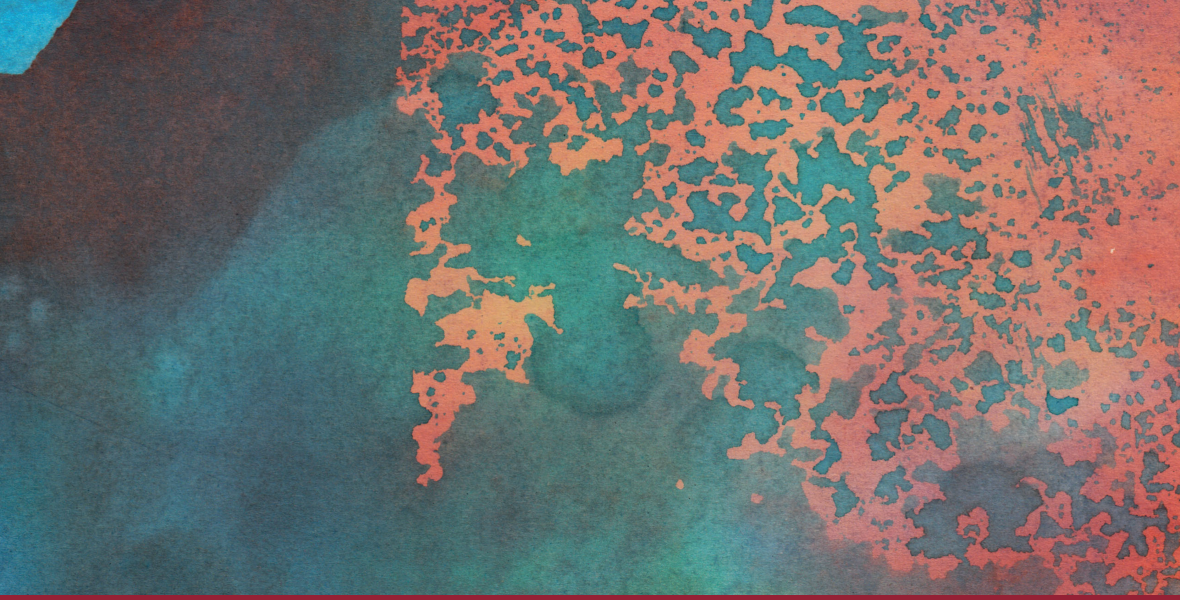

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RELIGIOUS LIFE IN THE LATE SOVIET UNION

FROM SURVIVAL TO REVIVAL (1960s–1980s)

Edited by Barbara Martin and Nadezhda Beliakova

Religious Life in the Late Soviet Union

This book presents the first large overview of late Soviet religiosity across several confessions and Soviet republics, from the 1960s to the 1980s. Based on a broad range of new sources on the daily life of religious communities, including material from regional archives and oral history, it shows that religion not only survived Soviet anti-religious repression but also adapted to new conditions. Going beyond traditional views about a mere "returned of the repressed", the book shows how new forms of religiosity and religious socialisation emerged, as new generations born into atheist families turned to religion in search of new meaning, long before perestroika facilitated this process. In addition, the book examines anew religious activism and transnational networks between Soviet believers and Western organisations during the Cold War, explores the religious dimension of Soviet female activism, and shifts the focus away from the non-religious human rights movement and from religious institutions to ordinary believers.

Barbara Martin is a Postdoctoral Researcher at the University of Basel, Switzerland.

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From Survival to Revival (1960s–1980s)

Edited by Barbara Martin and Nadezhda Beliakova

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

AShA:	Avestan School of Astrology
AUCECB:	All-Union (pan-Soviet) Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists
Belarusian SSR:	Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic
CARC:	Council for Affairs of Religious Cults
CCE:	Chronicle of Current Events
CCECB:	Council of Churches of Evangelical Christians-Baptists
CPSU:	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CRA:	Council for Religious Affairs
CROCA:	Council for the Russian Orthodox Church Affairs
CRP:	Council of Relatives of Prisoners
ECB:	Evangelical Christians-Baptists
Fr.:	Father (Priest)
Kazakh SSR:	Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic
KGB:	Committee of State Security
LSSR:	Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic
Moldavian SSR:	Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic
OCHVE:	United Church of Christians of the Evangelical Faith of Russia
OVTsS:	Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate
ROC:	Russian Orthodox Church
RSFSR:	Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic
Ukr SSR:	Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic
USSR:	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WCC:	World Council of Churches

Note on transliteration
Words in Russian have been transliterated using the Library of Congress standard both in the main text and in endnotes.

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Introduction

Barbara Martin and Nadezhda Beliakova

What did Russian Orthodox feminists and Pentecostal activists have to do with readers of astrological samizdat and Catholic believers seeking registration of their parish in Kazakhstan? How did Orthodox, Muslim, or Jewish believers adapt their worship practices and rituals to legislative constraints? How did young people, born and raised in the USSR, reconnect with religion, in both traditional and new forms? And how did women, who represented the bulk of Soviet believers, redefine their place in their religious communities and their identities as female religious activists?

These various facets of late Soviet religious life testify to its vitality in the 1970s–1980s, far from traditional narratives about repression and decline. Soviet propaganda unwillingly acknowledged the existence of a religious revival among urban and educated young people but usually dismissed the phenomenon as a mere "fashion". Was faith in an almighty god (uncapitalised in Soviet publications) not an old lady's superstition, which would give way to the materialistic worldview, as scientific progress demonstrated the inanity of such beliefs?

In the past decade, research on the link between rural religiosity and institutional religion has been under way.[1] Nevertheless, the process of individualisation of religiosity and its transformation in conditions of forced secularisation have received little academic attention.[2] For the Soviet authorities and their ideological enemies alike, the words "Soviet believers" were at best an oxymoron, at worst they referred to an endangered species, doomed to extinction or to be urgently rescued. Whether they were depicted as puppets of "bourgeois" ideological enemies or as silent victims of a godless regime, Soviet believers were usually deprived of their agency. This book seeks to shift the focus from secular and religious institutions to the action of the laity, who individually and collectively contributed to the survival, revival, and reinvention of religious practices in the late Soviet period.

The study of religion in the USSR has traditionally focused on the interaction between religious institutions and the Soviet state, with an emphasis on state repression.[3] This is unsurprising, since the regime relied precisely on religious hierarchies and structures to control believers. Yet the battle for the minds of Soviet citizens could not be fought solely on an institutional level, and atheist propaganda had to work with individuals, both among believers and the indifferent masses who could potentially join either side. As Victoria Smolkin has demonstrated, Soviet anti-religious propaganda tried in vain to adapt its discourse to address the spiritual

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needs of Soviet young people.[4] But even as civic rituals were created to replace religious ones, they succeeded neither in eradicating traditional confessions nor in stemming the rise of new religious movements. As new generations grew increasingly ideologically disaffected, religion often appeared as the only officially allowed alternative worldview. And the rise of ethnic and national identities, which in some republics superseded an elusive Soviet identity, also contributed to identification with traditional religions.

Recent scholarship on religion in the Soviet Union and the post-Soviet space has often placed secularisation at the centre of the debate.[5] Despite the violent character that efforts of eradication of religion took in the Stalin and Khrushchev eras, the processes of privatisation of religious belief at play paralleled more peaceful evolutions in Western Europe. Yet the existing literature often fails to reconcile two contradictory pictures, which coexisted side by side: on the one hand, a religious revival affecting old and new religious groups, the roots of which can be traced back to the late 1960s, and, on the other hand, a transformation of the place of religion within society, which cannot be reduced to a mere decline or relegation to the private sphere, as often implied by the term "secularisation". Viacheslav Karpov has used the term "desecularisation" to describe the return of religion to the public space in post-Soviet Russia in the 1990s[6] but debates about the reality of the revival show that this was not a linear process.[7] As the articles presented in this book show, the roots of this phenomenon can be traced back to the late Soviet years, when religion simultaneously experienced a decline and a revival. While traditional practices were weakened by repression and the interruption of intergenerational chains of transmission, new generations of believers without a religious background reinvented old practices and turned to new forms of spirituality, sometimes imported from the West or the East, with a high level of syncretism and without necessarily becoming fully churched. In the process, the population segment we could describe as religiously active narrowed down, as happened in Western Europe in the 20th century, and has remained quite low in many post-Soviet countries.

Another traditional lens is that of Cold War history: in a context of ideological confrontation, religiosity was equated with dissent, and the focus has often been on those actors who dared stand up to defend the rights of Soviet believers.[8] This also led to an emphasis on underground religiosity, the so-called Catacomb Church,[9] and the role of the KGB in monitoring and repressing religious dissent,[10] while communities affiliated with official churches raised little academic interest, save when they stood up for their rights. This narrative was reinforced by the predominant role of such institutions of defence of the rights of Soviet believers as Keston College, founded by Rvd. Michael Bourdeaux, in publishing research on the subject.[11] While we seek to go beyond dichotomous narratives about Western salvation of threatened believers in the Soviet atheist empire, some of our chapters tell this story from the perspective of those religious groups who made contact with Western actors, emphasising their agency, rather than victimhood.

By focusing on the lived experience of religion among Soviet believers representing a broad range of orientations and widely spread out geographically, this book gives a voice to religious groups and geographical areas traditionally

ignored by historiography. Much of the existing literature has focused on Russia and Ukraine, with a slant towards Orthodoxy, and to a lesser extent Evangelical Christianity, Catholicism, and Judaism.[12] Despite its importance in contemporary geopolitical terms, Islam has been the object of comparatively little research in the Soviet context.[13] As for oriental religions and new religious movements, they are only beginning to get scholarly attention.[14] Given the fluidity of religious identities and the frequent conversions from one faith to another, the interreligious approach of our book allows the reader to get a comprehensive view of the religious landscape of the late Soviet years.

We also cover such peripheral territories as the Kazakh republic, Moldavia, or the Perm region, which have often been ignored in existing scholarship. Filling this gap allows us to better understand the complex dynamics between centre and periphery, between rural and urban territories. This is especially important as religious groups could be both anchored in a national culture and transregional or transnational, particularly in the Soviet context of forced migrations.

We offer answers to a range of questions pertaining to religiosity in the late Soviet period. How did believers perpetuate religious traditions and adapt their liturgic and ritualistic practices as a result of legislative constraints? How did religious groups and individuals reclaim agency, address the Soviet leadership, and turn to the West for protection? How did new generations of converts rediscover and reinvent religious and spiritual practices? How did gender patterns evolve and women reclaim their agency in a religious framework? How did new syncretic forms of spirituality emerge in the late Soviet context?

This introduction offers a historical overview of the evolutions of Soviet policies regarding religion, followed by a presentation of the themes covered in the book.

Religious communities and believers in the context of Soviet religious policy

The Soviet period stands out in the history of religion and religious societies. Traditionally, researchers have focused their attention on the analysis of relations between the state and churches, due to the unprecedented violent politics conducted by the Bolshevik party, which seized power in October 1917. In the process, the Bolsheviks declared freedom of conscience and the right of each individual to choose one's convictions. In the first years of Soviet power, Bolshevik ideology insisted on the need to create favourable conditions for national and religious minorities due to their past suffering at the hands of the "Czarist regime".[15] The "Decree on Freedom of Conscience, Church and Religious Societies" promulgated on 20 January 1918 (which went down in history as the "Decree on Separation of Church from State"), declared complete freedom of conscience, equality of all religions before the law, and forbade the mention of confessional identity in official documents. At the same time, the decree deprived "churches and religious societies" of the right to be registered as legal entities and to own property, banned the teaching of religion in general educational institutions, and forbade church charity.[16] Having "separated" the Church from the state, it immediately determined the format in

which the Church was inscribed: "church and religious societies" were equated to "private societies and unions".

This document, combined with others, aimed to take away the Orthodox Church's levers of influence on Russian society. At the same time, however, it cut the "Gordian knot" of discussions that had been taking place in the Orthodox Church for several decades before the Revolution. The most heated debates concerned power distribution between clergy and laity in church administration, and in particular the question of who exercised power in the parishes.[17] The Instruction of the People's Commissariat of Justice "On the Procedure for Implementing the decree 'On the separation of the Church from the state and the school from the Church'"[18] confirmed the confiscation of all movable and immovable church property, placed at the disposal of the new government. Moreover, it designated laity from among local inhabitants as the secular authorities' interlocutors. Item 6 of the instructions read: "The required number of local residents entitled to receive liturgical property for use is determined by the local Council of Workers and Peasants Deputies but cannot amount to less than 20 people".

According to Gregory Freeze, in practice the decree only legitimised a situation, which existed *de facto* in Russian regions in summer 1917.[19] The Soviet authorities adopted a whole set of normative documents and practical measures to disorganise church structures, hoping to limit and weaken the influence of hierarchical structures on the laity, with the expectation that along with the disappearance of official church institutions, the population's religiosity would also decline.

An important milestone in the Soviet politics in relation to religion were two closely interrelated campaigns: the first, conducted between October 1918 and December 1920, to exhume and expose religious relics, and the second, launched in February 1922, to confiscate church valuables, officially for famine relief purposes. Relics were conserved in shrines made of precious metals and decorated with gems, and their "exposure" was conducted alongside expropriation of monastery or church property, including not only the seizing of such liturgical objects as chalices, but also the expulsion of monks from monasteries.[20] When the faithful or the clergy opposed resistance, the Soviet authorities arrested the culprits. The terrible famine raging in the Volga region offered a convenient pretext to order the confiscation of church property, but the actual goal of the 1917–1922 ideological campaigns was to exclude the clergy and all religious authorities from the public space.[21]

In its struggle against counter-revolutionary forces, the Bolshevik government presented religious leaders as the regime's opponents. The highest church dignitaries, such as Russian Orthodox Patriarch Tikhon (Bellavin) or Catholic Archbishop Jan Cieplak, were arrested and either forced to recant or silenced. At the same time, the authorities' strategy to undermine religious communities from within was to sow discord by sponsoring reformist schismatic movements. For instance, they supported the Renovationist or "Living Church", some preachers of which incorporated elements of socialist rhetoric, but this tactical alliance only lasted as long as necessary to weaken the official Church. The ultimate goal of these policies of repression and intimidation was to coerce church leaders into a pledge of loyalty

to Soviet power and disciplining of lower echelons of the religious hierarchy. A milestone in this regard was 1927, when on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Revolution the representatives of the main confessions were forced to issue declarations of loyalty to the regime. Metropolitan Sergii (Starogorodskii), acting patriarchal *locum tenens,* thus declared allegiance to Soviet power. Yet at this stage, he controlled only a fraction of the Russian Orthodox faithful. Anti-religious repression had thrown Christian churches into disarray, forcing the remaining clergy and believers underground. Those religious groups that remained beyond the boundaries of legality became collectively known as the "Catacomb Church".

In addition to repression, the Bolsheviks used anti-religious propaganda to denounce the clergy as frauds and create a negative image of religion. The League of the Militant Godless was particularly active in this field, and a number of studies have focused on this organisation.[22]

Yet research has shown that religious life did not disappear but underwent profound transformations: ideological campaigns did not succeed in eradicating religious belief, and in order to survive, religious practices had to become invisible to escape the omniscient oversight of the totalitarian state. Under conditions of persecution, isolation and physical destruction of the parish clergy and monasticism, the role and importance of lay people in religious life increased[23]. They intervened not only to defend tradition and ancient rituals, but also their new rights as independent owners of the local church.[24]

The campaign launched in the late 1920s turned both clergy and lay activists of all denominations into potential enemies of the Soviet government. Both "churchmen" (*tserkovniki*) and sectarians of different movements and directions would now be persecuted. The Regulation on Religious Associations of 1929 granted the laity the necessary powers for the emergence of an organised liturgical life but gave the state the broadest possibilities to interfere in the daily life of religious communities. By prohibiting educational, catechetical, social, and charitable work, this piece of legislation de facto reduced religious activity to participation in worship, while all other forms of religious activities became illegal.

The mass extermination of the clergy and religious activists of all confessions during the years of collectivisation and the Great Terror, the withdrawal of religious life into the underground in the 1930s contributed to the marginalisation of religious communities and also consolidated the special place of the laity in the preservation of religious tradition.

In addition to deportations of various social, ethnic, and religious groups, exile and criminal prosecution labour migration also led to fundamental changes in the geography of religion within the USSR. This explains the presence of Catholic communities in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Siberia,[25] and also Lutheran and Mennonite communities (primarily German-speaking) on the eastern fringes of the USSR. Representatives of evangelical Christians appear in almost all cities and even in those regions that the authorities considered "irreligious" due to the absence of registered religious associations on their territory.

During the Second World War, the religious landscape of the USSR changed dramatically with the legalisation of religious life in the occupied territories,[26] the

activities of missions[27] and the incorporation of new territories and new religious communities. This led to a restructuring of all confessional structures.

In the context of the Second World War, Stalin understood the potential of religion as a factor in international relations, and his decision to allow the episcopal Council of the ROC to convene to elect Sergii Patriarch in 1943 certainly pursued tactical aims. All Orthodox communities and dioceses of the Soviet Union were now incorporated into the structure of the ROC, centred in Moscow.[28] The legalisation and restoration of the Orthodox Church's hierarchical structure allowed for a relative normalisation of liturgical life and regulation of the laity's religious activity.[29] Just as was the case in Czarist Russia during the synodal period, the hierarchy had to act as an intermediary between the state and ordinary clergy, sometimes accused of "fanatism", as well as with "unruly" believers.[30] This replication of an older model of church-state relations is further evidenced by the fact that the church hierarchy not only displayed loyalty towards the state attitude to power but also enthusiastically participated in the legitimisation of the regime both on the domestic and international scenes.[31]

Muslim communities were also allowed to create their organisational structures: in 1923, the Soviet authorities sanctioned the creation of the Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the RSFSR, renamed in 1948 Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims from the European part of the USSR and Siberia. By 1943, three other regional organisations uniting Muslims from the North Caucasus, from Central Asia and Kazakhstan, and from Transcaucasia had seen the light of day, each headed by a mufti.[32]

A short-term change in the policy towards evangelical churches within the USSR led to the emergence of a new unique structure in the USSR – the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians Baptists (AUCECB), which united various evangelical groups under its wing. In 1948, however, the termination of registration of religious associations in the USSR left many religious societies and groups outside the boundaries of legality. So were Pentecostals, Jehovah's witnesses, and other "sects".

Not all religious groups had a chance to acquire legal existence. The Catholic Church in the USSR was deprived of the opportunity to create normal hierarchical structures, the Greek Catholic Church in Ukraine was merged with the Orthodox Church, and the religious life of Catholics proceeded largely underground.[33] Jewish communities were also deprived of the opportunity to create their own structures.

In addition to the legalisation and regulation of religious organisations, the Soviet authorities redefined their modalities of interaction with the state. While the ROC was placed under the tutelage of the Council for Russian Orthodox Church Affairs (CROCA), created in 1943, the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults (CARC), founded in 1944, oversaw the activities of other religious groups. By 1965, both organs were unified into the Council for Religious Affairs (CRA). In each region, the Plenipotentiary of the CRA was the main interlocutor of religious communities with the central authorities, in charge of controlling the application of the legislation on religious cults.

The legalisation of religious communities was intended as a means of increased control through church structures. The "Statement on the Management of the

ROC" adopted in 1945 established the church hierarchy's centralised authority[34] and made the priest the head of the parish.[35] Throughout the Soviet period, the state struggled with "underground" religious life, illegal clergy and persistent religious lay practices. This was done both through legislation and on the level of everyday life, by destroying holy places that drew flows of pilgrims, or by banning religious processions.[36] Nevertheless, CROCA officials regularly argued that the clergy could be more easily controlled and popular religiosity limited through legal church structures. Throughout the Soviet period, the ROC episcopate was required to take measures to stop illegal practices, which the authorities deemed unacceptable, and most of all refrain from taking part in mass popular religious practices.[37] Documents issued by CROCA show joint efforts to "legalise and introduce into the framework of legislation" the population's religious activity. In a 1949 report to the authorities about such mass religious practices as pilgrimages and the activity of unregistered clergy, Georgii Karpov, Chairman of CROCA, claimed:

> In their letters, the Patriarch and the episcopate repeatedly asked the Council to take administrative measures against what they call "unofficial services" (*samochinnye sluzhby*) and in relation to the clergy who perform "rites" (*treby*) without registration. The Synod even ruled on this issue twice in 1949, but in all these cases they proceed from their own interests, asking for the opening of more churches.[38]

The correspondence between Patriarch Aleksii I (Simanskii) and the CROCA shows how complex the situation of both the church leadership and representatives of the CROCA in the structures of the Soviet state was. While the Patriarch sought to defend certain positions before the state, others were seemingly surrendered "without a fight". For example, the church hierarchy does not seem to have protested about the struggle against pilgrimages and veneration of holy places launched during the Khrushchev era,[39] and to have accepted the closure of many monasteries. Unlike the Catholics or Evangelical Christians, the Orthodox was not in conflict with the state regarding catechisation of children, leaving religious instruction to the discretion of families.

Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign, launched in the late 1950s, aimed at eradicating "religious remnants" and eliminating religious rites from the life of the population. Interestingly, this new attack on the church, which took place in a context of de-Stalinisation of Soviet society and a return to "socialist legality", was accompanied by a declaration of the return of "democracy" to Orthodox parishes through the removal of "authoritarian" clergy. A secret resolution of the Central Committee of the CPSU of 13 January 1960 demanded the abolition of the clergy's "usurpation of power" in the parishes and its return to the laity in accordance with the law.[40] As Vladimir Kuroedov, who presided CROCA during the anti-religious campaign, stated in 1961: "In our truly democratic country, in which government is carried out by the people, the dictatorial power of one person preserved in religious communities is unacceptable".[41]

Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign also inflicted a massive blow to members of evangelical communities, who were stereotyped in official propaganda as

dangerous "sectarians". Pressure was exercised on them through public institutions, conflict over the religious upbringing of children, etc.[42]

The reforms of 1961 transferred the full power of financial and economic activities from the clergy to the members of an executive body, which was theoretically mandated by the parishioners, and which in turn hired the clergy to perform spiritual duties. Another reform intended to strengthen control and increase administrative pressure over believers was the compulsory registration of all rites performed in places of worship, with indication of the full name and place of work of participants. This measure was meant to undermine the material situation of the clergy, and most importantly, to testify to the waning of religious rites, which was believed to result from a successful atheistic education of society.

However, the long-awaited decline was not forthcoming: archival documents from the late 1960s and early 1970s show that celebration of such religious life cycle rituals as baptisms, weddings and funerals and the income of religious communities increased in such large cities as Moscow and Leningrad. Moreover, as the studies presented in this book show, official data covers only a fraction of all celebrated rituals, across religious confessions and regions. The boundaries of legality, both on a macro and micro level, determined which religious communities and phenomena were allowed to exist, and which had to remain hidden from sight. Whether we are talking about unregistered parishes, unrecorded rituals, unofficial seminars, or the parallel lives of Soviet believers, it is crucial to grasp fully the complex dialectics of visible and invisible religiosity.

After Leonid Brezhnev came to power in 1964, discrimination and repression of believers abated. The authorities posited the ineffectiveness of excessive "administrative means of struggle" with religious organisations, which triggered in return the "desperate resistance" of believers. Moreover, in 1965, the Supreme Court recognised the existence of faith-based repression: it was established that between 1961 and 1965, around 1,200 persons had been condemned for their religious convictions, and a revision of such cases was undertaken.[43] Still, previous restrictions remained in place, and until the mid-1980s, the clergy could not legally take part in the administrative and financial management of religious organisations. Although the new Constitution adopted in 1977 nominally guaranteed Soviet citizens the "freedom to practice any religion or none, to celebrate religious cults and conduct atheist propaganda", in practice even this restrictive framework was frequently infringed upon, and believers often faced discrimination at work or in school. Moreover, punishment of religious activists through article 142 of the penal code was strengthened.[44] In the 1970s and 1980s, the bulk of religious repression concerned religious dissent and unregistered communities, a phenomenon that concerned all major religions and confessions. The Soviet state only deemed loyal those religious organisations that functioned in the framework of "socialist legality".[45] In order to gain legitimacy for their organisations, religious leaders generally felt compelled to demonstrate their political loyalty to the Soviet authorities.

An important factor influencing the development of religious life in the USSR was the growing international activity of religious leaders, who, in the context of détente with the West, turned into diplomats.[46] In order to improve the Soviet

Union's image on the international scene, the Soviet leadership relied on the integration of the Russian Orthodox Church into the World Council of Churches (WCC), starting from 1961. The ROC's Department of External Church Relations (OVTsS), particularly under Metropolitan Nikodim (Rotov) (1960–1972), was tasked with promoting in the West a rosy image of religious life in the Soviet Union and negating religious repression.[47]

This, however, proved increasingly difficult with the rise of various protest movements across all religious confessions and communities, whether legally registered or not. Continuing a tradition of protest letters to the Soviet leadership, religious activists began to address their grievances directly to the WCC, the UN, and other international bodies, through their own channels of communication, thus providing an alternative view on the question of freedom of conscience in the USSR.[48] As Soviet dissent became a trending topic, religious activists could count on a range of allies in the West, eager to assist their Soviet brethren. The England-based organisation Keston College and its Swiss and Italian counterparts "Glaube in der 2. Welt" and "Russia Cristiana", the Russian Student Christian Movement, based in Paris, and the Brussels-based organisation "Foyer oriental chrétien" (and its publishing house "Zhizn' s Bogom") collected and published religious samizdat, invited religious dissidents to speak out at informative and fundraising events, and smuggled religious literature to the Eastern bloc. Several American and European missions (such as Slavic mission, Licht im Osten, or Open Doors) also lent assistance to persecuted believers and smuggled religious literature to the Eastern bloc.

This increased international scrutiny, reinforced by the conclusion of the Helsinki Accords, in 1975, explains the relative moderate response of the Soviet authorities to religious dissent. The opening of emigration to Soviet citizens of Jewish and German descent, and also the expulsion of numerous dissidents in the 1970s, offered the Soviet leadership an "innocuous" solution to this issue. Emigration, however, became a bone of contention with those who were refused the right to emigrate, most prominently within the Pentecostal community or among Jewish Refuseniks.[49] After John Paul II's election as Pope and his visit to Poland in 1979, which emboldened the Catholic opposition, allied to Solidarity, the Soviet authorities also began to fear a strengthening of the Catholic Church within the USSR.[50] Episodic arrests of religious activists continued until 1986.

By 1987, however, the wind of Perestroika was blowing, and with the release of Soviet dissidents by amnesty and the onset of glasnost in the media, the question of the celebration of the Millenium of the Baptism of Kievan Rus' arose. Mikhail Gorbachev's decision to celebrate this anniversary had unintended consequences: it led to a cardinal shift in the Soviet state's relation towards religion and the onset of what has often been called a "religious renaissance" of Russian Orthodoxy and other religious confessions in the USSR and post-Soviet space.[51] By 1990, new legislation on the cults was adopted, which granted religious groups extensive freedoms – so much so that the proliferation of cults in 1990s Russia would lead the Parliament to adopt a more restrictive legislative framework in 1997.

As the research presented below demonstrates, however, the roots of the processes which unfolded after 1988 could be found already in the 1970s.

A note on sources

Our book focuses on the last three Soviet decades, which correspond to a period of progressive resurgence and growing visibility of religion. Based on a range of archival sources, ego documents, and oral history interviews, our book's contributions offer a collective answer to the question why many post-Soviet societies experienced a religious revival in the 1990s. Our focus on Soviet believers warrants the question: how can we reflect the perspective of individuals whose spiritual worlds and religious practices often remained hidden from official agencies? How can we reconstitute their agency, when most of their actions left no paper trail? Each type of sources offers both limitations and advantages.

Archival documents from state archives, and in particular from the Fonds of Plenipotentiaries of the CROCA or CRA, reflect the Soviet authorities' perspective on religious groups and contain information obtained through Soviet organisations and reports from the clergy. Yet the question remains of how adequately documents from archival collections can reflect real processes and events from the religious life of the period under study. Indeed, they fail to take into account underground religiosity, and the reports' political bias often undermines their reliability. As the anthropologist Sonja Luehrmann has rightly pointed out, the very language used by Soviet civil officials in their records could not adequately reflect manifestations of religious life, and this factor also imposes a limitation on the use of documents from state institutions.[52] Nevertheless, the primary sources collected by the CRA offer a unique vantage point to understand the logic of the Soviet authorities, their perception of religious processes and the character of participation of Soviet citizens in religious life. These documents show the closely intertwined worlds of Soviet believers and the organs in charge of controlling them and limiting their religious activity. In some cases, we can rely on personal files of clergy and members of executive organs of religious communities, reports on meetings with representatives of religious organisations and foreign guests, materials on the activity of religious educational structures, reports on the celebration of religious holidays, the financial activities of religious groups, as well as a huge corpus of letters and complaints of believers addressed to the state and international structures.[53]

Non-state archives and samizdat repositories provide another perspective on late Soviet religious life. *Samizdat* designated the reproduction (initially mostly on private typewriters, later also by photocopies and other mechanic means) and circulation of uncensored texts and literature. In the 1960s, samizdat turned from an individual practice into a full-fledged alternative network of circulation of information, which allowed for a rapid spread of dissident ideas and discourses. In the 1970s, *tamizdat*, the uncensored publication of books by Soviet authors in the West, to be smuggled back to the USSR, also turned into a widespread phenomenon. Religious samizdat also crossed the Iron Curtain and informed Western publics about the situation of believers in the Soviet Union. Such sources allow for a study of various forms of religious activism and give a voice to a vocal minority of Soviet believers, but they leave out less conspicuous actors, leading to a narrowing of perspectives.

Finally, ego documents, in particular memoirs, and oral history interviews, provide a unique glance into the internal worlds of individual Soviet believers. The use of oral history[54] allows for a radical expansion of the source base on the daily life of believers in the Soviet Union, by giving access to information absent from Soviet official documents, from protest letters of believers, and from the memoirs of religious leaders. Turning to oral history allows the possibility of hearing the voice of the "silent minority", which found itself in the position of latent discrimination and created for itself alternative spaces in the complex societal layout of the late USSR.

Many of our authors make use of such sources, which allow them to reconstruct religious practices, representations, and beliefs. Nevertheless, it is essential to understand the limitations of this type of sources: half a century after the events, memories of witnesses are usually affected by the passage of time and lack reliability. They may be influenced not only by nostalgia, current views and the contemporary political or religious situation, but also by the narratives of other witnesses they may have heard. Researchers are confronted by the arduous task of distinguishing between individual memories pertaining to the late Soviet period and later influences and collective narrative tropes. Still, these sources hold a unique potential for historians and, when handled with due care, allow us to restore the "voice of the voiceless".[55]

Overview of contents

The first chapters by Natalia Shlikhta and Svetlana Riazanova raise in similar ways the question of survival and adaptation of Orthodoxy from the 1950s to the 1980s, during and after the Khrushchev anti-religious campaigns. Shlikhta shows how in Ukraine, a territory traditionally more religious than Soviet Russia, participation in life cycle rituals and confession remained the norm. However, these rituals evolved and were often performed secretly. She concludes that the modified rituals were, for different reasons, a source of concern both to the Soviet authorities and the Church hierarchy. In the Perm region, as Svetlana Riazanova shows, based on documents from the Fond of the Plenipotentiary for Religious Affairs, church closures did lead to a decline of institutionalised religious practice. Nevertheless, in a region where the network of churches had always been sparse, such life cycle rituals as baptisms had often been performed by a range of unofficial figures, from unemployed priests to underground nuns, and these practices persisted throughout the Soviet period, along with various vernacular rites.

In non-Russian regions of the USSR and among believers of other religions, tradition persisted to various extents. Maria Kaspina's case study focuses on a small Jewish community in the Soviet Moldavian town Rybnitsa, in Transnistria. Thanks to the presence of the Rybnitser Rebbe, an informal religious leader who enjoyed fame throughout the region, Jewish rituals continued to be performed in the city until the Rebbe's emigration to the United States, in the mid-1970s. Yet in a context of increasing secularisation of Jewish life, which led to a considerable adaptation of traditional practices, younger generations of Jews no longer understood the Rebbe's ritual practices. Islam Zaripov and Marat Safarov's research on funeral and

memorial rites of Moscow Tatar Muslims shows that these rituals were the most persistent and were so widespread among Tatars, including party members, that the authorities did not even attempt to eradicate them. Nevertheless, both religious repression and Soviet modernity led to a shift in practices, particularly concerning the role of women, who played a growing role in Tatar religious life. Due to the shortage of imams at the Moscow Cathedral mosque, both women and laypeople fulfilled various religious functions.

The question of the boundaries of legality, and how religious communities struggled to be officially registered under fluctuating political conditions, is central to the chapters by Johannes Dyck and Jerzy Rohozinski. Dyck examines the case of Evangelical Christians-Baptists and shows how their situation was regulated by charters adopted by the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians and Baptists (AUCECB), which allowed for more fine-tuning than general legislation on religious groups. Ultimately, however, the fluctuating boundaries of legality depended to a large extent on the application of legislation. Dyck argues that the protest activities of the unregistered Baptist groups also led to a slackening of rules for registered communities. Jerzy Rohozinski's chapter focuses on the example of two communities of Polish and German Catholics in the Kazakh SSR, which both applied for official registration in the 1970s. Rohozinski analyses the reasons for differential treatments of these two groups, constituted of ethnic minority groups deported in the 1930s and from earlier migration waves. Not only ethnic criteria but also the size of the congregation seem to have played a role in the authorities' decision.

Some communities, however, remained beyond the boundaries of legality, and this concerned in particular Evangelical Christians and Pentecostals who had refused to join the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians and Baptists (AUCECB) or had not registered their communities individually. In their chapters, Vera Kliueva and Nadezhda Beliakova examine various forms of activism in these communities, denounced by Soviet propaganda as "sectarian". Kliueva shows that Pentecostals engaged not only in religious and social activism in their community, from religious education of children to evangelism, but also in samizdat production and human rights activism on behalf of Soviet believers. Beliakova further elaborates on such activism among unregistered Evangelicals, analysing its gender dimension. While men traditionally occupied leadership positions and were imprisoned as "martyrs for the faith", their wives' activities were less conspicuous but no less crucial for the community. Motherhood of large families could constitute a form of activism in the Soviet context, but women were also empowered by becoming secret helpers and by speaking up to defend their families' and communities' rights.

The gender aspect of religious activism is also central to the chapter by Anna Sidorevich about Christian feminism, which focuses on the religious women's club "Mariia", founded by Tat'iana Goricheva and other Orthodox women from Leningrad. After participating in the creation of a samizdat journal of feminist orientation entitled *Woman and Russia,* the female collective split along religious lines, and those who identified with Russian Orthodoxy founded a club and a publication named "Mariia", after the Virgin Mary. Sidorevich shows the reception of this publication among Western feminists, as well as the repression that the group faced in

the USSR, and concludes that the brand of "Russian feminism" advocated by its founders made it unpalatable both to the Soviet authorities and Western audiences.

Goricheva and her peers were converts of a new generation, who were born in non-religious families and yet found faith as adults. Barbara Martin's chapter looks at this group of Russian Orthodox believers from the intelligentsia and shows how they recreated a "parallel polis" both within society and the Church. Faced with considerable limitations in their religious life, young converts created alternative spaces of socialisation, both in underground seminars and in monasteries, as well as independent networks of reproduction and circulation of religious literature. Anna Lepekhina focuses more closely on one of these underground seminars, which gathered in Leningrad around Anatolii Vaneev and Konstantin Ivanov, with the participation of dissident Orthodox priests Fr. Sergii Zheludkov and Fr. Pavel Adel'geim. Based on the group's written correspondence, which circulated in samizdat, Lepekhina examines the themes discussed in the circle, whose focus was religious-philosophical. She identifies a gap between those who were better acquainted with religious tradition, and those who had grown up in an atheistic environment.

Eva Rogaar's chapter on ethnic Russian converts to Islam shows the fluidity of boundaries between confessions among Soviet young people who found faith in the late Soviet period. She looks at the trajectories of Valeriia Porokhova, Viacheslav Polosin, and Sergei Moskalev, three people who converted to Islam in the late Soviet period. Their very diverse trajectories reflect the sometimes protracted spiritual searches of some representatives of the Soviet intelligentsia, who could embrace in turn Eastern religions, Orthodoxy, Islam, or esoteric and new age spirituality. In this regard, they were not unlike their Western peers of the "flower power generation".

The Baltic states were a space of relative freedom in the Soviet context, at the crossroads between East and West, and it was also an entry point for Indian spiritual movements, which gained increasing popularity in the 1970s–1980s. Solveiga Krumina-Konkova examines this phenomenon in Soviet Latvia, singling out several manifestations of this phenomenon, from interest in yoga to the appearance of Hare Krishna groups. Interest in Eastern religions was also related to the birth of the New Age movement in the USSR. While esotericism had strong roots in pre-revolutionary Russia, astrology continued to develop in the late Soviet period, as Anna Tessmann shows in her chapter, dedicated to astrological samizdat. The texts often came from the West, but Soviet astrologers and their readers produced very original compilations, which Tessmann has been collecting and analyses.

The chapters assembled in this book show various facets of late Soviet religiosity, testifying to its vibrancy and diversity. Despite repression, traditional religious groups and protestant communities, which had sprouted up in the USSR in the 1920s, maintained themselves throughout the Soviet period, particularly in the countryside, where unofficial clergy and underground religiosity could more easily survive. Communities that remained beyond the boundary of legality persisted, and some of them were eventually officially registered. Others developed forms of religious activism to defend their rights, appealing to the Soviet authorities and to the international community. In the cities, secularisation was the strongest, but by the 1970s, new generations of believers were appearing within the intelligentsia and

among Soviet young people. They turned not only to Orthodoxy or Judaism, but also to Eastern religions or Islam. The rise in religious sensibility did not always lead to a full "churching" but also to non-institutionalised forms of spirituality and esoteric practices. Some of our contributors describe late Soviet religiosity as being embedded in, and influenced by developments in Soviet secular culture, while other authors describe these spheres as coexisting in "parallel". These different perspectives mirror debates on Soviet dissident culture's close entanglement with official culture in recent research by Ann Komaromi, for instance.[56]

This book offers an entry point into the complex religious worlds of this period but in no way claims to cover exhaustively this field, which deserves further historical research.

Notes

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2 An exception would be Catherine Wanner, *State Secularism and Lived Religion in Soviet Russia and Ukraine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

3 See for instance John Anderson, *Religion, State and Politics in the Soviet Union and the Successor States* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Jane Ellis, *The Russian Orthodox Church: A Contemporary History* (London; Sydney: Croom Helm, 1986); Mikhail Shkarovskii, *Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov′ pri Staline i Khrushcheve : (Gosudarstvenno-Tserkovnye Otnosheniia v SSSR v 1939-1964 godakh)*, Materialy po Istorii Tserkvi (Moscow: Krutitskoe Patriarshee Podvor′e [etc.], 1999); Mikhail Shkarovskii, *Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov′ v XX Veke* (Moscow: Veche, 2010); Gerhard Simon, *Church, State and Opposition in the U.S.S.R.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974); Otto Luchterhandt, *Der Sowjetstaat und die Russisch-Orthodoxe Kirche. Eine rechtshistorische und rechtssystematische Untersuchung* (Köln: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1976).

4 Victoria Smolkin, *A Sacred Space Is Never Empty: A History of Soviet Atheism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

5 Sonja Luehrmann, *Secularism: Soviet Style. Teaching Atheism and Religion in a Volga Republic* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2011); Alexander Agadjanian, "Vulnerable Post-Soviet Secularities: Patterns and Dynamics in Russia and Beyond," in *Multiple Secularities beyond the West. Religion and Modernity in the Global Age*, ed. Marian Burchardt, Monika Wohlrab-Sahr, and Matthias Middell (Boston; Berlin; Munich: De Gruyter, 2015), 241–260; Wanner, *State Secularism*. See also the special issue "Religiia v postseculiarnom prostranstve" of *Gosudarstvo, religiia, Tserkov' v Rossii i za rubezhom* (2012, vol. 2 no. 30).

6 Vyacheslav Karpov, "Desecularization: A Conceptual Framework," *Journal of Church and State* 52, no. 2 (Spring 2010): 232–270. See also; Zhanna Kormina, Sergei Shtyrkov, and Aleksandr Panchenko, eds., *Izobretenie Religii: desekularizatsiia v postsovetskom Kontekste* (Saint-Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Evropeiskogo universiteta, 2015).

7 For a general discussion of the revival in post-Communist Eastern Europe, see Miklos Tomka, "The Changing Role of Religion in Eastern and Central Europe: Religion's Revival and Its Contradictions," *Social Compass* 42, no. 1 (1995): 17–26. Russian sociologists have spoken about a "pendulum effect". See for example Kimmo Kääriäinen and Dmitri Furman, eds., *Starye tserkvi, novye veruiushchie. Religiia v massovom soznanii postsovetskoi Rossii* (Moscow, Saint-Ptersburg: Letnii sad, 2000). For a religious-based theory on the alternation of periods of rise and fall of religiosity, see Boris Filippov, "O volne dukhovnogo napriazheniia kontsa 1960-kh XX veka- nachala XXI veka," *Vestnik PSTGU I: Bogoslovie, Filosofiia* 5, no. 61 (2015): 112–130.

8 See Ellis, *The Russian Orthodox Church*; Michael Bourdeaux, *Patriarch and Prophets: Persecution of the Russian Orthodox Church Today* (London: Macmillan, 1969); Liudmilla Alexeyeva, *Soviet Dissent: Contemporary Movements for National, Religious, and Human Rights* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1985); V. S. Vardys, *The Catholic Church, Dissent, and Nationality in Soviet Lithuania* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978); Nadežda Alekseevna Beljakova, Thomas Bremer, and Katharina Kunter, *"Es gibt keinen Gott!" : Kirchen und Kommunismus : Eine Konfliktgeschichte* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2016).

9 William Catherwood Fletcher, *The Russian Orthodox Church Underground, 1917–1970* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971); Aleksei Beglov, *V poiskakh "bezgreshnykh katakomb". Tserkovnoe podpol'e v SSSR*, 2nd ed. (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2018).

10 James Kapaló and Tatiana Vagramenko, *Hidden Galleries: Material Religion in the Secret Police Archives in Central and Eastern Europe*, Anthropology of Religion 1 (Wien: LIT Verlag, 2020).

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13 For recent studies, see Yaacov Ro'i, *Islam in the Soviet Union: From the Second World War to Gorbachev* (London: Hurst, 2000); Eren Tasar, *Soviet and Muslim. The Institutionalization of Islam in Central Asia, 1943-1991* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Renat Bekkin, *People of Reliable Loyalty: Muftiates and the State in Modern Russia* (Stockholm: Södertörn University, 2020). See also Alexandre Bennigsen's research on Islam in the USSR, for example Alexandre Bennigsen and S. Enders Wimbush.

Mystics and Commissars: Sufism in the Soviet Union (London: C. Hurst, 1985); Alexandre A. Bennigsen and S. Enders Wimbush, "Muslim Religious Dissent in the U.S.S.R.," in *Marxism and Religion in Eastern Europe* (Dordrecht: Springer, 1976), 133–146.

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23 See Andrii Kukurudza, *Demokratizatsiia pravoslaviia v 20-e gg. XX stoletiia* (Rivne: Vydavets' O. Zen, 2008); Gregory Freeze, "'Vsia vlast' prikhodam': vozrozhdenie pravoslaviia v 1920-e gg." *Gosudarstvo, religiia, tserkov' v Rossii i za rubezhom*, 30, no. 3–4 (2012): 86–105.

24 Freeze, "Vsia vlast' prikhodam," 94.

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1 Change of Ritual Practice under Communism

The Case of the Russian Orthodox Church in Soviet Ukraine in the Late 1950s to Early 1970s

Natalia Shlikhta

Introduction

The policies of Soviet authorities regarding institutionalised religion and its adherents evolved over time, as circumstances, both inside and outside the country, changed. The Leninist "red terror" against all "former people" (*byvshie liudi*) and anti-religious persecutions of the 1920s were replaced with the Stalinist pragmatic "concordat" with the Russian Orthodox Church (thereafter – ROC) and parallel suppression of other "religious cults" in the 1940s. The revival of aggressive antireligious rhetoric and harsh anti-religious measures under Khrushchev – quite predictable within the context of his reforms – ended up with "disappointments and failures", while the Brezhnev era policies "were reoriented to manage the Church's power and visibility, rather than attempting to eradicate them".[1]

All these changes notwithstanding, the inherent incompatibility of Soviet and religious was not questioned and "secularization was an integral element to socialist modernity and state building in the USSR", as Catherine Wanner noted.[2] This necessarily implied continuous struggle (from the rhetorical level to administrative and criminal persecutions) with religious rituals that were seen as providing religious institutions with access to the private life of Soviet subjects, including those who did not fall within the narrow category of "regular churchgoers".

The chronological focus of this chapter is on the period of Khrushchev's anti religious campaign and its immediate effects in the early Brezhnev period. In order to trace certain patterns of ritual observance, I will also refer to some earlier instances. Khrushchev's attack on religion adopted a range of forms: assault on the so-called holy places of local popular traditions, mass closures (of church buildings, monastic institutions, and theological schools), compulsory registration and mass de-registration of clergy, economic control and restrictions, and administrative and criminal persecutions of clergy and faithful. Key measures also included numerous restrictions imposed upon religious ritual performance (most importantly, introduction of special receipt books (*kvitantsionnye knigi*) for the registration of life cycle rituals, a fixed salary for clergy, prohibitions on ritual practices outside church walls) and consistent introduction of new Soviet civil rituals (*bezreligioznaia obriadnost'*) as its alternative. After Khrushchev's

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fall, however, "repressive tactics shifted from raw coercion and violence to propaganda and agitation as the main means to suppress religious practice and belief in the public sphere".[3]

The territorial focus of the paper is the Ukrainian Exarchate of the ROC, whose boundaries coincided with the administrative borders of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. Although the post-war Ukrainian Exarchate was part of the ROC, whose autonomous status was only nominal, my research shows that it can be viewed as a separate ecclesiastical entity, which considerably differed from the rest of the ROC by many features of its church life.[4] Bohdan R. Bociurkiw suggests that there were two key factors that made religious life in Soviet Ukraine distinctive from the rest of the Orthodox community: one was the greater density of the net of religious communities and another was the complexity of the ecclesiastical situation there.[5]

The high density of the religious community in the post-war Exarchate had its dual origins in the Soviet annexation of Galicia and Western Volhynia in 1939 and the so-called wartime religious renaissance. The view of the Ukrainian Republic as a certain "bulwark of Orthodoxy" in the Soviet Union prevails in the scholarly literature.[6] The complexity of its ecclesiastical situation was primarily caused by the liquidation of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (thereafter – UGCC) and forceful but mostly nominal, as my research suggests, incorporation of its clergy and faithful into the ROC under the official slogan of "reunification".[7] Available information on ritual practices examined in this paper demonstrates the higher rates of recorded ritual observance, as well as numerous mentions of secret rituals in the West Ukrainian "reunited" dioceses, thereby confirming the view on their specific position within the Ukrainian Exarchate.

To answer my research question on how religious ritual practices were preserved throughout the 1950s–1970s, I will focus on the example of life cycle rituals and the sacrament of confession in the Orthodox Church. One important reason for this selection is that they are most extensively presented in available sources because of Soviet officials' and ideologists' obsession with life cycle rituals, which were to be replaced with new civil rituals, and ecclesiastical authorities' concern regarding the preservation of traditional sacramental confession, because of its inseparable linkage to the Holy Communion.

My research is based on sources produced both by state officials and the Church, from central archival holdings in Ukraine and the Russian Federation. The most important are reports at various levels on the "state of religiosity" (*sostoianie religioznosti*) of the population prepared by the commissioners of the Council for the Affairs of the ROC (thereafter – CROCA) and, after 1966, of the Council of Religious Affairs (CRA), as well as internal church documentation and correspondence. Of special importance for such research are ego-documents by the clergy and oral history sources (both collected by the Institute of Church History in L'viv and interviews conducted by myself), which provide a rare possibility to access a personal dimension of the story. For the final part of the chapter, I have analysed published sources presenting the official church view (in the *Journal of Moscow Patriarchy,* thereafter – JMP) on ritual practice and ritual change.

Secret rituals

The Orthodox Church is a "liturgical" Church, which stresses the necessity of "visible sacraments" (*vidimye tainstva*) for the attainment of salvation. This, together with the ritualism of popular religiosity, made the Orthodox Church especially vulnerable to the regime's anti-religious measures. In the course of Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign, numerous visible obstacles to sacramental life were created. I primarily mean a drastic reduction of the number of functioning churches, as the sole places where the performance of the majority of rituals was allowed, and of the clergy, especially in rural regions. In the peak years of the Khrushchev-era anti-religious campaign, in 1959–1962, the number of registered churches and clergymen was reduced by 24% in Soviet Ukraine.[8]

Moreover, as already mentioned, a priest was required by state and ecclesiastical authorities to officially record all rituals that he performed and thereby became a tool of monitoring of the population's religiosity. Frs. Nikolai Eshliman and Gleb Iakunin pointed in their 1965 Open Letter to Patriarch Aleksii I (Simanskii) to disastrous consequences of the clergy's compliance with official requirements: a priest was turned into an "informer" denouncing those who "entrusted themselves to the protection of the Mother-Church".[9] Developing this idea further, Nadezhda Beliakova points to a curious parallel and yet a crucial difference with the imperial period when "the state required recording and metric functions from the Church". Since the Khrushchev period, the state has required the recording of ritual observance "to limit the possibilities available for the Church" and its members.[10]

As Vlad Naumescu argues, given these restrictions, and within the general secularising context of the Khrushchev and Brezhnev years, ritual observance required a degree of courage from Soviet subjects and even became a "form of protest" for them.[11] Official data by the CROCA/CRA on ritual observance in the Ukrainian Republic demonstrates that all the efforts to forcefully and rapidly secularise the population paid off only in the case of religious weddings. For instance, in 1964–1965, these amounted to only 8% of all the registered marriages,[12] while the percentage of baptisms amounted to up to 48% of registered births and religious funeral services up to 33–34% of registered deaths.[13] The true figures of life cycle rituals, however, were even higher than official figures, even in the case of weddings – a situation the CROCA/CRA was well aware of. Nadezhda Beliakova quotes a revealing CRA document from 1984: "In some regions of the Ukrainian SSR the rates of ritual performance were underreported by a factor of 10-15 times, religious weddings were not recorded for years".[14]

One reason for such distorted statistics was a desire by local CROCA/CRA commissioners and local authorities to present a "correct" picture of the "decline of religiosity" in their regions. Another was the spreading of secret – non-registered – rituals. The secret performance of life cycle rituals became a common response from below – by laity and clergy – to excessive restrictions imposed upon sacramental life. This constituted part of a general process of privatisation and so-called domestication of religion, which researchers consider a distinctive feature of the late Soviet landscape.[15] For obvious reasons, researchers have little reliable

records of secret rituals and have to rely primarily upon oral testimony and rare ego-documents.

Secret baptisms were the most widespread practice. This was quite predictable, given the essential role of this sacrament for the Church and a strong popular belief in its sanctifying effects. One of my interviewees, Iaroslava Datsyshyna, widow of Fr. Mykhailo Datsyshyn, a "reunited" priest from the L'viv region, recalls that he always asked whether or not to record baptisms and other rituals prior to accomplishing them. She also remembers numerous instances when, after the performance of a "proper" – duly registered – ceremony, parishioners returned to Fr. Datsyshyn, asking him to remove recordings from the registry book.[16] Inside churches, secret baptisms were often performed at night, mostly with the sole participation of grandparents, even without godparents, or, in fewer cases, with the participation of the mother of an infant. Datsyshyna mentions that baptisms outside church walls were most frequent and that such baptisms were usually performed not at the parents' or grandparents' but at someone else's house.[17]

Fr. Datsyshyn's conduct was in line with general practices in the context of the "reunited" dioceses. As an anonymous party official observed in his 1995 interview: "I was absolutely sure that in Galicia and Volhynia in the 1970s and 1980s – as well as before and after this period – the rate of baptism among newborn children approached 100 percent. Party officials were not excluded. Even if they did not respect the Church's rituals, their parents and relatives did".[18] Although Galicia was exceptional in this regard, an analysis of internal church documentation confirms that secret performance of life cycle rituals was a widespread practice among Orthodox Christians. The message of the Head of the Chancellery of the Moscow Patriarchate, Fr. Nikolai Kolchitskii, to the episcopate of October 23, 1959 elaborated on the "violations of legislation on the cults on the part of the clergy". Particular attention was given to priests' inclination to perform baptisms and other sacraments on private premises and the widespread practice of renting apartments and houses specifically for this task.[19] Patriarchal Message no 1917 of December 22, 1964 discloses that secret performance of rituals reached a critical scale by the mid-1960s. The message forbade non-registered baptisms, baptisms without parental approval, and baptisms performed on private premises.[20] It was stated that the baptismal sacrament performed illegally – outside church walls and without due registration – "does not correspond to the sanctity (*vysota i sviatost'*) of the sacrament and violates [Soviet] legislation".[21]

Oral testimony and Soviet officials' reports reveal priests' readiness to forge records in registry books: to write down information that was obviously false, particularly inaccurate names and addresses of the parents.[22] Because forgery came out only as a result of administrative checks periodically practiced by local officials, it is difficult to determine the scale of this practice. When interrogated if forgery was discovered, priests usually maintained that they were not aware of whether the information provided was true or false.[23] This excuse sounded quite plausible from urban clergy. The reason was a common practice to baptise children in the large cathedrals of deanery and diocesan centres, even if a local church was still functioning, in order to conceal one's religious allegiance.[24]

Yet another notable development in the Soviet context was that "lay activists took on more responsibility in the face of clerical shortages, which altered who had authority" in ritual life.[25] In his 1952 report on church life in the Ukrainian Exarchate, the Deputy Republican Commissioner, Katunin, was the first to suggest that so-called lay services – including baptismal ceremonies performed by laypeople, most frequently by older women – had become an important feature of ritual life. He examined various secret gatherings by the faithful for such services in churches and on private premises and mentioned that these services were led by lay activists, "without prior permission" (*v iavochnom poriadke*), who performed priestly functions, since "they remember by heart something from church services or can recite a certain number of prayers".[26]

Lay baptism is allowed by the Canon Law of the Orthodox Church "in emergency case": "Baptism can be administered by a deacon or, in his absence or if he is impeded, by another cleric, a member of an institute of consecrated life, or by any other Christian faithful; even by the mother or father, if another person is not available who knows how to baptise" (Canon 677).[27] Still, the mass spreading of this ceremony, as Katunin concluded, was a new phenomenon for the Orthodox Church in Ukraine.[28]

Modified baptismal and funeral ceremonies

In her widely acclaimed study, Catherine Bell pays special attention to "ritual change", a need faced by religious communities in the modern context to "adapt the traditions of worship to shifting social and spiritual reality".[29] Moreover, rituals "mediate change", helping a religious community protect itself from undesirable social transformations and "maintain a sense of cultural continuity".[30] This role of rituals was an important reason, which rendered inevitable considerable modifications of ritual practices – always a highly thorny issue for the Church.

A careful reading of CROCA/CRA documents discloses officials' true concern with modified ritual ceremonies. They primarily paid close attention to the modifications of life cycle rituals because these concerned larger segments of the Soviet population, not only regular churchgoers. Theological significance and far-reaching socio-cultural implications turned baptismal ceremony into the main target of official anti-religious and secularising efforts. Because restrictions imposed upon baptisms were most numerous and control over their performance most rigorous, the ceremony underwent the most varied changes.

One of the important undertakings of Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign was to ban any baptisms except for those of infants. "It is forbidden by the authorities to baptise children older than two years. If a child is above this age, s/he is sent back home non-baptised".[31] By attempting to implement this prohibition, the authorities reacted to the widespread practice of baptising older children, teenagers, and adults. This ritual reached a critical scale in the late 1940s and early 1950s when those who had not been baptised as infants during the earlier years of the regime's struggle against religion were baptised.

Commenting on the "state of religiosity" in the Ukrainian Exarchate in 1947, Pavlo Khodchenko, CROCA Republican Commissioner, examined non-infant baptisms, which were performed on a particularly large scale, as crucial evidence for the "high level of religiosity among the population".[32] In the early 1950s, the Deputy Republican Commissioner, Georgii Korchevoi, emphasised that baptisms remained among the most popular rituals. As concerns non-infant baptisms, according to his data, after reaching their peak during the early post-war years, they were performed in less, though still significant, numbers.[33] Unexpectedly, when the prohibitions of the early 1960s were lifted,[34] the number of non-infant baptisms drastically increased once again and during the subsequent decade amounted to more than one half of all Orthodox baptisms in some Central and Eastern regions of Ukraine.[35]

Given the scale of non-infant baptisms, the CROCA/CRA leadership required from commissioners to pay closer attention to them and to submit detailed statistics, which would allow for the elaboration of more sophisticated policies to restrict such baptisms. It is significant that in the space of six months in 1965, CROCA Chair Vladimir Kuroedov issued two almost identical orders to commissioners (letters no 494 of 25 February and no 2030 of 27 August) to provide in their reports separate figures for infant baptisms, baptisms of children up to the age of 3, those aged between 3 and 7, those between 7 and 16, and older.[36]

The mass spread of non-infant baptisms thus became a revealing phenomenon in the life of the Orthodox community in the Ukrainian Republic, starting from the mid-1960s. In the view of the CROCA/CRA, these baptisms were a particularly important manifestation of the religiosity of the population. In contrast with traditional infant baptisms, non-infant baptisms "cannot be explained simply by established popular tradition. Most probably, they attest to the strengthening of the impact of the Church upon the population".[37]

The practice of mass baptisms appears to have been the most troubling for state authorities. When Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign began, CROCA Republican Commissioner Pavlo Pinchuk suggested that it was necessary to ban collective baptisms.[38] At first glance, the spread of general ceremonies only provided evidence for the scarcity of clergy and the desire of laity to hide themselves in the crowds, which filled churches during great holidays, when such ceremonies were usually performed. However, a simple enumeration of those holidays during which mass baptisms were usually performed explains the authorities' concern. In addition to Easter and Christmas, these were New Year's Eve, the International Labour Day on 1 May, and the anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution on 7 November. The latter two holidays were mentioned in CROCA/CRA documents quite often. Pinchuk traced "the believers' striving to schedule baptisms of their children on the revolutionary celebrations of 1 May and 7 November" back to the early post-war years.[39] In my view, such timing of baptism to coincide with major Soviet holidays, with an aim to "ensure a more solemn character" for this private event,[40] testified to a curious blend of Soviet and Orthodox identifications in the late Soviet context.[41] The particular popularity of this ritual amongst the working population and intelligentsia of the industrial regions of Ukraine is further evidence of this.

