” alleged Kolbach, “the latter sent to Moscow, to Kulyzhskii, so that they could validate there everything said about the other preachers. By such actions, S.P. Kulyzhskii contributed to the rise of great evil and schism in the communities.”<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, Kulyzhskii “abused his status as the former chairman of the VSASD” and behaved as a two-faced Janus.<sup>14</sup> For instance, he would tell one group of leaders that “all preachers were equal in the aftermath of the VSASD’s dissolution, but at the same time would tell Parasei, Bondar’, and their supporters something different—that only their instructions should be obeyed as those given by the former leaders of the VSASD.”<sup>15</sup> Similar accusations were brought against other members of Kulyzhskii’s group. The congress therefore ruled to strip Kulyzhskii, Parasei, Bondar’, Dyman’, and others of their ordination. Since

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<sup>11</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 455, p. 22.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

excommunication was rightfully the prerogative of parish communities, the congress recommended that the respective communities of these brothers excommunicated them. As the acting head of the Moscow community, Likarenko seemed to have escaped such harsh judgment, although the congress specifically stated: “Should anyone initiate any actions on the authority of Kulyzhskii, Likarenko, and Galadzhev as on the authority of VSASD, consider it an act of disorganization of the SDA church.”<sup>16</sup> The congress’ decision amounted to nothing less than a humiliating fiasco for a number of the most prominent and respected leaders of the SDA church. The repercussions this decision engendered began to be felt instantly.

While prosecuting members of Kulyzhskii’s group for arbitrariness, the congress indulged in the same vice and violated the church’s regulatory code. Matsanov, Kolbach, Sil’man, and other influential figures of the schismatic branch imposed their will on the congress while claiming in their protocol that “all preachers and presbyters unanimously accepted this decision.”<sup>17</sup> Sadly, the congress proved to be a testimony to the proliferation and infectiousness of Soviet authoritarian mentality—the same mentality whose paternalistic, unquestionable moral absolutism loomed so large at the Stalin era trials of leftist or rightist deviationists. Reminiscing of the part he played at this congress, N.A. Zhukaliuk regretfully admitted what many other younger and less experienced participants of this “tragic spectacle” must have felt afterwards:

The formation of my views was then affected not so much by the ability to analyze as by unlimited faith in the elder brothers. In the course of the schism, I

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

did a lot of things because such was the decision of my faction, not because I was convinced of the veracity of my actions. Moreover, when I had to read in communities accusatory, slenderizing letters against leaders and members of the opposing spiritual center, I could not look in the eyes of church members without embarrassment, since those letters in fact scorned the authority and dignity not of some ordinary persons but God's servants as such.<sup>18</sup>

Instead of uniting the SDA church, the congress provoked greater unrest in communities and, even worse, divided the church's leadership and engendered lasting antagonism between its various factions. In this latter sense, the congress organizers walked straight into the trap set up for them by the government.

Just months after the congress, one of its participants, F.V. Mel'nik, sent the following "Explanatory Note" to Matsanov, Sil'man and Kolbach:

I hereby inform you that I remove my signature from the circular letter from 01/20/1965, because some people are abusing my name, saying that I signed the protocol concerning the punishment of brothers-preachers S.P. Kulyzhskii, A.F. Parasei, I.S. Bondar', and D.S. Fishchiuk. This appalls me, since I had signed only a blank sheet of paper which everyone present at the meeting [congress] had signed. The protocol does not have my signature. The protocol was signed only by brothers P.A. Matsanov, P.G. Sil'man, and D.K. Kolbach. I could not have signed the protocol, because some points of that protocol were too harsh, hastily made, unlawful and in contradiction to the church regulatory code. That is why, I did not take part in the voting, and for that reason brother Sil'man reproached me later.

Besides, none of the brothers who had been subjected to punishment was invited on the eve of the meeting, that is on 01/19/1965, to the council of elders to hear about the nature of accusations to be brought against them—something that I suggested to do in accordance with the Word of God: 'Does our law condemn anyone without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?' (John 7:51)...<sup>19</sup>

Mel'nik's statement reinforces Zhukaliuk's earlier recollection of the unquestionable authority the senior brothers wielded over their junior subordinates and laity. Preparing

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<sup>18</sup> N.A. Zhukaliuk, *Cherez krutye perevaly*, p. 178.

<sup>19</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 455, p. 97.

for the congress, leaders of the Matsanov majority faction apparently dismissed all democratic inklings inherent in the idea of a congress and made sure that its outcome would be to their satisfaction. Such bullying of the congress, however, backfired, and Mel'nik was not the only one to notice that the military-style subordination of the junior delegates to the will of the seniors supplanted at the congress the established procedural steps. Shortly after the congress, Kulyzhskii, who did not have a chance to properly defend himself at the congress, submitted his written objections to the congress' decision to Matsanov, Sil'man, and Kolbach. He stipulated that the decision was invalid on the following grounds:

Since I did not have an opportunity to address point by point the accusations brought against me, because I was merely presented to the entire congregation so that everyone who could say anything against me could act as my accuser, I hereby wish to bring your attention to the following facts:

1. Not only few days in advance, but not even on the eve of the congress' convocation did you inform me of your accusations in a written form or orally. Even the congress' agenda, delineating the character and objectives of the congress, contained nothing indicating this issue. I wonder why? Either to utterly stun me by the unexpectedness of accusations against me, or to avoid the confusion among delegates that the public announcement of charges against me would have engendered. In this manner, the existing evangelical rules for bringing a sinner to his senses and repentance had been circumvented...
2. A decision to charge me on the said accusations had been prepared and typed ahead of time, before the congress' convocation. Is it just to pass a sentence before the court hearing, before questioning witnesses and acquiring testimony from the accused himself, as it happened in this particular case when brother Matsanov hastily, without leaving the pulpit [from which he preached a sermon], read the prepared decision, not having given to me, as the accused, the right to speak in my defense?<sup>20</sup>

In the next several paragraphs, Kulyzhskii claimed that the evidence brought against him by certain brothers was no more than hearsay and, in turn, accused the

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 9.



congress organizers of not taking the time to determine the truthfulness of such evidence. He also flatly denied allegations that he attempted to derail the congress by not showing up, and for which reason the congress organizers summoned him to the congress via a telegram instead of a formal written invitation. Although he was privy to a preliminary conversation about a possible small meeting of church servants, he had no idea that the government in fact allowed not just a meeting but a congress. Once Matsanov and his supporters received permission to convene a congress, they held three preliminary meetings to which Kulyzhskii had not been invited. In Kulyzhskii's opinion, these were the tale-tail signs of Matsanov's faction setting him up for a surprise trial. He therefore demanded that the former VSASD members carefully reviewed his statement in his presence and allowed him to defend himself. "I do not fight for the honorable title of Chairman [of VSASD] as others do," he concluded, "(I was stripped of that title on December 12, 1960, when the organs of Soviet authority disbanded our all-union spiritual center), but I stand for God's work which I have been carrying out to the best of my ability, with my weaknesses and possible mistakes." Kulyzhskii further informed his opponents that he intended to make the content of his statement available to all brothers who signed the congress' letter to communities.<sup>21</sup>

With their clean victory over the opponents in doubt even by those delegates who signed the protocol, the Matsanov faction's leaders now faced a formidable task of convincing communities to accept the congress' decision. In his apparently voluntary report to the Council's Upolnomochennyi for Moscow oblast, comrade Lishakov,

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 9-10.

Likarenko, who along with Parasei and Kulyzhskii allegedly accused other SDA presbyters of collaboration with the authorities, provided the state with incredibly detailed (and incriminating) information about Matsanov's supporters' attempts to push through the congress's decision in the Moscow community. According to Likarenko, Matsanov, Sil'man, Vasiukov, and their supporter, Vera Agarkova appeared at his Moscow apartment on Friday, May 21, 1965. Likarenko commented that "an uninvited guest," as the Russian saying goes, "is worse than a Tatar [an allusion to the Tatar-Mongol domination of Russia during the Middle Ages]." The uninvited guests expressed their intention to address the Moscow community the next day during the Sabbath prayer meeting. Likarenko replied that that the Moscow Community was registered and no one could speak to the congregation without the expressed permission of the Upolnomochennyi. Even Kulyzhskii, residing in Moscow, could not speak *ex cathedra* because the Upolnomochennyi did not grant him permission to do so. Matsanov purportedly parried: "If you need such a permission, then go and petition for it. We do not need such a permission, since we visit communities everywhere, deliver sermons, establish order, and do not ask anyone for a permission to do so."<sup>22</sup> Agarkova argued that another CARC official, Riazanov, did not have any objections to their coming to Moscow. Likarenko, however, doubted the authenticity of Agarkova's claim and replied "that if comrade Riazanov permitted them to come to Moscow, then comrade Lishakov would say the same thing, but comrade Lishakov stated that no one could without his permission deliver a sermon *ex cathedra* in Moscow." In order to cool his guests'

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 59.

enthusiasm and perhaps intimidate them, Likarenko mentioned that he knew about their illegal activities, such as dissemination of “tape-recordings with children’s voices [children singing religious songs].” Knowing that involving children in religious activities was a punishable offense, Matsanov, nonetheless, said: “Is it bad? This is the goal of our work.”<sup>23</sup> The guests left without having reached any consensus with Likarenko.

When Likarenko arrived at the prayer house next morning, he noticed a lot of “specially prepared” visitors from Ukraine and other parts of the country in the congregation. Likarenko meticulously listed their names and places of residence. “Matsanov, Sil’man, and Vasiukov,” he reported, “sat close to the stairs leading up to the cathedra and, as it became known later, planned to force their way to the cathedra and address the audience.” The plan failed due to preventive measures taken by Likarenko. He placed “reliable men and women near the cathedra” with an expressed purpose of blocking the guests’ approaches to it. He overheard one member of the Moscow community, a schismatics’ sympathizer, Gevorkian labeling this measure as “installing militia sentries.” When the prayer service ended and Likarenko asked everyone to clear the building, Gevorkian and a number of other members of the Moscow community, to whom Likarenko referred sarcastically as “honorable fathers” or “a group of mutineers,” “rushed into the crowd and raised a lot of noise” that “was squashed with great difficulty by the efforts of [community’s] executive organ and *dvadtsatka*.” Only by 4:00 p.m. the believers finally left the prayer house. Some believers later told Likarenko that while

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

mingling with the congregation, Matsanov, Sil'man, and Vasiukov enticed believers with the following words: "In Ukraine, we have full freedom. We do not ask permission from anyone anywhere. We do not need permits from the Upolnomochennye. We travel to communities, preach, and establish order according to our own discretion. We arrived here on the invitation of members of the Moscow community (certainly of that group of rebels [inserted Likarenko]) to bring your community into order." When some believers "tried to object to their 'order,'" the guests reportedly stated: "You are afraid, as Likarenko is afraid. You need to act boldly. You don't need to go to the Upolnomochennyi, and you need to do everything independently as our regulatory code states."<sup>24</sup> Debates and conversations with the guests on the topic of unity continued that day in the believers' private apartments. One participant of these talks, a wife of the Moscow community member, Khrenov, told Likarenko: "You [Likarenko and Kulyzhskii's faction] preach peace and love, but you do not possess them yourselves. Our elder brothers arrived, and we did not receive them properly—did not allow them to speak from the pulpit. They are our leaders, and we do not recognize that the Council's Upolnomochennye took them off registration." When Likarenko tried to reason with her, saying that Adventists no longer had their central organ, she objected, stating that "the authorities annulled its registration," and that she and her group firmly believed that they "had a central organ in Kiev and elder brothers headed by Matsanov."<sup>25</sup> These kinds of simplistically articulated arguments, it appears, fueled divisions and disagreements

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 60-61.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

among believers even in the showcase Moscow community. Although there is no definitive evidence indicating that the government gave Ukrainian Adventists preferential treatment, Matsanov's supporters, if Likarenko did not pervert facts to his advantage, may have interpreted the 1965 Congress as a whiff of change and an invitation to circumvent certain government restrictions. At any rate, the temporary relaxation of religious persecution in the mid 1960s could have given Matsanov's schismatics a false impression and encouraged them to sell their agenda to registered communities in an attractive wrapper of the newly gained freedom.

Likarenko generally dismissed these talks of freedom as mere hearsay disseminated by schismatics, but made sure that the government knew who was ultimately responsible for the activity of the mentioned "rebel group" in his own community:

Such actions of this group are further reinforced when they hear that Matsanov's liberties are being condoned in Ukraine. For instance, an SDA community was recently registered in Kharkov, and that during the May holidays this community organized a special youth and children meeting at which poems were recited, etc. According to rumors, the same is taking place in other communities of the Ukrainian SSR. If there is no uniformity of action on the part of the Upolnomochennye of CARC with respect to this issue, it will lead to the weakening of and dismissive attitudes towards the Soviet laws on religious cults. If these 'fathers' are continuously given a green light (and as I hear, Sil'man is being registered as presbyter in Belaia Tserkov where he has already bought a house...), then the SDAs are cultivating the spirit of Kriuchkovite Orgcommittee. This will certainly lead to a complete neglect of the Soviet legislation on religious cults.<sup>26</sup>

This last passage of Likarenko's report, in particular, strikingly resembles the worst examples of VSEKhB's collaborationism and stands as a testimony to the additional

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

benefit the government derived from permitting the 1965 Congress. The SDA leaders humiliated or defrocked at this congress felt so insecure about their careers that they hastened to show their loyalty to government by exposing their opponents. As a result, the CARC gained a valuable insight into the inner workings of SDA communities and learned a great deal about the personal views and propensities of a number of prominent SDA leaders.

At the same time, there is some inconclusive evidence that the leaders of Matsanov's faction were in fact given a green light to freely visit those SDA communities in Ukraine that were most affected by Parasei's and Bondar' activity. The Council's Upolnomochennyi for Chernovtsy oblast, Urychev, for instance, submitted a long report to the CARC headquarters in both Kiev and Moscow, in which he described the tour of 11 SDA communities in his oblast by Kolbach, Matsanov, Vasiukov, Khimenets, Smyk and other influential figures of the Matsanov faction for the purpose of imposing the congress' decision and making appropriate leadership rearrangements. The tone of Urychev's report, however, suggests that this action represented a part of some master plan to which Urychev himself was not entirely privy and simply followed specific instructions from the CARC headquarters. To add to the confusion, Urychev referred to Parasei and Bondar' as "schismatics" and representatives of Matsanov's group as legitimate leaders working in tandem with the CARC. According to Urychev, some communities "unanimously condemned Parasei's, Bondar's, and Kulyzhskii's schismatic activity and supported the congress' decision," whereas others, such as those in villages Klishkovtsy, Shishkovtsy, M-Kucheriv, and Beregomet, slammed the doors of their

prayer houses shut before Matsanov's envoys. "After this," reported Urychev, "I summoned leaders of communities in Klishkovtsy and Shishkovtsy for a talk and warned them that they could not act in such a manner; that the preachers would come to their communities once again and they should be given full opportunity to converse with believers."<sup>27</sup> However, when Matsanov's envoys appeared for the second time, they were again turned down. "Moreover," stressed Urychev, "the community leaders in Klishkovtsy put two padlocks on their prayer house, locked their apartments and left the village for that entire day."<sup>28</sup> In the SDA community in village Novosel'e, the preachers were eventually allowed to enter the prayer and deliver a sermon, but not to conduct explanatory conversations [*raziasnitel'nye besedy*] or condemn the activity of Bondar' and Parasei." When Matsanov tried "to judge the activity of schismatics Bondar', Parasei and Kulyzhskii under the guise of delivering a sermon, the community's presbyter instantly began restraining Matsanov by pulling on the sleeve of his jacket and wagging his finger at him."<sup>29</sup> In those communities that accepted the congress' decision, Matsanov and his team officiated at the elections of new leaderships, and in some cases, petitioned the Upolnomochennyi to terminate the registration of former community leaders and to approve the registration of new leaders selected by them.

Urychev was afraid that in such communities as in villages Klishkovtsy and Shishkovtsy "it would be extremely difficult to register the new leadership and that it could lead to a break up of these communities into two large groups—supporters of

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<sup>27</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 2, D. 450, p. 125-126.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 126.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

Bondar' and Parasei, and supporters of the congress (preacher Kolbach and others)."

Urychev also observed "while receiving supporters of Bondar', Parasei and Kulyzhskii in his office that they do not recognize the congress' decisions and think that Kolbach, Matsanov and others should make peace with Kulyzhskii, Parasei, etc, who supposedly are not guilty of anything, and that only after this they would acknowledge them [Matsanov, Kolbach, etc] as preachers and respect them." Urychev saw this situation as potentially dangerous and asked his superiors in Kiev and Moscow to send him instructions "as to how to resolve this issue in the best way."<sup>30</sup> A sizable portion of Urychev's report was dedicated to detailed descriptions of sad spectacles into which these explanatory conversations tended to degenerate, with SDA leaders and believers on both sides venting out their old grudges and calling each other liars and double-crossers. Summarizing the substantive part of his report, Urychev expressed what amounts to perhaps the most revealing indication of a possible master plan behind this CARC-orchestrated reshuffling of SDA leadership in Ukraine:

While conducting their explanatory work among the SDA believers in the oblast, preachers Kolbach, Matsanov and others apparently tried to somehow use it to their advantage... [They] tried to appoint to leadership positions people who were like-minded, but also readily promoted to leadership and presbyter positions people recommended by us... Their explanatory work produces more positive results for us than for them.<sup>31</sup>

Although it will require further research and access to the KGB archives to definitively prove the presence or absence of a master plan alluded to earlier, certain improbable interpretations of the objectives the government may have pursued by

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 127-128.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 128.



allowing the 1965 Congress to take place could be ruled out on the basis of evidence presented so far. That the CARC encouraged the systematic implementation in the Ukrainian SDA communities of the decisions made at the 1965 Congress proves that the convocation of this congress was not a mere blunder on the part of the government. It is also clear that the government did not care about enforcing the congress' decisions in Moscow or other parts of the Soviet Union. From the government's point of view, the short-term purpose of the congress was to stamp out the source of SDA revivalism in Ukraine by the hands of Adventists themselves. That Matsanov's faction received permission to organize and lead the congress did not mean that the government had plans to promote this faction to leadership over the SDA church in the USSR. Having cleverly used this faction for a specific purpose, the government relegated it shortly after to its former status of a schismatic branch and in the mid 1970s appointed the "temporary schismatic" Parasei to a prestigious post of presbyter of the SDA community in Kiev. The following excerpt from the characteristic of Kolbach, compiled by the head of the Ukrainian CARC, Litvin, and cited by Zhukaliuk in his memoirs, shows that the CARC knew Kolbach all too well to consider him as viable alternative to the strayed Parasei:

D.K. Kolbach—a dangerous SDA leader: exceptionally cunning, deft and versatile in carrying out politico-religious machinations; rabid adventurist, subtle and experienced conspirator; carries out all of his designs with other people's hands, without leaving any tracks; seasoned and versatile tactician in the conduct of struggle against the Soviet legislation; considers himself a modern believer, camouflaging himself in loyalty to the state and government policies...; gifted organizer and eloquent orator who stubbornly fulfills the will of the so-called 'Council of the corpus of preachers.' Presently he does not visit the Kiev SDA community. According to the available data, he runs a conspiratorial network of about 120 of his followers outside of Kiev. He formed them into platoons, having appointed himself a company commander! Our last meeting with Kolbach took

place on August 5, 1971, during which we demanded that he immediately ceased his illegal activity.<sup>32</sup>

The 1965 Congress did mark “the apogee of schism” in the SDA church, as Zhukaliuk put it in his memoirs, but his assumption that by pitting one SDA faction against the other the Soviet state expected to bring about the ultimate destruction of the SDA church<sup>33</sup> is somewhat far-fetched and informed not so much by the reality of state-church relations at the time but by the unrealistic and yet frightening enough predictions of antireligious zealots and ideological maximalists such as Nikita Khrushchev. By 1965, however, the Khrushchev era was over and, as the evidence of previous chapters suggest, the Brezhnev leadership realized, on the basis of data provided by the CARC/CAR, that Khrushchev’s antireligious excesses did little to curb religiosity as such and only provoked a determined and well-organized religious opposition to these excesses, forcing the government to make concessions to the moderate majority of believers in order to undermine the lure and attraction of the radical minority. From the mid 1960s, the Soviet leadership reverted to a more pragmatic and gradualist approach to the problem of religion and could not seriously entertain the idea of swift and utter destruction of any religious denomination in the foreseeable future. The fact that despite periodic bursts of persecution the SDA church continued to steadily grow throughout the remainder of the Soviet era was perhaps the most vivid evidence that the government did not entertain any “final solution” scenarios for the SDA church. Given the specificity of the SDA schism, the government could not, as in the case of the EKHB brotherhood, wholeheartedly

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<sup>32</sup> N.A. Zhukaliuk, *Cherez krutye perevaly*, p. 181-182.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 178-179.

support one faction against the other because it did not trust either one of them. At the same time, in view of the problems the EKhB dissenters presented for the state, the government was not interested in the deepening and perpetuation of the SDA schism. It was much more preferable for the state to keep as many SDA communities registered or at least accounted for as possible. In the mid 1960s, it appears, the state had only one clear-cut objective with respect to the SDA church—to keep its various influential leaders from coalescing into a single union-wide central leadership. The 1965 Congress unwittingly helped the state to achieve this objective. When Matsanov’s faction discredited one group of influential SDA leaders, communities loyal to the latter responded by defying the SDA leaders loyal to Matsanov. This is not to say, however, that the blame for the tragic consequences of the 1965 Congress should be placed squarely “on the tactic of Communist authorities”<sup>34</sup> who duped the innocent and well-intentioned initiators of the congress. One simply cannot dismiss a certain myopic misunderstanding of human psychology on the part of Matsanov’s supporters who failed to foresee that a public humiliation of their fellow-leaders commanding loyalties of numerous communities could not but result in the perpetuation of the schism. Another less noticeable at the time but nonetheless important consequence of the 1965 Congress was that the future leader of the SDA church in Russia, M.P. Kulakov, who previously tried to communicate with both factions, left the Matsanov faction (along with a number

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 179.

of other leaders)<sup>35</sup> and began to blaze a trail of his own while nominally associating with the Kulyzhskii faction.

The government's victory in 1965, however, proved to be a Pyrrhic victory. While driving a wedge between the SDA communities and the upper echelons of the SDA leadership, the government could not keep these communities autonomous. Once the initial confusion cleared, communities reemerged even more divided on the issue of loyalty to one or the other faction of SDA leaders. In November of 1967, after two years of enforcing decisions of the 1965 Congress, the government now instructed the guilt-ridden leaders of both factions to revoke the congress' decisions and self-liquidate. In his report to Kuroedov, Litvin wrote:

With the purpose of liquidation of these two groupings, the CAR...allowed their representatives to hold a meeting of former members of the VSASD's presidium and certain SDA preachers..., at which participants of the meeting composed an appeal to all SDA believers. In this appeal, they announced about the liquidation of both groupings and called upon believers to stop all squabbles in communities and preserve unity.<sup>36</sup>

In their appeal, the SDA leaders reminded believers that the VSASD was officially disbanded in 1960 and asked "all SDA brothers and sisters not to invoke anywhere and under no circumstances the former VSASD employees or the Moscow brothers and Moscow community, for at the present time we do not represent any spiritual center." The organizers of the Kiev Congress now asked believers not to refer to the Kiev Congress, since this congress did not have the authority to form a spiritual center or elect its representatives and focused exclusively on ending the schism. Claiming that this latter

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 186.

<sup>36</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 33, p. 102-106.

objective had been reached, the Moscow conference delegates divested themselves “of any further responsibility to implement the Kiev Congress’ decisions.” They also clarified that “the corpus of preachers,” “elders,” or “senior brothers” were “spiritual terms non-indicative of any organization to whose authority one could refer,” and proclaimed all unauthorized antagonistic pamphlets, brochures and letters circulated by either side “subject to requisition, destruction, and complete oblivion.” Most importantly, the delegates took pains to elaborate that “due to circumstances beyond their control each SDA community represents an autonomous ecclesiastic unit, guided by the Holy Spirit, presbyter, and deacon, elected by the general assembly of a given community’s believers, and by the community’s council and revisional commission, elected in accordance with the standard registration procedure.” “No preacher or member of one community,” they explained, “can interfere in the affairs of another community, unless he is invited to do so by that community.” The delegates concluded their appeal by encouraging communities to accept back all members excommunicated as a result of the 1965 Congress.<sup>37</sup>

After allowing the Matsanov’s faction to plant the seeds of long-term disunity among the SDA leaders and enjoy the brief euphoria of being in charge, the CAR forced both factions to officially affirm that the SDA church did not and could not have any central leadership. The evidence shows, however, that the Moscow conference’s appeal made little impact on either the SDA leaders who signed it or the SDA communities at large. In his earlier cited report to Kuroedov, Litvin remarked that when decisions of the

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<sup>37</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 72, p. 145-147.

Moscow conference were discussed at the Kiev SDA community, there were 200 extra people present besides the 323 official members of this community. The Kiev community, headed by Kolbach, was thus in violation of at least one paragraph of the Moscow conference's appeal. "According to the statement of the Kiev community's presbyter, Kolbach," commented Litvin, no one invited them [the 200 extra people] and they had come to the meeting on their own initiative. Later on, it had become clear that the organizers of such invitations were Kolbach, Matsanov, Vasiukov, and others."<sup>38</sup>

Although the membership in the Kiev community of Parasei and his wife were unanimously restored, it was quite apparent that the leaders who signed the 1967 Moscow appeal did not intend to observe it entirely themselves. The acceptance of the appeal was even more problematic in Belaia Tsetkov', the stronghold of Parasei supporters, such as A.Dyman' and others. "The meeting achieved the reconciliation of both groupings," wrote Litvin. "However, Dyman's supporters announced to certain believers that even though an agreement had been achieved, they would remain at their old positions, and that Parasei supports such a stance by Dyman'."<sup>39</sup> Although the number of groups like Dyman's was far from "insignificant," as Litvin thought, he boldly concluded that "the Moscow meeting...played a positive role in the overcoming of schism within the SDA church."<sup>40</sup> Contrary to Litvin's wishful thinking, the Pandora's Box opened at the 1965 Congress would prove extremely difficult to close.

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<sup>38</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 33, p. 102-106.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

The 1967 arrangement could not last not only because it tied ambitious SDA leaders, accustomed to running entire oblasts and regions, to a single parish community (and not every former VSASD member had even that limited opportunity, as Kulyzhskii's case demonstrated), but also because it atomized the SDA church by isolating individual communities and preventing communication between them. The leaders of both factions (by no means reconciled) knew it all too well that without some sort of central leadership providing believers with guidance, coordination and standardized readings even if only at the level of a republic or several oblasts the parish communities would eventually wither under the strictures imposed on them by the local Upolnomochennye and other Soviet agencies. The problem of the notorious "corpus of preachers" and illegal counseling meetings of SDA preachers, therefore, persisted throughout the 1970s. In 1971, Litvin described one of such disguised meetings and a number of ways by which the former VSASD leaders continued to wield authority over and centrally coordinate the activity of the purportedly autonomous SDA communities:

In 1968, the activist of the illegal SDA center in Ukraine, Kolbach, invited to his son's wedding approximately 500 fellow-believers from various places around the country and conducted a counseling meeting with his supporters. Among participants of the meeting there were 82 SDA presbyters from Ukraine and prominent preachers of the sect from Belgorod oblast—Matsanov, Moldovian SSR—Mel'nik, Belorussian SSR—Yaruta and others. In 1969 alone, 'the all-union preacher' Anatolii Dyman' (from Belaia Tserkov', Kiev oblast) visited many communities in Ukraine, RSFSR, Belorussia, Latvia and Moldavia. He continues to do the same this year. Preachers of the Kiev SDA community, Parasei, Bondar' and Kolbach also do not stop traveling. In their repertoire of methods of influencing believers, the more widely practiced are the tape-recording of festive prayer meetings, sermons of skilled preachers and choir performances, and their dissemination among religious communities...

In its activity, the SDA sect routinely violates the legislation on religious cults. These violations are manifested everywhere in the conduct of the so-called 'Bible hour'—essentially a school of religious instruction in which they involve

children, adolescents and youths; in the organization of systematic work with women; in the conduct of missionary work; in the interference in the life of autonomous communities by preachers coming from other places; in permitting foreign preachers to address congregations; in the clergy's interference with the work of communities' executive organs; and in the arbitrary removal by preachers of 'undesirable' presbyters... These and other violations of legislation are especially rife in the Kiev SDA community headed by Kolbach. He illegally promoted as presbyters his most fanatical supporters and tried very hard to establish contacts with the General Conference of the SDA church in the United States, with which so far none of the SDA communities in the USSR has any contacts.<sup>41</sup>

The former VSASD leaders and other influential preachers were also responsible for composing standardized reading for communities within their unofficial domain. In 1973, the Senior Reviewer of the Ukrainian CAR, V. Klimenko, reported about his conversation with the SDA presbyter V.I. Prolinskii who had just returned from Lvov where he attended a wedding of N.A. Zhukaliuk's daughter—a gathering of about 600 Adventists attended by such figures as Matsanov, Khimenets, Sil'man, Kolbach and many others, and featuring an orchestra of 25 musicians. Although Prolinskii denied that a secret counseling meeting took place under the guise of this wedding (in fact, it did), he mentioned Zhukaliuk saying that as a result of his recent trip to the Moscow community, where he discussed the issue of prayer readings, an agreement was reached “‘to read the same thing,’ that is, prayer readings offered by the Moscow community.” Klimenko instantly deduced from this information that “at present (unlike in the past years) Zhukaliuk supports ‘prayer readings’ offered by the Moscow community.”<sup>42</sup> Although hostilities between different SDA factions persisted, the evidence suggests that spiritual

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<sup>41</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 185, p. 8-10.

<sup>42</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 359, p. 46.



literature produced by one faction could be readily utilized by another faction, since all factions subscribed to essentially the same doctrine while arguing primarily over the issue of leadership. In 1971, the Council's Upolnomochennyi for Cherkassk oblast, Z.S.

Sidorenko, reported:

Two SDA groupings function in the oblast—the so-called supporters of Kolbach-Matsanov, and Paraseevites. Five communities support the first grouping, and three—the second. Communities in cities Cherkassy and Uman', and in villages Pavlovka and Leshchinovka are divided between these two groupings. Approximately 10% of believers do not support either side. These groupings compete for authority in communities...The dissemination of Adventist literature continues in the oblast. This literature is found among Kolbach's supporters and among their opponents.<sup>43</sup>

Aside from suggesting that the SDA activists be “prosecuted on criminal charges for the spread of religious literature and teaching children religion,” Sidorenko insisted that “a provisional all-union council of the SDA church be formed by whose ‘hands’ the two centers vying for authority over communities and violating the legislation on cults could be liquidated for good.”<sup>44</sup> In fact, Litvin reiterated Sidorenko's suggestion repeatedly in his correspondence with the CPU's Central Committee. In 1970, he pleaded again: “Therefore, we find it expedient to have a Senior Presbyter of the SDA church for the republic, who could supervise the activity of the oblast presbyters and religious communities. It would also be expedient to create under the republican Senior Presbyter a council of presbyters responsible for the affairs of the church's internal life. We ask the CC of CPU to approve the implementation of these measures.”<sup>45</sup> Approving Litvin's

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<sup>43</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 236, p. 67.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

proposal, however, would mean setting a precedent for the other republics and could lead to the virtual restoration of the VSASD. In view of the former VSASD's uncooperativeness, the government loathed the idea of its restoration in any form. At the same time, it was quite clear that the schism would persist for as long as the so-called autonomous SDA communities were in fact subordinate to the rival and equally unaccountable SDA centers. Moreover, even if the government approved the establishment in Ukraine only of the republican-level leadership for the SDA church, it would be nearly impossible to bring both warring factions to recognize its authority. The reconciliation of these factions had to come first.

The government responded to this delicate matter in a traditional way—by passing on September 28, 1970, of a decree “On facts of violation of legislation on religious cults by the sect of Seventh Day Adventists” that triggered a new crackdown on the SDA activists. Although this measure targeted all Adventists, the Matsanov supporters were hit especially hard. Kolbach was among the first ones to lose registration, his prestigious post of the Kiev community presbyter eventually passing to his opponents, Bondar' and, later, Parasei. Contrary to 1965, the CAR now backed the Kulyzhskii group whose leaders took their turn to act as inquisitors and pushed through the excommunication of Kolbach from the Kiev community. The news spread that Kolbach's expulsion would be announced by the Moscow preachers in Kiev on November 2, 1970, his supporters travelled to Kiev from other places to voice their disapproval. Rumors abounded that many preachers from abroad and even members of

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<sup>45</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 185, p. 12.

the General Conference would be present. When Likarenko ascended to the pulpit to read the decision concerning Kolbach's excommunication, believers raised so much noise that someone suggested to turn the lights off to put an end to the pandemonium.