The clergy, especially from the industrial regions of Eastern Ukraine and Kyiv, vividly depicted difficulties that they experienced in having to perform too many baptisms on the dates of major Soviet holidays. Available statistical data helps to contextualise descriptions provided below. In 1958, Pinchuk reported on the performance of baptisms on 7 November in the churches of the large industrial centres of Eastern Ukraine: 496 children were baptised in Kharkiv, 226 in Voroshylovograd, and 400 in Stalino.[42]

A dean of the diocesan centre of Stalino stated that each year, on 7 and 8 November, four priests from the diocesan cathedral were unable to satisfy an ever-increasing popular demand. They "baptised children until they virtually died from fatigue", though they performed simplified collective ceremonies instead of individual ones.[43] Other priests from the Stalino region confirmed that on official holidays they had to baptise infants, children and adults from the early morning until late at night "one by one, in larger and smaller groups", which left them completely exhausted afterwards.[44] In his *Notes of a Village Priest,* Fr. Georgii Edel'shtein describes a picture commonly observable in Orthodox churches in the late Soviet period: "On the right two-three tens of infants are screaming – they will be baptised together with a few adults… on the left the funeral service has already started according to some new strange patterns".[45]

Fr. Edel'shtein's observation directs our attention to another key life cycle ritual, which underwent important modifications. The funeral ceremony was no less essential to popular religiosity and had no less important socio-cultural implications. Available sources indicate that virtually everyone was buried according to religious rites. Communist party members were no exception. Khodin, a commissioner in the Kharkiv region, even considered them "sacrilege" and, in his 1965 report, called for "the elaboration of legal provisions, which will restrict the possibility of performing religious funeral ceremonies for deceased atheists". He concluded with the statement that there was an urgent need to elaborate a competing alternative in the form of a "solemn and cheap [funeral civil] ceremony".[46]

An unnamed priest from the industrial village of Novoukrainka in the Kharkiv region admitted in 1947 that he knew of no single occurrence of burial without a religious funeral ceremony. Even if "a funeral is performed according to civil rite, [the relatives of the deceased] bring the soil to a church for the priest to 'seal' the coffin".[47] The latter method was an answer to restrictions on ritual performance, as well as to the scarcity of priests who could perform the ritual, which dated back to the early Soviet period. Already in 1930, funerals *in absentia* (*zaochnoe otpevanie*) were allowed by the official church, "if circumstances require so".[48]

In 1969, CRA Republican Commissioner Kostiantyn Lytvyn acknowledged in his official note to the CC CPU on the "Contemporary State of Religion on the Territory of the Ukr.SSR" that funerals remained one of the most widespread religious rituals and the number of funerals *in absentia* even exceeded proper funeral ceremonies.[49] According to his data, in 1968, Orthodox priests in the republic had performed 96,338 funerals and 114,041 funerals *in absentia*.[50] If compared to available statistics from earlier years, Lytvyn's figures testify to the growing popularity of the modified ceremony: in 1964, the traditional ceremony was performed for

34.2% of all the deceased in the Ukrainian Republic, while the modified was used in 30.3% of all cases; in 1965, the figures were 33.4% and 28.9%, respectively.[51] The modified funeral ceremony became so popular in the late Soviet period because it compensated for the unavailability of clergy, especially in rural areas, and, no less importantly, allowed one to escape state control. This was also part of a general shift of authority from "trained specialists" to "non-specialists", in Tamara Dragadze's terms,[52] with laity starting to play a more prominent role in performing rituals than ever before.

According to information available concerning the 1940s and 1950s, priests required that the soil be taken from the grave by the relatives of the deceased and poured back after it was blessed. In the 1960s, the requirements were considerably slackened, and priests allowed "to bring the soil for blessing from any grave and even not from any grave at all, and also to pour it on any grave".[53] Still, as oral sources show, at least in Galicia, such an oversimplified ceremony was regarded as an option only in the direst cases. Usually, the soil was taken from the deceased's grave and brought to a priest who "prayed and blessed it with holy water, and performed the [funeral] service over it". Afterwards, it was carried back with accompanying prayers by the relatives.[54]

Already this mode of performing funerals contributed to the linking of religious and civil ceremonies, since the former was always performed after the latter. The linkage between the two became visible when a combined funeral ceremony was performed. In its common form, it consisted of a funeral procession led by a priest and a church choir, followed by a brass band, the necessary attribute of a civil requiem service. After a proper religious service by a priest, a farewell speech was delivered by an official "comrade".[55] Such combined funerals vividly testified to the failure of official attempts to replace religious ceremonies with their secular substitute and became one of the most curious manifestations of late Soviet religiosity, with its blending of Soviet and religious elements.

Ecclesiastical authorities' view on ritual change

Just like secret rituals, modified practices originated as survival techniques from below. As the CROCA/CRA and Soviet sociologists acknowledged, they became a viable means of circumvention of official restrictions.[56] An overview of the evolving view of church officialdom on ritual change helps to interpret them more adequately. This analysis testifies to the scale of the spread of modified ritual practices no less persuasively than the rare statistical data provided by the CROCA/CRA.

William C. Fletcher approaches ritual modifications by distinguishing between "theological conservatism" of the Church and its "practical adaptability". He claims that church conservatism did not undermine the ability of the Church to adapt to contemporary circumstances but actually strengthened it. "Changes did take place … but because the dogmas of the Church were sacrosanct, these changes did not necessitate a reconsideration of the theological basis of the Church".[57] A close reading of church sources reveals that the shift from "dogmatic inflexibility" (using Fletcher's term) to "practical adaptability" was not as unproblematic as he

implies. It further suggests that some changes introduced at the local level to satisfy popular demand reached the scale when their theological reconsideration or at least authorisation on the part of ecclesiastical authorities was hard to avoid.

The case of confession is particularly revealing in this regard. For the adherents of the ROC, the sacrament of confession is a necessary condition for partaking in the Holy Communion. As Aleksei Beglov observes, regardless of all the changes in the practice of communion throughout the Soviet period, partaking in the Eucharist at least once a year (mostly on Easter), remained a requirement for "non-active parishioners", which also implied their duty to confess.[58] Given the scarcity of registered priests and functioning churches in the late Soviet period, individual confessions during Lent became most improbable, especially in large urban areas,[59] forcing priests to switch to a simplified general ceremony.[60] Nadieszda Kizenko concludes:

> For most believers, the combination of secularizing pressures, church closures, and fewer priests meant that individual confession was replaced by general confession. The routine, institutionalized aspect of confession before 1917, which had made individual auricular confession something familiar to the average Orthodox Christian believer, vanished.[61]

Because of its inseparable linkage to the Eucharist, general confession was one of those modified rituals, which ecclesiastical authorities were the least prepared to tolerate, although it was first allowed by Metropolitan Sergei (Stragorodskii) and his Holy Synod back in 1929.[62] Patriarch Aleksii I (Simanskii) was an outspoken opponent of this practice. He raised the issue of general confession immediately after his appointment as the Guardian of the Patriarchal Throne during the Synodal meeting on 19 July 1944. The future Patriarch claimed that the "practice of so-called general confession radically distorts the mystery of confession", as "church statutes do not envisage general confession". He particularly emphasised that general confession threatened the paramount sacrament of the Holy Communion. "Careless attitude towards confession necessarily assumes careless attitude towards the mystery of the Eucharist".[63]

Notwithstanding his severe criticism, then Metropolitan Aleksii authorised the performance of general confession "in case of need", the only requirement being an individual absolving prayer for each repentance. The obvious reason was that he was unable to propose another solution to the problem, which the Church faced each year during the Lent period. But in spite of the absence of any alternative solution, church officialdom was reluctant to definitely allow general confession throughout the period we analyse, maintaining that it could be tolerated only as an exception in "extreme cases".[64]

Available sources concerning priests' perceptions of general confession are predictably scarce. The diary of Fr. Mykhailo Datsyshyn, written in the 1960s and early 1970s, contains numerous quotations from Orthodox religious literature with his personal approval remarks: "contemporary general confession is, strictly speaking, not any confession at all" and "it is terribly harmful", because it "retains only the

form, while pointing to indifference towards one's salvation".[65] Still priests practiced this ceremony because of their inability to satisfy popular demand otherwise.

Regardless of such a negative attitude, the official church was compelled to react to numerous modifications in ritual practice, not only through criticism, but also by authorising them. An examination of church documents suggests that, in the late 1960s, the views of ecclesiastical authorities had not changed much since the future Patriarch's statement in 1944: "The teaching of the Orthodox Church says that any sacrament will indeed be a sacrament and have a blessing effect upon the person, only if it is performed precisely according to the established patterns".[66] Nonetheless, the interpretation of the formula "precisely according to the established patterns" did change considerably over the following decades. Departures from traditional patterns were seldom approved officially but rather semi-officially. We will not find any Synodal or Patriarchal sanction, but the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchy* provides ample evidence of change.

Articles discussing the modification of rituals and the alteration of canonical patterns first appeared on the pages of the JMP in the mid-1950s. Early articles sought to justify ritual changes and customarily accomplished this by referring to apostolic tradition. One of them, discussing ritual changes introduced by the Apostolic Council, explained, "It cannot be otherwise, because the external patterns of rituals often depend on circumstances. Therefore, they must change when circumstances have changed".[67] The author of this article emphasised that only ecclesiastical authorities could allow any modification of ritual practice and thereby he attempted to limit initiatives from below.

Articles from the late 1950s to early 1970s continued to elaborate on this idea of the dependence of ritual practice on changing circumstances in a dialogue with those who criticised the Orthodox practice for its "supposed stagnation and immobility".[68] It is telling that they dropped any mention of the exclusive authority of church officialdom to initiate modifications. Every change was considered valid on the condition that the modified ritual preserved mandatory attributes of the sacrament: the power of the person who accomplishes the rite (a priest, except for lay baptisms), the use of the required substance or visible sign, and the preservation of the sacramental formula.[69]

Such minimal requirements reveal that ecclesiastical authorities were forced to accept and unwillingly tolerate undesirable spontaneous initiatives from below, because they could suggest no viable alternative approach to ensure sacramental life, and because these modified rituals were performed on such a scale that it was no longer possible to simply ignore or ban them.

Conclusions

In the "Introduction" to the 2012 volume on *State Secularism and Lived Religion in Soviet Ukraine and Russia,* Catherine Wanner concludes that "the outcome of processes of secularization in the USSR was not a loss of religion, but religious change".[70] The preservation of traditional ritual life of the Orthodox Church was not possible without change, given aggressive anti-religious propaganda, excessive

restrictions on religious life, and administrative and criminal persecutions of those involved. Any such change was immensely difficult and undesirable for the highly traditionalist Church; still it became the key to its survival at the local level, as my study demonstrates.

Religious change brought about "new understandings as to what constitutes the sacred and who has the authority to declare so".[71] Information on the spread of secret ritual practices and on the modifications of rituals examined on these pages demonstrates this convincingly. Laypeople took upon themselves a much more active role in ritual life than at any time before; so-called lay services were just extreme evidence of this process. As for the clergy, it openly disobeyed the orders of state and ecclesiastical authorities when performing secret rituals and deliberately broke established ritual practices when resorting to modified ceremonies. The episcopate and official church were forced to react to these initiatives from below, which challenged their authority within the Church and endangered their position in front of state authorities. An examination of their answers to this challenge and positions regarding ritual change contributes to study of the ROC hierarchy in the late Soviet period.

Ritual change necessarily presumed accommodation to the Soviet socio-cultural context. The modifications of life cycle rituals are especially revealing in this regard. The mass performance of baptisms on the red dates of the Soviet calendar, on the one hand, and the appearance of a strange mix of religious and civil ceremonies in the form of combined funerals, on the other, demonstrated the gap, which remained between the ideal of complete separation of Soviet and religious life preached by official propaganda and reality. This curious mix of Soviet and religious identifications is an important research question, to which this study partly contributes.

Notes

1 Catherine Wanner, "Introduction," in *State Secularism and Lived Religion in Soviet Russia and Ukraine*, ed. Catherine Wanner (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 17.
2 Wanner, "Introduction," 1.
3 Wanner, "Introduction," 17.
4 For more details, see Natalia Shlikhta, *Tserkva tykh, khto vyzhyv. Radianska Ukraina, seredyna 1940-kh – pochatok 1970-kh rr.* [The Church of Those Who Survived. Soviet Ukraine, mid-1940s – early 1970s] (Kharkiv: "Akta," 2011).
5 Bohdan R. Bociurkiw, "The Orthodox Church and the Soviet Regime in the Ukraine, 1953–1971," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* XIV, issue 2 (Summer 1972): 193–194.
6 See, for instance: Adriano Roccucci, *Stalin i patriarkh: Pravoslavnaia tserkov i sovetskaia vlast', 1917–1958* [Stalin and the Patriarch: Orthodox Church and Soviet Power, 1917–1958] (Moscow: Politicheskaia entsiklopediia, 2016), 391–401; Nadezhda Beliakova, "'Prizyvaiu otsov nastoiatelei strogo sobliudat' zakonodatelstvo.' Uchastiie naseleniia v tainstvakh Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi v pozdnem SSSR: mezhdu tserkovnymi i gosudarstvennymi ogranicheniiami," ["I am Calling on the Fathers Superiors to Strictly Observe the Legislation." Population's Participation in the Sacraments of the Orthodox Church in the Late USSR: Between Church and State Restrictions] *Istoriia* 4, no 7(23) (2013).
7 See, for instance: Natalia Shlikhta, "'Ukrainian' as 'Non-Orthodox': How Greek Catholics Were 'Reunited' with the Russian Orthodox Church," *State, Religion and Church* 2,

no 2 (2015): 77–95; Natalia Shlikhta, "The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church," in *Eastern Christianity and Politics in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Lucian N. Leustean (London: Routledge, 2014): 623–655; Natalia Shlikhta, "'Verschieden' und 'Identisch': Orthodoxe und griechisch-katholische Gläubige in der Ukrainischen Sowjetrepublik nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg," in *Religiöse Pluralität als Faktor des Politischen in der Ukraine,* ed. Katrin Boeckh and Oleh Turij (München: BiblionMedia, 2015): 249–276.

8 Shlikhta, *Tserkva tykh, khto vyzhyv,* 402 (Appendix 4).
9 Fond 1, Folder 31, File 2972, p. 8, Central State Archive of Civic Associations in Ukraine (TDAHO), Kyiv, Ukraine.
10 Beliakova, "'Prizyvaiu otsov nastoiatelei strogo sobliudat' zakonodatelstvo,'" 5.
11 Vlad Naumescu, *Modes of Religiosity in Eastern Christianity: Religious Processes and Social Change in Ukraine* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2008): 5.
12 Shlikhta, *Tserkva tykh, khto vyzhyv,* 404–405 (Appendix 6).
13 Shlikhta, *Tserkva tykh, khto vyzhyv,* 404–405 (Appendix 6).
14 Beliakova, "'Prizyvaiu otsov nastoiatelei strogo sobliudat' zakonodatelstvo,'" 8.
15 See, for instance: Beliakova, "'Prizyvaiu otsov nastoiatelei strogo sobliudat' zakonodatelstvo,'" 3; Tamara Dragadze, "The Domestication of Religion under Soviet Communism," in *Socialism: Ideas, Ideologies, and Local Practice*, ed. C. M. Hann (London and New York: Routledge, 1993): 148–156.
16 Iaroslava Datsyshyna, interview by author, Stryi, L'vivska Oblast, Ukraine, 20 March 2002. Similar evidence is provided in: Interview with Fr. Bohdan Shchur, the village of Derzhiv, Mykolaivsky rayon, L'vivska Oblast, 13 March 1993, P-1-1-331, p. 14, Archive of the Institute of Church History (AIIT), L'viv. Ukraine; Interview with Fr. Bohdan Nud, 1 April 1993, the village of Zagirochko, Zhydachivsky rayon, L'vivska Oblast, P-1-1-333, p. 34, AIIT.
17 Datsyshyna, interview by author.
18 Cited in: Viktor Yelensky, "The Revival before the Revival: Popular and Institutionalized Religion in Ukraine on the Eve of the Collapse of Communism," in *State Secularism and Lived Religion in Soviet Russia and Ukraine*, ed. Catherine Wanner (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 313.
19 Fond 4648, Folder 1, File 187, p. 25, Central State Archive of the Higher Organs of Power and Administration in Ukraine (TDAVO), Kyiv, Ukraine.
20 Fond 4648, Folder 5, File 220, p. 33, TDAVO.
21 Fond 4648, Folder 5, File 220, p. 33, TDAVO.
22 See, for instance: Beliakova, "'Prizyvaiu otsov nastoiatelei strogo sobliudat' zakonodatelstvo,'" 9.
23 Report by a commissioner in Volhynska Oblast, Fedulov, 1963. Fond 4648, Folder 1, File 407, p. 112, TDAVO.
24 Report by the CROCA republican branch on the introduction of civil rituals during the 1963 CROCA All-Union Meeting. Fond 1, Folder 31, File 2166, p. 15, TDAHO.
25 Wanner, "Introduction," 13.
26 Fond 1, Folder 24, File 1572, pp. 261–262, TDAHO.
27 "1990 Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches," http://www.jgray.org/codes/cceo-90eng.html (accessed on 31 January 2022).
28 Fond 1, Folder 24, File 1572, p. 261, TDAHO.
29 Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspective and Dimensions* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 210.
30 Bell, *Ritual: Perspective and Dimensions,* 211, 251.
31 Natalia Shlikhta, "Kak uchredit' 'antisovetskuiu organizatsiiu': k istorii Kestonskogo instituta i pisma veruiushchikh iz Pochaieva," [How to Establish an "Anti-Soviet Organization"? History of the Keston Institute and a Letter of Orthodox Believers from Pochaev Monastery] *Gosudarstvo, religiia, tserkov' v Rossii i za rubezhom* 35, issue 1 (2017): 251.

32 Fond 1, Folder 23, File 4555, pp. 186–187, TDAHO.
33 Korchevoi's report, 1950, fourth decade, Fond 1, Folder 24, File 783, p. 39, TDAHO.
34 I have not encountered official documents that prohibited non-infant baptisms. Indirect evidence from archival sources suggests that the prohibition was introduced in early 1963. See: Report by a commissioner in Krymska Oblast, Hlukhov, Fond 4648, Folder 1, File 407, p. 74, TDAVO.
35 Report by a commissioner in Kyivska Oblast, Sukhonin, 1965, Fond 4648, Folder 1, File 450, p. 41, TDAVO; report by a commissioner in Donetska Oblast on rituals in 1964–1965, Fond 4648, Folder 1, File 450, pp. 19–20, TDAVO; Kostiantyn Lytvyn's report to the CC CPU on the religious situation in the Ukr.SSR in 1968, Fond 4648, Folder 5, File 281, pp. 206–207, TDAVO; Fond 6991, Folder 2, File 574, p. 172, State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF), Moscow, Russian Federation.
36 Fond 6991, Folder 2, File 566, p. 5, GARF.
37 Report by a commissioner in Kyivska Oblast, Sukhonin, 1965, Fond 4648, Folder 1, File 450, p. 43, TDAVO.
38 Pinchuk's report of 1959, Fond 6991, Folder 1s, File 1788, p. 48, GARF.
39 Fond 6991, Folder 1s, File 1788, p. 48, GARF. See also: Fond 1, Folder 24, File 312, pp. 4–5, TDAHO; Fond 4648, Folder 1, File 144, p. 123, TDAVO.
40 The estimate is from a 1961 report by a commissioner in Zaporizka Oblast, Sydorenko. Fond 4648, Folder 1, File 298, p. 25.
41 For more details, see: Natalia Shlikhta, "'Orthodox' and 'Soviet': the Identity of Soviet Believers (1940s–early 1970s)," *Forum for Anthropology and Culture* no 11 (2015): 140–164.
42 Fond 1, Folder 24, File 4927, pp. 49–50, TDAHO.
43 1956 report by a commissioner in Stalinska Oblast, Chernomorchenko, Fond 4648, Folder 1, File 144, p. 130, TDAVO.
44 Chernomorchenko's report of 25 December 1956, Fond 4648, Folder 1, File 144, p. 124, TDAVO.
45 Georgii Edel'shtein, *Zapiski sel'skogo sviashchennika* [Notes of a Village Priest] (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo RGGU, 2005), 63.
46 Fond 4648, Folder 1, File 450, p. 111, TDAVO.
47 Fond 1, Folder 23, File 4555, p. 186, TDAHO.
48 Cited in: N. S. Gordienko, *Sovremennoe russkoe pravoslavie* [Contemporary Russian Orthodoxy] (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1987), 292.
49 Fond 4648, Folder 5, File 128, p. 206, TDAVO.
50 Fond 4648, Folder 5, File 128, p. 206, TDAVO.
51 Shlikhta, *Tserkva tykh, khto vyzhyv,* 404–405 (Appendix 6).
52 Dragadze, "The Domestication of Religion under Soviet Communism," 150.
53 Report by a commissioner in Dnipropetrovska Oblast', Dneprovoi, first decade, 1965. Fond 4648, Folder 1, File 450, p. 10, TDAVO.
54 Interview with Fr. Ivan Repela, Ivano-Frankivsk, 14 February 1993, P-1-1-275, p. 17, AIIT; Iaroslava Datsyshyna, interview by author, 22 March 2002.
55 Fond 1, Folder 31, File 2166, p. 17, TDAHO; Fond 1, Folder 23, File 4555, p. 281, TDAHO; Fond 5, Folder 33, File 90, p. 9, Russian State Archive of Contemporary History (RGANI), Moscow, Russian Federation.
56 See, for instance: A. S. Onyshchenko (ed.). *Religioznaia obriadnost': soderzhanie, evoliutsiia, otsenki*. [Religious Rituals: Essence, Evolution, Estimations] (Kyiv: Vyshcha shkola, 1988); Vladimir Tancher, *Religiia i sovremennyi mir: Problemy sotsialno-politicheskogo modernizma v russkom pravoslavii* [Religion and Contemporary World: Sociopolitical Modernism in Russian Orthodoxy] (Kyiv: Znannia, 1985).
57 William C. Fletcher, *Study in Survival: The Church in Russia 1927–1943* (London: S.P.C.K., 1965), 5.
58 Aleksei Beglov, "Praktika prichashcheniia pravoslavnykh prikhozhan sovetskoi epokhi," [The Communion Practice of the Orthodox Faithful in the Soviet Period], *Gosudarstvo, religiia, tserkov' v Rossii i za rubezhom* 30, no 3–4 (2012): 47.

59 Describing the much more secularised context of Moscow of that period, Aleksei Beglov mentions the increase of communion rates by 3–7 times during Lent. Beglov, "Praktika prichashcheniia pravoslavnykh prikhozhan sovetskoi epokhi," 53.
60 Fond 4648, Folder 1, File 176, pp. 19–20, 60, 105, TDAVO; Fond 4648, Folder 1, File 193, p. 135, TDAVO; Fond 4648, Folder 5, File 7, p. 101, TDAVO.
61 Nadieszda Kizenko, "Sacramental Confession in Modern Russia and Ukraine," in *State Secularism and Lived Religion in Soviet Russia and Ukraine*, ed. Catherine Wanner (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 211.
62 Gordienko, *Sovremennoe russkoe pravoslavie,* 290.
63 Fond 6991, Folder 2, File 2a, p. 100, GARF.
64 Vladislav Tsipin, *Istoriia Russkoi Tserkvi 1917–1997* [History of the Russian Church, 1917–1997] (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Spaso-Preobrazhenskogo Valaamskogo monastyria, 1997), 372; Nadieszda Kizenko, "Ispoved' v sovetskoe vremia," [Confession in the Soviet Period] *Gosudarstvo, religiia, tserkov' v Rossii i za rubezhom* 30, no 3–4 (2012): 21.
65 "Dumky – Zhurnal MP," [Thoughts – JMP], a notebook entitled *Spovid'* [Confession], Private archive of Fr. Mykhailo Datsyshyn, Stryi, L'vivska Oblast', Ukraine.
66 Fond 6991, Folder 2, File 2a, p. 100, GARF.
67 Bishop Isidor, "Sushchestvennyie svoistva Istinnoi Tserkvi," [The Essential Characteristics of the True Church] *Zhurnal Moskovskoi patriarkhii* 5 (1955): 47.
68 P. Gnedich (rev.), "O pravoslavnom ponimanii Tservi i edinstva tserkovnoi zhizni," [About the Orthodox Understanding of the Church and the Unity of Church Life] *Zhurnal Moskovskoi patriarkhii* 8 (1962): 54.
69 Gnedich, "O pravoslavnom ponimanii Tservi i edinstva tserkovnoi zhizni," 55; A. Georgiyevskii, "Smysl i znacheniye obriadov Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi," [The True Meaning of the Rituals of the Orthodox Church] *Zhurnal Moskovskoi patriarkhii* 4 (1957): 51; V. Talyzin, "Sobornost' i avtokefaliia," [*Sobornost* and autocephaly] *Zhurnal Moskovskoi patriarkhii* 7 (1959): 54–55.
70 Wanner, "Introduction," 8.
71 Wanner, "Introduction," 9.

2 The Erosion of Tradition

Life Cycle Rites among the Orthodox in the Kama River Region (1950s–1980s)

Svetlana Riazanova

In 1972, the Commissioner for Religious Affairs of the Perm Region issued a report on the following incident, which he judged unacceptable: "An unauthorised Orthodox priest operates in the village of Kriukovo. He baptises, buries and gives absolution to all comers".[1] This short phrase raises a number of questions: Why does the priest not work in an officially registered parish, of which there were many at that time in the region? Why do the villagers turn to a self-proclaimed cleric, behind whom there is no official structure and whose activities may not conform to canonical requirements? And finally: Are there many people willing to turn to such a figure in the era of developed socialism in the industrially developed region of the Urals?

In order to answer these questions, we have to understand the role played by such unofficial priests in the performance of life cycle rituals, provided fellow villagers were not frightened by the fear of breaking the law and were not deterred by the disapproval of their non-religious fellow citizens. The answers will help us to understand the role played by Orthodoxy in a society that for many years struggled with religion at all levels of social life. In the second half of the 20th century, the pre-revolutionary clergy had been almost completely destroyed in the Soviet provinces, and the vast majority of churches and the entire system of religious education had been abolished. At the same time, however, the experience of unofficial religiosity, which existed among so-called Orthodox sectarians in the pre-revolutionary period, was preserved. It was characterised by a fairly high level of organisation of believers and the ability to exist without church hierarchy. Attempts by the authorities to influence religious life were perceived by believers as coming from the devil and met with passive resistance in the form of illegal rituals.

All this baggage could not remain unclaimed in the conditions of a new persecution of religion in the post-war USSR. But it was used by a new generation of believers, within re-opened churches and newly trained priests. The religious behaviour of believers was also influenced by competition from socialist culture, which offered a different lifestyle. These circumstances determined the characteristics of religious life in the province, some aspects of which I would like to examine in this chapter.

For my analysis, I have chosen the Orthodox community of the Perm (at the time: Molotov) region. In the academic literature, this region is called the upper

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Kama region (in this chapter, we will simply refer to the Kama region as the European part of the Urals). Traditionally, a significant part of the believers in this area were Orthodox Christians. In their religious life, they reproduced traditions that were established when the first missioners came to the Urals in the 13th century. Despite some changes in the course of history, the Orthodox community of the Kama region reproduced religious peculiarities, patterns of church attendance, and participation in religious activities, which will be discussed below.

Unfortunately, researchers have only examined the religious life of the Orthodox in the Kama Region in the context of state-confessional relations,[2] and on the basis of a rather narrow range of sources. Nevertheless, other regions of the USSR have been the object of such studies focusing on the late Soviet period.[3] The examination of archival sources will help reduce the gap in our understanding of the specifics of the religiosity of Soviet citizens. The situation was compensated by the work of supervising bodies thanks to which a set of documents, fixing peculiarities of religious life from a certain point of view, was formed. For the provinces, such documents were the materials of regional funds of Commissioners for Religious Affairs, ideologically biased, but providing an opportunity to read "between the lines". The few analytical notes of local scholars of religion, responses to citizens' appeals, forms of included observation conducted by members of the CPSU, and data from questionnaire surveys form a chorus of opinions and positions that allows us to avoid a one-sided view of the religious space of the Soviet period in the provinces. The emphasis on overcoming religion as a relic of social life has caused historians and sociologists working on the basis of Marxist ideology to miss on a generation of post-war believers. This was particularly true in the provinces, where one or two specialists studied the problems of religion.

This situation was compensated by the work of supervising bodies, which produced a corpus of sources documenting the peculiarities of religious life, albeit from a certain point of view.[4] For the provinces, such documents can be found within regional archival repositories of Commissioners for Religious Affairs, which are admittedly ideologically biased[5] but provide an opportunity to read "between the lines".[6] They include a few analytical notes of local scholars of religion, responses to citizens' appeals, forms of participant observation conducted by members of the CPSU, and data from questionnaire surveys, which taken together offer a broad range of opinions and positions[7] that allow us to avoid a one-sided view of the religious space of the Soviet period in the provinces.

The chronological frame of our study spans the years 1947–1985 – a period when the local leadership constantly monitored Orthodox believers and institutions of the region, based on criteria that remained stable throughout, which facilitates a historical and comparative analysis.

The main research topic of our chapter is to determine the place of life cycle rituals in the life of an Orthodox Permian in the late Soviet period. On the one hand, it was precisely this type of cult activity that was the object of the closest attention from the authorities, which makes it possible to use these sources. On the other hand, the participation in these rituals, along with the mandatory attendance of the liturgy, has traditionally been regarded as an indicator of the degree of involvement

in religious life. Our hypothesis is that, under the influence of political and social factors, there was a gradual curtailment of official religious life cycle rituals (baptism, marriage, and funeral) in favour of vernacular practices and socialist rituals. I suggest that the main reasons for this were the pressure towards religion by the Soviet authorities and the emergence of a new generation of believers. The new Orthodox faithful could be members of the Communist youth organisations, watch films with atheistic content, and have little knowledge of the canons and sacred texts. In the Soviet environment, they chose to live their religious lives in accessible ways, including through participation in rituals that mattered to them.

In order to understand the factors constraining the choices of Orthodox believers regarding participation in religious rituals, it is worth referring to a series of legislative acts, mainly adopted under Nikita Khrushchev's leadership,[8] which formally improved the position of the Russian Orthodox Church. At the time, the Church even received the right to register new communities, while preserving[9] the leading role of the church executive body, composed of 20 representatives of laity.[10]

In fact, this policy undermined the role of the clergy, which became dependent on decisions that the lay bodies took.[11] An example of such pressure exercised on the clergy is the letter of believers from the village of Egva, who complained that "the church elder and the accountant, previously condemned, have slandered the young priest".[12] During the peak of post-Stalin persecution of the Church (1958–1964), state control was also strengthened over the Synod, the highest organ of administration of the Church between two bishop councils, over clergy in the parishes, educational institutions, and the publishing houses of the Church.[13] The Decree "On Religious Associations" (1975) allowed parishes, as legal entities, to acquire vehicles and religious utensils but abolished the right to appeal to higher authorities regarding the closure of churches. By that time, whole cities and districts in the Perm Region (known as the Molotov region from 1940 to 1957) were completely devoid of churches.[14] From 1959 to 1964, the number of churches in the region decreased by 75%, and this position remained unchanged until Perestroika.[15] All these measures should have led to the curtailment of official ritual activities and, ideally, to the complete fading away of individual religiosity.

The course of religious life was influenced not only by anti-religious pressure. During the period under study, the Kama Region was highly urbanised, and there was a marked rural exodus towards regional centres, which also affected the clergy. The transition to an urban lifestyle forced the believer to adapt to a wholly different rhythm and to abide by a strict work schedule. Labour discipline, female work, which implied changes in gender roles, and the organisation of leisure activities for adolescents and young people, interfered with church attendance and active participation in religious practices. The specificity of urban life did not stimulate the reproduction of the traditional model of ritual participation either. An important role was played by the education system, which imposed the formation of a non-religious worldview.[16] Taken together, these circumstances should have led to the gradual elimination of the religious activity of Soviet citizens, including those rituals that were associated with the most important phases of personal life: birth, marriage, and death. However, forced secularisation of society turned out to have

less obvious results. In the following sections, I will show how the inhabitants of the Perm region in the Soviet era combined in their religious life not only the status of citizen of the USSR and the desire to remain believers, but also the significant influence of anti-religious propaganda on the Orthodox community.

Life cycle rites in official religious practice

The participation of Soviet citizens in life cycle rites deserves special attention for several reasons. On the one hand, they do not always testify to a strong faith and can constitute part of the traditional behaviour. On the other hand, engaging in these practices in spite of atheistic ideology indicates a conscious choice of the believer.

Before analysing the extent to which Orthodox believers practiced the rituals associated with the most important events in life (birth, marriage, and death), it is worth paying attention to the historical and cultural context, which determined the local specificity of attitudes towards religious practices. The European Urals is one of those territories that experienced the influence of missionary activity relatively late for Medieval Russia. Russian missionary activity led to Christianisation as late as the 13th century, which was explained by the specifics of internal colonisation in Russia. Even after the creation of a network of churches and monasteries, active participation in church rites was often difficult, due to the harsh climate and a poor road network. Starting from the 18th century, new churches were built only when the nearest church was extremely remote or the local one was dilapidated, and the diocesan authorities were not always interested in spending money on construction, which made the network of churches very loose.[17] The region was mostly rural, which not only was reflected in infrastructure and logistics but also determined the way of life. The population, which was tied to the rhythm of agricultural activity, had to adapt to the constraints of land cultivation and crop harvesting.

Cultural factors also played a role. The Western Urals has traditionally been a place of internal exile (Perm was the westernmost city where exiles were allowed to live in pre-revolutionary times) and a refuge for Old Believers who left the regions of central Russia in an effort to avoid pressure from the state church. This stimulated the formation of population groups who mistrusted the official religion and its cult.

The combination of these circumstances informed the local specificity of participation in religious life. Among the laity, a model of Orthodox behaviour gradually developed, which included participation in parish life: "diligent church attendance (at least on major holidays), listening to the word of God, active participation in the life of the parish".[18] Such an attitude did not exclude independence from the official church in the organisation of rituals: it is no coincidence that, according to the *Spiritual Regulations* (1721), the Orthodox faithful did not have the right to organise church services at home, receive wandering priests, or baptise infants unofficially.[19] Unemployed clerics and villagers who wielded authority performed life cycle rites at home, compensating the weaknesses of official church infrastructure in the region.

After the October Revolution of 1917 and the promulgation of the Decree on the Separation of Church and State, this situation became further entrenched. The impoverishment of the clergy forced priests to look for additional income by conducting rituals at home, in a simplified form.[20] The deterioration of the clergy's moral reputation,[21] due to the weakening of control from the Church hierarchy and anti-religious propaganda, undermined the authority of the official Church as an institution. This, in turn, led to a considerable decrease in the number of baptisms.[22] Nevertheless, anti-religious policies and destructive tendencies within the Church itself did not lead to a complete rejection of the customary rites and rituals, the performance of which could entail a long journey and a likely blame by the authorities.[23] As before, the rites were performed by authoritative laypeople, Old Believers,[24] and travelling monks.[25] Throughout the history of Orthodoxy in the Kama region, life cycle rites remained a significant part of the life of the faithful; yet these rites were often performed in the format that seemed most convenient to the believers.

In the post-war period, thanks to the gradual opening of churches, it became possible to restore the system of official rituals. The extent to which this system was developed and remained in demand can only be judged by fragmentary data from the Commissioner for Religious Affairs' archival fond. It should be kept in mind that data obtained through monitoring did not evenly cover all the districts of the region. There is practically no information on the places of compact residence of Muslims, although there were places of worship there.

In addition, the statistics of life cycle rituals was not absolutely reliable. In a situation of near total ideological control, the clergy tried not to record the rituals they performed at the homes of the faithful. The believers themselves concealed the performance of religious rituals, especially if they took place outside the region (which will be discussed below). On the other hand, the mere fact of participation in the rite could not serve in itself as an indicator of religiosity: baptism was traditionally considered a "necessary" ritual (as is often the case now),[26] or the rite could be performed under the pressure of older relatives within the family. It is noteworthy that one of the priests openly said: "Almost all believers are now 'ritualists' (*obriadovery*); they do not know the Bible and have no knowledge about religion".[27] Such a characterisation could have been born out of a desire to please the interviewer (a well-known ideologist of atheism and anti-religious propaganda in the Perm region). However, in my opinion, the cleric may have had his own reasons for this.

An analysis of the data contained in annual reports suggests that the civil registry system was not able to supplant religious rites.[28] Throughout the period under review, baptisms of not only newborns and children but also adults persisted in certain groups of believers. Condemnation by party members and Komsomol workers apparently did not have any significant impact in these cases. Whether in towns or villages, among adults or children, non-party or party members, baptisms remained widespread.

However, despite the stability of the rites, we can observe a tendency towards their decline by the mid-1980s. This is especially evident in the case of baptisms:

while 50% of children born in 1957 were baptised, by 1985 the proportion had fallen to 11%.[29] There can be several explanations for this. From the early 1950s onwards, the parents of baptised children belonged to the generations born after the year of the "great turn" (1929) and were socialised in a socialist state. Their education was accompanied by constant criticism of religion through the school system, the radio, and the press. The vast majority of young people joined the Communist youth organisations, which could strongly influence the formation of their worldview, including with regard to Church and ritual. However, even when using documents "for official use", such as reports of commissioners for religious affairs and various official memos, the researcher cannot be immune from distortion of information. Just as the CRA plenipotentiary himself was interested in creating a favourable image of the situation in the religious sphere in his region, believers very often tried to hide (or at least not to advertise) the fact that a potential pioneer had a baptismal cross. Therefore, baptisms could be performed in secret and not included in the statistics.

The desire to conceal participation in rituals is evidenced by the records of the metrical books, which were regularly checked by the CRA plenipotentiary and his assistants. The church records contain information about citizens who came to Perm from the Kirov, Sverdlovsk and Magadan Regions, the Bashkir ASSR, the cities of Bratsk, Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii, Irkutsk, and Kishinev for baptism: "Communists and Komsomol members leave for distant places to conceal their official and party position".[30] It could be that this geographic mobility was related to the practice of compulsory work assignments. Young specialists were very often sent to work in other regions of the USSR after training. During holidays, young people would come home to visit their parents and could use their free time to perform rituals. Most often these were Communists and Komsomol members who did not want to tarnish their party reputation, but it was equally true of non-party members who feared social censure. In my view, having a membership card of the CPSU and taking part in rituals was an example of Soviet religiosity, in which belief in God was combined with an identification of oneself as a Soviet citizen.[31] In some cases, party membership became an obligation that it was inconvenient and dangerous to evade, even for a believer. I had several conversations with one of my grandmothers, who had been baptised as a child (1929) and began attending church immediately after the collapse of the USSR, despite being a former member of the Communist Party. In her own words, to hold any position (she was head of a production unit in a city printing house) implied membership in the CPSU, the refusal of which was seen at once as nonsense, incompatible with official duties, and disloyal to the authorities. My grandmother herself confessed that she had never stopped believing in God all her life.

Starting from 1967, the overall number of baptisms increased somewhat[32] due to the baptism of schoolchildren and adults (up to a sevenfold increase in some areas and due to occurrences of mass baptisms)[33] who were not baptised earlier for fear of persecution. The growth seems to have been a consequence of the relaxation of local control. It is also worth noting that the increase occurred chiefly in the rural areas, where the authorities could be more liberal, being away from the centre.

Control (especially in remote villages) was more difficult to implement, and the pressure on active believers was less effective than in cities:

> In the Cherdynskii and Uinskii districts, there were cases of baptisms of whole families. On some Sundays, 40–50 people were baptised in the village of Zverevo. Some religious communities introduced discounts for family baptisms. For example, in the town of Dobrianka, if three people were baptised, they would charge for two.[34]

Residents of the rural areas of the Perm Region were in an incomparably worse financial and living situation than the population of Perm and the fairly large towns of the Kama Region and had almost no prospects for career advancement. Those who were dissatisfied with this situation moved to the regional centre if possible, where they began to behave according to the rules of Soviet society. In the countryside, more elements of traditional life were preserved. Religious behaviour was not an expression of disagreement with the ideology of atheism, but a usual way of life.

This is also a time of growing popularity of baptisms in the families of Komsomol and Communist members, mostly in the countryside as well.[35] Party membership was not a guarantee of high ideological consciousness in the post-war period. Much more, it reflected a desire to fit into the established socialist community and to avoid possible problems for oneself and relatives. Since the degree of individual religiosity, often concealed, was impossible to control effectively, unlike knowledge of the CPSU or Komsomol statutes, people with very different outlooks and attitudes joined the ranks of the party. The presence of a believer in the Communist Party was as possible as the presence of a thief in the Department for the Prevention of theft of Socialist Property or a bribe-taker in the Soviet judicial system. The lack of an effectively functioning system of positive selection, combined with an ongoing process of negative selection since the 1920s, led, among other things, to an erosion of the ranks of local party organisations, where faith in God became one of the indicators of this erosion of the party. Such behaviour was one manifestation of the "performative shift", which Judith Butler[36] and Alexei Yurchak[37] have written about.

In any case, the generation born in the 1950s gradually changed its attitude towards the baptism of newborns, taking on a rather indifferent position on this issue. The youth followed the advice of the elder generation in psychologically complex situations, such as the fear of childbirth,[38] or more often because of the risk that grandmothers would not agree to babysit unbaptised children.[39] "Many of those who baptized their children who were say that they did it under the pressure of the older generation, so that they would help them afterwards".[40] Women could use the expectant mother's psychological state as an excuse when confronted by the Komsomol leadership, "Lopatnikova, being afraid of childbirth, gave in to her mother's persuasion and performed the rite of baptism".[41] It can only be stated with certainty that membership in the Komsomol was not enough to warrant a renunciation of religious behaviour.

Baptism of a child as a guarantee of help from the older generation seems to have had a more secular basis. Throughout the Soviet period, the problem of day care for children remained acute. Families who could not find a nursery for their children

automatically lost a large part of their income if the mother did not work. An additional incentive for women to take up employment was the compulsory three-year work placements after completing their education. This created additional difficulties in later employment, as the diploma was effectively invalid without the placement certificate. Thus, due to the peculiarities of the labour organisation of the USSR, believing pensioners held a great lever of influence on the younger generation. This cannot be considered evidence of the active religious life of the parents of a baptised child, but it does indicate the persistence of religious behaviour in the older generation and the possibility of compromise in this area. This is confirmed by one of the Perm priests who, in a conversation with an interviewer in 1969, noted that often even godparents "do not know how to cross themselves" and the parents baptise their children under the pressure of the older generation.[42]

Of particular note are cases of baptisms when "false parents" stood for the real ones, who may not even have been aware of the situation.[43] The brief mention of such cases in the CRA plenipotentiaries' reports makes it impossible to state with certainty for what reason the real parents did not take part in the rite. The only facts on the surface are that the fathers and mothers of baptised children then had to justify themselves to the management of their enterprises because they were "spoiling the socialist statistics". Bearing in mind the performative shift that was taking place in the post-war USSR, we cannot say how sincere these repentances were, or whether the parents themselves had not made such arrangements. Obviously, all such events had accomplices – a priest who did not bother to check the documents of the child's representatives (it is unlikely that passports were forged for this purpose), citizens willing to fake a kinship with a child, and grandmothers who, according to the records, were certainly present at the baptisms. Separate consideration should be given to the meaning that adults endowed the rite with: in a socialist society, a cross around a child's neck did not necessarily mean that he was truly churched, nor did it guarantee the salvation of his soul. Since membership in the Orthodox Church (as in other religious organisations) offered no obvious social benefits to the individual, and since inclusion in the Soviet educational system minimised religious socialisation, it seems most likely that baptism took on the function of spiritual protection for the child. The basis for this assertion is that such a meaning persists within the boundaries of vernacular Orthodoxy even today, not only in the Kama region, but also in other regions of Russia.

Nor were religious wedding ceremonies a popular rite in the region: they fell from 14% in 1957 to just 3% by the early 1980s. Admittedly, these figures do not take into account those spouses who were married religiously years after a civil wedding, but such cases were extremely rare. The decline in the rite of marriage seems to be quite natural. It is an act which is hard to conceal, even with a small number of witnesses present. A religious wedding marks a person as an active believer who, by his behaviour, challenges the secular system of marriage registration, perceived as insufficient. Another factor in the decline of religious marriages was the much smaller involvement of the older generation in the ceremony in dictating established norms of family behaviour. Through the efforts of the ideological and educational system, church ceremonies were presented as outdated (one could

say, unfashionable), not modern, and for this reason unsuitable for young couples. The cost of the rite for young people, who are not always well off, could have been an additional discouraging factor.

One finds a similar picture in regard to funerals: from 1947 to 1981, their proportion was divided by two (from 34% to 17%). The drop in the number of religious funerals cannot, in my opinion, be explained by environmental pressure alone. Obviously, the rite could no longer be detrimental to the social career of the deceased, but it could have an impact on relatives involved in the rite. A weighty argument that Soviet people were afraid to perform funeral rites because of possible sanctions was the increase in funerals during the perestroika era and later. In Soviet times, believers had either to make funerals as inconspicuous as possible (e.g., to celebrate the funeral in a rural church away from the deceased's place of residence) or to modify the rite itself.[44] Those who did organise religious funerals, however, sometimes did so in great pomp. Archpriest Lukkanen thus declared in a conversation in 1975:

> The faithful prefer to order religious services and buy expensive candles to emphasise deep religiosity. For example, in the West [of the USSR] for funerals they put 4 candles on the coffin, while here they put up to 40 or more. When several deceased are buried, there is a competition among the relatives – who will put more.[45]

This competition not only cancels the power of religious feeling, in my opinion, but also indicates the transformation of individual religiosity towards the primacy of the external rather than the internal.

We have to admit that no matter how crude and inconsistent with the historical tradition the atheistic propaganda was, in conjunction with the system of secular education, it exerted a large degree of influence on the Orthodox believers in the region. Orthodoxy did not so much lose its positions in the Kama Region as it progressively took on compromise forms of existence and survival in a socialist society.

The underground rites of the life cycle: the choice of the faithful

In the Soviet period, the major life cycle rituals, which followed or at least reproduced the established tradition, were not only performed in churches. To avoid condemnation from the atheistic part of society, Orthodox Permians also turned to the usual, independently organised rituals. This variant of life cycle rituals became a compromise between the Soviet lifestyle and the desire to remain religious. Unofficial rites were more often implemented in small, rural settlements, rather than in the regional centre or industrial towns like Berezniki and Chaikovskii. This phenomenon is easily explained by a greater role of close social ties and a higher level of trust within small communities of believers, as well as remoteness from the diocesan centre, which weakened the control by official structures.

Some vernacular practices, which combined religious and non-canonical – even at times mythological – aspects, also persisted in the underground. This was due

not only due to gaps in the network of existing parish churches and monasteries, but also because of established norms of religious life. In some parts of the Komi Region, even in the presence of an actual parish church with a fully staffed clergy, the services of "baptismal grandmothers" (women elders), and the use of baptismal stones, etc., were widespread.[46] The baptismal elder women were also addressed when it was necessary to expel or exorcise the so-called *ikotki* (evil spirits, known as "hiccup" spirits): when such problems arose, residents of the region's villages would address the official clergy only in the last instance. The demand for this kind of rites was not related to the availability of open churches under official diocesan administration. Of course, the distant location of the church, poor weather conditions, and lack of priests were additional incentives for turning to baptismal women. The reason for this seems to have been the wide range of skills of these women: unlike priests, they also acted as healers, guardians of tradition, and were competent in everyday matters. Those issues which until now had not been fully canonically defined (e.g., the practice of exorcism) were dealt with without bureaucratic red tape and the need to refer to a higher hierarchy, which was particularly important in conditions of poor roads and telephone communication.

In addition, rites performed by provincial clergy (or by "knowledgeable" laypeople) were also in demand. A report from 1964 noted that in a number of settlements in the Perm Region, services were conducted by "various rogues and former monastic people (*monashestvuiushchie*) who were not registered".[47] While the term of "rogues" could be due to the plenipotentiary's frustration with the lack of control over the situation, we are left with the notion of "former" monks. The document does not clarify what gives a cleric his ex-status – whether they are "former" monks because the monasteries have been dissolved, or whether the person has been stripped of his religious title. It is unlikely that party officials were capable of ascertaining the exact status of such an itinerant cleric, who did not always have a passport. It is quite possible that someone who was not officially registered and was thus not authorised to perform rites was automatically considered an ex-monk by the authorities. The lack of registration did not make the cleric less competent, but it did dilute the controlling function of the authorities in the sphere of religion and potentially threatened to reduce financial flows to the budget, since the payment for such rites was also undeclared.

Such "healers and sectarians" were found in almost every large settlement.[48] The mention of the size of a town or city shows that recourse to the services of itinerant clergy was not solely due to a shortage of churches. This raises the question of the additional incentives for such a choice, and the most probable one is a lack of trust in the official church, which was in fact run by the Soviet authorities and whose priests exhibited a level of income and way of life that was not wholly socialist. The appeal to "sectarians" was also reinforced by the traditionally strong presence of various denominations of Old Believers in the Urals, as well as the popularity of hermitages. Apparently, the image of the holy elder (*starets*), who was not included in the official church hierarchy, continued to be endowed with high authority.

Officials reported on lay readers or chanters, who "pray over the dead" and perform services "without being ordained and without paying taxes; as deacons they

organise services at their homes".[49] This quotation shows not only financial anxiety on the part of the local authorities, concerned about replenishing the budget. Between the lines, one can read about the existence in the provinces of a layer of educated believers whose level of familiarity with the church service and sacred scriptures made it possible to organise local alternative rituals. Since such services must have been attended by people who were familiar with, and regularly attended religious practices, such alternative rites were clearly conducted on a high enough level. What we can also imply is that churches were in short supply, or so inconveniently located that they were replaced in everyday life by such domestic "surrogates".

Unlike the common vernacular practices, the organisers of such rituals claimed to follow the canonical norms of Orthodoxy, but all the services they performed were held outside church walls, most often in private apartments. Thus, a memorandum from 1956 includes a report about a citizen who organised a private prayer house and performed religious rites for many years without having been ordained priest.[50] Since the archival document mentions Perm, one can only speculate as to what made the volunteer clergyman appealing to his visitors. Admittedly, the services conducted may not necessarily have conformed to the official canons of the Russian Orthodox Church, since the reports repeatedly noted visits to Old Believer churches in the absence or inconvenient location of official ones. It could be that the man had more flexibility in responding to the needs of the faithful, not being restricted by the traditional duties of a parish priest. What is clear is that he was able to remain invisible to the authorities for a long time, which shows the high solidarity of visitors and the demand for religious home services.

By 1970, the situation was unchanged, and archival documents still mentioned unofficial services, for instance a memorial service celebrated in the village of Tis, where, in addition to relatives, ten outsiders were invited to attend.[51] This is not enough to conclude that there was an "underground" house church. It is quite possible that the memorial service was organised by an itinerant clergyman. Unfortunately, we have no information about the existence of a church in Tis at that time, or the availability of a priest to perform the required rites. What we do know is that funeral services were still in demand in part of the population, despite the possible social repercussions. It is likely that this kind of religious "self-service" was not a set of isolated cases but constituted a whole system of alternative rituals. The fact that such independent forms of cult practice are mentioned quite rarely testifies to the secrecy that surrounded them rather than to their exceptional character.

It is noteworthy that the organisers of these "underground" religious ceremonies were predominantly women, generally nuns. For example, the faithful in Lower Kurya complained to the CRA plenipotentiary that a nun named Varvara "makes a lot of money" by holding memorial services.[52] The authors of the complaint did not mention that the holding of services by a female cleric could make them invalid or insufficient in meaning for the deceased. Rather, their indignation seems to be due to a reluctance to incur additional costs. Since we are talking about a functioning church with a stable parish community, the question naturally arises as to why an officially appointed priest could not conduct the same services for a lower price. Since we have no record of any complaint by the priest against his competitor,

we can assume that, either the church lacked a clergyman, or he had to serve several churches simultaneously, which made it impossible for him to always respond quickly to the needs of the faithful.

In the village of Korshunovo, "the nun Serafima gathered believers at her place and performed ceremonies, saying that the Synodal Church and its priests are not genuine, that it is all organised by the Soviet government".[53] On the one hand, the demand for meetings outside the church is obvious: traditionally, there were no churches in the countryside, only in larger villages. On the other hand, there is the influence of the traditions of the Catacomb Church, who as a matter of principle did not recognise Soviet authority and who worked with believers at an unofficial level. What is interesting is the presence in the village of a stable community sympathetic to the ideas expressed by the nun. The very fact of the meetings confirms the existence of distrust not only of the Church as a social institution, but also of the whole system of Soviet power among certain groups of believers. The mention of the "non-authentic" character of official rituals may give a clue as to why popular houses of worship could compete with canonical churches and self-declared clerics with officially registered priests.

Sometimes ordinary lay women took over the organisation of religious services: in the village of Biziar in 1965, the authorities found a group of believers led by a woman who knew the canons and, on this basis, served as their priest.[54] It seems that the emergence of such situations had to do not only with the lack of men willing to organise such practices, but also with processes of emancipation of women in Soviet society.[55] We do not know how old the woman from the village of Biziar was or where she might have received her religious education. It was this layer of educated laypeople who served as one of the social forces that contributed to the restoration of church life in the post-Soviet era.

The persistence of illegal ritual practices, in a context of gradual decrease in the number of participants in the rites of the official Church, gives us ground to say that Orthodoxy in the Ural hinterland did not so much give way to a secular way of life but rather retreated further and further into the private space, adapting to Soviet life. This evolution was reinforced by local traditions that had existed for decades.

Conclusion

The information contained in the Perm archival fond of the Council for Religious Affairs allows us to examine life cycle rituals in the Kama Region in the late Soviet period from two different angles. On the one hand, we witness the preservation of historically established forms and practices of official Orthodoxy; this testifies to the fact that the local Orthodoxy retained at least part of the tradition, despite the oppressive policies of the state and the passing of older generation of believers. The stability of everyday practices, which testify to the close merging of Orthodox culture with local beliefs, allows us to speak of the deep roots of religiosity, despite low-church attendance rates and a limited acquaintance with dogma. Statements of various clergymen of that time also testify about this: "almost all believers are now are 'ritual believers' (*obriadovery*), very often even the godparents 'do not

even know how to cross themselves'".[56] Of course, the documents do not allow us to talk about the strength of religious feelings, but they clearly indicate a readiness to participate in religious life. The priest of the small village of Egva thus characterised such an approach in 1977. "Believers are no longer the same, they go to church when they have free time, not because they are drawn to the church. Well, there is also the force of habit, but not the inner call and Christian devotion as it used to be".[57]

On the other hand, evolutions in the way the life cycle rites were carried out after the war mirrored changes taking place in Soviet society at the time, which could not but affect the behaviour of believers. The carrying out of religious rites outside the church, the admittance of new people who were chosen to serve (unemployed clerics, wandering monks, and lay women), and the independent organisation of rituals did not mean the curtailment of official religious practices. All this testifies to the fact that the forced, state-led secularisation actually led to an increase of the number of options in which rituals, so vital for the Orthodox believers, could be performed.

Notes

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3 The Rybnitser Rebbe and Underground Jewish Religious Life in the Soviet Town of Rybnitsa (1960s–1970s)

Maria Kaspina

Introduction

The Rybnitser *Rebbe* (Khaim-Zanlvl Abramovich, 1896–1995) was a Hasidic *tsadik* who lived in the small Moldavian town of Rybnitsa during the years 1941–1972. In the Hasidic tradition, a *Tsadik* is a spiritual leader, who embodies and channels the Divine flow of blessing to the entire world of common Jews. Khaim-Zanvl Abramovich was not the official rabbi of the town since it had neither a synagogue nor a registered Jewish Congregation. He was called a *Rebbe* by his American Hasidic followers, meaning a tsadik or a righteous person. This term, used in the Hasidic movement, refers to spiritual leadership and is related to special Hasidic dynasties, such as Lubavitcher Rebbe, Ruzhiner Rebbe, and Satmar Rebbe. Khaim-Zanvl did not come from a famous dynasty; his parents were not rebbies themselves. This is why he was later called Rybnitser Rebbe by the name of the town where he became renowned. In Rybnitsa itself, he was known as a ritual specialist who held underground religious services in different private houses in Rybnitsa, a person who can slaughter a kosher chicken, and as a unique authority on all questions of Judaism.

This chapter focuses on the case study of Jewish religious life in Rybnitsa in the 1960s–1970s in order to understand the phenomenon of Judaism as a lived religion in the domestic sphere, far from the political centers on the Soviet periphery. Our main sources are materials collected during field research among inhabitants and immigrants from Rybnitsa in 2006–2019 (around 300 interviews),[1] as well as hagiographic memoirs and collections in Hebrew and Yiddish, published by followers of the Rybnitsa Rebbe in the USA and Israel.[2]

The first academic paper about the Rybnitser Rebbe and Soviet Jewish religion, memory, and identity was written by Sebastian Shulman.[3] Shulman admits that there is a temptation to characterize the Rybnitser Rebbe and his community during the Soviet period as heroes of religious resistance against a totalitarian atheist regime, but this applies less easily to the other Soviet Jewish people, who seem to reflect a particular post-war "Soviet Jewish" sensibility combining ethnic identification and belonging to the socialist state. He argues that the Rybnitser Rebbe "can perhaps be seen as a kind of underground spiritual entrepreneur who opened a religious 'black market' where Jews could operate outside the state's restrictions and form an ethnic and ethical community of their own".[4]

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Our research stands in the continuity of Shulman's study, involving more materials and interviews and focusing on how the Jews of Rybnitsa perceived and reacted to the Rebbe, as well as on their religious practices.

Judaism in the USSR (1960s–1980s)

Religious life in the USSR in the post-war years had its own specifics. It was impossible to observe Judaism publicly due to the difficult historical and political situation in which the Jews found themselves after the war. Those who openly observed the commandments of Judaism were subjected to strong pressure from the authorities. Jews were forced to partially violate religious laws as they tried to somehow adhere to the tradition without attracting undue attention from the state. During the Khrushchev "Thaw", a certain liberalization of policies toward religion allowed for greater observance of Judaism. Starting from 1957, the printing of Jewish calendars resumed, and a prayer book entitled *Peace* was published, containing a prayer for the USSR; a yeshiva was opened in Moscow; and some synagogues continued to function. However, already in the early 1960s, the persecution of Judaism resumed. In 1959, the Soviet authorities began to impose restrictions on the baking of matzah. Parcels to the USSR from abroad with prayer accessories, matzah, and religious books were mostly opened at the border and sent back. At times, the Soviet government suppressed more strictly the production of kosher meat and the baking of matzah on Passover. As Mordechai Altshuler showed in his study of the Religion and Jewish Identity in the Soviet Union, despite the fact that observance of kosher was maintained mainly within the family, there were at least two public practices: *shekhita* (ritual slaughter of cattle) and baking matzah, which the entire community was directly or indirectly involved in.[5] These practices were persecuted by the state.

A representation that became commonplace in the study of the religiosity of Soviet Jewry after the works of Zvi Gitelman is the idea that, among Jews in the Soviet and post-Soviet space, the "thick tradition" of real Judaism was replaced by a "thin culture", a cultural identity without full-fledged ethnic characteristics, such as language, religion, customs, cuisine, costume, music, and regions of compact residence.[6] This concept caused a lot of polemic among field researchers who conducted oral interviews with Jews not only in large cities, but also in the former shtetls of Ukraine, Moldova, and Russia.[7] Nevertheless, we may note that the religious beliefs of Jews in the territory of the former Soviet Union have very specific and sometimes simply unique characteristics.

Attitudes to religion have undergone very serious changes in the USSR, and along with the observance of several key elements of the tradition, such as fasting on Yom Kippur, commemorating the anniversary of the death of relatives (*yortsayt*) or the purchase of matzah on Passover,[8] religious traditions in general have left the public sphere and become restricted to the domestic environment[9] or have adapted to new conditions. Religiosity has often become synonymous with the sharply negative concept of "fanaticism".[10] Secular Jews seemed to be ashamed of their religious relatives who continue to observe traditional Judaism, accusing them of being fanatics, out of sync with Soviet ideology.

As Mary Douglas has shown, cultural taboos mark the boundaries of the sacred realm within the tradition.[11] Accordingly, by studying ways of violating and transforming the precepts of Judaism, we can understand how new boundaries of the sacred and the profane are formed in the religious tradition of Soviet Jewry. The previous traditions of Orthodox Judaism started to seem strange and alien to our informants. However, new modified folklore practices emerged, following the model of "invention of traditions" elaborated by Eric Hobsbawm. The most striking example is the justification for eating pork. Kosher pork is the most difficult and most popular oxymoron in Soviet Jewish studies. Following the work of Anna Shternshis,[12] the term "kosher pork" became one of the main characteristics and stereotypes for Jews born in the USSR. Shternshis noted that religious observance and non-observance is usually manifested in stories about food, through the food code. According to Shternshis:

> The presence of separate dishes for pork preparation can shock a contemporary Jewish audience outside of the former Soviet Union, because Jews consuming pork as a "Jewish" product signifies breaking a taboo or, at least, a full departure from Jewish tradition. . . . Pork was consumed regularly, but in order to keep things peaceful and respectable in the family, adjustments were made. Similarly, adjustments were made for the consumption of bread during Passover.[13]

Interviews conducted with Jews of the former USSR during field expeditions of the Sefer Center in 2015–21 show that temporary restrictions on pork in Jewish homes are not isolated examples, but a common tendency in maintaining a balance between tradition and modernity.[14] In the city of Rybnitsa, for example, we recorded the following story:

- Did you eat pork?
- No, mostly not. I did, I ate both bacon and pork, but my mother did not. Dad didn't eat [it] either because my dad had an ulcer. He had undergone a gastric resection. We didn't have pork, meat, but I loved lard. Sprinkle it with garlic, salt, cut it and eat. But on Saturdays, never, it was a sin, my mother always threw it out of the fridge. There was never [pork] on Saturdays, although on weekdays she would buy [some]. She also cooked "*tsimes mit fasole*", it was beans with sunflower oil, with onions, they pounded it, the beans were pockmarked.
- Your mother bought bacon, but afterwards she threw it out on Saturday?
- We went out and bought bacon, but on Saturday, before Saturday, it had to be gone.[15]

Here we can see that along with the traditional Jewish dish, such as *tsimes*, which consists generally of cooked vegetables, the older generation of Jews tried to preserve the purity of the tradition at least during certain sacred calendar periods: on Saturdays, pork was thrown out of the refrigerator. The *tsimes* is mentioned here

as a marker of the true Jewishness of the informant's mother as well as her practice to clean the house from the forbidden products on holidays. At the same time, it is noticeable that even within the framework of one family, these traditions became eroded, and children no longer observed any of the prohibitions and prescriptions of religion, except for the commandment to respect their parents.

Jewish life in Rybnitsa

In this chapter, we will focus on the case study of underground Jewish religious life in the city of Rybnitsa (Transnistria) under the influence of the Hasidic tsaddik, who was called Rybnitser Rebbe. Interest in this city is justified by the unique situation which developed there in the late Soviet period.

Khaim-Zanvl Abramovich (1896–1995) was born in Romania and studied in Shtefanesht with his teacher, the Rebbe of Shtefanesht, Avrom Mattisiyahu Fridman (1847–1933). Before the Second World War, he married the daughter of a religious judge in Rezina and lived in this Romanian town close to Rybnitsa. During the war, he was deported to Rybnitsa and spent several years in the local ghetto. After the war, he decided to stay in this town and lived there until his emigration. While he resided in Rybnitsa from 1941 to 1972, he continued to fully observe all traditional practices of Judaism. He practiced ritual immersions in the river Dniester every day of the week, sometimes several times a day. He was a *shoikhet,* the person who performs the ritual slaughter of chickens and cattle, as well as a *mohel,* someone who performs the circumcision rite on newborn Jewish boys. He secretly gathered people in various houses for common prayer and Torah reading, he wore the traditional Jewish hat and long *kapote,* a special black coat. Since such traditional observance was, in general, a rarity for Jews in the USSR, this case deserves greater attention. The Jews in the city visited him when they needed a religious authority, to circumcise a child, to commemorate their dead relatives, to prepare kosher food for holidays. The usual picture of "thick" Jewish traditional culture was a little bit denser in Rybnitsa due to the Rebbe's presence.

Rybnitsa is an industrial center in Transnistria, a region of Moldova that has declared its independence but remains unrecognized by the international community. At the end of the 19th century, about 40 percent of the population of Rybnitsa was Jewish. The situation was similar in many other towns in the south-west of the Russian Empire. Rybnitsa was then a part of the Balta district of the Podolsk province of the Russian Empire. During the years 1924–1940, Rybnitsa belonged to the Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (MASSR), and thereafter to the Moldavian SSR. According to official government documents, Jewish religious life in Rybnitsa ended in 1927 when the last synagogue was closed as part of a widespread anti-religious campaign in the MASSR.[16]

Although the majority of Rybnitsa residents then identified themselves as Jews, life in interwar Rybnitsa was subjected to the principles of socialism rather than the commandments of Judaism. Quoting ideological clichés about "the friendship of peoples", some informants emphasize the fact that social networks and romantic relationships often crossed ethnic boundaries between Ukrainians, Jews, and

Moldovans, since "building a communist future" united them all.[17] There was even a Jewish School in interwar Rybnitsa from 1930 to 1937. But this was by all means a standard Soviet school imbued with communist ideology, only the language of teaching was Yiddish. One of the students recalled her childhood: "I was a young dictator at home. I am ashamed to think about it now, but once I didn't allow my father to go to the synagogue to order a memorial prayer. Once my father even beat me a little because I didn't allow my grandfather to pray".[18]

During the Second World War, a ghetto was organized on the territory of Rybnitsa under Romanian occupation. Local Jews as well as the Jewish population from the neighboring Romanian region of Bessarabia and from other parts of Soviet Moldavia and Ukraine were concentrated there on the small territory of the poor Jewish quarter near the river Dniester. During the war, a total of about 25,000 Jews passed through this ghetto.[19] Khaim-Zanvl Abramovich, who was a Bessarabian Romanian citizen was deported from neighboring Rezina to the ghetto of Rybnitsa in 1941. The Soviet Jews from Rybnitsa first encountered the traditional Romanian Jewish population during the war. They pointed out that they started more frequently using Yiddish language as the only means of communication with other Jews. The Romanian Jews before the war were not persecuted for observance of religious rites, and after the liberation of Rybnitsa by the Red Army in 1944 some traditional Jews from the former Bessarabia decided to stay in the Soviet Union and in Rybnitsa. Among them was Khaim-Zanvl Abramovich.

Archival documents show several attempts of the Jewish Community of Rybnitsa to officially open a synagogue, but their requests were regularly turned down.[20] From interviews with residents of Rybnitsa, we know that at least 1,000 Jews lived in the city in the 1960s and 1970s. They regularly gathered in underground *minyans* (prayer meetings with a quorum of 10 adults), there were two private homes where Jews baked matzah, there were at least two ritual slaughter facilities, and new gravestones with Hebrew inscriptions appeared in the Jewish cemetery until the mid-1970s. At the same time, people describe the fear of constant surveillance by the authorities and state security: religious gatherings were illegal, religious books and artifacts were confiscated, and some people were sent to jail for baking matzah.

In the post-war period, underground religiosity was characteristic of many small towns in Ukraine and Moldavia that previously had a significant Jewish population. This is probably due to the peripheral status of all these places on the map of the USSR. However, the presence of a real Hasidic *tsadik* who came from neighboring Bessarabia greatly changed the overall picture of Jewish religious life in Rybnitsa.

The Rybnitser Rebbe in the Ghetto

Although this period lies before the framework of this chapter, the stories about miracles of the Rebbe in the Ghetto are key to understand his popularity and authority within the Jewish Community of Rybnitsa in the 1960s–1970s. The role he

allegedly played in saving the Jewish ghetto in Rybnitsa is the main motive uniting all accounts of Jews who knew him. Almost every Holocaust survivor in Rybnitsa mentions the Rebbe himself, and how he continued his daily ritual immersions in the Dniester in the ghetto, which was located near the river in the lower part of the city. They emphasize that it was thanks to the merits of the Rebbe, his prayers and rituals, that the Rybnitsa ghetto was not destroyed, and many Jews were saved:

> During the war, there was a ghetto in Rybnitsa, which was guarded by Romanians. Thanks to the merits of the Rebbe, not a single Jew died there. The Romanians allowed the Rebbe to go for an immersion every day and gave him fruits and vegetables, they were afraid of him. Once, a Romanian hanged my 12-year-old uncle, and the Rebbe ordered him to be removed [from the gallows], and my uncle survived. Then the partisans came (they were Ukrainian Jews) and liberated the ghetto.[21]

A middle-aged Jew, who asked his older relatives about the Holocaust in Rybnitsa, declared:

> So I know from the stories of this Aizerovich that practically the entire Rybnitsa ghetto survived – thanks to him! There was even such a story. So, there is a Romanian officer … There was a Romanian unit, they guarded the ghetto. This Romanian officer – he was a believer, well, of course, a Christian. And he gave Khaim-Zanvl a soldier every day when he went to the Dniester to do ritual immersion. Every day he gave him a soldier to accompany, and I don't know … he was very … When he felt that the ghetto was being destroyed, something … he was very passionate - this is how people told me, who were there… prayed very fervently. I don't know how it happened, but absolutely the entire ghetto remained alive, no one died.[22]

The actual death toll in the Rybnitsa ghetto, however, did not conform to these optimistic claims. According to the *Holocaust Encyclopedia of the USSR*, total losses of the Rybnitsa ghetto amounted to 2731 victims; 1297 of whom were shot, 240 burned, and 1194 died of hunger and diseases.[23] But in the lived Jewish memory, the figure of the tsaddik became the main symbol of survival and hope.

The Rebbe and the Jewish community outside Rybnitsa

The Rebbe was famous beyond the city, and underground religious Jewish leaders from Moscow, Leningrad, Samarkand (Menachem Mendel Futerfas), Lvov (Mordechai Luxemburg), and especially often from Transcarpathia, regularly came to him. The Rybnitser Rebbe developed very close relations with Jews of Transcarpathia from Uzhgorod, Mukachevo, and other cities and villages. They often came to him for advice, brought him kosher food, which was not available in Rybnitsa, and helped him financially. Despite the considerable distance (around 600 kilometers), Transcarpathian Jews regularly visit the Rebbe, who in his turn often visited

Transcarpathia for Jewish Holidays such as Pesakh and Sukkot. There, the situation was slightly different regarding the observance of Judaism. The region only became part of the USSR after the Second World War, and the traditional structures of the Jewish community survived and remained untouched for a long time. Perhaps the peripheral and marginal position of this region explains why the production of kosher products continued in Transcarpathia for several years, synagogues were not immediately closed, many local Jews observed Judaism, and Jewish weddings and Jewish holidays were celebrated. Transcarpathian Jews treated Khaim-Zanvl from Rybnitsa as a classic Hasidic tsaddik, gave him the appropriate honors, and, ultimately, helped him leave the USSR in 1973. Many Transcarpathian Jews were connected with western Jews, had relatives in the USA and Israel. Through them, Rybnitser Rebbe was acquainted with the situation of the Hasidic movement in America. For example, Jacob Ratner, a Transcarpathian Jew who personally knew Khaim-Zanvl, provided the following testimony:

> The Rybnitser Rebbe knew somehow that the Satmar Rebbe had a stroke in 1969. This happened during a wedding ceremony that Khaim Zanvl conducted in Transcarpathia. Then he asked every guest of the ceremony to pray for full recovery of Yoel, son of Khana, and the Satmar Rebbe got better.[24]

On the other hand, American Hasidic leaders Satmar Rebbe and Lubavitcher Rebbe also knew about the Rybnitser Rebbe; they secretly sent prayer books, fur hats, and other religious objects to the Soviet Union for him. Such popularity of the Rebbe among Jews of the Soviet Union and abroad gave him additional authority within his community.

The Rebbe and the Jewish and non-Jewish community of Rybnitsa

For our Jewish informants, the presence of the Rebbe in their city was a source of pride. They all remember how they were sent to him as children to slaughter a chicken for the holiday, how their parents gathered at the Rebbe's house for a *minyan* – a prayer requiring a quorum of ten adult men. He was requested to come by local Jews when it was necessary to circumcise a newborn boy, conduct a *khupah* – a ritual Jewish wedding, or read a memorial prayer.

The Rebbe apparently did not speak Russian. He knew Romanian, Yiddish, and Hebrew. Soviet assimilated Jews almost did not speak Yiddish after the war, but the people of the older generation knew Yiddish well and could find a common language with the Hasidic Tsaddik. Many of our informants mention that their parents knew the Rebbe personally and were even on friendly terms with him. Khaim-Zanvl did not have his own children, and he treated Jewish children very well. He stroked them on the head, made compliments, and offered them sweets. Elderly relatives of our informants helped the Rebbe around the house when his wife was ill, tried to help him gather the necessary number of people for prayer, and in general were very close to him. Nevertheless, the ritual behavior of Khaim-Zanvl Abramovich often seemed too extravagant and incomprehensible even for

the elderly people who were familiar with the practices of Judaism from their childhood and youth.

Misunderstanding of the Rebbe's Hasidic traditions

The Rybnitser Rebbe practiced a special kind of Hasidism and was himself a disciple of the Shtefanesht Rebbe. His daily practices included the custom of fasting from Saturday to Saturday, and he hardly spoke to any women and refused to sit in the same cart or car beside a woman, even his own wife. Every night he got up to perform the special rite of "*tikun hatses*" – "improvement of the world at midnight". It is a special Kabbalistic tradition, when at night a person covers himself with ashes in sign of sorrow for the destroyed Temple, lights candles, and prays until dawn. Jacob Ratner, a Transcarpathian Jew personally acquainted with Khaim-Zanvl, left the following written testimony: "While the Rebbe was praying [during the war], he promised to fast all week, except Saturday, and to celebrate every night *Tikun Hatses*, mourning the destruction of the Temple, and to cover his beard with ashes".[25] According to our interviews, many Soviet Jews from Rybnitsa, upon accidentally seeing their Rebbe covered in ash, thought that he was just not a very neat person, someone strange, "not from this world". Only the more observant Transcarpathian Jews understood elements of the Rebbe's behavior that remained incomprehensible and simply strange for the residents of Rybnitsa. These different perceptions of the Rebbe's behavior are visible when we compare two types of sources used for this chapter. Oral interviews contain more stories about the Rebbe's role in local Jewish life: he saved close relatives from the ghetto, and he performed the rituals of circumcision, wedding, and burial. But his Hasidic practices, typical for the tsadiks of Eastern Europe, were absolutely incomprehensible for Rybnitsa Jews. On the other hand, in written hagiographic collections recently published by the followers of the Rebbe in the USA and Israel, the specific Hasidic practices are the main focus of a huge number of stories about the Rebbe. This kind of stories was often transmitted by Transcarpathian Jews, who continued to communicate with the Rebbe after his emigration to America. A telling example relates to the Rebbe's habit of burying the remnants of food from his table in the ground, while throughout the Hasidic world it is customary for followers to zealously collect the *shiraim*, remnants of the Rebbe's food, which become healing remedies for many problems and diseases. One of the Transcarpathian Jews later described in his memoirs his visit to Rybnitsa:

> Once, when I came to the Rebbe, I saw the Rebbe burying the remains of the Sabbath challah in the ground. I was surprised and asked him why. He replied: "What can I tell you? Unfortunately, my heart is in sorrow, but I have no one here to leave the remains of the *challah*. Because the Jews who live here do not wash their hands before eating; nor do they bless the bread or pronounce blessings after the meal. Therefore, I don't want to give them *shiraim* [the remnants of the *challah*], I would rather bury them in the ground", he told me sadly.[26]

The Rebbe's practice of going to the river for regular ritual immersions in any weather caused a lot of confusion among the Jews of Rybnitsa. For observant Hasidim, it was clear that this immersion was a ritual *mikvah*, which is performed especially carefully in some Hasidic dynasties several times a day. Khaim-Zanvl repeatedly said that in order to fulfill some difficult requests of his followers, he needed to go to the river. If he touched a non-Jew or a Jew who had not performed the *mikvah* that day, or if he met a woman on the way back, he returned to the river and started the ceremony again. After the liberation of the ghetto, the Rebbe lived near the river in the lower part of the city, where Jews traditionally settled. But after the flood of 1967, the old Rybnitsa was flooded, and the Rebbe moved to the upper part, which was much farther from the Dniester. Nevertheless, this did not prevent him from regularly walking to the river. In the winter, he cut a hole in the ice and tried to take a ritual bath every single day. Local Jewish and non-Jewish teenagers noticed him and often made fun of him, deliberately getting into physical contact with him and watching him walk back to the river. Many of our interlocutors confessed that they liked to monkey around the rabbi and cross his path in their childhood. They did not understand his behavior. They did not even use the term "immersion", but simply used the word "to bathe", both in Yiddish (*bodn zikh*)[27] and in Russian:

> Khaim-Zanvl, he slaughtered chickens…. When he was young, he would go swimming in an ice hole in winter. And when he would go bathing, and Russian children would cross his path, he would go back to swim, and back [again]. And so on several times.[28]

Some Soviet Jews thought that in this way the Rebbe was improving his endurance to cold: "Khaim Zavl would go bathing in an ice hole in winter. The children would follow him. And he would hide from them. He became hardy in this way. It was sacred to him".[29]

On the other hand, for the Jews of Transcarpathia, this practice was more than understandable; they often accompanied him during his immersions in the Dniester. He shared with them stories of how his ritual immersion helped him perform miracles during the war, and they took his requests to return into the water again and again seriously.

The Rebbe played a very prominent role in the life not only of the Jewish community but also of the entire city. We have conducted several interviews with non-Jewish old residents of Rybnitsa, and they all remembered the holy man who wore strange black clothes and constantly bathed naked in the Dniester by any weather.

We recorded narratives about his extravagant behavior, how he punished hooligan boys who threw stones at him, and about attitudes toward him, wavering between veneration of a saint and a holy fool. All those who lived in Rybnitsa in the 1960s to early 1970s knew about him, saw him on the Dniester River, and noticed his unusual appearance. Such an increased attention to the Jewish community in a non-Jewish environment is also quite uncommon for a Soviet city.

Miracles of the Rebbe

For the Soviet Jews of Rybnitsa, the Hasidic practices of salvation were obscure: they did not understand the meaning of ritual immersion in the river, of some ascetic obligations, of some specific religious practices. Nevertheless, they realized that the Rebbe was able to perform extraordinary deeds. They all noticed the amazing effect that the Rebbe had on Romanian guards when he was in the ghetto, but while they describe his miracles, they don't have an appropriate vocabulary to characterize wonders and unusual things:

> [Khaim Zanvl] himself told how the Germans drove Jews to be shot from all over Moldavia to Dubossary. They were driven in a column. Khaim Zanvl hypnotised all the guards: the guards stood rooted to the spot, the people dispersed; there was not a single shot. He hypnotised all the guards – the Romanian guards were there. Khaim Zanvl saved several thousand Jews, he personally said this. He was considered clairvoyant.[30]

Another popular narrative of the Rebbe's miracles is a story about boys who threw stones at Khaim-Zanvl and suddenly got paralyzed. According to the testimony of a Jew from Rybnitsa, local residents often bullied and mocked the Rebbe:

> I saw him, he lived on Voikova Street, Abramovich. People have a lot of interesting memories about him, he was, as they say, some kind of magician…. He, as a rabbi, went to the Dniester to swim, and in winter he carved a hole into the ice and dipped himself 2-3 times. And if someone crossed his road, he was forced to return and plunge again. And somehow the boys mocked him, he went back once, went back a second time, then he said something and these boys were paralysed…. Then the parents came to him, asked him [to free their sons], he muttered something there, and they were released. He was like a magician.[31]

Interestingly, to describe supernatural events, Soviet Jews used the terminology of available parapsychological discourse ("hypnosis", "clairvoyance"), or just the term "magician", but they did not use a typically Hasidic vocabulary such as "miracle", "salvation", and "tsaddik".

The Rebbe in everyday Jewish life

In post-war Rybnitsa, such traditional Jewish life cycle rituals as circumcision, religious weddings, and funerals became much more relevant, since the Rebbe was present. Despite the persecution of the authorities, Khaim-Zanvl tried to gather regularly ten Jews for prayer. They met every day in different houses, so as to confuse the KGB agents who often visited the city and to conceal the full scope of the Rebbe's activities. As Sebastian Shulman writes, to get a day off from work, people would pretext every day attending a *yortsayt* – the anniversary of the death of a close relative – in a different family: "an excuse that took

advantage of a supposed legal loophole, often invoked especially in the early postwar years, that allowed for leniency for missed days of work where funeral practices were concerned".[32]

Another religious practice, which continued to be performed regularly in Rybnitsa in the 1960s–1970s, was the kosher slaughter of poultry. However, as the informants emphasized, this was done mainly on holidays, and it could be combined with eating pork on other days. Khaim-Zanvl tried to teach some Jewish children the Hebrew alphabet and laws, and, even if he was less successful in this, he remained in the memory of the Jews of Rybnitsa. Many of them still cherish his portrait, the coins that he handed out for good luck, the cap that he left, etc. One of the Jews, who knew Khaim-Zanvl in his childhood, remembers:

- When someone had *yurtsats*... Do you know what it is? Anniversary of death. And people would bring something. Usually they brought *leikheh* (honey cake), vodka, because there was nothing else … they would pray, and those who could, would drink 20 grams [of vodka] each. He took us (me, I was born in 1952 and my elder brother, born 1949) and he made Jews out of us all. He circumcised us.
- And you said that when you were 12 years old, he began to teach you something?
- You see, he tried. And my grandfather wanted him to. But we were pioneers, Komsomol members. You understand. Then it was impossible, everything was forbidden. When he would come, he would say: "Leibele, kim, kim mit mir.[Leibele (diminutive from Leonid, Lev), come with me]." He called me [to come] with him and he called my father, of course. He would give me beer as a reward for visiting him. Transcarpathians came, brought him Czech beer, so delicious. He would give me a bottle of beer.[33]

We may notice that Rybnitser Rebbe tried to attract young boys to become religious; he counted them for the ritual quorum, for the commemoration prayer, and to reward them, he presented them with beer. The Rebbe left his cap to the grandmother of one of our respondents, who conserved it, along with the Rebbe's photograph, which he placed near his parents'. Clearly, the Rebbe played a great role in his life, despite his Komsomol membership.

Although the Rebbe became a very close person for assimilated Jews, at the same time, he still remained incomprehensible, like the old traditional world of Jewish "thick" culture, which was lost with the onset of Soviet rule. They are forced to translate the Rebbe's strange behavior into a more understandable language: hypnosis, aura, ice-swimmer. It is curious that for many Jews from Rybnitsa who later left for Israel or America, Khaim-Zanvl still remained a guide to the world of Orthodox Jewry. He kept in touch with people from Rybnitsa until his death in 1995. He would receive them without them having to wait for their turn, although the rest of the Hasidim had to wait for an audience with the Rebbe for more than a week. He continued to visit them on each of their family celebrations:

circumcisions, bar mitzvahs, weddings, etc. After the death of the Rebbe, even the mention of acquaintance with him helped to solve problems with the conclusion of a religious marriage in Israel:

> If you go to the main rabbinate and you want to accelerate [the decision that you are Jewish], then you go and say: "I am from Rybnitsa, I knew Khaim Zanvl well." You show his portrait and that's it. "You knew Khaim Zanvl! Yes! Ouch!" That's it.[34]

Conclusion

To conclude, it can be noted that the presence of the Rybnitser Rebbe over the course of several decades in a provincial Soviet city significantly changed the picture of Jewish religious life for its residents and helped those who were interested in being included into the "thick" Jewish culture. However, he could not completely return the Soviet Jewry of Rybnitsa from the "thin" tradition in which they lived. It was more prestigious to be a Komsomol member, not a religious Jew. Sometimes, young people, out of respect for elderly relatives and people who had survived the Holocaust, agreed to some concessions: they had their children circumcised, yielded to their parents if they insisted on a religious marriage ceremony, removed pork from the refrigerator before Saturday, etc. However, in general, these concessions did not greatly affect their behavior and worldview. The role of the tsaddik is in many ways similar to that of Russian Orthodox spiritual leaders, the so-called *starets, or elder*. In peripheral regions of Russia, it was very popular to turn to such a leader with different kinds of problems, expecting a miracle that the prayer of such an elder would cause. But visiting a *starets* did not automatically turn believers into regular churchgoers.

Notes

1 The interviews were conducted in the framework of an expedition of the "Sefer Center" (Moscow) and a grant program of the Research Centre of the Jewish Museum and Tolerance Centre.
2 Jacob Ratner, *Mayn lebns geshikhte. zkhrunus aun vunder [Story of my life. Memories and Miracles. Behind the Iron Curtain of the Russian communist regime]* (New York, 2014), Yiddish; Matatyahu Cohen Kagan. *Toldot_ve-avodat_rabenu_ha-kadosh [History and service of the Rabbi from Rybnitsa]* (New York, 2016. Part 1, New York, 2018, Part 2), Yiddish; David Geldzeler. *Rabeinu_na-kadosh_me-Ribnits [The book about the life of the saint Rebbe]* (New Jersey, 1999). Hebrew; Abraham Cohn. *The Ribnitzer rebbe. Memories. Anecdotes, lessons, and customs of a venerable and mystical worker of our generation* (New Jersey: Israel Bookshop Publications, 2019). English, Hebrew, Yiddish.
3 Sebastian Schulman. "Undzer Rebenyu: Religion, Memory, and Identity in Postwar Moldova", in *Going to the People. Jews and the Ethnographic Impulse*, ed. Jeffrey Veidlinger (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2016), 219–238.
4 Schulman, "Undzer Rebenyu," 233–234.
5 Mordechai Altshuler. *Religion and Jewish Identity in the Soviet Union, 1941–1964* (Waltham, IN: Brandeis University Press, 2012), 161.

6 Zvi Gitelman. "Thinking About Being Jewish in Russia and Ukraine", in *Jewish Life After the USSR*, ed. Zvi Gitelman with Musya Giants and Marshall I. Goldman (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003), 49.
7 Alexandr L′vov. "Predislovie [Introduction]", in *Shtetl, XXI vek: polevye issledovaniia [Shtetl in the XXI century, field research*], ed. Valery Dymshits and Aleksandr Lvov (Saint Petersburg: European University Press, 2008), 16–19; Jeffrey Veidlinger. *In the Shadow of the Shtetl: Small Town Jewish Life in Soviet Ukraine, 1919–1953* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013), 154–155.
8 Altshuler, *Religion and Jewish Identity*, 155; L'vov, *Shtetl, XXI vek,* 71–73.
9 Arkadiĭ Zel′tser. *Evrei sovetskoĭ provintsii: Vitebsk i mestechki 1917–1941 [Jews of the Soviet Provinces – Vitebsk and the Shtetls, 1917–1941]* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2006), 320; Altshuler, *Religion and Jewish Identity*; Veidlinger, *In the Shadow of the Shtetl.*
10 Galina Zelenina. "'Vsia zhizn′ sredi knig': sovetskoe evreĭstvo na puti ot Biblii k biblioteke" ["'All the life inside the books": Soviet Jewry from Bible to the library"], *Gosudarstvo, religiia, tserkov′ v Rossii i za rubezhom*. 2012, 3–4, 63; Mariia Kaspina. "Narodnyĭ iudaizm: varianty religioznykh praktik (po materialam ėkspeditsiĭ k evreiam Ukrainy i Moldavii, 2004–2011)" ["Folk Judaism: variants of religious practices"], *Gosudarstvo, religiia, tserkov′ v Rossii i za rubezhom*. 2015, 3 (30), 18–20.
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13 Shternshis, "Salo on Challah", 15.
14 Mariia Kaspina. "Narodnaia religioznost′ sovetskikh assimilirovannykh evreev: svinina i khleb vmesto matsy" ["Folk religious life of soviet assimilated Jews"], in *Evrei pogranich′ia: Smolenshchina* [Jews of Smolensk region], ed. Svetlana Amosoca (Moscow: Sefer Publication House, 2018), 209–220.
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16 Charles King. *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Change* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2000).
17 Schulman, "Undzer Rebenyu," 221.
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21 Kagan. *Toldot_ve-avodat_rabenu_ha-kadosh*. Interview with Zvi Girsh Gerzhoy, Part 2, 261.
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24 Kagan. *Toldot_ve-avodat_rabenu_ha-kadosh*. Part 2. P. 106.
25 Ratner, *Mayn lebns geshikhte*, 295–296.
26 Ratner, *Mayn lebns geshikhte,* 306.

27 According to the testimony of Zlata Kotlyar, Rybnitsa 2011.
28 Interview with Anna Leshan, born in 1941, Rybnitsa, conducted in Rybnitsa 2018 (FRACS).
29 Interview with Mikhail Dyomichev, born in 1943, Rybnitsa, conducted in Rybnitsa 2018 (FRACS).
30 Interview with Semyon Zbrizher, born in 1934, Rybnitsa, conducted in Rybnitsa 2018 (FRACS).
31 Interview with Alexey Yudovich, born in 1938 in Rybnitsa. conducted in Rybnitsa 2017 (FRACS).
32 Schulman, "Undzer Rebenyu," 223.
33 Interview with Leonid Tulchinsky, born in 1952 in Rybnitsa, conducted in Rybnitsa 2017 (FRACS).
34 Interview with Galina Freydkina, born in 1980, Rybnitsa, conducted in Israel, 2019. Archive of the Jewish Museum and the Tolerance Centre, Moscow.

4 Funeral and Memorial Rites of Moscow Muslims in the 1960s–1980s

Islam A. Zaripov and Marat A. Safarov

Introduction

The Soviet regime's anti-religious policies, accompanied by not only repression and propaganda, but also the strong migration and assimilatory processes triggered by industrialisation at that time, have certainly had a deep impact on the religiosity of all peoples of the Soviet Union, including the Tatars.

After the October Revolution, the Soviet authorities initially flirted with the Muslims, promising them complete freedom of religion, which they had been deprived of in Tsarist times. In the 1920s, it also tried to use the Muslim clergy to promote its interests in the Arab-Muslim world and India. Hence, during this period, the anti-religious policy among the Muslim population was predominantly characterised by active atheistic propaganda and restrictions on educational institutions and publishing houses. By the end of the decade, however, the measures tightened. In 1929–1940, most mosques were closed, and imams were repressed. One of the most notorious trials was the so-called Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims (TsDUM) case. During this and related processes, several dozens of the most prominent Tatar religious leaders throughout the country were convicted and sentenced to various terms of imprisonment, and some to capital punishment. In Moscow, for example, Abdulla Shamsutdinov (1878–1936), the *akhun*[1] of the city and imam-khatib of the first mosque, was arrested and then shot, and in 1939, the temple itself was closed. In the Gor'kii region, whose natives made up the overwhelming majority of the Muslim community in the capital throughout the Soviet period, 76 (or 78) local mullahs[2] were convicted in 1937, 56 of whom were shot.

At the same time, two distinctive features of the anti-religious campaign against Muslims in Russia should be noted. First, the complete absence of legal religious educational institutions was in the RSFSR until the late 1980s. The only official Soviet madrasas that were allowed to operate after 1946 were located in Bukhara and Tashkent, in Central Asia. Second, the Tatar language, which for several centuries had been based on the Arabic script, underwent two successive reforms: it was first translated into the Latin alphabet in 1927, and then into Cyrillic in 1939. These two factors were essentially aimed at a complete break with the Arab-Muslim culture and educational system.

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Nevertheless, throughout the Soviet period, a centralised Muslim religious organisation with its centre in Ufa continued to function (from 1917 it was called *Diniia Nazaraty*, literally "Department of Religious Affairs", from 1920 it was renamed the "Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims", and from 1948 onwards, the "Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the European part of the USSR and Siberia"), whose jurisdiction included mainly Tatar communities of the latter-named territories. In 1943–1944, three more nominally independent organs were created: the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan (Tashkent), the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Transcaucasia (Baku) and the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the North Caucasus (Buinaksk). However, all the activities of these religious organisations were effectively controlled by the Council for Religious Affairs (CRA) under the USSR Council of Ministers.

In addition to the small number of official clergy in all regions of the country, including Moscow, there were a sufficiently large number of unofficial mullahs, who mainly performed funeral and memorial rites in cemeteries and in the homes of believers.

Ethnographers have long noticed that memorial-funeral rituals are the most persistent and conservative.[3] They are one of the most potent instruments to maintain and activate cultural memory, not only within a family, but even within a people.[4] Therefore, the study of these rituals allows us to uncover the deepest layers of a people's spiritual culture and assess the real level of its religiosity.

Therefore, in this chapter, we will study funeral-memorial rituals within a Moscow Tatar community of the period of "mature socialism" – in the 1960s–1980s, based on archival documents and testimonies.

We consider that Tatars, unlike other ethnic groups, including Russians, continued to strictly observe traditional memorial-funeral rituals throughout the Soviet period, even within the numerically small and quite secular Tatar communities of large cities. It also testifies to the fact that, in spite of widespread stereotypes about an opposition between the official and unofficial clergy, in the Soviet period they often *de facto* collaborated. This was the case not particularly in the sphere of funeral-memorial rituals, but also in the conservation, albeit in a limited form, of religious tradition, on the basis of which a revival of Islam occurred in the late 1980s.

Moscow Muslim community in the 1960s–1980s

Old inhabitants of the Muslim community of Moscow are descendants of immigrants from the city of Kasimov and historically associated villages of the Riazan region. However, a significant part of them was repressed in the 1930s, and many of the survivors continued to live in the historical Tatar settlement in Zamoskvorech'e, around Bolshaia Tatarskaia Street (since 1947 – Zemliachka Street). Having lost in 1937 the mosque (now called "Historical"[5]), which the Kasimov Tatars perceived as their spiritual centre, they became parishioners of the Moscow Cathedral Mosque. The parishioners of this mosque were mainly Tatar-Mishar. The Mishars are a sub-ethnic group of the Tatar people, with their own dialect, peculiarities. They traditionally inhabited a few regions of the Volga (in the Nizhnii Novgorod,

Ul'ianovsk and Penza regions). Historically, Mishari, due to the vector of migration, constituted the basis of the Moscow Tatar community. As a result, newcomers from the Kasimov community found it quite difficult to adapt to the realities of this parish. The process of rapprochement lasted for a long time – until about the beginning of the 1960s, and differences in socio-cultural traditions, degree of urbanisation, standard of living between different groups of Tatars were felt even longer.

Differences were also felt among the groups of Tatar-Mishars themselves, especially between natives of the Gor'kii region (now Nizhnii Novgorod), on the one hand, and natives of the Penza region, Mordovia, on the other. By the middle of the 20th century, most Moscow Muslims came from Tatar villages of the Gor'kii region. This group was the most active among the faithful, including those who attended prayers in the mosque; most of the official and unofficial imams came from this community. At the same time, there was a marked division within this sub-ethnic group based on origin from specific villages, for example, from such large ones as Bol'shoe Ribushkino, Urazovka, Krasnaia Gorka, Petriaksi, Krasnii Ostrov.

In general, the differences were reinforced by the socio-professional stratification of immigrants from certain places. Most of the Tatar-Mishars who moved to Moscow chose such industries as trade, the service sector and public administration as places to work. The images of a Tatar janitor or a station porter were typical for post-war Moscow. Often, the choice of a specific place of work was conditioned by the presence of relatives or fellow countrymen there. As a result, social ties among the Gor'kii Tatars remained quite close and strong. The old Tatars with deeper roots in Moscow (especially those who lived in Zamoskvorech'e) often belonged to the intelligentsia, mostly technical, or were employees. By the beginning of the 20th century, the Tatar community was also divided on a social basis, with Kasimov Tatars, who were traditionally tradesmen, and Mishar Tatars, with peasant origins, and this also had an influence on the conclusion of marriages.[6]

At the same time, despite their differences, representatives of different groups of Tatars did not show hostility towards each other, and in matters concerning the whole community, they always acted harmoniously (for example, in the maintenance of burial sites).

Religious policy and Muslim institutions

The year 1964 marks the end of Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign. After the Soviet leader's overthrow in October 1964, open persecution of believers ended, but, of course, this did not mean the end of the dominance of atheistic ideology. Only the methods of implementation of this ideology changed.

From the mid-1960s until the end of the 1980s, mass anti-religious persecution gave way to a system of anti-religious propaganda consisting of atheistic lectures and "discussions with believers". In terms of the dynamics of the development of religious communities, the following pattern was observed: churches closed in the late 1950s to early 1960s were usually not returned to believers, new churches were not built, but there was also no active closure of existing ones. Public manifestations of religiosity and social activities of religious communities remained banned.

By the early 1980s, "socialist rituals" began to be implemented, from civil weddings to funerals, in order to replace religious life cycle rituals. This process also affected the Muslim regions of the USSR, such as the Tatar Autonomous Socialist Republic, but hardly affected the Moscow Tatars.[7]

At the peak of the Khrushchev anti-religious campaign, in 1961, the authorities implemented measures that had long been planned, which significantly weakened the position of the clergy in the parishes. Clergymen received the status of employees hired by the religious community and could be dismissed by decision of the executive body (parish council). At the same time, the clergyman still needed to be registered with the local commissioner for religious affairs. Starting from the early 1960s, all the power in the communities was transferred from the clergy to the parish council, which represented the parish in front of the commissioner for religious affairs. It goes without saying that the latter continued to exercise the most complete power over the parishes. This often gave rise to contradictions and conflicts among the clergy, the parish council and parishioners, which contributed to the weakening, not only of the clergy's position, but also of the entire structure of officially registered communities.

Nugman Ashirov[8] has noted in this regard that "if earlier the imam was the owner of the mosque, almost a holy man, and his authority among believers was indisputable, his word was the law for the faithful, now he has actually turned into an employee in many religious associations, his activities are currently under the leadership of an executive body elected by parishioners, consisting of believers … There are cases when activists of the mosque, its executive body show quite an active attitude to the subject and content of sermons read by ministers of worship. It happens that they criticize the imams who are too zealous in threatening with 'hellish torments' in the next world". Further, Ashirov cites the example of the Leningrad Mosque at the end of the 1960s, where believers achieved the removal of the imam (apparently, we are talking about the famous imam F. Sattarov,[9] who forbade women to participate in the funeral rite, who did not allow the sale of tickets to concerts of Tatar pop artists in the courtyard of the mosque (they were freely sold under the former imam Isaev):

> The believers, outraged by the actions of the imam, bombarded various instances with complaints, in which they noted that such a backward fanatic imam could no longer be tolerated in Leningrad, one of the most [prominent] cultural centers of the country.[10]

In the Moscow Cathedral Mosque on Vypolzov Lane, according to the rules, the parish council (the so-called *dvadtsatka*) took over executive power and performed administrative functions. But in practice, the power of the executive body was not decisive and was limited to solving purely economic issues of the normal functioning of the mosque. The *imam-khatib*, the religious leader who delivers the Friday or holiday sermons (*khutba*), continued to exercise the main leadership role in the mosque, including after the Khrushchev anti-religious campaign. All this relates to the traditions laid down in the Moscow Cathedral Mosque at the beginning of the

20th century. Thus, since the foundation of the mosque, there has been an institution of trustees (*mutawalli*) characteristic of Tatar mosques. In Soviet times, the executive body oversaw economic issues, but the parishioners elected to the council recognised the authority of the imam-khatibs, although they often debated with them (for example, when discussing the appointment of second imams, muezzins). In general, community life in the Moscow Cathedral Mosque was characterised by democracy, public discussion of personnel and other organisational issues. Imams always needed to consider the opinion of parishioners.

Since all the work of the clergy in the USSR after the end of the Khrushchev anti-religious campaign had to be limited to ritual practice and geographically circumscribed to the religious building, three areas of activity can be distinguished in the work of the imam-khatib:

First, the official activity: performing prayers and rituals in the mosque; reading Friday and holiday sermons in the mosque; brief consultation of parishioners on issues of Muslim rites and creeds; interaction with the authorised representatives of the CRA; interaction with the governing structures of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the European part of the USSR and Siberia, including trips to Ufa.

Second, the unofficial activities: real management of all aspects of the functioning of the Moscow Cathedral Mosque, including the development of the direction of the work of the executive body of the mosque and other imams; visiting the homes of believers to conduct life cycle rituals and to read sermons in the homes of believers at *mejlis*; control over the state of affairs at the Danilovskoe Muslim cemetery and at Muslim sites of other metropolitan cemeteries, the implementation of funeral and memorial rites; implementation of the relationship with unofficial Moscow imams and Muslim communities of the central part of the RSFSR, advising them on ritual and religious teaching; teaching individual parishioners of the mosque the basics of Islam.

Third, the international activity, which concerned only the most prominent Muslim religious figures of the USSR, including the *imam-khatibs* of the Moscow Cathedral Mosque. It consisted of participation and speeches at international conferences, foreign trips to strengthen Soviet positions on several international issues, to sustain the image of religious freedom in the USSR among the foreign public, meetings with foreign audiences and political leaders who visited the Moscow Cathedral Mosque.

Ahmetzian Mustafin, the first *imam-khatib* of the Moscow Cathedral Mosque from 1964 to 1986, conducted rituals in the homes of Muslims – *mejlis* (there were also other designations – *hatem, jien, Qur'an uketu, ash*[11]), Ramadan evening meal (*iftar*, or *awiz achu*), naming ceremonies after a child's birth (*isem kushu*) and marriage ceremonies (*nikah*). These rites were also invariably conducted by Moscow Muslims throughout Soviet history and were carried out by both unofficial and official imams. However, the imams in the mosque were obliged to record the rites performed in a special registration book. Such information became known to the local commissars for religious affairs, who had full access to the registration books. The CRA treated marriage and naming ceremonies much more seriously than funeral rites, since their performance testified to the high religiosity of

young people. The plenipotentiaries could transmit information about the participation of young people in these religious ceremonies to their study or workplaces, and, consequently, involve Komsomol organisations. Therefore, many among the faithful Tatars sought to conduct these rites privately, at home and without official registration.

Both Mustafin and the second imam of the Moscow Cathedral Mosque Rizautdin Basyrov – a prominent expert on rituals – gave consultations to believers and performed funeral and memorial rituals. An employee of the mosque Vais Bedretdinov recalls:

> … how carefully Akhmetzyan-*hazrat* and Riza-*hazrat*[12] treated our cemeteries, the maintenance of places for ablution of the dead. Then there was such an order among the Moscow Tatars: the body of the deceased was brought to the courtyard of the mosque in Vypolzov Lane. Whoever of the imams was free went out into the courtyard to perform *janazah* [the funeral prayer] – both in summer and in winter it was like this, both in the rain and in the snow. Then the deceased was taken to the cemetery for burial.[13]

A parishioner of the Moscow Cathedral Mosque Nurzide Dubinnikova told us that at the birth of her son in 1985 she turned to Mustafin with a request to conduct a naming ceremony at home, so that the religious celebration would not affect the career of her husband, a prominent Soviet sports functionary. Mustafin, despite not being closely acquainted with this family, granted the request. Amina Gubaidullina (1929–2011), another Moscow Muslim, worked in the 1970s in responsible positions in a ministry and was a member of the CPSU. She could not attend the mosque but invited Ahmetzyan Mustafin home to conduct the *mejlis*.[14] Among the parishioners of the mosque were also other members of the CPSU – mostly pensioners or employees of a retail chain. Some Moscow Muslims did not hide their participation in religious rites from the authorities. Thus, in 1966, 115 naming ceremonies, 168 marriages and 506 religious funerals were held in Moscow "officially" (with recording in the mosque's accounting books).

Funeral and memorial rites

As noted in the Soviet religious studies, literature, funeral and memorial rites were preserved in the USSR most steadfastly of all religious practices.[15] Despite all the obstacles, the majority of the Soviet people, including those who were not closely connected with local religious communities, sought to fulfil the traditions of burial and commemoration of their deceased relatives. This also applied to Soviet Muslims.

Among the Muslims of Moscow, ritual ablution of the dead, funeral prayer (*janāzah*) and strict observance of the annual memorial cycle were carried out strictly. Regular memorial meetings were held, usually on a yearly basis. The Moscow Tatars called them *mejlis* "meeting", with the invitation of the imam, who recited passages of the Qur'an, turned to God with supplications (*du'ā'*) for the

deceased and, as a rule, delivered a short sermon. There are whole canons of the Tatar memorial *mejlis*. They varied in the time of prayer and the structure of preaching. Any divergence from established rules of conduct of such ritual meals encountered disapproval among believers. Such gatherings-meals were usually held according to local traditions of the place of origin of believers. Since the majority of Moscow Tatars were natives of villages in the Gor'kii region, various types of Mishar *mejlis* were held in Moscow, with appeals to the Almighty in the Tatar language (*du'ā'*).

The genesis of the Tatar *mejlis*, and most importantly, the strong place that the memorial meal occupied in the structure of Tatar everyday religiosity in the 20th century, obviously had not only purely Islamic roots. There are also echoes of the Turkic cult of ancestors, "feeding of ancestors": it is no coincidence that the reading of a memorial prayer for the souls of ancestors is designated as "spiritual food" for them, the entire course of the *mejlis* is subordinated to the memory of departed relatives, whose names are scrupulously enumerated in special memorial lists.

We may also mention the influence of Orthodoxy, or rather the general atmosphere of limited religious everyday life in the Soviet city, where the example of the church with its ritual routine became a model for other communities. This may have also contributed to the foregrounding of memorial rites, as other forms of rituals and public manifestations of religiosity retreated to the background. Secularisation and the progressive departure of Moscow Tatars from traditional prayer practices while retaining family and brotherly connections transformed the *mejlis* into a key manifestation of religiosity.

It is worth noting that the space of the *mejlis* created a sacred territory. When crossing the threshold of the apartment where the *mejlis* was held, women put on a headscarf, which they no longer wore on the street, the guests tuned in to a prayerful mood, controlled their behaviour.[16] Preparation for the *mejlis* also included the invitation of a mullah from among the imams of the Moscow Cathedral Mosque or unofficial experts in ritual. The etiquette of the *mejlis* prescribed the distribution of donations (*sadaqa* or *khaer*) not only to the mullah but also to all those present, presenting guests with a portion of food from the table after the meal and, accordingly, coming to visit with a gift, a treat.

When visiting the graves of relatives at the Danilovskoe Muslim cemetery, the reading of memorial prayers was mandatory. This cemetery, founded back during the reign of Catherine the Great in 1771, was perceived not only as a place for burials, but also as a material expression of historical memory. Moreover, in general, Tatars saw Muslim cemeteries as a sacred space.

It is characteristic that the ritual of Muslim funerals and commemorations-*mejlises* in Soviet Moscow generally did not trigger any sanctions against the relatives of the deceased. First, this was due to the position of the Commissar for Religious Affairs on this issue, who strove to limit religious life to the celebration of such rites. In addition, among Moscow Muslims, only a small number of people (mainly representatives of the technical intelligentsia, employees of the retail network and the service sector) were members of the CPSU. But Muslims who were members of the Party usually buried their relatives according to religious rites as well.

The role of women in the performance of funeral rites

Of particular interest is the question of the role of women in the Moscow Muslim community in the Soviet era. Based on materials from various regions of the area of settlement of Tatars in the Volga region, the authors note numerous evidence of the increasing importance of women in the daily religious life of the Tatar village or urban communities.

Among Volga Tatars of the Sufi-Ishani tradition, female relatives were involved in the preservation of "holy places" associated with the life of *awliya* (those close to Allah), including a place of memory well known among Tatar-Mishars: the house of Sadek-abzi (Sadek Abdulzhalilov) in the village of Ovech'ii Ovrag of the Gor'kii region. In addition, during the Soviet period, women began to actively hold religious memorial meetings, perform rituals, regularly visit cemeteries and mosques. The material we have collected in the Volga Region correlates with our data on Soviet Moscow largely due to the intensive ties of the Moscow Tatars with their native villages, which was especially characteristic of the Tatars. Women actively participated in various aspects of religious life, and although they did not make up the majority of the parishioners of the Moscow Cathedral Mosque and did not numerically predominate among active believers (unlike Orthodox churches, which in the post-war years increasingly became "female"), they were an important and noticeable factor in the daily life of the community.

It should be noted that researchers of the history of Islam in Russia face conceptual difficulties related to the absence of adequate terminology and standardised norms to express various Muslim terms and concepts in Russian. Another feature, which dates back to Russian pre-revolutionary scholarship, is the extrapolation of church, Orthodox terminology to Islam, and the interpretation of Muslim life in the context of Russian Orthodoxy. When studying the role of women in Tatar Muslim communities, scholars tend to apply to Islam concepts and notions characteristic of Orthodox communities, such as the institution of Old Believer female supervisors (*nastavnitsy*) or the traditional female predominance in ROC communities.

The analysis of testimonies we collected both in Moscow and in the area of traditional residence of Tatars (for example, in the Riazan region and Mordovia) showed that, even in the condition of total absence of male religious figures, religious experts from among women were not perceived by believers as imams or mullahs (with all the conditionality of the concept of "clergy" in relation to Muslim religious life). In the Tatar environment, these women were designated as *abystay*, which in the original sense is defined as the wife or relative of a mullah. Later they began to be called more simply *apa* (the traditional appeal to an older woman among the Tatars). Enjoying respect among Muslims, possessing a certain charisma, they were considered "performing the duties" of male religious figures.

Of course, the question of the sources of legitimisation of women in the ritual practice of Soviet Islam is extremely important. We have testimonies showing that women performed not only the traditional ablution of deceased women, but also many basic Muslim rituals, including the naming ceremony (*isem kushu*), after a child's birth. Here it is worth considering that from the point of view of Shariah law, a woman can

perform these rituals in the absence of men. We have recorded material about the case of a Tatar woman in the village of Kliazma in the Moscow region performing a sacred rite – reading a special prayer "*Istihara*", during which a person turns to seek the guidance of Allah in the presence of a problem that has no obvious solution, at the request of believers. However, this was probably exceptional, and according to the data we possess, such cases occurred only during the Second World War.

According to some accounts, the only rites that women did not celebrate were the *dzhana-namaz* (funeral prayer) and *nikakh*. In the Soviet period, elderly women started to conduct particularly actively the *mejlis*, including reading of suras from the Qur'an, and the meals took place in mixed audiences (including both men and women).

We will highlight several considerations regarding the status and reasons for legitimising women's religious activity, based on material relating to the Moscow community.

First, with the beginning of the Second World War, the Moscow Cathedral Mosque was filled with believers again, most of whom were elderly and disabled. A significant number of the mosque's parishioners were women. In the past, women, according to established tradition, rarely visited the mosque, but during the war years, many of them began to gather for collective prayer and then communicate with each other in the courtyard, in Vypolzov Lane, sharing anxious thoughts about the fate of relatives who were at the front. Women would pray on the upper level of the mosque, but in 1954, a semi-basement was allocated to the holiday prayer, which raised the protest of female parishioners, who complained about it to the Plenipotentiary for the Affairs of Religious Cults Spiridon Besshaposhnikov.[17]

Women also began to actively visit the graves of their relatives at the Danilovskoe Muslim cemetery, a practice which was not common before (especially the participation of women in funeral rites). In the post-war period, women continued to participate in the life of the mosque and visited the cemetery even more often (including the Muslim section of the Kuzminskii Cemetery in the south-east of Moscow, opened in 1956).

Second, the active religious activity of Tatar women could be connected with a pre-revolutionary tradition of special female schools, where the wives of imams would teach girls. It is worth noting here that the level of education of women engaged in religious activities varied. Many women possessed only elementary knowledge acquired in the family and in pre-revolutionary village schools (*mekteb*).

Third, it is obvious that the main reasons for the formation of this special gender phenomenon were, on the one hand, the insufficient number of male experts in ritual due to the repression and consequences of the war; and, on the other, the improved status of women in Muslim communities (for example, the active visits of women to mosques and cemeteries in Soviet times mentioned earlier).

It is also worth mentioning the continued influence of the reformist movement jadidism[18] and its conceptions concerning the rights of women. Many Jadid trends were secretly preserved in the official ideologies of the Spiritual Administrations (in Tashkent and Ufa), intertwining in a complex way with Soviet attitudes on gender equality.

The significant role of women in the ritual life of Moscow Muslims, the functioning of the Moscow Cathedral Mosque, was preserved in all subsequent decades of the Soviet era.

Unofficial imams

In the 1960s–1980s, as in the past, Muslim rites were carried out in Moscow not only by employees of the mosque, but also by unofficial imams. Contrary to Alexandre Bennigsen's well-known thesis about the existence of a "parallel" unofficial Islam in the USSR,[19] in the daily life of Muslim Tatars, the "official" and "unofficial" were closely intertwined directly in the mosque itself. Religious figures who did not have official registration took an active part in performing rituals, not only at home, but also often in the space of registered mosques. They were well known to the imams of the Moscow Cathedral Mosque and were in contact with them.

A mosque employee who has worked there since 1979, Vais Bedretdinov, recalled,

> Akhmetzian-*khazrat* also worked actively with respected old people. For example, on Fridays and holidays we often did not have enough people collecting donations or for lamentations (*dua*).[20] And the *khazrat* allowed us in those days to appeal to people who had not been registered by the [CRA] Plenipotentiary. We had such a respected elderly man Abdullah-abzi, who knew how to read prayers. He worked for us "at the [donation] box", although he was not a mulla.[21]

Most of these experts in rituals were elderly and long-term parishioners of the Moscow Cathedral Mosque and thus had a connection with the leadership of the religious community of Muslims; they were well known to imam Mustafin. Usually, unofficial imams were limited in their activities to performing rituals and preaching short sermons at *mejlis*. The need for unofficial imams was largely caused by the fact that the Muslim population of Moscow was increasing, and the Moscow Cathedral Mosque with its limited staff of imams remained the only religious institution. So, Damir Khairetdinov notes that if in 1959 the number of Tatars in Moscow was 80,500 people, by 1970 it had reached 109,300 (the sharp increase was caused not only by migration, but also by the inclusion of suburbs in Moscow in 1960); and by 1979 – 132, 400.[22] At the same time, it was the Tatars who formed the basis of the Muslim community in Moscow. It is obvious that such a large number of people, the vast majority of whom at least periodically faced the need to resort to Muslim rituals, were unable to get help from the imams of the mosque: A. Mustafin and R. Basyrov could not physically attend all the *mejlis* held by Moscow Muslims.

Many features of the ritual practice that developed in the 1960s–1980s have been preserved in the Moscow Tatar community even now, despite the colossal transformations of the religious life of the post-Soviet period. This is primarily related to the *mejlis*, which remains an important marker of the manifestation of ethno-confessional identity.