According to presbyter of the Sutiskaia SDA community, Skakun, who was present at this meeting, only 30% of believers agreed with the decision to excommunicate Kolbach, whereas 60 % were against it.<sup>46</sup>

Kolbach's supporters did not take his expulsion lightly and wrote petitions to the CAR and the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, demanding his restoration and complaining that Kolbach's demotion was the work of the local Soviet authorities meddling in the affairs of the Kiev community. The evidence suggests that in order to undermine not only Kolbach's influence, but also that of his successors, Bondar' and Parasei, the CAR relied heavily on the carefully selected *dvadtsatka* and the executive organ of the Kiev community—these two pillars of its purported autonomous self-administration. The evidence shows that if Kolbach or his successors tried to bend the Kiev community to their will, so did the CAR by controlling the community's executive organ and *dvadtsatka*. "The refutation of the complaint submitted to the Chairman of the Supreme Council of the USSR, comrade Podgornyi, by the grouping of Kolbach," penned by the chairman of the Kiev community's executive organ, M.P. Tsybmal, reveals that the elections to the executive organ and the revisional commission of the Kiev community were conducted in the presence "of representatives of the local authorities."<sup>47</sup> While

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<sup>46</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 282, p. 6.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

complaining to both the CAR and the local Kiev authorities about the Kolbach supporters' "disruption of prayer meetings, making of provocative statements, organization of illegal meetings of community members, and suborning people to disobey the executive organ,"<sup>48</sup> the same Tsymbal, according to Litvin's assistant, comrade Gladarevskii, "confidentially told" the latter "that the presbyter of the Kiev SDA community, I.S. Bondar', has recently stepped on the path of violation of the legislation on cults." More specifically, Bondar' "convokes the church council and activists to solve some sorts of questions without the knowledge and consent of the community's chairman, that is, of Tsymbal." Furthermore, reported Tsymbal "confidentially," "presbyter Bondar', with the support of Parasei and V. Dyman', receives visitors from other Adventist communities, and the executive organ knows nothing about the nature of their conversations."<sup>49</sup> Tsymbal estimated that "about 100 community members stopped coming to the prayer meetings, not because they were Kolbach's supporters, but because they supported the 'corpus of preachers.' These believers do whatever the 'elder brothers told them. Vasilenko, Zhukaliuk, Pavliuk, and others think that wherever there is no influence of the so-called 'corpus of preachers,' there is no Adventist church."<sup>50</sup> Concluding his report, Gladarevskii remarked that "at the end of their conversation Tsymbal asked again not to mention it to Bondar' and other preachers, since they were presently discontented with him already, set other believers against him and, should they

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>49</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 236, p. 128.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 129.

find out about this conversation, they could raise the question about his expulsion from the church.” Gladarevkii suggested to Litvin that while honoring Tsymbal’s request for anonymity, “the material should be utilized for conversations with Bondar’, Parasei, and V. Dyman’.”<sup>51</sup>

The example of Tsymbal’s collaborationism provides a vivid explanation of the value of the “autonomous model” for the government. Once the CAR succeeded in installing the “right” people in a given community’s executive organ and *dvadtsatka*, it could systematically receive information about the inner life of this community and the orientation of its leadership. In his secret report at the all-union conference of the Council’s Upolnomochennye, which took place on April 25, 1972, in Moscow, Kuroedov articulated this official policy quite bluntly:

The question of executive organs of religious organizations needs to be underscored. If the election into these organs is properly organized, and if an appropriate systematic work with these organs is maintained, we would be able to better and more effectively monitor the observance of the legislation on cults...The Council demands that all Upolnomochennye pay special attention to this aspect, enforcing that executive organs consisted of loyal, honest Soviet citizens observing all requirements of the law. Everyone needs to finally grasp that this is the key issue of administering the affairs of religious organizations.<sup>52</sup>

The longer the SDA schism lasted, the more wide-spread such collaborationism became. In 1971, the Upolnomochennyi for Kharkov oblast, N. Borisko, reported:

Both sides are applying maximum efforts in their quest to attract believers: they use all possible ways to boost their activity and spread their influence in communities; they attempt to show themselves before the Council’s workers and the Upolnomochennye in the locations as true and legitimate representatives of believers, loyal to the organs of authority, and so forth. When they come to our

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 663, p. 19, 19(b).

office, supporters of both factions do not spare insults against the opposite side, trying to convince us that it is precisely the opposite side that serves as the breeding ground for fanaticism and flagrant violations of legislation. The purpose of such mutual assaults boils down to the acquisition of a dominant position in the church and, ultimately, to gaining benefits for themselves.<sup>53</sup>

By pretending not to take sides and providing an equal opportunity to either side to voice its grievances and vent its frustration in a private setting, behind the closed doors and with assurance of confidentiality, the CAR delicately but vigorously promoted among religious minorities what in the 1970s had already evolved into a covert and all-pervasive culture of collaborationism. In his earlier mentioned secret report, Kuroedov stressed yet again the importance of this element in Upolnomochennye's work:

What does it mean to work with leaders of religious institutions? It does not mean simply to point to their shortcomings or give them warnings, but to attentively and seriously converse with them about a very wide spectrum of issues. In conversations with clergymen, one can sound out their moods and views. One should strive towards gaining their trust...By doing so, one can learn a lot of interesting things—things that you would not see at any religious service or hear in any homilies.<sup>54</sup>

If in 1970 Tsymbal provided the CAR with information about Parasei's violations of legislation on cults and his covert support of the notorious "corpus of preachers"—something that the government could effectively use to blackmail and discipline the unsuspecting Parasei—in 1977, Parasei supplied the CAR with equally valuable information. In his secret report to the CC of CPU, an assistant to the Chairman of CAR for Ukraine, Gavriliuk, wrote:

The CAR at the CM of Ukrainian SSR received on January 10, this year, the preacher of Kiev SDA community, A.F. Parasei, at his own request. In a

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<sup>53</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 282, p. 124-125.

<sup>54</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 633, p. 21(b)-22.

confidential conversation, he informed us that recently it was proposed to him to give his approval to the election of an all-union spiritual center of Adventists which, in his words, is going to be created illegally at the initiative of a group of Moldavian preachers...According to Parasei, the Adventist illegal center is planned to be created no later than February-March, this year. After the establishment of this center, its organizers supposedly intend to make the government aware of the fact of such center's existence and officially raise the question of its recognition...Parasei himself does not take a definitive stance with respect to the mentioned fanciful undertaking of the extremists. On one hand, he is apprehensive that his refusal to join the proposed center may set him against all Adventists in the country, but on the other hand, he is troubled by the circumstance that this spiritual center is being created without the government's knowledge, that is, illegally...<sup>55</sup>

The question naturally arises: what was Parasei trying to accomplish by deliberately informing the government of the intention of his fellow-brethren from Moldavia, thus betraying their trust? Was he merely reaffirming his loyalty at the expense of others, or was he simply anticipating on the basis of long and bitter experience that the CAR would find out about this illegal undertaking anyway through other sources and accuse him of not bringing this important information to its attention right away? Parasei certainly was not new to the system and most likely knew that the other SDA leaders talked behind his back with the Upolnomochennye.

In 1974, for instance, the senior reviewer of CAR for Donetsk oblast, V. Klimenko, reported about a visit to his office of the presbyter of the SDA community in Donetsk, V.I. Prolinskii. In a conversation with Klimenko, Prolinskii told, among other things, that "Parasei's activity is similar to that of Prokofiev—the former ideologue of the EKHB schism, and stressed that an absolutely overwhelming majority of of the SDA communities in Ukraine does not recognize Parasei and will not recognize in the future;

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<sup>55</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 1508, p. 63-64.

that Parasei is a destroyer of unity, a ‘second Prokofiev.’”<sup>56</sup> While readily listening to Parasei’s opponents’ attempts to blacken his reputation by presenting him as a dangerous dissenter, the CAR officials knew all too well that Parasei was a valuable asset. In 1973, reporting to the CC of CPU on the state of the SDA church, Litvin wrote: “We constantly work with the cult servants Parasei, Bondar’, Shul’ga and others to neutralize the activity of the more fanatical preachers.”<sup>57</sup>

Regardless of their intentions, many Adventists on either side of the schism contributed directly or indirectly to the mystique of the all-knowing government, unwittingly assisting the latter in turning religious communities into self-disciplining societies. It could be argued that perhaps 75% of information that the CAR routinely received about the believers’ and communities’ various violations and non-compliance were provided by believers themselves, acting either out of grudge against the opposing faction or, as the Council’s Upolnomochennyi for Vinnitsa oblast, S. Kulikov, put it, out of the desire “to show their loyalty to the organs of authority, strengthen their own standing..., and occupy a dominant place in the [prospective] spiritual center, for which purpose each side makes efforts to present its opponent in an unattractive light.”<sup>58</sup> Every new shred of compromising information on individual SDA leaders and activists was diligently processed by the CAR and shared with the other involved institutions. In his

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<sup>56</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 398, p. 11-12.

<sup>57</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 872, p. 6-7.

<sup>58</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 359, p. 23-24.



earlier cited 1972 address to the conference of the Council's Upolnomochennye,

Kuroedov stressed:

For the successful solution of tasks with which we are entrusted, it is necessary to constantly strengthen the Council's and Upolnomochennye's ties with administrative organs—the Procuracy, the KGB, the MVD, and the Supreme Court of the USSR. We have established close contacts and business-like relationships with these organs, and we should develop them still further as beneficial to all involved parties.<sup>59</sup>

Having collected enough compromising evidence on certain SDA preachers or activists, the CAR could alert the local organs of authority to issue a search warrant of their apartments, which would yield even more evidence of their illegal activities. On the basis of such evidence, the CAR could terminate a presbyters' registration, or initiate a criminal case against especially notorious violators. In his memoirs, N.A. Zhukaliuk provided further insight into how the secret services often recruited their informers:

In order to control the Church activity, the organs of KGB sought for informers among the Church members, especially among the leadership. To our great regret, they were successful...Some people became informants on their fellow-brothers and colleagues to avoid going to jail. It so happened that some people could fall into the hands of militia for various petty crimes not associated with religious activities. The militia naturally worked in close cooperation with the KGB...If a culprit was a member or servant of the Church, the militia would transfer him to the KGB and the latter would begin 'working him over.' At first, it would be impressed on him what a criminal he was and sort of prison sentence awaits him. Then freedom would be offered to him in exchange for regular information about everything happening in the Church. If he agreed, he would be asked to sign a special promissory note, which landed him in a thralldom worse than that of a prison—he would henceforth be a slave of circumstances.<sup>60</sup>

Although such delinquents were rare in Protestant communities, in comparison with the mainstream Soviet society, they represented valuable assets for the KGB as embedded

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<sup>59</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 663, p. 22.

<sup>60</sup> N.A. Zhukaliuk, *Cherez krutye perevaly*, p. 210.

snitches who contributed to both the KGB's mystique as an omnipresent and omniscient agency and its growing dossiers on virtually every Protestant leader and activist. The government records show that the CAR routinely cleared with the KGB all proposed appointments of religious leaders. Since the KGB preferred to remain in the shadows, the CAR officials referred to it simply as "neighbors," which reflected the fact that the CAR and KGB local offices were usually situated in the same Oblispolkom building, often on the same floor. For instance, following Zhukaliuk's arrest in 1973, the Council's Upolnomochennyi for Lvov oblast, Inshin, reported to Litvin that presbyter Kolodii could serve as Zhukaliuk's replacement, since "according to the 'neighbors'" data, Kolodii is loyally disposed towards the Soviet state and the legislation on cults."<sup>61</sup>

Due to its ongoing cooperation with the KGB, the CAR remained well-informed about the covert activities of even such a cautious and experienced conspirator as D.K. Kolbach and delegated it to the local law enforcement agencies to keep constant pressure on him. In 1971, an assistant to the head of the MVD of the Shevchenko district in Kiev, Colonel Baranov, served Kolbach an official written warning about the impermissibility of organization of illegal gatherings, councils..., centers; of the conduct of propaganda and agitation..., or of violation of social order and resistance to representatives of Soviet authority." Should Kolbach ignore the warning, which Baranov made him sign, "the issue would be raised about his [Kolbach's] deportation from Kiev, for which purpose an

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<sup>61</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 398, p. 37-38.

appropriate public opinion would be created.”<sup>62</sup> In 1974, the Council’s Upolnomochennyi for Zakarpatie oblast, S. Oleolenko, reported:

The Senior Presbyter of the SDA church for Zakarpatie oblast, I.V. Khimenets permitted gross violations of Soviet legislation on cults in his activity. He joined the so-called ‘corpus of preachers’ illegally acting in Ukraine...He conceals his participation in the illegally-acting ‘corpus of preachers’ from the Council’s Upolnomochennyi, demonstrates insincerity and secretiveness during discussions of routine issues associated with the activity of Adventists in the oblast, republic and the country.<sup>63</sup>

I.V. Khimenets’ attempts to conceal information about his church’s internal life from the Upolnomochennyi (who, nonetheless, remained informed of Khimenets’ activities through other sources) resulted in the termination of his registration as an SDA presbyter and the subsequent search of his apartment, of which Oleolenko reported shortly after: “On December 26, 1973, the administrative organs conducted a search in I.V. Khimenets’ apartment and confiscated various religious literature and correspondence, including a 78 page long copy of readings for the prayer days for 1973, entitled ‘The Moving Power of Christian Life.’”<sup>64</sup>

Earlier, in 1970, the Council’s Upolnomochennyi for Zhitomir oblast, I. Gerashchenko, reported about the arrival in his oblast of “active SDA believers,” Maria R. Logvinenko and her husband, Vladimir F. Logvinenko. They chose the city of Berdichev as their permanent residence. Under the cover of shopping for some deficit items in shortage in Ukraine, Maria apparently made frequent trips to the Baltic

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<sup>62</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 282, p. 57.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>64</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 398, p. 7.

republics, either transporting samizdat religious literature from there to Ukraine or visa versa. Suspecting her of speculation, the local authorities searched her apartment and “requisitioned large quantities (43 copies) of religious literature typed on a type-writer and bound with the use of some home-made equipment.” “The authors of a number of books,” noted Gerashchenko, were “Ellen White, Philip Knox, O.A. Johnson, and G. Drummond.” Maria took all the blame on herself, claiming that “being a professional typist and having a type-writer of her own, she typed all requisitioned literature for herself.” Maria’s clever ploy seemed to work this time, since Gerashchenko did not suggest any harsher measures than “warning her of the impermissibility of producing religious literature privately.”<sup>65</sup>

In 1973, the authorities finally caught up with the activity of the frequently quoted in this study N.A. Zhukaliuk. The trouble began with the arrest of Zhukaliuk’s close associates. As the Council’s Upolnomochennyi for Lvov oblast, B. Inshin, reported, “...at the Lvov railway station, the workers of militia stopped the SDA presbyter from Vinnitsa oblast, V.S. Neikur and citizen Olga I. Polishchuk, from whom about 50 copies of religious literature and proofs of noted religious hymnals were requisitioned.” A wave of searches of the Lvov believers’ apartments followed, resulting in the “confiscation of large quantities of various religious literature (produced by the presbyter of the Lvov SDA community N.A. Zhukaliuk and [his accomplice] L.A. Polishchuk), book reproduction accessories (5 type-writers, binding presses, and lots of typing paper), and reels with recordings of sermons and religious singing.” On the basis of this evidence,

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<sup>65</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 282, p. 87.

N.A. Zhukaliuk and the choir conductor of the Lvov SDA community, Liia Polishchuk, were arrested for “manufacture of religious literature,” tried at the Lvov People’s Court on charges circumscribed under Article 148/2 (engaging in unlawful trade) of the Criminal Code of the Ukrainian SSR (charges under Article 138/2 were dropped due to the lack of evidence), and sentenced to 2 years of conditional deprivation of freedom (that is, to 2 years in a colony-style facility attached to a large construction site where the sentenced would have to work).<sup>66</sup>

Zhukaliuk’s and Liia Polishchuk’s sentences could have been much stiffer, had the government known of the real extent of the SDA samizdat operation in Lvov. V.S. Neikurs and Olga Polishchuk were only two of the many runners who had been for a long time delivering samizdat literature produced in Lvov to a number of regional SDA centers. Moreover, Zhukaliuk and his associates removed and concealed the bulk of remaining samizdat literature and implements of its production shortly before the Lvov authorities began their search raids.<sup>67</sup> In an interview, one of Zhukaliuk’s young associates in the late 1960s-1970s, Bogdan Kachmar (born in 1949), who was a technical wizard or a “chief engineer” behind the Lvov samizdat operation while at the same time studying cardiology at a medical school in Lvov, revealed what the government utterly failed to detect. “Before 1968-1969,” told Kachmar, “most samizdat items were produced on type-writers. There were many mistakes in these issues...and we began to think about making improvements to our production process—switching to using

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<sup>66</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 398, p. 36-37.

<sup>67</sup> N.A. Zhukaliuk, *Cherez krutye perevaly*, p. 242.

matrices or a rotoprint. But this also could not insure good quality. So we decided to play it big and obtain a movable type set.”<sup>68</sup> They found access to a used type set in one of the most unlikely places—an internal printing press at the Oblast Administration of Militia located in the center of Lvov. Their contact there was a militia Captain who one Sunday handed to them, for a price of course, a heavy suitcase with a movable type set made out of lead. Having ensured that they were not followed by taking a round-about route through the park, Bogdan and his athletically-built brother-in-law, the only one who could lift the heavy suitcase, made their way home with their precious cargo and, with the help of Bogdan’s technical expertise, soon set up in an ordinary apartment an underground print shop that published 2,000 copies of Ellen G. White’s book *The Way to Christ*. “That was already something,” proudly commented Bogdan.

Besides, Bogdan and his friends produced noted hymnals for choirs on special sensitive paper used for topographical maps. Musical notes were inscribed on transparent proofs and transferred onto the sheets of sensitive paper by means of intense light from electrical lamps. The exposed paper then had to be developed in ammonia vapors. The process was a tricky one, as Bogdan described it:

As you know, ammonia emits unpleasant smell, and we had to do all this in the confines of an apartment. All our technical equipment was custom built and concealed in such a way that should anyone walk into the apartment, he/she would not notice anything unusual. Special boxes were made in which paper sheets could be suspended without touching anything. Then, ammonia vapors were fed into these boxes through hoses attached to bottles of heated ammonia. Once the development process was over, we used blow-dryers (with removed electrical spirals), to fan out the remaining ammonia vapors into a burning stove where they burned out, leaving no smell behind. The two people who were

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<sup>68</sup> Interview with B. Kachmar, 2008.

stopped at the railway station carried noted hymnals produced by this method. The fact that they were stopped at the same time indicated that we had been watched. So, we had to quickly disassemble and hide all our equipment. We cut rolls of stored sensitive paper with handsaws and burned them in the stove. For 3 days the stove remained red hot. In 3 days, we cleaned up everything and no evidence was left behind. Although some people knew what we were doing, and where, as well as that Zhukaliuk coordinated all this activity, no one, thank God, leaked out any information.<sup>69</sup>

After Zhukaliuk's release, when things "thawed out a little bit," Bogdan and his crew revived their samizdat production, this time using an "entirely home-made Xerox." It was a much safer technology, since, as Bogdan commented, "for a mere keeping at home of a movable type set, one could get from 8 to 12 years in prison, and if one used it for printing religious or anti-Soviet materials, he could get up to 24 years." Nevertheless, responding to the still further relaxation of the government policy on religion later on, brought back their movable type set and renewed printing on a grander scale, powering their press with an automobile alternator and mechanizing other aspects of production. In the early 1980s, they were already printing Bibles. The arrival of perestroika and new legal opportunities finally rendered their samizdat operation "unnecessary."<sup>70</sup>

The earlier mentioned Anatolii Dyman', nominally the head of one of several illegal SDA conferences in Ukraine under the supervision of Parasei, also participated in a much grander samizdat operation whose existence was known only to a handful of "entirely dedicated people ready at any moment to be arrested."<sup>71</sup> Between 1965 and 1981, Dyman' and his associates produced by various methods and distributed all over

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Interview with A. Dyman', 2008.

the Soviet Union tens of thousands religious books. Early on in his conspiratorial career, Dyman’ envisioned a truly ingenious method of obtaining good quality printed religious literature:

We had a deacon in Kiev. I asked him: ‘Listen, I know that your son works as an engineer at the publishing house *Bolshevik* (later it was renamed *Soviet Ukraine*). We need to print *The Great Controversy* [by Ellen G. White] and other books. How can we do it?’ He promised to talk with his son about it. When we met again, he said: ‘No problem. The main thing is to have a printed original, so that we would not have to prepare the edition but simply scan the book and send it into production. It’s a job that one man can handle. But, you know, it costs money.’ I said: ‘No problem. Money is not an issue.’ The publishing house employees were very fond of their Lenins [Lenin’s images on Soviet paper money], and no one seemed to keep an eye on these employees. So, ‘our’ employee leaves the publishing house in his ‘Volga’ car loaded with cargo, drives it to an agreed-upon place, usually a forest-park. We meet him in our car and transfer the cargo from his car into ours. In this manner, we printed all our books: *Psalms of Zion*, *The Great Controversy*, and many others.<sup>72</sup>

Dyman’ claimed that he and his associates not only in Ukraine but throughout the country, especially in the Baltic republics, printed huge editions of religious books using this ingenious method—“at least 10,000 copies of *The Great Controversy*,” for instance, and a mind-boggling “5 million of *I Found the Way*.” With no customs checks between the Soviet republics, Dyman’s crew could easily transport editions of religious literature printed with such impunity in the state-owned publishing houses in Latvia back to Ukraine or visa versa, for as long as there was a steady flow of money to oil the process.<sup>73</sup>

Once the copies were bound in underground binding shops, Dyman’ and his assistants shipped them by plane to SDA communities in different corners of the USSR.

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.



Believers on the receiving end needed only the flight number and the arrival time.

“Every now and then,” reminisced Dyman’, “we would receive a postcard from believers at these various destinations, saying ‘Thanks for your birthday greetings,’” which was a sign that the shipment reached its addressee. Later on, Dyman’ and his associates set up underground printing presses of their own: “Initially, these underground presses were powered by electricity, but we soon figured out that the KGB could locate these presses by tracking down the unusual consumption of electricity and, therefore, we switched to operating them manually.” Pointing in the direction of the general area outside the windows of his house in Irpin’, near Kiev, Dyman’ said:

For example, we were assembling a subterranean press in this vicinity, but suddenly militia began scouting the territory nearby and we received a signal that tomorrow or the day after they would zero down on us. So we brought in transport, disassembled everything, moved it to Krivoi Rog, and buried it there in a secret place. During late perestroika, some Americans heard this story and said: ‘We would pay you in gold, if you could only unearth your machine and give it to us [to keep as a museum relic].’ But we replied: ‘No. Thank you. We better hang on to it, since we do not know what may happen tomorrow.’<sup>74</sup>

Dyman’s samizdat operation did not always function flawlessly and at least on a couple of occasions his associates were caught and prosecuted. The investigative organs, however, could never establish a connection between the apprehended small shipments of samizdat or its arrested carriers and the well-concealed source of this underground production.

Despite the ongoing schism, the SDA church did not appear languid or disoriented and, to the government chagrin, continued to grow while its leaders never

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

abandoned the idea of creating an underground spiritual center. Reporting in 1973,

Litvin wrote:

In order to create a religious center for this sect, some non-registered and registered presbyters and preachers stepped on the path of illegal activity. The Adventist ‘authorities,’ such as Matsanov, Neikur, Khimenets, Koterlo, Pavliuk, Panchenko, Vishnevskii, Zhukaliuk and others, conducted a number of meetings and illegal counseling sessions in various cities of the republic, particularly in Odessa, Zhitomir, Mukachev, Lvov and Chernovtsy, at which they discussed and approved texts of Bible readings, prayer readings and the church calendar—all in contradiction to the legislation. The illegal actions of certain preachers...became especially apparent in the expansion of missionary activity, the spread of illegal literature and the organization of youth and children meetings...<sup>75</sup>

Commenting on the SDA schism and mutual accusations leveled by the opposing factions at each other, the Council’s Upolnomochennyi for Vinnitsa oblast, S. Kulikov, wrote in 1973:

Undoubtedly, there is certain truth in the accusations of either side. Such squabbles would not bother us, if they led to the sect’s weakening and decomposition or the believers’ departure from the sect. However, this is not the case. In reality, the reverse process is taking place. If certain believers leave registered communities, they join the unregistered groups...Such developments are entirely unacceptable to us.<sup>76</sup>

Joining unregistered groups, observed Kulikov, usually radicalized believers. Religious parents in such groups tended more often to “forbid their children to visit schools on the Sabbath” and cases of “refusal to serve in the Soviet Army” were more frequent among the unregistered believers.<sup>77</sup> Writing only a year later, Litvin, however, argued the opposite. He claimed that the enforcement of the “principle of communities’ autonomy” and “the internal struggle among preachers within the [SDA] church, which has not

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<sup>75</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 872, p. 6-7.

<sup>76</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 359, p. 25.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

stopped for the past 10 years, objectively weaken the ranks of sectarians and slows down their growth.” If the SDA church recently showed considerable growth, thought Litvin, it was primarily due to the activity of the illegal central leadership and energies of such SDA notables as Matsanov, Kolbach, Khimenets, Neikur, Zhukaliuk, Vishnevskii, Vasiukov and others, who skillfully selected and placed “their cadre,” “held a number of instructional meetings to coordinate their activity, and sent their group organizers to those oblasts where there were functional Adventist communities” which, “in its turn, boosted the activity of those preachers who have hitherto had a loyal attitude toward the legislation”:

Aiming at overcoming the crisis in Adventist communities, the sect’s activists are trying to organize systematic work with children via the children’s religious parents. Children are constantly present at prayer meetings of the SDA communities in Zakarpatie, Chernovtsy, Kiev, Donetsk and Vinnitsa oblasts, and they are often asked to take active part in services.<sup>78</sup>

In order to put a stop to this revivalism and “neutralize” people responsible for it, the CAR took a number of measures, among which, paradoxically, was the following: “The visit of the Vice President of the General Conference [of the SDA church], Carcich, his condemnation of the [Soviet] Adventists’ illegal activities, and his support of those preachers who stand on positions of observance of the legislation on cults had a positive impact on the activity of Adventist communities.”<sup>79</sup>

Does it mean, as this CAR document suggests, that the American SDA leadership condemned what the Soviet government clearly viewed as religious revival responsible

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<sup>78</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 1040, p. 39-40.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

for the recent growth of the SDA church in the USSR? Could a representative of the SDA General Conference consciously side with the Soviet government agenda aiming at slowing down the growth of the SDA church in the Soviet Union? Matsanov, it appears, tended to answer these questions in the affirmative and attributed the General Conference's paradoxical stance to it being misinformed by the opposing faction of Soviet Adventists. In 1971, during a conversation with the Council's Upolnomochennyi for Kharkov oblast, N. Borisko, Matsanov stated:

Parasei and Kulyzhskii are trying to single-handedly guide the church's spiritual life, to stand at its head and, in the future, assume leadership of the spiritual center—the VSASD, having thus removed all people objectionable to them. They fear opposition more than anything—weave intrigues against us behind the scenes, drawing into their sphere of influence greater and greater number of foreign brothers whom they deceived...A recent meeting held in Moscow at Likarenko's apartment, at which a permanent member of the SDA General Conference [Marvin] Loewen was present, confirms my point of view. None of our supporters was invited to this meeting. We don't even know what was on the agenda there. In our firm opinion, supporters of Parasei-Kulyzhskii invited Mr. Loewen to this meeting through Kulakov, who traveled to the United States last year, with the purpose of enlisting the General Conference's support of the Kulyzhskii-Parasei faction...At present, a secret competition for the highest posts of authority and influence over believers is taking place between us and supporters of Parasei-Kulyzhskii. Who will in the future head the VSASD, or at least the organizing committee for the convocation of the congress? This is the question. This is an internal church feud. It is now reaching the critical stage and, undoubtedly, there is now no room left for compromises.<sup>80</sup>

Borisko further reported that “during the conversation Matsanov repeatedly expressed his outrage vis-à-vis Parasei and Kulyzhskii who more and more often enlist the help and support of foreign colleagues to back their dirty deeds.” Speaking of the behind-the-

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<sup>80</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 282, p. 125-126.

scenes negotiations between his opponents and members of the General Conference,

Matsanov purportedly remarked:

Misinforming them [Americans] about the true state of affairs in our church, these leaders [Parasei, Kulyzhskii, etc] try to get into the foreigners' good graces and fawn before them. They care less about the problem of overcoming the crisis in our church and worry about their own core interests. The situation that had developed in our church is our own internal business and we will not stand the meddling of foreign brothers in our affairs.<sup>81</sup>

When in a separate conversation Borisko asked Matsanov's opponent, N.G. Trusiuk, "how could all major SDA leaders simultaneously appear at Likarenko's apartment [for a mentioned meeting with Loewen]," Trusiuk answered: "Mel'nik was summoned from Moldavia by Loewen personally, via a letter or a telegram. Kulakov knew about Loewen's arrival ahead of time and accompanied him in Moscow. The others knew about his arrival and gathered in Moscow ahead of time."<sup>82</sup> If Trusiuk told Borisko the truth, then Matsanov and his supporters were in fact deliberately excluded from participation in this important meeting and deprived of the opportunity to present their point of view to Loewen and, hence, the General Conference. Matsanov and his supporters, however, claimed to have the majority of the SDA communities in the USSR. The government documents show that in some places in Ukraine, the SDA communities were predominantly pro-Matsanov. In Vinnitsa oblast, estimated the Council's Upolnomochennyi Kulikov, "of the 22 SAD communities functioning in the oblast, 20 are supporters of A.D. Vasiukov, P.A. Matsanov, and D.K. Kolbach, or, as the opposition calls them—followers of the corpus of preachers." Only 2 communities in villages

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 126.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

Pedosy and Voronovtsy, and a group of SDA believers in village Voroshilovka, according to Kulikov, were “supporters of S.P. Kulyzhskii, A.F. Parasei and Likarenko, or as the opposition calls them—supporters of the former VSASD.”<sup>83</sup> That despite this numeric preponderance of his faction the General Conference chose to negotiate with the Kulakov-Kulyzhskii-Likarenko minority faction apparently troubled Matsanov and aroused his suspicion that the General Conference was misinformed by his opposition. At the same time, the 1965 Congress clearly manifested that the SDA leaders centered on Matsanov were not exactly the sort of people willing to share power with the opposition. Both Kulikov and Borisko agreed that the opposing factions did not have any doctrinal differences and advanced essentially identical arguments reducible to the following points:

- a.) The SDA spiritual center must exist in the country. Without it the SDA church would not have freedoms enjoyed by the other confessions.
- b.) The reconciliation of quarrelling groups and the achievement of unity of the SDA church are inconceivable without a coordinating center.
- c.) Keeping believers informed of the church affairs and connections with foreign communities can only be done via the church’s publishing organ whose activity is impossible without the VSASD.
- d.) It should be the spiritual center’s responsibility to coordinate the church’s relations with the state at both the union and local levels.<sup>84</sup>

The study of the opposing factions’ agendas thus convinced some Ukrainian CAR officials that the SDA schism was fueled exclusively by the SDA leadership’s competition for hegemony.

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<sup>83</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 359, p. 23.

<sup>84</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 282, p. 125.