Conclusion

The data we have presented shows that, even during the late Soviet period, traditional ethno-confessional funeral-memorial rituals were conserved in the Tatar Muslim community under study. Even high party and nomenklatura officials among Tatars observed them. In our view, this testifies to a high level of religiosity, manifestations of which were limited by the conditions imposed by Soviet anti-religious policies. On the other hand, the massive and steady observation of these rituals allowed for the conservation of community links, prevented assimilation and constituted a solid basis for the religious revival which took place among Tatars in the late 1980s–1990s. But this is another phenomenon, which deserves a separate study.

Notes

1 *Akhun* (from Persian *Akhund* "mentor") – In the Russian Empire, the official title of the head of the Muslim clergy of the region.
2 Mullah (from Arabic *mawlā* "vicar, master, guardian") – an expert in Islamic rituals, a mosque attendant, a teacher of a religious school or just an educated Muslim. In the Russian Empire, the official title of a Muslim cleric who was appointed by a special decree of the Spiritual Assembly to a community.
3 Irina Kremleva, "Pokhoronno-pominal'nye obychai i obriady," *Russkie*. (Moscow: Nauka, 1997), 517–532.
4 Anna Sokolova and Anna Iudkina, "Pokhoronno-pominal'nyi obriad vne traditsionnoi kul'tury: tendentsii i dinamika transformatsii v sovremennoi Rossii", *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie*. 2014, 2: 3.
5 The mosque built in 1823 on the territory of the Tatar neighbourhood was the only one in the city until 1904. It was in function until it was closed in 1937. After the revival, in the post-Soviet era, it received the name of "Historical Mosque".
6 Islam Zaripov and Marat Safarov, *Akhmetzian Mustafin: iz istorii islama v SSSR*. (Moscow: ID Medina, 2017), 84–85.
7 See Raufa Urazmanova, *Sovremennye obriady tatarskogo naroda: istoriko-etnograficheskie issledovaniia.* (Kazan': Tatarskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo 1984), 145. Conclusions about the artificial nature of socialist rituals, the weakness of their implementation, are confirmed by our field research and correspond to the observations of Victoria Smolkin. See Victoria Smolkin, *A Sacred Space Is Never Empty: A History of Soviet Atheism*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).
8 Several key works on the situation of Islam in the Soviet Union were published in the 1970s and 1980s under the pseudonym "Nugman Ashirov". Their author was the head of the Department of Islam and Buddhism of the Council for Religious Affairs Abdul Nurullaev (1929–2009). More about him see Marat Safarov, "Abdul Nurullaev: Sovet po delam religii i musul'mane v 1970-80-e gg", in *Islam v Rossii i Evrazii XVI – XXI veka. Pamiati D. Iu. Arapova.* Ed. Tatiana Kotiukova. (Saint-Petersburg: Alethea, 2021), 597–620.
9 Faizrakhman Sattarov (1929–2015) was a religious leader who served in large mosques of the RSFSR, including the Leningrad Mosque, and an official of the Spiritual Administration. For more information about him, see Renat Bekkin, "'Dock the Tail of Illegal Religious Figures.' Ideological Evolution of Faizrakhman Sattarov's Views on the Role of Official Clergy in the Life of the Russian Muslims", *Gosudarstvo, religiia, tserkov' v Rossii i za rubezhom.* 2018, 36(4): 277–323.
10 Nugman Ashirov, *Evoliutsiia islama v SSSR*. (Moscow: Politizdat, 1973), 10.

11 These are different designations of the collective religious prayer-meal, which vary not only because of different dialectal norms, but also depending on the function of a given ritual (meeting, Qur'an reading, meal).
12 *Khazrat* is a respectful way of addressing an imam among Tatars.
13 Interview of the authors with Vais Bedretdinov (Moscow, 18 October 2015, in Tatar).
14 Interview of the authors with Amina Gubaidullina (Moscow, May 12, 2010, in Tatar) and Nurzide Dubinnikova (Moscow, 25 June 2013, in Russian).
15 See Ashirov, *Evoliutsiia islama*; Nugman Ashirov, *Musul'manskaia propoved'.* (Moscow, Politizdat, 1978); Zinnat Ishmukhametov, *Sotsial'naia rol' i evoliutsiia islama v Tatarii (Istoricheskie ocherki).* (Kazan': Tatarskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1979).
16 Leah Abdrakhmanova, "Traditsionnaia tatarskaia obriadnost' v prostranstve Moskovskogo regiona." *Islam v moskovskom regione. Materialy trt'ei mezhdunarodnoi nauchnoi konferentsii.* Ed. Rushan Abbiasov. (Moscow: Islamic Sermon, 2019), 106–144.
17 Fond 3004, finding Aid 1, file 35, p. 69. Central Archive of the City of Moscow. Spiridon Besshaposhnikov was the Plenipotentiary of the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults for the Moscow Region from 1944 to 1959.
18 Jadidism is a religious and socio-political movement for the renewal of Muslim culture and society among Muslims from Crimea, the Volga region, the Caucasus and Central Asia in the years 1880s–1920s.
19 Aleksandr Bennigsen, *Musul'mane v SSSR.* (Paris: Ymca-Press, 1983), 87.
20 A *dua* is a personal supplication of a Muslim in his/her native language.
21 Interview of the authors with Vais Bedretdinov (October 18, 2015).
22 Damir Khairetdinov, Tatari, "Tatarskaia obshchina Moskvy i Podmoskov'ia", in *Islam v Moskve: entsiklopedicheskii slovar'.* Ed. Damir Khairetdinov. (Nizhnii Novgorod: Medina, 2008), 260.

5 The Boundaries of Legality as an Approach to the Study of Soviet Religious Policy

The Case of Evangelical Christians-Baptists

Johannes Dyck

Judging by the official Soviet publications,[1] the country's religious policy was remarkably consistent throughout the Soviet era, enforcing the well-known Decree of 1918 on Separation of Church from State and School from Church and the Regulation of the Central Executive Committee "On Religious Associations" of 8 April 1929 that set out the legal status and limits of what was allowed for religious societies. Indeed, the essence of these legislative acts did not change significantly until the collapse of the USSR in 1991. However, the situation of religious communities often changed throughout the period. Andrei Savin, adapting the observations of Russian and American researchers such as Oleg Khlevniuk or James R. Millar to the religious field, has described the inconstancy of Soviet religious politics with the term "zigzag." Based on an analysis of all policies in relation to religion, he identifies four notable changes of direction, the last two of which he relates to 1943 and 1965, both of which stood under the sign of liberalisation.[2] Soviet believers also observed fluctuations in religious politics, but from a different perspective and at a different pace. They witnessed not only liberalisation during the war, but also a tightening of screws afterwards. Time flowed more slowly for them, and between the zigzags of 1943 and 1965, they were aware both of the Stalinist renewed repression in 1947–1948, when thousands of so-called sectarians were sentenced to up to 25 years of labour camps, and the temporary relaxation in 1955–1957 after Stalin's death when prisoners were released early. Under Khrushchev, when religion was persecuted again, the sentences were on average shorter, up to five years. Under his successor Brezhnev, the persecutions declined again. Given these fluctuations, we believe that for an adequate description of religious politics finer granularity is needed.

The law was not the only instrument of regulation of religion. This may sound odd to Western readers, who assume an unrestricted rule of the law. For example, the German jurist Otto Luchterhandt, after analysing Soviet religious legislation, blamed the low level of legislative technique, the inadequate structure, and internal order of the laws and the insufficient interlocking of the regulations.[3] To evaluate religious policy more precisely, we need additional criteria independent of the two state acts mentioned and the notion of zigzags. For this purpose, we will introduce

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a concept drawn from Russian-language historiography, namely the "boundaries of legality." In the context of the perennial existence of legal and illegal religious communities, it corresponds to a demarcation line beyond which a community finds itself in the illegal sphere. This line evolved repeatedly, even as religious legislation itself remained unchanged.

The concept of boundaries of legality defines more precisely than codified law, as per the 1918 Decree and 1929 Regulation, what religious communities can and cannot do. This definition also includes the changing interpretation of the scope of what the state deemed acceptable. As result, the boundaries of legality encompassed congregations that were considered by the state as legal. Nadezhda Beliakova used the term in reference to Evangelical Christians-Baptists;[4] Aleksei Beglov worked with this idea in relation to catacomb groups of the Russian Orthodox Church.[5] For him, everything that was not foreseen by Soviet law—communities without official registration, prohibited forms of prayer, and social activity of believers—was "illegal." At the same time, the state tolerated and even permitted different religious practices not explicitly authorised by the law. This suggests that the state used additional means to assert the boundaries of legality. They will be the subject of more in-depth consideration in this chapter.

For our case study, we will narrow down our research area to the Evangelical Christians-Baptist community, the second largest confession in the USSR after the Russian Orthodox Church. Baptism emerged in the country beginning with German colonists in the 1850s and expanding into the Russian population a decade later. In the 1900s, the church-building work of Ivan Prokhanov led to a next wave of Baptists known as Evangelical Christians.[6] Both groups went through severe persecutions in the 1930s and finally united in 1944 to form the confession of Evangelical Christians-Baptists. In the 1960s, the Evangelical Christians-Baptists split into two groups. The larger one tried to use all the few legal opportunities. The smaller one, approximately 10%, formed a protest movement and intentionally remained outside legality, forcing the authorities to adjust the legal boundaries. This dual configuration and their relatively large number of members make the Evangelical Christians-Baptists a group particularly suitable to explore the concept of boundaries of legality. Their example shows how the state used the mechanism of additional restrictions to govern the movement and how resistance changed the boundaries. This chapter will examine the following question: how accurately does the concept of "boundaries of legality" describe Soviet religious policy? Our hypothesis is that this concept describes Soviet religious policy more accurately than the Soviet anti-religious literature[7] based on the 1918 Decree and the 1929 Regulation.

Registration

An important element of Soviet religious policy was the registration of religious communities with the government. This question is covered in more detail in Nadezhda Beliakova's research.[8] Here we will concentrate solely on elements relevant to our case. Policies of registration of religious communities existed already in the

Tsarist era.[9] The Imperial Edict of 17 October 1906 stipulated that the congregation should be entered in a certain register of the provincial administration; at the same time, the edict also mentioned a required minimum of 50 founders, granted the right to a house of worship, foresaw the obligation to hold annual general meetings, and required a three-person congregation council. The law demanded the registration of a spiritual leader, who could be rejected by the authorities, and required from religious congregations the keeping of registers of civil status.[10] Those who are familiar with post-war Soviet registration regulations from the 1960s to 1980s will find many similarities here.

The legalisation of religious organisations in the form of registration was resumed in the Soviet Union at the end of the Second World War. Stalin authorised the creation of the Council for Russian Orthodox Church Affairs (CROCA) and the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults (CARC) on 14 September 1943[11] and 19 May 1944,[12] respectively. The ensuing resolution of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR "On the rules for opening of churches"[13] approved the registration of Orthodox churches. The prescriptions of this document did not differ much from the scheme of registration of prayer buildings established on 19 November 1944.[14] The scheme of legalisation was approved on the highest level of executive power: both documents were signed by the deputy chairman of the Council of People's Commissars Viacheslav Molotov. These documents gave a first shape to the boundary of legality.

Additional reasons for registering churches were the plans to establish a global centre of Orthodox Christianity in Moscow. To carry them out, naturally, legal churches were needed. In addition, many churches were opened during the war on occupied territories or remained on territories annexed in 1939–1940 and were subsequently registered. As a result, in two and a half years (before 1 June 1947), 1,800 communities were registered in Ukraine and 200 in Russia.[15]

The CARC followed a confessional approach in its work. It worked both with non-Christian religions (Islam, Buddhism) and with Christian ones, among which it distinguished between those who had their own centres (Armenian Apostolic Church, Old Believers, Evangelical Christians-Baptists, and Seventh-day Adventists), and those whose centre was outside the country (Catholics, Lutherans, Jews, etc.). The Council was not familiar at that time with "intellectual mystical formations like the former organizations of theosophists, anthroposophists, satanists, and the like."[16] They would not have had the slightest opportunity to be legalised.

The CARC viewed legalisation as an instrument of denominational control. Considering baptism to be a "democratic" movement, "adapted to occasionally going underground," the CARC developed a strategic concept for transforming it into a rigid hierarchical structure modelled after the Orthodox Church[17] and placed it under the supervision of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (AUCECB), officially founded in October 1944. Locally, it was represented by a newly created senior presbyter system similar to that of Orthodox bishops. From the outset, the AUCECB was embedded into the standard legalisation scheme. Registration of Baptist communities outside it was impossible. It registered not only local congregations but also their presbyters in its own registry, issuing them

a time-limited certificate of registration, which had to be renewed periodically.[18] The state interfered with the process of ministerial registration and could easily reject any application behind closed doors and without having to give any justification. Communication between the state and individual Evangelical-Baptist congregations was reduced to a minimum. The state viewed the AUCECB as the body through which it could control the Evangelical-Baptist movement.

The strategists of the CARC were well aware of possible opposition in the Baptist ranks. On 1 July 1947, CARC chairman Ivan Polianskii reported to the heads of the main governing instances, including the Party's Propaganda Department and State Security organs, on the possibility of forming a religious underground: "The insignificant weight … of the possible 'opposition' and the lack of ground for its development, however, allows us not to take into account this prospect."[19] The statement was supported by accompanying rigid measures of the law enforcement institutions. At that time, the religious underground was dealt with in a particularly harsh manner: from 1947 onwards, its members were sentenced to 25 years' imprisonment in labour camps. By comparison, the penalty for murder at the time was eight to ten years. Until 1953, 8,290 so-called sectarians were convicted.[20] In 1950, the Council's admittedly incomplete statistics listed 1,844 illegal Evangelical Christians-Baptist, Pentecostal, and other "sectarian" groups.[21] If these numbers are reliable, there was an average of 4.5 sentences per illegal group. Even if the actual number of illegal groups was five times higher than these statistics, each of them had to pay for their existence with one arrest. Such was the extent of the persecution.

Post-war legalisation was selective. In March 1947, Polianskii submitted to the Soviet leadership a list of 18 sects known to his department, most of which could not be legally registered.[22] An important element for legalisation was the doctrinal essence of the religious community. However, the selection relied on other criteria as well. We have already noted the purely formal registration in the formerly occupied territories. It was counter-balanced, however, by a decreased pace of registration in the east of the country. The activities of unregistered congregations were prohibited, and the authorities naively assumed that such congregations would dissolve themselves.

For the authorities, even this artificially reduced level of religiosity was unexpectedly high. In the summer of 1947, the state leadership began to seriously worry about the legalisation process. In June 1947, Polianskii reported to his superiors: "On the Evangelical Christians-Baptists … consider the current number of congregations to be essentially the limit."[23] By that time, 2,678 Baptist congregations had been registered; 614 applications for registration had been rejected,[24] leaving them in the underground. In 1948, at Stalin's insistence, the legalisation of religious communities was ultimately stopped. With this, the initial boundaries of legality underwent a first major shift. This date marks the end of the first period of post-war religious policy—the period of initial registration. This situation persisted for almost two decades.

Beginning in 1948, the CARC steadily narrowed the boundaries of legality by deregistering congregations. That year marked the beginning of the second period of religious politics—the last years of faith suppression under Stalin. By 1 January 1951, the number of legal Evangelical-Baptist congregations had declined by 16%. The deregistered congregations, however, did not dissolve, increasing the number

of illegal groups. By that time, the CARC counted already 854 illegal communities for 2,241 registered ones,[25] i.e. at least 27.6% of Evangelical-Baptist congregations were outside the boundaries of legality (admittedly, the statistics of the CARC should be regarded as incomplete). A decade later, after a short period of political thaw after Stalin's death, during Khrushchev's attack on religion, they became a breeding ground for a major split in the Evangelical-Baptist milieu. The division followed the boundaries of legality, based on different attitudes towards registration, some communities striving for legalisation, and others rejecting it. Only in 1965 did the authorities come to the conclusion that pushing religious groups beyond the boundaries of legality was extremely unproductive.

The second important change in the boundaries of legality took place in 1953 immediately after Stalin's death. Miriam Dobson identifies three major political events in that year, all related to the so-called restoration of socialist legality (*sotsialisticheskaia zakonnost'*).[26] In 1955–1956, as a result of an extensive revision of cases, previously imprisoned "sectarians" were released and returned as heroes of faith to their illegal communities, reinforcing confidence in the rightness of their convictions. These rehabilitations resulted from political transformations in the sphere of religion. In November 1954, the central newspaper *Pravda* published a Central Committee's resolution about errors in conducting atheistic propaganda within the population. This admission sent a fresh wind of change and a notion of positive shifts in religious policy not only to believers in the country, but also to the CARC commissioners.[27] For the next few years, this institution did not burden the illegal congregations with its demands. In this way, in 1954, the religious policy entered its third phase of uncertainty but temporary tolerance.

Charter

From the very beginning, the concept of boundary of legality had a mechanism for fine-tuning built into it. What was not regulated by law was specified in a charter of the religious organisation,[28] which was also negotiated with the government and approved by it. In this way, differences could be made between a Lutheran church and a mosque, an Evangelical-Baptist congregation and a synagogue. We put forward the thesis that the changes in the statutes allow us to trace the fluctuations in the boundaries of legality with a reasonable degree of accuracy. The implementation of a charter in a local congregation was closely monitored by local CARC commissioners.[29] Both the tightening and loosening of the religious policy were accompanied, at least in the case of the Evangelical Christians-Baptists, by changes in the charter.

The AUCECB adopted its first charter when it entered the field of legality in October 1944.[30] As if in anticipation of future repression, it was designed to be as unspecific as possible, was short, and mostly contained general provisions. The charter provided a foundation for unification of future leadership mode and included a paragraph about the sole responsibility for the congregation by a presbyter and made no reference to any collegial governing bodies or other attributes of Baptist congregational democracy, thereby effectively abandoning these principles. Moreover, it did not even contain any reference to senior presbyters who

represented the Moscow centre in the regions. A year later, in 1945, the AUCECB affirmed the importance of the charter for the daily work of the senior presbyters and supplemented it with a separate instruction for them exclusively,[31] which remained unknown to the majority of the church.

More than the charter mechanism, the CARC used intensively the tool of recommendations to the AUCECB, which the latter processed into circulars and instructions to its senior presbyters. The price of disobedience was the loss of legal registration, together with the loss of a house of worship, the impossibility of conducting meetings, and possibly the arrest of the church leadership. Circulars of the AUCECB contained a whole package of restrictions—including a prohibition on the baptism of the underaged, a warning about itinerant preachers,[32] and a restriction on the right to preach only to a narrow circle of people.[33] Already in February 1947, the demand to minimise early baptisms for young people testified to a willingness to struggle with Baptist expansion.[34]

In the summer of 1948, marking the new alteration of the boundary of legality, the CARC returned to the idea of the charter as an instrument of oppression and decided to "prompt" the AUCECB to develop a new charter, prescribing further restrictions in it.[35] The new charter, drafted by the end of November 1948, was a full-length document of 4 sections and 44 paragraphs, with many sub-paragraphs.[36] The document reads like a wish list of the AUCECB called upon to protect the Baptist movement. It incorporated traditional elements of Baptist inner-church democracy—countrywide conventions, a five-year turnover of its leadership, as well as a Bible school, training courses, a periodical, and contacts with believers in foreign countries, all things that were not available at that time. There was nothing in the charter about an issue that became crucial in the following years, the limitation of baptism to adults over the age of 18 after a year's probationary period. Through this charter, the state interfered primarily with the way congregations were governed internally. The congregational leadership structure was reduced to a three-person council. Nevertheless, a permanent cadre of allowed preachers selected by the council was declared. A traditional Russian Baptist service included several short sermons, and large churches could have several dozen preachers.

The chairman of the Baptist Union Iakov Zhidkov took pains to justify the new charter in the Baptist periodical press, on the one hand, but, on the other hand, threatened excommunication for failure to abide by it:

> Believers in their service to God must reckon both with the charter and with the times. One time may be devoted to one service and another to another one… Those believers who will not submit to this charter naturally have no place within the congregations of the Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists, whose statutes they reject.[37]

The new charter, however, afforded the Baptist Union and its congregations no protection from the impending tightening of religious policy. Its *Brethren's Herald* magazine, enshrined in the charter, was closed down only a few months later, in the spring of 1949. The year 1950 marked the next step: a confidential circular

issued by the AUCECB prohibited recitation of poetry in services, the number of preachers was reduced to a minimum, and the age limit for baptism was raised to 25 years.[38] In 1951, baptism candidates were even supposed to be approved by the AUCECB.[39] Conventions, mentioned in the charter as well as in the 1929 law, were held neither during the last Stalinist decade, nor during the five years that followed, 1953–1958. Not just charters, but direct orders from the authorities were the main instrument of denominational control.

The fourth phase of post-war religious policy started in 1958, another milestone in the history of worsening relations between state and church. There was a return to the political course of systematic destruction of religion taken in 1948. Deregistration of churches, but also criminal persecution resumed, albeit less severely than in the Stalin era. By 1 January 1964, 1,797 registered Evangelical Christians-Baptist churches remained,[40] representing 67.1% of the total of summer 1947, and 80.1% of 1951. In 1961–1965 alone, 350 Baptists were convicted of illegal activities.[41] The attack on the church was unexpectedly brutal, and even a legal status offered no protection to churches. A.V. Karev, General Secretary of the AUCECB, even spoke in a private conversation of the threat to limit the number of services to ten a year.[42] Jumping ahead, we should note that the protest from the illegal Evangelical-Baptist communities put an end to the harassment. Following Tat'iana Nikol'skaia, we assume that the turning point came with the wave of protest in connection with the death of the neophyte Nikolai Khmara in prison on 9 January 1964. His case was heard in the Supreme Court, which condemned the persecutions of believers.[43]

In 1959, the state once again required a new version of the charter. The AUCECB included in it some of the previous instructions to senior presbyters. The Council's chairman A. Puzin reviewed the charter himself.[44] Compared to the previous edition (1948), it lost a number of Baptist democracy elements, such as the periodic plenums of the AUCECB. Its area of responsibility was narrowed from all congregations to registered ones only. Educational institutions and trainings for ministers disappeared from the document. The charter expanded the probation period before baptism to two or three years. The full church responsibility was assigned to an executive body composed of three persons, and the right to preach was strictly limited again. The fight against Baptist democracy continued. In keeping with the spirit of the times, the charter prohibited the use of musical instruments in church except for the harmonium, the organ, and, exceptionally, the piano, so that services would not be attractive.

The new charter, issued in the spring of 1960,[45] went almost unnoticed against the background of a simultaneous Instructional Letter of AUCECB to its senior presbyters,[46] which was an expanded commentary on the charter. The latter was leaked to the Evangelical-Baptist community and acted as a trigger that accelerated heavy centrifugal processes within it. In 1961, it became the main cause of the split in Soviet Baptism.

The protest originated among illegal Evangelical-Baptist churches and groups that were not affiliated with the AUCECB and were not subject to its charters with their limitations. In 1961, the protest became organised and quickly gained prominence in illegal and even legal congregations. A group of protest leaders started with demands of a countrywide convention to discuss the situation and replace the

existing AUCECB. Over time, their list of demands expanded. In 1965, they formed a full-scale counterpart of the legal confessional centre—the Council of Churches of the Evangelical Christians-Baptists (CCECB). By the end of the 1980s, it united approximately 25,000 believers,[47] totalling about 10% of the Baptist community. The authorities were unable to suppress the CCECB either through strong administrative measures or criminal prosecutions.

As a result of the heavy impact of the split, the authorities proved ready for concessions. In 1963, the AUCECB, with the permission of the authorities, convened a countrywide conference, which was declared a convention (*s"ezd*), and where one more charter was adopted.[48] It significantly expanded the boundaries of legality for the Evangelical Christians-Baptists: its first paragraph already declared that "the Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists in the USSR … includes the former associations of Evangelical Christians, Baptists, Christians of the Evangelical Faith and Mennonites."[49] The explicit naming of the Pentecostal and Mennonite denominations, previously considered anti-state and anti-social, not subject to registration, was new and marked an acknowledgement by the authorities of their defeat and a victory for the AUCECB on the path of legalisation.

This time, the AUCECB included into the charter many lost elements of Baptist democracy and collegiality. The protesters' main demand, the convention, went into the text of the charter under a slightly changed name and was to be convened at three-year intervals. Its main point, "consideration of questions of internal church life," took to the highest level the central principle of Baptist democracy—collegial discussion of faith matters. The regular convention was at least nominally placed above the AUCECB. The new charter vested senior presbyters not only with oversight of order, but also above all with spiritual leadership; their appointment was made dependent on the consent of their local congregation. The age qualification or probationary period for baptism candidates was dropped from the text. As a tribute to grassroots Baptist democracy, the charter restored the clause on preaching by ordinary church members, a phenomenon common in big Baptist churches. This point proved decisive for the approval of the charter in the legal part of the Baptist community because it satisfied broad masses who longed for activity in the church. Preachers were given the legal right to participate in the spiritual matters of the congregation, which suggested a format for regular meetings of the congregation's leadership with their participation. Finally, the charter authorised musical accompaniment for choral and congregational singing, an important nuance that put an end to the artificial stifling of Baptist musical culture and to the struggle against the attractiveness of Baptist worship services.

The 1963 version of the charter lived up to the hopes of the legal part of the Baptist community. Although it was subsequently revised twice more, in 1966[50] and 1979,[51] the later changes were not as significant. As a token of Baptist democracy, in 1966, presbyterial councils were established at the senior presbyter level and regional presbyterial meetings were enshrined. At the grassroots level, the "zealous participation" of each member in the life of a legal church was underlined. The traditional baptismal tests remained, but without a time limit, which was in keeping with tradition. The 1979 charter contained only cosmetic changes.

In the end, the charters proved to be less of an instrument of denominational control than a mark of the boundaries of legality. Reality turned out to be too complicated for this approach to governance. All in all, the organised disobedience of the illegal part of the Baptist community forced a significant relaxation of restrictions on registration for Baptists. As early as the end of 1965, the CARC decreed: "All Baptist religious groups of believers should be registered, subject to unconditional recognition and observance of Soviet legislation on cults and other state laws."[52] The general ban on registration, introduced in 1948, had finally fallen.

The years 1965–1966 can be considered the next milestone of Soviet religious policy. This new, fifth, phase could be placed under the motto of legalisation in exchange for loyalty. This time, the boundary of legality was stretched far beyond such a centralised union as AUCECB and included confessions considered anti-Soviet and anti-social just a few years earlier. They were allowed to register autonomously without a connection to the AUCECB. To our knowledge, the first beneficiaries of the new registration order were two Mennonite congregations at the end of 1966.[53] In 1968, Pentecostals followed.[54] The new registration procedure was also supposed to be attractive enough for illegal Evangelical Christians-Baptists who considered it impossible to become members of the AUCECB. A significant number of illegal CCECB churches also made use of the offer and applied for legalisation autonomously, breaking with their former centre. By 1986, their number had increased to 71.[55] This produced one more split, this time within the protest movement, showing that changes in the religious policy had reached their goal.

The distinctive feature of the time for the Evangelical Christians-Baptists was the coexistence of three parallel currents. The illegal one did not recognise fully any religious laws, giving its own interpretation of the boundaries of legality and transgressing them. Both legal currents visibly benefited from this, and not least the AUCECB. As early as 1972, the Council for Religious Affairs noted with alarm the violations of religious law in its congregations, which was discussed in detail in several reports to the AUCECB plenum in July 1972.[56] The state, however, had to come to terms with the fact that a number of senior presbyters and even members of the AUCECB Presidium were totally unresponsive to violations of the boundaries of legality, seeking to avoid a "new ferment among the believers,"[57] and to prevent a possible migration into the illegal camp. In this way, the illegal part of the Evangelical Christians-Baptist community helped protect its legal part.

It appears to us that, at that time, the boundaries of legality were closely tied to international politics. If so, the next milestone could be set to the early 1970s, when the main ideas of the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe began to be discerned and the country began in advance to prepare for the implementation of a document that finally was signed in 1975 in Helsinki. This sixth period of religious politics was perhaps the period of the broadest boundaries of legality since the war. During that period, the principle "the severity of Russian laws is mitigated by the optionality of their enforcement," attributed to a number of literature classics, was most often applied.

In 1982, the boundaries of legality began to shrink again. A new, seventh, period in religious politics opened up, with an increase in the number of trials within

the CCECB community. Even the AUCECB churches were forced to consider the changing circumstances. A clear indication of the reversal of previously gained freedoms was the trial of Nikolai Reimer and Svetlana Stat'eva in 1983 in Kant, Kirghizia. They were accused of holding a religious youth rally in the nearby mountains, a practice that was not allowed by the 1929 law but had become common in previous years in many legal churches. Only due to the intervention of the Moscow authorities was the sentence suspended.[58] In 1986, with the beginning of perestroika, this period came to an end, giving way to the last, eight, period of Soviet religious politics that lasted until the dissolution of the USSR.

On the whole, the periods of persecution and liberalisation remained specific to each denomination. Only Baptists kept their union and enjoyed the right to regular conventions; other denominations were not allowed even occasional conferences. Nor is it known how long the privileges enjoyed by Baptists would have lasted. After 1982, the coercive pressure on the illegal groups increased significantly, and we may never know what effect this would have had on the legal part if perestroika had not brought significant changes to the state's policies regarding religion.

Conclusion

To conclude, we believe that studying the boundaries of legality allows to describe state religious policy more adequately than the approach known from Soviet anti-religious literature and even Savin's "zigzag" scheme. The most evident boundary of legality was registration. It allowed continual fine-tuning at the local level. The mechanism of charters effectively allowed more fine-tuning of the boundaries of legality depending on the confession. At the same time, as Beliakova's dissertation[59] shows, one more dimension of religious policy was the often chaotic implementation of law at the local level.

Any religious movement in the Soviet Union, be it new or experiencing a revival, would sooner or later have come to the attention of the state authorities if it reached a certain size and activity level. The consequence would have been a struggle for acceptable boundaries of legality, which was the subject of our discussion. All in all, Evangelical Christians-Baptists congregations managed to maintain a certain level of resistance and, at times, to carve out a modicum of religious independence.

Notes

1 For example, A.I. Barmenkov, *Svoboda sovesti v SSSR,* 2nd ed. (Moscow: Mysl', 1986). This type of literature was fully consistent with the anti-religious ideological course of the Communist Party.
2 A.I. Savin, "'Zigzagi' sovetskoi religioznoi politiki (1923-1966 gg.)," *Gumanitarnye nauki v Sibiri* 25, No 4 (2018): 28–32, 28.
3 Otto Luchterhandt, *Die Religionsgesetzgebung der Sowjetunion* (Berlin: Berlin-Verlag, 1978), 45–46.
4 N.A. Beliakova, "Vsesoiuznyi sovet evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov – produkt i zalozhnik stalinskoi religioznoi politiki," in: *Konfessional'naia politika sovetskogo gosudarstva v 1920–1950-e gody: Materialy XI Mezhdunarodnoi nauchnoi konferentsii. Velikii Novgorod, 11-13 oktiabria 2018 g.* (Moscow: Politicheskaia entsiklopediia, 2019), 418–429, 428.

5 Aleksei Beglov, *V poiskakh "bezgreshnykh katakomb": Tserkovnoe podpol'e v SSSR*. (Moscow: Izdatel'skii sovet RPTs, 2008), 12.
6 The first wave of Baptism in the Russian Empire rolled from the late 1860s. The term "Evangelical Christians" in the context of Free Churches in Russia goes back at least to 1864. Later, I. S. Prokhanov gave the term "evangelical Christians" the character of a distinct confessional identity that was distinct from the main Baptist identity. Often the term "evangelical Christians" is retrospectively projected onto the St. Petersburg revival of the 1870s, whose leaders, however, considered themselves supra-confessional Christians. In the 1860s and 1870s, the term was generic and somewhat diffuse. Prokhanov himself used the term "Russian Open Baptists" for a Western audience. S. *The Story of the Early Mennonite Brethren (1860–1869): Reflections of a Lutheran Churchman*, John B. Toews, ed. (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2002) 25, 104, 130–131, 133; Albert W. Wardin Jr., *On the Edge: Baptists and Other Free Church Evangelicals in Tsarist Russia, 1855–1917* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013) 380, 385.
7 See endnote 1.
8 N.A. Beliakova, "Vlast' i religioznye ob"edineniia v 'pozdnem' SSSR: problema registratsii," *Otechestvennaia istoriia*, No 4 (2008): 124–130.
9 More on continuity between Russian imperial and Soviet religious policy: Nadezhda Beliakova, "Tserkov' v sotsialisticheskom gosudarstve: osobennosti russkoi pravovoi traditsii," in: *Religii mira. Istoriia i sovremennost. 2006-2010* (Moscow: Nestor-istoriia, 2012), 428–469.
10 "Imennoi Vysochaishii Ukaz Pravitel'stvuiushchemu Senatu. 17 oktiabria 1906," *Tserkovnye Vedomosti*, No 43 (1906): 458–465.
11 Postanovlenie № 993 Soveta narodnykh komissarov SSSR, 14.09.1943 "Ob organizatsii Soveta po delam russkoi pravoslavnoi tserkvi"[Resolution of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR "On the Organization of the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church"], F. 5446, Op. 1, D. 218, L. 179, "Sovet Ministrov SSSR", State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF).
12 Postanovlenie № 572 Soveta narodnykh komissarov SSSR, 19.05.1944 "Ob organizatsii 'Soveta po delam religioznykh kultov'" [Resolution of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR "On the organization of the Council for Religious Cults"], F. 5446, Op. 1, D. 228, L. 50, "Sovet Ministrov SSSR", GARF.
13 Postanovlenie № 1325 Soveta narodnykh komissarov SSSR, 28.11.1943 "O poriadke otkrytiia tserkvei" [Resolution of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR "On the procedure for opening churches"], F. 5446, Op. 1, D. 221, L. 3–8, "Sovet Ministrov SSSR", GARF.
14 Postanovlenie № 1603 Soveta narodnykh komissarov SSSR, 19.11.1944 "O poriadke otkrytiia molitvennykh zdanii religioznykh kultov" [Resolution of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR "On the procedure for opening prayer houses of religious cults"], F. 5446, Op. 1, D. 238, L. 246–249, "Sovet Ministrov SSSR", GARF.
15 I.V. Polianskii, O zadachakh Upolnomochennykh Soveta po delam religioznykh kul'tov [Tasks of the Commissioners of the Council for Religious Cults], 01.10.1946, F. 6991, Op. 3, D. 41, L. 133–134, "Sovet po delam religii pri Sovete Ministrov SSSR", GARF.
16 I.V. Polianskii, Otchetnyi doklad Soveta po delam religioznykh kultov pri Sovete Ministrov Soiuza SSR po sostoianiiu na 1-e ianvaria 1947 g. [Report of the Council for Religious Cults as of January 1, 1947], 27.02.1947, F. 6991, Op. 3, D. 47, L. 71–103, 79, 81, "Sovet po delam religii pri Sovete Ministrov SSSR", GARF.
17 Iu.V. Sadovskii to K.E. Voroshilov and A.A. Zhdanov, 12.02.1947, F. 6991, Op. 3, D. 47, L. 33–38, "Sovet po delam religii pri Sovete Ministrov SSSR", GARF.
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6 Trying to Leave the Religious Underground

Registration of Catholic Communities in Late Soviet Kazakhstan

Jerzy Rohoziński

"There was no church, the old women gathered around the houses to pray. (…) And the children also went when we prayed around the houses. There were a lot of children. And there were no men, men didn't go. (…) I have all the books, I can read Polish, I know all the prayers, only I can't speak". These were the words of Mrs. Janina Ulrich (née Stachowska), a 95-year-old resident of the village of Petrovka in northern Kazakhstan.[1] She was part of a community of Polish and German "special settlers" who continued to practice Catholicism after their deportation in the Stalin era – a phenomenon that remained unstudied by both Soviet ethnography and Western sociology.

What does this old Polish woman's account reveal us? As it turns out, the Polish settlers' local Catholicism showed tendencies similar to that identified in Soviet Islam. Along with the "parallel" or "unofficial" Catholicism that the Kazakhstani Polish woman mentions, there was also, as I will show in my paper, "official" or "registered" Catholic communities.[2] I will analyse how "unregistered", "illegal" community of believers achieved official registration in accordance with Soviet religious legislation. The analysis will focus on two cases – one community with pre-revolutionary roots and the other formed only in 1936. This chapter will also examine how "underground" Catholicism functioned in the reality of Soviet Kazakhstan.

The origins of Catholicism in the Kazakh steppes: a general overview

Mrs. Janina is among the last surviving witnesses of a generation of Poles and Germans who were deported from the Ukrainian SSR in 1936, and whose descendants have formed the backbone of Kazakhstan's Catholic population. Nevertheless, the history of Catholicism in Kazakhstan does not begin in 1936, for its roots go back to the pre-revolutionary period.

Before 1917, the structures of the Catholic Church in the Kazakh steppes were only weakly developed. However, the take-over of government by the Bolsheviks would lead to the complete disappearance of church structures on these lands. At the turn of 1922, there were only 15 parish churches and 25 affiliates in the

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entire Asian part of the vast Archdiocese of Mogilev, which stretched across most of pre-revolutionary Russia. At the time, Catholic communities of note existed in two Kazakh cities: Semipalatinsk (approximately 500 persons) and in Petropavlovsk (approximately 5,000), and they were pastorised by no more than two priests: one residing in Omsk and the other in Ishim, in the Omsk region. The rest, dispersed over enormous areas, were completely deprived of churches and any pastoral care. We know, for example, that in 1923, the district of Kustanay did not even have a single church or house of prayer. The church in Petropavlovsk is last mentioned in Soviet administrative documents in 1925, when it figured in the list of insured buildings serving religious purposes, while the congregation of faithful was registered at the church in 1924. In the second half of the 1920s, however, the edifice was appropriated for a storage depot, and in the 1930s, it was transformed into residential apartments for secretaries of the District Party Committee and guest lodgings for representatives of the Party apparatus who visited the city on official delegations.[3]

When, however, in 1936, these lands were settled by Catholics deported from the border regions of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, there occurred no revival of the Church organisation. For while in 1925 there were 332 Catholic parishes in Soviet Ukraine (and 292 as of 1 January 1928), all that remained in Kazakhstan were communities of former parishioners without any parochial organisation as such. The Bolsheviks actively combated the Catholic faith and hoped that it would finally disappear in the wake of the deportations.[4] Thus, the Polish exiles arrived in Kazakhstan completely deprived of pastoral care. Immediately after the deportation, there was probably not even a single clergyman at any of the Kazakh special (forced) settlements; this was the direct result of the intentional policy of the authorities.[5] Our collection of testimonies given by elderly Polish women from the Akmola Region, who remembered the first years following their exile, contains no information about priests, and the only references are to "prayers for a priest". The collective memory of the time recorded the first religious emotions experienced upon reaching the Kazakh steppes; these, however, were associated with lay persons.[6] Religious leaders also appeared in these stories, and they seemed to function as "holy men", and in some measure as "folk healers", using their religious "gift". This is an intriguing analogy to beliefs associated with the holy men of "folk" Islam in various other parts of the USSR.[7]

Such forms of "folk religiosity" may have become entrenched among the believers, given that mostly Catholics in Kazakhstan had no choice but to function "underground". The faithful I visited in November 2018 in the Shortandy district, for example, obtained permission for the erection of a church only in 1990 and thus functioned in the religious "underground" practically throughout the entire Soviet period. However, Catholics in other parts of Kazakhstan undertook efforts – sometimes successful – to register their congregations in accordance with Soviet legislation. The fundamental elements of this legal system were developed already in the first years of existence of the Soviet regime and remained in force nearly until its collapse, albeit with alterations after the Second World War.

Development of the legal basis for the functioning of religious communities in the Soviet system

What were its primary tenets? The Resolution of the All-Union Central Executive Committee and of the Council of People's Commissars of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, dated 8 April 1929 and entitled "On Religious Assemblies", developed the regulations provided for in the "Decree on the Division of the Orthodox Church from the State" of 23 January 1918. It introduced the concept of "a local association of citizens who are believing Christians and are over 18 years of age, and who adhere to one and the same religious cult, denomination, current or branch, this comprising at least 20 persons who have gathered for the joint satisfaction of their religious needs".[8] In accordance with Soviet law, religious assemblies did not have (and could never obtain) legal personality; however, they were obliged to register with the Standing Committee for Religious Cults at the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR. Only then did the religious practices of the faithful become legal, even though their communities continued to function as no more than private associations. At the same time, all charitable, self-help, social, didactic and educational activities were forbidden, as was the teaching of religion to persons under 18 years of age, and there was also a ban on obtaining external financial assistance. Further, the donations of members could be solely voluntary and not ensue from any obligations.

The Resolution of 1929 introduced a differentiation between "local denominational associations" (*mestnaia religioznaia obshchina* or *religioznoe obshchestvo*) and "groups of believers" (*gruppa veruiushchikh*). In accordance with formal requirements, local associations could only be established by groups numbering at least 50 persons and had to have their own statutes. Pursuant to a contract concluded with the local authorities, each such body received assets, was allowed to conclude private-legal transactions, and took upon itself the coverage of all payments – usually exorbitant – associated with the usage of premises for religious purposes. At the beginning of 1930, for example, the Consulate General of the Polish Republic in Kharkiv reported that the local Catholic community was unable to pay rent for its lease of the church.

A group of believers, on the other hand, was a phenomenon typical of the 1920s and 1930s – the period of confiscation of places of worship. It was usually established on the basis of a petition, signed by no less than 20 persons, for the restitution of a confiscated church building. Pursuant to Soviet law, religious communities existed independently of each other and could not make themselves subordinate to any church structures, while the authority and power of a bishop or other hierarch derived solely from the voluntary consent of their flock. In any case, the cleric ministering to a given group formally had the status of a person "hired" by the body representing the congregation. To a large extent, this corresponded to the image of the local Orthodox priest that was entrenched in Orthodox culture, i.e. of a person who held religious ceremonies for the community but at the same time had no pastoral functions and was not viewed as a spiritual mentor, the role of whom was often reserved for representatives of informal religiosity (the so-called elders).

Procedures for considering the applications of religious associations by the Soviet authorities finally became established during the Second World War. Faced with a titanic struggle against Nazi Germany, the state made concessions to the Orthodox Church. In November 1943, when there was only a single Orthodox church open in the whole of Kazakhstan, the Council of People's Commissars approved a project put forward by Colonel Georgii Karpov from the 5th Department (*otdelenie*), 2nd Directorate (*upravlenie*) of the People's Commissariat for State Security (NKGB), who played the role of "Chief Prosecutor" of the Russian Orthodox Church. In this document, he proposed that applications for the opening of Orthodox churches would be considered in a two-stage process – by the local authorities and by the central authorities. An application could be rejected already at the first stage; however, the local authorities would have to consult the matter with the local bishop and present a written substantiation of their decision to the Council for the Russian Orthodox Church, which was chaired by Karpov himself. While the Council could not intervene directly, its positive recommendation would be necessary for the application to gain support and thus be submitted for approval to the Council of People's Commissars.[9]

Pursuing registration in late Soviet Kazakhstan

In this subchapter, I will present two cases of Catholic communities pursuing registration in late Soviet Kazakhstan: one "easier" and the other "more difficult". I will also try to provide an explanation as to why one community obtained registration faster, while the other one had to wait longer. Finally, I will also answer the question of why Catholics were only belatedly allowed to legally exist in the Soviet public sphere.

The State Archive of Akmola *Oblast'* (Kokchetav/Kokshetau) contains a number of documents recording the efforts made towards the end of the 1970s by two Catholic communities in order to achieve official registration. Although both petitions were successful, one was examined and endorsed fairly rapidly, while the other took nearly a decade to process. It is difficult to explain this difference, although the stance of the local administration must have played an important role. Unfortunately, the records do not tell us whether there was any ethnic or religious discrimination involved, if attempts were made at bribery, or indeed if any other factors played a part.

Let us start with the "easier" case. On 26 October 1981, the executive committee of the Rozdolne village council (*sel'sovet*) approved the application of a group of Catholic faithful from the village of Lineevka for opening a house of prayer and turned to the regional authorities with a request for approval of its decision. The document contains a brief description of the group, stating that it was established in 1905, at the time was comprised of 32 women aged between 52 and 87. It was headed by Elizaveta Maier (a German born in 1910, with no criminal record), who also ministered (*sluzhitel' kul'ta*). The place of worship was to be located in the home of one of the female members of the congregation (with her consent). Acting in its capacity of supervisory body, the Committee assured that the assembly of

faithful was not infringing the law, "demonstrated a loyal approach to Soviet reality", and "was not engaged in agitation among the youth aimed at attracting them to the group". In 1980, the group was entered into the "temporary register" (*vremennyi uchet*) for a specific "test period", which it successfully passed.

The list with the 32 names of its founders – all female pensioners – contains only two who are Polish, the rest being German: Szymanowska and Herlińska (in Russian: Gerlinskaia). Interestingly, the prayer meetings were to be held in the house of the former, while the latter became a member of the audit commission. In her résumé, however, Herlińska stated that she was of German ethnic nationality, so she had probably taken her Polish surname from her husband. It could have been the same in the case of Szymanowska. Maier's records indicate that in the years 1929–1954, Lineevka's religious leader worked in a kolkhoz, and thereafter (1954–1956) in a sovkhoz, retiring in 1965. Szymanowska herself wrote in her résumé that, just like Herlińska, she was born in Lineevka. We may therefore venture the hypothesis that in the case of Lineevka, we are dealing with a Catholic community with pre-revolutionary roots and not constituted of special settlers deported in 1936 from the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.

Thereafter, the process of registration progressed rather speedily. Already on 30 October 1981, the Executive Committee of the Council of People's Deputies of the Kokchetav *Oblast'* (Region) turned to the Council for Religions at the Council of Ministers of the USSR with a motion for registration of the community, which was duly effected on 20 November. In their substantiation, the regional authorities employed the term "German religiousness":

> At present, out of the 80,000 Germans living in Kokchetav *Oblast'*, more than 3,100 faithful have been entered in a temporary register. This number accounts for approximately 3% of the entire German population. In recent years, Soviet authorities have registered 6 religious associations of Evangelical Christians-Baptists, and 6 of Lutherans, some 1,500 persons in total, that is more than 46% of the total number of faithful figuring in the temporary register. In consequence, the majority of faithful operate in unregistered congregations, i.e. illegally… . In order to regulate the situation of religious associations comprising persons of German ethnic nationality, and also strengthen control over their activities, the Executive Committee of the Council of Workers' Delegates of Kokchetav *Oblast'* considers it justified to grant the request of the faithful and register an independent religious association of faithful Catholics operating in the village of Lineevka in the Kokchetav district of Kokchetav *Oblast'*.[10]

The case of Taiynsha (Krasnoarmeisk) differs from that of Lineevka in three important respects: namely, the number of faithful comprising the community was considerably larger, the vast majority were Poles who had been deported to Kazakhstan in 1936, and the registration process took much more time. The party responsible for slowing down the entire procedure was the local administration, not the Council for Religious Affairs. Documented correspondence starts with a

letter sent by the local plenipotentiary of the Council for Kokchetav *Oblast'* to the chairman of the Regional Executive Committee in Krasnoarmeisk, dated 5 February 1975. In the letter, he demanded a response to his letter of 15 August 1974 concerning the application of the local Catholic community for the registration of a house of prayer (dated 17 May 1974), which had already been submitted to the municipal council. In its reply of 11 March, the Executive Committee informed the plenipotentiary that

> …the application of the Catholics had not been processed for 8 months for a specific purpose. During this time, the aforementioned group of faithful had been subjected to surveillance. This disclosed that the Catholic faithful, acting in violation of the Act on Religious Cults, regularly gathered for religious meetings at the houses of individual members of the congregation, thereby infringing Soviet legislation concerning religious cults, against which they have been repeatedly cautioned.[11]

On 25 July 1975, the municipal council received another application, in which the faithful complained that their request had been dismissed by the Krasnoarmeisk *raispolkom* chairman, although they were entitled to a place for common prayer, similarly to members of the Orthodox Church and other believers in the USSR. A few days later, the plenipotentiary of the CRA submitted another letter, requesting that the application of the faithful be reconsidered pursuant to the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the USSR, dated 12 April 1968, "On the Procedure for Considering Propositions, Motions and Complaints Submitted by Citizens". In his letter, the plenipotentiary called it "inadmissible" to forbid citizens to satisfy their religious needs. In the meantime, the faithful intervened at a higher level, with the plenipotentiary of the Council for the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic. When asked to take up the matter, the *oblast'* plenipotentiary intervened once again with the local authorities of Krasnoarmeisk. However, registration was once again refused. He duly informed the republican bodies of the Council and responded to the chairman of the Executive Committee that regular prayer gatherings did not constitute an infringement of Soviet law. At the same time, he requested that the *oblast'* Executive Committee enter the community in the temporary register for the purpose of supervision. Meanwhile, the community submitted fresh complaints to the plenipotentiary and the *oblast'* authorities, citing Article 124 of the Constitution of the USSR on freedom of religion. But all this made no impression on the Krasnoarmeisk Executive Committee, which in November 1976 refused to register the congregation again.[12]

As it turned out, the next year – when the matter reached the central authorities of the Council for Religions in Moscow – proved decisive. Towards the end of January 1977, the plenipotentiary of the Council for Kokchetav *Oblast'* wrote to the headquarters in Moscow, motioning for a positive consideration of the case:

> ….the Catholic faithful in Krasnoarmeisk have been applying for the registration of their assembly for some 6-7 years. Their activity particularly

> intensified after 1974, when an application was submitted by 248 citizens of Catholic faith… . . The Catholic faithful are loyal people, have a positive stance towards the legislation on religious cults, and do not infringe the law through their activities. The composition of their community is as follows. Three faithful aged between 30 and 40, 30 persons aged between 40 and 50, and 215 people aged over 50. Of these 248 Catholics, 38 are employed, while the rest are aged pensioners or elderly housewives.[13]

When appearing in the same registration case, the Deputy Chairman of the Executive Committee of Kokchetav *Oblast*, added:

> Presently there are 27,000 Catholics in Kokchetav *Oblast'*, of whom some 400–500, that is approximately 2% of the total Polish population, are believers. Until 1970, the Catholics had never applied for registration of their community. From April to July 1970, a few applications were received for the opening of Catholic churches in certain townships in the Chkalovo and Kellerovka districts. Due to the small numerical strength of these congregations, the matter was not taken up at the time. Lately, the Catholic faithful from Krasnoarmeisk have started to act with greater vigour. This is a sizeable community, numbering 248 persons, of whom some 30 are Germans who adopted Catholicism… . In order to regulate the situation concerning religious assemblies comprising citizens of the USSR of Polish ethnic nationality, we consider it justified to register the Catholic congregation in the city of Krasnoarmeisk in the Krasnoarmeisk district of Kokchetav *Oblast'*.[14]

A month later, on 24 February 1977, the Council adopted both recommendations and issued a decision approving registration of the community. Three months later, the plenipotentiary applied for approval for the congregation to convert an item of real estate belonging to one of the faithful into a prayer house, stressing that it was located on the outskirts of the city, away from schools, nurseries, and other public utility buildings. From May 1981 onwards, the position of priest in Krasnoarmeisk was held by Father Jan Paweł Lenga, who was born in 1950 in Khmel'nytskyi *Oblast'*, in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, and who would go on to become the Apostolic Administrator of Kazakhstan. Documents show that he had taken holy orders only in 1980, and that his first parish was Qurghonteppa in the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic. The new appointee promised the municipal council that he would "hold all religious ceremonies in accordance with the canons of the Catholic Church and the provisions governing religious cults". Conversely, when they hired the clergyman, the executive committee of the community simultaneously undertook to exercise control over him in this regard. Extant documents contain handwritten memos authorising Father Lenga to minister in Krasnoarmeisk and also present arguments in favour of the decision, such as "otherwise extremists may come in from Poland or other places and the situation could get even worse" (sic!).[15] Father Lenga's predecessor had been Karol Kisielewski (Karlis Kiselevskis, 1906–1979) from Liepāja, a Latvian

with Polish roots who had graduated from the seminary in Riga as a Doctor of Theology and taken holy orders in 1937. In 1949, he was deported to Karaganda, where he remained in exile until 1956. After his return, he ministered in the Daugavpils region of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic. Father Kisielewski does not figure in the list of collaborators of the KGB of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic, unlike the man who had recommended him for the position, Iulianis Vaivods, the Apostolic Administrator of the Archdiocese of Riga and the Diocese of Liepāja (appointed cardinal in 1983), who had been registered by the secret services in 1948 under the pseudonym "Omega".[16]

The "German" example of Lineevka in Kokchetav *Oblast'* would appear to confirm a certain tendency, namely that the pre-Revolutionary traditions of self-organisation of religious communities also played a role in the Soviet era. This rural and not very numerous congregation petitioned for registration rather late but succeeded relatively quickly. In Krasnoarmeisk, a larger city, albeit devoid of pre-Revolutionary traditions and mainly inhabited by former special settlers, the considerably larger Polish community started applying at an earlier date, but the whole process took considerably more time. On the other hand, the faithful initiated their efforts rather quickly, perhaps due to the influence of Father Kuczyński.

The ethnic factor seems to have played a role in this difference of treatment: as a result of several waves of deportations, the German population of Kazakhstan was much larger than the Polish one, and the Soviet authorities had to take this fact into account. Although the project of German autonomy eventually failed,[17] Germans enjoyed a number of possibilities that the Polish minority was deprived of, such as the possibility of learning German in schools. Finally, this had an impact on religious matters. German religiosity (not only Catholic, but also Lutheran, Mennonite, and Baptist) posed a much greater challenge to the authorities than Polish religiosity because of the total number of believers in the Kazakh SSR. This is probably why the authorities, seeing an application for registration of a community dominated by Germans, were inclined to allow its official registration faster than in the case of communities dominated by Polish believers.

In both cases, however, we are dealing with a similar age structure, with the activists being pensioners and the elderly. In Lineevka, the group was strongly feminine. The Soviet authorities were happy with such a state of affairs: pensioners and elderly women could "devote themselves to matters of religion in their old age" in a building located on the outskirts of the city and safely distant from schools, thus having little impact on the public and professional spheres and on youth. At the same time, these groups would actually find it easier to engage in the organisation of religious practices, as they had more time and were free of the "pressure of the workplace". Further, this would be a continuation of the situation that existed during the period of the "religious underground", i.e. with the "old women" functioning as "quasi priests" of the community.

For Catholics in the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic, this state of affairs lasted for a very long time when compared with the other, officially recognised denominations. Until 1956, Polish and German Catholics were special settlers with limited

rights and were considered "agents of the Vatican". Therefore, they could not take part in the religious rebirth engendered by the Great Patriotic War and were thus deprived of a unique opportunity of achieving legalisation of their communities. They were forced to function underground for many years, away from the Soviet public sphere, which they tried to reintegrate after the liberalisation of the special settler's status in 1956.

Legalisation, the "pass" to reintegration into the official sphere, was granted relatively late. For Krasnoarmeisk, in 1977, for Lineevka, in 1981. When we project these dates onto the timeline of the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic, we see just how delayed these "successes" were in relation to the religious revival that occurred in the republic towards the end of the war and immediately after its conclusion. Importantly, we should keep in mind that shortly after these registrations, some other local denominations – and in particular Islam – came to the end of a cycle of post-war "prosperity" which reached its zenith in the Brezhnev era. This relative affluence, which was felt particularly strongly in the Muslim regions of the USSR, resulted in the introduction of ostentatious consumption at religious and family ceremonies – a phenomenon that the new General Secretary of the CPSU, the "puritanical" Iuri Andropov, criticised.

When discussing the conclusions of the June 1983 Plenary Assembly of the Central Committee of the CPSU and the "tasks" which these implied for ethnography, Iurii Bromlei, the long-standing Director of the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, recommended that the paradigm of "lenient" treatment of religious ceremonies as "national traditions" be rejected:

> … important tasks have been set for the science of ethnography as regards combating the anachronism of religion. This has special significance today, when many religious phenomena take the form of religious rituals and customs… . Rituals have become an inherent element of the Soviet lifestyle, and play an ever greater role in the social awareness of people… . In this context, the improvement of the standard of living, which should lead to the expansion of manifestations of the socialist way of life, actually results in a deformation of socialist principles and customs. Conspicuous weddings, monuments, anniversaries, etc. have flooded the southern regions – the republics of Transcaucasia and Central Asia, while at present – and this is borne out by the observations of ethnographers – they are boldly making headway in the northern areas, including in regions inhabited mainly by the Russian nation.[18]

Conclusion

Why did Catholicism, a religious denomination with a significant presence in the northern part of the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic, experience such delays in comparison with Islam or Orthodox Christianity? Why was it condemned to exist underground for so many years?

In my opinion, the reasons for this were twofold and closely connected with the period of the Great Patriotic War, which was key for the history of religion in the Soviet state. Kazakh Poles, being special settlers, were excluded from participation in the "patriotic euphoria" of the war. All that remained for them were the labour battalions – an onerous and much less honourable form of service that could be classified as "rear echelon patriotism" only with great difficulty. Poles, in order to be sent to the front and avoid being stigmatised as pariahs, oftentimes passed themselves off as Russians. Indeed, by virtue of being Polish deportees and Catholics, they had no other option.[19] Further, at the time, there was no official Church structure in the Soviet state that could have given assurances of loyalty to the authorities in the name of the Catholics. Neither did one come into being in later years. This was significant, given that readiness to serve at the front and wartime support for the regime had decisive importance for the legitimisation of religious communities as groupings of loyal Soviet citizens.

After the de-Stalinisation campaign of 1956 and the liberalisation of regulations applicable to the so-called special settlers, Kazakh Poles functioned in two parallel and mutually contradictory realities: the Soviet public sphere, represented first and foremost by the school and the workplace, which was hostile towards religion, and the private sphere, where Catholic religious traditions – ridiculed at school – were cultivated, mainly through the involvement of women. This situation was in many ways common to other religions in the Soviet Union. Some Kazakh Catholics tried to change their circumstances and made efforts to officially register their religious communities. While some of them succeeded – albeit quite late, only in the 1980s – others had to wait for the collapse of the USSR. The long years spent in the "religious underground" endowed Kazakh Catholicism with very specific features and unique attributes when compared, for example, with the system, faith, and practice of the Catholic Church in Poland.

Transl. Maciej Zakrzewski

Notes

1 Interview with the author of Janina Ulrich, born in 1925, Petrovka (Shortandy district, Akmola region), 3 November 2018.

2 On the dichotomy of "official" vs "parallel" Islam (the latter one often tended to be associated with the activities of Sufi brotherhoods) see Alexandre Bennigsen and S. Endres Wimbush, *Mystics and Commisars: Sufism in the Soviet Union*, Berkeley LA: University of California Press, 1985; Alexandre Bennigsen and Chantal-Lemercier Quelquejay, "'Official' Islam in the Soviet Union", *Religion State and Society*, 7/3, 1979, pp. 148–159.

3 Irina G. Wierizhnikova, "Prehistoria Kościoła Katolickiego w Kazachstanie", *Credo,* no 2 (2007), http://www.catholic-kazakhstan.org/Pl/teksty/prehist.html, accessed 30.12.2007; "Khram Presviatogo Serdtsa Iisusa", http://katolik-petropavlovsk.com/prihod/hram-presvyatogo-serdca-iisusa, (accessed 26.02.2020); Ludmila Burgart, *Vlianie migracyonnykh faktorov na formirovanie i razvitie Katolicheskoi Tserkwi v Kazakhstanie,* [in:] *Etnodemograficheskie protsessy v Kazakhstanie i sopriedielnykh territoriakh,* Ust'-Kamienogorsk: Librus, 2006, p. 54–61; Archive of Modern Records (AAN), *Ambasada RP w Moskwie,* catalog no. 2/510/70; State Archive of Kostanay Region (GAKO) Fond 237, Finding aid 1, file 149.

4 Henryk Stroński, "GPU przeciwko Kościołowi. Dokument o antykatolickiej polityce i działaniach radzieckich służb specjalnych na Ukrainie w latach 20. XX wieku", *Echa Przeszłości* 4 (2003), p. 231–243; Henryk Stroński, *Represje stalinizmu wobec ludności polskiej na Ukrainie w latach 1929–1939,* Warszawa: "Wspólnota Polska", 1998, p. 77–78; Mikołaj Iwanow, "Polonia w Związku Radzieckim okresu międzywojennego. Kontrowersje wokół liczebności", *Dzieje Najnowsze* 19, 4 (1997), pp. 29–51; Mikołaj Iwanow, *Zapomniane ludobójstwo. Polacy w państwie Stalina. "Operacja polska" 1937–1938,* Kraków: SIW "Znak", 2014, p. 150.

5 Zbigniew S. Siemaszko, "Życie religijne obywateli polskich w głębi ZSRR w latach 1939–1957", in Edward Walewander (ed.), *Polacy w Kościele katolickim w ZSRR*, Lublin: KUL, 1991, p. 130, 139.

6 Interviews with the author of Anna Stawska, born in 1930, Shortandy, 4 November 2018; Anna Niewęgłowska, born in 1933, Franciszka Olejnik, born in 1935, Stanisława Musiewicz, born in 1931, and Janina Ulrich, born in 1925, Petrovka, Shortandy, 3 November 2018.

7 Sergei Mishchenko, born in 1958, interview by author, Zhetisai, 3.09.2018; Ewelina Korzeniewska from Rostovka in the district of Kokshetav, born in 1941, recalled that there was a folk healer, male or female, in every Polish village – interview by author, 5.12.2019, and this was supported by Józef Siedlecki, born in 1945, interview by author, Pułtusk, 22.11.2019; regarding the topic of beliefs connected with a "gift", for example in Azerbaijan Shiitism, cf. Jerzy Rohoziński, *Święci, biczownicy i czerwoni chanowie. Przemiany religijności w radzieckim i poradzieckim Azerbejdżanie,* Wrocław: Wyd. Uniw. Wrocł., 2005, p. 231–239.

8 *Sobranie uzakonenii i rasporiazhenii raboche-krest'ianskogo pravitel'stva RSFSR,* Leningrad 18 May1929, no 35 (1), art. 353.

9 *Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov' i kommunisticheskoe gosudarstvo, 1917–1941: Dokumenty i fotomatierialy,* Moscow: Rosspen, 1996, pp. 250–261; Mikhail I. Odintsov, Anna S. Kochetova, *Konfessional'naia politika v Sovetskom Soiuze v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny 1941–1945 gg.,* Moscow: Rosspen, 2014, p. 41–57; Adriano Roccucci, *Stalin i patriarkh. Pravoslavnaia Tserkov' i sovetskaia vlast' 1917–1958,* Moscow: Rosspen, 2016, p. 82–89, 178, 179; Polish Central Archives of Modern Records (AAN), *Ambasada RP w Moskwie,* catalog no. 2/510/184, 2/510/71; Grzegorz Szubtarski, "Antykościelne ustawodawstwo w ZSRR za rządów Włodzimierza Lenina 1917–1923"*, Kościół i Prawo* 2, no 15 (2013), pp. 63–75 (unfortunately, the author has mixed up the Decree issued in 1918 with the Decree on Associations of 1929).

10 *"*Zaregistrirovannoe obshchestvo katolikov s. Letovochnoe", GAAO (State Archive of Akmola Region), Fond 730, Finding Aid 1, File 51, pp. 10, 4–9, 16, 20, 24–28. The dossier has been erroneously titled, for the documents concern the village of Lineevka, which was founded in 1901 and inhabited by German Catholics, and not Letovochnoe, a colony established in 1936 for Polish and German special settlers, cf. the heading *Lineevka, Letovochnoe* in *Die Deutschen Russlands. Siedlungen und Siedlungsgebieten. Lexikon,* Moscow 2006; Maria Karpińska née Kwiatkowska, who was born in Lietowocznoje (1937), recalled that in addition to the Polish and German deportees of 1936, the village was also inhabited by Ingushes (interview by Adam Kaczyński and Kamila Zacharuk, Dołbysz, 19 February 2019).

11 *Katoliki g. Krasnoarmeiska 1975–1979,* GAAO, Fond 730, Fidnign Aid 1, File 23, pp. 77, 79.

12 GAAO, Fond 730, Finding Aid 1, File 23, pp. 68–75, 81–87, 89, 90.

13 "Zaregistrirovannoe obshchestvo katolikov v g. Krasnoarmeiske 1977–1982 gg.", GAAO, Fond 730, Finding Aid 1, File 30, p. 62.

14 GAAO, Fond 730, Finding Aid 1, File 30, p. 64.

15 GAAO, Fond 730, Finding Aid 1, File 30, pp. 41, 42, 44, 46, 57, 58, 59, 60; Amerlia Homycz, born in 1942, remembered traveling with her mother from Iasna Polana to the district of Taiynsha/Krasnoarmeisk to confess, and that "there was a small prayer house there". Interview by author, Środa Wielkopolska, 27 June 2020.

16 "Katoliki g. Krasnoarmeiska 1975–1979", GAAO, Fond 730, Finding Aid 1, File 23, pp. 54–60; card-index of collaborators of the KGB of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic, available on the website of the KGB of the Latvian SSR https://kgb.arhivi.lv/ (accessed 17.05.2020).

17 In 1972, over 3,500 German Russians sent a petition to Moscow requesting an autonomous republic in the Volga region. The government responded with the creation of an ad hoc committee to study this request. In 1976, the commission finally agreed to create an autonomous *oblast'* in Northern Kazakhstan, centered in Ereymentau. See Siro Khan'ya, "Tselinograd, iiun' 1979 g.: k voprosu o nesostoiavsheisia nemetskoi avtonomii v Kazakhstane", *Acta Slavica Iaponica* 20 (2003), 230–236. The unsuccessful efforts to introduce Polish language teaching in schools in the Polish regions of Kazakhstan, made at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s in the Ministry of Education of the Kazakh SSR by the Polish activist Jan Plater Gajewski, are characteristic of the situation of the Poles. Gajewski was arrested in the USSR in L'viv in 1939. He did not manage to leave the Soviet Union with the Anders Army, in 1943, he was arrested as a "socially dangerous element" and went through the camps in Uzbekistan, Siberia, and Karaganda, and in 1951, he was sent to a special settlement in Karkalinsk. After 1956, he made a career as a recognized agronomist. See "Materiały dot. starań Jana Platera Gajewskiego o nauczanie języka polskiego w szkołach w Kazachstanie z okresu 1975–1985", APW (State Archive of Warsaw) 72/3270/3.

18 Iurii Bromlei, "O nekotorykh aktual'nykh zadachakh etnograficheskogo izucheniia sovremennosti", *Sovetskaia etnografiia* 6 (1983), 22.

19 Wiktoria Czebaniuk, born in 1952, interview by author, Shortandy, 3 November 2018.

7 The Activism of Soviet Pentecostals in the 1960s–1980s

Vera Kliueva

In modern historiography, unregistered (illegal) groups of Evangelical Christians-Baptists, known as Reformed Baptists, are usually depicted as the most active Evangelical group in the USSR.[1] Human rights activist and founder of Keston College Michael Bourdeaux[2] was the first to introduce this group to Western readers, voicing the position of those Evangelical Christian Baptists who not only opposed the official Baptist leadership, but also the Soviet regime, and identified themselves as religious dissidents. Citizens of the USSR were told about their "religious extremism" and "anti-social/anti-Soviet" activities.[3] Much less has been written about Pentecostals. Sovietologists were interested in the Pentecostals as an example of arbitrary decision of the Soviet authorities, who united potentially conflicting denominations into a single structure, combining radically different religious practices that had some semblance of doctrinal similarity.[4] Although there were works devoted exclusively to Pentecostals,[5] Soviet religious scholars branded them as a "savage" sect and therefore focused on exposing their "harmful" behavioural practices and eschatology.[6] Human rights activists left reports on Pentecostal activism, but only in exceptional cases (for example, in connection with the arrests of believers or the movement for emigration).

A note on methodology

Before turning to the analysis of Pentecostal activism, it is necessary to clarify the methodological foundations of my research. The concept of "activism" is inextricably linked with the study of social movements and is used to describe any extra-institutional activity aimed at achieving large-scale change. Most often, activism is understood as "any type of grassroots collective action aimed at redressing governance failures, rights protection, or demands for policy change enacted or imposed by political, cultural, and economic elites".[7] Unfortunately, there is no convention in religious studies about when and how to talk about activism. The most common application of this concept is to fundamentalist groups of believers, who unite and strive to achieve religious goals,[8] or to believers as a social group claiming influence in society[9] and/or participating in social change.[10] But, in my opinion, such definitions of activism inadequately apply to activism of Soviet believers from the mid-1940s to the early 1980s. Only from the late 1980s onwards does the activism

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of Soviet believers become comparable to that of believers from other countries. In my opinion, it is necessary to separate religious activism (institutional activities associated with cult practices) and the activism of a religious community (a set of actions that have a common goal and are non-religious in nature).

The greatest methodological challenge lies in the fact that activism is less easily identifiable in the decades leading up to Perestroika.[11] Chronologically, the activism of religious communities coincided with the emergence of other activist communities that formed the dissident movement, also called "Sixtiers' movement" (*Shestidesiatniki*).[12]. Yet the religious component often remained outside the scope of studies on the "Sixties phenomenon", save for the Jewish Refuseniks (*Otkazniki*) Movement and the activism of Crimean Tatars, who fought for the right to return to Crimea after the deportation of the 1940s.[13] While a few Orthodox dissidents who were also human rights activists (Father Gleb Yakunin and others[14]) have received some attention, Evangelical activism has remained a marginal topic for researchers. Perhaps this is because religion was a peripheral issue for the dissidents themselves.[15]

Soviet atheist literature and official documents use the descriptive concept of "religious activity" in a rather broad sense to refer not only to cult practices (prayer meetings, divine services, sacraments etc.), but also to any visible activity of religious leaders and activists. This generalisation forces us to introduce additional distinctions between "activism" and "activity". This research focuses on the non-worship activities of the Pentecostals, which we can consider a manifestation of Soviet believers' activism. I would like to single out the three most notable components of Pentecostal activism: the social (aid and support to members of their own community/denomination), evangelical (missionary) and political (human rights) aspects.

My research topic could thus be formulated as follows: did Pentecostal activism have its own specifics or were the forms of activism among Soviet believers similar across confessions in terms of content and implementation?

A brief overview of the history of Pentecostalism in the USSR

Until the early 1920s, Pentecostals were represented in Russia exclusively by Oneness Pentecostals, who called themselves "the Evangelical Christians in the Apostolic Spirit".[16] The growth of Pentecostal Churches, like other Evangelical communities, took place in the 1920s, thanks to the missionary work of Ivan Voronaev and Vasilii Koltovich.[17] By the end of the 1920s, there were over 350 communities and 17,000 believers among Voronaev's followers on Soviet territory. The adoption in 1929 of new legislation on religious associations complicated the work of all religious groups in the country. The subsequent repressions of the 1930s led to the annihilation of many Pentecostal activists, including Voronaev himself.

During World War II, following the German occupation of the Western republics of the Soviet Union, the leaders of the Pentecostal movement in Ukraine and Belarus were able to open prayer houses, even hold a congress of their leading brothers and restore ties between different communities. At the same time, changes

took place in the organisational structure of Soviet Pentecostals: senior presbyters were ordained bishops. Among the first Pentecostal bishops were Mikhail But, Gavriil Ponurko, Afanasii Bidash and Dmitrii Ponamarchuk. The relations between German occupational authorities and believers were then used by Soviet propagandists to accuse the Pentecostals of collaborating with the Nazis.

In the post-war period, almost all communities of Evangelical believers were given the opportunity to legalise themselves as members of the All-Union (pan-Soviet) Council of Evangelical Christians and Baptists (AUCECB). Pentecostals joined the Union after the signing of the "August Agreement" in 1945,[18] according to which they had to abandon public prayer "in tongues" (glossolalia) and the rite of washing the feet before communion. In turn, Evangelical Christian Baptists recognised the possibility of the baptism with the Holy Spirit for Pentecostals. According to the agreement, in places where independent Pentecostal communities existed, they had to become members of the Evangelical Christian Baptists Union. The search for a compromise between the leadership of the *voronaevtsy* and the AUCECB became a necessary measure for both sides, beneficial, first and foremost, to the state.[19] Registration of all religious associations was stopped by the state in 1948, and a significant number of Evangelical believers remained outside the boundaries of legality.

The difficulty for evangelicals of being united within a single organisation became immediately clear in the first years of the existence of the AUCECB. Thus, as early as 1946, part of the Pentecostals, due to the difficulty of finding a compromise with the Baptists, began to leave the AUCECB. In 1948, in Dneprodzerzhinsk (Ukrainian SSR), a uniting congress of Pentecostals was held, who were not part of, or who left the AUCECB. Later, all participants in the congress were arrested and released only in the mid-1950s. In 1956, a congress of ministers was held in Kharkov (Ukrainian SSR), which proclaimed the creation of an independent unregistered Union of Christians of the Evangelical Faith. During the period of Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign, the number of communities outside state registration increased; the intensified protest movement and the formation of illegal organisational structures forced them to look for more flexible models of interaction with the state due to the constant persecution of religious activists.

By the beginning of the 1980s, Pentecostal communities in the USSR were divided into three types according to the nature of their relationship with the state: (a) those registered in the official union of the AUCECB; (b) autonomously registered communities; (c) communities without state registration – and therefore "illegal". Believers from illegal communities were the main actors of Pentecostal activism.

The internal structure and organisation of the unregistered Pentecostal movement in the USSR

Throughout the Soviet period, rather flexible boundaries of acceptable behaviour were maintained in the Pentecostal movement in matters of internal regulation, everyday life and interaction with secular society. Problematic issues were resolved on the local church level. This was largely due to the genesis of the movement and

unsuccessful attempts to create a single, unified centre both in the 1920s[20] (with the impossibility of official registration of Voronaev's All-Union Union of Evangelical Christians) and in the 1940s–1950s (before and after the August Agreement of 1945). At the same time, from the 1920s onwards, the continuity of ordination to the presbyters, and then to the bishops, was preserved. This line of succession, on the one hand, safeguards the internal hierarchy among Soviet/Russian Pentecostals and, on the other hand, allows solving contentious issues through appeals to the authorities. The presence of authoritative religious leaders makes it possible to construct a line of common conduct in a number of issues, primarily in matters of a theological and ritual nature.

From the late 1940s to the mid-1950s, Afanasii Bidash and other leaders saw their goal in the consolidation of the Pentecostal movement. From 1948 to 1956, they repeatedly tried to register an independent Union of Christians of the Evangelical Faith and then concentrated their efforts on internal unity. The authorities' refusal to register the Union prompted them to create an independent, unregistered Union of Christians of the Evangelical Faith. To confirm internal unity, non-registered Pentecostals began to use the concept of "brotherhood" in relation to their organisation. After 1956, Pentecostal churches that were not included in the AUCECB began to unite under the supervision of a coordinating body – the Kiev Council of Bishops (or Kiev Episcopate), first headed by Bidash.

It should be noted that the Pentecostal communities were not structurally homogeneous. Not only did the official representatives of the AUCECB try to "persuade" believers from unregistered communities to join their ranks,[21] but, starting from 1968, the state also allowed for autonomous registration of individual communities outside the structure of the AUCECB.[22] This was an acceptable compromise for those Pentecostals who did not want to break the law, yet did not wish to join the ECB communities.

In the 1970s, another event, which became known as the "Tallinn Blessing" or the "Tallinn Awakening" [23] contributed to a further division, this time running through the internal structure of the brotherhood. This movement began to develop in the late 1960s within the Tallinn ECB church and spread rapidly among Soviet Evangelicals throughout the USSR in the late 1970s, before ending in 1980. Representatives of the Kiev Episcopate were radically divided in their opinions about the essence of this phenomenon: their opinions varied from categorical rejection to unconditional approval. Most of the Pentecostal bishops were opposed to this movement; moreover, in 1984, the clergy who supported the "Tallinn Awakening" were removed from their ministry. The final restructuring took place at the turn of the 1980s–1990s, with the formation of several independent Pentecostal unions.

The first years of the "active phase" of Evangelical activism (1956 to early 1960s)

The release of the movement's leaders from imprisonment and the formation of an actual coordinating body, the Kiev Council of Bishops, led to the intensification of the faithful's activities. Initially, all their work was aimed at consolidating the

movement. In order to achieve this, Bidash and other leaders made an attempt to get an independent union of Christians of the Evangelical Faith registered. However, the Council for Religious Affairs rejected this request. Then the believers switched to the tactics of exhaustion: requests for registration of groups and a formal registration of a "spiritual centre" began to pour in from different cities of the USSR. In 1955, the Soviet Council for Religious Affairs received eight such applications, and in 1956 more than a hundred.

After a wave of formal refusals from the Soviet Council for Religious Affairs, believers began to write to Soviet leaders: Nikolai Bulganin (President of the Council of Ministers), Nikita Khrushchev (Central Committee of the CPSU), Kliment Voroshilov (Supreme Council of the USSR). The next level of complaints was on the international stage. As believers from Kirovograd (Ukraine) complained in 1957: "In the USSR, we filed complaints everywhere and to everyone, yet they turn us down. Now we will write to the United Nations".[24] The "Reformed" Baptist groups (*Otdelennye*) would later follow the same tactics.

A new system of communication and mutual support contributed to a consolidation and homogenisation of the movement:

> The Soviet press, basing its messages mainly on biased reports of former members of the sect, describes Pentecostals, especially their preachers, as skillful propagandists of their faith. Wherever they are, they actively try to spread their faith, either through personal conversations or through letters that were meant to be copied and passed on…. Members of the sect demonstrate a great spirit of generosity, and collect a lot of money at their meetings, most of which goes to evangelisation. [25]

Such activities were not to the authorities' liking and triggered a wave of arrests from 1958 to 1963. Some other activists redirected their activities inside the evangelical community.

We should note that by the beginning of the 1960s, a generational change had occurred within the movement's leadership. Younger presbyters had replaced the elders and older bishops who had fallen victim to Stalin era repression or had been arrested after 1956. These presbyters, who had found their faith in the postwar period, had a different religious experience. They had not "suffered for the faith", but they had a clear idea of how the church should develop, first of all, in its relations with other believers and the state. After their release, the "prisoners of conscience" began to claim their former positions in their respective churches. According to Bishop Vladimir Murashkin, those who were oppressed for their faith believed that they were entitled to lead the brotherhood and individual communities, since "whoever suffered the most will be the first over us". Bishops who had no experience of imprisonment, however, argued that ordination legitimised their position: "My work is from God, I am the senior pastor here". And it was precisely these community leaders who were most likely to engage in activism. Yet the spiritual authority of the "prisoners of conscience" was very high within the brotherhood.

The new generation of believers, who focused on activism within and outside the religious space,[26] relied on the provisions prescribed in *The Brief Doctrine of the Christians of the Evangelical Faith who are in the USSR* (1956). The regulation contained four major provisions: (a) renunciation of any relations with the Soviet State, public bodies and organisations[27]; (b) disregard of Soviet laws[28]; (c) performance of military service is left to the believer's conscience; (d) charity, missionary work, organised teaching of religion to children are declared an inalienable right of the church. This provision thus offered a clear legitimation for believers' activism.

The various orientations of Pentecostal activism

Any manifestation of religious activism could potentially be prohibited by the state. A careful reading of the *Instructions for the Application of Legislation to Cults*[29] (1961) shows that any initiative going beyond "activities aimed at satisfying religious needs" was expressly prohibited. But the faithful, especially young people, did not miss any opportunity to express themselves. As one interviewee remembered:

> We have not experienced the moment when these things happened in the years of Stalin's reign. We were bolder, and the authorities did not know what to do with us. There were no [criminal] articles against faith, and we did not give any ground to be convicted for anti-Soviet [agitation].[30]

Here my interlocutor is mistaken, since the Criminal Code of the RSFSR from 1960, which was in force until 1997, contains three articles (142, 143 and 227) concerning religion. Article 227 explicitly prohibited any activities of a religious group "carried out under the guise of preaching religious beliefs and performing religious rites, associated with causing harm to the health of citizens … or inducing citizens to refuse public activities or the performance of civic duties".[31] Moreover, in the church of which my interlocutor was a member, several people were convicted in the first half of the 1960s for refusing military service and "preaching religious beliefs".

Social activism

Social activism within the Evangelical community was manifested primarily through charity. Helping fellow church members has been a hallmark of many Evangelical communities. Therefore, even those who grew up in Pentecostal communities and later left them have good memories of these activities. "In general, among old Pentecostals [believers who were active in the 1960s-1970s] there was mutual assistance, moral support, constant material [assistance]. They treated you like family, you can't say otherwise".[32]

At the same time, any kind of religious charity was also officially banned by the state. "Religious associations … should not create mutual funds and engage

in charitable activities; … organize any kind of meetings, circles, etc. that are not related to worship".[33] One of the means of social assistance was the collection of donations and their subsequent distribution. As already mentioned above, parts of the donations were meant to support senior brothers, who were travelling around the country.

Social work was organised on two levels: helping members of one's own church and helping "prisoners of conscience". Within the community, the believers themselves decided how and whom to help. According to published memoirs, the initiative could come from both ordinary believers and community leaders. The youth was engaged in volunteer work, "evangelising" others along the way. According to one interviewee:

> We never miss an opportunity to help others. As it is written: "Your generosity made up for their deficiency" And we did not leave the elderly without attention… . We also helped those families that had many children…. It was an occasion to testify to them [of God]. We were not shy about helping out.[34]

The forms of social activity my interlocutor listed could be very different, from support with clothing or food products to various forms of labour assistance (*pomochi*).[35] A traditional form of aid was participation in construction. As the Krasnodar Pentecostals remembered:

> The construction of houses was the responsibility of the brothers and the youth. Our older brothers would send us: "Boys, we must go and help." We went there. We lay the foundations, erected the wall. There was no mention of payment. The only thing they would give us was good food.[36]

In another case, the construction of a house for a non-believer allowed an unregistered community in the Rivne region (Ukrainian SSR) to find a permanent place for their prayer meetings. In the early 1970s, Pentecostals helped build a home for a disabled person. For this, the unreligious host allowed them to gather at his place for prayer meetings. The official prayer house was not built until the late 1980s.[37] There is information on lending aid to the unreligious. In Minsk, in the early 1960s, church members helped a paralysed woman and her five-year-old daughter.[38]

Examples of such activities are highly characteristic for all Evangelicals. When I asked a pastor's daughter if they were afraid to do charity work in the registered community of ECB in Mtsensk, she replied:

> No, no. Of course, they engaged in [charity], distributed aid, shared…. I always had one clothes item of each in my wardrobe. One or two items. If two [skirts or blouses] appeared, my father would say: "There are people in need, we must share."[39]

Another example of social work within the community took the form of helping soldiers who were drafted from the ranks of believers. Most of them were

stigmatised by their refusal to take an oath,[40] and the assistance of fellow believers was needed. In the Church of unregistered Pentecostals in Perm, young people made special trips to the checkpoint on the first days after the oath. Upon learning that there were soldiers in the military unit who had refused to take the oath, they invited them to visit and tried to support them throughout the years of service. "They came [to visit us] and their parents sent packages to us. Mom put it in the fridge and said: 'Don't touch it, it's the soldiers'.'"[41]

The leaders of the movement – bishops and presbyters – indirectly coordinated assistance to "prisoners of the faith" and offered to pray for certain convicts. Aid consisted, first and foremost, of parcels for prisoners and letters of support, as well as assistance to the families of prisoners. They collected clothes for the children, money and food, in case when older family members would visit the prisoners and take the children with them. After their release, the prisoners could live near the camp for some time, and the members of the nearest community would take over. For example, believers in the cities of Perm and Saransk, who lived near the large political camps in the Perm Region and Mordovia, were actively engaged in such assistance.

> Murashkin did time there at some point. The political camp where he was imprisoned is now a museum…. And his wife, Olga, always came here. And we have always helped. It was [considered] an honour…. There were people who were released, lived here, and then, when the opportunity arose to leave [they] were given permission, [they received] passports and left.[42]

Other Protestants helped their co-religionists in the same way, including Evangelical Christians and Baptists from the Council of Churches (the CC ECB) and Adventists-Reformists (*Shchelkovtsy*). Moreover, supporters of the CC ECB had a more consistent and structured support system for arrested believers.[43]

Evangelisation (missionary activities)

As a result of the regime's pressure on Pentecostals, they were forced to move frequently from one place to another, and this contributed to the spread of their missionary activity.

> In such a climate, the Pentecostals pursued a new strategy. Rather than directly confront the authorities, they migrated frequently, moving farther and farther east and eventually finding something of a refuge in Siberia. According to one account, they moved as frequently as every two or three years, enjoying religious liberty upon settling in a new area that was yet unfamiliar with them and their practices, and then moving on again as a group, once local resentment and suppression became intolerable. This behaviour must also be seen as part of their missionary effort – if not as a strategy, then as an added benefit.[44]

The opinion that Soviet Protestants, despite all the bans, were actively engaged in evangelism was commonplace in official statements. In 1958, the chairman of the Council for Religious Affairs, Aleksei Puzin, stated in his report:

> Not a single religious association located on the territory of the USSR conducts such active missionary work among the population as these sectarians. To achieve their goals, they use a variety of means, showing exceptional flexibility in propagating their faith. [45]

This is confirmed by interviews of believers from various Protestant Churches. "Heart-to-heart" evangelism was widespread, with believers telling relatives or colleagues what they knew about God and their faith.

Here is a glimpse at how people reacted to such missionary activities of a Pentecostal from the Krasnodar Region in the late 1970s:

> They could either drive us away, listen, or argue. But the seeds were sown. I know that God said to "sow the seed" wherever it falls. One [person] says: "He quarrelled with his wife, got divorced." I ask him: "Why did you get married? Did you think about children? You go to God, bring the children, ask your wife for forgiveness." … Some people got angry, some agreed, some came [to God]. They listened and they didn't listen, and they came to church and asked us [to leave, stop talking]. They reacted in different ways.[46]

A presbyter from Kazakhstan recalls that in the late 1980s, while working at the plant as a pumping unit operator, people regularly came to his office, including to talk on religious topics: "People came, they were interested in who was giving lectures there. Some laughed, and some were curious. [We] worked around the clock and they kept coming". He explained this need by the fact that by the end of the Soviet period, "people were maturing, and the [socio-political] situation itself had changed. People felt that some kind of thaw was drawing nearer… Even those who said 'no' [did not want to discuss religious issues], then came to listen to me".[47]

Another approach, common among young Protestants, was to conduct evangelism through "cultural activities". Memoirs often feature stories of trips during which believers communicated with fellow travellers on religious topics. Again, this was not unique to a particular denomination. Recalling the 1960s, a Baptist from a Moscow church said:

> Young people travelled a lot back then… . We went on what would now be called a missionary trip, but back then we neither used this word nor thought about it. A missionary was something so far away… . And often we went from village to village, during the day, from church to church, and at night – on the train – even though we were tired, we would still talk, sing, tell stories all the time, on the train. We always sang on the train. We sang our Christian songs. Hymns.[48]

The story of a Perm Pentecostal from a later period (the turn of the 1970s–1980s) echoes with this one:

> At that time, we communicated more than today…. We had a great desire to show that there is a God and there are other people. We often sang in trains…. Many people didn't understand [what we were singing about], but they understood that they were also concerned. Thus, a conversation would begin, and the conversations was of great interest.[49]

Interestingly, even in the late 1980s, interdenominational joint events dedicated to the millennium of the Baptism of Russia were perceived as an indirect form of evangelisation.

> And this was the first time that Christians went out to such a public service…. It was impossible to preach. It was said that this was a charity concert…. And Uncle Vitia Lukashov, he was a good preacher, he knew how to preach to unbelievers. Until his death, he engaged in such personal evangelism with the unreligious …. And so, Uncle Vitia made such special sketches… it was impossible to preach, but from song to song it was necessary to make [transitions]. He is like an entertainer – but with a catch. And then we would sing again.[50]

It can be assumed that for the secular environment, the practice of singing Christian hymns in public places was legitimised by the spread of bards and "guitar poetry" in Soviet society.[51] My interviewees emphasised that those around did not interfere with singing: "There were people who could shout something, forbid it, but no one ever fought with us. Wherever we were".[52] Another witness remembered: "And I must say that rarely was anyone indignant, and those were immediately pacified: 'They sing good songs, let them sing!' That's all. The songs are melodic and positive. And we always used this [fact]".[53]

Another widely used method was evangelism at family events, especially during weddings and funerals.[54] In their reports, the commissioners for religious affairs paid special attention to these events, which brought together dozens and sometimes hundreds of people. These actions allowed Pentecostals to maintain contact with their community, including with communities from different regions of the country. For example, Pentecostal youth from all over the region or republic could come to see someone off to the army. This pretext made it possible to justify large meetings before the authorities. For example, my informant from the village of Goriachii Kliuch (Krasnodar Region, RSFSR) was escorted to the army by more than a hundred people. "We were not allowed to gather like that, but on the occasion of birthdays, funerals, army drafts, weddings, we had the right to gather many people".[55]

In addition to trying to conduct indirect missionary work in a secular environment, Pentecostals were engaged in missionary work within the Evangelical community itself. Their activities are determined by their theological doctrine, which

focuses not so much on repentance and changing one's life, but rather on changing certain properties of one's nature after being baptised with the "Spirit" and receiving the "gifts of the Holy Spirit".[56] The most commonly mentioned gifts are speaking in tongues (glossolalia), prophecy, interpretation and healing, although nine gifts are described in Pentecostal theology.[57] One witness explained that he understood Evangelical Christian Baptists' opposition to their practices, for Pentecostalism "brought destruction" to their communities. It was an idea that brought life, "stimulated new feelings when a person gained the experience of the baptism with the Holy Spirit".[58]

There were instances of individual disputes between Pentecostals and Baptists. A Perm believer remembered such a theological dispute at his workplace with a Baptist colleague. "I'd say – that's what's written in Scripture. And he'd says: no, that's not what it says".[59] There are many examples of such oppositions between Pentecostals and Baptists, which often resulted in the excommunication of Pentecostals, whose action was perceived as a threat to the community. Such a "split" occurred in 1963–1964 in a registered community of ECB in Petropavlovsk (Kazakh SSR). A participant I interviewed told me how he received the opportunity to preach in the registered church of ECB. His sermons raised interest among Baptists, small informal groups started forming around him, but eventually, the Pentecostals were excluded from the membership of the official church and formed their own community. By the end of the 1980s, this community became one of the largest in the Kazakh SSR, and its leadership came to minister to believers in the Tiumen and Sverdlovsk regions.

One of the well-known Soviet Pentecostal communities, headed by Ivan Fedotov, also began with the "secession" of several believers from the ECB community in the city of Maloiaroslavets (Kaluga region, RSFSR) in 1970.[60]

Political activism (human rights activism)

By engaging in human rights activism, Pentecostals not only stepped out openly into the public space for the first time but also tried to collaborate with other religious and Soviet dissidents and to establish contacts with human rights activists. Such methods of action were common to all Evangelicals, who skilfully used the "Soviet language" and demonstrated an understanding of the symbolism of public actions. They wrote letters of protest[61] and refused to participate in Soviet political practices, such as elections, expressing their disagreement with the authorities' discriminatory measures.[62]

Pentecostal women were mainly involved in human rights activism. However, unlike Nadezhda Beliakova, who discusses female activism among Evangelical Christian Baptists in detail in this volume, I cannot talk about the specificities of female activism among Pentecostals. Indeed, they did not create special associations like the Council of Relatives of Imprisoned Evangelical Christian Baptists. Their political activity took the non-gender-specific form of protest letters, as well as the production and distribution of samizdat. Yet these letters did have a gendered orientation and were traditionally written by Pentecostal women, often mothers

with many children, whose husbands were in prison. The petitioners described the difficult situation of the families of believers in the Soviet Union, demanded the authorisation to leave the country from the Soviet authorities, and asked international organisations to support their struggle for the right to emigrate.

The Pentecostals saw emigration as the ultimate way of protecting their rights.[63] After filing an application for an exit visa and receiving a refusal, the next stage of confrontation with the system could begin. Further steps were the renunciation of Soviet citizenship and the boycott of all Soviet civic activities: the surrender of passports, non-participation in elections and refusal to serve in the army. The repressive measures adopted in return served as further arguments justifying the right to emigrate from the USSR. Pentecostals also continued to petition the authorities, both on behalf of individual churches or in the name of the whole Evangelical community, but switched from demands for registration of the Pentecostal Union to requests for permission to leave the country. Such collective letters were also sent to various international organisations.

The issue of emigration also allowed Soviet Pentecostals to develop relations with the dissident (human rights) movement in the 1970s. The samizdat bulletin *Chronicle of Current Events* (CCE) first mentioned Pentecostals to document their attempts to obtain exit visas from the USSR.[64] Interest in Pentecostal activities from fellow human rights activists may be explained by the fact that they reached out for the first time beyond their closed community, meetings with foreign correspondents, writing open letters addressed to "all Christians of the world", the UN Human Rights Committee, or the US President. Starting from 1976, information about Pentecostals began to appear regularly in the CCE in the sections "Persecution of believers" and "Right to leave". Thanks to human rights activists, information about the struggle of believers for their rights spread within the dissident community, and religious objectors received moral and informational support. Thanks to contacts with Western correspondents, the struggle to leave the USSR received broad media coverage in European and American newspapers in the 1970–1980s.[65] Dissidents who left the country transmitted letters to the international community and information about the situation of believers. In 1976, the Pentecostals, with the help of human rights activists, produced a collection entitled *Get Out, My People* with biographies of Pentecostals attempting to leave. Aleksandr Ginzburg took the manuscript with him out of the country. Another result of the contact between Evangelicals and human rights activists was joint statements and speeches of Pentecostals and other refuseniks, particularly among Jews.

In the second half of the 1970s to early 1980s, the Pentecostals started resorting to extreme methods of protest, namely hunger strikes and attempts at seeking asylum at the American embassy in Moscow. Such attempts were made twice: in 1962–1963 and 1978–1983. And both times the participants were members of the families Vashchenko and Chmykhalov: these families were Pentecostals from a small community in the Siberian city of Chernogorsk (Krasnoiarsk Region). [66] In 1981, a group of Pentecostal women held a demonstration in front of the reception room of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the USSR, demanding the right to leave the country.[67] This action, unique for Pentecostals, followed a model of

demonstrations and sit-ins that had become traditional among Soviet dissidents, including among Baptist or Jewish activists seeking emigration or Crimean Tatars seeking repatriation to their historical homeland.

Not all Pentecostals supported potential emigrants, however. Some bishops even suggested that they held self-serving motives and expressed dissatisfaction with the participation of their faithful in the dissident movement.

Another form of activism within the Evangelical community in the 1960s–1980s was the production of samizdat, which compensated for the lack of religious literature and censorship prohibitions. Tatiana Nikolskaia, analysing the spread of Protestant samizdat, differentiates between spontaneous and organised samizdat. She defines spontaneous samizdat as "the independent, undirected activity of individual believers in the production of literature for personal use or distribution in a narrow circle of relatives and acquaintances".[68] Organised samizdat is understood as the regular activity of underground printing houses for the production and distribution of literature of various contents: periodical (journals and leaflets), religious (first and foremost Bibles and hymn books, religious calendars, books by Christian authors) and human rights editions (informational literature). For instance, an interviewee remembered leaflets being thrown from the balcony by representatives of the CC ECB at the end of a service at the Moscow ECB church in Malovuzovskii Lane. Pentecostals were more often engaged in copying psalms or religious literature. Pentecostal Bishop Ivan Fedotov remembered that members of the community would sew together school notebooks to form a book. "And we would copy our favourite psalms into such notebooks. We collected them wherever we could. And we would also compose new ones ourselves".[69] The Pentecostal hymns from a Siberian village, or rather their first songbook (*Spevnik*) was recorded by another believer, who saw that her "sister in faith" did not know the words of spiritual songs and offered to write down the words for her.[70]

Samizdat was most widely distributed among "reformed" Evangelical Christians-Baptists and Adventists-Reformists (*Shchelkovtsy*). They had not only separate underground printing houses, but also their respective publishing houses: *The Christian* (ECB) and *Faithful Witness* (Adventists-Reformists). Among Pentecostals, organised samizdat was most often the work of individual enthusiasts. As a Pentecostal presbyter of an unregistered church in Saratov recalled:

> Over time, we decided to publish the Gospel independently…. We printed in the simplest and most artisanal way, but with pictures. We distributed it for free…. Everyone helped whichever way they could …. In tents we printed the brochure *A Sip of Cold Water*, songbooks and other literature, and then we would take printing presses and return to Saratov by hitchhiking, on buses and trains.[71]

Pentecostal samizdat aimed not only at the reproduction of religious literature but also played an important role in informing the non-religious dissenting environment about the problems of believers. The samizdat bulletin *Information Service of Evangelical Christians-Pentecostals*, which, starting from 1976, grew into

a periodical bulletin entitled *Facts and Only Facts*, became the main source of information about Pentecostal affairs for the *CCE*.

Concluding remarks

Soviet Pentecostals represented a small part of the whole Evangelical community of the Soviet Union. But their ritual practices and communication with other believers attracted attention and caused problems both among evangelicals and with Soviet authorities. They did not have a stable status in the official religious space of the USSR: some of the faithful were part of the registered communities of the AUCECB, others were participants in illegal meetings, which were coordinated by the Kiev Council of Bishops. In public discourse, Pentecostals were pictured as an asocial "savage" sect.

However, this state of affairs did not affect the activity of the faithful. The activism of believers from Evangelical churches manifested itself in different ways, the most widespread and notable forms of which we have presented in this chapter. These various forms were not isolated from each other, they often complemented one another or were implemented by the same activists. The type of activity that certain groups of evangelicals engaged in depended on the personal views and capabilities of the believers themselves. Only a minority were involved in human rights activism, which was most severely punished by the state. At the same time, these activists were the most consistent in their actions and can be considered the driving force of Soviet religious activism.

Most forms of activism described in this chapter were common to all Evangelicals. This applies to youth volunteer work, participation in the production and distribution of samizdat, religious education of children or human rights discourse. Only one form of activism seems to have been specific to Pentecostals: evangelisation activity within the Evangelical community itself. This approach is linked to the theological doctrine of the movement: the need for baptism in the Holy Spirit. And in a context of ban on open preaching, it was easier to spread the ideas of "spiritual baptism" among Evangelicals.

Pentecostals, however, differed from other protestant groups in their approach to publicity, which they generally avoided. Moreover, when they did organise conspicuous actions, which brought them fame in dissident circles, these were not welcome by their fellow believers. The Pentecostals thus understood the prospects of publicity rather late and only changed their strategy in the post-Soviet period, when large-scale evangelisation campaigns began to be held, albeit for a short time. Pentecostal churches with Soviet experience, however, still adhere to the thesis that their "presence should be inconspicuous".

List of interviews

A.B. – female, Baptist, Krasnodar, Russia, October 2013.
O.M. – female, Baptist, Krasnodar, Russia, February 2018.
S. – male, Pentecostal, Krasnodar, Russia, December 2015.
S.K. – male, Pentecostal, Tiumen', Russia, August 2007.
T.M. – female, Pentecostal, Perm', Russia, January 2015.

V.B. – female, Baptist, Moscow, Russia, March 2017.
V.O. – male, Pentecostal, Perm', Russia, January 2015
V.R. – male, unbeliever from Pentecostal's family, Ishim, Russia, August 2007.
V.D. – male, Pentecostal, Petropavlovsk, Kazakhstan, August 2013.
Z. – female, Pentecostal, Tiumen', Russia, August 2015.

Notes

1 See Alexander Daniel, "Topologiia sovetskogo inakomysliia: 1950-1960-e gody" in *Povsednevnaia zhizn' pri sotsializme. Nemetskie i rossiiskie podkhody*, ed. Ian K.Berends, Vera Dubina, Aleksandr Sorokin (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2015): 95–96; Victor Dönninghaus and Andrey Savin, "Religioznyi landshaft 'razvitogo sotsializma' kak prostranstvo politicheskoi loial'nosti," *ISTORIIA* no. 8.9 (63) (2017).
2 Michael Bourdeaux, *Religious Ferment in Russia: Protestant Opposition to Soviet Religious Policy* (London: Macmillan, 1968).
3 See, for example, Aleksandr Klibanov and Lev Mitrokhin, *Krizisnye iavleniia v sovremennom baptizme* (Moscow: Znanie, 1967); Galina Lialina, *Baptizm: illiuziia i real'nost'* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1977); Eduard Filimonov, *Sotsial'naia i ideologicheskaia sushchnost' religioznogo ekstremizma* (Moscow: Znanie, 1983); Ivan Brazhnik, *Sotsial'naia sushchnost' sektantskogo ekstremizma* (Moscow: Znanie, 1974).
4 See for example, Walter Kolarz, *Religion in the Soviet Union* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1961): 330–338; Steve Durasoff, *The Russian Protestants: Evangelicals in the Soviet Union: 1944–1964* (Rutherford, Madison, Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1969): 117–234; Walter Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals since World War II* (Kitchener, ON: Herald Press, 1981).
5 Steve Durasoff, *Pentecost Behind the Iron Curtain* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1972).
6 See, for example, Aleksei Moskalenko, *Ideologiia i deiatel'nost' khristianskikh sekt* (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1978).
7 See Jeremy Morris, Regina Smyth and Andrey Semenov, eds. *Everyday Activism: Tracking the Evolution of Russian State and Society Relations in Varieties of Russian Activism: State-Society Contestation in Everyday Life* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2023).
8 Quintan Wiktorowicz, *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004): p. 2; Gregg, Heather Selma. "Three Theories of Religious Activism and Violence: Social Movements, Fundamentalists, and Apocalyptic Warriors," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 28, (2016): 338–360.
9 Robert Wuthnow and John H. Evans, *The Quiet Hand of God: Faith-Based Activism and the Public Role of Mainline Protestantism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002); Jeremy Morris and John P. Burgess, "Social Activism in the Russian Orthodox Church" in *Varieties of Russian Activism: State-Society Contestation in Everyday Life*, ed. Jeremy Morris, Regina Smyth, and Andrey Semenov (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2023): 97–119.
10 David Doellinger, *Turning Prayers into Protests: Religious-based Activism and its Challenges to State Power in Socialist Slovakia and East Germany* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2014); Sharon Erickson Nepstad, *Catholic Social Activism* (New York: NYU Press, 2019).
11 A notable exception in this case is the activism of national movements, which is also closely connected with religious identity (mainly Jewish). See, for example: Saadya Sternberg and Mordechai Altshuler. *Religion and Jewish Identity in the Soviet Union, 1941–1964* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2012); Stefani Hoffman, Ann Komaromiand Yuli Kosharovsky, *We Are Jews Again: Jewish Activism in the Soviet Union* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2017).

12 Viktor Voronkov, "Proekt "shestidesiatnikov": dvizhenie protesta v SSSR" in *Ottsy i deti: Pokolencheskii analiz sovremennoi Rossii*, ed. Teodor Shanin i Iurii Levada (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2005): 168–200. In turn, V. Voronkov uses the concept of miles as understood by Fester (see Mikhael' Fester, "Sotsial'nye mil'e, klassy i stili zhizni v Zapadnoi Germanii" in S*otsial'noe neravenstvo. Izmeneniia v sotsial'noi strukture: evropeiskaia perspektiva*, ed. Viktor Voronkov and Mikhail Sokolov (Saint Petersburg, Aleteiia, 2008): 25–43.
13 Voronkov, "Proekt "shestidesiatnikov", 196.
14 Cécile Vaissié, *Pour votre liberté et pour la nôtre. Le combat des dissidents de Russie* (Paris: Éd. Robert Lafront, 1999); Philip Boobbyer, *Conscience, Dissent and Reform in Soviet Russia* (London, New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2008).
15 For more, see Nadezhda Beliakova, "Ob otnosheniiakh mezhdu religioznikami i dissidentskim dvizheniem v SSSR v usloviiakh kholodnoi voiny kontsa 1960-kh – nachala 1980-kh godov" in *Dissidenty SSSR, Vostochnoi i Tsentral'noi Evropy: epokha i nasledie: Pervye chteniia pamiati A.B. Roginskogo*, ed. L. Eremina (Moscow: Pero, 2020): 66–77.
16 For more, see Vladimir Stepanov, *Rossiia v ogne piatidesiatnitsy: obzor vsemirnoi istorii tserkvi, istorii rannego russkogo piatidesiatnichestva i tserkvi evangel'skikh khristian v dukhe apostol'skom (do 1929 goda)* (Saint Petersburg: Bibliia dlia vsekh, 2020); J. L. Hall, "Early Pentecostals in Russia," *Pentecostal Herald* (December 1991): 3–5. Albert W. Wardin, Jr., "Pentecostal Beginnings among the Russians in Finland and Northern Russia (1911–1921)" *Fides et Historia* 16:2 (1994): 50–61.
17 This movement was known as the "Voronaevtsy" (following the name of their leader). Their alternative name was "Christians of the Evangelical Faith". For more, see: Pavel Mozer, and Oleg Bornovolokov, "The Development of Pentecostalism in Russia and the Ukraine" in *European Pentecostalism*, eds. William Kay and Anne E. Dyer (Leiden: Brill, 2011): 261–289; Dony K. Donev, *The Life and Ministry of Rev. Ivan Voronaev: Now with a Special Addition of the (Un)Forgotten Story of the Voronaev Children* (Spasen Publishers, 2011); Vera Kliueva and Roman Poplavsky, "Russian Pentecostals: from the Soviet Union to Post-Soviet Russia," in *The Pentecostal World*, ed. Michael Wilkinson and Joerg Haustein (London: Routledge, 2023): 107–121.
18 For more, see: Tat'iana Nikol'skaia, "Avgustovskoe soglashenie i pozitsii piatidesiatniov v 40-50-kh gg XX v" in *Gosudarstvo, religiia i tserkov' v Rossii i za rubezhom* no. 3 (2010): 124–133; Vera Kliueva, "'Ne oni ustupili, a s nimi soglasilis'": evangel'skie khristiane-baptisty i piatidesiatniki v pervoe poslevoennoe desiatiletie" in *Sovetskoe gosudarstvo i obshchestvo v period pozdnego stalinizma. 1945-1953 gg.,* ed. Jorg. Baberovski and Alexandr Drozdov (Moscow, ROSSPEN; Prezidentskii tsentr B. N. El'tsina, 2015): 586–594. Durasoff, *The Russian Protestants: Evangelicals in the Soviet Union: 1944–1964*. (Rutherford, Madison, Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1969): 117–176.
19 Nadezhda Beliakova, "Vsesoiuznyi sovet evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov – produkt i zalozhnik stalinskoi religioznoi politiki" in *Konfessional'naia politika Sovetskogo gosudarstva v 1920-50-e gody*, ed. N. Volynchik (Moscow: politicheskaia entsiklopediia, Prezidentskii tsentr B. N. El'tsina, 2019): 418–429.
20 Mikhail Gal'chuk, "O soiuze khristian evangel'skoi very" *Evangelist*, no. 2 (1928): 14–15.
21 On the complexities of the Pentecostal and AUCECB interaction, see Nadezhda Beliakova and Vera Kliueva, "Leadership, communication, and conflicts among evangelicals: analysis of relations in religious communities in the late USSR." C*anadian Slavonic Papers/Revue canadienne des slavistes* 61 (2019): 4–24.
22 See Tat'iana Nikol'skaia, *Russkii protestantizm i gosudarstvennaia vlast' v 1905–1991 godakh* (Sankt-Peterburg: Izdatel'stvo Evropeiskogo universiteta v Sankt-Peterburge, 2009): 243–251.
23 For more, see Ringo Ringvee, "Charismatic Christianity and Pentecostal churches in Estonia from a historical perspective." *Approaching Religion 5*(1) (2015): 57–66.

24 "O deiatel'nosti religioznykh grupp piatidesiatnikov", 1956, Fond 6991. Findign Aid 3, File 132, p. 103, State Archives of the Russian Federation, Moscow (GARF), 108.
25 Kolarz, *Religion in the Soviet Union,* 335.
26 This suggests an analogy with the formation of the generation of the 1960s and the emergence of the private-public sphere (as a communicative space, where there were almost no taboo topics for discussion). (For more, see Voronkov, "Proekt 'shestidesiatnikov'", 168–200.)
27 In other words, from now on, the Pentecostal Union under the leadership of Bidash ceases its attempts try to legalize itself. Therefore, in Soviet terminology, they became known as the "non-registering Pentecostals".
28 I will note that this item was used in exceptional cases – for example, when trying to emigrate from the USSR. Other religious groups were more consistent in rejecting Soviet laws – True Orthodox Christians, Jehovah's Witnesses, part of the Seventh Day Adventists, the so-called. Shchelkovtsy.
29 "Instruktsiia po primeneniiu Zakonodatel'stva o kul'takh, 1961 g." in *Zakonodatel'stvo o religioznykh kul'takh*, ed. Vladimir Kuroedov (Moscow: Iuridicheskaia literatura, 1971): 150–160.
30 V.O., interview by author, Perm', Russia, January 2015.
31 "Ugolovnyi kodeks RSFSR", in *Zakonodatel'stvo o religioznykh kul'takh*, ed. Vladimir Kuroedov (Moscow: Iuridicheskaia literatura, 1971): 270–273.
32 V.R., interview by author, Ishim, Russia, August 2007.
33 "Instruktsiia po primeneniiu Zakonodatel'stva o kul'takh, 1961 g.", 152.
34 V.O., interview by author, Perm', Russia, January 2015.
35 For more on this tradition, see: Gromyko, Marina. *Mir russkoi derevni* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1991): 41–49.
36 "Memoirs by Petr Kolesnikov" in *Istoricheskie vekhi tserkvi OTsKhVE,* ed. Mikhail Nozdrin (Krasnodar: Blagovestnik, 2020): 249.
37 This story was communicated to me by a former resident of the village, a pastor of the Pentecostal Church in Tiumen (S.K. interview by author, Tiumen, Russia, August 2007).
38 Thomas M. Bohn and Rayk Einax. "Pentecostals in the BSSR: An Alternative Way of Life in a Hero-Society After Stalin," *The Journal of Belarusian Studies* 8, no. 3 (2018): 16.
39 O.M., interview by author, Krasnodar, Russia, February 2018.
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41 T.M., interview by author, Perm', Russia, January 2015.
42 V.O., interview by author, Perm', Russia, January 2015.
43 For more, see: Liudmila Alekseeva, *Soviet Dissent: Contemporary Movements for National, Religious, and Human Rights* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1985): 205–214; Beliakova, Nadezhda and Miriam Dobson. *Zhenshchiny v evangel'skikh obshchinakh poslevoennogo SSSR. 1940-1980-e gg. Issledovanie i istochniki* (Moscow: Indrik, 2015): 348–484.
44 Christopher Marsh and Artyom Tonoyan, "The Routinization of Soviet Pentecostalism and the Liberation of Charisma in Russia and Ukraine" in *Global Pentecostalism in the 21st Century*, ed. R.W. Hefner (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013): 179–180.
45 Puzin, Aleksei. O nekotorykh voprosakh politiki Sovetskogo gosudarstva po otnosheniiu k religii i tserkvi i zadachakh Soveta, 25 November 1958, Fond 6991, Finding Aid 3, File 165, p. 18, GARF.
46 S., interview by author, Krasnodar, Russia, December 2015.
47 V.D., interview by author, Petropavlovsk, Kazakhstan, August 2013.
48 V.B., interview by author, Moscow, Russia, March 2017.
49 V.O., interview by author, Perm', Russia, January 2015.
50 A.B., interview by author, Krasnodar, Russia, October 2013.

51 On Soviet-era "guitar poetry", see Rosen Dzhagalov, "Avtorskaia pesnia kak zhanrovaia laboratoriia." *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, no. 6 (2009): 204–215.
52 V.B., interview by author, Moscow, Russia, March 2017.
53 V.O., interview by author, Perm', Russia, January 2015.
54 Vladimir Murashkin described in detail how the weddings were held, in his *History of the Maloiaroslavl' Church* (the manuscript is in the archive of the OCHVE in Moscow).
55 S., interview by author, Krasnodar, Russia, December 2015.
56 For a more detailed analysis of Pentecostal theology, see Vera Kliueva, "Soviet Pentecostals: The Exclusivity of the Excluded" in *Eight Essays on Russian Christianities*, ed. Igor Mikeshin (Saint Petersburg: Saint Petersburg Center for the History of Ideas; Politekhnika Service, 2020): 132–155.
57 David Lim, "Spiritual Gifts" in *Systematic Theology: A Pentecostal Perspective*, ed. by Stanley M. Horton (Springfield, MO: Logion Press, 1994): 457–488.
58 V.O., interview by author, Perm', Russia, January 2015.
59 V.O., interview by author, Perm', Russia, January 2015.
60 O. Murashkina elaborates on that in her interview, see Beliakova and Dobson. *Zhenshchiny v evangel'skikh obshchinakh poslevoennogo SSSR. 1940-1980-e gg. Issledovanie i istochniki*. (Moscow: Indrik, 2015): 135–139.
61 On the masterful craft of writing such letters, see Nadezhda Beliakova, "Soobshchaem o prestuplenii protiv pravosudiia…": obrashcheniia i zhaloby veruiushchikh v brezhnevskom SSSR," *Noveishaia istoriia Rossii* 8, no. 3 (2018): 640–658.
62 The theme of formal complaints, submitted to the Soviet authorities, see Elena Bogdanova, "*Obrashcheniia grazhdan v organy vlasti kak opyt otstaivaniia svoikh interesov v usloviiakh pozdnesovetskogo obshchestva (1960-e – 1970-e gody),*" PhD diss., (Sociological Institute of the RAS, 2006).
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67 Beliakova and Dobson. *Zhenshchiny v evangel'skikh obshchinakh poslevoennogo SSSR. 1940-1980-e gg. Issledovanie i istochniki*. (Moscow: Indrik, 2015): 346–347.
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69 Fedotov, Ivan. *Vstat'! Sud idet!* (Moscow: Titul, 2006): 216.
70 Z., interview by author, Tiumen' region, Russia, August 2015.
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8 Gender Specificity of Protest Activism in Unregistered Groups of Evangelical Christians-Baptists in the Late Soviet Union

Nadezhda Beliakova

How many now are suffering in prisons, in exile,

How many Joes, Pauls and those who bear other names!
Our Brother Khrapov from Tashkent,
And Iakimenko, who's from Moscow,
Prokofiev from Donbass,
Boris Zdorovets,
Brother Shevchenko from Odessa
And Brother Bondarenko
When will the persecution end?!
How many of our sisters - Christ's bees,
Who carry honey, drop by drop, to their entrusted hives,
Such as Vera Tkach,
Lena Zubovskaia,
You've all - courageously - stood up, for us, your brethren, in the courts![1]

This poem, written by a provincial believer, introduces us to the world of the unregistered Evangelical Christians-Baptists of the late Soviet period. Traditionally, the identity of this community has been constructed through the lens of the faithful "suffering for the faith", the vivid imagery of martyrs persecuted by the godless Soviet regime. The protagonists of the struggle "for the faith" were the leaders of an illegal institution, the Council of Churches of the ECB, who spent many years in imprisonment or clandestinity, fleeing state persecution. Meanwhile, the women in these communities remained in the background. They were thought of as "Christ's bees" and their names were considered unworthy of recording. Nevertheless, these women began to receive long overdue attention when they found themselves on the bench of the accused in the Soviet courts or, as in the poem cited, when they acted as witnesses for the defence in the case of the Baptist youth leader Iosif Bondarenko (b.1936).