In order to untangle this knot of mutual accusations and suspicions, it is necessary to look at the activity of the rising SDA star, Mikhail P. Kulakov, who in the 1960s and early 1970s maneuvered himself into a position of being the main intermediary between the General Conference, the CAR, and certain SDA leaders in the Soviet Union who shared his vision of their church's future. Writing in 1997, the co-authors Parasei and Zhukaliuk characterized M.P. Kulakov in the following terms:

The personality of M.P. Kulakov shines brightly against the backdrop of church history. His renown in social circles not only on the territory of the Commonwealth of Independent States but also in many countries around the world attracted the attention of both ecclesiastic and social activists. In the course of many years, he had been a constant object of scrutiny by the unique in the world history agency of the former USSR—the KGB. The attitude to him of believers and servants of the SDA church has always been differentiated. For some people he was and remains an unquestionable authority in theological, ecclesiastic and ordinary life matters: such people see him as an angel of God. For others, he is an enigma—a mystery incarnate, since in one and the same person lived side by side a man of faith, a martyr for the truth, a bearer of firm convictions, and—a loyal citizen of the country that pitilessly tore the life of his family and a defender of interests of this country on the international arena, enjoying the trust of the very people who persecuted him.<sup>85</sup>

Like many other church leaders who rose to prominence during the Soviet era, M.P. Kulakov engendered suspicions that linger to this day, despite the most adamant defense of his integrity voiced by the General Conference dignitaries and his close associates in every corner of the former USSR. Challenging or proving the validity of these diverging claims would require a separate extensive research. For the purpose of this chapter it would suffice to state that M.P. Kulakov was instrumental to the overcoming of the SDA schism and briefly outline the steps he took towards achieving this objective. Born in 1927 into the family of an SDA pastor, M.P. Kulakov shared the

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<sup>85</sup> A.F. Parasei and N.A. Zhukaliuk, *Bednaia, brosaemaia bureiu*, p. 128.

plight of many SDA activists during the Stalin era. Along with his father, Pyotr (repeatedly imprisoned) and his elder brother, Stefan (who met a martyr's death in the GULAG), M.P. Kulakov served his sentence in the late 1940s-early 1950s and was spared a life-long exile in a tiny fishing village in Kazakhstan only by Stalin's death and subsequent amnesty. In the late 1950s and 1960s, Kulakov coordinated the activity of many unregistered SDA churches in Soviet Central Asia, being repeatedly harassed by the KGB and local authorities. As a young man, before imprisonment, Kulakov finished an art school, learned German while in the GULAG, and in the 1960s "enrolled in a correspondence through the Moscow Institute of Foreign Languages," graduating with a degree in English in 1966.<sup>86</sup> Proficiency in English proved especially instrumental in his interactions with the General Conference.

As it is typical for memoirs of prominent Soviet-era church leaders, M.P. Kulakov's recent autobiography *Though the Heavens Fall* is a fascinating read and an instructive tale of moral fortitude, but it provides scanty and fragmentary information on the topic of state-church relations in the USSR, specifically the mechanics of negotiations between the church leaders and state authorities. Although nominally in Matsanov's camp until 1965, Kulakov, it seems, became disenchanted with some SDA leaders' inflexibility already in the late 1950s. He found it regrettable that some of his colleagues could not accommodate "occasional articles that encourage...[Adventist] readers to be patriotic people who love their country" or columns dedicated to the Soviet Union's "work for peace among nations" in exchange for having an official SDA paper or

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<sup>86</sup> M.P. Kulakov, *Though the Heavens Fall*, p. 144.



magazine.<sup>87</sup> His personal searches for a way out of the dead-end situation, in which the SDA church found itself as the result of some of its leaders' inflexibility, led him to Moscow in the autumn of 1960 to sound out for himself the attitude of the opposing camp leader, Kulyzhskii. It so happened that due to his hesitations to go directly to Kulyzhskii's office Kulakov missed meeting the General Conference President, R.R. Figuhr who travelled to the USSR as a tourist and paid an occasional visit to Kulyzhskii. Kulakov's English would have been appreciated at this meeting. Kulakov learned from Kulyzhskii that Figuhr suggested in a conversation that Soviet Adventists should begin searching "for opportunities to develop working relations with the Soviet government."<sup>88</sup> The initiative to overcome the mentioned inflexibility that troubled Kulakov, therefore, allegedly came from the General Conference. This, however, raises the question that Kulakov does not address in his memoir: what did the General Conference, whose carefully watched representatives had so far seen only a few showcase SDA communities in major Soviet cities and had brief conversations with people like Kulyzhskii and Parasei, know about what it entailed to have "working relations with the Soviet government"? Instead of addressing this important question, Kulakov leaves his reader with an enigmatic "It would take me a full 10 years to reflect on those words before I began to see some light in them" and leaps to the year 1970 when the government permitted him to travel to the United States to visit his aunt in San Francisco.<sup>89</sup> Kulakov

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 128.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

conveniently ignores the natural question—why would the Soviet government suddenly allow a person with Kulakov’s record of political unreliability travel to a capitalist country and an ideological arch-enemy of the USSR while denying an opportunity to visit even socialist countries to people whose political records were not nearly as blemished as Kulakov’s? Both Kolbach and Kulakov were invited to the General Conference Congress in 1970. However, the government found Kolbach’s visit to the United States “inappropriate” while approving Kulakov’s private visit (to see his aunt).<sup>90</sup>

Although Kulakov does not elaborate it in his narrative, he makes it quite clear that “during the 10 years from 1960 to 1970” he “was considering the General Conference president’s suggestion to seek ways to cooperate with the authorities.”<sup>91</sup> By 1970 Kulakov became quite conspicuous among the SDA leaders and had a chance to convey his views to representatives of the General Conference. It is very unlikely that the CAR officials, who had regular confidential conversations with religious leaders, knew nothing of Kulakov’s agenda. The evidence presented in this and previous chapters shows that the main principle that governed relations between the Soviet regime and religious organizations was the principle of utility. The government did not gratuitously allowed Kulakov travel to the United States simply because his aunt invited him. He must have convinced the CAR that the General Conference’s new agenda vis-à-vis the Adventist church in the USSR—an agenda that could not have been developed without a significant input from Kulakov—was of some utility to the Soviet state, and that, given

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<sup>90</sup> A.F. Parasei and N.A. Zhukaliuk, p. 90.

<sup>91</sup> M.P. Kulakov, p. 144.

an opportunity, he was in the position to promote this agenda. It is not incidental that Kulakov's stay in the United States "coincided with the Annual Council of the SDA world church" at which he "met and formed lifelong friendships with many wise and influential leaders," including president of the General Conference, Robert Pierson who told Kulakov: "We will stand with you in all your efforts to work for our church's unity in your country, and to present Adventists as law-abiding citizens." Another GC official, Theodore Carcich advised Kulakov that "it takes special wisdom to carry on the work in Socialist countries."<sup>92</sup>

The meaning of this "special wisdom" could be in part deduced from the theoretical underpinnings of the "cooperation" agenda, with which the GC officials allegedly provided Kulakov. One such explication of the General Conference's stance on the issue of state-church relations came from the report of its secretary, W.R. Beach, who argued:

The Savior attempted no civil reform, attacked no national abuses, condemned no national enemies. He did not interfere with the authority or administration of those in power...So Seventh-day Adventists preach God's good news, not politics, not social reform. By no stretch of the imagination, much less sound biblical exegesis, could they equate anarchy in any form with the will of God. And the extension they make of their loyalty to God to government forbids any participation anywhere in so-called 'underground' movements. 'Underground' activity would be dissonant, a contradiction in terms for Seventh-day Adventists. They conspire against no one, nor do they hide underground in fear...<sup>93</sup>

Some biblical and social scholars would doubtless disagree with Beach's rather skewed interpretation of Jesus' message and practical activity. Had Jesus not challenged the

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 132.

existing socio-political arrangements in the Roman-ruled Palestine, he would not have been prosecuted as a person presenting a threat to the existing order, political, social, or religious. Even if he did not mean to be political, he did become political in the eyes of authorities, and it is this latter circumstance, especially viewed in the context of Soviet reality, that renders Beach's argument unconvincing, naïve and too general to address any real challenges faced by Christians in totalitarian societies. Christ's and his followers' predicament in the 1<sup>st</sup> century C.E. strikingly resembled the situation of many Protestants in the Soviet Union. Unlike Beach, Kulakov knew all too well that the Soviet establishment left no room for being apolitical or neutral. It demanded that a person took sides. Being apolitical in the USSR meant being indifferent to the state agenda, which the state instantly read as a statement of disloyalty and, hence, a political statement. In view of this Soviet reality, Beach's condemnation of "anarchy," which was never the case with Soviet Adventists, or his vehement discountenance of the "underground" movements and activities, in which the Soviet Protestants were involved not deliberately but in response to specifically Soviet circumstances, appeared uninformed and translated into an insult to thousands of Soviet Adventists who would love to be apolitical, but were not given that option. It is not clear whether Kulakov ever voiced these legitimate objections to the American brothers, although he admitted: "When I returned home with this material...I had a hard time convincing some of my colleagues that we should accept this position...So the struggle continued for more than a decade, as intolerance and lack

of understanding on the part of some inhibited the growth of the church and the establishing of a good rapport with the society in which we lived and worked.”<sup>94</sup>

Throughout his narrative Kulakov consistently conveys that the “cooperation” agenda was a brainchild of the General Conference while in the same narrative he provides examples that the GC representatives were hardly versed in the intricacies of negotiating with the Soviet government and relied on his skills to sell this idea the state officials. “The lack of understanding,” invoked by Kulakov, could cut both ways. Did the GC representatives know exactly what it entailed to cooperate with the Soviet government? The “cooperation” agenda ultimately aimed at convincing the Soviet government to permit the establishment of the SDA spiritual center with all attendant benefits, such as theological seminaries, the publication of periodicals, Bibles and other spiritual literature, as well as maintenance of regular contacts with the West. Having a spiritual center was arguably a blessing but, as the example of VSEKhB demonstrated, it came at a cost. Was the General Conference prepared, after having stated its apoliticism, to condone the Soviet Adventists’ participation in expressly political actions such as furthering the Soviet Union’s foreign policy interests on the international arena while misinforming the world about the true state of religious freedom in the USSR? The CAR documents show that even in the early 1970s the government benefited from the disunity among the SDA leadership and that it was not at all interested in the church’s growth. A revived VSASD would benefit the state only if composed of people prepared to

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 132-133.

consistently enforce the same state restrictions that the VSEKhB enforced—restrictions that aimed at stunting the church’s reproductive capability.

There is no question that Kulakov and Zhukaliuk, who embraced the new agenda soon after his release from prison, hoped that their “Christian diplomacy,”<sup>95</sup> as Kulakov put it, would result in more benefits than losses for their church. In the meantime, they had to work hard swaying the opposition to their vision of the future. In 1974, the Council’s Upolnomochennyi Kulikov reported that the SDA community in Vinnitsa received a brochure authored by M.P. Kulakov and entitled “Where is the Right Path?” The CAR apparently condoned the reading of this brochure to believers. As Kulikov remarked, some believers did not agree with a number of Kulakov’s conclusions. The community’s former presbyter, V.S. Neikur, even wrote a rebuttal, in which he stated:

Trying to play the role of pacifiers and gatherers in the church, the authors of this letter [Kulakov’s brochure] point to the divisions on doctrinal grounds. As far as I know, there have never been any difference of opinion among Adventists about the teaching of ‘righteousness through faith’ ...Did the authors ever see for themselves Adventists who performed good deeds, such as carrying the cross, confinement in monasteries, pilgrimages, etc, in hopes of ensuring their resurrection and eternal life?...I do not know what else the believers are supposed to do if the authors consider it a crime ‘to one-sidedly cultivate in believers religious sentiments only’! Adventists believe that communities exist only for the maintenance and satisfaction of religious needs (Colossians 3:15-16). Perhaps the authors suggest that believers should get involved in politics, philosophy, or subversive and rebellious activities? One believer commented: ‘It appears that simply being a believer is now a crime in the eyes of our preachers!’<sup>96</sup>

Neikur also questioned Kulakov’s statement—“How erroneous are the actions of those of us who to this day stubbornly attempt to steer the church in the direction of

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<sup>95</sup> A.F. Parasei and N.A. Zhukaliuk, p. 147.

<sup>96</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 5, D. 398, p. 41-43.

underground activity.” Responding to this accusation, Neikur asked Kulakov and his supporters “why would they, having realized the erroneousness of their past actions, continue to service unregistered communities?” Neikur sarcastically implied that if some communities were not registered, it was not their fault, and that believers of such communities felt as being “shamelessly accused before the authorities of disloyalty to the existing order.” Neikur further argued that “the registration of all communities and groups of believers in our oblast served as the most eloquent proof that ‘believers could not take part in any subversive and rebellious activity’ as it is written in the General Conference’s letter to the CAR at the CM of USSR.”<sup>97</sup> Implicit in Kulakov’s brochure was the same progressivist tone that characterized the notorious VSEKhB’s Instructional Letter—an attempt on the part of the government to involve religious leaders in secularizing the church under the guise of broadening believers’ horizons. After decades of being cut off from their fellow-believers in the West and recent liberalizing tendencies in theology, the SDA church in the USSR certainly suffered from extreme conservatism often reinforced by the old-fashioned and dictatorial leaders. An avid reader of recent SDA literature in English, Kulakov noticed this deficiency in the Soviet Adventists’ grasp of certain aspects of Protestant salvific theology, such as “righteousness through faith.” However, his criticism of this deficiency was taken by some of his opponents in the USSR as an attempt to interpret the Russian/Slavic Adventists’ generally more conservative frame of mind as doctrinal deviation from the accepted SDA creed and, hence, an attempt to disqualify them on the grounds of their purported doctrinal non-

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

compliance. Although legitimate in the broader context of Soviet Adventists' intellectual isolation, Kulakov's criticism appeared to his opponents as a new tactical maneuver in his struggle for leadership of the SDA church in the Soviet Union.

The evidence shows that leaders of both factions readily talked with the government and would gladly jump at the opportunity to lead the prospective VSASD, if the government offered them a chance. Their advanced or poor understanding of "righteousness through faith," therefore, was rather peripheral to the central problem of the schism—the leadership's struggle for dominance. Since the most obvious remedies for the Soviet Adventists' theological backwardness—access to systematic theological education, regular contacts with the West and general democratization of church life—were denied them by the oppressive Soviet state, Kulakov's criticism appeared either premature or even hypocritical. Unlike Kulakov and his followers, the Soviet state did not care about turning Soviet Adventists into modern Christians, but it did care about turning Adventist leaders into instruments of the state, furthering its secularizing/progressivist agenda. "Working relations with the Soviet government" could not be established without a cost to the church's integrity.

In 1976, the Council's Upolnomochennyi for Lvov oblast, Inshin, reported about his sounding out Zhukaliuk's recent attitudes and his opinion concerning the overcoming of the SDA schism. Among other things, Inshin learned that Zhukaliuk "thinks of himself as belonging to the new generation of SDA believers," "does not consider himself a fanatic," and "supports the position of Mikhail Kulakov." Zhukaliuk further stated that "at present time, Mikhail Kulakov proposes the right solution to the problem



[of schism],” and expressed his “complete solidarity with him [Kulakov].” A long-time supporter of Matsanov, Zhukaliuk now had a different opinion about his former associates:

Matsanov, Vasiukov, and their supporters, according to Zhukaliuk, are people of the old generation, who have conservative views that do not correspond with the spirit of the time. They speak against believers’ children going to movies and to school on Sabbath days; against watching TV programs, and so forth. Zhukaliuk states that one should not endorse such bans, and that one should account for the reality. For example, the school programs have become very complicated, and if a child missed even one day of school, it would affect his academic performance. Besides, skipping classes would entail a moral trauma when it would become evident in school that the child skipped classes on the insistence of his believing parents. Zhukaliuk himself supposedly never endorsed such demands and his children always went to school on Sabbath.

With respect to Matsanov, Zhukaliuk considers him a ‘corpse...who can no longer play any role...Zhukaliuk is for the creation in the USSR of a centralized SDA organization that would be structured from the bottom up, but from the top down. This organization must be autonomous and independent of the General Conference. The General Conference, Zhukaliuk thinks, is somewhat Americanized and does not account for peculiarities and conditions of the SDA believers various countries; it does not account for the political system of the country in which believers live...During the conversation, Zhukaliuk was relaxed, conversed readily..., and I could feel that he spoke sincerely. He is trying to make a positive impression.<sup>98</sup>

Throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, the government encouraged the feud between the SDA leaders and used their squabbling to sound out the actual and potential propensities of individual church leaders. In other words, the government treated the SDA leadership feud as a theater of natural selection until it yielded an adaptation of leaders with whom the government could maintain a dialogue. By the mid 1970s, the SDA church in the Soviet Union finally produced leaders who, with the General Conference’s blessing, embraced views that strikingly resembled those of the VSEKhB

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<sup>98</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 7, D. 24, p. 223-225.

leadership. Although their position potentially threatened to provoke a radical dissent movement, the General Conference's wholehearted support of Kulakov and his followers on one hand, and the fear of being accused of Kriuchkovism, effectively cultivated by the government to keep both factions at bay, on the other, prevented Kulakov's opponents from forming anything similar to the Initiative Group. The schism would continue to brew at low key until the early 1980s. The next chapter will provide a follow-up to both the EKhB and SDA schisms.

The abnormality of state-church relations in the USSR divided Soviet Protestants and forced them to respond to the state's invasiveness in basically two ways—cooperation or resistance. Both these responses were open to criticism and had its weak and strong points. Cooperation with the Soviet government provided certain perks for the church but left many believers facing a moral dilemma: to follow dictates of their Christian conscience and observe requirements of their religious creed to the last iota despite the extraordinary circumstances and at the risk of violating state laws, or opt for safety at the cost of sacrificing certain religious principles. At the level of leadership, the cooperation model also entailed participation in the government campaign of counterpropaganda and deception that inevitably turned participants into political agents covering up some of the worst features of the Soviet regime. Although there was some room for evasion and reduction of such cooperation to mere lip service, the mandatory enforcement of state restrictions ultimately aimed at institutionalization of the church, gradual hollowing out of religious values, and secularization of the young generation of believers.

The resistance model entailed suffering, humiliation and instability, and, as in the case of the EKhB schismatics, could evolve into a political dissent. Such fusion of religious and political values earned the EKhB dissenters respect and admiration of their contemporary non-conformists and spared them unpleasant accusations of collaborationism that the post-Soviet era unleashed against religious leaders. At the same time, the very nature of resistance tended to narrow some believers' horizons and make them unreceptive to certain secular values from which they could benefit. Far from promoting organizational democracy and tolerance of alternative opinions, it fostered ideological single-mindedness and army-type subordination to authoritarian leaders. Ultimately, however, those who freely chose to resist rather than cooperate had the privilege of living according to the dictates of their own conscience. The post-Stalinist gradual liberalization of Soviet society also contributed to the attraction of the resistance model. The prison terms were becoming shorter and camp conditions more survivable. This is not to say that serving a 3 to 5 year term in the 1960s-1970s was an easy undertaking. In one of his accounts of labor camp life, Georgii Vins wrote:

Chepichanka was a place of constant, gnawing hunger. Prisoners were fed rotting fish cooked in a watery 'soup.' The fish was often so decomposed and wormy that it was impossible to use as food, even for prisoners... There were a number of horses at the camp used to haul groceries and wood. In winter, they were reduced to walking skeletons, their ribs barely covered by skin. When not hard at work, they sometimes fed in desperation on the icy heap of garbage... Often digging around the same pile were a few convicts who had become totally dehumanized... Sometimes they pounced on chunks of fish turned over by the horses, their foraging rivals. It was a tragic sight, which could only be seen in a Soviet labor camp.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Georgii Vins, *Konshaubi: A True Story of Persecuted Christians in the Soviet Union* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), p. 40-41.

Despite these harsh conditions and often brutal treatment, the overwhelming majority of prisoners for the faith survived camps in the 1960s. Unlike in the 1930s, they were allowed to maintain regular correspondence with the outside world, receive frequent packages of food and warm clothing from their relatives and enjoy occasional visits by their loved ones. Speaking of prisoners' families, one personage of Hartfeld's novelistic rendition of Baptists' life during this era observed:

Regarding our families that were left without fathers, they did not die of hunger. The church monthly provided them with sums of money equivalent to salaries of the arrested. Besides, Christians of other regions sent them packages. So, these families were well provided for... In Stalin's time, only a few Christians dared to help the family of an arrested brother. In the 1960s, doing so had become quite natural.<sup>100</sup>

The prisoners also knew that with their families and fellow-dissenters continuously petitioning the government about their release and making their stories known abroad, the chances of their disappearance in the camps were rather slim. As Sawatsky observed, Kriuchkov "utilized" his prison term "for extensive reading and emerged as the reformers' authority on Soviet law and philosophy," while Vins "wrote poetry which was later to move the hearts of thousands around the world."<sup>101</sup> No longer synonymous with assured self-destruction, resistance in the 1960s-1970s was a way for many Protestants to test the strength of their convictions, both Christian and civic, and put their faith to work among people who needed it the most—convicts.

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<sup>100</sup> Herman Hartfeld, p. 39.

<sup>101</sup> Sawatsky, p. 237.

## CHAPTER XII

### PROTESTANTS IN THE 1970S AND THE 1980S

In the 1970s-1980s, the incremental evolution of the Soviet policy on religion continued to be informed by the key lessons of the 1960s. First, a direct assault on the churches during Khrushchev's campaign against religion proved counterproductive and led to the rise of Evangelical dissent movement that challenged the status quo of state-church relations and created problems for Soviet foreign policy. Second, the attainability of a religion-free socialist society in the long term pivoted on the state's ability to gradually secularize the majority of believers via sophisticated atheist propaganda and on an institutional model of church organization epitomized by the VSEKhB. In order to implement the first part of this two-pronged strategy and eliminate unsanctioned improvisations and the arbitrariness of local authorities, the government opted for greater centralization of control over religion. It elevated the status and expanded prerogatives of the unified CAR as "the basic policy-making framework responsible for religion"<sup>1</sup> and, as far as legislation on religion was concerned, "the Brezhnev period saw gradual codification and clarification of the relevant laws, taking into account the confusing tangle of administrative decrees promulgated since the early 1960s under Khrushchev."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> James W. Warhola, "Central vs. Local Authority in Soviet Religious Affairs, 1964-1989" in *Journal of Church and State*, Winter 92, 34(1), p. 16.

Legislation enacted in 1975 “defined for the first time [publicly] the field of competence of the Council for Religious Affairs” and “circumscribed more closely than hitherto the range of legal religious activity.”<sup>3</sup> Although the greater centralization aimed at a “more...consistent implementation” of religious policy and “better protection for believers against the occasional abuses of local authorities,” as John Anderson has commented, dissenters “charged that now believers had lost even the faint hope that they might achieve results, say in opening a church, by means of exerting pressure on the local authorities.”<sup>4</sup> Other researchers have argued that since “the concomitant emphasis upon propaganda and other didactic measures...fell on the shoulders of the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee and its lower level cognates, ...‘the struggle on the religious front’ became ‘more decentralized than it was several years ago,’” resulting, paradoxically, in “increasing centralization, yet diminishing central control; greater emphasis on formal laws, yet no evidence of increased legality; heavier emphasis on atheistic indoctrination, yet deeper and more widespread religiosity in Soviet society.”<sup>5</sup>

Despite this continued dissonance between the practical-legal and theoretical aspects of the Soviet antireligious drive, the 1970s and early 1980s were characterized by the government’s much more differentiated approach to religious organizations and an attempt to improve the overall quality of antireligious propaganda. As Philip Walters

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<sup>2</sup> Philip Walters, “A Survey of Soviet Religious Policy” in *Religious Policy in Soviet Union*, edit. Sabrina Petra Ramet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>4</sup> John Anderson, “The Council for Religious Affairs and the Shaping of Soviet Religious Policy” in *Soviet Studies*, 1991, 43(4), p. 26.

<sup>5</sup> Warhola, p. 16.

observed, “efforts were now made both to centralize” the antireligious education and propaganda and “to render it more ‘objective’—which principally meant integrating it with findings of sociologists.” “Antireligious material,” noted Walters, “became once again the preserve of specialist journalists, and it no longer pervaded the secular press to the same extent as it had under Khrushchev”—“articles by religious apostates and personal testimonies virtually disappeared, and slanderous personal attacks on individual believers and clergy were more selective, generally preceding the arrest and trial of specific prominent dissidents.” In general, “efforts were made to give anti-religious publications a more responsible and attractive appearance.”<sup>6</sup> Although religious persecution continued throughout the Brezhnev years, it resembled surgical strikes rather than the carpet bombing of the Khrushchev era and was informed by a differentiated approach to religious organizations and leaders, the central tendency being “to show favor to lukewarm clergy and passive believers...who did minimum to encourage the growth of the faith, but who were prepared to travel abroad and speak in favor of Soviet policies,” and to reserve the authorities’ wrath “for religious activists, particularly evangelicals, who were concerned with producing religious literature unofficially, organizing religious education for children, and so on.”<sup>7</sup> John Anderson has asserted that majority of believers prosecuted during the Brezhnev era “were sentenced under criminal (generally false charges such as embezzlement, or speculation) or political articles,” and

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<sup>6</sup> Walters, p. 24.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 25-26.

concluded that the thrust of state persecution was “directed less against religion as such, than against non-conformity in general.”<sup>8</sup>

While my research generally validates Walter’s assertion that the government’s “practical policies towards religious believers and religious associations from the mid 1960s were governed by the realistic perception that religion is here to stay,”<sup>9</sup> the state documents show little evidence that the framers of Soviet religious policy in fact accepted this assertion as a fair reflection of reality until the beginning of perestroika, when, for the first time, they subjected their rhetoric to the scrutiny of political correctness, began addressing former “sectarians” and “religionists” as “believing citizens,” and embraced the possibility of working hand-in-hand with bearers of non-Marxist religious ideology. Throughout the 1970s, the government remained upbeat about the ultimate success of its anti-religious agenda and saw no need to alter the Soviet legislation on cults in response to believers’ claims that it was essentially Stalinist and outdated. The purportedly updated 1975 legislation only confirmed *de jure* the *de facto* restrictions of the Khrushchev era. The adoption of a more realistic policy toward religious organizations was certainly evidenced by the state’s granting certain small concessions to the VSEKhB and churches under the reemerging central SDA leadership, and by the extension of registration to select autonomous EKhB schismatic and Pentecostal communities. These concessions, however, were made primarily for reasons of counterpropaganda (to undermine the appeal of religious dissent domestically and

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<sup>8</sup> John Anderson, Religion, *State and Politics in the Soviet Union and Successor States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 135.

<sup>9</sup> Walters, p. 25.



offset the growing criticism of Soviet religious policy in the West) and in hope that the application of institutional model, with its attendant benefits, would help to filter out and crush radicals in Protestant communities, divide religious dissenters' leaders, and convert the majority of law-abiding believers into nominal church-goers.

Surprisingly, despite the growing number of Protestant communities opting for the institutional model in the late 1970s-early 1980s, the Soviet state ultimately failed to reduce religiosity in the country. "By the outset of the Gorbachev era," Warhola has argued, not one of "the general goals of the regime"—"reduction in number of believers; effective control of churches; attenuation of the fervor of religious devotion; and disassociation of religious from national identity"—"had been minimally achieved."<sup>10</sup> This latter assertion casts serious doubts on the effectiveness of the institutional model as a projected means of gradual secularization of believers. While in no way exonerating the Protestant spiritual leaders of their participation in the government counterpropaganda campaigns in the 1970s-1980s, the ultimate failure of the institutional model to achieve its intended objective suggests that in opting for this safer model the "cooperative" spiritual leaders might have exercised a foresight that researchers often deny them. It also brings back to focus the Protestant survival strategies discussed in previous chapters, namely, the ability of members of registered Protestant communities to effectively subvert government designs without giving grounds for legal actions against them.

Reflecting on this issue, Catherine Wanner writes:

It is a delicate balance of confrontation through submission, of couching acts of total defiance in apparent acts of compliance, that distinguishes the evangelical

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<sup>10</sup> Warhola, p. 17.

response to state mandates they found objectionable. In many respects, these responses mirror a theological tenet that encourages believers to submit to the will of God and surrender autonomy so as to be empowered and liberated. The patterned response of defiant compliance, of challenging from within, on the terms of the state but based on entirely subversive values—this is what gave the resistance they offered its force and often left the state with little punitive recourse. In this way, evangelicals challenged, circumvented, and even subverted Soviet secularism. By insisting that religion be less marginal, less sequestered in an invisible sphere, and, therefore, less of a private individual affair, they attempted to reenchant the public sphere by elevating the authority of God’s law over secular law.<sup>11</sup>

This chapter will test the assertions outlined above in the light of new archival evidence and serve as a follow-up to issues discussed in previous chapters. My main contention is that although throughout the 1970s and early 1980s the Soviet government continued to apply to religious organizations the four strategies of containment reviewed in earlier chapters, both the activity of the CCEKhB, now coupled with the Pentecostals’ movement for emigration, and the greater scrutiny by Western religious and human rights organizations forced the Soviet state to exercise greater caution in implementing its antireligious strategies. The Period brought a gradual relaxation of state pressure on registered Protestant communities and more favorable conditions for the registration of autonomous EKhB schismatic and Pentecostal communities. In its attempts to make the legal alternative more appealing for unregistered communities, the state could no longer consistently pursue the strategy of “quantitative reduction” and largely abandoned the unconstitutional practice of excluding young people below the age of 25 from participation in religious services and choirs.

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<sup>11</sup> Catherine Wanner, *Communities of the Converted: Ukrainians and Global Evangelism* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2007), p. 86.

Although concessions to registered Protestant denominations came at a cost of their strict observance of Soviet legislation on cults and leaderships' involvement in the state-sponsored counterpropaganda campaigns, believers at the grassroots level, as Catherine Wanner noted, effectively circumvented the state restrictions on proselytizing while every new generation of better educated and upwardly mobile Protestant believers felt less inclined to unquestionably accept the antiquated worldview and authoritarian habits of its old-generation spiritual leaders. As the stagnant Soviet state entered the last decade of its existence, the young Protestants, unfettered by experiences of the GULAG, on one hand, and more receptive to the subtle signs of Soviet people's disaffection with the dominant ideology, on the other, boldly exploited the Soviet state's weaknesses, particularly the inadequate responses of its outdated ideology to the intellectual and spiritual needs of the "post-totalitarian" Soviet society, to borrow Vaclav Havel's term. I also argue in this chapter that the sustained growth of religion in the USSR of the 1970s-1980s and its outstanding resurgence in the 1990s were not ensured solely by the remarkable resilience and adaptability of believers themselves, but by a whole slew of domestic and international problems that independently impacted the Soviet system, pushing it in the direction of greater and greater liberalization. Notably, the institutional model began to yield significant benefits for religious organizations precisely during the decline of the Soviet era.

### **1. The CAR, the Soviet Religious Policy, and Protestants in the 1970s**

The CAR had traveled a long way from being an underdog among the established Soviet bureaucracies in the 1940s-1950s (see Chapter II) to acquiring an elevated status equivalent to a Ministry in the 1970s. The differentiated approach to religious organization, adopted by the CAR in the mid 1960s, combating the local authorities' continued abuses of believers, and the increasing frequency of reciprocal contacts between registered Protestant denominations in the USSR and the West, taking place against the backdrop of the now well-publicized struggle of religious dissenters for religious freedom, required a more uniform implementation of the Soviet religious policy, better trained cadre and, hence, a greater centralization of supervision over all religion-related issues in the hands of CAR. However, as the CAR labored to consolidate its authority, an opposite tendency towards decentralization began to develop within the Council itself. The Ukrainian CAR, backed by the republican top party officials, argued that it could function more effectively as a separate Council subordinate to the Council of Ministers of Ukrainian SSR. In February of 1972, the Chairman of the CM of Ukrainian SSR, V. Shcherbitskii, petitioned the CM of USSR about the creation of a separate CAR for his republic. Shcherbitskii predicated his call for this structural alteration on "the complexity of religious environment in the republic and the necessity...to exercise a more differentiated approach to the study of the activity of religious organizations."<sup>12</sup> Pointing to the fact that Ukraine had 7,295 registered or accounted for religious

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<sup>12</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 663, p. 45-46.

organizations and 1,392 groups operating in the underground, Shcherbitskii hoped that Moscow would solve the question of forming a separate CAR for Ukraine “positively.”<sup>13</sup>

Kuroedov, who was asked by the CM of USSR to express his opinion on the matter, disliked Shcherbitskii’s initiative and argued that “although the Council’s Upolnomochennye in the union and autonomous republics are subordinate to the [central Moscow] Council directly,” they “have the same rights as the [Moscow] Council as far as the implementation of control is concerned.” He firmly believed that the established “organization of the Council’s work completely justified itself, allowed for a uniform approach to the implementation of the Soviet state’s policy on religion, provided for a standard set of requirements concerning the observance of legislation on religious cults, and helped bring definite order into church affairs.” The creation of a separate CAR for Ukraine, he maintained, “would lead to decentralization, inconsistencies in the implementation of legislation..., and would place apparatuses of Upolnomochennye in other republics into an unequal position.” Noting that “religious centers of the more wide-spread religions [in Ukraine]” were “not located on the territory of the republic” anyway, Kuroedov stipulated that the introduction of a separate Council for Ukraine might boost ambitions of those who “entertain thoughts of creating an autonomous Ukrainian Orthodox Church and Ukrainian Catholic center under the leadership of Cardinal Slipyi (former head of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church)” ...and generally “cause the reawakening of pro-nationalist religious elements.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 47-48.