This chapter uses the concept of activism to designate an activity, a call to action motivated by religious beliefs[2] and set aside the classic dichotomy of "persecutor vs victim". This, in turn, allows us to analyse the specifics of religious life in the late USSR in new ways. The unregistered Baptists were a unique phenomenon, penetrating the very secularised Soviet public space by virtue of being individuals who declared that their religious beliefs guided their everyday life, and

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social and political positions. Various groups of activists were emerging in Soviet society at this time and, in the Khrushchev era, the authorities prompted "public initiatives" at various levels, but this type of activism had undesired effects for the regime.[3] The type of religious activism examined here was primarily a struggle for religious rights that sometimes manifested as a form of "actionism", for example, public demonstrations or political posters hung in public places. Such actionism was a common expression of artistic political dissent in Eastern Europe.[4] Therefore, I propose examining this phenomenon in a global context. The activism analysed here had a religious background that, to a certain extent, makes it closer in nature to the contemporary forms of Evangelical fundamentalism witnessed in the United States[5] and, thus, connects it to the acts of religious activism practised far beyond the borders of the former Soviet Union. Furthermore, as the growth of religious activism in the USSR began in the early 1960s and focused on human rights, it can also be considered part of the history of the human rights movement in the USSR.[6] Indeed, comparing the Soviet case with precedents of Christian activism in other Eastern European countries is even more interesting. For example, David Doellinger[7] draws our attention to the public protests of Christians in Czechoslovakia and East Germany, mainly in the 1980s, although Soviet Evangelicals took to the path of activism much earlier – from the beginning of the 1960s.

Protest movements and organised activism within the USSR have mainly been studied based on sources related to the Soviet Jewish, dissident and anti-war movements.[8] However, the creation of activism networks and related ties was also characteristic of Evangelicals within the USSR. The Evangelical protest movement began with letter campaigns sent to the authorities in the early 1960s.[9] This was part of a persistent effort on the part of the Evangelical community to gain visibility and attract attention from senior Soviet leaders. In this regard, one of their successes was the meeting the Evangelical leadership secured with Politburo member Anastas Mikoian in 1965. One of the unregistered ECB's boldest actions was the protest they held in front of the building of the Central Committee of the CPSU in 1966 which prompted a harsh backlash from the Soviet law enforcement agencies.[10]

The protests of religious activists relied on mediatisation as a means of achieving publicity. This aspect, in the context of the state monopoly over the media, deserves particular attention. Within the Evangelical community, an alternative form of "media", uncontrolled by the state, developed rapidly and the Evangelical Christians-Baptists regularly published journals. The most notable were *The Herald of Salvation* and *The Bulletin of the Council of Relatives* of Prisoners. In my research, I noticed a clear gender specificity in the creation and distribution of uncensored Evangelical media.[11]

Some Evangelical media was clearly addressed to the Western reader, and it was because of the Western informational support that the Soviet Evangelical activism was able to acquire the significant attention of international media outlets.[12] Several Evangelical missions, Amnesty International and at least two Western human rights organisations[13] collected and spread information about the Evangelical

activism being conducted by unregistered communities. However, in the West and, in particular, on the US political agenda, Soviet Evangelical activism only became significant from the late 1970s onwards.[14]

My focus on the gender specificity of religious activism stems from the fact that, in the USSR, religion traditionally had a "female" face, while in the community of unregistered ECB, men were the ones considered the "heroes of faith". Despite this, I believe that it was actually because of the women's initiatives that this community's activism began to receive media coverage – their actions were recorded in actively constructed written messages and photographs, and narratives about heroic behaviour. These narratives were then spread in many ways and through various media, which helped shape patterns of activist behaviour within the communities. According to the community's gender-determined norm, women were in an openly subordinate position to the male leaders; nevertheless, they actively participated in the movement. The studies of Saba Mahmood[15] and several anthropological studies by Jewish conservative communities help us to grasp this social structure. For example, Mahmood has noted that the women's "subordinate" position does not interfere or conflict with their social activism. In this chapter, I also explore how religious activism was related to the gender project of the late USSR. However, as space will not permit me to consider all the varieties and forms of activism, I focus only on areas related to the representation of persecution and "suffering for the faith".

The main sources of information on religious activism are texts written by believers. Therefore, my research is based on issues of *The Bulletin of the Council of Relatives of Prisoners*, *The Brethrens' Bulletin,* The Herald of Salvation and other samizdat materials.[16] Memoirs and interviews with activists from registered or unregistered communities were also important for my research.[17] These sources are supplemented by archival materials from the Archive of the History of Dissent of the Moscow, a branch of Memorial, and the archive of the Swiss organisation "Glaube in der 2. Welt".

Structure of the "initiative movement" or "Reform Baptists"

In English-language historiography, the unregistered Baptists are known as the "Reform Baptists".[18] It is, therefore, necessary to emphasise that this movement's separation from the registered community was not caused by disagreements of a doctrinal character, but by issues related to state policy. The Baptist communities remained unregistered because of changes in state policy and the end of the registration of religious communities in 1948.[19]

At the turn of the 1950s–1960s, Evangelical Christians-Baptists not only attempted to preserve their communities amidst Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign but they also set on a course of open confrontation with the authorities, accusing them of infringing the law and violating their freedom of conscience. The Baptist petition campaign was initiated following the vicious murder of a Baptist neophyte, Nikolai Khmara, in Barnaul. News of the murder spread through samizdat, stirring up the country's evangelical population and providing the impetus

for the crystallisation of forms of resistance. A massive petition campaign was launched among the Baptists in support of their fellow believers suffering persecution. In the unfolding letter campaign, believers sent reports of persecution to the highest state authorities in an action that seems to have contributed to a revision of court sentences imposed on believers following Khrushchev's ouster in 1964–1965.[20]

In a very short period of time, the Evangelical Christians-Baptists were able to self-organise and form a vibrant protest movement. The genesis of this movement was, perhaps, facilitated by their previous experience as a religious minority, marginalised by the authorities and branded "sectarians".[21] The community was based on rather large, branched networks, often linked by kinship ties as the high mobility of the population in the USSR, their frequent job changes and intensive urbanisation contributed to the rapid spread of Evangelicals throughout the country. Moreover, the expansion of the private sphere in the late Soviet period seems to have made it possible to successfully develop evangelical networks within the Soviet social space.

However, the success of this project in the Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras does not appear to have been accidental. The anti-religious campaign unleashed by Khrushchev seems to have unwillingly stimulated a wave of activism among believers. By the beginning of the 1960s, the Evangelical Christian-Baptist community manifested a clear ability to structure an organisation on a USSR-wide level, with a fairly clear distribution of powers and a rigid hierarchy, and the group that took up the task of managing the unregistered brotherhood also claimed leadership over the evangelical brotherhood across the whole USSR.[22] The unregistered Baptists adopted common forms of religious mobilisation and actively used the concept of "religious awakening"[23] combined with the rhetoric of religious cleansing, enlightenment and renewal. The individual was set in opposition to the ageing communities of the legal brotherhood, who lacked dynamism. Accordingly, the social practices in these communities were shaped in a highly disciplined way that stimulated their adherents' activism.

Thus, by the early 1960s, the young leaders began to stand out within the otherwise relatively heterogeneous Evangelical movement in the USSR and strove to take over the leadership of the older generation.[24] These young leaders – Aleksandr Prokof'ev, Boris Zdorovets and Gennadii Kriuchkov – planned to change the leadership at a congress of representatives of Evangelical Christians from all over the USSR. The "Initiative Group", created by opposition leaders, organised an unprecedented set of activities, addressing all evangelical believers in the USSR through samizdat and activists, who were starting to travel between the communities. Unable to take control of the structures of the legal brotherhood, these young leaders began to create networks that were outside the legal boundaries of the USSR, an alternative Union that stood in opposition to the legalised one. The new alternative association was called the "Council of Churches of the ECB" and this new body's power was concentrated in the hands of the permanent chairman Gennadii Kriuchkov, while Georgii Vins became the official secretary of the Union.[25] The

leadership of the "Council of Churches" appointed and ordained travelling Evangelists (*blagovestniki*), who were given unique rights to discipline local communities.[26] For example, they introduced the practice of "cleansing and sanctifying", which each member of the community had to undergo. This unique disciplinary practice was carried out by a travelling evangelist through public confessions and humiliating interrogations by fellow attendees. The movement even had its own "security service", whose mission was to eliminate those who were thought to be KGB agents.

The movement of unregistered Evangelical Christians-Baptists, with some support from Western Christian activists, became highly active in publishing and established several underground mobile printing houses.[27] Another typical collective practice that periodically took the form of protest activism was the organisation of mass religious weddings and funerals, mass public religious services to attract outsiders' attention and use these actions for preaching, the creation of a system of alternative religious education of children through Sunday schools, camps, musical bands and choirs, the distribution of religious literature, the creation of a stream of information writing letters to various authorities both within the country and outside about the persecution of believers in the USSR. An association of activists, the Council of Prisoners' Relatives, was also formed to fight for the rights of persecuted believers.

The viability of the illegal religious structure rested on its members' activism and they violently clashed with various branches of the state system. It is interesting to note that, for the most part, the structures within the illegal community replicated the Soviet state's structure on a smaller scale, including the shortcomings that accompany an authoritarian system: a distrust of personal initiative, searches for enemies, screening out members suspected of "cooperation" with the state.

The gender specificity of activism in the unregistered Baptist movement

The congregations of the Council of Churches turned out to be filled with predominantly young believers. The fact of the matter is that during Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign, persecution aimed to separate "youths from religion"[28] and prevent youth and children from attending prayer meetings in registered prayer houses. In some regions, the community split along generational lines: the older generation of believers remained in the registered communities with a previously registered presbyter (often registered back in the Stalin era), while the youths left to join the illegal community.[29]

The second element of the illegal community was a significant number of young men who could not find their place in the legal structure and were thirsty for religious activity. All of the authoritative positions in the unregistered brotherhood were occupied exclusively by men. Only men could become the authoritative employees of the Council of Churches, evangelists, elders and deacons of local communities or youth work leaders etc.

Their activism was regularly punished with fines, arrests and imprisonment. As Peter Serebrennikov[30] recalled in his memoir:

> In 1962 I was ordained as a presbyter (before that, I performed presbyter duties without ordination). Several times, I was taken from the meeting to a place where they took photographs, threatened and warned us… On 23 November 1968, they took me alone to that neighbourhood, where they arrested me. I was accused of holding illegal services, of not gathering with the registered excommunicated [Baptist community].[31] On 24 December 1968, there was a trial. Under articles 142-1, 188-1, 38 of the Criminal Code of the Az SSR, I was sentenced to three years in prison…
>
> They soon collected more evidence, arrested six people: me, my brother, Ivan Aleksandrovich, two preachers… and two sisters. On 5 September 1972, we were tried under Article 142 Part 2. I was sentenced to three years in a high-security prison…
>
> On 11 July, I was arrested again and prepared for trial… On 21 July 1976, I was convicted under Article 142-1 part 1 of the Criminal Code of the AzSSR and sentenced to five years in a high-security prison.[32]

Perhaps one could argue that leadership was also a form of activism. The leader remained in his position in his city or village, as Serebrennikov did, while activists could refuse to work in secular positions and "go underground". As Ivan Antonov[33] recalled:

> In November 1962, a pastor of the Initiative Group came to [my wife] Lina and offered to take me into hiding and do spiritual work in the brotherhood. Lina and I prayed and, in humility, willingly accepted the brothers' offer.
>
> "The doors to the prison are always open," Lina said. "Go and dedicate at least two or three months to hard work."
>
> We knew that the authorities were planning my arrest and that I was already being followed by intelligence officers.
>
> Lina stayed at home with our three children, hoping only for the Lord…[34]

Such narratives about the fate of the Council of Churches' activists and the gender roles in their families are ubiquitous in the published memoirs of the heroes of the Council of Churches. These narratives demonstrate that the camp subculture permeated the unregistered Baptist community and its hierarchy, and the leadership eventually came to be known for whether they had "done time" and how many years they had spent in prison.

We see a persistent narrative linking relationships between spouses, the leadership position within a community or any other structure and the prospect of arrest by the state authorities. For example, in his memoirs, another "hero of the faith" in the Council of Churches, Nikolai Boiko, described marriage as follows:

> In 1956 I decided to get married. I told my fiancée, my sister in the Lord, Valia, that I would have to suffer for the Lord for 10 years. "Before you get

> married, you should know about it, and make a decision accordingly. Maybe this is just the beginning of suffering for Christ, I don't know, but the Lord revealed to me that I would be condemned to 10 years. Do you agree to such an unsettling life?"[35]

In contrast, the forms of female activism are somewhat more difficult to reconstruct, since most women did not strive to be visible in the public sphere. Modesty and invisibility were priority values for women within the Baptist community. However, through community periodicals, we can identify patterns of gendered behaviour. While having many children was considered a form of activism for a married woman, there were other avenues open to younger unmarried women.

This research has identified the following areas of women's activity in the community:

- teaching religion to children, organising alternative pastimes for children;
- the creation and dissemination of religious literature;
- work as messengers and couriers, ensuring the transfer of information abroad;
- marriage for the sake of childbirth in a family of believers; and
- organisation of daily life of the "heroes of faith".

In general, these forms of activism were designed to preserve and support the community's internal development. In a significant number of cases, women acted as witnesses, accompanying and providing a presentation of the feat of faith. The following photograph (figure 8.1) illustrates this well.

This photograph was taken in Mogilev on 2 May 1974.[36] It clearly illustrates the gendered distribution of roles in the religious activism of Evangelical Christians-Baptists. The focus is on the suffering of a particular young believer, while women – devoid of individuality (their heads are even cut off in the photo) – are present to accompany and support him. At the same time, they expose the inflicted wound, make it visible, and draw the viewer's attention to it. The figure of a woman in the foreground, turned away from the camera, seems particularly curious. She is not treating the wound, not healing it, only lifting up the shirt in order to achieve the most eloquent photographic shot. This is an important feature of female activism. The women ensure that activism is recognised as such and control how it is portrayed in the media space.

Women acquired agency and their names appeared on the public agenda when they were themselves imprisoned. As an example, let us examine the fate of Zinaida Tarasova. She was born in 1942, into a Baptist family from the registered community, but she and her six siblings grew up as unbelievers and did not receive a Christian upbringing in their family. The girl concealed her attendance at prayer meetings from her parents and decided to devote her life to God:

> While working in the city, I prayed that the Lord would take my life into His service. One Sunday, I was at work reading the journal *Herald* of Salvation.

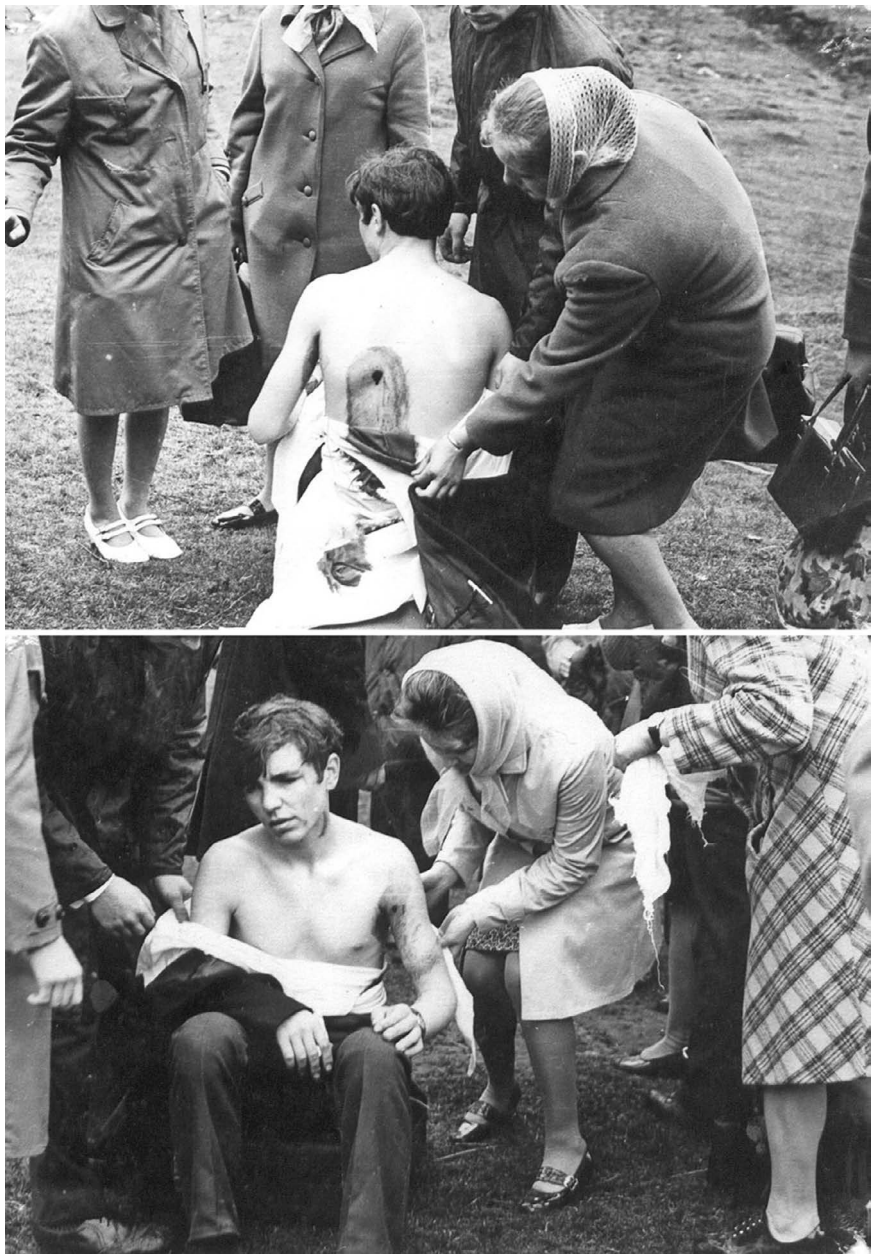

Figure 8.1 A wounded member of the youth Christian fellowship Nikolai Loiko. Mogilev, 2 May 1974. Collection of the Travelling Museum of the Council of Churches of the ECB (courtesy of Mariia Iants)

> I had a great desire to put at least some of my work into the ministry that was reported in the journal. Right there at my workplace, I knelt down and asked the Lord to reveal a way for me to do this work.
>
> Several days passed and one of the ministers asked me to come to his house. When I got there, he asked me to take several bags to another town. I knew nothing about the contents of the bags. When I arrived at my destination, I saw that these bags were collections of hymns in Russian… For some time, I transported the literature. Then the brother asked if I would agree to work at a publishing house for three months… All the publishing house's employees, seven people, were then arrested and sentenced to various terms of imprisonment. At the first interrogations, we were threatened with ten years [sentences] in the general regime camps, but then we, the sisters, were sentenced to three and two and a half years, and our brothers to four years in the general regime camps. On 27 June, I and the other sisters were released under amnesty.[37]

This narrative demonstrates the life strategy of this religious girl. Although her family is quite secularised, she chooses to serve God and comes into conflict with her parents over her belief. Her parents belong to a registered Baptist community and the radical activity of young people from an unregistered movement frightens them because it stands in open opposition to the state. The girl's service to God involves her being at the disposal of her male "brothers/ministers" and to serve the interests of the unregistered brotherhood. Thus, the young woman's life alternated between working in an underground printing house and serving prison sentences (she mentions three arrests and imprisonments), that is, it is described using the same language as that of the "heroes of faith". Admittedly, women generally received shorter sentences than men, as we can see from Tarasova's example. Nevertheless, it is at the moment of her arrest that Tarasova becomes a public figure and acquires agency.

Providing "channels of communication" with the Western world became one of the most important forms of activism. However, it must be said that this topic remains the most sensitive issue for both respondents in the post-Soviet space and Western activists to this day. One of the most famous activists in the West at the beginning of the 1960s was the Baptist poet Aida Skripnikova.[38] She was accused of establishing contacts with foreigners (such as the Swede, Jursmar) and was tried under Article 190-1 of the Soviet penal code.[39] Skripnikova's activism included the distribution and transfer of samizdat materials and documents informing people about the persecution of believers throughout the USSR. These actions directly led to her arrest and trial, which drew attention to her activities among the Evangelicals.

Motherhood was another field of female activism as mothers acted as agents in their own right, although mostly anonymously. Giving birth and raising several children became an important marker of belonging to the unregistered brotherhood and challenged the societal trend towards one- or two-child families. This trend is reflected in numerous photographs, most of which featured numerous children who had been left without a father, often indicated by the caption "Daddy is in prison"[40].

Figure 8.2 The sons of the evangelist Iurii Kuksenko. 1973. Family archive of Vera Katko (courtesy of Vera Katko)

Photos of those who suffered for the faith were sent *en masse* to Western Evangelical missions and human rights organisations.

Motherhood, specifically the motherhood of numerous children, seemed to be each woman's most important mission. She was expected to give birth and raise the future members of the Church. Furthermore, women could step up as defenders of believers' rights, especially the right of Christian mothers to raise their children in their faith of choice. Thus, I have identified a specific genre of letters written by Christian mothers in which they publicly declared their disagreement with the state policy regarding raising children as atheists. In March 1969, a group of 1,453 women identifying themselves as mothers of Evangelical Christians-Baptists living in the USSR[41] sent a statement to the leading Soviet publishing houses and newspapers, the Council of Churches of the ECB and the Council of Relatives of Prisoners of the ECB. This multi-page letter (containing a number of documents on the violation of children's rights) began with a list of Soviet laws and international conventions that were being systematically violated by the USSR's treatment of children from believing families:

> Today we turn all your attention to the suffering of our children, whom you torment, presenting it to the public under the guise of "salvation from the corrupting and pernicious influence of Christian upbringing". They are witnesses to house searches. These children have experienced, in their childhood, the horror of the arrest of their fathers and mothers. Many of them

> have experienced the fear of interrogations by the prosecutor's office and the KGB: they are thrown into a fever at the sight of a policeman. Many of them are nicknamed "obscurantist" by their unbelieving peers. Based on a number of specific examples, we have ascertained that atheists, by their actions, do not re-educate but contribute to the physical destruction of our children.[42]

The authors of the letters then provided detailed descriptions of individual cases and provided fully articulated complaints.

This letter was not a unique case. The Christian mothers also sent an appeal to international institutions, signed by 4,031 mothers, dated 20 May 1977. Copies of this appeal were addressed to "all the heads of state in the world and all Christians and people of goodwill". This letter began with a comparison of the contemporary period with the cruellest periods in human history:

> Nero and his followers, in the first centuries of Christianity, threw children and mothers into the arena to be torn apart by predators. Fascism ruthlessly killed children. Tsarist Russia took children away from sectarians and gave them to other people's houses to be educated. Slavery separated children from their mothers on the markets.
>
> The time of revolutions was marked by the death of hundreds and thousands of children from starvation, mass epidemics, and the resettlement of many families from their homes to the snows of Siberia, the North, the Far East, etc.[43]

This multi-page letter also contained specific examples and harshly criticised the Soviet government for violating children's rights. Unfortunately, its authorship cannot be established: the letter does not contain the names of the compilers and is collectively signed by "Christian mothers". The text of the letter only stated that the "Signatures of 4,031 Christian mothers are attached, on 166 sheets, to the address of the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR Comrade Kosygin A.N."

The discourse defending "Christian motherhood" was not typical for Russian Evangelicals. Rather, it seems to be part of a conservative construction that emerged on a global level.[44] As previously noted, for unregistered Evangelicals, giving birth to many children was a vocation, an act of activism, a sacrificial service to the "brotherhood". At the same time, having many children was an open contradiction to the Soviet tendency towards the smaller families. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasise that the success of such "Christian motherhood" was conditioned by Soviet family policies: women bore responsibility for their children and, in practice, were often the main breadwinner in the family. A Soviet family could also consist of just a woman and her child or children. The state subsidies to support motherhood[45] and some social benefits for mothers of large families (*mnogodetnye materi)* allowed women to feel quite confident and protected.[46]

However, despite the various practices of activism described above, the gender specificity of activism in unregistered ECB communities demonstrates that a primary feature of most forms of women's activism was impersonality and anonymity.

The "Council of Relatives of Prisoners who suffered for the Word of God"

This section focuses on the informal structures used to protect the imprisoned Evangelical Baptist Christians. This task was performed by the "Council of Relatives of Prisoners Who Suffered for the Word of God" (hereinafter referred to as the CRP). Although many of the documents produced by the CRP are well known, the Council's composition, its fate and the motivation of its members have remained outside the interest of academic researchers.[47] According to the official lists published by the Council of Churches of the ECB, there were 26 women in the Council of Relatives from 1964 to 1987.[48] What prompted these women to create this unique and long-lived organisation, a genuine human rights organisation, focused on protecting religious freedom?

The Council's first official leader was Lidiia Govorun[49] who described her path to activism in an interview as follows:

> It was all my fault that I, a believer, belonged to the ECB church and took my child with me to worship. And then one day the authorities committed a terrible evil. Serezha went to school and did not return home… I wrote a complaint about the arbitrariness of the authorities and appealed to the people of God: "Dear children of God, help me bring my child back." And many believers of our long-suffering country began to intercede, and my complaint, with their signatures, was brought to the USSR Prosecutor's office, to the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, to the Central Committee of the party, and to the regional prosecutor of the city of Smolensk. The regional prosecutor of the city of Smolensk, where I lived, called me and said: "Govorun [literally "talker"], why are you shouting to the whole world? Look, I have a full bag of your applications." I answered him: "I am a mother. I demand my maternal rights. You will take my child only over my dead body. I will never give him back to you… You steal a child from a defenceless mother, shame on you and your communism." …
>
> Then I stood up and said, "I will go and die with my brothers. There is no Serezha, and no life left for me on Earth. Nina Iastrebova,[50] who had ten children, and whose husband was in prison,[51] has agreed to go with me.

Thus, in 1964, this group of women spontaneously came together, through an open, public dialogue with the authorities. The Council of Relatives of Prisoners was then founded on 24 February 1964, when the group sent its first appeal to the communities in the country. The tone of the appeal was unexpected: the initiators of the SRU declared that the arrests and imprisonment of believers must be made known to the world and that information on the persecution of the faithful could successfully achieve this mission.

> Beloved brothers and sisters, Apostle Paul in his letter to the Philippians wrote: "As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard

and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ" and that "…my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel" (Phil. 1:12-13).

We, the relatives of the prisoners, also want our circumstances to serve the greater success of the work of God and, for this, we want the imprisonment of our relatives to be known to all of you so that you too can be involved in the body about which it is said: "… being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies…" (Eph.4:16)

We thank the Lord for you, that through your ministry we are persecuted by the world, but not abandoned by you, so that God, through you, meets all our needs for His glory, but we ask that you always remember the brother and sister prisoners in your prayers to God…

Therefore, if there is anyone who is in such a position as we are, having their husbands, brothers and sons imprisoned for the Word of God, let us know, and we will inform the Church. The Church, through her prayers, will tell her Head – Jesus Christ, who will send His protection soon.[52]

This message sounded a call to all the churches to pray together for the prisoners and report on the persecution of believers and, in so doing, instigated a new form of activism. Indeed, this seemingly harmless Christian proposal about the need for prayer support for prisoners and their family members acquired an overtly political resonance. The public declaration that the "democratic" Soviet state held some of its citizen prisoners for religious beliefs was a criminal offence – a "slander discrediting the Soviet state and social system". Until the end of the Soviet era, praying for prisoners within a congregation was considered an open challenge to the Soviet system and a marker of community opposition. Such public prayers were often initiated by women.

Together with an appeal to the churches, the All-Union Congress of the Council of Prisoners' Relatives sent out a report on the election of the "Provisional Council of Relatives". The goals and objectives of the public organisation were formulated as follows:

1 Provide constant information from the ECB about its faithful convicted for the Word of God and about the children taken away from believing ECB parents; calls to prayers for the prisoners and children.
2 Petition the Government to review all trials of ECB believers convicted for the Word of God since 1961 with the aim of securing their release and full rehabilitation (acquittal), as well as petitioning the Government to return the ECB children taken from their parents to their families ….[53]

The Council of" Relatives of Prisoners began to collect and publish materials on religious persecution. From 1971, material about the persecutions was synthesised and published in a special periodical, the *Bulletin of the Council of Relatives of Prisoners*.[54] Thus far, we do not have a complete list of the women who were members of the Council of Relatives of Prisoners. The 26 women named in the official documents are only a small portion of the members this organisation is

known to have had today. This is confirmed by other Council documents, such as the message about the expanded Council meeting that took place on 11 April 1971 in Moscow. This document features signatures from 18 women but only 6 of these names also appear on the final list of CRP members.

The signed appeals not only allow us to identify CRP activists but they also allow us to outline the geography of the movement. Participants in this 1971 meeting came from as far away as Alma-Ata, Novosibirsk, Kulunda, Odessa, Brest, Rostov-on-the Don, Kishinev, Karachaevsk, Gomel', L'viv, Timashevsk, Moscow and Dedovsk. Thus, the women came from five republics within the Soviet Union (RSFSR, Ukrainian SSR, Belarusian SSR, Kazakh SSR and Moldavian SSR). This impressive geographical span shows the ubiquitous presence of unregistered Evangelical Christians-Baptist communities, as well as the degree of coordination of the movement in the vast expanses of Soviet territory.

The stories told about the members of the CRP reflect their adventurous life, escaping KGB surveillance and travelling around the country in order to verify information about the persecuted and organise assistance for the families of the prisoners. In an interview, Vera Khoreva[55] recalled that seven to nine of the young women in the Council had travelled to communities whose members were under arrest. At least once a month, meetings were held in different cities around the country so that the CRP members could process and summarise the information received.[56]

Figure 8.3 Meeting of the Council of Relatives of Prisoners. Early 1980s. Collection of the Travelling Museum of the Council of Churches of the ECB (courtesy of Mariia Iants)

Which functions did the members of the Council of Relatives of Prisoners assume? The CRP aimed to collect as much information as possible about the persecution of believers. The Council of Relatives of Prisoners singled out the most outstanding "heroes of the faith" and publicised their fate through samizdat. They also regularly updated statistics on persecuted believers. The reality of the situation was that the courts did not always issue charges based on "religious articles", instead, attempting to condemn believers based on non-political articles of the penal code. Thus, one purpose of the CRP publications was to attract attention to the Soviet Baptists, and they seem to have succeeded in doing just this. Their attendance at trials and documentation of the audiences, therefore, became a form of activism. The "records" of the trials had both an apologetic function – to preach the Gospel to atheistic members of the court – and a didactic function – to offer the believers at the trial models of behaviour.

The CRP activists took it upon themselves to petition the authorities to end unjust persecution. The CRP members not only "interceded", but also actively explained the illegality of the authorities' treatment of the believers to their readers. Their appeals contained detailed quotes from the International Covenants on Human Rights that explained the inconsistencies of Soviet legislation regarding the cults:

> Having signed the Helsinki Treaty, having ratified the International Covenant on Human Rights, you should have brought in line with them all the domestic laws and regulations that guarantee the observance of the political and civil rights of citizens, in particular, the right to freedom of conscience… Religious citizens of the country have written and are writing to you, petitions with numerous signatures that request the amendment of the legislation on religious cults so that it does not encroach on the freedom of conscience of believers. By sending you these statements, they prove their unrelenting desire to regulate the relationship between the state and the Church. You have still not responded to the requests of believers from among the citizens of the country entrusted to you, have not taken the path of fulfilling the international treaties you have signed, rather you continue to persecute believers for non-compliance with the legislation on religious cults, clearly moving toward the complete physical destruction of believers in the country.[57]

The CRP members also became an important communication channel for transmitting information about persecution and various forms of discrimination against believers to international institutions. Appeals to international structures, particularly foreign Evangelical and human rights organisations, and international law became a distinct fundamental feature of female activism.[58]

Lidiia Mikhailovna Vins (1907–1985) contributed to the success and legitimisation of the CRP within the closed hierarchical structure of the Council of Churches of the ECB. She was the official leader of the Council of Relatives of Prisoners from 1966 to 1968 and directed the activism of its members until she was forced to flee the USSR in 1979. She gained her special position as she was the widow

of a preacher who had been persecuted for his faith and the mother of one of the leaders of the Council of Churches of the ECB. Many contemporaries ascribed the unprecedented popularity that the Council of Relatives acquired abroad to Vins' actions. Her broad knowledge, intellectual outlook and organisational skills allowed her to resonate with the media and, thereby, make the activism of the Council's members visible.

However, there is far less extant memorial material related to the other activists from this movement other than those who received coverage in samizdat. One example describing the dramatic fate of the activist of the Council of Relatives of Prisoners is the obituary of Uliana Germaniuk (1930–1987), which was published in the movement's Bulletin. A mother with many children and the wife of an activist of the Council of Churches, she fell seriously ill in custody and died three months after her release.

The rhetoric of the CRP documents reflects two strategies designed to expose Soviet authorities through religious and legal arguments. The extent to which this discourse was accepted within the community is a matter of debate. The actions of the CRP prompted relatively severe criticism of some of the male leaders and a desire to limit their activism. Mikhail Shaptala (1925–1998), a leader of the "autonomous" wing of the Evangelical Christians-Baptists, spoke most openly on the matter. He was extremely critical of Vins' leadership style and her desire to exercise influence over the selection and action of male leaders in the organisation. These accusations betray the acute gender conflict present among the leaders of the unregistered movement.

The unregistered ECB community itself was not a human rights movement; indeed, it was not even a movement geared towards gender equality. It was more the type of movement that is commonly referred to as conservative or fundamentalist. Such movements commonly promote patriarchal religious interpretations and structures of religious practice in which women hold subordinate positions.[59] However, to some extent, it fits into the understanding of female piety recorded by Saba Mahmood (according to her thesis, pious Muslim women can experience agency in acts of submission, rather than in resistance to external norms)[60] or Lihi Ben Shitrit's thesis that female activists interpret their agency through pious practices performed in a framework of individual autonomy. However, in the USSR, the situation seems to have been fundamentally different from in the Middle East, where, as Ben Shitrit observes, religious movements offered women genuine liberation from oppressive socio-economic conditions and cultural norms. In the Soviet Union, we see that while women present themselves rhetorically as autonomous individuals, they do so when addressing outside audiences, "external" readers and observers. Yet, unlike in the West, Soviet Baptist women did not try to expand their opportunities within the religious community. Therefore, in line with Saba Mahmood's observation, we might ask whether these women were actually expressing agency through acts of submission, rather than in resistance to external norms. Women could realise and express their piety through "traditional motherhood", the secret work of "invisible" agents (printers, Sunday school teachers, couriers for the transfer of materials) or, in the case of members of the Council of

Prisoners' Relatives, as mediators in dialogue with a hostile external environment. By publicly defending the freedom of religion before the Soviet state and international institutions, women received a unique opportunity for self-realisation. This activity caused a certain tension (especially in relation to gender) and even opened criticism within the community. While confrontation with the state had decreased significantly by the end of the 1980s, this form of female activism was curtailed: the CRP was renamed the Department of Intercession and subordinated to the Union's male leadership.

In my opinion, such female religious-based activism became possible not in spite of Soviet socio-political conditions, but thanks to them. Religious activists mastered the discourse of "socialist legality" and, by inscribing their demands "to abide by the law" within this discourse, they emulated the strategy of the Soviet human rights movement. Thus, instead of the traditional piety of a woman, we see an individualistic subjectivity in their actions. What is more, such activism has much in common with the Eastern European Christian human rights movements.[61]

Conclusion

Analysing the history of the illegal organisation of the Church Council of ECB, it becomes evident that membership in its communities was, in itself, a form of religious activism. The Church Council's funerals and weddings, lawsuits and prison releases became manifestations of the Baptist faith. Practices of community leadership, pastors, preaching and evangelistic activity were exclusively male.

At the top of the hierarchy of the Church Council, we usually find a male activist, a prominent minister, a "preacher of the Word of God". Often married, with a large family, he remains in hiding and, therefore, does not work. Such men, or "prisoners" (*uzniki*), spent most of their time either behind bars or travelling around the country evangelising or, on secret journeys, setting up printing houses and delivering literature. Although these male activists only appeared in their families to father children before disappearing again for several years, they were portrayed in the media as the heads of these large families. Other activists lower in the hierarchy, who were imprisoned for their religious activities, enjoyed some fame but often remained anonymous. Among them were the women who had received prison sentences for their activities as printers in publishing houses or Sunday school teachers.

In this study, it was noted that, while men's activities aimed, primarily, to preserve the community's internal stability (and construct the community's identity through conflict with the leadership of the ECB), the primary aim of female activism was to publicise male activism in the outside world and create heroic narratives of suffering. Motherhood, given that the faithful women were bearing numerous children, also became a specific form of activism. Having numerous children became notable in the context of both the Soviet gender project, in which mothers were, essentially, the heads of families and the emergence of the discourse of Christian motherhood as a vocation.

In the communities of the Council of Churches, women were generally deprived of the opportunity to position themselves independently. However, their strategy of submission can be interpreted as a form of female piety. In the study, special attention was paid to the organisation of unregistered ECB, which fought for the rights of those suffering for the faith. This was the most durable human rights organisation with a focus on religious rights in the USSR and an unprecedented case of female activism in the USSR. It is also notable that the task of defending religious freedom and presenting this movement to an international audience predominantly fell to women who otherwise adhered to traditional patriarchal norms. However, this patriarchal and traditionalist worldview did not prevent them from using the discourse of human rights, albeit with a limited focus on the religious rights of their own community, and following a pattern we also find in other postwar Christian human rights movements. The concept of "traditional roles" fits into the Soviet gender project in a very bizarre way. Indeed, the women of the Council of Churches were clearly aware of their subjectivity in the secular legal system. Thus, we see that the women of the Council of Relatives of prisoners acted as fully fledged agents in both political and social spheres. They explained international norms and criticised domestic ones, recorded discriminatory measures and acted to defend their rights in a secular space, talking about infringement and discrimination in addition to their religious and social rights, and those of their families.

Notes

1 This poem was dedicated to the "fighters for the faith, who were condemned for their devotion to Christ's Church, to the witnesses of Truth and Purity". Collection of poems. Baptist Samizdat.
2 See Alton B. Pollard, *Mysticism and Social Change* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992); Joy R. Bostic, *African American Female Mysticism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).
3 Examples of emergence of a thawing community: Mariia Maiofis, "'In Assistance to Decisions of the High Command': Birth Of the 'Thaw'-Period Community (*Obshestvennost'*) from the Spirit of 1939." *SHAGI / STEPS* 2, no.1 (2016): 44–81; Kiyohiro Matsudo, "'*Obshchestvennost'* in the Struggle against Crimes: The Case of People's Vigilante Brigades in the Late 1950s and 1960s", in *Obshchestvennost' and Civic Agency in Late Imperial and Soviet Russia* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 152–170. See Natalia Lebina, *Povsednevnost' èpokhi kosmosa i kukuruzy. Destruktsiia bol'shogo stilia: Leningrad, 1950–1960-e gody* (SPb: Kriga; Pobeda, 2015).
4 Katalin Cseh-Varga and Adam Czirak, *Performance Art in the Second Public Sphere Event-based Art in Late Socialist Europe* (London: Routledge, 2018).
5 Lauren Frances Turek, *To Bring the Good News to All Nations. Evangelical Influence on Human Rights and U.S. Foreign Relations* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020).
6 On the specifics of the relationship between the dissident and religious movements, see Nadezhda Beliakova, "Ob otnosheniiakh mezhdu religioznikami i dissidentskim dvizheniem v SSSR v usloviiakh kholodnoi voiny kontsa 1960-kh – nachala 1980-kh godov", in *Dissidenty SSSR, vostochnoi i tsentral''noi Evropy: Èpokha i nasledie: pervye chteniia pamiati A.B. Roginskogo. Moskva, 29–30 marta 2019 goda* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi Memorial, 2020), 66–77.
7 David Doellinger, *Turning Prayers into Protests. Religious-Based Activism and its Challenge to State Power in Socialist Slovakia and East Germany* (Budapest-New York: CEU Press, 2013).

8 Cécile Vaissié, *Pour votre liberté et pour la nôtre. Le combat des dissidents de Russie* (Paris: Laffont, 1999). Marina Morozova, *Anatomiia Otkaza* (Moscow: RGGU, 2011); Mark Hurst, *British Human Rights Organizations and Soviet Dissent, 1965–1985* (London, New York: Bloomsbury, 2016); Stefani Hoffman, Ann Komaromi, and Yuli Kosharovsky, *We Are Jews Again: Jewish Activism in the Soviet Union. Syracuse* (NY: Syracuse University Press, 2017).
9 Nadezhda Beliakova, "'Soobshchaem o prestuplenii protiv pravosudiia…': Obrashcheniia i zhaloby veruiushchikh v Brezhnevskom SSSR", *Noveishaia istoriia Rossii* 8, no. 3 (2018): 640–658.
10 Andreii Savin, "'Mnogie dazhe ne dopuskaiut mysli, chto sektant mozhet byt′ chestnym chelovekom.' 'Brezhnevskii' povorot v antireligioznoi politike i rossiiskii protestantizm (1964–1966 gg.)", *Vestnik Tverskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta.* Seriia: Istoriia. no. 4 (2016): 59–75.
11 Collections of works were regularly spread among the Evangelical Christians-Baptists, collections with very characteristic titles, such as *Follow the example of their Faith.*
12 For example, in the Norwegian Parliament.
13 Keston College and Glaube in der 2. Welt.
14 Lauren Frances Turek, *To Bring the Good News to All Nations: Evangelical Influence on Human Rights and U.S. Foreign Relations* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press: 2020), 98–124.
15 Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).
16 Some photographs and biographical information of members of the Council of Relatives of Prisoners of the ECB were received from Mariia Iakovlevna Iants, the organiser of the Mobile Museum of the Brotherhood of the MSC ECB. The creation of this exposition and the very concept of the museum itself are vivid examples of female activism. Mariia Iants came from Novokuznetsk, in the Kemerovo region, and was the daughter of the presbyter of an unregistered community. After Perestroika, she created a museum of the history of the ECB. She took this mobile exhibition around the ECB communities giving lectures teaching the younger generation about the past.
17 Some of this material was collected during a joint project with Miriam Dobson (University of Sheffield). See publications: Nadezhda Beliakova and Miriam Dobson, "Protestant women in the late Soviet era: gender, authority, and dissent", *Canadian Slavonic Papers/Revue canadienne des slavistes* 58, no. 2 (June 2016): 117–140; Nadezhda Beliakova and Miriam Dobson, *Zhenshchiny v evangel′skikh obshchinakh poslevoennogo SSSR* (Moscow: Indrik, 2015).
18 This concept was apparently introduced by Michael Bourdeaux, the first author to write about the activism of Soviet Evangelicals, and was also used by Walter Zawatsky and Albert Wardin.
19 For studies on the lives of evangelical Baptists-Christians, see Sergei Savinskii, *Istoriia Evangel′skikh Khristian-Baptistov Ukrainy, Rossii, Belorussii* 2 (Saint-Petersburg: Khristianskoe obshchestvo "Bibliia dlia vsekh", 1999); Irina Gordeeva, "Sovetskii Period v istoricheskom opyte Rossiiskikh Evangel′skikh Khristian-Baptistov," in "*Sovetskoe nasledstvo": Otrazhenie proshlogo v sotsial′nykh i ėkonomicheskikh praktikakh sovremennoi Rossii* (Moscow: Rosspėn, 2010), 159–200; Tat′iana Nikol′skaia, *Russkii Protestantizm i gosudarstvennaia vlast′ v 1905 - 1991 godax* (Saint-Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Evropeiskogo universiteta v Sankt-Peterburge, 2009).
20 For more details, see Aleksandr Shubin, *Svoboda v SSSR* (Moscow: Veche, 2008).
21 For more information on the marginalised faithful, see *Marginaly v Sovetskom Sotsiiume. 1930-e – seredina 1950-kh godov*, ed. Sergii Krasil′nikov (Moscow: ROSSPĖN, 2017), 94–192.
22 See the *Brethrens' Bulletin* from 1965.
23 Iurii Kuksenko, *Nashi Besedy* (Titel–Verlag. 2005).

24 Nadezhda Beliakova, "Vsesoiuznyi sovet evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov – produkt i zalozhnik stalinskoi religioznoi politiki" [All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists—product and hostage of Stalinist religious policy], in *Konfessionalnaia politika sovetskogo gosudarstva v 1920-1950-e gody: Materialy XI Mezhdunarodnoi nauchnoi konferentsii. Velikii Novgorod, 11-13 oktiabria 2018 g.* [Confessional policy of the Soviet state in 1920-1950s: conference papers of the XI International science conference, Velikii Novgorod, Nov. 11-13, 2018.] (Moscow: Politicheskaia entsiklopediia, 2019), 418–429.
25 Georgii Vins took the back seat in the Council of Churches of the ECB. He became the secretary of the Organising Committee of the CRP ECB. However, unlike Kriuchkov, he was imprisoned several times and, in 1979, ultimately exiled to the United States along with several dissidents by the decision of the Politburo. RGANI. Fond 89, Finding Aid 25, File 37, p. 2,7.
26 Detailed memoirs of the evangelist: Kuksenko, *Nashi Besedy*.
27 Their publishing network later became known as "The Christian" (Khristianin) publishing house and they distributed the religious literature in various ways.
28 Olena Panich, "Children and Childhood among Evangelical Christians-Baptists during the Late Soviet Period (1960s–1980s)," *Theological Reflections*, no. 13 (2012): 155–179.
29 The separation often took place between generations. This has been demonstrated by studies such as Michael Bourdeaux*, Religious Ferment in Russia: Protestant Opposition to Soviet Religious Policy* (Edinburg: R&R Clark Ltd., 1968); Walter Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals since World War II* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1981).
30 Petr Aleksandrovich Serebrennikov (1905–1986) was born in Azerbaijan, baptised in Baku at the age of 18, received his first term of imprisonment in 1931, a second term in 1968, a third term in 1972, and a fourth term in 1976. He served as the pastor of the Ivanovo Church of the SC ECB in the Azerbaijan SSR.
31 Members of the registered community excommunicated those who gathered for prayer "illegally".
32 *«Podrazhaite vere ikh» 40 let probuzhdennomu bratstvu* (Moscow: Izdanie soveta tserkvei EKhB, 2001).
33 Ivan Iakovlevich Antonov (1919–2009) was an active member of the Council of Churches of the ECB. In the 1940s and 1970s, he was repeatedly imprisoned for religious activities. He was the pastor of the Baptist community in Kirovograd (Ukraine). According to reports inside the SC ECB, by 1993, he had ordained 207 ministers, received 5 sentences and spent 21 years in detention.
34 Ivan Antonov, *Moe schast′e v Boge* (Izdatel′stvo "Khristianin" MSTs EKhB, 2010), 96–97.
35 Continuing the story, the author noted: "12 years later, when we already had 8 children in the family, I, as a church minister, was sentenced to 10 years in prison, fulfilling the revelation that the Lord sent me back in Vorkuta". See Nikolai Boiko, *Veriu v bessmertie. Avtobiograficheskii ocherk* ("Khristianin" MSTs EKhB, 2007), 39–40.
36 This photo, taken by Nikolai Loiko, was provided by a long-term lecturer on the history of the unregistered Evangelical movement, Mariia Iants. The daughter of the presbyter of an unregistered community, she helped found a museum on the history of the unregistered movement in Novokuznetsk. For two decades, since 1991, she has been travelling and displaying these portable stands with photographs. She accompanied these exhibitions with lectures on the history of the unregistered brotherhood.
37 "Moi put' v izdatel'stvo «Khristianin»," in *Ne khlebom edinym*, ed. Margarita Pazych (Missionswerk Friedensbote, 2001), 51–53. Information about the arrest of underground publishers was published in the Bulletin of the Council of Relatives of prisoners.
38 Michael Bourdeaux and Xenia Howard-Johnston, *Aida of Leningrad; The Story of Aida Skripnikova* (London: Gateway Outreach, 1972).
39 Samizdat Archive No 808. Trial of A.M. Skripnikova, 11–15 July 1967.
40 Below is a photo that shows the Iurii Kuksenko family and was given to me by his daughter Zoia Bardina.

41 Nadezhda Beliakova and Miriam Dobson, *Zhenshchiny v Evangel'skikh Obshchinakh Poslevoennogo SSSR, Chapter 6* (Moscow: Indrik, 2015), 284–345.
42 Beliakova and Dobson. *Zhenshchiny*, 312–327.
43 Beliakova and Dobson. *Zhenshchiny*, 328–335.
44 On gender roles in conservative communities in the United States, see Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Bible Believers: Fundamentalists in the Modern World* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987); Sophia Korb, "Mothering Fundamentalism: The Transformation of Modern Women into Fundamentalists", *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* 29, no. 2 (2010): 68–86.
45 The Soviet state supported mothers with large families by, for example, awarding the "Medal of Motherhood" and the medals of "Mother-Heroine" and "Motherly Glory".
46 Another more significant support system was the stable funding of the families of prisoners from the Council of Churches. Assistance was provided on a systematic basis: each child was allocated specific benefits: a bed, clothing and food. This support was of crucial importance given the level of Soviet poverty. Author's interview with Vera Khoreva 15 February 2013. AHRC AH/1025883/1/1; Author's interview with Vera Khoreva, 26 April 2014. AHRC AH/1025883/1/27.
47 For the initial academic approach to this topic, see Belyakova and Dobson, "Protestant women".
48 See, the List of members of the Council of Relatives of ECB Prisoners in Slovo Bozh'e in the USSR (1964–1987) https://www.fondsp.ru (last accessed 30 March 2022).
49 Lidiia Govorun (born 1929) married in 1952. In 1954, her husband Sergei was paralysed and lay in this state for 30 years. In 1962, the Smolensk Regional Court deprived her of parental rights and her eight-year-old son Sergei was placed in a boarding school for a year and a half. In 1965, as part of a delegation of five persons of the ECB Church, she was at a reception with the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, A. I. Mikoian. She was also sentenced to three years in prison, from 1966 to 1969, during which time her son was placed in a boarding school outside of Smolensk (100 km away). Since 2000, Govorun has resided in the United States.
50 Nina Iastrebova (1934–2010), mother of 12 children. Wife of Vladimir Iastrebov, evangelist in the Khar'kiv region. Member of the Council of the Republic of Uzbekistan from its formation (1964–1969). Her signature is on the first "Appeal to all the believers of the ECB" dated 23 February 1964. In 1964, Iastrebova was placed in a psycho-neurological hospital in the Kharkov region, where she was kept for a month, for making petitions to the Government.
51 Memoirs of sister Lidiia Govorun. Samizdat. 2–3.
52 See the address of the participants in the First All-Union Conference of Relatives of prisoners of ECB, dated 23 February 1964 in Beliakova and Dobson. *Zhenshchiny*, 358–359.
53 Report on the work of the All-Union Conference of relatives of prisoners of the ECB, 23 February 1964.
54 The fact that the Council of Prisoners' Relatives had, from the very beginning, its own channels for transmitting information and consistently transmitted its texts to Western human rights organisations is evidenced by the collection of Radio Liberty *Samizdat Archive*. Three volumes (14, 15 and 19) contain a selection of messages from ECB believers, while lists of prisoners, open letters, records of trials were published in previous volumes. We know that the publication activity of the CRP turned into a separate periodical samizdat outlet, *The Bulletin of Relatives of Prisoners,* the first issue of which was published in 1971. By 1987, there were 141 issues with 9–10 issues being published in some years.
55 Vera Khoreva, born on 27 March 1934, mother of three sons, wife of the minister of the Council of Churches Mikhail Khorev (1931–2012). Khorev was convicted four times and spent a total of 12.5 years in prison.

56 Interview of the author with Vera Khoreva, 15 February 2013. AHRC AH/1025883/1/1.
57 Bulletin of the Council of Relatives of Prisoners, 1980.
58 My research on the G2W archive showed that most of the messages came in the form of film footage.
59 Lihi Ben Shirit, "Women, Freedom, and Agency in Religious Political Movements: Reflections from Women Activists in Shas and the Islamic Movement in Israel," *Journal of Middle East Women s Studies* 9, no. 3 (October 2013): 82.
60 Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).
61 Samuel Moyn, "Personalism, Community, and the Origins of Human Rights", in *Human Rights in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 85–106.

9 A Christian Feminism in the USSR?

A Historical Overview of the Religious Women's Club "Mariia" (1980–1982)

Anna Sidorevich

> We understand, of course, that Western feminists are in search of freedom. But it is clear to us that in its search for freedom, Christianity goes further than any feminist doctrine.
>
> Tat'iana Goricheva, *Filles de Job. Les féministes de "Maria"* (1989)[1]

> Their feminism cannot have come from the West.
> Neither has it come from the past.
>
> Women and Eastern Europe Group, *Woman and Russia: First Feminist Samizdat* (1980)[2]

In 1980, the religious women's club "Mariia" was created by a group of women who were participants in the so-called second culture[3] of Leningrad. By the moment of the club's creation, its co-founders Tat'iana Goricheva, Nataliia Malakhovskaia and Iuliia Voznesenskaia had already taken part in the publication of the samizdat feminist edited collection *Woman and Russia,* initiated by the unofficial poet and artist Tat'iana Mamonova. However, they eventually came to reject the orientation towards Western feminism advocated by the latter and turned to Orthodox Christianity as a source of liberation. The theory of Russian feminism[4] was conceived by its adherents in opposition to both the Soviet project of women's emancipation carried out by the Bolsheviks in the early 20th century[5] and contemporary Western feminism of the second wave,[6] some notions of which somehow reached Leningrad across the Iron curtain.

In recent years, the phenomenon of the independent women's movement in Leningrad in the late 1970s and early 1980s has attracted considerable attention from Russian feminist activists and researchers from different parts of the world. This led to the reissue of the samizdat edited collection *Woman and Russia* by a group of researchers and feminist activists in 2020.[7] The existing scholarship has primarily focused on the history of the foundation and development of the Leningrad women's movement[8] and on its place within Soviet dissent,[9] in the broader context of "state feminism"[10] and public discourse in the USSR,[11] as well as its transnational connections.[12] However, it has paid less attention to the role of religion in the development of the movement.

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My interest in the subject of the religious feminism of the group "Maria" dates back to a Master thesis defended in 2017,[13] which prompted me to explore the issue further in my PhD dissertation, currently in progress.[14] In addition, the thesis, together with a number of interviews I conducted with the movement's participants, served as a reference material for Kateryna Zorya's article "The Maria Underground Zine: Religious Feminism in 1980s Leningrad".[15] By drawing on the first two issues of the journal *Maria*, women's memoirs and oral sources, Zorya examines the rejection of Soviet Marxism by the participants of the club "Maria" and explores the uniqueness of their alternative, Christian feminism centred on the figure of the mother of God. However, the analysis conducted by Zorya seems to be rather limited in scope, as it does not consider the circumstances of women's conversion to Christianity in the context of Leningrad underground. Besides, while giving an overview of the repressions the group experienced domestically, it only briefly mentions its marginalisation on a global scale, without engaging in a closer and more detailed analysis.

In this chapter, I will argue that the uniqueness of the theory of Russian Christian feminism elaborated by the members of the club "Mariia" conditioned its insecure position in both domestic and international contexts and predetermined its subsequent decline. While the denunciation of Soviet women's condition and use of religious discourse led to the activists' persecutions at home, the Christian orientation of their feminism elicited rejection from Western feminists after their exile. This chapter will trace these women's path towards religion and feminism, present the circumstances of the creation of the discussion club "Mariia" and related samizdat journal, analyse the main theoretical foundations of their unique brand of religious feminism, and study the reception of Christian feminists' ideas in an international context.

"Job's daughters"[16]: the path towards God

None of the founders of the club "Mariia" had been Christian believers since childhood. Tat'iana Goricheva, the club's main ideologist, was raised in an atheist family. Although her mother came from a priest's family, she shared this information with Tat'iana only on the threshold of death. Goricheva believes that her grandfather might have been executed in the early years of Bolshevik rule, which made religion a taboo for the next generation of her family.[17] At first, Tat'iana got interested in such spiritual practices as yoga, rather common in the milieu of Leningrad underground of the 1970s. She turned to Orthodox Christianity after she had a revelation at the age of 26, but her religiosity quickly became a problem at home, which made her leave:

> When I started hanging icons at home, [my mother] rose strictly against it. She would say: "You are shaming us in front of the neighbours, only old women go to church, and you go to pray every day just like an old woman." In sum, I was a disgrace to this family, and so I left.[18]

In the letter "Rejoice, redemption from the tears of Eve" published in the samizdat collection *Woman and Russia*, Tat'iana Goricheva confesses that in her

"pre-Christian" years she suffered from what Carl Gustav Jung calls the "Electra complex",[19] which made her rebel against her female self. It was compounded by the whole Soviet educational system, which aimed at raising a "one-dimensional, 'pseudo-male' personality".[20] She argues that after she banned her female self from her consciousness, it was relegated to the unconscious, where it took a sinister and demonic form, encouraging her to live by the rule "nothing is forbidden", until prayer to the mother of God – "the perfect incarnation of humanity and of women"[21] – helped her discover and resurrect her female self "in all its purity and absoluteness".[22]

> I thought that my life was ruled by my "sharp intellect" but in reality I was the slave of my unconscious. Thus our dissolute "paganism" induced us to reject our female essence, just as the pagan religion of the past had done. We saw the female essence as the vehicle of irrational and demonic forces and were frightened by its chaos and violence. And then She appeared, rescuer of the fallen.[23]

Banished from home, Tat'iana found refuge in the "second culture", where she had a community of like-minded people, who also came to God in adulthood. Tat'iana recalls that they had very little knowledge of Orthodox Christianity and had to educate themselves, to look for scarce religious literature, which was often smuggled by foreigners.[24] In 1974, Tat'iana Goricheva, together with underground poets Sergei Stratanovskii, Viktor Krivulin and Evgenii Pazukhin, co-founded a religious-philosophical seminar in order to provide Leningrad nonconformist youths with a platform for religious self-education. At first, the participants in the seminar read the works of the Church Fathers, studied the history of Orthodox Christianity, and listened to lectures on modern Western theology. Later on, presentations and discussions on such topics as "Christianity and humanism" and "Christianity and culture" came to play a central role. The seminar was open to everyone, and among its participants were writers, philosophers, poets and artists recently converted to Christianity, Orthodox priests, Baptists, Catholics, Jews and Anthroposophists.[25] The samizdat journal *37*, co-edited by Tat'iana Goricheva, Viktor Krivulin and Lev Rudkevich, named after the number of the apartment they shared, was the seminar's press organ. Philosophy and religion were the main topics covered in the journal, although it also included poetry, prose, literary translations, critical essays and journalistic articles.

It was also in the 1970s that Tat'iana found a confessor who can be seen as her spiritual guide:

> We were looking for a spiritual person, who lived this life… There were very few such priests. And those who cooperated with youths were sent to prison. … That is why all those whom we approached in Petersburg told us: "Go away from my church". And once the poet Boris Kupriianov told me: "Father Aleksandr[26] wants to meet you". And we arrived for the evening service: me, Krivulin, and Galia Grigor'eva. … And he told us: "I can be your confessor. I see that you do not confess, do not live a proper church life". And we agreed because it was a rare case. He also attended our seminars, in plain clothes – so that no one would see that a priest has come to the seminar.[27]

Another co-founder of the club "Mariia", poet and political activist Iuliia Voznesenskaia, came to God and was baptised at the age of 33. Other participants in the club, such as Klavdiia Rotmanova, Galina Grigor'eva and Alla Sariban, followed a similar path and were also converted to Orthodox Christianity as adults. In the 1970s, Klavdiia Rotmanova lived in Riga and participated in the Jewish dissident movement: "Every week there were meetings, on Saturday evening, Shabbat. We would get together, read prayers and listen to lectures on different historical subjects". She tells the story of her coming to God in the text entitled "About my faith"[28] published in the journal *Mariia*. She was raised in an atheist family and received atheist education at school. After graduating from university, she met someone who guided her towards God. As for Galina Grigor'eva, at first, she became involved in such spiritual practices as yoga and converted to Orthodox Christianity after meeting Tat'iana Goricheva in the mid-1970s. From 1975 to 1980, she also attended Goricheva and Krivulin's religious-philosophical seminar. For Alla Sariban, the way to Orthodox Christianity lay through a process of self-education and personal reflection on the meaning of life.[29] As for the third co-founder of the club, underground writer Nataliia Malakhovskaia, she was never baptised but also became a Christian at the time of her participation in the club "Mariia". In an interview in the 1990s, Nataliia admitted that she was religious back then, but in an untraditional way: she was more interested in spirituality, rather than in religiosity as such. In addition, she claimed that her involvement with Christianity was to a significant degree due to the political context of the late USSR:

> God was perceived as some kind of freedom, as opposed to the KGB. When everything presses on you, and it feels like they will always oppress you here…. And it seemed that God was some kind of alternative. Moreover, I have some things of my own that are connected with spirituality, rather than with religiosity in the literal sense, which has been going on since my early childhood.[30]

However, in a more recent interview,[31] Malakhovskaia denied any involvement with religiosity. This shift might have been conditioned by the recent Russian context, with the predominant atheist orientation of contemporary feminism and significant opposition between feminists and the Church, especially as far as the issue of abortion and the rights of LGBT-persons are concerned. The conflict between religiosity and struggle for women's rights, however, does not appear to have existed for the founders and members of the club "Mariia" back in the early 1980s. Quite the opposite: Christianity was seen as an inherent part of Russian feminism, as opposed to both the Soviet emancipation project and feminism in the West.

The club "Mariia": its origins and development

In 1979, Tat'iana Mamonova initiated the creation of the first independent women's edited collection (*al'manakh*) "for women and about women", under the title *Woman and Russia,* to denounce women's condition in the USSR. The idea to create such a periodical was encouraged by her personal experience of social conditions

in the USSR (such as childbirth at a Soviet maternity hospital) and discrimination encountered among underground artists and poets in Leningrad.[32] It was also fuelled by her personal readings. Thanks to her involvement in the community of nonconformist artists in Leningrad, she had contacts with foreign diplomats,[33] which gave her access to the foreign press. She read French, American and West German feminist magazines, such as *Emma* and *Courage*.[34] Besides, Mamonova also adhered to certain ideas of Marxist feminism and spoke positively of Lenin and Alexandra Kollontai.[35]

In 1975, she shared her idea of launching a samizdat women's journal with Iuliia Voznesenskaia, but the latter rejected her invitation at first and joined the editorial board only in 1979 when she returned from the camps[36]: "I had to go through women's camps and prisons to change my mind and realise that the women's condition in our country needs a special conversation".[37] In summer 1979, Mamonova repeated her offer to Tat'iana Goricheva, who agreed to join the editorial board and also invited Nataliia Malakhovskaia. Goricheva studied philosophy at the university and was closely familiar with existentialism; she had also read *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir and gave underground lectures on this subject. However, sympathy towards Marxist feminism or familiarity with Western second-wave feminist ideas was an exception rather than the rule in the group of authors and editors of the journal. In her interview, Nataliia Malakhovskaia confirms that she had "zero" knowledge about feminism and did not even know the word: "Only Mamonova was familiar with Western feminism".[38]

Ten copies of *Woman and Russia* were published in September 1979. It revealed such problems faced by women in Soviet Russia as poor conditions in maternity hospitals and abortion clinics, the women's "double burden" of house chores and employment, humiliation and violence experienced by women in prisons. The first KGB persecutions followed immediately, and in November 1979, Tat'iana Mamonova was summoned to the KGB for questioning. They asked her to stop the publication and enquired whether she was going to leave the country.[39] According to Malakhovskaia, Goricheva told her that Mamonova was threatened to have her son's custody taken away from her, which led to their decision to protect her and create a new women's journal *Mariia* to replace *Woman and Russia*.[40] This decision *de facto* initiated the division of the group: Tat'iana Mamonova continued to collect texts on her own, which she published in Paris after her exile in 1980, while many other women from the Leningrad artistic underground joined the group "Mariia". At the same time, in December 1979, a smuggled copy of *Woman and Russia* was discovered in Paris by French feminists, participants of the group "Psychanalyse et Politique", who translated it and published the whole issue in French in their journal *Des femmes en mouvements hebdo* in January 1980.[41] Later the collection was also translated and published in West Germany, Italy and many other countries.[42]

According to Natal'ia Dukova, one of the participants in the group "Mariia", among the reasons of the group's division and the creation of a new samizdat women's journal *Mariia* was also the desire to evade Mamonova's undivided authority and to enlarge the scope of issues which could be raised.[43] In her interview, she also mentions that those who later founded the group "Mariia" were not interested

in writing texts on "phallocracy" but wanted to raise the question of the search for spirituality.[44] Tat'iana Goricheva shared her impressions:

> But it is in the chapter on Christianity that our ideas least correspond to the convictions of Tat'iana Mamonova. She strives to resemble Western feminists. She upholstered her room with feminist literature (procured by tourists). She is well convinced of the fact that men are solely responsible for the misfortune of humanity and general misery…. We don't like it. We like neither the tone, nor the eternal recriminations against the masculine gender. This face clenched by the fire of passion, these brittle words which exclude any contradiction; for us, all this belongs in the past. It reminds us of the time when we were convinced of our innocence and the guilt of everyone else.[45]

The discussion club "Mariia" was founded in March 1980 following the initiative of Iuliia Voznesenskaia. Among its members were those who had already participated in the publication of *Woman and Russia*, such as Sof'ia Sokolova and Galina Grigor'eva, but there were also many new participants: Tat'iana Belaeva, Elena Shanygina, Alla Sariban, Klavdiia Rotmanova, Irina Zhosan, Natal'ia Lazareva, Natal'ia Dukova, Elena Borisova, Renata Sycheva, Anna Malonga, Liudmila Levitina, Natal'ia Savel'eva, Tat'iana Fedotova, Kari Unksova and Natal'ia Voronina. The publication of the first issue of *Mariia* in spring 1980 reinforced persecutions against the co-founders of the women's movement. Iuliia Voznesenskaia was threatened to have her son drafted and sent to Afghanistan and had to leave the USSR in May 1980. On 20 July, the second day of the 1980 Summer Olympics, Tat'iana Mamonova, Tat'iana Goricheva and Nataliia Malakhovskaia also left the USSR. Those who stayed behind continued to host club discussions and edit the journal *Mariia*, the second issue of which was collated and published in summer and autumn 1980. However, in September 1980, the illustrator of *Mariia* Natal'ia Lazareva was arrested. During the search in her art studio, the draft of an "Address to the women of the world" concerning the War in Afghanistan was found. At first, she was accused of "dissemination of knowingly false fabrications defaming the Soviet state and social system" (Article 190-1). But later these charges were dropped,[46] and she was accused of forgery of documents (Article 196-3), as she had falsified one of the employment records in her work record book. As a result, Lazareva was sentenced to ten months of imprisonment.[47] This arrest shocked the other participants of the group, but they continued to put together and edit the third issue of *Mariia* in 1981. When the issue was published, the KGB forced a large part of the editorial board to exile: Tat'iana Belaeva, Elena Shanygina, Alla Sariban, Irina Zhosan and Sof'ia Sokolova had to leave the country in 1981.

According to Natal'ia Dukova's testimony, the few women who stayed behind continued to collect texts, and three more issues appeared in samizdat in Leningrad. However, there is no evidence of any further circulation of *Mariia* in Leningrad after Lazareva's arrest. Instead, the materials were smuggled to the exiled club members, who tried to reproduce them in the West. However, to our knowledge, only the first three issues of *Mariia* were published in tamizdat.[48] According to

Galina Grigor'eva, it was Natal'ia Lazareva who initiated the release of the journal's sixth issue in samizdat in 1981.[49] Lazareva bound three copies of the issue and tried to smuggle one of them across the border to Iuliia Voznesenskaia through the intermediary of a foreigner named Georg.[50] However, she was denounced and arrested in March 1982. Natal'ia Lazareva was accused of "anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda" and sentenced[51] to four years in prison and two years of exile,[52] which marked the end of the Leningrad women's initiative.

From Eve to Maria: major theoretical foundations of Russian feminism

In the address "To the women of Russia" published in the first issue of *Mariia*, the participants in the group explained their choice of a name for the journal and the discussion club in the following way: "We called our club and journal after Her, who brought salvation to the world, the intercessor of Russia on Earth and in Heaven".[53] The authors went on to explain that Russia was facing a spiritual crisis, and only women, who suffered the most in Soviet Russia, could save the nation: "You have a weapon capable of protecting humankind on the edge of destruction. And this weapon is Love".[54] They denounced a civilisation that, having achieved great technological progress, was still a "civilisation of savages". As for Russia, the catastrophe was even more obvious: "We tried to achieve justice at the price of a bloody revolution, we killed God, we tortured millions of the best people and now we are reaping the fruits [of our deeds]".[55] In their view, it was time to abandon politics of expansion and war and to turn to "feminine" values. Salvation should then come from the new Russian woman who "should be born": free and independent, she would not abuse her freedom to harm her neighbours – instead, she would transform it into a creative urge. She would realise her high purpose, treat the "pain of the century" as her personal pain; the suffering of others would be her destiny.[56] The problem of women's emancipation was seen not only and not so much as a political one but also as a spiritual and ontological one. They thus understood Christianity as the key to the crisis and necessary condition of a genuine liberation, which no feminism outside Christianity could achieve. In Tat'iana Goricheva's words:

> This was our conviction: feminism that does not go through Jesus Christ leads to a dead end. For it lacks the strength and courage to change the world and the hearts of people. My friends were well placed to know the difference between freedom without God and freedom with God. The first is deadly and self-destructive, and it leads to despair. It leads precisely to demagogic and hysterical accusations, which spare nothing and no one. Whereas the latter makes us discover freedom beyond freedom, freedom which no longer cares about itself; that, which is the music, the backdrop, and the expression of the great reconciliation.[57]

The major theoretical foundations of the Russian feminism of the club "Mariia" appear to have been developed in opposition to Western feminism. The club members used this term to refer to the feminist tendency represented by Tat'iana Mamonova in a context of limited access to knowledge about different feminist

currents of second wave feminism in the West. The "demagogic and hysterical accusations" denounced by Tat'iana Goricheva in the aforementioned quote seem to refer to the common representation of Western feminism among the members of "Mariia". In their responses to the questionnaire of the French journal *Alternatives* published in *Mariia*, the club members admitted that they had little knowledge about Western feminist movements, but they knew that most of them were leftist, if not avowedly Marxist, while the club "Mariia" was against Marxism. They argued that they entertained no illusion about the use of violent, revolutionary means to achieve a transformation of society. The women's condition in the late USSR, which resulted from Soviet emancipation policies, allowed them to conclude that no political or social reform could transform society and emancipate women, and only a "great spiritual metamorphosis of life" could bring about this fundamental change. This orientation towards religious and spiritual values was what distinguished Russian feminism from feminism in the West, they argued.[58]

Russian feminism also stood in sharp opposition to Marxist feminism as it was incarnated by the Soviet emancipation project. The members of the club "Mariia" accused Marxism not only of lacking spirituality but also of having caused the current spiritual and social crisis in Soviet Russia.

> Marxism has no spiritual background, no principle of love, no search for spiritual truths, beauty, and art – there is only the principle of the belly (*printsip zhivota*): everything is equal, enough chow-down (*zhratvy*) for everyone – this is its ideal….
>
> Marxism is a severe illness of consciousness, karma endured by millions – and there is no coming back to it …. It is a pity that there is an illusion of Marxism in the West despite our painful experience, despite appeals by Solzhenitsyn and other believers. We would not like to see Europe experience Marxism [the way we did].[59]

In her text "Witches in space" published in *Mariia*, Tat'iana Goricheva presented the Soviet emancipated woman as a hermaphrodite, an "asexual homunculus" who had lost her history (age) and nature (sex).[60] This Soviet woman devoid of her womanhood appeared as a non-human being, a "witch", a "Valkyria", a "she-devil" who abandoned all the feminine Christian virtues. Goricheva introduced the notion of *femina sovietica* to define the women from the covers of the journal *Sovetskaia zhenshchina*: "animal-smug, rough face with straw instead of hair and glass instead of eyes, women-judges, women-administrative workers, women-guards, harsh and fanatic, blindly obeying someone else's will and shamelessly treading upon the weaker".[61] She concluded by encouraging women to restore their sex and their nature, which she understood primarily as the nature corresponding to the feminine Christian virtues, as this was the essential condition for women to achieve genuine freedom.[62]

At the core of the theory of Russian feminism was humility, a virtue which, according to the Leningrad feminists, was long misinterpreted and downplayed to the extent that the word had lost its original Christian sense. The discussion

"Modern woman and humility", which took place in Leningrad in autumn 1980 and was reproduced in one of the tamizdat issues of *Mariia,* complemented by the texts of some exiled club members, allowed for the expression of various, even contradictory points of view on the subject. The predominant tendency, however, seems to have been formulated by Tat'iana Goricheva. She based her argument on the opposition between Eve, representing the path of self-will, and Mother Mary, representing the path of obedience. Eve stood for the demoniac world, which the club members had long forgotten and overcome after shedding their previous convictions. According to Goricheva, Mother Mary's power lay in her humility, which should not be confused with servility: while the latter is due to an inner anxiety, the former results from inner peace; servility is caused by fear, whereas humility is the ultimate victory over fear: "Humility conquers egoism and gives openness to any destiny, any heaven-sent obstacle".[63] In her monograph published later on, she highlighted that humility, which played a central role for the women of "Mariia", was equally subversive in bourgeois and communist societies:

> In their struggle against society and the state, my friends could feel how contingent the values of destruction and confrontation are. Only humility helped them reach the plane of existence where there was no narcissism, where they could be themselves with no harm to others…. Humility is the most incredible, the most mysterious, and the deepest Christian virtue, which is banished by both bourgeois society (with its complacency) and communist society (because [the word] man "sounds proudly" (*chelovek zvuchit gordo*)[64] over there).[65]

Mariia in the West

"Women are subjected to God in all monotheistic religions, and this is repression", said the French feminist Michèle Idels, a participant in the group "Psychanalyse et Politique" in an interview.[66] In the late 1970s and early 1980s, she was one of the contributors of the publishing house "Des femmes", which played a crucial role in the reproduction of the Leningrad women's samizdat in France. French feminists helped draw international attention to the Soviet authorities' repression against the group, thus significantly contributing to their decision to exile most dissident feminists instead of imprisoning them. In 1981, "Des femmes" published the French translation of the first issue of *Mariia.*[67] However, the religious tendency first expressed in Tat'iana Goricheva's text "Rejoice, redemption from the tears of Eve" published in *Woman and Russia*, and later developed in the journal *Mariia,* appears to have been the central point of divergence between the two groups. For most Western second-wave feminists, religion was part of the conservative patriarchal system. A critical letter published in the journal *Des femmes en mouvements hebdo* in response to the edited collection illustrates well this point:

> Tat'iana G. does not just talk about her own personal experience, which is as valid as everyone else's, but she also presents a model, universal "salvation"

> in some way. What she claims to be a discovery is exactly what has been used to justify our oppression for centuries.[68]

Soon after their exile, the co-founders of the club "Mariia" became aware of this major discrepancy, which divided them from their Western feminist "sisters". At first, Tat'iana Goricheva tried to explain Western atheist feminists "how Russian 'feminism' became religious and why only in church could the modern Russian woman find freedom and consolation, gain strength for life and accomplishments".[69] She would explain that Orthodox priests never forced women to get married and never told them that marriage was their primary purpose. She set in opposition Catholicism, based on prohibitions, with her personal experience of Orthodox Christianity and argued that her priest (*batiushka*) never prohibited her anything, but "he created such an atmosphere of seriousness and significance around him" that they were "ashamed of and uninterested in sin".[70] However, her explanations never elicited complete understanding. Many years later, Tat'iana Goricheva would formulate an explanation for this failure to find a common ground with "bourgeois" feminists: it had to do, in her view, with the discrepancy between the Western context, where Christianity was a rather conformist path, and the late USSR, where it was a conscious choice and a way to confront the oppressive state:

> Indeed, is it possible to advocate humility among those who live in the absolute conformism of an overly decent "bourgeois Christianity"? Is it possible to advocate humility among those who have never rebelled, who live their programmed life, unconsciously subjecting themselves to customary norms and fears? Those who have never been themselves, who have never made a choice, but who have always listened to others (just not God) – listened to people and to the state. It is obvious that first you need to wake these women up from eternal slumber, knock them out of a state of inertia.[71]

Finding themselves in a new environment without any limitations placed on access to information, including knowledge of contemporary Western feminist theories, the exiled Soviet feminists had an opportunity to further elaborate their ideas, while reflecting on their common Soviet past. The correspondence between some of the members of the club "Mariia" in exile provides unique insights into the role of Christianity in the development of Russian feminism. In one of her letters addressed to Tat'iana Goricheva in 1982, Alla Sariban shared her impression of the role that religion played in the West as a driving force of the political right: "it is an ideology employed to achieve worldly goals which is largely abused (*kotoroi zloupotrebliaiut*)". She compared it with the context of the late USSR, where, on the contrary, inner spiritual life was seen as the last frontier of freedom:

> After all, in Sovdepiia,[72] all of us, i.e., each of us, either completely alone or in small groups of like-minded people, opposed a huge, uncoordinated system, which was ready to grind us. Each of us was generally alone in the struggle for their "I", and we could not simply have an influential party under

> the conditions of Soviet life, etc. So, in Sovdepiia, the Church and the circle of believers were only a means to help each individual soul survive and find the way to God…. Inner life and religion as the ontological basis of inner life, – this is a sphere where a person is still free, where they can create.[73]

Further in this letter, Sariban raises the issue of Western feminists' rejection of religion and suggests organising a discussion devoted to this subject. She argues that the Law of Moses contradicts the teachings of Christ regarding women's position, because it reflects a particular historically contingent social structure. But the teachings of Christ, according to her, are based on love and cannot but contribute to the advancement of society. The "unnatural" character of Soviet life and humiliations experienced by Soviet women had increased the attractiveness of the traditional lifestyle, which offered women a respected place as a mother, wife and housewife and the possibility to fulfil their feminine nature. However, Alla Sariban argued that this "old" life would no longer suit Soviet educated women. The Christian family that the club "Mariia" strove for had nothing to do with returning to the past, but rather it aimed at developing radically new social relations, based on the spirit of Christianity.[74] In her letters to Alla Sariban, Tat'iana Goricheva shared in turn the idea that women's oppression was due not to religious, but purely historical reasons, and expressed her criticism towards the political right in the West:

> …the rightists here ideologise and bureaucratise the situation too much. Why do they fight abortion this much? If there is no trust in life, in God, in the commandments of the Gospel, the laws won't scare anyone and won't be an obstacle. I always tell them – you need to be "for" and not against…. And contraception is a "good thing", there should be freedom, not everyone must be a mother of many children (or a mother at all), marriage has a different purpose.[75]

However, this exchange of ideas, rather revealing as far as the theory of Russian feminism is concerned, never took place on the pages of the journal *Mariia*. After her exile, Iuliia Voznessenskaia worked for the International Society for Human Rights (ISHR) in Frankfurt am Main, West Germany. In 1980, together with Tat'iana Goricheva, she founded the Women's Association *Mariia* at the ISHR, an international network for support of persecuted women in the USSR.[76] However, after the publication of the first two tamizdat issues of *Mariia*, a series of disagreements arose over editorial decisions, which led to the division of the group. Iuliia Voznesenskaia launched a new journal entitled *Vestnik Marii* (*Herald of Mariia*), while Tat'iana Goricheva published the third issue of *Mariia* in Paris. In 1982, after the break with Iuliia Voznesenskaia and after funding from the ISHR ended, the exiled members of the club "Mariia" faced difficulties in paying high publication costs. Moreover, the distribution of *Mariia*[77] seems to have been complicated by the lack of popularity of the journal among Soviet dissidents and Western feminists. These factors, combined with the necessity to settle in foreign countries, led to the end of the journal's publication.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of the club "Mariia" at the beginning of the 1980s can be seen as the result of two simultaneous phenomena: Tat'iana Mamonova's feminist initiative, which triggered a reexamination of the "woman question" in the USSR within the Leningrad underground, and the conversion to Christianity of several of the women constituting this group. Among them was Tat'iana Goricheva, a prominent underground Christian philosopher who largely contributed to the formulation of the group's major theoretical foundations. The theory of Russian feminism, inspired by the figure of the Virgin Mary (Mariia) and based on the Christian virtue of humility, denounced the women's condition in the USSR and offered a unique solution to the "woman question" in the context of an atheist authoritarian state. Persecuted by the KGB at home and facing misunderstanding among Western feminists, the religious women's club "Mariia" ended its activities two years after its foundation, but it left a unique heritage, which cannot be fully understood without a careful consideration of its historical context.

Notes

1 Tatiana Goricheva, *Filles de Job. Les féministes de "Maria"* (Paris: Nouvelle Cité, 1989) (first published in German: Tat'iana Goricheva, *Hiobs Tochter* (Freiburg im Brisgau: Verlag Herder, 1988), 11).
2 *Woman and Russia. First Feminist Samizdat* (London: Sheba Feminist Publishers, 1980), 2.
3 The underground or "second culture" of Leningrad was an unofficial cultural milieu formed in Leningrad by the mid-1970s by a number of groups which defined themselves in opposition to the official Soviet culture.
4 The term used by Tat'iana Goricheva in her text "From a letter to Leningrad", published in the third tamizdat issue of *Mariia* (Tat'iana Goricheva, "From a letter to Leningrad," *Mariia, Zhurnal rossiiskogo nezavisimogo religioznogo kluba "Mariia*", vol. 3 [1982], 62.). Although Tat'iana Goricheva used the term in quotation marks (Russian "feminism"), I would like to introduce this concept to my analysis under the form of "Russian feminism" as a notion standing for the set of theoretical foundations elaborated by the members of the religious women's club "Mariia".
5 In addition to women's voting rights granted by the Provisional Government in 1917, the legislation introduced by the Bolshevik government in 1918 abolished women's inferior legal position by establishing civil marriage and simplifying divorce, as well as by granting women freedom to seek employment and obtain an education. Furthermore, in 1920, the Soviet Union became the first European state to legalise abortion.
6 The term "second wave of feminism" is used to refer to the women's movement in the United States and Western Europe in the 1960s and 1970s. At the centre of theoretical debates of second-wave feminists were the issues of the origins of women's oppression, the nature of gender, the reproductive rights and the family.
7 Oksana Vasiakina, Dmitrii Kozlov, Sasha Talaver, ed., *Feministskii samizdat. 40 let spustia* (Moscow: Common Place, 2020).
8 Nadina Milewska-Pindor, "The almanac "Woman and Russia" and the Soviet feminist movement at the end of the 1970s," *International Studies: Interdisciplinary Political and Cultural Journal (IS),* vol. 15, no. 1 (2013), 5–20; Rochelle Ruthchild, "Feminist Dissidents in the "Motherland of Women's Liberation": Shattering Soviet Myths and Memory," in *Women's Activism and "Second Wave" Feminism*, ed. Barbara Molony (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 99–123.

9 Anke Stephan, *Von der Küche auf den Roten Platz: Lebenswege sowjetischer Dissidentinnen*, Vol. 13 (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zurich Ag Tvz, 2005).
10 The concept "state feminism" originated from the notion of "state feminist" denoting feminist bureaucrats holding positions of power or female politicians promoting gender equality in the context of Scandinavia. Later, the term "state feminism" came to be used in scholarly works examining "the institutionalisation of feminism in state agencies in a variety of political and economic systems". Source: Wang Zheng, "'State feminism'? Gender and socialist state formation in Maoist China," *Feminist Studies*, vol. 31, no. 3 (2005), 519–551. For a more detailed account of the evolution of the term, see Dorothy McBride Stetson and Amy G. Mazur, eds., *Comparative State Feminism* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1995).
The term "state feminism" has also been applied to analyses of socialist gender policies in China (see for example Wang Zheng, ""State feminism"? Gender and socialist state formation in Maoist China," *Feminist Studies*, vol. 31, no. 3 (2005), 519–551) and in the USSR (see for example Zamira Yusufjonova-Abman, "State feminism in Soviet Central Asia: anti-religious campaigns and Muslim women in Tajikistan, 1953-1982," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Women and Gender in Twentieth Century Russia and the Soviet Union* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 299–314).
11 Alexandra Talaver, "*Samizdat Magazines of the Soviet Dissident Women's Groups, 1979–1982: A Critical Analysis*" (Master thesis, Central European University, 2017).
12 Kirsten Harting, "*Transferts franco-russes? L'almanach Femmes et Russie comme point d'intersection des féminismes dans les années 1970–1980*" (Master thesis, Université Denis Diderot – Paris VII, 2013).
13 Anna Sidorevich, "*Un féminisme dissident orthodoxe: une étude historique de la revue Maria en Union Soviétique (1979–1982)*" (Master thesis, Collège universitaire français de Moscou, 2017).
14 I am currently preparing a PhD dissertation provisionally entitled "The Leningrad Women's Movement (1979–1982): between Soviet Emancipation and Second Wave Feminism".
15 Kateryna Zorya, "The Maria Underground Zine: Religious Feminism in 1980s Leningrad," in *Kvinnligt religiöst ledarskap: En vänbok till Gunilla Gunner*, eds. Simon Sorgenfrei and David Thurfjell (Huddinge: Södertörns högskola, 2020), 149–160.
16 This is the English translation of the title of Tat'iana Goricheva's book on the phenomenon of the club "Mariia." Tatiana Goricheva, *Filles de Job. Les féministes de "Maria"* (Paris: Nouvelle Cité, 1989).
17 Tat'iana Goricheva, Interview by author, online, 3 March 2017.
18 Goricheva, Interview.
19 The Electra complex is a notion introduced by Carl Gustav Jung in 1913 to refer to the girl's version of the Oedipus complex. It manifests itself by the girl's sexual attachment to her father and hostility towards and psychosexual competition with her mother.
20 Tat'iana Goricheva, "Rejoice, Redemption from the Tears of Eve," in *Woman and Russia. First Feminist Samizdat* (London: Sheba Feminist Publishers, 1980), 30.
21 Goricheva, "Rejoice, Redemption from the Tears of Eve", 29.
22 Goricheva, "Rejoice, Redemption from the Tears of Eve", 31.
23 Goricheva, "Rejoice, Redemption from the Tears of Eve", 31.
24 Goricheva, Interview.
25 Viacheslav Dolinin and Dmitrii Severukhin, *Preodolenie nemoty: Leningradskii samizdat v kontekste nezavisimogo kul'turnogo dvizheniia (1953–1991)* (Saint-Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Novikova, 2003), 34–35.
26 I believe that it might have been Aleksandr Anisimov, the Archpriest of the Holy Trinity church (1980–1990) in Vsevolozhsk, Leningrad region.
27 Goricheva, Interview.
28 Kseniia Romanova, "O vere moei," *Mariia, Zhurnal rossiiskogo nezavisimogo religioznogo kluba "Mariia*", vol. 1 (1981), 35–36.

29 Alla Sariban, Written interview by author, e-mail, 4 August 2021.
30 Nataliia Malakhovskaiia, Interview by Sof'ia Chuikina, Saint-Petersburg, 1994–1995, Folder "Malakhovskaiia Natal'ia L'vovna, Fond Iofe, Saint-Petersburg, Russia.
31 Nataliia Malakhovskaia, Interview by author, online, 16 November 2016.
32 According to Tat'iana Mamonova, her works were characterised as possessing a mark of "feminine inferiority". Tat'iana Mamonova, "Autobiographie," in *Des femmes russes* (Paris: Des femmes, 1980), 12.
33 In the late 1970s, the French consul in Leningrad Philipp Legrain actively cooperated with dissident nonconformist artists, and Tatiana Mamonova was one of them. According to Marc Finaud, vice-consul and cultural attaché at the French consulate in Leningrad (1977–1978), the diplomatic pouch was even used to smuggle *Woman and Russia* abroad. Marc Finaud, e-mail, 16 May 2017.
34 "Le mouvement des femmes est beaucoup plus large que le mouvement dissident; parce qu'il va plus loin," Interview with Marina Oulianova (pseudonym of Tat'iana Mamonova), in *Femmes et Russie* (Paris: Des femmes, 1980), 152.
35 "Le mouvement des femmes …", 142–143.
36 In 1976, Iuliia Voznesenskaia was accused of "dissemination of knowingly false fabrications that defame the Soviet state and social system" (Article 190-1) and sentenced to five years of exile. However, in 1977, she was sentenced to two years in prison for escaping from exile. See *Chronicle of Current Events*, no. 45 (May 1977), http://hts.memo.ru/ (last accessed 22 March 2022).
37 Iuliia Voznesenskaia, "Zhenskoe dvizhenie v Rossii", *Posev*, no. 4 (1981), Antologiia samizdata, last modified 29 January 2022, http://antology.igrunov.ru/authors/voznesenskaya/1145211846.html (last accessed 22 March 2022).
38 Malakhovskaia, Interview.
39 *Chronicle of Current Events*, no. 55 (December 1979), http://hts.memo.ru/ (last accessed 22 March 2022).
40 Malakhovskaia, Interview.
41 *Des femmes en mouvements hebdo*, no. 10 (1980).
42 "*Femmes et Russie* a été publié entièrement ou en partie en France, en Norvège, en Suède, au Brésil, au Japon, en Angleterre et en Allemagne fédérale. Des articles sur l'Almanach ont paru dans la presse américaine, canadienne, italienne, espagnole, australienne et même dans celle des îles Hawaï," in *Femmes et Russie* (Paris: Des femmes, 1981), 11.
43 Natal'ia Dukova, Speech "Istoria sozdaniia feministskogo dvizhenia v nachale 80-kh godov" at the conference "Obshchestvo i totalitarism: pervaia polovina 80-kh", Museum of Political History of Russia, Saint-Petersburg, 28–29 November 1998, personal archive of Natal'ia Dukova.
44 Natal'ia Dukova, Interview by author, Saint-Petersburg, 15 September 2020.
45 Goricheva, *Filles de Job,* 10–11.
46 Our hypothesis is that the Soviet authorities tried to avoid an international scandal in the context of the ongoing war in Afghanistan and the international visibility of the Leningrad women's movement after the exile of its founders in July 1980.
47 Tat'iana Matytsina, "Po etomu delu ia sela odna," Interview with Natal'ia Lazareva, *Pchela*, no. 12 (1998), 68–71.
48 *Mariia, Zhurnal rossiiskogo nezavisimogo religioznogo kluba "Mariia",* vol. 1 (1981); *Mariia, Zhurnal rossiiskogo nezavisimogo religioznogo kluba "Mariia",* vol. 2 (1982); *Mariia, Zhurnal rossiiskogo nezavisimogo religioznogo kluba "Mariia*", vol. 3 (1982).
49 Galina Grigor'eva, Interview by author, Saint-Petersburg, 24 September 2020.
50 Record of interrogation of an indicted individual of 31 March 1982, Criminal case no. 95 of Natal'ia Lazareva on the charge of the crime under article 70 part 1 of the Criminal Code of the RSFSR, Fond Iofe, Saint-Petersburg, Russia.
51 Verdict of 1 July 1982, Criminal case no. 95 of Natal'ia Lazareva on the charge of the crime under article 70 part 1 of the Criminal Code of the RSFSR, Fond Iofe, Saint-Petersburg.

52 In August 1982, the two years of exile were excluded from the sentence.
53 "K zhenshchinam Rossii," *Mariia, Zhurnal rossiiskogo nezavisimogo religioznogo kluba "Mariia*", vol. 1 (1981), 7.
54 "K zhenshchinam Rossii", 7.
55 "K zhenshchinam Rossii", 7.
56 "K zhenshchinam Rossii", 8.
57 Goricheva, *Filles de Job,* 11–12.
58 "Otvety na anketu zhurnala "Al'ternativy," *Mariia, Zhurnal rossiiskogo nezavisimogo religioznogo kluba "Mariia*", vol. 1 (1981), 23.
59 "Discussion on the subject "Feminism and Marxism," *Mariia, Zhurnal rossiiskogo nezavisimogo religioznogo kluba "Mariia*", vol. 1 (1981), 19–20.
60 Tat'iana Goricheva, "Ved'my v kosmose," *Mariia, Zhurnal rossiiskogo nezavisimogo religioznogo kluba "Mariia*", vol. 1 (1981), 10.
61 Goricheva, "Ved'my v kosmose", 11.
62 Goricheva, "Ved'my v kosmose", 11.
63 Tat'iana Goricheva, "Hope beyond hope," *Mariia, Zhurnal rossiiskogo nezavisimogo religioznogo kluba "Mariia*", vol. 3 (Leningrad – Paris, 1982), 32.
64 The reference is to a well-known quote from the play *The Lower Depths* (1902) by Maxim Gor'kii.
65 Tat'iana Goricheva, *O sviashchennom bezumii. Khristianstvo v sovremennom mire* (Saint-Petersburg: Aleteiia, 2015), 65.
66 Michèle Idels, Interview by author, Paris, 23 October 2017.
67 *Maria, Journal du club féministe «Maria» de Léningrad* (Paris: Des femmes, 1981).
68 Séverine Ferzli, "Le nouveau doit être critiqué avec du plus neuf, et non avec de l'ancien," *Femmes en mouvements hebdo*, no. 16 (1980), 24.
69 Tat'iana Goricheva, "From a letter to Leningrad," *Mariia, Zhurnal rossiiskogo nezavisimogo religioznogo kluba "Mariia*", vol. 3 (1982), 62.
70 Goricheva, "From a letter to Leningrad", 63.
71 Goricheva, *O sviashchennom bezumii,* 64.
72 A pejorative term for the "Soviet Union".
73 Alla Sariban, Letter to Tat'iana Goricheva, 28 June 1982, Fond FSO 01-197, Archiv der Forschungsstelle Osteuropa an der Universität Bremen, Germany.
74 Alla Sariban, Letter to Tat'iana Goricheva, undated, Fond FSO 01-197.
75 Tat'iana Goricheva, Letter to Alla Sariban, undated, Fond FSO 01-197.
76 "Zhenskoe ob'edinenie 'Mariia' pri nemetskom obshchestve prav cheloveka", Fond FSO 01-143.
77 "*Mariia* is heaped to the ceiling in my apartment, and I have no idea where to give it". Tat'iana Goricheva, Letter to Alla Sariban, 26 January 1983, Fond FSO 01-197.

10 *Startsy,* Samizdat and Underground Seminars

The "Parallel Polis" of Young Russian Orthodox Converts in the 1970s–1980s[1]

Barbara Martin

Introduction

Communism may have had a strong force of attraction for generations of Soviet citizens born before the war, who had taken up arms to defend their Fatherland during the Nazi invasion, and who had identified with the struggle for a fairer world. However, the generations born after the war perceived the system in which they were raised as an immutable set of rites and slogans, the performance of which was a necessary token of loyalty, but which had lost much of their literal meaning.[2] From passivity to rejection, there was but one step, which some educated young people made. Elena Beliakova, who converted to Russian Orthodoxy while in university, remembered: "The thing is, at the time Soviet ideology had kind of 'exhausted itself'. Its falsity could be felt at many levels. Therefore, it was so easy to give it up. And the path to faith was a path away from Soviet ideology."[3] Like her, many young people who had received a higher education turned away from "scientific materialism" and became interested in a variety of spiritual and religious traditions, from Hinduism to Judaism, and from Baptist Protestantism to Russian Orthodoxy. Yet these young people were also a product of the Soviet system, which had left a deep imprint on their education, values, and mindset. The search for alternative beliefs was in itself typical of a society that had always placed ideas over the material realm.

These young people had had few contacts with religion in their childhood. A religious grandmother was usually their only link to a religious culture that seemed to be dying out, while their parents had either lost their religious faith or were too afraid of repression to give their children a religious education. Soviet atheist education emphasised the alleged incompatibility between religion and science, insisting that the former was but a relic of the past, soon to disappear. To replace religious rituals, new civic rituals were introduced.[4] However, by the 1970s, Communist ideology was steadily losing its grip over the minds, and young people who had been raised with high moral ideals were left with a void, sometimes a feeling of helplessness, purposelessness. While a tiny minority engaged in open dissent, many others turned to alternative subcultures, from rock music and hippie culture to religion.[5] If the regime had lied about so

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many things, couldn't it be that the materialist worldview was just another of its mystifications?

The first step on the path to faith could be the effect of peer influence, when a group of friends with a shared interest in religion decided to get baptised or to go on pilgrimage to monasteries to visit revered monks (*startsy*). But coming to faith has always been a highly individual process.[6] It could happen suddenly, for example through a mystic experience or an encounter with a priest or a believer, or it could be progressive. Often, interest in Eastern religions and yoga, which was then widespread, opened young people up to the possibility of the existence of the divine, and the next stage was a conversion to Russian Orthodoxy, perceived as the traditional religion of the Russian people. For others, readings in Russian religious philosophy of the late 19th and early 20th century, from Vladimir Solov'ev to Pavel Florenskii and Sergei Bulgakov, or the most accessible writings of Fr. Aleksandr Men' could offer a way to faith.

Interest in Russian Orthodoxy was also related to the growing revival of a Russian national identity and an interest in ancient Russian material culture. As Zhanna Kormina and Sergei Shtyrkov have pointed out, the Soviet authorities also contributed to this movement of interest in ancient Russian heritage, by restoring ancient monuments of traditional Russian architecture, including churches and monasteries, and by involving student volunteers in these projects.[7] Elena Beliakova was thus involved in the restauration of the Krutitsy Patriarchal Metochion on Communist days of volunteering (*subbotniki*). "They probably recorded our names (*nas vziali na zametku*), but left us in peace, [after all] it was also a *subbotnik,* a restoration *subbotnik,* and we were historians."[8] But these innocent volunteering projects did not leave participants unaffected. Beliakova remembered the anti-Soviet views of the restorer Petr Baranovskii who worked in Krutitsy. Others found faith while working on such restoration projects or by studying ancient religious architecture.

Religious conversion, however, was but a first step towards the Church. This chapter concentrates on the next stage, which was that of "churching" (*votserkovlenie*), which could last several years, sometimes even decades, or never be achieved. The factors complicating this process were the atheist and scientific education of young converts, the ban on religious education, and the lack of access to religious literature.

My focus is on young converts to Russian Orthodoxy, in particular from the Moscow and Leningrad intelligentsia. I include in this category young people with higher education or who were students at the time, a type of believer characterised by an intellectual approach to religion and an interest in theology and religious history. While they constituted only a fraction of the total number of believers and were arguably a marginal group in regard to the crowds of elderly ladies who usually filled churches, I argue that their experience is relevant because they would come to play an influential role in the religious revival that unfolded in Russian society after 1988. And the constraints they faced in getting access to religious literature, their efforts to restore the broken link to religious tradition informed their approach to crowds of new converts in the 1990s. The following questions will be examined: How did new converts overcome obstacles in getting access to religious literature and religious knowledge? How did they create religious spaces sheltered

from the authorities' control and connect their trajectories to pre-revolutionary tradition? This research is based on a corpus of around 100 oral history interviews with Russian Orthodox believers from Moscow and Saint-Petersburg who converted before Perestroika, only a fraction of which is cited in this chapter.

For young converts, religion appeared as a counter-ideology, offering an alternative to the stifling ideological climate of late Soviet years. However, since the official Church was directly subordinated to the Soviet authorities, and believers faced severe constraints in their religious life, young converts strove to create alternative spaces for religious socialisation and education. These, I argue, followed the model of the "parallel polis" described by Vaclav Benda in Czechoslovakia. According to Benda's definition, Eastern European dissidents were called upon to create "parallel structures capable of fulfilling, at least to a limited extent, generally useful, or even indispensable functions that are not being fulfilled" by official structures in the economic, educational, cultural, and other fields.[9] Such parallel structures existed across Eastern Europe and in the USSR in the cultural (with samizdat, the uncensored press) and economic fields (with the black market and various corruption schemes). While Benda included a political dimension to his notion, in the case under study this concept did not necessarily entail an oppositional orientation and was devoid of a directly political component. The creation of alternative, unofficial spaces outside of the state's control allowed for the recreation of a "parallel Church" in the sense of *ecclesia,* the assembled community of believers.

Three aspects of this phenomenon are examined here: alternative networks of access to religious literature, and alternative spaces of religious socialisation and education, both in cities and in monasteries. I argue that religious seminars of the 1970s facilitated access to religious literature and offered the necessary discussion spaces to facilitate conversion, while the Orthodox circles of the 1980s were geared towards the churching of participants. As for monasteries, they put young converts into direct contact with the carriers of religious tradition, esteemed elderly monks, *startsy.* The progression was also largely ideological: from the artistic and philosophical discussions of Russian religious thinkers of the early 20th century, converts moved to the study of the Scriptures and the writings of the Church fathers.

Accessing religious literature

For new converts, one of the main impediments to a meaningful religious life was the lack of religious literature available. Believers attempted to make up for this shortage in many ways.

The most easily accessible publications about religion were, paradoxically, anti-religious ones. Bibles, Gospels, or prayer books could be borrowed or inherited from an elderly relative. Some had friends or relatives with well-stocked private libraries. A lucky few managed to buy religious literature or church calendars in monasteries or churches, but copies remained in limited supply. In the early 1970s, one could still chance upon pre-revolutionary editions of Russian religious philosophy on a flea market but in 1975, the second-hand sale of religious literature was prohibited and books by religious philosophers were targeted.[10]

Finally, the black market was also a place of purchase and sale of religious literature of all kinds.

Most controlled but also best stocked were public libraries. PhD students or researchers who had access to restricted sections or could read foreign languages were more likely to get a hand on theological works, provided they knew what to look for.[11] Even more privileged were library employees or those whose job it was to read "forbidden" literature to summarise it.

Samizdat, the reproduction of uncensored literature on private typewriters, was another way to make up for the lack of available literature. Russian Orthodox believers reproduced prayer books, lives and theological writings of the Church Fathers and saints, from John Chrysostom to Theophan the Recluse; excerpts of works by Russian religious philosophers Nikolai Berdiaev, Sergei Bulgakov, Vladimir Solov'ev or Pavel Florenskii; works about church history by such samizdat authors as Lev Regelson or Anatolii Levitin-Krasnov; open letters of protest and in defence of Soviet believers' rights by Boris Talantov, Frs. Gleb Iakunin and Nikolai Eshliman, and others; sermons by Fr. Vsevolod Shpiller transcribed by zealous parishioners; Fr. Dmitrii Dudko's questions and answers sessions; or publications by Orthodox churchmen from abroad: Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh and Fr. Alexander Schmemann ….

There were also samizdat periodicals, some produced by religious seminars, others edited independently, with various orientations along a liberal/nationalist spectrum. Some, like *Nadezhda,* edited by Zoia Krakhmal'nikova (1977–1991),[12] had a "traditional" religious orientation. Others ranged from a philosophical-literary orientation, represented for instance by *37*, the press organ of the Leningrad religious-philosophical seminar (1976–1980), to a more political discourse, characteristic of the nationalistic journals *Veche* and *Zemlia*, published in Moscow by Vladimir Osipov (1971–1974).

Samizdat existed in various formats, beyond the traditional reproduction on typewriters, and was a source of small income for some, who typed or reproduced literature for friends or for the black market. Those who had access to a photocopying machine at work secretly copied religious books, other made photocopies on cameras. Some respondents also remembered works reproduced on small Rotaprint presses.[13]

In addition to samizdat, the phenomenon of tamizdat gained prominence in the 1970s:[14] works by Soviet authors were published in the West and smuggled back into the USSR. Several religious figures took the risk to publish their works in tamizdat: Fr. Aleksandr Men', who published his works under pseudonyms, the most popular of which was a life of Christ, *Son of a Man* (1969); Fr. Dmitrii Dudko (*Our Hope*, 1975); or Fr. Sergei Zheludkov (*Why I, too, am a Christian,* 1970, *Liturgic Remarks,* 1971). Several Soviet believers, such as Iurii Kochetkov, Mikhail Meerson-Aksenov, Vladimir Zelinskii, or Sergei Bychkov, also published articles in a popular émigré journal, *Vestnik RKhD,* the press organ of the Russian Student Christian Movement, which was widely read in dissident and religious circles.

More generally, Soviet believers benefitted from the active support of Western and émigré organisations and publishing houses which specialised in smuggling

dissident and religious literature to the Soviet Union. Among organisations helping Soviet believers, we can name Keston College[15] in England, but also Glaube in der 2. Welt in Switzerland[16] or Russia Cristiana in Italy. Their function was to collect and publicise information about the situation of Soviet believers, based on samizdat publications, which they relayed to the Western public.

Some émigré publishers were also actively involved in smuggling religious literature across the Iron Curtain. The journal *Grani* and publishing house Posev, run by the anti-Soviet organisation Narodno-Trudovoi Soiuz (NTS), had a nefarious reputation and collaboration with them was considered criminal in the Soviet Union. Less controversial and more religious in orientation were two émigré publishing houses: Zhizn' s Bogom/La Vie avec Dieu in Brussels[17] and YMCA-Press in Paris, ownership of which was transferred to the Russian Student Christian Movement (RSCM) in the 1950s. In 1961, the RSCM opened a section dedicated to assistance to Soviet Believers, which organised the smuggling of a part of YMCA-Press's production to the USSR through a network of sympathising travellers.[18] Among those who brought whole suitcases of religious literature to the USSR were such high church dignitaries who regularly travelled to the West as Metropolitan Nikodim (Rotov), head of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate.[19]

Finally, the activity of Protestant organisations in smuggling Bibles and Gospels to the Soviet Union intensified in the 1980s. Most prominent was Open Doors, an organisation founded by Brother Andrew (Anne van der Bijl), who smuggled Bibles to Eastern Europe in his car, starting in 1957.[20] Igor' Chapkovskii was one of Open Doors' contact persons in the USSR, in charge of taking incoming deliveries and covertly distributing Bibles. As he remembered: "Eschatological ideas that 'we have to save Russia' have always been [strong] in Russia. We thought that if everyone had the Gospel, the country would start living differently. This motivated [our work]."[21]

Samizdat and tamizdat fulfilled important functions for young believers from the intelligentsia: they allowed them to gain the necessary knowledge for a meaningful religious life, and in some cases a solid theological baggage, which they could use to teach others in the framework of home seminars.

Unofficial seminars, catechism groups, and prayer circles

Unofficial religious seminars played an important role both in the coming to faith and "churching process" of young converts from the intelligentsia. Neophytes could not easily understand Orthodox liturgy in old Slavonic, and they could grow discouraged if they were not accompanied in this process. But Soviet legislation, which prohibited any kind of "religious propaganda," ensured that churches were merely places of worship, and not socialisation or education. Many priests were reluctant to speak with young people, let alone give them religious instruction, for fear of repression. In church, young people often faced an army of old ladies (*babushki*) who scolded them for any *faux pas* in their attire or the way they crossed themselves or lighted candles – although some occasionally shared their

rudimentary religious knowledge. A few newcomers, hastily baptised in childhood or as adults, remained ignorant that there was such a sacrament as communion. Even accessing churches could be complicated: in large cities, there were more open churches than in the countryside, but they were often overcrowded on holidays. On Easter, access was usually barred to young people by groups of Communist youth activists – some of whom could eventually cross over to the other side.[22]

In these circumstances, in the 1970s and early 1980s, two models of youth religious socialisation emerged, which answered different needs: on the one hand, home seminars, which usually occupied a peripheral position in relation to church institutions, although they could include clergymen as participants or receive the blessing of a priest or monk; and, on the other, catechism and prayer groups, which could be organised by a priest in the framework of a parish or by laypeople. Such groups were few and probably concentrated in large metropoles and the surrounding regions, sometimes with branches in smaller cities. They were certainly not typical for the Russian Orthodox landscape of the late Soviet era and were a predominantly urban and intellectual phenomenon.

Religious home seminars appeared in Soviet intelligentsia circles in the 1960s and 1970s. They were based on the model of circles (*kruzhki*) typical of the late Soviet intelligentsia and had a more intellectual orientation, combining to various degrees philosophy or literature with theology. In her study of religious circles in Leningrad, Ol'ga Chepurnaia identified 11 groups active in the 1960s and/or 1970s. In the early period, a few groups, like the VSKhSON, connected Christianity with political struggle, while others functioned on the model of "home churches" and concentrated on reproducing religious tradition. By the 1970s, however, hopes of reforming the system had given way to the quest for an alternative, religious, worldview, and participants of home seminars sought to create spaces sheltered from official ideology.[23]

These seminars functioned as intellectual fora, with oral presentations of participants and open discussions, and often lacked or evaded a clear confessional identity, developing ecumenic connections. They were often led by one or several charismatic figures who could also be neophytes and usually attracted young people who were not yet fully churched, with various degrees of involvement in religious activities but with a general interest in religion. Some of these groups showed little concern with conspiracy, developed samizdat activities, and even stepped into contact with the West, landing into trouble as a result. Others remained more inward-looking, seeking to escape undue attention, and had a longer lifespan.

The format that seems to have been most widespread was that of religious-philosophical seminars, focusing on the study of Russian religious philosophy of the early 20th century. Many of these groups encompassed just a few participants, a few were much larger. Most well-known in the West were Tat'iana Goricheva and Viktor Krivulin's religious-philosophical seminar in Leningrad, close to the literary and artistic milieu of the "second culture," and the "Christian seminar to study the questions of religious renaissance," created by Aleksandr Ogorodnikov in Moscow, with branches in Leningrad (Vladimir Poresh), Smolensk (Tat'iana Shchipkova), and other cities.[24] Less well-known in the West but equally successful

was the ecumenic community of Sandr Riga, which also had branches in a number of cities with regular gatherings in Moscow.[25] These seminars published samizdat periodicals, with various success and longevity: the Leningrad religious-philosophical seminar produced the journal *37*; Ogorodnikov's Christian seminar edited the journal *Obshchina* (*Community*); and Sandr Riga's ecumenic community called its publication *Prizyv* (*The Call*).

But beyond these most well-known cases was a flurry of smaller groups, which have only weakly been studied. Anna Lepekhina has written about the religious-philosophical circle of Anatolii Vaneev and Konstantin Ivanov in Leningrad, which also gathered two non-conformist priests, Frs. Sergii Zheludkov and Pavel Adel'geim.[26] The Vladimir Solov'ev Saint-Petersburg philosophical society, founded in 1992, had its roots in another religious philosophical circle gathered by the astronomy professor and later Orthodox nun Elena Kazimirchak-Polonskaia, assembling many scientists.[27] In Leningrad as well, a religious circle gathered for a few decades around a charismatic doctor, Aleksei Loktev, who, despite being a layman, was a kind of spiritual father to his young followers. The orientation of this circle was artistic, with an emphasis on music and arts.[28] Any attempt to map out these groups also has to take into account the unstable character of many of them: not only was their membership in flux, but they could also easily merge or have regular joint meetings with other groups. They were sites of exchange of samizdat, scholarly discussion, and socialisation. Their common feature was to offer a respite from the stifling ideological climate of the late Soviet era and a forum to voice debates and lead reflections on subjects which were banned from official public discourse.

By the 1980s, however, many of these circles had either disappeared or evolved, as some participants had come closer to the Church and others had left. As Nikolai Simakov, who participated in Goricheva's religious-philosophical seminar in the 1970s, noted: the first religious Renaissance of the beginning of the 20th century was essentially modernist, exploring such concepts as Sergei Bulgakov's "sophiology"[29] or seeking to combine Christianism with more esoteric concepts. In contrast, the "second Renaissance" of the 1970s moved away from these notions and was more traditional, striving to return to the Russian Orthodox tradition.[30] Those converts who started out with the reading of existentialist and Russian religious philosophy often moved on to study the writings of the Church fathers and the works of Russian mystics: *Candid Tales of a Wanderer to his Spiritual Father*, an anonymous 19th-century work on prayer and ascetics; the writings of Saint Silouan the Athonite, a 19th-century ascetic; or the more ancient Philokalia, a collection of writings of the Orthodox hesychast tradition.

Simakov, along with Evgenii Pazukhin, another former member of Goricheva's seminar, formed in the 1980s a new, smaller seminar, which Simakov called "a small catechisation school," with a stronger theological focus. The 10 or 12 participants were all Christians who regularly went to church, confessed, and communed. The themes discussed went from Apostle Paul's Epistles to the history of the Church, liturgics, dogmatics. The participants also regularly met with a priest, Fr. Aleksandr Anisimov. Ultimately, however, the circle split along the traditional Slavianophile/Westernist lines.[31]

Such catechisation structures appeared in a number of parishes, sometimes around a young priest, sometimes in a group of laypeople. The most well-known example of catechism groups was the system of "small groups" (*malye gruppy*) organised by Fr. Aleksandr Men' in his parish in Novaia Derevnia, in the Moscow region, in the late 1970s. Various models may have served as inspiration for these groups, from the Catacomb church underground communities in which Aleksandr Men' grew up in the Stalin era to the "small groups" organised by French Catholic priest Fr. Jacques Loew, who visited Fr. Aleksandr Men' five times from 1977 to 1982.[32] When the flow of new converts in his parish increased, Fr. Aleksandr resorted to this system to prepare new converts to baptism and organised prayer and Bible reading circles. According to the testimony of one parishioner, small groups differed from fraternities by their informal nature and lack of an official charter, which made them a more effective organisational form in the parish.

> In Novaia Derevnia [Fr. Aleksandr Men's parish] such small groups appeared at first for the study of Holy Scripture and theological works. The new form turned out to be so effective, and the parish was growing so quickly, that soon all members of such groups had to head new groups. In some groups there was only common prayer, in others the Gospel with commentaries was read, etc… The "small groups" turned out to be a surprisingly effective instrument for the cohesion of believers, creation of a Christian communication circle, mutual help, growth in faith.[33]

Indeed, new converts received not only a good preparation for baptism but also solid theological knowledge, ranging from the Holy Fathers to contemporary Western theology. They also created lasting bonds with other members of the parish. Couples were formed and families founded in the framework of the small groups, and children catechism groups naturally appeared, as well as children shows on religious holidays. However, this system was illegal, and all parties involved had to observe strict conspiracy measures. Participants met at private apartments in Moscow, and when speaking on the phone they would pretext birthday parties to invite each other.

Few priests were ready to take upon themselves such risks, and a number of catechism groups were organised by laypeople. Most prominently, Iurii Kochetkov, future Fr. Georgii, started his catechism activities in the 1970s and developed what arguably became the most effective catechism system in post-Soviet Russia. As he was still studying economics at the Plekhanov Institute in Moscow, fellow students interested in religion naturally gravitated towards him. By the late 1960s, he had gathered a circle of about 25 people and started to organise catechism on a small scale. In 1979, he systematised his method of adult catechism in the parish of a young priest of his acquaintance, Fr. Arkadii Shatov (future Bishop Panteleimon).[34] When he joined the Spiritual Academy in Leningrad in 1980, he pursued his catechism activities there, with the tacit support of the rector of the Academy, future Patriarch Kirill. At the time, he was also in close contact with Baptist groups, which led to his exclusion from the Academy. In the late 1980s, the group which

had formed around Kochetkov would form the basis of the Transfiguration Fraternity, which now encompasses a large number of "small brotherhoods" (*malye bratstva*) across Russia.[35]

In Leningrad, about 20 spiritual children of another charismatic priest, Fr. Vasilii Lesniak, also gathered once or twice a week at the home of Lev Bolshakov, a future priest, for common prayer and Bible study. In the late 1980s, several members of the group took on catechising functions, and connected with Kochetkov's brotherhood, adopting its catechisation schemes.[36]

The brotherhood format was a variation on the model of catechism and prayer groups, with a more stable membership. Future priests Arkadii Shatov and Dmitrii Smirnov had their own circle, for which they created a brotherhood charter in the 1970s. [37] After their ordination in the Moscow region in 1979–1980, the brotherhood merged with their newly created parishes but also had a legacy in the post-Soviet era with the Brotherhood of the Saviour (*bratstvo vo imia Vsemilostovogo Spasa*).