Kuroedov's negative response, however, did not sway Shcherbitskii from his conviction that a more effective control of religion in his republic could be achieved precisely through decentralization. In his next petition, addressed to A.N. Kosygin, he articulated his argument still tighter, beginning by throwing his most powerful card on the table. He bluntly stated that "60% of all religious network in the country" was "concentrated in Ukraine," and that the proposed "reorganization of the apparatus of the republican Upolnomochennyi" would have "strengthened" it and "allowed it, consensually with the union CAR, to solve with greater operative speed such problems as the selection and distribution of cadre, registration and termination of registration of religious organizations and clergy, etc." Shcherbitskii also had in mind to increase the staff of the reformed apparatus of the republican CAR by 8 people, and of the oblast Upolnomochennye—by 20. He also pointed to the precedent of establishing such a separate Council in the Armenian SSR in 1943.<sup>15</sup> Shcherbitskii's argumentation ultimately prevailed and in 1974 the Moscow authorities finally sanctioned the establishment of a separate CAR at the CM of Ukrainian SSR. Despite this measure, purportedly aiming at a more effective control of religion, Ukraine continued to be a hotbed of religiosity in the country for the remainder of the Soviet era.

The increasing rejuvenation of religious communities, translating into a greater number of young, better educated, legally aware and audacious religious activists, exerted additional pressure on the CAR as it tried to walk a fine line between combating religion and maintaining the façade of religious freedom in the USSR. In 1974, for instance, an

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

instructor of the Department of Propaganda and Agitation at the CC of CPU, V. Zolot, submitted an alerting report in which he describes the activity of illegal Pentecostal and EKhB groups in Nikolaev oblast. Some of the “fanatically-disposed” supporters of the CCEKhB, “a student of the Institute of Shipbuilding, Kazakova, and the shoe factory worker, Nikori,” complained Zolot, “try to attract youth to their sect, illegally create youth circles for that purpose, produce by method of ‘samizdat’ and distribute religious tracts, brochures, leaflets, and tape-recordings, in which they call upon believers to teach children religion and resist in every way...the requirements of Soviet legislation on cults”:

Enticed by Kazakova, her like-minded followers, Nikora, L.Y. Dziuba, N.Y. Dziuba, and other religious extremists, the young believers produced and actively distributed leaflets entitled ‘Dear Friend,’ in which they provided the radio frequency and precise time of religious programs by foreign radio stations. In September of 1973, the administrative organs arrested the worker of the 1<sup>st</sup> turbine plant, Rublenko (born in 1949), and the worker of condenser plant, Didiak (born in 1950), while they were distributing these leaflets. 642 copies were requisitioned from them. During the search of Didiak’s house, 1,028 more leaflets were found together with equipment used to produce them. At the apartments of the other 5 activists of the group religious literature of the underground press ‘Khristianin,’ records of gospel study lessons and other items were found. In March-April of 1972 and May-June of 1973, the mentioned persons tossed religious leaflets into mail boxes of the town’s residents, and disseminated the New Year’s appeals, in which they called on people to believe in god and listen to foreign religious radio programs. The group of young sectarians, inspired by Nikora and Karlashov, committed a provocative outburst: they marched down the Sovetskaia Street, singing hymns and songs of religious content...The Pentecostal sectarians continue their active anti-social work. They arrange prohibited gatherings where they pray and conduct collective readings of religious literature...One of the fanatically-disposed leaders of the sect, Orzhekhovskii, organized a house church and, under the guise of festivities for his son, held a gathering in which about 300 Pentecostals from the rich oblasts of the republic participated.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 1040, p. 55-56.

The youth of the registered EKhB community in Nikolaev, according to Zolot, behaved in a similarly provocative fashion:

Some of its members listen to foreign religious programs, accompany them with bold commentaries, and encourage menacing slanders on the Soviet way of life. A tendency emerges among the EKhB sectarian youth towards independence and formation of a separate group. A youth choir is created in the community and trips of youth to other communities are being authorized. The young sectarians condemn the community leadership for obstructing the promotion of youth to leadership positions...<sup>17</sup>

It especially troubled Zolot that among the Baptists who recently received baptism, 259 were people under the age of 28, and 60.7 % of them had “secondary or unfinished secondary education.” These youths, observed Zolot, “often quote in conversations prominent philosophers-idealists and invoke such notions as the theory of relativity, the hypothesis of the expanding universe, the problem of gravitation, etc,” which indicated to Zolot that these young religious zealots creatively used the same identical methods, proofs, quotes, and sources as those employed by antireligious activists.<sup>18</sup>

While the government did not hesitate to resort to tested methods of disciplining activists of illegal religious groups—Nikora, Rublenko, Orzhekhovskii, and others “were prosecuted on criminal charges for anti-social activity and each sentenced to 5 years of imprisonment”<sup>19</sup>—keeping up with inventiveness of the assertive, better educated and increasingly independent-minded young activists of registered communities required more diplomacy and skills than many of the aging CAR employees possessed. In 1976,

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 67.



Kuroedov addressed this problem in a letter to V. Shcherbitskii, now the 1<sup>st</sup> Secretary of the CC of CPU:

At the present time, the question of perfecting and increasing control over the activity of religious organizations and clergy is posed with special acuteness. The matter is that the church, adapting to our socialist reality, organizes its activity more competently, more subtly, and exhibits greater flexibility; it updates and modernizes its ideology and rituals as well as its forms and methods of influencing some segments of the population. One also cannot discard the circumstance that in conditions of aggravation of ideological struggle on the international arena, it is necessary to harden the struggle against attempts by foreign reactionary circles to use churches in the USSR for anti-Soviet purposes. All this necessitates a thorough increase of control over the observance of legislation on cults and improvement of political work with the clergy.

In order to solve these present-day complex problems, it is necessary that the CAR employed politically mature cadre—people having experience in party, political and Soviet work, and having such qualities as a sense of tact, reserve, and ability to approach people. These people need to have college education (preferably in humanities). We ask you to help in fortifying the cadre of the Council's Upolnomochennye and their apparatuses. Keeping in mind the relatively large religious network in Ukraine, we think it necessary that the Council's Upolnomochennye in oblasts had assistants.<sup>20</sup>

Later the same year, the head of Ukrainian CAR, Litvin, reported that “the CC of CPU extended considerable help, having sent to the Council's central apparatus and apparatuses of oblast Upolnomochennye responsible party and Soviet workers (including 5 former secretaries of Raikoms and 6 former assistants to the heads of Obkoms' departments), which contributed to raising the CAR's overall performance and improved the style of its work.” The influx of new cadre allowed for the creation of posts of assistants to the Council's Upolnomochennye in 20 of the republic's oblasts. Moreover, remarked Litvin, “the occupational salaries of the Council's Upolnomochennye were increased,” their “working conditions...considerably improved,” and the Council's

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<sup>20</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 1357, p. 2-3.

overall status—“elevated.”<sup>21</sup> If in the late 1940s- early 1960s the Raikom and Obkom party bosses mocked the Council’s Upolnomochennye and treated them as mere pawns to be appropriated and sent on all sorts of unrelated missions, by the 1970s the CAR status improved so much as to employ these haughty local functionaries as assistants to its oblast Upolnomochennye.

Despite its recognition of religion’s remarkable and unexpected ability to keep pace with modernity, and despite the increasing cost of combating criticism of its religious policy on the international arena, the Soviet government stubbornly refused to significantly alter the existing legislation on religious cults. In his secret report delivered on April 25, 1972, at an all-union conference of the Council’s Upolnomochennye, Kuroedov noted that “after the 24<sup>th</sup> Congress of CPSU, many religionists expressed their satisfaction with the absence in the congress’ materials of any direct references to the scientific-atheist education of workers.”<sup>22</sup> While this may have been a conscientious government strategy to fool the public opinion abroad, Kuroedov reminded his audience that, for all practical purposes, nothing had changed in the party’s attitude towards religion, and that some clergymen’s expressions of joy were simply groundless:

All these expressions manifest first of all the lack of understanding that the struggle against religious ideology is a component of communist education of the laboring masses. We did not ‘amnesty’ religion, as some people in the West tend to see it, and we are not making any ideological compromises in our relations with religion. The struggle against religion has been and remains the programmatic demand of our party. This has been stressed in the CC of CPSU decree from July 16, 1971 ‘On the Intensification of Atheist Education of the Population.’ Decisions of the 24<sup>th</sup> Congress and the mentioned decree...obligate

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>22</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 663, p. 3.

us to increase in every way our control over the correct and consistent implementation of the party policy towards religion and church... The necessary condition for the improvement of our work is a deep knowledge of the content and essence of religious ideology—the understanding of new and complex processes that take place within religions, and timely detection of tendencies towards their evolution.<sup>23</sup>

Kuroedov then switched to the importance of counterpropaganda in the Council's work—of refuting accusations such as expressed in Solzhenitsyn's recent "dirty slanderous letter to Patriarch Pimen." According to Kuroedov, Solzhenitsyn opened his letter with the following "gloomy and menacing" preamble: "This letter is about something which like a tombstone squashes the head and crushes the chest of the not yet completely dead Russian Orthodox people." In Kuroedov's words, "Solzhenitsyn accused the Patriarch and the church hierarchy of driving the church into a deliberate internal 'enslavement and self-destruction'; of 'robbing our children and depriving them of inimitable and purely evangelical perception of worship' by refusing to influence them in a religious way." The letter's author further described atheism as "belatedly berserk" and called atheist propaganda "primitive and dishonest." Summarizing the rest of Solzhenitsyn's letter, Kuroedov stated:

In his letter, he [Solzhenitsyn] characterizes the fact of youth's departure from religion with an especially mean sarcasm. He writes about it: 'In terms of moral education, all that is left to youths, torn away from Christianity, is a chasm between an agitator's notebook and the Criminal Code.' All church administration, fulminates Solzhenitsyn, is secretly patronized by the atheist dictators from the Council for the Affairs of Religion—'a spectacle,' he exclaims, 'unseen yet in the two millennia of Christianity!' As we found out, Solzhenitsyn maintains close ties with the reactionary groups of clergy... He refers to the 'heroes' of Orthodoxy—priests Yakunin and Eshliman, whom we all know—as 'the most honest priests,' and calls the Archbishop Ermogen, expelled some time ago from three dioceses for blatant violations of legislation on cults, 'the only

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 3-4.

fearless Archbishop.’ The Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church expressed to the Council’s leadership his profound outrage at Solzhenitsyn’s action and thought it below his dignity to respond in any form to this slanderous letter inspired by anti-Soviet activists who use every means to undermine the relationship between the ROC and the state.<sup>24</sup>

If a mere expression of protest against the Russian Orthodox hierarchs’ hobnobbing with the state to the detriment of spiritual upbringing of believers earned the ordinary priests Yakunin and Eshliman a rather unsuited title of reactionaries, the EKhB schismatics, demanding a thorough-going reform of the Soviet legislation on cults and, in the meantime, “fabricating and sending abroad different slanderous materials containing falsifications about ‘suffering for the faith in the USSR’”—materials readily utilized by foreign reactionaries, such as Michael Bourdeaux, who not only sympathized with the *Initsiativniki* but interpreted their activity as “‘a form of social protest against the existing order in the country’”—received the choicest of Kuroedov’s derogatory labels—that of “fiendish scum” (*nechist*).<sup>25</sup> Kuroedov much rather preferred to see more believers like Patriarch Pimen who would sing accolades to religious freedom in the USSR even as Kuroedov shared with the Upolnomochennye the following figures indicating the impact of Soviet antireligious campaign on the ROC: “If before the revolution there were 77,767 Russian Orthodox churches in our country (including 40,000 parish churches), presently, there are only 6,983 churches, 600 of which practically do not function.” It is notable that Kuroedov prefaced the release of this data with the following warning: “I

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 15-16.

want to warn you that the data I am about to quote is not liable to circulation and may be used only in auditoriums closed to public.”<sup>26</sup>

The production and dissemination of institutional lies was always an integral part of the Soviet public relations campaign. By the 1970s, however, falsifying or skewing data became unavoidable even at the inter-institutional level. As was the case with many other institutions of the Brezhnev era, reports of the CAR officials increasingly reflected not so much the real state of affairs as their wishful thinking. The confidential data provided by Kuroedov, for instance, reflected the combined impact of the Soviet campaign against religion since the revolution and conveniently disguised the fact that during the postwar decades, except for the period between 1959 and 1964, religious denominations, especially Protestant, continued to grow and rejuvenate. In his own report for 1973, Kuroedov admitted:

Sectarians continue to succeed in drawing a considerable number of young people into their sects. For example, of the 2,985 people who received baptism in 1972 in the EKHB communities functioning in Ukraine, almost 18% were persons below 30 years of age. Almost 80% of people baptized in the SDA communities in Moldavian SSR between 1969 and 1971 were youths...In 1972, the Catholic Church alone confirmed 23,000 of boys and girls, while the Russian Orthodox churches baptized over 26,000 of school students.<sup>27</sup>

In his report at the 1972 conference, however, Kuroedov preferred to hide facts behind general assumptions and stipulated that the vibrant Protestant denominations were in fact slowly dying out:

The general number of the sects' followers is decreasing. Many sectarian organizations are at the edge of dissolution. The sects' growth occurs almost

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>27</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 872, p. 63.

exclusively on the account of sectarians' family members. Outside the families of sectarians, in the general population, neither Baptism, nor Adventism, nor any other sectarian teaching, it could be stated, finds grounds, although many sectarian groupings announced the so-called 'great campaign of evangelization.'<sup>28</sup>

Yet, in his 1974 report, Litvin again provided information that hardly justified

Kuroedov's premature dirge to sectarians:

Sectarian religious communities are characterized by stable organization, high level of believers' awareness in matters of Holy Scripture and religious practice, constant missionary work, believers' deep convictions, and acceptance into sects of people of mature age. Nowadays, the registered communities [in Ukraine] only accept 3-4 thousand new believers [annually]. In 1974, sectarian organizations accepted through full immersion baptism 306 people in Rovno oblast, 247 in Donetsk oblast, 169 in Odessa oblast, and 379 in Chernovtsy oblast...The number of [registered] EKHB believers [in Ukraine alone] as of January 1, 1975, reached 100,400, which is 1,300 members more than there were in 1973.<sup>29</sup>

The main thrust of Kuroedov's 1972 report was ultimately directed at reaffirming the existing legislation on cults and brushing aside all talks of its possible revision:

Some say that our laws on religious cults have supposedly become obsolete. This is not true. Their basis, the principal premises laid out in Lenin's decree 'On Separation of the Church from the State and the School from the Church' and the decree of VTsIK and SNK from April 8, 1929, stands unshakable. There is no need to develop some special new legislation on religious cults. Nothing calls for it.<sup>30</sup>

Kuroedov responded in part to the emerging cautious discussion within the Council of the need to standardize the existing legislation (the applicability of its legal and extra-legal components) and make it more compatible with the new differentiated approach to religious organizations, but, primarily, to religious dissenters' scathing criticism of

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<sup>28</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 633, p. 15-16.

<sup>29</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 1040, p. 37.

<sup>30</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 633, p. 17.

contradictions immanent in Soviet laws on religion. It is unlikely that the head of CAR was merely oblivious of these contradictions and, more likely, intentionally obscured the gap between the two decrees that he quoted as the basis of Soviet laws on religion.

Whereas Lenin's decree specifically prohibited all forms of state interference in the church's internal life and guaranteed believers the right of religious propaganda, the 1929 decree, on the contrary, justified state interventionism and for decades served as the legal basis for persecuting religious proselytism. The EKhB reformers, in particular, repeatedly pointed it out in their letters to the government that for as long as the two decrees were not complimentary, Lenin's principles of separation of state and church served only as an attractive façade to fool the foreigners. Moreover, the 1929 decree took the gist out of all international conventions protecting religious freedoms and rendered them useless to Soviet believers.

On the eve of signing the Helsinki Accords (August, 1975), the Soviet government finally realized the need to revise the existing legislation on religious cults with a view toward making it more compatible with the Leninist principles. In his another classified report to the conference of Upolnomochennyye, held in March of 1977 and only months prior to the ratification of the new Brezhnev Constitution (October 7, 1977), Kuroedov significantly altered his prior rhetoric concerning the old legislation to suit the new party line:

The most important document by the CC of CPSU was the decision of June 23, 1975, 'On Making Changes and Additions to the Decree of VTsIK and SNK from April 8, 1929'...The monumental and ceaseless significance of this decision consists in that the legislation on religion and church...acquired a contemporary ring and the necessity to strictly observe socialist legality with respect to religion had been stressed. The decision focuses, therefore, not on a mere codification and

systematization of legislation on religious cults, but on strict fulfillment of Leninist principles with respect to religion, church, and believers...

It is especially worth noting because in most republics, prior to 1976, we either did not have any normative acts concerning religion and church, or had acts that provided for a diverse formulation of certain laws on cults. Now we have a uniform legislation on cults in all republics. It is appropriate, with respect to this issue, to recite Lenin's words: 'The law must be the same everywhere. The tendency to uphold Kaluga laws as opposed to Kazan' laws is the main scourge of our life and the source of all our unculturedness.'<sup>31</sup>

Kuroedov, therefore, impressed upon his subordinates "to adopt a new method of work," remembering that "the overcoming of religion is a complicated and protracted process that may take many, many years..." "The ousting of religious rituals," he insisted, "must be carried out exclusively by means of ideological work and education of the people."<sup>32</sup> Signing the Helsinki Accords apparently compelled the CAR to give a more definitive articulation to the new approach to religion and believers and to declare officially the revocation of certain extra-legal restrictions that it so rigorously enforced during previous decades. In his extended treatment of this issue, Kuroedov focused, among other things, on the types of violations of believers' rights that could no longer be tolerated:

The cases of infringement upon believers' civil rights and their right to satisfy their religious needs within the boundaries of law are completely impermissible. How can one tolerate such lawlessness as when believers are denied employment or are fired from work due to their religious convictions, or when students are expelled from institutions of higher learning on the same grounds, or when graduates of secondary schools are given letters of recommendation in which their religious affiliation is mentioned?! There are even cases, and we are aware of a number of them, when mothers having 10 children or more are not given a medal of 'Mother-Heroine' only because they are believers... In a number of oblasts, executive organs of religious communities are required to monthly submit to

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<sup>31</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 1508, p. 74.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 76.



Raiispolkoms lists of parents who baptized their children. These lists are then sent to such parents' places of employment so that measures of social pressure could be applied to them. But this is a blatant violation of the principle of the freedom of conscience! We have the right to hold Communists and Komsomol members responsible for such acts [baptism of children]. But how could one do this to non-partisans?! How could we then talk about the freedom of conscience and freedom of confessing religion, granted in the USSR's Constitution?!

Certain officials unlawfully forbid children accompanied by their parents to visit churches... Quite often believers are fined for coming to church with their children. Leaders of religious communities are also fined for permitting the presence of minors at prayer meetings... The administrative commission at the Kamenets-Podol'sk Raiispolkom, Khmel'nitsk oblast, for instance, fined believer L. Y. Zheltova for 'bringing up her daughter in the spirit of religion'... It must be said that many Upolnomochennye take a conciliatory stance toward violations of socialist legality with respect to believers and do not take necessary measures to put an end to such occurrences. But our laws, as you know it, carry provisions for even criminal charges against officials who permit discrimination and infringement of the rights of believers... The observance of socialist legality is an issue of great political importance. Discrimination of believers and infringement of their rights evoke their discontent and fills them with a sense of social and legal inferiority and leads to their estrangement from social life—to artificial division of our society into believers and non-believers.<sup>33</sup>

A truly remarkable feature in Kuroedov's rendition of the CAR's new agenda was not so much the stress on guaranteeing the freedom of conscience to Soviet believers as a rather casual announcement of the dramatic reversal of the CAR's policy on believers' children's attendance of prayer meetings and reaffirmation of believing parents' right to raise their children in the spirit of religion. Although Kuroedov did not care to explain on what grounds the CARC/CAR previously terrorized believing children and their parents for what apparently had been their legal right all along, this sudden shift in the Soviet religious policy indicated that the Soviet government found it currently more expedient to resuscitate the long-forgotten Leninist principles while keeping the more aggressive 1929 legislation dormant.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

Kuroedov's report also indicated a certain relaxation of the policy on registration and the government's new focus on legalizing religious communities functioning in the underground. "Around one quarter of religious organizations," he stated, "function without registration and, hence, uncontrollably." Over 60% of such communities, he estimated, were "sectarian." One half of 898 unregistered Baptist communities were in the fold of the CCEKhB, 729 were Pentecostal, 220—Adventist, and 411 communities consisting of followers of Jehovah's Witnesses. "Altogether," he calculated, "the illegally functioning sects comprise around 100,000 people."<sup>34</sup> Kuroedov certainly did not propose to register all these communities en masse—JWs, for instance, were still considered ineligible for registration, and not every CCEKhB community would accept registration unless it was unconditional—but his preparedness to legalize "one third of the illegally functioning sectarian organizations" represented a departure from the previous policy of "quantitative reduction" and served as an indicator of the government's changing perception of sectarians. In contrast to previous decades, the government now took a more inclusive view of sectarians, finding most of them eligible for integration into the institutional model of state-church relation and reserving its ire exclusively for the die-hard resisters:

Unfortunately, we have not yet overcome the incorrect perception of sectarians as some kind of villains or enemies of our society. This is a profoundly erroneous view that misguides our work with sectarian believers. Certainly, the leaders of many unregistered sectarian groups are extremists and fanatics, but the overwhelming majority of sectarians are good laborers and honest Soviet people who have merely fallen under the influence of their leaders. Moreover, a process of stratification is taking place among sectarians under the influence of huge socialist transformations in our society and our ideological work. Many

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

sectarians seek to legalize their religious activity and petition for the registration of their communities. Thus, in the past four years, over 30 communities of the former supporters of the CCEKhB and approximately 80 Pentecostal communities were registered. As a result, over 15,000 believers broke their ties with extremists.

Comrades, our task consists in working more intensively towards the goal of bringing ordinary believers from under the influence of sectarian extremists, legalizing the religious life of these believers, and keeping it within the boundaries of law. We must act bolder in expediting the registration of those religious communities that recognize legislation while suppressing the activity of those that evade registration.<sup>35</sup>

Kuroedov also emphasized the importance for CAR “to build its work on a scientific basis,” the necessity “to know all aspects of religious teachings” and “the profound study of the life and activity of religious organizations” with the view of registering “new tendencies in their development.” For this purpose, the CAR “should broaden its contacts with the Institute of Scientific Atheism,” “scientific-research institutions,” experts of religion, and “departments of scientific atheism in universities.”<sup>36</sup> Lastly, “the Council’s Upolnomochennyi,” Kuroedov, exhorted, “could not work well without close contacts with the clergy and believers.” Establishing and maintaining “trusting relationships” with the latter, insisted Kuroedov, was one of the primary objectives of all CAR officials<sup>37</sup> whose job as “state controllers” encompassed “political, ideological, diplomatic and, if you will, secret police [*chekistskii*] aspects.”<sup>38</sup>

These alterations in the Soviet religious policy as well as the increased demand for professionalism on the part of the CAR employees were apparently motivated by the

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

Soviet foreign relations and counterpropaganda concerns. Earlier in his report, Kuroedov stated: "Disinformation, lies and slanders about the party and Soviet state policy on religion and church have lately acquired a character of the yet unseen anti-communist hysteria." Such a turn of events led to the increased volume of the Council's international activity directed at "mobilizing progressive religious forces around the cause of defending peace, relaxing international tensions, and strengthening friendship between the peoples."<sup>39</sup> In order to better deflect the attention of international community from the continued violations of believers' rights in the USSR, it was imperative for the Soviet government to move from confrontation to cooperation with the church. "Today," announced Kuroedov, "we are pleased to point out that the church supports both domestic and foreign policy of our state, conducts great patriotic work abroad in defense of peace, and donates tens of millions of rubles to the Peace Fund. The church's political support of the Soviet social and state order is growing stronger and stronger."<sup>40</sup> Contrary to the assurances of some church leaders (see previous chapter) that their church "preached God's good news, not politics," any church's "working relations with the Soviet government" presupposed political support of the Soviet agenda and the head of CAR viewed religious leaders' cooperation with the state precisely as political.

It is quite clear from Kuroedov's own report that the main purpose of Soviet religious delegations abroad was not the defense of peace or promotion of friendship between the peoples, but counterpropaganda:

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 77.

...The reactionary circles in the West increased, as never before, their attacks on the Soviet Union, in particular, on its policy towards religion and the church...Recently, the US House of Representatives and Senate passed a special resolution in which they call upon the Soviet Union 'to immediately cease the persecution of believers,' free the leader of EKHB schismatics, Georgii Vins, who was sentenced for persistent violation of the legislation on cults and provocative actions against the organs of authority. In the Swedish parliament, would you believe it, they are also purportedly 'concerned' with the state of religion in the USSR and raised the issue about 'the persecution of believers' in our country. We must clearly understand the goals of this dirty anti-Soviet campaign. Its organizers and inspirers would like to oppose the interests of believers to interests of Soviet society, to embroil the church and state, and create a religious political opposition to the Soviet authority.<sup>41</sup>

The Soviet government countered this growing western awareness of the plight of believers in the USSR by turning counterpropaganda into a "large and serious sector" of CAR's work. Demanding that his subordinates "got better results from receptions of foreign delegations and visits of religious leaders abroad," Kuroedov stated: "This is precisely what the CC of CPSU focuses its attention on now... You should more carefully prepare the USSR's religious leaders for visits abroad and make sure that every delegation served as an active propagandist of our Soviet reality and skillfully debunked slanderous figments of all sorts of anti-Soviet activists."<sup>42</sup>

By 1977, the Soviet counterpropaganda represented an extensive state-sponsored institutional network. Religious organizations constituted a vital component of this network, "maintaining contacts with fellow-believers in 80 countries around the world and participating in the activities of 10 international ecclesiastic organizations." In 4 of such international centers—The Christian Movement in Defense of Peace, the World

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 84.

Council of Churches, the Buddhist Movement for Peace in Asia, and the Berlin Conference of Left Catholics—“the USSR’s religious leaders occupied top leadership positions.” In 1977, according to Kuroedov, “the USSR planned to send abroad over 110 ecclesiastic delegations and receive representatives of about 100 foreign organizations.”<sup>43</sup>

The documents of the Ukrainian CAR shed more light on the counterpropaganda operations and show that by the 1970 counterpropaganda worked as a well-adjusted conveyor belt delivering thoroughly sanitized pre-packaged events and presentations for consumption by foreigners visiting the USSR or receiving Soviet delegations in their home countries abroad. “A Schedule of the Ukrainian CAR’s International Activities for 1977,” submitted by Litvin to the CC of CPU, reveals that counterpropaganda was a multi-institutional endeavor, involving Soviet religious leaders, select showcase communities, specially trained guides and translators from the all-union network of hotels “Inturist,” Soviet media, and the main orchestrator, the CAR, serving as an attentive host and entertainer of foreign religious dignitaries. Nothing was left to chance, and each sector of counterpropaganda had a crew of responsible CAR employees assigned to it. Aside from pursuing its routine objectives, in 1977 the counterpropaganda had the following pressing issues to address:

Representatives of foreign countries intend to bring up at the Belgrade conference on security and cooperation in Europe the ‘problem of violation of religious freedom in the USSR.’ The US information agency in close cooperation with its West-European allies collects and systematizes materials on cases of ‘violations of rights and persecution of believers in USSR.’ These agencies discuss the necessity of boosting religious propaganda by means of setting aside more time to the ‘Voice of America’ radio programs in Ukrainian, since a

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

significant portion of USSR's Orthodox, Catholic and Baptist believers reside in Ukraine. Keeping this in mind, we plan this year to use all available means to make a favorable to us ideological impact on leaders of clerical centers and foreign guests and thus achieve the reduction of their hostile activity; to organize and conduct aggressive counterpropaganda work on issues of religion and transmit it abroad via radio and the press; to prevent excesses that could negatively impact the preparation for the celebration of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Great October.<sup>44</sup>

Since over the years many westerners formed an opinion of CAR as some faceless Soviet bureaucracy, not much different than the secret police, the CAR now widely practiced “receptions of religious figures from the West” with the purpose of utilizing information about such meetings, especially positive interviews extracted from foreigners, as materials for Soviet articles and radio programs intended for consumption abroad.<sup>45</sup> Members of foreign delegations were never left to their own devices and always chaperoned along specific routes established ahead of time, as Litvin's bullet point instructions indicate:

This year, the following are established as main routes for religious delegations and groups: Kiev-Odessa, Kiev-Vinnitsa-Chernovtsy, and Kiev-Lvov. In cooperation with the Council's Upolnomochennye of the mentioned oblasts and representatives of VAO 'Inturist'—select and prepare people who will take part in servicing religious delegations and pilgrims...In order to more fully assess the state of religion in the USSR, the World Council of Churches decided to sent to our country in 1977 via various channels 25 reporters and journalists for the purpose of familiarizing with the life or rural religious communities. In conjunction with the Council's Upolnomochennye and Administration for Foreign Tourism at the CM of Ukrainian SSR—to complete the work of selecting and preparing objects of functioning religious communities in the countryside for exhibiting them to foreign figures; to conduct individual work with the clergy of these objects with the purpose of training them for meetings and conversations with foreign reporters...; to select cadre for the work with religious delegations and groups of believers; to ensure that guides-translators and clergy

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<sup>44</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 1508, p. 21-22.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

accompanying foreign religious delegations objectively and fully portrayed the Soviet reality and thus made a beneficial to us impact on believing foreigners.<sup>46</sup>

The Soviet religious leaders participating in conferences held in the USSR and abroad were also thoroughly instructed on how to “objectively” and “fully” portray the Soviet reality:

Between June 6 and 10 this year, Moscow will host an international conference ‘Religious Leaders for Stable Peace, Disarmament, and Just Relations between the Peoples.’ We are to prepare and send for participation in this conference the representatives of religious organization of the republic (the ROC, VSEKhB, SDA, Pentecostals, and Reformats). After the conference, 70 of its participants will visit Ukraine. We plan to utilize their stay [in Ukraine] for counterpropaganda measures.<sup>47</sup>

Religious leaders firmly integrated into the institutional model were also expected to periodically write articles or provide interviews in which they would refute charges of religious persecution in the Soviet Union:

To publish in the newspaper *Visti z Ukraini* the following interviews: with the Senior Presbyter of VSEKhB in Ukraine, Y.K. Dukhonchenko, on the topic of freedom of religion for members of the sect of Baptists in the republic; and with ksendz [priest] of the Odessa kostel [Roman-Catholic church] on the absence of any oppression from the organs of authority... The leaders of Baptist schismatics send abroad slanderous materials and documents related to the purported ‘persecution’ for the faith in Ukraine—materials that could be used at the projected conference of heads of European states in Belgrade. In order to frustrate and compromise these actions of hostile foreign and clerical centers, we plan to interview leaders of sectarian EKhB communities and Baptist schismatics Spisovskii (Chernigov), Logvinenko (Odessa), Kovalenko and Roshten (Kiev), Sokolov (Khartsizsk) about issues of religious freedoms in the USSR. These materials will be published in *Visti z Ukraini* and used in radio programs targeting foreign audiences.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 22-24.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 25-26.



A part of the cost the officially functioning denominations paid for their legal existence in the USSR consisted in involving their foreign guests in counterpropaganda:

We are expecting the arrival in our country via the tourist channel of the president of the SDA General Conference, Pierson, vice-president, Alf Lohne, and their wives, who will visit a number of our country's cities and Ukraine. We plan to organize a meeting with them of the Radio Committee and reporters of RATAU [Ukrainian Telegraph Agency] with the purpose of obtaining positive interviews about the freedom of conscience in the USSR and transmitting them to the United States and all countries of the West.<sup>49</sup>

Since it was a routine practice, Litvin did not care to mention that the task of familiarizing foreign guests with the intricacies of state-church relations in the USSR and involving them in the spectacle of counterpropaganda fell to the Soviet leaders who accompanied them. However, in his earlier 1976 report, Litvin stressed "the development of measures for patriotic and internationalist education of clergy, church activists and believers with an aim of using the latter in our work with foreign religious delegations towards the goal of exposing anti-Soviet falsifications about the state of religion, church and believers in our country."<sup>50</sup> Although the western church leaders often gave the expected "positive interviews" merely as a tribute to local conditions under which their Soviet fellow-believers lived, they nonetheless made themselves, quite conscientiously, instruments of the Soviet foreign policy. While their participation in the Soviet cover-up campaign may have ensured some benefits for their registered fellow-believers in the USSR, it also undermined the struggle of many other persecuted believers

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>50</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 1357, p. 33.

for the de facto observance in the Soviet Union of the freedom of conscience and religion.

In his earlier cited 1976 report Litvin also provided a vivid example of how the involvement of Soviet religious leaders helped alter the western opinion with respect to the plight of schismatic Baptists in Kiev:

A broad and diversified program of getting visiting religious activists from capitalist countries acquainted with our reality has been carried out. The more experienced servants of the cults were brought in for this work helped train guides and interpreters from the 'Inturist.' Measures have been taken to provide foreigners with the maximum objective information concerning questions of interest to them. As a rule, the guests were received at the Council [CAR]. Such an approach contributed to the decrease of the anti-Soviet agitators' activity in the West. Thus, upon his return home, the General Secretary of the Union of Baptists in England, D. Russell, who personally visited the prayer house of schismatic Baptists in Kiev and received objective information concerning Vin's case, made statements in press and spoke in the Baptist communities against demonstrations 'in defense of prisoners' that were under way in a number of countries.<sup>51</sup>

In 1978, the head of the Department of Propaganda and Agitation at the CC of CPU, Y. El'chenko, reported to the Secretary of the CC of CPU, V.E. Malanchuk, that based on the information received from Litvin, two important western visitors were to arrive in Kiev—a pastor of the same church in Washington D.C. that President Carter attended, Charles Trenton, and the chairman of the US Consultative Commission for International Contacts and Affairs of Culture and Education, Olin Robison. "Before Trenton's departure to the USSR," remarked El'chenko, "Carter had a long conversation with him...The pastor is especially interested in the case of the sentenced Baptist leader, G. Vins, and the situation of his family that had recently received an invitation to move to

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

Canada.”<sup>52</sup> The CAR handled these visitors in the same way it handled Russell’s visit: “The Senior Presbyter of VSEKhB for Ukraine, Dukhonchenko, has been informed about it and prepared a program for the mentioned representatives’ stay in Kiev.” Although Malanchuk trusted Dukhonchenko as an experienced chaperone of foreign guests, he scribbled on the margins of this document: “Under strict control.”<sup>53</sup> Malanchuk’s suggestion was not lost on Dukhonchenko. According to his “Program,” Trenton and Robison were to be escorted by trusted VSEKhB representatives every step of the way from Moscow to Kiev. The CAR and Raiispolkom employees were responsible for “the maintenance of public order in places the foreign guests will be visiting and where they will be staying,” which translated into their effective isolation from the unwanted public. “Once we have data on the guests’ positive impressions from their stay in Kiev,” stated one of the program’s provisions, “they will be asked to share these impressions in an interview with reporters of the Ukrainian Radio Broadcasting, APN, and the newspaper *Visti z Ukraini*.”<sup>54</sup>

The guests were allowed to visit “the prayer house of the registered schismatic community to which G.Vins’ family members belonged.” Although the guests purportedly “had conversations with clergy and believers” in the Vladimirskii cathedral and the synagogue, there is no indication in the document that they conversed with members of Vins’ family or any other prominent schismatics. The CAR apparently

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<sup>52</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 1688, p. 21.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 22-23.

preferred to discuss the issue of Vins and his family at a more private setting, that is, during the reception at the CAR office, where the guests were surrounded by carefully instructed personnel. The conversation about G. Vins' family, as Litvin reported, proved to be "the longest":

Members of the delegation were told in detail about the crimes committed by G. Vins: that he was prosecuted on criminal charges—not for the faith, but for antisocial and unlawful activity. Robison showed great interest in the statement of the Council's chairman that should Vins ask for clemency and promise not to engage in the antisocial activity in the future, his petition would be considered in accordance with the established procedure. In response to Robison's question about G. Vins' son, it was explained to him that Vins' son was not a believer and was charged with a crime as an accomplice of dissidents.<sup>55</sup>

In his turn, Robison stated that "some influential circles in the United States, England and Canada are ready to support Vins' family financially, should the family raise the issue of emigration," and also defended President Carter against the CAR's accusations, reportedly backed by many statements from [Soviet] believers, that the US Baptist President "contributed to the international tension by having given his approval for the production of neutron bomb." Although Trenton and Robison were not gullible foreigners and their better awareness of the plight of believers in the USSR contributed to "the sharp character of the conversation at the Council," as Litvin put it, they "agreed, before their departure, to meet with reporters." Trenton, according to Litvin, supposedly "told the representatives of the Ukrainian Radio Broadcasting, APN, and *Visti z Ukraini* about the positive impressions he had of Moscow and Kiev, and about the really existing freedom of conscience in our country." "After processing," concluded Litvin, "these materials

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 25-27.

will be used for propaganda purposes.”<sup>56</sup> The Soviet media thus skillfully used whatever positive general impressions of the Soviet Union it could extract from Trenton and Robison, including their visit of a legally functioning schismatic community in Kiev, to deflect the western public attention from the plight of religious dissenters in the country and the continued violation by the Soviet Union of the provisions of the Helsinki Accords.

It is for this reason that Georgii Vins’ wife, Lidia, and members of the Council of Prisoners’ Relatives (mentioned in previous chapter) opposed registering schismatic communities even as autonomous from the VSEKhB. As her husband served his second prison term, from 1974 until his expulsion from the country in 1979, the EKhB religious leaders, including, obviously, some members of the Kiev schismatic community, helped the government to cover up the true cause of Vins’ and other reformers’ imprisonment. Registration never came without any strings attached, and the government increasingly used it not only to favorably impress foreign guests, but also to divide the CCEKhB leadership.

The government, however, had only a limited success in wooing schismatic communities into some sort of mutually beneficial alliance. Most schismatics remained adamant in pursuit of their agenda of achieving true separation between church and state, arguing that international agreements, signed by the Soviet Union, would not be binding on the state for as long as the existing Soviet legislation on religious cults contradicted the spirit of these agreements. In his 1976 report, Litvin dedicated considerable space to

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

reviewing various reactions of believers to the Soviet Union's signing of the Concluding Act of the Council on Security and Cooperation in Europe (The Helsinki Accords).

Describing the EKHB reformers' and other non-conforming believers' reaction, he wrote:

The leaders of supporters of the so-called 'Council of the EKHB Churches' try to convince believers that [the USSR's] signing the concluding document of the Helsinki Council on Security in Europe is a prerequisite to the revision of the legislation on cults...An active preacher of the Lebedinskaia group of schismatic Baptists in Sumy oblast, Topchii, stated in a conversation with representatives of local authorities: 'Why do you keep interpreting to us laws on religion and church that are 45 years old? They were issued during the era of Stalin's cult of personality. At present time, one should be guided by documents signed at the European Council in Helsinki. It is stated there directly that states will in practice respect and defend human rights and basic liberties, such as the freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Our state also signed this document. Therefore, on the basis of this document (which, strangely enough, was signed by Brezhnev and not Podgorny), we have the right to confess any religion individually or collectively with our fellow-believers. We will never give up our spiritual subordination to the CCEKhB...We are not against initiating an application for registration with the authorities, but only on the condition that the registering organs would have no right to exclude certain persons from the church council and obstruct our charitable work or acceptance into our community of persons who have reached the age of 16.'

Extremists of the SDA sect also pervert the meaning of the Concluding Act...for the purpose of boosting their activity. They ignore the legislation on cults, plant in believers' minds ideas about the restoration of the church's 'independence' and 'democratization' of its status in new conditions; they demand unlimited right to teach religion to children and youth.<sup>57</sup>

The latter tendency especially perturbed Litvin, since despite certain relaxation of its policy with respect to religious upbringing of children in believers' families, the government still hoped to win the battle for the hearts and minds of the young generation. Commenting on this tendency, Litvin wrote: "The common place in homilies of clergy of all confessions are an appeal to bring up the youth in the spirit of religion, since the

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 68-70.

youth is the church's future, and the focus on women who, as children's educators, actively contribute to the reproduction of religiosity in new generations."<sup>58</sup>

That the Soviet Union's signing of the Helsinki Accords emboldened believers was also evidenced from a more determined behavior of the registered EKhB community in Chernovtsy. Numbering over 1,000 members, this community petitioned the local authorities about a permission to build an extension to their prayer house. The authorities granted such permission at the end of 1974. However, by the end of 1975, while "the documentation was still being processed, this community's extremists," according to Litvin, "supported by majority of believers, declared...that they changed their mind with respect to their initial request and began demanding...permission to build a new prayer house and the allocation for that purpose of a plot of land within the city limits." The community further "unlawfully elected a committee of 30 and entrusted to it to bargain with the organs of authority about the satisfaction of the said demands." The community's leadership, moreover, "embarked on the path of blackmailing, stating that should the question be not resolved, all believers would march in demonstration towards the Oblispolkom." When the government dissolved the committee of 30, "the community's extremists began openly speaking about retreating into the underground."<sup>59</sup>

On November 16, 1976, the Register [*Vedomosti*] of the Supreme Soviet of Ukrainian SSR published the recently standardized "Regulation Concerning Religious Organizations in the Ukrainian SSR" (a Ukrainian republican version of the revised

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>59</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 1357, p. 69-70.

legislation on religious cults passed in every Soviet republic). Its publication made but little impression on believers most of whom knew that that the so-called new legislation was merely a more systematized version of the old legislation, as Litvin himself admitted: “The publication in the open press of the legislation on religious cults did not bring any changes to the activity of registered religious organizations.”<sup>60</sup> Some leaders of registered communities, cited by Litvin, expressed their expected satisfaction with the new legislation and “evaluated it as a significant improvement in the state’s attitude towards believers.” The EKhB Senior Presbyter for Vinnitsa oblast, V.F. Vasilenko, for instance, said: “The new Regulation...completely satisfies me personally and the EKhB communities in the oblast. We thank the highest organs of authority for the opportunity given to us to freely satisfy our religious needs’...” The ROC clergyman, R.N. Mikorin, commented on the utilitarian value of the better organized “Regulation”: “It’s good that everything is in one place now; everything’s become clear.”<sup>61</sup> For members of sectarian organizations who, as Litvin reported, “were expecting some concessions to the church in the legislation,” the “Regulation” was a “disappointment.” They viewed it as a mere tactical maneuver on the part of the government—an attempt to make an impression of a change without conceding anything:

The schismatic Baptist and leaders of unregistered Pentecostal communities and groups continue to hold on to their position of non-recognition of the legislation on cults. The Baptist schismatic, F.E. Luchko (Lutsk) declared: ‘I heard that some new legislation has come out, but I don’t want to read it. We will get by without it.’ A.S. Zadoianchuk (Vinnitsa) said: ‘This is not a new legislation. It’s the same old legislation. Only the paper it is written on is new.

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<sup>60</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 1508, p. 65.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.



We cannot recognize legislation that allows arbitrary appointment to religious organizations of only those servants of the cult and members of executive organs that the government finds agreeable.’ A fanatically-disposed schismatic, P.M. Shepot’ko (Sumy), stated: ‘We did not recognize the 1929 Regulation, and we won’t recognize this one. There is only one law for us—the Constitution where it is stated, without any reservations, that the freedom to practice religion is granted to all citizens!’<sup>62</sup>

In view of the much closer scrutiny of the observation of the freedom of conscience and religion in the USSR now exerted upon the Soviet state not only by foreign religious centers but also national governments, the Brezhnev administration could no longer maintain the status quo with impunity. At the same time, it stubbornly resisted any meaningful alteration of the Soviet policy on religion and hoped to appease domestic and western critics by hiding the essentially unchanged fundamentals of this outdated policy behind the smoke screen of the new and more politically correct terminology. In his explanation of certain pertinent articles of the new Brezhnev Constitution, Kuroedov exhorted: “The freedom of conscience has always been a constitutional principle in the Soviet society. The Constitution of the developed socialist society, created on the basis of continuity and accounting for all requirements of the modern era, presents in the fullest measure the principle of the freedom of conscience.”<sup>63</sup> However, in his practical remarks on changes introduced to Article 52 of this new Constitution he could only point out the following subtle nuances:

The new Constitution points to the right of every citizen to ‘confess *any* religion or none,’ and the term ‘antireligious propaganda’ is replaced by ‘atheist propaganda.’ A deep meaning is embedded in this: the task is set to form a scientific, materialist worldview. It should be especially noted that if the 1936

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>63</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 1688, p. 48-53.

Constitution stated that ‘the freedom to practice religion and the freedom of antireligious propaganda are *acknowledged* for all citizens,’ Article 52 of the new Constitution states that ‘the right to confess any religion or none, to practice religion or conduct atheist propaganda is *guaranteed* to all citizens of the USSR’...Article 34 of the new Constitution states that citizens of the USSR are equal before the law regardless of their origin, social and property status, racial and ethnic background, gender, education, language, or attitude toward religion...The equal status...is granted in all spheres—economic, political, social, and cultural.<sup>64</sup>

The insertion of a qualifier “*any religion*” presupposed the legal status of any religious denomination. In reality, however, the Greek Catholics, Jews, Reformed Adventist, the True Orthodox Church, and many others remained illegal simply because the government arbitrarily deemed them ineligible for registration. The substitution of the terms “atheist propaganda” for “antireligious propaganda” and “guaranteed” for “acknowledged” did nothing to put religion and atheism on an equal footing or protect religious communities from state interference in their internal affairs. The rhetoric of unconditional equality of all citizens before the law, invoked in Article 34, should have allowed Communists to go to church and believers to be elected to the government offices. Far from providing these opportunities, the new Constitution still treated religious observances and matters of religious conscience as secondary to the fulfillment of civic duties, which meant that a refusal to bear arms or to work on Sabbath, for instance, remained punishable offenses, since Article 39 of the same new Constitution stated that “the use of citizens’ rights and liberties (including the freedom of conscience) must not hurt the interests of the society and state.”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

As the government tried to maintain as much as possible the pre-Helsinki status quo, many Soviet believers mentally embraced freedoms enjoyed by their western counterparts and, sensing the Soviet state's vulnerability, either openly violated the outdated Soviet legislation or observed it only grudgingly. Disagreements, especially over involvement in the counterpropaganda campaigns, began to affect even the VSEKhB leadership. On June 16, 1977, the Soviet newspaper *Izvestiia* published an interview with the assistant of the VSEKhB's chairman, M. Zhidkov, in which the latter, among other things, criticized the policy of President Carter and his administration. This time, however, believers' reactions to M. Zhidkov's interview ranged from the wholehearted approval to condemnation. In a conversation with the Upolnomochennyi, Dukhonchenko told that during a recent meeting with his subordinates in Ukraine, the Senior Presbyter for Donetsk oblast, S.F. Karpenko, said "that many oblast Senior Presbyters, including Vasilenko, Andrikevich, Kravchenko, and others, have already stated to Dukhonchenko that M.Zhidkov acted dishonestly, speaking in defense of other people, and not the church; that he interfered in politics—something that a religious leader should not do. In doing so, he lost his respect in the eyes of the Baptist brotherhood and 'will be given a dishonorable discharge' at the next EKhB congress." Dukhonchenko responded evasively (in order to avoid a falling-out with presbyters), but had to admit "that since the publication of M. Zhidkov's statement, he received numerous letters from believers in which they condemn Zhidkov's interview."<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 7, D. 49, p. 4-5.

In 1977, the EKhB Senior Presbyter A.A. Lysiuk received an anonymous letter criticizing the incumbent VSEKhB leadership. In the opinion of the top VSEKhB officials, Bychkov and Mitskevich, the letter was generated not by the CCEKhB, but by someone in “the VSEKhB apparatus.” In a conversation with the Council’s Upolnomochennyi for Chernovtsy oblast, P.G. Podol’skii, Lysiuk admitted that “approximately 80% [of the letter’s content] was the truth.” In Podol’skii’s opinion, the letter indicated that “certain circles” within the VSEKhB “were discontented with Bychkov’s international and ecumenical activities.” The letter’s authors expressed their frustration at the present VSEKhB leadership’s failure to eliminate problems caused by the old leadership, namely, the schism. The VSEKhB continued to promote leaders of questionable reputation. For instance, “a man of poor spiritual reputation, the Senior Presbyter for Moscow oblast, Fedichkin, was sent by the VSEKhB to study abroad.” The reputation of the Senior Presbyter for Sumy oblast, Pavlenko, was no better, but despite this circumstance, the authors held, “his candidature is always at the top of the list of people going abroad.” Among other instances of unmerited promotion and sheer nepotism were the following:

The morally depraved behavior of the Moscow community’s chairman, Tkachenko, has a corrupting influence on the community, but the VSEKhB’s Presidium entrusts him to represent our brotherhood. The Senior Presbyter for Volynia oblast performed so poorly that he was excommunicated by the Lutsk community. Yet, it does not prevent him from continuing to work in the capacity of a Senior Presbyter. N. Sverev presently works in the VSEKhB’s foreign relations department. Where and by who was he baptized? What community recommended him for the study abroad—remains a mystery. The VSEKhB is fully aware of this and this is happening right in front of its eyes. The VSEKhB’s General Secretary brought in nine of his relatives into the EKhB apparatus, turning the VSEKhB union into a union of Bychkov’s relatives...At the previous VSEKhB Plenums and in official VSEKhB letters, there has been a lot of talk

about the VSEKhB's publishing activity and money that it required. Believers sincerely responded to this need. But where is Karev's book? Where is the promised anniversary edition of the Bible? ...Believers are deprived of the possibility to visit neighboring communities. The VSEKhB [representatives] visit communities abroad, but if their fellow-countryman visits any [neighboring] church in his own country, he is charged with missionary activity, and the VSEKhB does not speak in defense of our brotherhood's interests...<sup>67</sup>

For decades, the institutional model of religious organizations rested on the CAR's control and manipulation of communities' executive organs. The CAR closely monitored the composition of these organs, making sure that they were staffed with reliable people from whom the local Upolnomochennye could routinely receive detailed information about communities' internal life. More importantly, the CAR used these official exponents of communities' autonomy and self-organization to undermine the authority and aspirations of enthusiastic and motivated parish presbyters. In the late 1970s, as some documents suggest, presbyters of certain registered EKhB communities began freeing themselves, with the blessing of some high-ranking VSEKhB officials, from the tutelage of government-control executive organs. Quoting the words of an assistant to the Senior Presbyter for Ukraine, I.S. Gnida, that "the role of executive organs is now limited to repairing fences,"<sup>68</sup> the presbyter of a numerous (1,147 people) Dnepropetrovsk EKhB community, A.M. Kirichenko, for instance, tried to undermine the authority of this community's executive organ (acting as an informant for the Upolnomochennyi) by creating an alternative "Brotherly Council" from "radically-minded deacons, preachers, former CCEKhB supporters, and persons earlier prosecuted

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 118-121.

<sup>68</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 7, D. 25, p. 34.

on criminal charges for violations of the legislation on cults.”<sup>69</sup> The CAR

Upolmomochennyi for Dnepropetrovsk oblast reported:

Relying on this influential council, presbyter Kirichenko ignores the executive organ, appropriates its functions, and systematically violates the legislation on religious cults... On March 8, 1976, acting on presbyter's instructions and without the knowledge of the executive organ or permission from the local authorities, the former CCEKhB supporters, deacons Vakuliuk and Komarov, organized at the prayer house a meeting of youth representatives from the EKhB communities of Dnepropetrovsk, Dneprodzerzhinsk, and Krivoi Rog oblasts. Patronizing the youth choir, Kirichenko asked the community's accountant to withdraw 3,500 rubles from the account to buy a second electric organ. When the accountant refused..., the 'Brotherly Council' voted to fire the accountant... Inspired by Gnida's directions, presbyter Kirichenko openly rebukes the executive organ for transferring considerable sums of money to the Peace Fund and the Fund for Protection of Historical Monuments, saying that 'there is no law requiring to give money to these funds: it's a voluntary thing and, therefore, non-obligatory'... Kirichenko made efforts to remove from the executive organ loyal and honest believers... In secret from the executive organ, Kirichenko collects voluntary offerings from believers... and uses them for charity purposes and as aid for the CCEKhB prisoners... The passive position of the VSEKhB's Ukrainian branch with respect to this issue suggests that it is quite content with the actions of our extremists. In the light of these facts, I.S. Gnida's thesis that the role of an executive organ consists in 'repairing roofs and painting fences' becomes clear: it's a straightforward directive to artificially replace executive organs with the so-called 'Brotherly Councils' staffed exclusively by clergy.<sup>70</sup>

The Ukrainian EKhB leadership's tacit approval of the parish presbyters' attempts to free themselves from the government tentacles in communities indicated that the VSEKhB was slowly coming around to embracing some of the same objectives that the CCEKhB pursued for years. Although in the particular case of the Dnepropetrovsk EKhB community the CAR worked closely with the executive organ and ultimately succeeded in replacing Kirichenko with a person "loyal to us" and "approved by the

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 43-46.

neighbors [KGB],”<sup>71</sup> Gnida’s toleration of Kirichenko’s and his “Brotherly Council’s” activity, especially their sympathetic view of schismatics, suggested a certain differentiation of opinion on the issue of cooperation with the government within the official VSEKhB leadership.

As Protestant communities continued rejuvenating in the late 1970s, the young people grew not only in number but also in assertiveness and sought greater involvement in the life of communities traditionally dominated by geriatric leaders who were not fully in tuned with the needs of a better educated younger generation. In 1978, Litvin reported to the CC of CPU:

Lately, there has been a manifest tendency among the Baptist youth in some places to gain certain autonomy from the mass of EKhB believers. Someone Senchenko (a member of one of Moscow’s EKhB communities and an MGU graduate) proposes the introduction in communities of assistants to presbyters, who would be in charge of working with the youth, and of appropriate departments at the republican and all-union [VSEKhB] offices. If this proposal is not accepted, he intends to create an autonomous center of Baptist youth and Baptist youth organizations in the locations. This year, Senchenko visited Kiev with this purpose in mind, met with the young Baptists, but did not receive support. In July, he planned to continue his mission in Donetsk oblast, but was intercepted by the appropriate organs in Moscow. In order to resist the said undesirable tendency, we think it expedient, along with measures designed to curb actions directed at the creation of a youth section in Baptism, to recommend that the Senior Presbyter of VSEKhB in Ukraine promoted more often loyal young believers to leadership positions in communities while removing those servants of the cult and activists who are inclined to extremism.<sup>72</sup>

The sense or restlessness characteristic of the late 1970s manifested also in the Pentecostal movement for emigration. Believers of this unfortunate denomination, both members of the unmerged communities and those who felt increasingly uncomfortable in

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 45-46.

<sup>72</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 1688, p. 31-32.

the EKhB union, demanded that the government either allow Pentecostals to form their own union or granted them exit visas to any capitalist country that would take them.

Reporting to the 1<sup>st</sup> Secretary of the CC of CPU, Shcherbitskii, the CC and Propaganda Department officials, Y. El'chenko and V. Malanchuk, wrote:

At your request, we inform you about the emigration moods among believers of the sect of Pentecostals. In a number of oblasts of the republic, some believers of this sect began expressing their wish to emigrate since April, 1977. Among those who petitioned about leaving the Soviet Union on religious grounds for capitalist countries are: 93 families (590 people) from Rovno oblast, 76 families (276 people) from Ternopol oblast, 44 (226) from Chernovtsy oblast, 27 (130) from Donetsk oblast, 21 (98) from Zaporozhie oblast, 11 (30) from Volynia, as well as several families from Nikolaev, Kherson, Zakarpatie, Voroshilovograd, Kharkov, and other oblasts. Altogether they number 324 families or 1,562 people, over one half of whom are children of school and pre-school age.<sup>73</sup>

The authors claimed that, “according to studies, these facts could be explained by the recent upsurge, especially during the discussion of the project of the USSR’s new Constitution, of the activity of fanatics and extremists of the illegal religious organizations and, first of all, of persons who were formerly prosecuted.” They also attributed this renewed drive for emigration to “the influence of foreign anti-communist propaganda and incendiary actions of the so-called dissidents” who “fabricate slanderous lies about the ‘persecution of believers,’ make ultimatums, such as, demands to terminate all control over the activity of religious organizations, and entice believers to ask for a free exit from the country.” In order to solve this problem, Malanchuk and El'chenko suggested that greater attention be given to “the liquidation of religious underground—

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<sup>73</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 1508, p. 4-5.



this main breeding ground of extremism and fanaticism.”<sup>74</sup> In Kuroedov’s assessment, it was often the refusal by the local authorities to register groups of believers that evoked their discontent, rekindled religious fanaticism, created conflict situations between believers and local organs of authority, and fostered antisocial moods. “Quite often,” he reasoned, “the foreign press picks up these facts and tries to use them for anti-Soviet purposes—to compromise our policy toward religion and church, and to damage the international prestige of our state.”<sup>75</sup> Reporting about “certain manifestation of emigration moods among Pentecostals in the republic,” Litvin also attributed these moods to both “lies about ‘the persecution of believers in the USSR,’ ...spread by western bourgeois propaganda centers,” and to “the provocative actions of such notorious anti-Soviet activists as Sakharov, his followers, and certain religious extremists who travel to religious communities in the republic and fuel the emigration moods among the fanatically-disposed believers.” One sectarian, cited by Litvin, stated: “I do not know whether we will be allowed to go abroad, but I am confident that this letter (a collective letter of believers about a permit to leave the country) will help to end discrimination towards believers.” Litvin further informed that according to the data available to him “the port of Nakhodka was chosen as a staging ground for the relocation of believers abroad,” and that “sectarians are active in this town: they inspire writing letters to different levels of authority, demanding permission for the emigration of believers abroad.” Litvin assured that the Council’s Upolnomochennye in oblasts would continue

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

to work in close cooperation with the local organs of authority on “paralyzing the emigration moods among certain believers.”<sup>76</sup>

Litvin’s euphemistic invocation of medical terminology cloaked a massive coordinated attempt by a variety of Soviet agencies to frustrate and “neutralize” the emigration drive. In November of 1977, the sector heads of the Department of Administrative Organs, Burtsev and Velikanov, reported that in “response to the assignment of the CC of CPU” a meeting of representatives of administrative organs was held at the Procuracy of the Ukrainian SSR. A number of high-ranking Soviet officials attended the meeting, including the 1<sup>st</sup> assistant to the Procurator of the republic, assistant to the Minister of Interior, Litvin as the head of the Ukrainian CAR, and high-ranking KGB, MVD, and Procuracy officials. “The organs of KGB” took upon themselves “the work of detecting and preempting the activity of persons engaged in fueling the emigration moods and establishing connections with foreign centers and the so-called dissidents,” while the “organs of Procuracy warned leaders of illegal Pentecostal groups about the cessation of their lawless activity.”<sup>77</sup> The neutralization campaign had some limited success and “110 families withdrew their applications for going abroad.”<sup>78</sup>

While admitting that the religious underground remained the “main breeding ground of extremism,” the state attempted to tackle the problem of emigration via administrative measures of pressure and intimidation—measures that contributed to the expansion of religious underground in the first place. A more sensible solution—the

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 47-48.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

recognition of Pentecostals as a separate Protestant denomination eligible for registration and formation of its own spiritual center—was not even seriously considered. In March, 1979, Litvin reported to the CC of CPU:

As a matter of preparation for the next EKhB congress (to be convoked tentatively in the end of 1979), the VSEKhB leadership studies the issue of possible reorganization of the EKhB union into a Federation of Evangelical Churches (FETs). Supposedly, such a reorganization would help weaken tensions that periodically occur between Baptists and Pentecostals who have been members of the union since 1945, expedite the legalization of those Pentecostals who are prepared to accept the legislation on religious cults but want to preserve the autonomy of their confession, and resolve the problem of central leadership for those legally existing Protestant churches that do not have a center. The expediency of the said reorganization is also motivated by the consideration that the federation, as the new churches start entering it, would be able to more effectively counteract slanderous conjectures about the conditions of believers in our country.<sup>79</sup>

Since Ukraine was a home to a significant number of Protestants—1,103 registered communities of the VSEKhB union (106,000 members, including the merged Pentecostals), 48 autonomously registered Pentecostal communities (about 4,000 people), 340 Pentecostal groups acting outside the registration (about 15,000 people), 131 groups of the CCEKhB followers, and 120 SDA communities (10,000 people) “who might also show interest in entering the proposed federation”—the Moscow CAR wished to know the opinion on the matter of its Ukrainian counterpart. The Ukrainian CAR promptly replied:

In our opinion, the acceptance and implementation of the said proposition would significantly destabilize the religious environment in the republic. The formation of FETs and, consequently, of the autonomous Pentecostal church may cause about 20,000 Pentecostals, who are now members of mixed EKhB communities, to express their desire to separate. This would mean the formation

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<sup>79</sup> TsDAGO, F 1, Op. 25, D. 1887, p. 55-57.

of at least 150 new communities and groups, which would, in turn, bring about the appropriate increase of the number of servants of the cult and the need for more prayer houses.

The organizational formation of the Pentecostal church as a member of the FETs would most likely be accompanied by a fierce struggle for leadership positions between the various existing groups of leaders. It is known that a number of influential bishops from the autonomously registered communities (Bozniuk, Ozeruga, etc) think that the Pentecostal leaders who entered the EKhB union have lost the 'purity of the faith' and have no moral right to lead the autonomous Pentecostal church. The illegally acting bishops (Artyshchiuk, Ivanov, etc) do not recognize either the first or the second of the mentioned groups of leaders. The autonomy of the Pentecostals may provoke the Baptists...and stir the anti-Pentecostal moods in their midst...There is also no unity in the official Adventist church..., which compels us to delay indefinitely the issue of their center's creation in order to preserve their disjointedness and restrain their inter-zonal contacts. The formation of FETs, on the contrary, would inspire them to unite. Keeping this in mind, the Council thinks it expedient at this time to not go any further than rename the EKhB Union into a Union of Evangelical Churches. This would allow..., most importantly, to preserve the mixed Baptist-Pentecostal communities in the Union, which contributes to the overcoming of detrimental cult peculiarities of the Pentecostal rite.<sup>80</sup>

As the government opted again for the preservation of the status quo, it did not account for the empowering affect on believers of the Helsinki Accords, the new Brezhnev Constitution, and of the publication of the Regulation Concerning Religious Organizations. Believers interpreted these new developments as signs of greater state accountability and growing importance of domestic and international public opinion. The circumstances surrounding the Pentecostal movement for emigration in the late 1970s differed considerably from those of the 1960s when attempts to emigrate were random and the western public remained still largely unaware of the plight of believers in the USSR.

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

The Americans first learned of the Soviet Pentecostals' plight when in January of 1963 thirty-nine of them forced their way into the U.S. Embassy in Moscow and asked for help emigrating from the USSR. "The Americans were embarrassed," commented Sawatsky, "and these believers were sent back to their home in Chernogorsk in Eastern Siberia."<sup>81</sup> When the Pentecostals renewed their drive for emigration in the late 1970s, the government could no longer nonchalantly discard the much better informed public opinion abroad and the growing coalescence between religious and secular dissenters inside the country. Moreover, for years the government tried to minimize the number of unregistered Pentecostals and now discovered that they were more numerous and better organized. They submitted their requests not only to the Soviet authorities, but also to the United Nations. "By January 1978," Sawatsky estimated, "the Pentecostal emigration movement encompassed 10,000 people, and by July the number of people wishing to emigrate had increased to 20,000."<sup>82</sup> When on June 27, 1978, seven Pentecostals of the same Chernogorsk group staged a replay of their "1963 drama..., the Americans did not turn them out, nor were they able to act on their request."<sup>83</sup> Catherine Wanner observed that "unlike the other Western counterparts to religious minorities (Jews, Mennonites, Lutherans, and so on), Western evangelical leaders never encouraged or facilitated emigration out of the Soviet Union," in part due to the "diametrically opposed portraits of a believer's life in the USSR" they were receiving from religious dissenters, on one hand,

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<sup>81</sup> Sawatsky, p. 289.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 289-290.

and the official VSEKhB leaders, on the other.<sup>84</sup> The United States government also did not yet have a clear policy concerning the Soviet evangelical refugees. The Siberian Seven, therefore, lived in the American embassy basement for several years before their emigration became possible.

In the meantime, a number of EKhB dissenters also revamped their struggle for emigration begun in the 1960s. In November, 1979, the secretary of Chernovtsy Obkom of CPU, V. Slinchenko, for instance, reported to the CC of CPU:

In recent times, new manifestations of emigration moods among the EKhB extremists have been noticed. In particular, in January of this year, the UVD's department of visas and registration at the Chernovtsy Oblispolkom received renewed petitions addressed to the General Secretary of the CC of CPSU, comrade L.I. Brezhnev and the Presidium of Supreme Soviet of the USSR from residents of Chernovtsy—Baptists A.F. Bernik, M.V. Buchok, I. F. Gavrilova and others (10 people in all), asking to emigrate from the USSR with their families.

What catches one's attention is the categorical tone of these petitions. It follows from these petitions that should exit visas from the USSR be denied to them, petitioners would renounce their Soviet citizenship...<sup>85</sup>

The EKhB believers' attempts to emigrate, however, were not as numerous as those of the Pentecostals, and in the late 1970s the government's was primarily concerned with finding an effective way to combat the increasingly bolder and well-organized inter-oblast and inter-republic illegal gatherings of schismatics. In October, 1978, the head of the Department of Propaganda and Agitation, El'chenko, sent to the Obkom of CPU a "top secret" methodological supplement prepared by the Kiev branch of the Institute of Scientific Atheism and entitled "On Some Methods of Work towards Intensification of Atheist Education of the Population and Prevention of Religious Extremism in Kharkov

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<sup>84</sup> Wanner, p. 93.

<sup>85</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 1887, p. 32.

Oblast.” Perhaps fearing that a number of real life examples of these methods’ application, attached to this document, might fall into the hands of schismatics, smuggled abroad, and used as evidence of religious persecution in the USSR, El’chenko requested that all attachments be returned to the Propaganda Department by December 1. The methodological supplement focused on achieving greater coordination between all involved institutions and saw the success of struggle against religious extremism as dependent on fast decision-making and “correct combination of explanatory work and administrative measures.”<sup>86</sup> The document, however, reveals that despite increased focus on persuasion and education (“explanatory work”), the Institute of Scientific Atheism was far from dismissing administrative measures. These measures amounted to constant harassment of schismatics at their places of employment and continuous aggressive surveillance of their lives everywhere.

The Institute’s theoreticians suggested mobilizing for this purpose virtually every potential ally, from militiamen and voluntary guards, from members of trade union and Komsomol organizations to students of the Department of Atheism at the Institute of Marxism-Leninism, and from workers’ collectives to experienced atheist agitators who would work with sectarian youths and children individually. Having made schismatics’ lives unbearable at work on the ground of their purported proselytism in workers’ collectives, the broad coalition of these combatants of religion would focus on preventing the relocation of the now jobless schismatics, hoping to charge them with the violation of the passport regime, not mentioning the most common charge of social parasitism. The

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<sup>86</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 1688, p. 6.

Institute's studies showed that sectarians with degrees in engineering and other university degrees intentionally sought employment "as emergency plumbers, electricians, traveling craftsmen, or photographers," in order "to have additional free time for missionary trips."<sup>87</sup> The tendency to seek jobs that occupied only a few hours of one's time per day or offered one a relatively flexible schedule characterized a great majority of Soviet Protestants. Working in such solitary, non-team occupations as those of janitors, night guards, or hardwood floor polishers allowed believers to keep a low profile and also rescued them from the mandatory attendance of atheist lectures and other ideology-laden activities (collective's, trade union, Komsomol or party meetings) inseparably linked with employment at Soviet factories and plants. At the same time, even a minimal employment as a janitor protected one from accusations of idleness or social parasitism. A prominent SAD pastor and executive, I.F. Khimenets (born in 1945 in Zakarpatie), reminisced:

All church servants, regardless of their post or whether or not they received remuneration from the church, had to be employed at one of the state institutions. I worked as a janitor [*dvornik*—a person responsible for picking up trash, sweeping sidewalks, or shoveling off snow within an assigned sector of municipal property]. On occasions, I presented a peculiar sight. For instance, on some days, I would have to sweep my sector early in the morning, from 6:00 to 9:00 a.m., and be at an important church meeting by 10:00 a.m. Since there was not enough time for me to go back home before the meeting to change clothes, I would go to work wearing a suit and a tie. People found it quite amusing to see a janitor dressed like that...Employment as a janitor was quite typical. All church servants had similar employments. Zhukaliuk, I remember, worked as a metal roof installer, although he was a well-educated person.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>88</sup> Interview with I.F. Khimenets, 2008.



Even though there was a number of other socially reclusive occupations available to believers, the honorable profession of a janitor—people often employed punning on words to describe their profession, stating that they worked as *dvoriane* (noblemen) rather than *dvorniki* (janitors)—became the Soviet Protestants’ proverbial occupation and even entered into their folklore. Older-generation Adventists still remember a once popular song, appropriately called “Janitor”:

Why are you sweeping up the leaves?  
 The Nature’s autumn attire is so beautiful!  
 The falling leaves are a reminder  
 Of how fast the days of our lives do shed.

Meeting the sunrise earlier than others,  
 You welcome every lucent day at dawn.  
 And as you clean the streets and pavements,  
 Cleanse also hearts of all your fellow-men.

Behold, you humble laborer  
 The symbolism of what you do:  
 So will the Lord sweep up our days  
 Like leaves with His ignited broom.<sup>89</sup>

By the 1980s, these typically sectarian occupational preferences would begin to attract wider and wider circles of non-conformist intelligentsia, artists, musicians, and literati wishing to limit their interaction with the official Soviet culture and escape the dull routine of prescribed social activities at the more respectable places of employment. The leader of a popular underground band *Akvarium*, Boris Grebenshchikov, honored this new phenomenon with a song ostensibly entitled “A Generation of Janitors and Night Guards.” As the Institute of Scientific Atheism searched for more effective ways to enforce the official Soviet doctrine, the greater number of open and tacit dissenters

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<sup>89</sup> Courtesy of Marta Khimenets.

submerged into Vaclav Havel's "parallel cultures" collectively representing an imagined community of incredibly diverse and yet likeminded non-conformists. This development meant that the state now experienced a greater difficulty in mustering a uniform public condemnation of sectarians as social misfits. Despite all the rhetoric calling for a more professional and scientific approach to the problem of religion, the theoreticians at the Institute of Scientific Atheism could not generate any new ideas for combating emboldened sectarians.

By way of preempting potential sectarian gatherings, the Institute suggested the tested method of placing sentries along routes leading to sectarians' gathering sites, especially in border areas between regions and oblasts where confusing jurisdiction boundaries often prevented the local authorities from timely detecting large gatherings of sectarians. The traffic police was instructed to stop more often believers who drove their own cars.<sup>90</sup> The Institute researchers also noticed that sectarian leaders often evaded responsibility by staying in the shadows and "moving to the foreground the radically-disposed young believers" while all along fueling their followers' audacity by stating that "sooner or later they would exhaust the authorities' patience to control their [schismatics'] activity."<sup>91</sup> Typical of the large sectarian gatherings of the late 1970s (in Merefa and Babai, Kharkov oblast; in Khartsyzsk, Donetsk oblast, etc), ranging from 100 to 700 people, were improved logistical support and organization. Reporting about one such gathering of schismatic Baptists in Zakarpatie, in a forested area between village

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<sup>90</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 1688, p. 6.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 6-7.

Chinadievo and resort “Karpaty,” the secretary of Zakarpatie Obkom of CPU, I. Skiba, wrote:

It is worth noting that the illegal gathering of sectarians was carefully thought through and well-organized. The tents were set up at a chosen forest clearing, food storages established, electricity provided from large tank batteries, and tape-recorded melodies of religious nature played via speakers. A group of young people performed songs of the same character to the accompaniment of electric guitars.<sup>92</sup>

As the repertoire of such outdoor sectarian gatherings became more sophisticated and even included showing religious films,<sup>93</sup> the local authorities in many places showed signs of weariness from chasing schismatics. The CC of CPU officials complained that large gatherings of schismatics continued to occur mainly due to “the passive position on the issue of the local organs of authority.”<sup>94</sup> Reporting about the frequency and boldness of recent inter-oblast meetings of sectarians in Kharkov oblast, Litvin also pointed a finger at the local authorities when he wrote: “Such unlawful gatherings have already become a tradition in Kharkov oblast.”<sup>95</sup>

Characteristic of the late 1970s was also a sharp spike in the circulation of illegal religious literature produced domestically or smuggled from abroad. In 1975, the authorities “discovered an underground printing press near Riga, equipped with the latest machinery from the United States,” and in 1977, “another printing press, producing the EKhB schismatics’ *Messenger of Salvation* and other materials slenderizing the state

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 40-41.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 17-18.

policy vis-à-vis religion,” was detected in Leningrad oblast.<sup>96</sup> In October, 1977, the Ukrainian CAR issued “A Note on Measures of Intensification of Struggle against Foreign Religious Propaganda,” in which it stated:

The agents of anti-Communism and clericalism, sent to our country under the guise of tourists and often as members of church delegations, seek to find supporters of their views among certain servants of the cult and believers and thus confuse the public opinion. This is evident from the fact that in 1976-1977 several groups of auto-tourists from Holland, Norway and other countries, whose automobiles were equipped with special secret compartments stuffed with anti-Soviet and religious literature, leaflets, films, tape-recordings, aluminum matrices for printing, and other materials destined for distribution among their ‘brothers in Christ,’ were exposed in Ukraine.<sup>97</sup>

Although such busts were not isolated, the government detected and took out of circulation only a fraction of all religious literature and other supplies smuggled into the USSR from abroad. The growing volume of this illegal foreign aid helped break the isolation of Soviet believers and imbued them with a sense of belonging to the international community of fellow-believers and fighters for the freedom of conscience.

While the Ukrainian believers took full advantage of partial liberalization of the late 1970s, the CAR and Department of Propaganda and Agitation reports on the state of religiosity in the republic became more formulaic, theoretical, and far less optimistic than in the previous decades. The following report from the Borshchevskii region, Ternopol oblast, for instance, reflected the decline in the effectiveness of atheist propaganda in the republic:

Religiosity in the region is very high. In the past year [1979], 34% of children were baptized, 14 % of young couples were wedded in the church, and 76.3 % of

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<sup>96</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 1508, p. 78.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

all deceased were given religious burials. Certain Komsomol members and Communists participate in religious rituals...

The party, Soviet, and administrative organs of the oblast do not maintain systematic, active and concrete work regarding the atheist education of the population, replacing it in many cases by multiple meetings and protocols whose decisions are not being implemented. Many workers responsible for this most important sector have lost the edge, reconciled themselves with the existing state of affairs, and navigate poorly in circumstances that arise. Their education is also poorly organized.<sup>98</sup>

In the same year, researchers N.A. Kolesnik, E.K. Duluman, and P.L. Yarotskii, who conducted a study of atheist work in regions around Lutsk, concluded:

The goal-oriented activity of religious groups in the said locations did not meet obstacles. The local Soviets of People's Deputies as well as the party and Komsomol organizations assumed a conciliatory position. The actual social atheist opinion is absent here. Some Communists and Komsomol members themselves participate in religious rituals. The atheist work, in general, is reduced to reading episodic lectures. In village Okhlopov, the club is closed. In village Shklin', the club is in the state of disrepair and is not working.<sup>99</sup>

Although in the late 1970s the CAR continued to regularly submit copies of its reports to the CC of CPU, the virtual disappearance of the party bosses' heavy highlighting and numerous marginal remarks from these reports suggests that either the party now viewed the CAR as an experienced bureaucracy no longer requiring close supervision, by contrast with the 1940s-1960s, or that these reports were increasingly treated as a mere formality. The relative relaxation of pressure on religious organizations that marked the second half of the 1970 did not mean that the Soviet antireligious establishment finally ran out of steam. Despite the last spike in religious persecution in

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<sup>98</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 1887, p. 15-16.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

the early 1980s, however, the trend towards improvement of state-church relations, originating in the mid-1970s, would prove to be permanent.

## **2. From Confrontation to Coexistence: The State and Believers in the 1980s**

### *The Early 1980s*

The 1980s represent a much better researched decade, primarily due to the impact of perestroika that shifted the debate over the nature of state-church relations and future of religion in the Soviet Union from the institutional realm into the public sphere, drawing into the discussion a broader array of participants, from the party and Komsomol officials to social activists, intelligentsia, and religious leaders. V.A. Alekseev's *Shturmbes otmeniaetsia* and John Anderson's *Religion, State and Politics in the Soviet Union and Successor States*, produced shortly after the Soviet Union's collapse, emphasized that perestroika initiated "the fundamental shift in the nature of Soviet religious policy from a conflictual to a cooperative model"<sup>100</sup> and provided a thorough analysis of debates and legislative developments that accompanied this shift. Paul Froese's study of the Soviet experiment in secularization, *The Plot to Kill God*, offered a number of interpretations as to why the Soviet secularization project ultimately failed, while the work by Michael Bourdeaux, *Gorbachev, Glasnost and the Gospel*, and a series of articles by contributors to *The Politics of Religion in Russia and the New States of Eurasia* examined the impact of Gorbachev's liberalization on various religious communities. Interestingly, if the public debate over religion resulted in a substantial paper trail, the CAR and the

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<sup>100</sup> John Anderson, *Religion, State and Politics in the Soviet Union and Successor States*, p. 137.

Department of Propaganda and Agitation reports during perestroika became increasingly slimmer, more abstract and filled with theoretical tautologies rather than concrete examples of religious life in the locations. The shift towards a more scientific and professional assessment of the religious situation in Ukraine, for instance, resulted in less enlightening and revealing reports whose value for a social historian considerably diminished.

In the early 1980s, however, there was little indication of the upcoming changes. In fact, the decade opened with a new wave of prosecutions and arrests of believers. Reporting in 1977, still under the impression of the recently signed Helsinki agreement and in anticipation of the new Brezhnev Constitution, Kuroedov boasted that “the number of people prosecuted for violations of legislation on religious cults diminishes with every year.” He claimed that “if in 1974, 84 people were sentenced under Articles 142 and 227 of the RSFSR’s Criminal Code and corresponding articles of the Criminal Codes of other union republics, in 1975, 39 people were sentenced, and in 1976, the number dropped to just 7.” “The best indicator of the effectiveness of prophylactic control,” he exhorted, “would be bringing to naught the crimes committed on the grounds of violations of legislation on cults.”<sup>101</sup> Although Kuroedov’s figures were extraordinarily conservative and revealed nothing about the number of believers currently serving their sentences—in 1975, there must have been at least 180 EKhB prisoners alone<sup>102</sup> in Soviet camps—the late 1970s did witness a considerable reduction in the new prosecutions of believers.

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<sup>101</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 1508, p. 85.

<sup>102</sup> Sawatsky, p. 148.

This temporary lull in the Soviet antireligious struggle ended rather abruptly in 1980. In August of 1982, the new head of the Ukrainian CAR, N.A. Kolesnik, reported that “49 people were sentenced” during the past two years “for violations of laws on the separation of state from the church and school from the church, or for infringement on the person and rights of citizens under the guise of performing religious rituals.” Kolesnik further provided statistics that clearly indicated a sharp spike in sentencing around 1980: “It is characteristic that in 1977, only 1 person was sentenced [in Ukraine] for these kinds of crimes; in 1978—2 people; in 1980—16 people; in 1981—29 people; and in the first quarter of 1982—5 people.” At the same time, he pointed out, between 1976 and 1981, the number of violations of legislation on religious cults doubled: “If in 1976, there were 1,137 violations of legislation..., in 1981, there were 2,162. The majority of these crimes was committed by representatives of unregistered organizations.”<sup>103</sup>

The prosecution numbers provided to the CC of CPU in a secret report by the Procurator of the Ukrainian SSR, F.K. Glukh, were much higher than those quoted by Kolesnik. Glukh’s report, moreover, indicated that around 1980 the government in fact staged a coordinated crackdown on religion in fulfillment of a number of new decrees calling for the “intensification of struggle against violations of legislation on religious cults,” “enforcement of atheist education,” and directed primarily at “stopping the activity of those religious organizations that refuse to register in accordance with the established order”<sup>104</sup>:

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<sup>103</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 2403, p. 52-53.

<sup>104</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 2546, p. 2-4, 19-20.



In 1980-1981, the organs of Procuracy, MVD, Ministry of Justice and republican courts, with active participation of workers of KGB and in coordination with the Upolnomochennye of CAR, local soviets of people's deputies and other institutions, implemented a number of additional measures to increase the struggle against violations of legislation on religious cults...As a result, only in the past year, 1,652 people were subjected to administrative measures (fines) for violations of legislation on cults, which is a significantly greater number by comparison with the previous year. In 1980 and the first half of this current year, 193 people were prosecuted on criminal charges for the organization of sectarian gatherings, religious education of children, the spread of slanderous religious literature and other crimes...<sup>105</sup>

Among more specific violations, Glukh listed the production or procurement by believers of "large quantities of cult objects (crosses, icons, religious paintings, crafted religious paraphernalia, etc), including those smuggled as contraband from abroad." In Chernovtsy oblast, "7 leaders and more active members of illegal sectarian groups, Rymar', Ursul, and others, were exposed and sentenced for running 10 book-binding shops, a schismatic Baptist library, and the possession of 5,000 copies of religious propagandist and slanderous literature." In Dnepropetrovsk oblast, "the heads of illegal sectarian groups and organizations (EKhB, Pentecostal, etc), Kabysh, Rumachik, Shabura and others (10 people in 3 cases) were exposed and prosecuted on criminal charges." When their apartments were searched, specified Glukh, "a printing press, a rotaprint, 30,000 copies of hostile religious literature, photo equipment, tape-recorders, and a foreign film of a propagandist religious nature (in Russian) were found." One of the sentenced, Rumachik, alone...had "a hand-operated rotaprint, 1,000 plates for offset printing, over 10,000 wax plates, over 200 cans of printing paint, and 35,000 cards of

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<sup>105</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 2225, p. 30-32.

religious character.”<sup>106</sup> In 1982, the number of “prosecuted for violations of law due to religious motives” reached 227 people (in all 26 oblasts of Ukrainian SSR combined), according to the data provided by the head of the CAR’s Judicial Department, G.F. Sporeva. Of this total, 22 people were sentenced under Articles 138 and 209 of the Ukrainian Criminal Code, 97 people received sentences for refusal to serve in the army, and 108 people were subjected to administrative arrests or fines.<sup>107</sup>

If Glukh listed the material evidence of such violations, Kolesnik focused on the ideological content of dissenters’ activity, which he viewed as “associated with slander on the Soviet state and social order”:

Pentecostals from Dnepropetrovsk oblast, L.F. Litvinenko and S.F. Tkachenko, produced ‘an appeal—a request for help’ addressed to the heads of governments in the United States, Canada, and England, in which it is stated that the ‘Soviet regime’ supposedly enserfed believers and turned the country into a ‘frightening house of slavery.’ The other groups disseminate information that there is persecution of believers in the USSR: they supposedly suffer for their faith in prisons, psychiatric hospitals, and in the army. Quite often, documents manufactured by sectarians and containing slanders on the Soviet state and social order are transferred abroad, where they are used by the bourgeois press and various ‘voices’ for ideological diversions against the Soviet Union. A significant number of violations...has to do with the efforts of religious organizations to set up organized religious education of children and adolescents.<sup>108</sup>

The unregistered Pentecostals, according to Kolesnik, “stated that one should observe state laws only when they serve ‘the good and the Lord.’” In 1982, complained Kolesnik, these Pentecostals committed 505 violations—“1.5 times more than in 1981.” These violations amounted mainly to “evasions from registration and fulfillment of civic duties,

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4649, Op. 7, D. 221, p. 78.

<sup>108</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 2, D. 2403, p. 52-53.

including service in the USSR's Armed Forces," as well as continued "application for emigration based on religious reasons." In 1982, "such repeated applications were received from 62 families and 33 individuals (244 people in all)." Besides, the Pentecostals succeeded in smuggling abroad "121 brief biographical notes on believers who supposedly undergo persecution." In Kolesnik's estimate, "1/3 of the said applications and notes came from Ternopol oblast."<sup>109</sup> By 1983, however, the 222 known groups of Jehovah's Witnesses in Ukraine began to outdo all other religious confessions in terms of violations not only of the legislation on cults, but of "other state laws." "During the past year [1982]," reported Kolesnik, "141 cases of Jehovah's Witnesses' refusal to fulfill their civil obligations were registered. This represents 60% of violations of this kind committed by representatives of all confessions. The reduction of JW's refusals to serve in the army is taking place very slowly..."<sup>110</sup>

The government statistics, therefore, support the argument I advanced in the previous section: that the signing of the Helsinki Accords as well as other small measures taken by the Soviet Union in the late 1970s to improve the state-church relations were interpreted by many believers, especially those whose status did not undergo any significant change (EKhB schismatics, Pentecostals, JW's, etc), as a sign of regime's weakness and emboldened them to take a more assertive stance vis-à-vis the Soviet legislation on religious cults. As a result, the number of violations during this

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

period of relative liberalization doubled. The state reacted in a traditional manner—by tightened the screws yet again.

In 1981, the authorities finally caught up with some of Anatolii Dyman's samizdat co-conspirators, P.I. Mikitiuk, A.A. Baidala, and V.S. Sul'zhenko. According to the materials of the Judicial College for Criminal Cases at the Chernigov Oblast Court, presbyter of the SDA community in the town of Nezhin, Mikitiuk, "entered into a criminal cabal with members of the same community, Baidala and Sul'zhenko, for the purpose of buying, processing and selling for profit...of copies of the book *The Secret of Health* by an American author D. Holley. This book is not published in the Soviet Union and its dissemination is prohibited by law."<sup>111</sup> The court determined that in March of 1981, Mikitiuk "purchased from an unknown person in Kiev 700 copies of *The Secret of Health* for 1,400 rubles with intent to resell them for a higher price." Since the copies were not yet bound, Baidala transferred them in his own car from Kiev to Nezhin where the trio had book binding shops set up at two different locations. In April, Baidala and Sul'zhenko loaded 236 finished copies into a car and planned to drop off a portion of their cargo in Kiev, where Mikitiuk would sell them for 3 rubles a piece, and deliver the rest to Uman'. However, on route to Uman', Baidala and Sul'zhenko were stopped by the traffic police and their cargo apprehended. The subsequent searches of Mikitiuk's, baidala's and Sul'zhenko's apartments yielded 400 more copies and various book-binding materials and equipment.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 7, D. 255, p. 203.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p. 203-204.

The court prosecuted all three on charges of speculation, violation of laws regulating printing and handling of printed materials, possession and storage of prohibited items, and so forth, circumscribed under Articles 17/2, 154/2, 148/2, and 42 of the Ukrainian Criminal Code. Mikitiuk was sentenced to 6 years in high security camps, confiscation of all his property, and 3 years of subsequent exile, whereas Baidala and Sul'zhenko were spared the exile and sentenced to 5 and 4 years of high security camps, respectively, and the loss of all their property.<sup>113</sup> The investigation could not determine from whom Mikitiuk purchased the said copies or to whom exactly he and his associated planned to sell them. By taking the blame on themselves and interpreting their actions as a mere attempt to make a profit, the three SDA conspirators deflected the state's attention from a large underground operation that continued to function unimpeded for years. According to Dyman's recollections, the 700 requisitioned copies represented only a fraction of a "huge issue" illegally printed at one of the government publishing houses in Kiev. Speaking of his courageous fellow-conspirators, Dyman' stated:

They all served their sentences...Mikitiuk served 6 years, the other two were released earlier...Now they are all rehabilitated, because this book...The person responsible for the investigation—he read it in one night, and in the morning, he showed up and said: 'I refuse to investigate this case. You have found only 700 copies of this book, whereas we need to publish 700,000 copies of this book for the Soviet Union, so that everyone could be healthy.'<sup>114</sup>

Although by the early 1980s relations between the SDA Church and the state considerably improved due to the combined efforts of M.P. Kulakov, N.A. Zhukaliuk and the General Conference, the benefits of such improved relations were slow in coming.

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 202-203.

<sup>114</sup> Interview with A. A. Dyman', 2008.

According to the government data on official publications of religious literature by various denominations in 1982-1983, the SDA Church's share was rather miniscule—just 150 copies of the *Collection of Spiritual Songs*. That is not to say that other denominations received large quantities of religious literature. The numerous EKhb Union, for instance, received 1,366 Bibles, 2,772 New Testaments, and 2,772 *Collections of Spiritual Songs*. The Hungarian Reformats of Zakarpacie obtained 1,000 Bibles in Hungarian from the Hungarian bishops via the intercession of the Russian Orthodox Church. In 1984, the ROC proposed to publish 75,000 Bibles, some of which, at least theoretically, could be obtained by other denominations.<sup>115</sup> Even though the government permitted the SDA Church on occasions to receive small quantities of Bibles from abroad or purchase them from other denominations in the Soviet Union, the shortage of religious literature persisted into the 1980s, ensuring constant demand for samizdat publications provided by activists like Dyman' and others. In 1982, Zhukaliuk and Parasei submitted the following petition to the CAR:

The SDA Church in the Ukrainian SSR experiences a great need for Bibles in Ukrainian. It is well-known that almost one half of all Adventists in the USSR live in Ukraine. Many Adventists, especially in western oblasts, speak, read, and preach exclusively in Ukrainian. The SDA Church received Bibles in Russian...already several times...Bibles in Ukrainian, however, reach the USSR primarily via unofficial channels, and believers pay dearly for them... We convincingly ask the CAR in the USSR and Ukraine to consider the issue of printing Bibles in Ukrainian either in our country or permit the official shipment of a certain number of such Bibles from abroad.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 2546, p. 33.

<sup>116</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 7, D. 199, p. 101.

Although many religious leaders of the 1980s referred to N.A. Kolesnik as the more lenient of the postwar heads of the Ukrainian CAR, he made no effort to support this reasonable request and simply concurred with the Ukrainian party bosses' assimilatory approach to ethnically Ukrainian believers. Responding to a query by the Moscow CAR about the expediency of printing Bibles in Ukrainian, he wrote:

...During the years of Soviet authority, Bibles in Ukrainian have never been published or imported. Keeping in mind that 80% of residents in our republic consider Russian their native language, the directive organs view the request to import Bibles in Ukrainian as ungrounded and do not support it.<sup>117</sup>

While being parsimonious about providing perks for religious organizations willing to establish “good working relations with the government,” the CAR demanded that leaders of these organizations kept their part of the bargain and took concrete steps towards legalizing the still unregistered communities and making them transparent to the government. Moreover, the CAR instructed these leaders to put an end to certain Protestant practices that it found incompatible with the institutional model—a model designed to restrain, not enhance religion. One of such practices and, in fact, survival techniques—large weddings attracting numerous guests from various oblasts—served for decades as vehicles of religious revivalism, allowing believers, especially young men and women, from different parts of the republic or country to come together, interact socially and spiritually, exchange experiences, coordinate their future activities and, at least for a brief moment, feel a part of an all-union family of believers. Such large gatherings, under the guise of weddings, helped individual parish communities to fight their

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

loneliness and isolation and provided presbyters, preachers, and youth leaders with an opportunity to hold clandestine counseling meetings. Furthermore, large weddings were a form of religious propaganda, attracting the attention of outside public and providing believers with a chance to proselytize. In the late 1970s, such large weddings became so frequent among the Ukrainian SDAs that the Council's Upolnomochennyi for Chernovtsy oblast complained about the existence in Ukraine of an SDA wedding equipment rental service. In 1976, he reported:

While studying the issue of inter-communal contacts at the SDA weddings..., we have discovered the existence of a peculiar 'rental service' for supplying believers with necessities in case of a wedding...Six large canvasses [for tents] were purchased and sets of plates, forks, spoons, and glasses for 600 persons. All of this was documented as the Chernovtsy community property and rented out to believers for the conduct of weddings...The existence of such 'rental service' allowed Adventists to rapidly tackle organizational issues and conduct exceptionally large weddings (attracting 300-400 and, from time to time, even 700-800 people), with participation of guests from neighboring communities.<sup>118</sup>

The Upolnomochennyi suggested that "the rental items were requisitioned and transferred to the system of household services or other social organizations."<sup>119</sup>

Reminiscing about one of such large weddings, that of his own elder daughter Nadezhda in 1972, N.A. Zhukaliuk wrote:

A lot of people from all regions of the country arrived to participate in our family festivities. Every bit of space was taken up not only in our house, but even on our adjacent piece of property. The authorities dreaded not only any ordinary convergence of people (in those years, a church wedding was the only legal congregation of people starved for interaction), but especially the coming together of the church leadership. About twenty preachers—acknowledged authoritative figures of the SDA Church—were present at the wedding as guests. The pastors

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<sup>118</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 7, D. 24, p. 252.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p. 253.



arrived not merely for the sake of a wedding. This was a convenient opportunity to discuss many church issues and make a plan of action for the future...<sup>120</sup>

There is no doubt, therefore, that Zhukaliuk understood the value of these large weddings for all strata of believers. However, by the 1980s, as he worked closely with M.P. Kulakov to normalize relations between the SDA Church and the state, he and his co-workers in Ukraine began to feel the cost of maintaining good “working relations with the Soviet government.” In 1982, Zhukaliuk, Parasei, and a number of other elder brothers wrote an appeal to “all members and servants of the SDA Church in Ukrainian SSR,” in which they exploited to the fullest what M.P. Kulakov referred to as “Christian diplomacy” to convey to their fellow-believers the new vision of what an SDA wedding should be—a wedding, and nothing else. Resembling the VSEKhB’s Instructional Letter both in rhetoric and the use of theological arguments, construed to provide religious justification to for what in essence was but a blatant state interventionism in the internal life of religious communities, the appeal politely condemned both the frequency and magnitude of SDA weddings on the grounds of their promoting gluttony, financial profligacy, and unreasonable waste of time and energy. The latter, the authors argued, was especially detrimental since “weddings, in general, take place during the labor-intensive summer season, when ‘one day feeds a year’ [a popular saying stressing the importance of summer work in agriculture].” “How much of labor time is wasted on nothing!” exclaimed the authors and added health concerns to their didactic chiding, stating that during the hot summer season “even several refrigerators are incapable of

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<sup>120</sup> A.N. Zhukaliuk, *Cherez kruty perevaly*, p. 239-240.

preserving food from going bad.” The SDA wedding thus also contributed to poisoning people and “taking them out of the normal working regime.”<sup>121</sup> The elder brothers, therefore, instructed the SDA believers “to turn a wedding into a truly family festivity and limit the number of guests to a minimum,” excluding from participation in the reception “all those who do not have personal invitations.”<sup>122</sup> Ultimately, in writing their appeal, the elder brothers obliged the state seeking to reduce religious wedding from the multi-functional events, as they used to be in the past, to inconspicuous quiet family affairs. While this and similar statements certainly contributed to a good rapport between Kulakov’s faction and the state, they also startled many believers and fueled their suspicion that the elder brothers’ change of heart towards established SDA practices was a tail-tale sign of their collaboration with the atheist state.

It should be noted here that the overcoming of the SDA schism achieved a significant breakthrough in the summer of 1981 when, as Zhukaliuk described it, “God sent a ‘surgeon’ in the person of president of the General Conference, Neal Wilson” who “put an end to a frightful church schism that lasted for over 25 years.”<sup>123</sup> Commenting on this landmark in the history of the SDA Church in the Soviet Union, Zhukaliuk wrote:

This was a very difficult and, furthermore, risky undertaking, if one considers the reputation of our country on the international arena. It is not in vain that the President of the United States, R. Reagan, called it an ‘evil empire.’ Wilson risked not only his own reputation as an American and leader of the Church, but the reputation of the SDA Church worldwide when he announced that the General Conference recognizes only that part of the Church which is recognized by the communist government—in other words, by the ‘evil empire.’ This meant that

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<sup>121</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 7, D. 199, p. 106-107.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> A.N. Zhukaliuk, *Cherez krutyie perevaly*, p. 330.

the greater part of the Church had to submit, having acknowledged the correctness of its minor part.<sup>124</sup>

Giving credit to the opposition leaders, P.A. Matsanov, P.G. Sil'man, M.S. Zozulin, and others, who, "fearing for the future of the SDA Church in the USSR and with painful aches in their souls, agreed with Neal Wilson's arguments," Zhukalik claimed that Wilson "made his sensational statement not because he...suddenly fell in love with the totalitarian regime trampling under foot all human rights and liberties," but because it was "a wise strategy dictated by the heavenly Providence."<sup>125</sup> Zhukaliuk, however, fell short of explaining this wise strategy. Did the GC decide that in the post-Helsinki context the USSR was no longer the "evil empire" it used to be and could be cooperated with without much sacrifice for the church? Did the GC leaders somehow foresee the upcoming liberalization of perestroika? Was M.P. Kulakov privy to some inside information or simply had a good hunch about the upcoming political changes of the late 1980s and convinced the GC to strike a deal with the "evil empire"? But the said "wise strategy" was first proposed by the GC in the early 1960s, according to M.P. Kulakov's account, when the "evil empire" yet showed no signs of stagnation and withering and Kulakov himself was not yet a competent negotiator and middleman he would become 10 years later. Besides, commenting on Wilson's 1981 decision, Zhukaliuk still referred to the Soviet Union as nothing less than an "evil empire." How and on what evidence did the GC leaders calculate the extent of sacrifices their church in the USSR would have to make in the name of preserving unity? Did unity trump ethics in their judgment?

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., p. 330-331.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p. 331.

Regardless these still largely unanswered questions, after 1981, the SDA Church finally had some semblance of central leadership, with M.P. Kulakov at the helm. According to SDA historians, M.P. Kulakov built his constituency from a small base centering on the Tula SDA community. In 1975, the Tula community petitioned the CAR about the establishment of the post of a Senior Presbyter who would be responsible for all SDA communities on the territory of RSFSR and suggested M.P. Kulakov as a likely candidate to occupy this post.<sup>126</sup> Quite unexpectedly, this time the authorities decided to “play out” the “handy initiative of a parish community.”<sup>127</sup> It is very unlikely that the Tula initiative was not a result of prolonged thee-way negotiations between M.P. Kulakov, the CAR, and the General Conference. Once the CAR backed Kulakov’s line, it now needed to present this line as a genuine grass-roots movement. Although the Tula initiative provoked new local schisms, this time in communities guided by the underground center, in 1977, with the government permission, “over 30 [SDA] servants, mainly those who supported the former VSASD and M.P. Kulakov’s initiative,” gathered in the city of Gorkii and voted for the election of M.P. Kulakov as a Senior Presbyter of the SDA Church in the RSFSR.<sup>128</sup> M.P. Kulakov provided an exceedingly brief comment on this event in his memoir: “At that meeting, which was held in the city of Gorky, I was chosen for that position.”<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> D. Yunak, *Istoriia Tserkvi Khristian Adventistov Sed'mogo Dnia v Rossii, 1886-1981*, p. 428-429.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 430.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 431.

<sup>129</sup> M.P. Kulakov, *Though the Heavens Fall*, p. 133.

Both the Gorkii meeting and the election of M.P. Kulakov could not but raise issues of legitimacy. In 1980, Kulakov's opposition circulated a statement in which it described Kulakov's faction as "a new church organization independent of the [SDA] brotherhood, the activity of which is guided primarily by the two brothers, Kulakov and Libenko." Representatives of this new organization "secretly bargained with servants and members of communities persuading them to break ties with the neighboring communities and switch allegiance to the Tula organization." Those who succumbed to this "wooing" were asked "to separate from their communities and form independent groups that were later registered as communities belonging to the Tula organization." The Tula organization further "labeled those who refused to voluntarily join the Tula organization as people who have broke away from the General Conference," and threatened them that "the General Conference would soon denounce them as reformists." The opposition asked: "Could a person elected by 19 people be considered a Senior Presbyter for the republic [RSFSR] when the remaining 100 servants did not participate in his election?"<sup>130</sup> The Gorkii meeting thus succeeded only in initiating just another round of mutual accusations between the warring SDA factions. It is safe to say that had it not been for Wilson's 1981 ultimatum, the SDA schism would have most likely smoldered indefinitely.

The overcoming of the SDA schism, which took until 1985 to complete, and gradual incorporation of unregistered communities into the institutional model did not signal the end of illegal activities. In fact, the government documents testify that the

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<sup>130</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 7, D. 131, p. 5-12.

institutionalization of the SDA Church hardly altered its traditional modus operandi. In 1983, the head of sector for the study of clerical anticommunism and problems of atheist counterpropaganda at the Institute of Scientific Atheism in Kiev, P.L. Yarotskii, reported about the recent developments at the Kiev SDA community:

The extremist elements revamped their activity in the community. There has been a noticeable intensification of missionary-recruitment activity outside the community with the purpose of drawing into community of youth and intelligentsia... The homilies reflect contents of radio-propaganda and special orientations of foreign Protestant inter-confessional centers. The theatricality and emotional saturation of prayer meetings corresponds with the standards imposed by foreign radio-propaganda (contemporary styles of music and solo performances).

Here are some recently observed facts. On January 1, 1983, the Kiev SDA community (70 Yamskaia Street) conducted a 'festive meeting' on the occasion of New Year. There were approximately 150 children with their parents in the overfilled prayer house. One-third of the congregation consisted of young people 15-25 years of age. The youth choir was dressed in special uniform costumes. Two orchestras, brass and string, composed primarily of adolescents and youths 14-20 years of age performed music in a contemporary style. In the foyer of the prayer house there was a photo gallery dedicated to the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary (1882-1982) of the Kiev SDA community...

Adventist missionaries conduct goal-oriented work aiming at attracting into their sect Communists and Komsomol members. In 1982 alone, a leading specialist of Ukrmezhkolkhozstroï, Maksimova, a 1<sup>st</sup> category engineer-technologist of the plant Iskra, Mazharov, and the 6<sup>th</sup> grade polisher of the same plant, Vitko, were recruited into the sect... The same facts are registered in other cities of the republic... Pedagogues, medical workers, artists, workers of organs of the MVD, engineers and technicians are drawn into the SDA communities. In Kiev, Adventists apply the following methods of recruitment: as they ride in local electric trains or subway, or buses, they demonstratively read the Bible, which, according to their designs, should attract the attention of by-standers. Then they strike a conversation, provoke interest in the Bible, and establish contacts... We utterly do not have any popular, ideologically-correct literature about the newly discovered phenomena in the realm of the micro-world, biology, and astrophysics. These issues have completely fallen out of the field of vision of atheist propaganda, both oral and written. At the same time, in the Adventist, as well as in other foreign editions, smuggled into our country, these issues are hotly

debated at the level of Protestant ‘doctors’ and ‘professors’ of various secular universities.<sup>131</sup>

It appears that the dreaded covert secularization of the church, frequently associated with the institutional model promoted by M.P. Kulakov, A.N. Zhukalik, and others, materialized only in westernization and modernization of the antiquated SDA Church in the Soviet Union. If the General Conference’s controversial “wise strategy” envisioned this turn of events, then the overcoming of the SDA schism by such highly undemocratic methods as described earlier may have been worth the risk.

Whereas the SDA schism was essentially over by the beginning of perestroika, primarily due to the General Conference’s bold interference and a fresh start that the neutral Kulakov-led Tula organization seemingly offered (by the mid-1980s it would absorb majority of the formerly schismatic and neutral communities), the prospects of reconciliation between the VSEKhB and the CCEKhB were as bleak as ever. Although the VSEKhB wooed a number of schismatic groups and individual believers into its fold, majority of the CCEKhB followers remained loyal to their leadership or preferred to remain autonomous. The government’s continuous persecution of active EKHB dissenters counteracted the process of reconciliation and only heightened hostility between the opposing centers. In 1982, the authorities searched the house of the CCEKhB supporter, I.Y. Antonov, in Kirovograd. The analysis of 81 items of religious/schismatic literature found in his house led investigators to conclude that the CCEKhB leadership worked on “the development in ordinary believers (supporters of the CCEKhB) of hostile attitudes towards the VSEKhB...as a religious center functioning,

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<sup>131</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 7, D. 238, p. 1-9.

supposedly, under the tutelage of atheism in the persons of the Upolnomochennye of CAR...and the KGB.”<sup>132</sup> The following quote from Kriuchkov’s statement, published in the schismatic *Messenger of Truth* and cited by the investigators in their report, vividly described sentiments shared by majority of the EKHB dissenters even as late as the 1980s:

Working in close cooperation with the world [meaning—godless world], the VSEKhB workers caused a lot of suffering to God’s people. And so it continues to this day...They invite us to negotiate...How can we respond to such invitations or participate in such negotiations when they are cooperating with the organs and recruit others to do so? If we united with the VSEKhB, we would be uniting through them with the KGB, thus departing from God forever. That is why we must see accurately and clearly that the way to the VSEKhB is barred for us, and that we cannot have any contacts with their official servants.<sup>133</sup>

While becoming more lenient towards registered communities, where the youth figured prominently in the performance of religious rituals, as the earlier cited case of the SDA community in Kiev demonstrated, the government relentlessly persecuted schismatics for engaging in seemingly the same activities. Among many cases of prosecution of supporters of the CCEKhB from the early 1980s, there was a case of Lidia Bondar’ sentenced in 1982 under Article 138 to three years in the correctional-labor colony for violating the law on separation of the church from the state and the school from the church. According to the case proceedings, Lidia, along with other supporters of the CCEKhB, organized a children’s camp “The Forest Church” on the bank of the Pripiat’ River in Gomel’ oblast, Belorussian SSR, for the purpose of teaching religious doctrines to children. 27 minors from various cities of the country were involved in “The Forest Church.” After Lidia’s camp was disbanded by the authorities, she continued

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<sup>132</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 7, D. 221, p. 59.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.



religious education of children, “conducted studies of religious texts and their interpretation with children, tutored them in learning songs and poems, read to them religious texts and preached homilies, and lead discussions with them as a follow-up to their independent study of religious doctrines.”<sup>134</sup> The review of literature, as well as of tape-recordings, seized at the camp site “determined that this literature and manuscripts of religious content resembled textbooks for the study of religion,” “had an extremist religious character,” and were intended for instilling in children a religious worldview and cultivation in them of militant religious fanaticism and hostile attitudes toward Soviet reality.”<sup>135</sup>

Although both registered and unregistered believers alike provided religious education to their children and, in doing so, drew on essentially the same pool of smuggled foreign literature and foreign radio broadcasts, the government found it less dangerous if these practices occurred in closely monitored institutionalized churches. In the early 1980s, it appears, the main vector of the government antireligious endeavor shifted from combating religious proselytism and religious education of children as such to combating non-transparency and non-conformism. Not willing to alienate the official churches that it needed for its counterpropaganda campaign, the state grew increasingly reserved in the use administrative measures to suppress certain manifestations of non-compliance in registered communities, hoping to eventually eliminate them in a more tactful manner—via the influence of co-opted religious leaders who, in their turn, were

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<sup>134</sup> TsDAVO, F. 4648, Op. 7, D. 255, p. 96-100.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

becoming increasingly reluctant to do anything more than sing occasional paeans to the Soviet order at international conferences. In 1982, for instance, Koleskik reported:

We assisted the leading Orthodox, Baptist, and Adventist clergymen in their foreign trips to religious conferences in defense of peace where they explained the Soviet peace initiatives. Special attention was given to the preparation of representatives of religious organizations of the republic for participation in the world conference 'Religious Leaders for the Salvation of the Sacred Gift of Life from Nuclear Catastrophe,' which took place in Moscow and received broad international resonance...During this year, with the assistance of the CAR, journalists specializing in atheist counterpropaganda interviewed 79 foreign and domestic servants of the cult and ordinary believers. On the basis of these interviews, 99 materials were prepared and sent abroad, including 40 materials on the disclosure of Vatican's insinuations, bourgeois-clerical diversions, critique of the Greek-Catholic Church supporters, and 30 materials showing the real freedom of conscience in the USSR.<sup>136</sup>

Despite the government attempts to curb it, the Pentecostal movement for emigration grew stronger in the early 1980s. As Catherine Wanner asserted, "by 1980, just as Ronald Reagan assumed the U.S. Presidency and became a powerful spokesperson for the interests of conservative Christians, Boris Perchatkin amassed thirty thousand members under the 'Christian Emigration Movement in the USSR,' most of whom were Pentecostals striving to practice their religion elsewhere."<sup>137</sup> In 1983, the INS finally allowed the Siberian Seven, who for years have been surviving in the basement of the American Embassy in Moscow, to emigrate to the United States. "Their protest," held Wanner, "laid the groundwork for later legislation that made evangelicals the last wave of Soviet refugees to the United States."<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 2403, p. 43.

<sup>137</sup> Catherine Wanner, p. 93.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

If in the past the Soviet authorities categorically denied registration to Jehovah's Witnesses and knew little about the extent of their network, in the early 1980s, the Soviet state, preoccupied with transparency, showed the first signs of rethinking its stance towards the JW's. At this point, however, the JW's overwhelmingly turned down the opportunity of registration. In 1984, Kolesnik reported:

215 JW organizations, or  $\frac{3}{4}$  of their total number in the country, are accounted for in the republic [Ukraine]. They are mostly concentrated in rural areas of western oblasts...The migration of JW's to industrial regions by way of organized draft of workforce and individual relocation has been noticed...The sect of JW's is the only large Protestant current in the republic that does not have a single registered community. Following the lead of their world center located in the United States, the leaders of this sect strive for non-recognition of the Soviet legislation on cults, encourage believers not to participate in elections of the people's deputies, and refuse service in the army.<sup>139</sup>

The government studies of the religious situation in the republic from the early 1980s were full of mixed messages. One researcher from the Department of Propaganda and Agitation, Balashova, prognosticated "the continuing deepening and worsening of the crisis that all religious currents predictably experience in conditions of socialism" and, at the same time, pointed out that while "1/3 of respondents consider themselves convinced atheists,  $\frac{1}{2}$  think of themselves as simply non-believers, while a significant segment (18-25 %) is of the opinion that religion, supposedly, causes neither harm nor benefit." She further listed the recent tendencies among religious organizations that indicated the revival of religion in the republic rather its crisis:

--intensification of activity; the strengthening of internal consolidation of religious organizations

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<sup>139</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 2717, p. 7-8.

--intensification of religious life of the significant part of believers—more frequent attendance of prayer services; the broadening of contacts with fellow-believers; increased interest in religious literature

--the growth of religious fanaticism and extremism; the dissemination of illegal (samizdat) literature

--the strengthening of orientation toward foreign religious centers among Judaists, Catholics, and all Protestant sects

--the manifestation of emigration moods among Judaists, Pentecostals, and Mennonites

--the growth of urban churches and sectarian communities, and the transfer of center of religious life from the countryside to the city (the larger and more active sectarian communities have been formed in cities; the better prepared cadre of clergy is found here, and the tone of religious life is also being set from here)<sup>140</sup>

Balashova further argued that “the clergy rehabilitated itself in the eyes of believers,” and that “the bulk of believers now thinks positively of the clergy and is drawn towards organized forms of religious life.” She, therefore, predicted that “one should not expect a sharp reduction in the number of believers in the near future,” and viewed such a reduction as contingent on the tempo of “overcoming of religiosity among the middle-age believers” and on the success of “blocking avenues for the reproduction of religion among the young generation.” Balashova, however, openly admitted that the opportunity for such “blocking” may have already been lost:

Since religious organizations have for a long time been focusing on children and youth, and since their activity in this respect have not been neutralized in time, the rejuvenation of religious communities (especially sectarian) will continue for some time. There are, and there may be, attempts of creating religious youth movements... The internal consolidation of existing religious communities, and submission of applications for the opening of new churches and prayer houses will still continue for some time... Also possible is the growth of sects of the EKhB, Pentecostals and Adventists both on the account of many children in the families of these sects’ adepts, and on the account of their intercepting the ‘non-organized’ believers and those who oscillate between religion and atheism.<sup>141</sup>

<sup>140</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 2054, p. 2-6.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

Balashova's study also registered "the tacit forms of supporting religion" proliferating among the general population. Among such "indirect forms" she mentioned "the generation of interest towards the church history in our country" and "known religious figures of the past," as well as "the propaganda of the Bible, not only as a religious source but also as a source of history, literature, and a code of moral values." The indirect support of religion also manifested in "the fashion of wearing crosses and listening to liturgical music and religious hymns."<sup>142</sup>

That despite decades of persecution religion ensured its place in the future was also evident in the report of the head of the Department of Propaganda and Agitation, Kravchiuk, on the celebration of Ester in 1981:

The heightened interest and presence of large numbers of youth were observed ubiquitously...Especially large numbers of youth, children, and adolescents took part in prayer services in the Baptist prayer houses. In many cases, they constituted half of all present. Besides, they actively participated in various cult acts: religious singing, reenactments, and declamations...The Komsomol organizations in many cases displayed unjustified passivity...<sup>143</sup>

Later the same year, Kravchiuk reported on the emergence of non-sectarian religious youth movements in the republic. Besides the appearance in Kiev of the followers of "Krishna's Conscience," he mentioned a Donetsk-based group of "objective idealists" whose members "preached religious-mystical views, social passivity, and led a parasitic lifestyle." Kravchiuk's department learned of similar groups in Vinnitsa and Kharkov and reported to the CC of CPU about "facts of involvement of certain representatives of

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 2225, p. 20-22.

intelligentsia and students in religious organizations and the establishment within these organizations of autonomous groups of the so-called ‘religious intellectuals.’”<sup>144</sup> The cited evidence suggests that even before perestroika the Soviet ideological establishment began to realize that what it treated as a mere atavism of the past proved to be an essential part of life for many Soviet citizens, regardless of progress of socialism in the country or increased levels of literacy and education. Instead of disappearing, religion experienced a revival and attracted sympathizers in the supposedly least predisposed segments of Soviet population. Some commentators, Anderson remarked, “linked this renewal [of interest to religion] to a rejection of the official ideology and the social apathy associated with years of stagnation” and quoted one observer who stated: “‘atheism became in certain intellectual circles simply indecent—rather as before the revolution religion was considered equally unacceptable in the ranks of the intelligentsia.’”<sup>145</sup> Although the government was still far from embracing the co-existence of different worldviews, it clearly moved in the direction of non-confrontation with at least legally functioning religious organizations.

### *The Perestroika Years*

Both the Soviet believers’ struggle for their rights that generated international resonance and put pressure on the regime and their ability to offer an alternative to the stagnant Soviet ideology contributed to changes that affected the Soviet society in the late

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>145</sup> John Anderson, *Religion, State and Politics in the Soviet Union and Successor States*, p. 138.

1980s. It should be remembered, however, that believers constituted only a small segment in a multifarious strata of people challenging the status quo in one way or the other. It should also be kept in mind that perestroika did not arrive on the shoulders of massive popular protests, but was implemented by the government as a preemptive reform from above in response to complex political and economic problems, from the costly and unsuccessful war in Afghanistan to failure of the Soviet command-control economy to keep up with the arms race tempo set by the United States, and from the soaring deficit of consumer goods on the domestic market to the growing rift between the geriatric Soviet leaders, with their decades-old and no longer effective ideological clichés and expectations of the young generation of Soviet citizens. It is not surprising that for the first 18 months in the office reforming the church-state relations did not even figure on Gorbachev's priority list.

The necessary discourse, however, was slowly taking shape, political arrests virtually ceased, and registration of religious communities expanded. "By the late 1987," remarked Anderson, "roughly a third of all religious prisoners had been released," "religion in general began to receive more objective coverage in the press, and an increasing number of newspaper and journal articles described the persistent abuse of believer's rights."<sup>146</sup> The signs of relaxation of the government control over religion were also noticeable in a much calmer tone of the Upolnomochennyye reports about religious activities that formerly agitated the CAR officials. In his 1986 report, Kolesnik wrote:

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., p. 139.

According to the incomplete data, only among Baptists, Pentecostals, and Adventists in the republic there are 8,000 families with many children, in which 44,100 children are growing up. As a rule, these children do not attend the pre-school institutions, do not participate in their schools' social life, and do not go to summer camps..., but stay home, under the religious influence of their parents. The Ispolkoms of local Soviets of Workers' Deputies, pedagogical collectives, and Komsomol organizations, with rare exceptions, do not study the situation in such families and do not detect and stop compulsory religious education of children...

The sectarian youth, as a separate category of believers, comprising at least 20,000 people under the age of 30, is not content with visiting prayer services and other meetings arranged by religious communities. Young men and women in this milieu maintain informal contacts with each other, gather at apartments for evening parties, organize games and contests for the best knowledge of biblical texts, collectively read religious magazines, hand-written literary works and, of course, some painstakingly procured ('by incident') book of foreign interpreter of evangelical truths. At first sight, this does not show signs of unlawful activity. But, as it happened many times before, the young sectarians, under no control, often arrange missionary trips to villages without acquiring approval from their spiritual advisers, organize study groups for children in which religion is systematically studied, and so forth.<sup>147</sup>

Although still frequently referring to Protestants as "sectarians" in this report, Kolesnik for the first time introduced a more politically correct term "believing citizens," which would become rather standard in his future correspondence.

Kolesnik's assessment of the religious situation in Western Ukraine clearly pointed to the family and the strength of local traditions as the main engines behind the preservation and transmission of religious and cultural legacies:

In the western part of the republic reside two-thirds of the total number of sectarians with many children who constitute the main source of reproduction of the contingent of believers... The problem here is not only in a complex religious legacy inherited from the past, but also in that this legacy is being developed and transformed qualitatively, and it perceptibly influences religious life on the scale of the republic as a whole... During the past 5 years, the contingent of registered and unregistered sectarian organizations in the republic had increased by 8,225

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<sup>147</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 2980, p. 43-44.



people, 8,017 of whom (97.5 %) reside in western oblasts. If it is accounted that the network of Russian Orthodox and other ecclesiastic organizations in these oblasts is 8 times thicker per 10,000 of the population than in the remaining territory of the republic, it becomes clear that sectarianism grows not so much there where it does not have competition with the nominal [traditional] churches, but where there is a favorable religious-psychological atmosphere.<sup>148</sup>

Kolesnik's latter observation suggested that the least Russified Western Ukraine was not only the hotbed of religiosity, setting the tone for the rest of the republic, but also a place of phenomenal religious pluralism, which after the independence would become a characteristic trait of modern Ukraine as a whole.

The perestroika did not put an end to the religious leaders' involvement in the government political campaigns of counterpropaganda but rather intensified the crumbling regime's reliance on religious leaders. In the same report, Kolesnik outlined the expanding scale of this effort in Ukraine alone:

Over 120 journalists, religious figures, and church functionaries were involved in the preparation of counterpropaganda materials. 45 interviews were taken from representatives of foreign religious delegations. During this past year, 245 articles, reports, and other counterpropaganda materials were published or transmitted abroad over the radio. A great volume of work had been carried out by the CAR...in providing help to religious organizations in their work of dissemination of objective information about the conditions of churches and believing citizens in our state. Religious leaders made 52 trips abroad, spoke 50 times on foreign radio and TV, gave numerous interviews to correspondents of foreign newspapers and editorial boards of television and radio stations. As before, especially actively in this work participates Metropolitan of Kiev and Galicia, Filaret. Y.K. Dukhonchenko and G.I. Komendant [top figures of the EKhB Union in Ukraine] fruitfully work on freeing the North American Baptists of Ukrainian descent from under the influence of leaders of the All-Ukrainian Evangelical-Baptist Brotherhood known for their anti-Soviet sentiments and rabid nationalism.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., p. 45-47.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

Despite these massive counterpropaganda efforts, the international community headed by the United States increased pressure on the Soviet Union. In 1988, the Secretary of the CC of CPU, Shcherbitskii, complained:

Lately, the U.S. administration intensified its political speculations concerning the so-called 'questions of violations of believers' rights in Ukraine. In December of 1987, a group of American Senators and Congressmen submitted for ratification by the Congress a project of the resolution in conjunction with the 1000<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Baptism of the Kievan Rus, which contains slanderous assumptions about 'active persecution by the Soviet authorities of believers of Ukrainian Uniate [Greek-Catholic], Autonomous Orthodox Catholic churches, as well as unregistered communities of Baptists and Pentecostals. Demands are being put forth to open in our country the earlier closed churches and religious educational institutions, to proclaim amnesty to all persons serving their terms of imprisonment 'for religious convictions'; to permit unlimited publication, dissemination, and import of religious materials in the USSR. The resolution calls upon the President of the United States 'to speak decisively against violations of the freedom of conscience in the USSR at international forums. The President personally took part in a number of propagandist actions in support of leaders of foreign emigration clerical and nationalist centers. The enemy's special services actively promote the same agenda...<sup>150</sup>

While it is debatable whether or not it was the American and international pressure that compelled Gorbachev to pay closer attention to the subject of religion in the USSR, the year 1987 marked the beginning of an open dialogue between the state, religious leaders, and society in general about the nature of state-church relations in the atmosphere of the ongoing democratization of the Soviet system. In 1988, addressing the assembled Orthodox hierarchs, Gorbachev admitted that "religious organizations had been affected by 'the tragic events' of the Stalin years," and called "for a return to 'Leninist principles' in church-state relations."<sup>151</sup> Quite different from these admissions

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<sup>150</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 3329, p. 1-3.

<sup>151</sup> Anderson, *Religion, State and Politics*, p. 140.

made many times before to no particular avail for religious organizations was Gorbachev's stress on "universal norms and customs' which both sides had in common"—something that clearly indicated "that in future religious policy was to be based upon cooperation rather than conflict."<sup>152</sup> Assessing this marked shift in the state's attitude towards religion, Anderson averred:

At the heart of Gorbachev's strategy for reform lay the building of political 'supports', of appealing for the backing of various groups within society by offering them something that they wanted. Hence, the intelligentsia were presented with *glasnost*, the more advanced managers and workers greater economic autonomy, and the substantial community of believers greater religious freedom. In particular, religious institutions were seen as capable of encouraging their members to be loyal, hard working, peaceful and sober citizens, something that would be further facilitated by expanding their rights. More practically, believers might be able to supplement the efforts of the ailing Soviet welfare system by providing funds and personnel for hospitals, psychiatric institutions and people's homes. Increasingly the authorities were discovering that in a time of political reform even opium had its uses.<sup>153</sup>

As is to be expected, many party hardliners, such as Egor Ligachev, did not welcome the changing attitude towards religion. Despite their efforts to preserve the status quo, perestroika promoted "a few good men," as M.P. Kulakov referred to them, who were prepared to move forward even before the new Soviet policy on religion took shape. One of such good men happened to be the new Chairman of the Moscow CAR, Konstantin Kharchev. In 1986, according to M.P. Kulakov, Kharchev traveled with "a group of about 270 representatives the USSR community...to Chautauqua, New York, to attend the huge Conference of Public Diplomacy." Having learned that Kharchev was among the participants, the General Conference President, Neal Wilson, invited

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., p. 141.

Kharchev to visit some of the U.S. Adventists institutions—“the Adventist Media Center and Loma Linda Medical Center,” with Kulakov being “privileged to accompany him as a translator, even performing this duty on a telephone conversation Kharchev had with Senator Richard Lugar.” “Konstantin Kharchev was very much impressed by everything he saw,” wrote Kulakov in his memoir, “and said to me over and over, ‘All this we must do in the USSR.’”<sup>154</sup> On their flight back, Kulakov and Kharchev happen to sit next to each other and enjoyed a long conversation. Kulakov ended describing this episode with the following words:

Finally, as the plane began to descend through the morning skies towards Sheremetyevo International Airport, Konstantin Kharchev turned to me. ‘From now on,’ he said, ‘you are my spiritual father. Please tell me how I can help you in what you are doing for God and the people in the USSR.’ And over the next several years, as our church was building its seminary, its publishing house, and its media center—and was establishing its lines of organization—the help of that courageous and noble man was invaluable.<sup>155</sup>

Anderson also provided a rather positive characteristic of Kharchev, especially his role in the shaping of the new law on freedom of conscience:

Prominent in this was Konstantin Kharchev, a man with no experience in the religious field, appointed to head the CAR in late 1984. By his own admission his initial attitude towards religion was traditional and hostile, yet over the next five years, whether for reasons of principle or opportunism, he was to become a leading, if not always politically astute, promoter of reform in the religious sphere...In a December 1988 interview, Kharchev had dismissed the 1929 legislation out of hand as a ‘typical Stalinist document’, and suggested further radical changes in the legal regulation of religious life. He could see no reason why parents should not be able to take their children to synagogues, mosques or churches for religious instruction, and argued that the present understanding of ‘registration as permission’ should be dropped—it was clearly absurd that a group

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<sup>154</sup> M.P. Kulakov, p. 151.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.

of friends at prayer required permission while a group of comrades gathered for a sing-song did not.<sup>156</sup>

Kharchev also spoke of “transforming the CAR from an organ of administration into an organ of people’s power.”<sup>157</sup> Michael Bourdeaux thought of Kharchev as “a Yeltsyn-type maverick in religious affairs, criticizing government policies and extending his links with Western public opinion.”<sup>158</sup> Kharchev’s public advocacy of greater religious freedom “attracted the wrath” of the party hardliners, Ligachev, Medvedev and Kapto, the KGB, and even of the Orthodox Holy Synod hierarchs “who approached the Supreme Soviet with a request for Kharchev’s removal”—all for his attempt “to push through a more genuinely liberal law on freedom of conscience and to reduce the state’s role in religious matters.”<sup>159</sup> Bourdeaux summarized some of the rumors surrounding the

#### Kharchev Affair:

Some said the conservatives in the Kremlin had ousted him because his ideas on religious liberty were clearly at variance with Marxist orthodoxy. Other sources said he had been removed for criticizing the leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church for its unwillingness to move ahead with the times, in an unpublished interview with *Izvestia*. He had claimed that not only was the leadership slow to implement perestroika, but it was also financially corrupt: it was time to start publishing audited accounts for the benefit of believers. Later another rumor would emerge from Orthodox circles: that Kharchev was too sympathetic to the Ukrainian Catholics [Greek-Catholics] and wanted to legalize them.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> John Anderson, *Religion, State and Politics*, p. 157-159.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 161.

<sup>158</sup> Michael Bourdeaux, *Gorbachev, Glasnost and the Gospel* (London, Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton, 1990), p. 82.

<sup>159</sup> John Anderson, *Religion, State and Politics*, p. 163.

<sup>160</sup> Michael Bourdeaux, *Gorbachev, Glasnost and the Gospel*, p. 81.

Although Kharchev survived for a time (not without Gorbachev's protection), "the draft law on freedom of conscience disappeared into the bureaucratic maw"<sup>161</sup> until 1990. Kharchev would eventually be replaced by Yurii Khristoradnov who, in his days as the First Secretary in Gorky "had been Sakharov's jailer." Khristoradnov moved with "understandable caution,"<sup>162</sup> compared to his more radical predecessor, but he too realized that the status quo could no longer be maintained.

The sense of freedom, however, was in the air, and believers did not allow legislative setbacks and squabbles between the party reformers and hardliners to deter them from pursuing their agendas. Either on "a 'gentlemen's agreement' basis,"<sup>163</sup> as between Kulakov and Kharchev, or by simply ignoring the still acting obsolete legislation, believers found ways to further the cause of religion in the USSR. Besides building the first SDA seminary in Zaokskii [a village between Moscow and Tula], the permit for which was granted by the government on January 27, 1987, the SDAs, as believers of other Protestant denominations, sought opportunities to propagate their exceptional lifestyle and extend their welfare services, especially to problematic categories of Soviet population. In 1989, M.P. Kulakov and his son Michael approached the newly appointed Minister of Internal Affairs, Vadim Bakatin, and asked: "we would deeply appreciate if your office would grant us permission to begin a prison ministry." To their surprise, Bakatin joyfully replied: "That would be excellent. I definitely agree

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<sup>161</sup> John Anderson, *Religion, State and Politics*, p. 163.

<sup>162</sup> Michael Bourdeaux, *Gorbachev, Glasnost and the Gospel*, p. 84-85.

<sup>163</sup> M.P. Kulakov, *Though the Heavens Fall*, p. 151.

with you, and I deeply appreciate your offer to help Soviet society in this way. You know, this is the first time in my life that I have had a chance to meet with pastors of any denomination.” Recollecting this moving meeting, M.P. Kulakov wrote:

I remember sitting there almost numb with amazement at how much had changed for Adventism and the rest of Christianity in my country...The following week, upon his direct order, across the entire span of the Soviet Union our congregations received permission to visit inmates inside the labor-corrective institutions. Now we could minister to their emotional, social, and spiritual needs by establishing one-on-one friendships. And so we did, sharing the riches and the joy of our Christian experience with them. That visit with a high state official—a man raised as an atheist and a Communist, yet who sensed the potential of Christians to morally impact labor-correction inmates—drove me to my knees.<sup>164</sup>

For the unregistered believers, the perestroika, and especially the agitation surrounding the highly publicized celebration of the Millennium of Christianity in Russia (1989), seemed as an opportunity to abandon all reservations and openly challenge authorities. In his assessment of the religious situation in the republic, forwarded to all Obkoms of the party, the Secretary of the CC of CPU, Y. Elchenko, spoke of the “outburst of religious extremism in sectarianism.” Unlike in the previous years, however, he called for patience and understanding:

What caused the intensification of religious extremism? First of all, it was caused by their wrong and erroneous interpretation of processes of democratization of social life that is taking place in our country. Conversations with believers, sectarian activists, and their explanations of committed violations of order show that many of them, even in registered communities, think that the existing legislation on cults has lost its power in conditions of democratization; that all limitations have been removed; and that everything is now permissible. This generates unjustified claims and peculiar attempts to test the local organs of authority. The events associated with the 1000<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the introduction of Christianity in Rus’ have become additional motivating factors for such actions...Many violations of law on the part of religionists went unpunished. This only encourages extremists to new actions...

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid., p. 182-183.

The facts of extremist manifestations in sectarianism should not create difficulties for the cadre in their job of solving problems of political and law enforcement nature, nor should they give rise to confusion. In any situation, careful evaluations and thought-through actions are necessary. They should be in compliance with the existing legislation and demands of the party moving in the direction of democratization of our social life. It is necessary to explain to our ideological cadre that we are dealing with an outburst of religious activity—a sort of ‘extremist blowout’—which does not characterize, and cannot characterize, the activity of religious organizations as a whole. One should not be surprised that sectarian leaders perceived the renovation processes in our country in their own way and decided to use them for their uncouth purposes. One must look at it calmly, evaluate it soberly, and timely take the necessary measures toward stopping religious extremists...when their activity contradicts the Soviet legislation...

While defending the principal positions of the party with respect to religious worldview, it is necessary at the same time to remove excesses and dislocations that had been permitted in practical atheist work in the locations, which presented an abandonment of Leninist principles of relations with believers. The work with believers, and particularly with those from sectarian organizations and groups, should be organized in such a way as to make a believing person our ally, our helper in the business of perestroika.<sup>165</sup>

The believers certainly manifested their willingness to support the state in the business of perestroika and sent hundreds of volunteers to hospitals, old-folks homes, orphanages, and prisons, and extended their charitable services to other problem areas to which the faltering welfare state could not tend effectively. These actions, however, were usually arranged on an ad hoc basis with the local authorities or even such high-ranking state officials as the mentioned Bakatin. The Gorbachev administration realized that the talk of partnership between the church and state was but fancy verbiage for as long as the still acting old legislation on religion remained incompatible with the new role religious organizations were to play in perestroika. In April 1990 the process of drafting the new law moved forward once again and, on October 9, finally passed, “coming into effect

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<sup>165</sup> TsDAGO, F. 1, Op. 25, D. 3329, p. 23-28.



immediately.”<sup>166</sup> Most importantly, the new law “granted legal status [the power of juridical person] to parishes and religious organizations, permitted private or church based religious education, allowed ownership of property, removed all restrictions on publishing and charity, and abolished discriminatory tax rates on church employees.”<sup>167</sup> Although during the process of drafting some disagreement emerged over “the question of extra-curricular religious education in schools..., when the final decision was made the proposal for a specific ban on such activities was...omitted, thus leaving the issue open to the discretion of individual school authorities.”<sup>168</sup>

Even before the passage of this new law, religious organizations took advantage of the legal interregnum and the ostensible spiritual hunger of the masses and embarked on an unheard of campaign of religious proselytism. For years, the desecrated Kazanskii Cathedral in Leningrad served as a Museum of Atheism and Religion, displaying the Spanish inquisition-era implements of torture. On March 29, 1989, the religious choir of the Ukrainian “Baptist rebel extraordinary,” Valerii Barinov, “formed a group high up in the desecrated sanctuary...beside the museum exhibit attacking ‘sectarianism,’” and delivered a performance attended by “more than 700 people.” “The combination of the emotion in the music”—“‘Glory to God in the Highest’ by Bartnyansky or Bach’s ‘I will love you, Lord’”—“and the extraordinary symbolism of the event,” observed Bourdeaux,

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<sup>166</sup> John Anderson, *Religion, State and Politics*, p. 170-171.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171.

“left few in the audience unmoved.”<sup>169</sup> Similar concerts, performances, and evangelical rallies were held in other major cities of the Soviet Union.

A true apotheosis of these evangelical rallies, both in terms of symbolic significance and sheer scale, occurred in March of 1991 when, as M.P. Kulakov described it, “Communism’s totalitarian grip, which had held our citizens hostage for 70 years, loosened before the winds of democracy” and opened its inner sanctum, the Kremlin’s Palace of Congresses, to crowds of people seeking the Word of God. “Completed in 1961,” remarked Kulakov, “the Palace of Congresses was considered to be one of the finest in the world. It could seat up to 6,000 people, and was designed to accommodate Communist Party conventions and other major cultural events that trumpeted the greatness and unshakable stability of the Soviet state.”<sup>170</sup> Moreover, this edifice was erected under the watch of such enemy of religion as Nikita Khrushchev. “What would that energetic leader have done,” wondered Kulakov, “had he known that 30 years later...the walls of that very Kremlin Palace would resound with the voice of an American evangelist preaching about the second coming of Jesus?”<sup>171</sup>

With the help of some international businessmen, the Soviet Adventists managed to rent the palace for an evangelical rally by an American pastor, Mark Finley, and, as M.M. Kulakov reminisced, “during Mark Finley’s entire series that 6,000-seat auditorium was filled twice daily, without a single empty seat.”<sup>172</sup> Crews of Soviet Adventists,

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<sup>169</sup> Michael Bourdeaux, *Gorbachev, Glastnost and the Gospel*, p. 109-110.

<sup>170</sup> M.P. Kulakov, *Though the Heavens Fall*, p. 169.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*

remembered Zhukaliuk, welcomed ordinary Soviet people “representing contemporary Moscow and suburbs”—not “conceited minions of fortune” or “haughty aristocrats who are now called ‘partocrats,’” not “Generals in their red-striped trousers” or “government officials and movie stars,” but “simple laborers, young people who have for the first time entered this fairy-tale world, devout elderly men and women who reverently made the sign of the cross as they entered, invalids on crutches or in wheelchairs, house wives and soldiers.”<sup>173</sup> The usherers presented every newcomer with a Bible and a smile. For many veteran Adventists, the sight of what was unfolding before their eyes was simply overwhelming, as Zhukaliuk reminisced:

A lot of us had indeed forgotten how to smile. Some of the ministers attempted to produce something resembling a smile. Others gazed at stacks of Bibles they would be distributing, remembering how scarce this treasure used to be only a few short years ago and finding it difficult to believe that now this book is being given away for free...Mingling with people who flickered on the go the sacred pages of Bibles they have just received, I understood: they are the true owners of this wonder-palace. Their toil-hardened hands built it, and their money financed its construction, so that now they could hear within its walls the most important, urgently needed and eternal message.<sup>174</sup>

While believers enjoyed these unheard of opportunities for evangelization, the ruling Communist Party, many of whose members have for years been crypto-believers, had yet to determine it’s the attitude towards religion: should it continue to require that its members were atheists or open its ranks to believers? The spirit of perestroika did not seem to tolerate inconsistencies. On June 3, 1991, the Politbureau of the CC of CPSU finally approved the project of the new Party Program that included the following clause:

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid., p. 171.

<sup>173</sup> N.A. Zhukaliuk, *Cherez krutyie perevaly*, p. 339.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., p. 339-340.

“The recognition of the right of every party member to freely express his/her position on any issue of society’s life, including the right to believe or adhere to atheist convictions, is the guarantee of the party’s internal democracy.” Commenting on this development, V.A. Alekseev wrote: “In this manner, on the eve of the August ‘putsch,’ the CPSU, after a long and painful evolution, finally freed itself from the long-standing deadening dogma that demanded that a Communist could not be a believer. Huge opportunities for the consolidation of all population and the prosperity of the Motherland opened before the party and the entire society.”<sup>175</sup> Ironically, the CPSU arrived at this most civilized conclusion only months before being permanently dislodged from power.

Along with many other Russian scholars, Alekseev blamed the derailing of this “beneficial evolution of the party” on “‘democratic forces’...relying on the powerful support of interested and influential external centers and structures” that “began dismantling the USSR’s integrity and weakening Russia.” In Alekseev’s opinion, the CPSU in 1991 was no longer a party that “fought against its own people, but a party that could become a stronghold of all patriotic forces and an engine of national renaissance for all peoples of the USSR.”<sup>176</sup> The difficult subject of causes that led to the USSR’s collapse lies outside the parameters of this study. However, by way of concluding this chapter, it must be stated that the same complex set of circumstances that steadily pushed the CPSU from confrontation to coexistence with religion also compelled the ruling party to seek accommodation with many other national, economic, and social forces that

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<sup>175</sup> V.A. Alekseev, *Shturm neves otmeniaetsia*, p. 272.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 272-273.

challenged its former exclusive role as the universal think tank and policy maker for a huge multi-ethnic and multi-cultural empire. The CPSU's claim to this exclusive role was predicated on its being the sole interpreter of the omniscient Marxist-Leninist ideology that governed all aspects of life in the Soviet Union. The perestroika process challenged the verity of this ideology in many ways, delegated responsibilities for the remaking of the country to many non-party forces and, effectively stripped the CPSU of its exclusive role. In conditions of increasing democracy and ideological pluralism, the CPSU could at best hope to work side by side with the new social forces which, in time, could not but take the shape of competing political parties.

Alekseev also did not account for the fact that the CPSU's weakening during the perestroika released repressed animosity towards it on the part of many segments of Soviet society. In its history, except for a brief period in the 1920s, the Communist party consistently denied Protestants the active social and economic role they wished to play and did not seek to establish good rapport with believers in general either after the Second World War or during Khrushchev's de-Stalinization. If in the late 1980s the forgiving Christians could somehow forget the wrongs done to them by the Communist party in the past and embrace fruitful coexistence with its reformed equivalent, many other formerly persecuted and disenfranchised groups could not.

Finally, whereas the diverse social groups, from believers to avant-garde artists, and from rock musicians to home-grown capitalists, had been embracing new ideas and expanding their horizons all along, the Communist Party's evolution proved to be incredibly slow, and by the 1990s many people saw it as too backward to claim the

leadership role. It is safe to say that the CPSU could not salvage the Soviet system during perestroika precisely because for too long it placed the sanctity of the “deadening dogma” above the internal cohesion of Soviet society.

## CHAPTER XIII

### CONCLUSION

Quite fortunately for the believers of all denominations, the Soviet postwar policy on religion proved to be unsustainable. The strategy of dual commitment—the extension to religious organizations, brutally suppressed in the 1930s, of a conditional but legal status grounded in constitution and protected by law, on one hand, and the continuing struggle against religion, on the other—failed to accomplish the Soviet state’s goal of gradual elimination of religion and, instead, ensured its survival. When under Khrushchev the state attempted to speed up the withering away of religion while at the same time guaranteeing religion’s legal status in the Soviet Union, believers responded in a way that created more problems for the state than it bargained for. Although the state succeeded in reducing the number of religious communities by one third, the absolute number of believers remained either the same or continued to grow. Far from reducing religiosity, the Khrushchev persecution radicalized believers, provoked a very vocal religious dissent movement, and contributed to the swelling of a largely intractable but well-organized religious underground. These developments translated into control problems for the Soviet Union domestically and embarrassment on the international arena.

The new differentiated approach, adopted by the government in the mid 1960s, ended the era of indiscriminate assault against religion as such and indicated the state’s renewed interest in cultivating the institutional model based on mutually beneficial

alliances between the state and legally functioning churches. By making limited concessions to registered churches, the state hoped to both deflect western criticism and promote the institutional model as an attractive alternative for communities functioning in the underground. The remaining non-conforming die-hard minorities could then be crushed as extremists and common criminals. Contrary to the state's expectations, however, the institutional model also failed to work as an engine of secularization. Many believers in registered communities continued to successfully circumvent state restrictions on religious proselytism while the state's conceding to religious parents of the right to bring their children along to prayer meetings and relaxation of restrictions on participation of youth in religious choirs and ceremonies essentially ensured religion's prominent place in the USSR's future. Besides, the resistance model, adopted by dissenters, continued to compete with the institutional model and provided an alternative for the more radically inclined believers. The mid 1970s push for codification of legislation on religious cults and its uniform application in fact armed religious non-conformists with more legal tools with which they effectively exposed the Soviet state's duplicity with respect to religion. It was becoming increasingly difficult for the Soviet establishment to simultaneously claim that there was religious freedom in the USSR and maintain the state-sponsored struggle against religion.

The Soviet antireligious campaign also failed due to the limitations immanent in the strictly Marxist analysis the Soviet ideological gurus applied to religion in the postwar context. Earnest disciples of Marxist economic determinism, the Soviet antireligious zealots stipulated that during the 1920s the Soviet power effectively



deprived religion of its economic base and, during the 1930s severed all its real and imagined ties with exploitative classes by destroying or disenfranchising the latter. Since religion no longer had an economic base in a firmly entrenched socialist society, the Soviet scholars assumed that it also had no social base and could be treated as a fairly innocuous atavism still lingering primarily on the account of the old generation—too old to embrace the triumphant advance of science and modernity. Since during WW II the majority of believers manifested patriotism and loyalty to their Motherland, religion could be safely re-legalized in the victorious Soviet Union, which would present no threat to the dominant atheist ideology but project a kinder and more attractive image of the Soviet Union abroad. While the first premise of the Soviet scholars' argument was certainly correct—by the end of the 1930s, religious organizations lost all their possessions and did not have the power of juridical person even over the churches they built themselves—the conclusion they drew from it, namely, that religion had no social base in Soviet society, could hardly be validated empirically and manifested Marxism's typical neglect of the psychological aspect of human phenomena. Writing in the 1970s, Barbara Wolfe Jancar averred:

Marxism-Leninism, has been incapable of providing satisfactory answers to the basic questions of man's morality and of good and evil. Hence the revival of organized religious beliefs in the Soviet Union and the potential power of the religious dissenters. When this aspect of religion is combined with its thrust toward individual liberties and identification with national consciousness, it can be understood why the Soviet authorities are so determined to uproot theistic faiths from the minds and hearts of the Soviet people... Religion cannot be considered an epiphenomenon that will wither away with the banishment of prejudice and superstition.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Wolfe Jancar, "Religious Dissent in the Soviet Union" in *Dissent in the USSR*, p. 224.

Religion transcended property relations, gender and social classes and appealed equally to rich and poor, kolkhozniks and industrial workers, old illiterate folks and university students precisely because it addressed the psychological aspects of human condition that Marxism tended to ignore. A scholar of the Soviet experiment in secularization, Paul Froese, commented that the Soviet antireligious establishment discovered only belatedly that there was “no clear causal relationship between modernization and declining religiosity,” and that while “modernization may effect the popularity of particular religious and political ideologies, ...it in no way necessitates the complete abandonment of absolutist or dogmatic forms of belief” and, hence, “religious concepts are as fit to survive in a modern setting as any political or moral system of belief.”<sup>2</sup> Persecution could drive religion underground where it would remain dormant for years, just to sprout again at the first opportune moment. It made a rather impressive resurgence in the late 1940s, after 10 years of relentless persecution in the 1930s. At the same time, the inability of Soviet ideologues to assess the limitations of the official Soviet doctrine led to its increasing institutionalization and stagnancy during the postwar decades. The government did not account for the general liberating affect of literacy and education on the population. Even in its censored and closely monitored version, education fostered awareness and critical thinking that sooner or later could not but lead Soviet people, especially the inquisitive young generation, to questioning the state-enforced ideological uniformity. As problems with the Soviet system became more and more apparent, many Soviet citizens increasingly associated these problems with the

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Froese, *The Plot to Kill God: Findings from the Soviet Experiment in Secularization* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2008), p. 168.

inflexibility of the outdated Marxist-Leninist doctrine and searched for other, unsanctioned ways of interpreting reality. In the context of stagnant Brezhnevite socialism, religious worldview, reinforced by foreign broadcasts, smuggled foreign literature, and domestically produced samizdat, offered not the only but viable alternative for the curious and ideologically neutral or undecided segments of Soviet society. Whereas religious activists effectively exploited this hunger for everything alternative and non-standard, the Soviet government kept peddling essentially the same trite set of Marxist maxims that over the decades of endless invocation had lost their novelty, revolutionary content, and credibility. Both the Soviet ideology's failure to timely respond to challenges of modernity and its lack of experience in engaging alternative views in conditions of intellectual freedom paved the way for a remarkable religious renaissance that swept across the Soviet Union during late perestroika and, especially, after the regime's collapse.

This religious renaissance reached exceptional efflorescence in Ukraine—a historical home not only for the Orthodox Church but for a variety of non-indigenous Protestant confessions. Ukraine's prerevolutionary experience of being treated indiscriminately as a part of a single ethno-religious community represented by the tsarist state and the Russian Orthodox Church, the Soviet-era forcible absorption of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholics into the ROC, as well as the popular association of the ROC with Moscow and its interests, precluded the formation in the post-Soviet Ukraine of a single Ukrainian Orthodox Church and, according to Catherine Wanner, “contributed to making Ukraine a model of religious pluralism among formerly Soviet societies.”

Wanner further argued that “this religious pluralism, combined with a nominal commitment to Orthodoxy among large sectors of the population, has made Ukraine one of the most active and competitive ‘religious markets’ in Eurasia” and concurred with Jose Casanova’s claim that ““of all European societies, Ukraine is the one most likely to approximate the American model.””<sup>3</sup> Ukraine’s different historical legacy also helps explain its far more welcoming position towards foreign missionaries than that of Russia. Commenting on the legal status of religious organizations in modern Ukraine and Russia, Wanner wrote:

Legally, the Ukrainian government insists on fewer restrictions for nontraditional religious communities and foreign religious organizations, which has in turn generated greater religious diversity in Ukraine...In contrast, in 1997...Russia’s Parliament passed a bill establishing two categories of religious institutions, traditional and nontraditional, in contradiction to the Russian Constitution, which states that all religions are equal under the law. Traditional religious communities, legally referred to as ‘religious organizations,’ are defined as those with an established presence in Russia of fifteen or more years and include Orthodoxy, Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism. This special status allows religious organizations and their individual centers to legally act as a corporate body, to own property and commercial enterprises, to run radio and television stations, to distribute religious literature..., and to receive tax exemptions. Although Catholic, Protestant, and breakaway Russian Orthodox denominations have been in Russia longer than fifteen years, they were denied this status and classified as ‘religious groups.’ They are denied these privileges and are subject to cumbersome, annual registration procedures. Registration, as an erratic and time-consuming bureaucratic exercise, becomes a means to systematically disempower targeted denominations. The aim of the law was to restrict ‘totalitarian sects’ and ‘dangerous religious cults.’ In practice, however, the law discriminates against less established religious groups, especially Protestant and parachristian denominations, such as Jehovah’s Witnesses and Mormons, by making it difficult for them to establish institutional bases. Infringements on religious liberty are compounded by the fact that almost half of the regional authorities have passed legislation that is even harsher toward ‘foreign sects.’<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Catherine Wanner, p. 131-132.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 133-134.

In 2007, for instance, one of the main book stores in Moscow offered a book alarmingly called *Sects—A Threat to Russia's National Security*,<sup>5</sup> whose author, V.B. Shapar', indiscriminately subjected both esoteric and well-established religious denominations, such as the Old Believers, Molokans, EKhB sects, The International Society of Krishna's Conscience, Jehovah's Witnesses, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and others, to a pseudo-scientific analysis that echoed the worst examples of the Soviet-era anti-sectarian lore. Due to this cultivation of animosity, restrictive legislation and xenophobic attitudes of the local authorities, often incited by the insecurities of the power-hungry Orthodox clergy, members of religious minority groups continue to emigrate from Russia to this day. Even Ukraine is not free from occasional outbursts of religious xenophobia. For instance, leaflets lavishly scattered over the central part of Kiev in 2008 delivered an alarming message: "Kiev—the Cradle of Slavic Orthodoxy—Is Occupied by Sectarians!" The leaflets' authors targeted Kiev's mayor L. Chernovetskii for creating favorable conditions for the followers of non-indigenous religious groups, especially of the Kiev evangelical mega-church the Embassy of God, founded by the Nigerian journalism student turned evangelist, Sunday Adelaja, whom Chernovetskii calls his spiritual father.

Another lasting legacy of the Soviet era is the continuing presence in the former Soviet domain of independent EKhB communities formed by the persecuted followers of the CCEKhB. When asked a question—"What justifies the independent position of your

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<sup>5</sup> V.B. Shapar', *Sekty—ugroza natsional'noi bezopasnosti Rossii* (Rostov-on-Don: "Feniks," 2007).

church now when the Soviet Union is gone and believers in Ukraine enjoy unprecedented freedom?”—a prominent CCEKhB activist of the Soviet era, N.K. Velichko, replied:

First, we have a history behind our backs. The VSEKhB and the independents evaluate the Soviet-era events differently. If the VSEKhB adequately acknowledged the erroneous nature of its position—that it contradicted our brotherhood’s Statute and Creed...Baptism is characterized by the separation of the church from the state, by independence of each parish church from the religious center. This is how things are in the West. In the West, they don’t have directive organs governing over the churches. All religious centers tend to issues that a single church cannot resolve, such as large-scale missionary activity or publishing. The VSEKhB did not acknowledge its guilt—that its policy condoned not only compromise but treachery [a list of usual accusations follows]...Since the VSEKhB did not provide an adequate evaluation of its actions in over 30 years (from 1960 to 1990), new generations of believers have grown in our tradition. Besides, the EKhB Union still retains some atavisms of the past, such as centralization and the institute of Senior Presbyters...

The situation today is certainly different, and both those who fought for freedom and those who enjoy it today without having fought for it are thankful for it. That for which we served prison terms is now accessible to everyone. The EKhB Union does not only have a positive dynamic today. Dynamics could be different. We, for instance, exist as a parallel union. I think that the presence of alternative non-interacting unions is a positive thing. We have our autonomous independent brotherhood because, in principle, the independence of a parish community is inherent in Baptism. In our country during the Soviet era, when there were no democratic institutions, the same centralization also permeated religious life. In such a context, we made the independence of a parish community and separation of state and church the corner stones of our movement. In the United States there are many independent Baptist churches that do not belong to either Northern, or Southern, or corporate Baptists...So, we are not the first. The existence of alternative churches furthers the democratization of ecclesiastic structures and promotes a healthy competition. We can all teach each other something.<sup>6</sup>

Although the SDA Church successfully overcame its schism in the 1980s, it left a legacy of embarrassment, stifling an open historical debate, and a lurking suspicion towards certain spiritual leaders of the Soviet era. One Russian newspaper published an article in the 1990s, in which M.P. Kulakov was presented as the KGB informant

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with N.K. Velichko, Kiev, 2008.

disguised under a codename “Svetlov” (“Drozdov” being a codename of the ROC’s Patriarch, Aleksii). No specific archival documentation, however, showing the content of reports signed by the codename “Svetlov,” has yet been released. Collecting compromising information on this or that religious leader, without analyzing this information in the context of very complicated machinery of state-church relations in the USSR and all the internal and external pressures that influenced the Soviet-era religious leaders’ decision making, is bound to produce more heat than light. At the same time, leaving out certain archival evidence simply because it might be damaging to the established authority of certain religious leaders, or describing the unpleasant junctures in the history of a given denomination in general terms, without referring to specific names and documents, obscures the past, cloaks it in a shroud of unnecessary mystery, and delays facing the facts, drawing lessons from them and moving forward. It is quite understandable that writing a history of a given denomination without any reservations presents a formidable challenge for a person who is a member of that denomination and a former player in the events he/she is describing. Such a person is naturally protective of both his/her image and that of his/her denomination. A history of Protestant minorities in the Soviet Union, written from a detached secular point of view, stands a chance to benefit both the academic community and believers.

Contacts between the KGB (“neighbors”) and leaders of registered churches were simply unavoidable during the Soviet era and avoiding such contacts altogether would have required a definitive answer to a much larger question: whether or not religious leaders in the USSR should have accepted or rejected the state’s offer of registration in

the first place, given that registration entailed such contacts? Neither foreign nor domestic spiritual leaderships offered a uniform and definitive opinion on this matter. As a secret shadow agency, the KGB required that all written correspondence between the agency and spiritual leaders was signed by a codename, not the actual name of a correspondent. The extent of such correspondence depended on the character, wit, and diplomatic skills of a given spiritual leader, and the existence of a mysterious codename itself does not prove either his guilt or innocence. A prominent SDA leader of the Soviet era, I.F. Khimenets reminisced:

The specifics of ministry at that time presupposed interaction with authorities and the KGB. As soon as the KGB learned that a particular servant was active and promising, it instantly tried to find a common language with him, establish contacts, and ask him to sign a confidentiality agreement. This happened with almost everyone. We knew who was interacting with this or that KGB agent and did not hide it. I remember my first meeting [with the KGB] in Vinnitsa when I served there illegally. I was summoned to the cadre department at work and a woman told me that someone wished to have a talk with me. This person introduced himself and said: ‘We know that you are a believer and moved here on purpose’... After this meeting, I instantly reported about it to my superior in the church. He replied: ‘Yes, Ivan Ferorovich, they probably want to register you.’ He instructed me as to how I should behave around this kind of people...He said that we could interact with the organs, but must clearly understand that the best of them was worse than a thorn bush, and that we must exercise caution...They were quite delicate and never said that they wanted that I told them something about my fellow-brothers. They always said that the church interests them because it represents a territory that draws the attention of enemies from the West, domestic criminals who plot to rob us, or people who attempt to stir a revolution like in Poland under the guise of religious activity...We were supposed to inform them of such people. The KGB agents usually said: ‘We are not asking you to be snitches. We ask you to be patriots—to tell us about those who wish to cause harm to you, to us, and to all our state system. And you, as believers, recognize that all authority is from God, and our Soviet authority is also from God.

Every time, during the first meeting, they asked to sign a document stating that we would not use our real names in all future correspondence, but instead use a codename, predicating this on the consideration that should a KGB agent carrying such correspondence be run over by a car, for instance, and the



correspondence fall into the hands of bystanders or militia, the correspondence's author would not be exposed. Usually, they asked for a written response to questions like 'Did you have guests from abroad? Did anyone call for the overthrow of the Soviet authority?' But there were also questions concerning the church's internal life...I remember when I was asked about the codename I would like to use, I decided to crack a joke and replied: 'Judas.' I was told to choose a more neutral name...I continued to joke and said that I was as gossipy as a woman at a market place, that I could not keep a secret and would definitely share it with at least my wife. This agitated them: 'How dare you! You must not do that, or at least try not to tell her everything.' Despite these bans, the church servants shared with each other information about the questions asked by the KGB.<sup>7</sup>

This study confirmed that during the era of schisms the KGB, taking advantage of the acceleration of inter-factional squabbles, often succeeded in fishing out substantial information from religious leaders about their colleagues and their churches' internal life. The question to be asked here is whether or not this information led to arrests, harassment, or other harm to individual believers or communities? The answer to this question lies in the close examination of the KGB files and requires further research.

The Soviet practice artificially created problems that plagued Protestant communities for decades, and religious elites were a vital component of this detrimental practice. This sensible argument tends to lay the blame for what happened to Protestant communities during the Soviet era squarely on the two invasive forces alien to the customary Protestant principle of congregationalism—the Soviet regime and the complicit religious elites—while treating the mass of ordinary believers as passive victims of unfortunate circumstances. In reality, however, the ordinary believers made their own choices (even if not fully informed choices) and, therefore, also bore responsibility for the plight of their denomination. The greater portion of the EKHB

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<sup>7</sup> Interview with I.F. Khimenets, Kiev, 2008.

believers chose to stay under the VSEKhB jurisdiction when they could join supporters of the Council of Churches. The organizational anarchy and factional hostility that plagued the SDA church during the 1960s and 1970s demonstrated that the issue of central leadership and unity were no less important than the issue of leadership's legitimacy. It is no wonder that the General Conference ultimately disregarded the problem of not altogether consensual authority of Kulakov and his following for the sake of unity.

Critics who perceive members of religious elites as materialistic careerists overlook the fact that none of the religious leaders in question or their children attempted to defect during their frequent trips abroad. They always dutifully returned to the Soviet Union, not only because they had family members there (whom the Soviet authorities would most likely hold as hostages if these leaders chose to defect), but because they knew that their or their children's defection, as a selfish act, would cut short the nascent opportunity of regular contacts of their churches with the West. Kulakov and Zhukaliuk, for example, worked tirelessly to expand these contacts and viewed them as instrumental in overcoming the negative consequences of long decades of their church's isolation from the SDA world community. They were in effect liberalizing and westernizing their church in the USSR, addressing the crippling theological and cultural narrow-mindedness of many of their fellow-believers, introducing modern concepts of pastoral care and looking for ways to expand educational opportunities for Adventist youths. Of course, all of these positive contributions came at the cost of their participation in the government counterpropaganda campaign. In their sermons and reports, domestically and abroad,

advantages of the western lifestyle were downplayed and opportunities of religious life in the USSR exaggerated. But one's acting as a political conformist for the sake of gaining certain benefits for a religious community is not exactly a selfish act, and perhaps the difficulty of interpreting the behavior of a given Soviet-era religious leader stems from our inability to discern a Christian in him from a political being. All denominations in question believed in the primacy of their religious goals over those of politics. In a normative state, such a stance would not be problematic. In the abnormal conditions of Soviet Union, where the state refused to acknowledge Protestants as merely law abiding apolitical citizens and viewed their religiosity as both a sign of disloyalty and a threat to the dominant state-sponsored ideology, the believers were forced to become political whether they were singing paeans to the regime or writing diatribes against it. In any case, the politicization of Protestants in the Soviet Union was an aberration, and one may argue that they should be judged first and foremost as Christians and not as political agents. If occasional accolades (which were, in most cases, lies) to the state resulted in certain tangible benefits furthering the Christian agenda, then why should we base our evaluation of Protestant leaders on these accolades to the state rather than on acquired benefits to the church? In view of the aforementioned arguments, the Soviet religious leaders' complicity with the regime appears much more nuanced than what the face value of certain damning archival documents suggests.

One circumstance, however, moderates this argument from benefits—the churches began to reap the benefits of their leaders' compromises with the state precisely at the time of general political liberalization in the Soviet Union initiated by

perestroika—at the time when struggle against religion was losing its priority status for the Soviet government. Perhaps, these benefits were not so much the direct result of previous decades of religious leaders' good rapport with the state as a sudden and spontaneous consequence of the general crisis that the Soviet system experienced during the second half of the 1980s.

Finally, the post-Soviet developments tested the veracity of the initial assertion that the collapse of the system of state-sponsored atheism transformed the majority of former Soviet citizens into a community of believers. The recent MGU study of religiosity in Russia, for instance, show that although “some statistical data allows to speak of ‘religious renaissance,’ at the level of self-identification, that is, at the level of ‘how’ and ‘in what’ the people actually believe, we encounter a situation confirmed by many studies, according to which, the share of ‘truly believing’ people is not great.”<sup>8</sup> The researchers came to the conclusion that “the popular opinion about the increase of religious activity of the population is not confirmed by statistics, if this activity is understood as involvement of a believer in the church life, performance of religious rituals, etc.”<sup>9</sup> The majority of respondents in the traditionally Slavic regions declare their Orthodoxy primarily because it is the ethnic religion of Russians, Ukrainians, Belorussians, and so forth. But such “cultural religiosity,” the researchers established, “has almost nothing to do with religiosity in a direct sense.”<sup>10</sup> People claiming to be

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<sup>8</sup> A.B. Sinel'nikov, V.M. Medkov, A.I. Antonov, *Sem'ia i vera v sotsiologicheskom izmerenii (rezul'taty mezhregional'nogo i mezhkconfessional'nogo issledovaniia)* (Moskva: KDU, 2009), p. 25.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

Orthodox, for instance, are at different stages of growing into the church, and the number of believers who in fact practice Orthodoxy, that is, understand and observe its doctrines, remains rather small.

The Protestant confessions, with their emphasis on Biblicism and much stricter internal discipline, fare better. However, in the not so distant past, the authenticity and depth of Protestants' religiosity were paradoxically enhanced by the brute forms of compulsory secularization sponsored by the Soviet regime. It could be argued that the tightly-knit Soviet-era Protestant subculture was a product of ideological warfare and confrontation. Today, the Protestants face a different set of challenges. In modern Ukraine, for example, the absence of atheist component in the mainstream Ukrainian culture, the liberalizing impact of regular interactions with the West, and the secularizing influence of unrestricted business and professional opportunities call "for a different form of engagement with the world, and especially with money,"<sup>11</sup> and generally make Ukrainian Protestants more receptive to secular issues and secular society. Belonging to a religious community becomes a common place, while the mainstream culture and society are no longer perceived as a threat to believers. Many elder believers are nostalgic for the fire of true apostolic Christianity that sustained their communities during the Soviet era. Religion certainly passed the test of Soviet persecution. It remains to be seen, however, whether it will be just as successful in passing a more subtle test of contemporary freedom.

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<sup>11</sup> Catherine Wanner, p. 234.

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