Monasteries and *startsy*

While religious circles offered a space of socialisation shielded from the authorities' glance in the city, there were spaces on Soviet territory where young people could acquire religious knowledge and directly experience religious life on the periphery of Soviet society, and these were monasteries. While only a portion of pre-revolutionary monasteries remained open, some of them drew crowds of pilgrims. Visitors hoped to meet *startsy*, revered elder monks who had survived Stalin-era religious persecution. Attraction to monasticism and ascetism, in the spirit of Fedor Dostoevskii's character in *The Karamazov Brothers, starets* Zosima, showed the new converts' willingness to restore the broken link to pre-revolutionary tradition.

In addition, monasteries offered young converts a space of free expression of their religiosity sheltered from Soviet life. It did not necessarily take a lot of travel to visit a monastery. Elena Beliakova took to visiting the Donskoi monastery in Moscow, where the grave of Patriarch Tikhon, a martyr of the Soviet era, was buried. "And there was, of course, a very unusual atmosphere, because there were people who could really remember the old Moscow."[38] The Saint-Sergius-Trinity monastery in Zagorsk, just a short suburban train ride from Moscow, was another popular destination, but still under close watch from the KGB.

For the most part, however, travelling to a faraway place on pilgrimage was part of the adventure, and trains or hitchhiking rides to the confines of the USSR were part of the lifestyle of the "Iast Soviet generation," especially among hippies. Particularly popular were the Baltic states, where the pressure of Soviet power was less felt than in Moscow and Leningrad and Western influences stronger, due to the proximity of Finland.[39] Because the Baltic republics had only been annexed in 1940, they had suffered from anti-religious repression to a lesser extent than Soviet Russia, and along with Ukraine, this was where the most prominent monasteries were located. Most popular among Russian orthodox youth from Moscow and Leningrad were the Holy Transfiguration Ermitage near Elgava in Latvia, the

Piukhtitsy female monastery in Estonia, and the Pskov-Pechersk monastery on the border with Estonia. In Russia, many formerly glorious monasteries were closed, and those believers who still made the trip had to observe the strictest conspiracy. Ol'ga Erokhina, a young Orthodox convert and parishioner of Fr. Aleksandr Men', thus travelled to Diveevo and stayed in Saint Serafim of Sarov's house, where nuns from the Catacomb church secretly hosted pilgrims.[40] The Pochaev Lavra in Western Ukraine had also once been a renowned site of pilgrimage, but it was subjected to a wave of anti-religious repression in the Khrushchev era and remained under pressure until the mid-1980s. According to a samizdat account written by a pilgrim, in May 1984 policemen in plainclothes entered the Dormition Cathedral and asked visitors to show their documents, and after the service they beat and literally kicked pilgrims out of the church.[41]

Young pilgrims were not necessarily fully "churched," and some of them experienced their first religious stirrings while visiting a monastery with friends or as tourists. They were struck by the atmosphere of peacefulness emanating from these places. Elena Krylova, a young convert who had moved to Moscow from the province and renounced making a career after her conversion, remembered that her stays at monasteries, "these islands of orthodoxy," helped strengthen her faith.[42] Tat'iana Goricheva travelled to Elgava with some new converts and found "heaven on earth," a "place of grace" in the woods, where "everything smells heavenly, flowers, trees, herbs, the forest." She had the impression to visit "Holy Rus'" in the 15th–16th century, just as she had imagined it, inhabited by simple, free people, who behaved like "God-loved children."[43] Sergei Bychkov, a parishioner of Fr. Aleksandr Men', recalled his first trip to the monastery. After arriving late at night, he attended an early morning service and was struck by the experience of timelessness:

> Liturgy in this church felt special: it was like a flight into a harmonious, sweet world. Fr. Tavrion [Batozskii] remained, of course, the guide (*provodnik)*. We seemed to have crossed the frontiers of time and in the small space of this church, which was lined with carpets, reigned eternity. [44]

Many new converts who had read the novel *Brothers Karamazov* came to the monasteries in search of a *starets,* a venerated monk, resembling Dostoevskii's character Zosima. In addition to their spiritual father, to whom they regularly confessed and who gave them orientation in their religious life, believers consulted *startsy* regarding important questions and crucial life choices. As Goricheva put it:

> *Startsy* are the monastery's pride. Their clairvoyance, wisdom and holiness are glorified throughout Russia. People come to the *startsy* from Kazakhstan and Siberia, from the north and from Ukraine. Many just to obtain their blessing, others just to see them…. A *starets* is God's icon. After having seen him just once you understand that you can no longer live the way you used to, because from now on everything in your destiny will have to stand up to this beauty, this blessed light.[45]

Several *startsy* were most popular and considered higher authorities in matters of faith due to their wisdom, experience of suffering for faith, and gift of clairvoyance: Fr. Tavrion Batozskii from the Holy Transfiguration Ermitage in Elgava, Fr. Ioann Krest'iankin from the Pskov-Pechersk monastery, and Fr. Nikolai Gur'ianov, who lived on the island of Talabsk (Zalita) on the Pskov lake, among others. They had experienced Stalin-era repression but had emerged from this ordeal with an astounding inner strength, which impressed their visitors. Witnesses remembered Fr. Tavrion's sermons, during which he told about his life in prison.

Experience of communal life, with long days of common labour and prayer, attending early morning and evening services, left a deep impression on young converts, who found it difficult to return to the secular world afterwards. The Soviet authorities regarded with suspicion this constant flow of pilgrims, particularly young people, and in Elgava, the nuns checked passports and dutifully reported violations of the passport regime to the authorities.[46] But *startsy* felt it was their mission to contribute to the ongoing religious revival. As Fr. Tavrion told his young visitors: "The Hermitage can become the morning star, from which the revival of Orthodox faith will start."[47]

For pilgrims, monasteries were also liminal spaces between earth and heaven, where the supernatural became tangible and good and evil came into collision. Many witnesses recalled contacts with people allegedly possessed by demons, who visited the monasteries to be exorcised. During her first visit to the Piukhtitsy monastery, Elena Krylova shared a room with a possessed woman, who shouted and almost attacked her. This circumstance convinced Krylova that there was such a thing as dark forces: "There is darkness, there is evil, there is goodness and it is real, you can feel it."[48] Stories of miraculous healing also circulated.

But pilgrims believed that the *startsy* possessed gifts, which allowed them to counter forces of evil and to offer unique guidance. In particular, their gift of clairvoyance allowed them to guess their visitors' most secret thoughts. Visitors often found that, before even talking to them, the *starets* had answered their concern in his sermon. During private conversations, the *starets* could also make predictions, which later turned out to be true. For Sergei Bychkov, the encounter with Fr. Tavrion was decisive in ending seven years of doubts concerning his faith and produced an "inner transformation." "He had the gift of clairvoyance. That is, you came to him, and he saw through you just as on an X-ray."[49] *Startsy* also provided guidance in their correspondence with pilgrims, dutifully answering letters despite their huge workload.

Each *starets* had his own, unique personality. Fr. Tavrion, for one, had less than standard liturgical practices and markedly ecumenic views. He encouraged his visitors to commune every day during their stay at the monastery, joking that he "did not celebrate liturgy for the walls."[50] This practice was exceptional at the time and discouraged by the Soviet authorities. For some of his young visitors, this was their first experience of holy communion. They were also impressed to see that Fr. Tavrion, despite his old age and physical ills, celebrated liturgy every day, often alone. Vladimir Vinogradov, a young pilgrim from Moscow, was impressed by the labour that Fr. Tavrion took upon himself, "truly hard labour (*katorzhnyi trud*)," which a normal person could not have accomplished.[51]

In the ranks of the new converts were many young people who wished to become priests. Receiving the blessing of a *starets* before choosing this career path was usually important to them. Fr. Leonid Grilikhes remembered that on his first visit to Fr. Nikolai Gur'ianov, the *starets* immediately predicted that he would become a priest and during each visit encouraged him to follow this path.[52] Fr. Nikolai also told Natal'ia Vinogradova, who later became nun under the name of Sister Anuvia, that she "would be in a monastery."[53] But *startsy* did not automatically give their blessing. Aleksei Uminskii had decided to become a priest after visiting the Pskov-Pechersk monastery. The "piety and awe" with which Fr. Ioann preached and read prayers had left a deep impression on him. However, when he asked Fr. Ioann for his blessing, the *starets* advised Uminskii to pursue his current activity of teacher of French language instead.[54] When Aleksandr Ogorodnikov founded his Christian seminar, he decided to ask Fr. Ioann for his blessing but felt anxious and torn.

> On the one hand, I was afraid that he would tell me that we should close the seminar … On the other hand, I understood that I cannot close anything, I invited these people, I bear responsibility in front of them, I cannot abandon them…![55]

However, unexpectedly, Fr. Ioann not only gave his blessing, but enthusiastically supported Ogorodnikov's endeavour, giving him useful advice and accepting to become Ogorodnikov's spiritual father.

Monasteries were also places of socialisation among young converts. It was at the Elgava Hermitage that Sergei Bychkov met Iurii Kochetkov (future Fr. Georgii) and his friend Aleksandr Kopirovskii but also Arkadii Shatov (future Bishop Panteleimon) and Dmitrii Smirnov, both of whom were ordained priests in 1979–1980.[56] Although Bychkov, Kochetkov, and Shatov belonged to distinct groups, they started holding common meetings in Moscow and helping each other. At the time, the differences which would lead to a confrontation between the reformist current embodied by Fr. Georgii and the more traditionalist and conservative course defended by Fr. Dmitrii and Bishop Panteleimon were not yet apparent. As for Bychkov, from the mid-1970s he belonged to Fr. Aleksandr Men's parish, representing a more liberal and ecumenic orientation.

Socialisation also led to an exchange of religious literature. Kochetkov remembered bringing whole bags of religious samizdat and tamizdat to monasteries, from which these materials spread further throughout the country.[57] Some nuns were also involved in this samizdat circulation: Elena Beliakova remembered acting as a "samizdat courier" between Nikolai Pestov, an active samizdat author and key figure in the circulation of religious samizdat, and Mother Siluana, a nun of the Piukhtitsy monastery through whom a steady stream of samizdat circulated.[58]

Conclusion

In the late Soviet period, the Orthodox Church witnessed an influx of new converts in large cities, predominantly among educated youth. Soviet legislation imposed strict barriers on the practice of religion, from the restriction on sale of and

access to religious literature to the ban on religious "propaganda" outside church walls, which these believers tried to counter in different ways. While the Orthodox Church hierarchy, subjected to the Soviet regime, was unwilling to disturb the established *modus vivendi* to accommodate the needs of this new flock, a few priests and monks took the risk to interact with young believers from the intelligentsia and sometimes violated established rules.

As I argued in this chapter, the constraints under which young believers were forced to operate led them to create alternative spheres of socialisation, which I have designated under the term "parallel polis," both within Soviet society and within the Church. Since access to religious literature was strictly limited, believers resorted to samizdat, tamizdat, and various other stratagems to procure religious literature they deemed necessary to broaden their theological and historical knowledge. And although religious circles and catechism were forbidden, both priests and laypeople created socialisation and education circles, mostly functioning under strict conspiracy. While in the 1970s, these circles were ecumenic and combined philosophy and religion, open to believers and atheists alike, by the 1980s the dominant model was that of catechisation and Bible study groups, often with the participation of a priest. The return to pre-revolutionary church tradition also happened through pilgrimages to monasteries, which young converts perceived as "islands" of faith in a secular world. They could also interact with *startsy*, venerated monks, who were living carriers of this heritage and were known to possess gifts of clairvoyance and wisdom, making them spiritual guides for new generations of neophytes.

This way, young converts from the intelligentsia recreated an alternative *Ecclesia,* which would offer a basis for the "churching" of new generations of believers during the religious revival of the 1990s. Precisely the generation who had found faith in the 1970s–1980s would create, based on their Soviet experience, religious educational and socialisation structures, in the framework of parishes, brotherhoods, and Orthodox schools and universities. Yet this experience of alternative spheres also created difficulties, as the "parallel Church" was reintegrated with the official Church after 1988: it turned out that the Soviet converts' reinterpretation of tradition often clashed with the conservative views of the Russian Orthodox Church's hierarchy. And the crowds of newcomers who had been "baptised but not enlightened"[59] were often more attracted to the conservative discourse and ritual practices than to a more intellectual approach to the Holy Scriptures and theological-philosophical tradition.

Notes

1 This research has been financed by an Ambizione Grant of the Swiss National Science Foundation.

2 On the decline of Soviet ideology and emergence of parallel spheres, see Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

3 Elena Beliakova, Interview by the author, Moscow, 13 January 2020.

4 On the invention of new civic rituals, see Victoria Smolkin, *A Sacred Space Is Never Empty: A History of Soviet Atheism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018).

5 On hippie culture, see Juliane Fürst and Josie Mc Lellan, eds., *Dropping out of Socialism: The Creation of Alternative Spheres in the Soviet Bloc*, 2018; Juliane Fürst, *Flowers through Concrete: Explorations in Soviet Hippieland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020). On religious searching of the late Soviet intelligentsia, see Nikolai Mitrokhin, "Sovetskaia Intelligentsia v Poiskakh Chuda: Religioznost' i Paranauka v 1953–1985 godakh," *Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie*, 163, no. 3 (2020), 51–78.
6 On questions of conversion in the Soviet Union and post-Soviet space, see Jens Herlth, *Models of Personal Conversion in Russian Cultural History of the 19th and 20th Centuries.* (Bern [etc.]: Peter Lang, 2015); Mathijs Pelkmans, *Conversion after Socialism : Disruptions, Modernisms and Technologies of Faith in the Former Soviet Union* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009).
7 Zhanna Kormina and Sergei Shtyrkov, "'Eto nashe, iskonno russkoe, i nikuda nam ot ètogo ne det'sia': Predystoriia postsovetskoi desekuliarizatsii," in *Izobretenie Religii: Desekularizatsiia v postsovetskom kontekste*, ed. Zhanna Kormina, Sergei Shtyrkov, and Aleksandr Panchenko (Saint-Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Evropeiskogo universiteta, 2015), 20.
8 Beliakova, Interview.
9 Vaclav Benda, *La polis parallèle et autres essais (1978–1989)* (Paris: Groupe Artège Desclée de Brouwer, 2014), 23–24.
10 "Decree of the Chairman for the State Committee of the USSR Council of Ministers for Publishing, Printing Presses and the Book Trade 1 No 346 DSP," 6 June 1975. A 1977 report by the chief directorate for the preservation of state secrets in print, however, pointed out that books by Sergei Bulgakov and Nikolai Berdiaev were still being bought and sold. Both documents are reproduced in Felix Corley, *Religion in the Soviet Union: An Archival Reader* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1996), 270–75.
11 Often, these works would not be in the official catalogue, but readers exchanged references (*shifry*) among themselves.
12 Kirill Emelianov and Nadezhda Belyakova, "Spirituality, Tamizdat and Samidat During the Cold War: The Case of Zoja Krakhmalnikova," *Istoriia* 7, no. 9 (53) (January 15, 2017).
13 Vladimir Vinogradov and Andrei Shukhrai, Interview by author, Moscow, 24 January 2020.
14 On tamizdat in Eastern Europe, see Friederike Kind-Kovács and Jessie Labov, eds., *Samizdat, Tamizdat, and beyond: Transnational Media during and after Socialism* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013); Friederike Kind-Kovács, *Written Here, Published There: How Underground Literature Crossed the Iron Curtain* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2014).
15 On Keston College, see April L. French, "Michael Bourdeaux, the Centre for the Study of Religion and Communism, and the Defense of Religious Liberty, 1959–1975," *Gosudarstvo, Religiia, Tserkov' v Rossii i za rubezhom*, 35, no. 1 (2017): 216–243; Mark Hurst, "From Toothache to Keston, via Moscow – Michael Bourdeaux and the Centre for the Study of Religion and Communism," in *British Human Rights Organizations and Soviet Dissent, 1965–1985* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).
16 Stéphanie Roulin, "Lobbying et Expertise Durant le Processus d'Helsinki – L'institut Suisse Glaube in der 2. Welt et la Défense des Libertés Religieuses Dans le Bloc de l'Est," *Revue Suisse d'histoire Religieuse et Culturelle*, 115 (2021): 119–135.
17 See the collection of documents published by Grigorii Andreev and Aleksei Iudin, *Zhizn' s Bogom. Briussel' – Moskva* (Moskva: Kul'turno-prosvetitel'skii tsentr "Dukhovnaia biblioteka," 2013).
18 On YMCA-Press, see chapter 8 of Matthew Lee Miller, *The American YMCA and Russian Culture: The Preservation and Expansion of Orthodox Christianity, 1900–1940* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2013).
19 Several testimonies I collected mention this, including my interview of Fr. Vladimir Sorokin, who accompanied Nikodim abroad and also smuggled religious books (Saint-Petersburg, 25 October 2020).

20 See Brother Andrew's memoirs: Elizabeth Sherill, Brother Andrew, and John Sherrill, *God's Smuggler* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1998).
21 Igor' Chapkovskii, Interview with the author, Moscow, 24 January 2020.
22 See, for example, the testimony of future priest Vladimir Arkhipov, who was sent to a church on Easter day as part of an "operative squad" and ended up standing near the altar in fascination instead of barring the entrance. Aleksandr Borzenko, "'Khotelos' by verit''. Ioann (Krest'iankin)," Arzamas. Academy, n.d., https://soundcloud.com/arzamas-academy/khotelos-by-verit-ioann-krestyankin.
23 Ol'ga Chepurnaia, "Nezavisimye religioznye ob"edineniia v Leningrade v 1960-1980-e gody- sotsiokul'turnyi analiz" (Moskva, Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Gumanitarnyi Universitet, 2004).
24 On the former, see Josephine von Zitzewitz, *Poetry and the Leningrad Religious-Philosophical Seminar 1974–1980: Music for a Deaf Age* (London: Routledge, 2016). On the latter, see Koenraad Wolf, *Dissident for Life: Alexander Ogorodnikov and the Struggle for Religious Freedom in Russia* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2013); Aleksandr Shchipkov, "Ogorodnikov i drugie: kak èto bylo," *Istina i zhizn'*, no. 8 (1998).
25 See Irina Gordeeva, "Idei nenasiliia v zhurnale 'prizyv'ekumenicheskogo kruzhka Sandra Rigi (1971–1981)," in *History: Sources and People. XXI*, ed. I. Saleniece (Daugavpils: Daugavpils Universitates akademiskais apgads "Saule," 2018), 83–89.
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11 Anatolii Vaneev's Circle as a Phenomenon of Informal Church Community in Leningrad in the 1970s–1980s

Anna Lepekhina

Introduction

The anti-religious terror unleashed by the Bolsheviks against the clergy and the destruction of parish communities after the October Revolution and in the 1920s–1930s, as well as the consequences of the Second World War, led to an extreme impoverishment and destruction of church life, especially in Leningrad.[1]

The coming to power of Nikita Khrushchev led to a new anti-religious attack on the Church and society, which began in 1958.[2] It was an unprecedented campaign to suppress any religious initiatives, aimed at the final destruction of the religious sphere in the public and private life of Soviet citizens.[3] The authorities tried to undermine the strength of the Church financially, administratively and morally, to discredit its clergy. However, Khrushchev's de-Stalinisation campaign, launched in 1956, led to the beginning of a religious revival within the intelligentsia: "The time had come for questions – a fairly wide range, which also included metaphysical and religious questions".[4]

Precisely this desire for an independent and more open search and confession of one's religious, including Russian Orthodox identity, contributed to the emergence of communities where this identity could manifest itself and deepen.[5] Large cities, such as Moscow and Leningrad, turned into spiritual centres. Here, an informal (i.e. not conditioned by Soviet ideology and state structures) ecclesiastical and near-church intellectual environment developed, in which a "religious revival" began within the Russian intelligentsia.[6] From the point of view of Soviet laws, these informal public and church associations were illegal and were perceived by the controlling authorities as "dangerous" for the dominant Bolshevik ideology.

This informal social sphere united a broad range of groups. In the 1960s and 1970s, a dissident movement emerged, part of which adopted a human-rights rhetoric. At the same time, communities also appeared in the informal sphere close to the Church, which set as their goals not socio-political activity, but religious self-education, the study of the Orthodox tradition and theology. An important role in this process was played by the works of the Russian religious and philosophical revival of the late 19th to early 20th century, which were smuggled into the USSR, following their official ban from Soviet culture in the 1920s–1930s.

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The 1970s gave rise in the USSR to a powerful and diverse movement of intellectual, creative unofficial communities, circles, seminars etc., among which religious-philosophical and Christian ones occupied a significant place. As Aleksandr Kobak notes, on the one hand, in Leningrad, the atmosphere for such communities was more cramped and suffocating than in Moscow, but, on the other hand, it was precisely in Leningrad in the 1970s that the "all-Russian trend of interest in the restoration of historical memory" manifested itself in a unique way.[7]

Origins of Anatolii Vaneev's circle

In the history of the emergence of the circle under study, the starting point is the personality of Anatolii Vaneev. Born in 1922 in Nizhnii Novgorod, his grandfather was an associate of Vladimir Lenin. In 1924, Vaneev graduated from high school with honours and was admitted to the Faculty of Chemistry of Leningrad State University. In 1941, he was mobilised, sent to the front and wounded. After the war, he worked as a teacher of physics. In 1945, he was arrested for "careless talk" in a literary club and sentenced to ten years in the Gulag.[8]

In 1950–1952, Vaneev served time in Abez', a camp for the disabled and the elderly, where many cultural figures were then imprisoned. It was there that, in 1950, Vaneev met the religious philosopher Lev Karsavin. This encounter and exchanges with Karsavin made a very strong impression on Vaneev, who had been raised as an atheist. He saw in Karsavin an extraordinary type of religiosity, "free from any stiffness, living, individual and incomparably more genuine".[9]

Karsavin was arrested in 1949 in Vilnius: accused of participating in the anti-Soviet Eurasian movement and preparing to overthrow the Soviet regime,[10] he was sentenced to ten years in "corrective labour camps" of the Gulag. After being forcibly expelled from Russia in 1922 on the "philosophers' ship",[11] he was always attracted back to Russia. According to witnesses, when Karsavin was taken to the camp, he encouraged others and said: "It's easier for me, I'm going to the land of my ancestors".[12]

Vaneev describes his acquaintance with Karsavin in his memoirs *Two Years in Abez'*,[13] which he dedicated to the memory of the philosopher. This book became Vaneev's main literary and artistic work and is a unique source on the history of the Gulag in the 1950s.[14]

Svetlana Poliakova emphasises the uniqueness of Vaneev and Karsavin's acquaintance and dialogue: in ordinary life, a young man who had received an atheistic upbringing, as was commonly the case in the scientific and technical intelligentsia, could hardly have had the opportunity to communicate with someone of Karsavin's level.[15] Poliakova argues that

> … In normal life, outside the camp, hardly any of them could have experienced in such a concentrated fashion the purifying and transforming experience of an extreme situation … it was a very special situation that put a person above all the usual social barriers, above all cultural differences, which made them a hundred times more receptive to the super-empirical world and opened them in the face of the Other.[16]

Through Karsavin and his Christian faith, Vaneev came to Orthodox Christianity himself. Karsavin led Vaneev to faith through philosophy, became for him both a teacher of philosophy and a spiritual mentor.[17] This manifested the specifics of Vaneev's conversion, which in turn influenced his Christian worldview, and his relationship with the church practice. In addition, Vaneev became Karsavin's spiritual heir, seeing him off on his last journey and organising his funeral in the conditions of the camp.

The history of the burial and discovery of Karsavin's grave after many years is unique. Vaneev wrote an epitaph to Karsavin and sewed it into his remains before the funeral. The bodies of those who had died in the camp were not returned to their relatives, the graves were not marked by name in any way, and over time were erased from the ground and lost. Thanks to the presence of this epitaph and the efforts of many people, Karsavin's burial place was finally established with certainty in 1989.

It was in the camp that Karsavin's dream of reunion with Russia came true, and his last words were: "I was prepared for the fact that it would be bad for me here. But God let me die among my family and friends".[18]

In the following section, we will examine the sources of Vaneev's authority in the circle that formed around him.

Members of the circle and the dynamics of its gathering

Vaneev was released from the camp in 1954 and rehabilitated a year later. He was then able to return to Leningrad, where he was restored to his former job as a physics teacher. In 1972, Vaneev met Fr. Sergii Zheludkov, who in the early 1970s was at the peak of his creative activity and religious activism.

Fr. Sergii Zheludkov, a Russian Orthodox priest and religious thinker, was born in 1909 into a merchant family in Moscow. In 1926, Sergei audited courses at the "Renovationist" Theological Academy.[19] For him, it was a time of deep spiritual searches, self-education. In the 1930s, he worked as a technician-economist on the construction of the Baikal-Amur railway, which was then built by prisoners of the Gulag; during the Second World War, he worked on the construction of bridges in Siberia. After the war, in 1945, he left secular work, and in 1946, he was ordained priest, first serving in the Sverdlovsk diocese, and, starting from 1954, in Pskov. By nature, Fr. Sergii was a fighter for truth and justice, he defended his parishioners from pressure from the Soviet authorities. During the years of Khrushchev's anti-religious persecutions in the 1960s, he actively spoke up in defence of the church and believers.

In the early 1970s, Fr. Sergii was actively engaged in establishing communication among the living intellectual forces of Moscow and Leningrad, arranging correspondence and dialogues among believers, non-believers and agnostics.[20] It was in this context that Fr. Sergii Zheludkov met Konstantin Ivanov in 1972.

Konstantin Ivanov (b. 1942) graduated from the Faculty of Philosophy of the Leningrad State University and attended graduate school. In the late 1960s, he independently studied Russian religious and existentialist philosophy (Nikolai

Berdiaev, Semen Frank, Fr. Pavel Florenskii and others). Together with his brother Mikhail Ivanov, an artist and art historian, he turned his apartment into a meeting place for writers, artists, philosophers and theologians. They held art exhibitions, discussions, and published a samizdat newspaper entitled *Amin'*.

In 1970, Konstantin Ivanov came to faith, and in 1971, he was baptised in the Russian Orthodox Church. In 1972, Konstantin met Fr. Sergii Zheludkov. Through him, he made the acquaintance of Vaneev and joined the religious and philosophical circle that gathered around Vaneev and Fr. Sergii.

As Konstantin Ivanov writes,

> When in 1972 the "ubiquitous", well-known in church circles, priest Sergii Zheludkov "reached" Vaneev, who lived rather secluded, Vaneev's house immediately became a meeting place for interested people, a place of intense conversations on extreme spiritual topics of people holding the most opposite views: strictly ecclesiastical, religious freethinkers, sceptics, atheists.[21]

Thus, a religious and philosophical community gradually developed around Vaneev, which included, in addition to Konstantin Ivanov and his brother Mikhail, the future professor of the philosophy department of Leningrad State University Iaroslav Slinin (b. 1932), Orthodox priest Pavel Adel'geim (1938–2013) and others.

It is characteristic that many of them were united by the experience of repressions and had been through the camps. Vaneev served his sentence in the camps in 1945–1954. Fr. Pavel Adel'geim was arrested in 1969 for the construction of a new church and sentenced for "slandering the Soviet regime" to three years in "corrective labour camp" of the Gulag. There he lost his right leg during a camp uprising in the camp and remained disabled after his released in 1972. Fr. Sergii Zheludkov was repeatedly persecuted for his human rights and church activity and was stripped of his registration as a priest. Vaneev, however, enjoyed the greatest authority due to his age, Gulag experience and unique interaction with Karsavin.

Gradually, the circle expanded. Fr. Sergii informed from the beginning the agenda of the gatherings, declaring that he was disposed to communicate with all people of "good will" (as he called them), whether among believers and practising Christians, or non-believers and agnostics. The only woman to participate in the meetings was Vaneev's wife, Elena (b. 1945), a historian and researcher of ancient Russian literature who worked in the Pushkin House as an assistant to Academician Dmitrii Likhachev. The majority of the group, however, was male.

This is how the "core" of the circle was formed, which hosted almost on a weekly basis religious and philosophical conversations for more than ten years.[22] Konstantin Ivanov notes that quite a lot of people took part in these discussions, sometimes up to 20 participants: some of them were intellectuals, professors and scientists, "thinking and writing people", "artists", others were from the clergy. Regular participation of clergymen was an essential feature of this circle in comparison with other similar informal communities operating at that time in Leningrad.[23] Often, such informal associations rather avoided ties with representatives of the "official" church structure for two reasons: firstly, due to distrust of the clergy

as representatives of the Soviet church "system", and secondly, in those rare cases when clergymen elicited trust, to avoid "exposing them to a blow" on the part of the authorities.[24]

Fr. Pavel Adel'geim and Fr. Sergii Zheludkov met in 1976,[25] when Fr. Pavel began to serve in the Pskov diocese. Fr. Sergii was dismissed by the authorities from the same diocese that year. Fr. Pavel had come to faith and started his church life as a child, in the community of Elder Sevastian of Karaganda in Kazakhstan, where he lived in a settlement of internal exile with his mother. Pavel's grandfather and father were executed (his grandfather Pavel in 1938, his father Anatolii in 1942), and his mother Tatiana Pylaeva was arrested and convicted in 1946.[26] In the mid-1950s, Pavel entered the seminary, from which he was expelled for political reasons in 1959, a year before graduation. In 1959, Fr. Pavel was ordained a deacon by Archbishop Ermogen (Golubev) of Tashkent.[27] The Tashkent diocese experienced at that time a spiritual upsurge, thanks to the presence of Archbishop Ermogen, who gathered around him the believing intelligentsia, which was ready to engage in spiritual resistance to anti-religious persecution. These were church ministers who had survived the Soviet repression of the 1920s and 1930s, as well as repressed members of Christian informal (underground) communities and Orthodox lay brotherhoods from Moscow and Leningrad. In this non-conformist milieu, Fr. Pavel took on the spirit of resistance towards the Soviet regime that would influence his entire life and ministry. This was a rare experience for the late Soviet period.

Goals and activities of the circle

Correspondence materials from the personal archives of Fr. Pavel Adel'geim and Fr. Sergii Zheludkov allow us to explore in more detail the goals and forms of activity of the circle under study, the nature of the relationship between the circle members and the topics of their discussions.

Members of the circle had different conceptions of the goals of the group. Nevertheless, what united them was the desire to find answers to the pressing existential questions of faith and life in a space of free discussion. Undoubtedly, the impulse for communication came from Fr. Sergii Zheludkov, who found, gathered and stepped into dialogue with people who were close to him in spirit, and these in turn invited like-minded people to join the circle. "I can't live without *dialogue*" said Fr. Sergii.[28] Father Pavel Adel'geim confirms that by organising a correspondence called "Com-passion" (*So-chuvstvie*), Fr. Sergii meant "to build bridges between people with different, even opposite, beliefs, for example, believers and atheists".[29]

Konstantin Ivanov also notes that the central point was the meeting of "interested people" for "tense conversations on extreme spiritual topics of people of the most opposite views: strictly ecclesiastical, religious freethinkers, sceptics, atheists".[30]

> For Vaneev, the meetings' fundamental purpose was to stimulate thinking. He insisted that Christian faith is, first of all, truth (*istina*). It requires thought – especially sharp in the face of a world where unbelief reigns. Atheism has

> been given power over minds until Christianity answers the questions put to it – first of all, when it sees their scale and significance.[31]

Moreover, Fr. Pavel Adel'geim also saw an inner-church purpose of the meetings for the believing members of the circle:

> … it seems to me that our conversations cannot be called knowledge of God (*Bogopoznanie*). But only an introduction to the knowledge of God. And here we see two specific tasks: 1. Critical assessment of non-church paths; 2. Resolution of those doubts that [hinder?] us from following the path indicated by the Holy Fathers.[32]

As Konstantin Ivanov notes, the circle was never subjected to pressure from the authorities. He explained this by the fact that the circle was not political, and political issues could be raised only in connection with religious and philosophical topics.[33] Moreover, members of the circle deliberately refrained from talking about politics, and Vaneev, who had spent ten years in the Gulag and knew from personal experience what careless conversations could cost, made sure this rule was followed. He considered it unacceptable to "put either the interlocutors or the very existence of the circle in jeopardy".[34] In his memoirs, Konstantin Ivanov also emphasised the spiritual background of the activity of the circle.

> We identified neither with naked politics, nor dissidence, which is absorbed in indignation at Soviet reality. We understood that it was not some individual communists or bureaucrats who were to blame for our troubles, and even less so some impersonal "system". It was our entire people, indifferent and irresponsible to everything that happens to him, morally and spiritually savage and stupid, who bore responsibility for the stupidity and cruelty of Soviet life. And that, finally, the basis of all this is the people' spiritual state, the religious crisis that they are going through, Bolshevik sectarianism, the spiritual perversion, which they were passionate about at first, and which now afflicts them more and more …. Idols, which they worshiped, despising the true God, condemns them to servitude through madness and blood ….[35]

Due to the fact that some of the circle's members did not live in Leningrad (Fr. Sergii and Fr. Pavel were in Pskov), and only attended the circle's meetings once in a few months, Fr. Sergii Zheludkov launched the idea of a correspondence between the members. The idea was for the correspondence to run in parallel, completing and continuing live discussions. In general, about a dozen people took part in this correspondence with more or less intensity. The main participants were Vaneev, Konstantin Ivanov, Fr. Sergii Zheludkov, Fr. Pavel Adel'geim and other members of the circle. The letters could also be sent to trusted "friends of friends" who did not participate in Vaneev's circle. Fr. Sergii had experimented such forms of correspondence, for example, with the human-rights activist Kronid Liubarskii, which was later published under the title *Christianity and Atheism.*[36] By starting a new

correspondence with the Vaneev circle, Fr. Sergii continued the same topic. Later this correspondence was released in samizdat under the same title.[37] Letters were distributed in typewritten copies and were initially given publicity, albeit limited, through samizdat. The letters were generally signed not by full names and surnames, but only initials.

The Church and theological discussions in the circle

In this section, we do not aim to give a comprehensive theological analysis of the content of the discussions based on materials from the correspondence, but we will provide a broad outline of the range of problems raised, in the context of the development of a dialogue within the circle.

Vaneev and Konstantin Ivanov actively seized upon the theme of the dialogue between believers and non-believers, and the relationship between Christianity and atheism as worldviews. Ivanov believed that

> … atheism blindly senses the absence of God, which Christians are called upon to realise as precisely His, God's, the absence belonging to God Himself, as God's Self-denial. Through atheism, it turns out that not only His presence, but also His absence, belongs to God.[38]

For Vaneev, thinking about the question of the "Christian meaning of atheism" was a continuation of Karsavin's main idea of "Life-through-the Death-of-God". Ivanov wanted to talk about the Christian meaning of atheism, and Vaneev discovered this in Karsavin's thought. For both philosophers, it was natural to approach the question of atheism from a religious-philosophical perspective, whereas the church participants in the correspondence, without rejecting in principle such a formulation of the question, found it more natural to approach it from a theological point of view.

Father Pavel Adel'geim, speaking about atheism, tries to rely in his reflection on the Scriptures and the Tradition of the Church: "Your idea that atheism is a necessary condition for the revelation of faith is nowhere to be found in the New Testament and it is not clear how … to enter the fullness of truth".[39]

Thus, another fundamental theme arises in the discussion: the role of tradition in Orthodoxy and the question of authority in church life. This topic also became central throughout the dialogue, mainly among Vaneev, Konstantin Ivanov and Fr. Pavel Adel'geim. It was connected with the search for a "foundation", a starting point for reasoning about what Orthodoxy is; what the "principle of diversity of opinions" (*raznomyslie*) is in Orthodoxy and where its boundaries lie. The array of ecclesiological issues resulted in a conversation about what the Church is: what should be enshrined in tradition, and what is open to discussion and reform.

The discussion of a range of questions about the nature and boundaries of the Church and the foundations of its life revealed a significant number of disagreements among the members of the circle, especially between its "philosophical" and "clerical" sections. This can be explained by the gap in perception and knowledge

about church tradition as a whole due to anti-religious repression and the forced secularisation of Soviet society after 1917.

For Fr. Pavel Adel'geim, the theme of the Church (what the Church is and how it can function in practice under Soviet rule) already then became key to his reflections on the fate of the Russian Orthodox Church in the 20th century. In 1975–1976, i.e. shortly before he joined the circle, Fr. Pavel wrote the book *With My Own Eyes*. In this book, through his experience of church service and on the basis of documents, he tells "the history of the suppression of the spiritual freedom of the Soviet people in church, public and private life".[40] This book could not be published at the time, and did not even circulate in samizdat, only 35 years later did it appear in print. It is important that Fr. Pavel's conversation about the church tradition and the practice of life of the contemporary Russian Orthodox Church followed from his theological education and direct experience of serving as a priest, which distinguished him from other lay members of the circle.

In his correspondence with representatives of the scientific intelligentsia, conversations about the authority of Scriptures and tradition often stumbled on problems of interpretation of certain parts of the Bible: the creation of the world, such events of sacred history as the Nativity of Christ, the Gospel miracles, the relation between the Old and New Testaments etc.[41] These letters reveal a thirst for knowledge, learning, and even a desire to share the fruits of personal revelation with loved ones and friends. In fact, these letters were a kind of "catechesis" through letters, and on Fr. Pavel's part, they were a catechetical sermon in letters addressed to his intellectual friends in search.

These conversations about the Church also concerned the level of an individual person, touching upon such issues of Christian anthropology as the personal principle in faith,[42] the "opposition of mind and heart" in relation to a person's faith[43]; the meaning of human suffering (Fr. Sergii Zheludkov later entitled a cycle of correspondence "Com-passion")[44]; what is prayer[45] and what is true holiness in the Christian sense etc.[46] One of the stumbling blocks in the discussion was the question of one's personal responsibility for evil in this world.

The dialogue tackled the ultimate questions of the meaning of being and human life, theodicy (justification of God) and anthropodicy (justification of Man):

> Man decides to oppose God, Who is the perfect Good, to his own good, implicated in the absurdity of a fallen existence. By an evil irony, he fights in the name of good against Good, ultimately affirming evil, as we see in the Karamazov [Brothers].[47]

Touching upon the problems of Christian anthropology, the participants in the discussion repeatedly turned to the heritage of Russian religious philosophy, which points to its relevance and degree of accessibility at that time. On the pages of the letters, the works of Nikolai Berdiaev (*Philosophy of a Free Spirit*, *Self-Knowledge*, *Dostoevsky's Worldview* etc.), Semen Frank, Lev Karsavin, Mother Maria (Skobtsova) were regularly cited; Russian literature, poetry and prose, from Fedor Dostoevskii to Aleksandr Blok, as well as Western theologians, such as Hans Küng (*Being a Christian*).

A dialogue that bore fruits

Discussions in the Vaneev circle sometimes revealed vivid contradictions of opinions, mutual misunderstanding, indignation at each other's positions and a sharp rejection of judgements, up to the impossibility of continuing further correspondence. Similarly, during live meetings, according to the testimonies of the participants, the conversation sometimes "failed", and then the participants looked for ways out and tried to overcome such "failures".[48]

According to Fr. Pavel, the roots of mutual misunderstanding lay deeper and concerned more internal aspects: they were due to the distortion of the perception of the Church and religiosity, which the Soviet era had sown in the minds of people, secularisation and the loss of spiritual traditions. Father Pavel enumerated the prejudices towards the Church and further noted:

> We see that this [Soviet, i.e. anti-religious- *A.L.]* era has not passed without a trace. Poisonous seeds have sprouted in the minds of society, sowing many prejudices, distorted information, and false attitudes. … A person who comes from atheism to the Church inevitably carries with him atheistic prejudice and to some extent unconsciously shares a common prejudice towards the orthodox tradition. … There is an ambivalent attitude towards the Church. On the one hand, one expects from it true life. On the other hand, one cannot understand: either the Church's experience cannot fit in its entirety into one's consciousness, or one's consciousness cannot fit in its entirety into the Church …. This is why I said from the very beginning that liberation from this painful state of duality is associated not only with awareness, but also with the determination to repent, i.e. change the way you think.

Konstantin Ivanov also reflected upon the meaning of the circle's dialogues in a letter to a Catholic priest, Fr. Antoine,[49] pointing out the specifics of the "post-atheistic" state of consciousness of a Russian person and the ways to try to overcome it:

> Here, in our country, those who come to the Church still have questions about where they came to, related to the question of where they came from. The question remains for us: Who are we in the Church? … Can we simply return to the spiritual tradition? This questions, which is topical today, is related to the eternal requirement: in order to find God, a person must find himself.[50]

Interestingly enough, Konstantin Ivanov makes a clear distinction between what is Russian (national) and what is Soviet (ideological) in his contemporaries. He believes that to overcome the atheistic and post-atheistic consciousness of the "sub-Soviet" person, national, i.e. Russian self-consciousness must be restored, in order to expunge the experience of denial of God and godlessness.[51]

The conclusion that we encounter in the dialogues of the Vaneev circle, about the need for post-Soviet people to reconsider and, moreover, repent for the duality of their spiritual consciousness, seems an important and conceptual point in order

to understand the spiritual state of "split consciousness" of both individuals and the society in the 1970s–1980s.

This correspondence, which circulated in samizdat in the early 1980s, gained popularity and was in demand in several intellectual circles, where it elicited responses from a variety of people.[52]

We agree with Sergei Bychkov, who claims that thanks to the efforts of such righteous people as Fr. Sergii (to whom we would also add Fr. Pavel Adel'geim), church life changed rapidly in the post-Soviet era.[53] Fr. Georgii Kochetkov, who met Fr. Pavel Adel'geim in the 1970s, also testified to his singularity: "Spiritual centres are not determined by rank, not by positions in the church, and not by the formal hierarchy. … Even then he was known as a confessor of faith, as a person who internally resisted any anti-church forces".[54] Thus, already in the 1970s, the liveliest and freest intellectual forces of the Church and society gathered within informal religious communities. They lay the "groundwork" for dialogue and cooperation, the search for mutual understanding and enlightenment, which allowed many cultural, scientific, educational Christian and Orthodox associations to emerge legally in the 1990s.

Having diverged in views from Vaneev and Ivanov, Fr. Pavel ended his correspondence with them in 1981 but continued to communicate in letters with other members of the circle. In the mid-1980s, he began to actively revive ecclesiastical, educational and parish life in Pskov. In the 1990s, he became acquainted with the Saint Filaret Orthodox Christian Institute, whose board of trustees he later joined, and with the Transfiguration Brotherhood, founded by Fr. Georgii Kochetkov, a member of which he became shortly before his death in 2013.[55] In 2002, Fr. Pavel published, already openly, the book *Dogma about the Church in Canons and Practice*. As stated in the abstract, this book is dedicated to

> … one of the most "painful questions" of today's church reality. It is dictated by a firm belief in the need for the revival of the conciliar principles in the Russian Church and a mature understanding of reality based on the analysis of numerous documents and facts.[56]

In addition, reflections on the ways of reviving the Church, begun in the 1970s, developed at numerous conferences, in circles of like-minded people, and in particular, the Saint Filaret Orthodox Christian Institute.

Conclusion

The history of the Vaneev circle ended with the death of its main inspirers, Fr. Sergii Zheludkov in 1984 and Vaneev in 1985. In the early 1990s, with the regime change, many members of the circle translated the impulse of communication acquired in the circle into the organisation of legal communities of cultural and Orthodox-Christian character. In 1990, Konstantin Ivanov created the society "Open Christianity" with the aim of "opening the way for mutual understanding between believers and non-believers, Christians and atheists who recognize the

authority of the Church and freethinkers"[57] through meetings, seminars, lectures etc. In the early 1990s, Ivanov also participated in the creation of the Christian University, an ecumenical platform for education and dialogue between Christians of different confessions in Saint-Petersburg, where he taught philosophy and theology. However, this university was soon closed under pressure from the authorities. Ivanov and other members of Vaneev's circle were also behind the creation of the organisation "Encounter–Church and Culture",[58] which led to the creation in 1992 of the Institute of Theology and Philosophy,[59] an institution still in operation to this day.

The study of the history of the emergence and development of dialogues within the circle of Anatolii Vaneev allows us to shed light on the phenomenon of informal (underground) religious and philosophical communities in the late Soviet period, the sources of their thought and inspiration, as well as the role they played in the revival of a Russian Orthodox culture and religiosity for the intelligentsia who grew up under the conditions of Soviet atheism.

The multi-level dialogue within the Vaneev circle revealed not only the unity of the aspirations of the participants, but also contradictions and differences in understanding the main categories of Christian faith and life between, on the one hand, the representatives of the traditional understanding of the Christian foundations of faith and life, and, on the other, the participants in the "post-atheistic" experience of belief. At the same time, for the participants, the result of the dialogue was the realisation of the need for repentance, a "change of mind", "metanoia", not only personally, but also within society, in order for the Russian people to return to the spiritual roots of unity and church belonging.

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12 Longing for Truth, Morality, and Enchantment

Late Soviet Spiritual Searches and Journeys to Islam, 1970s–1980s

Eva Rogaar

Introduction

> I grew up in a non-religious family, but already as a child, deep in my soul I believed in a God unknown to me …. However, in the 1970s in Moscow, there was no other real alternative to communism, aside from the Orthodox Church. And when I entered an Orthodox church at age 19, I found an ancient tradition, the beauty of hymns, and I decided to pursue true theological knowledge and enter the religious seminary. This was not a conscious choice for a specific religion, but there was nothing to compare Orthodox Christianity to – my decision was merely a strong rejection of the lies of atheism, and I joined the religious organisation whose doors were open to me at the time …. In 1983–1985, I served as a priest in Central Asia, where I was introduced to Muslims and Islam for the first time, and I felt an internal attraction to them. One day in the church, a handsome older Tajik man visited me – rumour had it that he secretly was a sheikh. After a short conversation, my guest suddenly said: "You have the eyes of a Muslim. You will certainly become a Muslim!" This was a seemingly paradoxical comment, made in an Orthodox church to its abbot, but it did not evoke any resistance in me. On the contrary: it touched me in my soul.[1]

In his book *Priamoi put' k Bogu* (*Straight path to God)*, published in 2000, former Orthodox priest Ali Viacheslav Polosin wrote about his journey through Orthodox Christianity that eventually led him to Islam. Although Polosin, now one of the most well-known Muslim converts in Russia, did not formally convert until 1999, a long journey preceded his turn to Islam. As he wrote in the introduction to the book, he "did not know about the tradition of Islam for most of [his] life, therefore [he] arrived at it by conscious choice after 40 years of life and spiritual experience, many years of study and searching, and as a result of [his] willingness to follow God's call".[2] Of course, Polosin's memoir allowed him to construct his own narrative after the fact,[3] but there is no doubt that Polosin's experiences in the late Soviet years, like those of many of his contemporaries, were crucial to his eventual turn to Islam.

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This chapter argues that to understand the broad appeal of Islam to young people in the late Soviet and early post-Soviet period, it is important to pay close attention to converts' spiritual journeys before and around their conversion. My work foregrounds the journeys of young Moscow intellectuals in the 1970s and 1980s, as well as across 1991, who eventually, in various ways, embraced the Islamic tradition, and it positions these journeys in the broader historical context they operated in. These were young, engaged individuals who were profoundly concerned with questions of truth, morality, and justice, and who were searching for a framework that allowed them to break outside their own narrow, conventional world.[4] They were educated, often well-connected, and the information, literature, and mentors they had access to strongly influenced their individual paths. Their journeys demonstrate that their conversions did not happen overnight, but that they were part of long spiritual searches and developments in these individuals lives and in the world.

Attention to journeys, searching, and boundary-crossing is crucial in understanding conversion. I subscribe to Juliette Galonnier's position that conversion is a process of "moving toward" rather than "moving in", and that the concept of liminality best explains the conversion process, with converts being "threshold people".[5] This research also builds on Mathijs Pelkmans' approach to conversion as "a movement, a crossing of conceptual, social and/or religious boundaries or frontiers, while altering those boundaries in the process".[6] Boundaries around, and between, different religions and spiritual practices are more porous and ambiguous than they are commonly presented. From Gez et al., I borrow the concept of conversion as *butinage* to understand religious practice as actor-centred and inherently polymorphous and changeable.[7] Historical-methodologically, this chapter draws on Judith Brown's approach to life histories and her understanding that

> … the careers of prominent individuals are … a valuable source for the historian – not in the biographer's sense of "what did my subject achieve in his lifetime?" but more deeply, as a window into the networks and systems in which those individuals worked.[8]

And finally, my work draws on Clare Anderson's concept of subaltern prosopography, which centres the lived experiences of individuals who left only fragmentary traces in the archives, and seeks to demonstrate that, although often considered mundane, their lives reach far beyond the extraordinary.[9]

This chapter seeks to bring in conversation historiographies that are usually studied separately and that are part of the same broader context that Islam and Muslims operated in. I agree with Samuli Schielke's position that "there is too much Islam in the anthropology of Islam",[10] and this chapter seeks to demonstrate that an understanding of the spiritual journeys of converts involves numerous other factors beyond Islam. One body of literature I engage with is that of renewed interest in religion and spirituality starting in the 1970s, especially among Soviet youth in intellectual circles, who were actively seeking alternative worldviews and explored a variety of religious and spiritual movements. This religious underground scene

overlapped strongly with dissident circles and the hippie movement in this period, and this generation became an important force in the religious revival across the post-Soviet space.[11]

In the scholarship on this late Soviet interest in religion and spirituality among young intellectuals, Islam generally remains underexamined. This is understandable, as Islam was not as readily available to those in Moscow intellectual circles. At the same time, the persistent image of Islam as essentially unchanging, among both Muslims and non-Muslim observers, policymakers, and scholars, also seems to play a role. Part of this chapter seeks to address this disparity and shed light on a renewed interest in Islam among Soviet youth in the 1970s and 1980s, outside the tutelage of state-sanctioned Islamic institutions. While focusing primarily on the 1970s and 1980s, this chapter therefore also aims to bridge the 1991 divide and show the significant continuity between the late Soviet and early post-Soviet periods, and the fact that the seeds for many of the developments in the 1990s were sown in the decades prior. My protagonists were actively searching for truth and morality on both sides of 1991, and their journeys illustrate gradual change, contingency, and continuous learning that transcended the question of adherence to a particular religion.

The first part of this chapter briefly provides the historical context in which young, educated Russians pursued their spiritual journeys. The second part illustrates the abovementioned concepts through the spiritual journeys of three young Russian intellectuals in Moscow in the 1970s and 1980s, with a glimpse into the 1990s: Valeriia Porokhova, author of one of the most authoritative Russian-language translations of the Qur'an; Viacheslav Polosin, the former Orthodox priest who became one of the most influential Muslim converts in contemporary Russia; and Sergei Moskalev, a well-known Soviet mystic and adherent to Sufism. At different points in their journeys, each of them encountered and embraced the tradition of Islam – and although their stories differed, their backgrounds and the context of their searches showed striking similarities.

Soviet youth and renewed interest in religion and spirituality, 1970s–1980s

The young intellectuals who developed an interest in religion in the late Soviet period belonged to a generation that grew up in a more globalised age and as Juliane Fürst argues, "these youngsters despised the grey and dull character of Brezhnev's Soviet Union. They rebelled against a pervasive sense that nothing would ever happen, and nothing would ever change".[12] These youths looked for something that could take them outside the rigidity of Soviet society, and their renewed interest in religion occurred in this context. As Irina Gordeeva points out, the religious "renaissance" of this period was accompanied by a turn towards new values, a chance of self-perception, a culture of spiritual resistance, a "religious and cosmological eclecticism", the absence of dogmatism, and the deeply personal nature of religious seeking.[13] For the young generation in the 1970s, pursuing religion and spirituality in new ways provided a sense of freedom and renewal in an officially atheist society and made them feel connected to a global community.

This chapter focuses primarily on young intellectuals who came of age in the late Soviet period in Moscow, the centre of the Soviet Union. They were not merely a young, educated class, but also engaged youth profoundly concerned with the directions of their society and humanity. These youths' concerns in some ways resembled the Russian intelligentsia of the 18th and 19th centuries, in terms of their moral critique of the political order, their emphasis on personal responsibility, and their focus on social justice as the prerequisite for individual conscience.[14] Despite their criticism of Soviet society, they were also greatly indebted to early Soviet ideals of human progress, education, artistic and literary creativity (*tvorchestvo*), and internationalism.[15] At the same time, the global appeal of Western countercultural youth movements in their struggle for peace, against war, and for the environment cannot be underestimated either. The protagonists of this chapter share with these different generations of intellectual avant-garde a deep concern with questions of morality and justice, community, and their own role in society, and they sought to carve out their own authentic paths to answer these questions.

These young intellectuals' education, social networks, and location in Moscow made them a privileged group with access to resources (e.g., literature and technology for copying and printing) that were not widely accessible at the time. They shared a thirst for knowledge, and through their networks, they often had access to more information and samizdat literature than the average Soviet citizen.[16] Their journeys were strongly influenced by the literature they were able to read, and by the teachers and mentors they had the opportunity to interact with. Indeed, teachers and mentors were an important aspect of the spiritual journeys of many intellectuals in the late Soviet period. There were numerous small religious and spiritual seminars and discussion groups. Some of these were offered by officially ordained priests who gathered circles around them, while others were unofficial seminars organised by laypeople. Young intellectuals, in search of fresh views, were especially drawn to charismatic and energetic religious leaders like Fr. Aleksandr Men', who had a personal approach and were interested in interreligious dialogue and in developments beyond their own communities.[17]

Aside from Orthodox Christian literature, other kinds of spiritual and religious literature were circulating. This wide variety of religions that young intellectuals engaged with in the late Soviet period were on one hand new interpretations of religions that already existed in the USSR, influenced by contemporary needs and pressures, and on the other hand, they also included a range of new forms of spirituality, such as neo-Hinduism, Hare Krishna, and neo-paganism. Intellectuals at the time engaged with them in an eclectic manner, and many practiced multiple religions and spiritualities simultaneously.[18] Among Soviet youths with an interest in spirituality, hippies occupied a special place; as Fürst argues, they were among the best informed people in the country, not least because "the [hippie] movement's tentacles reached into the milieu of religious dissenters, political dissidents, and nonconformist artists and musicians".[19]

Despite rarely figuring in accounts of countercultural youth and religious dissidents in this period, Islam did have some appeal in these communities. An attraction to Eastern spirituality was widespread among youths, and sometimes this also

included an interest in Islam. This interest commonly developed during travels to Central Asia in the 1970s and 1980s. Like Western hippies who travelled to Asia to escape modern civilisation and in search of "exotism", young Soviet intellectuals were drawn to the East out of curiosity and out of desire to escape their own narrow world. According to Fürst, "the encounter with Soviet Asia could be informed by deference and awe, especially towards the rich spiritualism hippies hoped they could find, but it could also have decisively colonial overtones. Especially encounters in Central Asia contained a mix of curiosity, illusionary expectation, and disappointment".[20] The travel memoirs of Vladimir Videmann, an Estonia-based writer and philosopher who was an active member of the late Soviet hippie and New Age scenes and who travelled frequently to Central Asia, are among the most extensive first-hand accounts that illustrate encounters of young Soviet intellectuals with the Soviet East.[21]

For many young intellectuals who travelled to Central Asia, their interactions with the local population, especially with local imams and sheikhs, were limited, and their interest in eastern philosophy, spirituality, and religion were often mediated by Western perspectives.[22] However, some of the nonconformist youths were quite committed to Islam and even participated in underground Islamic networks. Videmann himself, as a result of several trips to Central Asia, grew more interested in eastern religion, spirituality, and yoga. As he spent more time in Dushanbe in the late 1970s, he became more immersed in the local academic and mystical communities and began to organise illegal production of Islamic literature in Estonia and a network for its distribution in underground circles. He also involved other intellectuals in this endeavour, such as the Azerbaijani-Russian philosopher Geidar Dzhemal', who later developed his own radical interpretation of Islam and emphasised its revolutionary potential.[23]

Muslim communities themselves were also undergoing major changes, especially outside the official realm. Historians' writings on Islam in the 1970s and 1980s, however, tend to focus on the official, state-sanctioned Muslim administrations of the USSR or on reports by Soviet officials or academics of that time. This is understandable, as such stories predominate in the state archives, where many historians find their sources. Such official accounts highlight the favourable conditions of Muslims under socialism, they view the persistence of religion in Muslim-majority areas as a threat to the Soviet project; and they portray Islam as a static religion, reduced to symbols and holidays, and most widespread among older individuals and foreign students.[24] Soviet magazines of this time also contributed to this image, for example, by celebrating young Central Asian women who were able to "overcome" local traditions and who embraced the "modern" secular Soviet lifestyle.[25] Other historians' accounts focus on the fact that despite Soviet persecution of unofficial religious activities, many Muslims found ways to practise their religion in private spaces, and the number of unofficial mullahs and sheikhs soared.[26] While such stories are important because they show that Islam continued to be a force to reckon with for the Soviet authorities in the 1970s and 1980s, they tend to ignore the ideological shifts that took place, influenced by trends within and outside of the Soviet Union.

New approaches to Islam appeared especially among young, educated Muslims. In the 1970s and 1980s, many of them embraced pre-revolutionary ideas about the unity of Muslim peoples. A major initiative in the spirit of internationalism was the creation, in 1973–1974, of an unofficial organisation uniting foreign Muslim students and Soviet students from Muslim ethnic groups across the USSR. In Moscow, they met weekly in small groups at the Moscow Cathedral Mosque to study Islamic texts, and in other larger cities across the country, these gatherings took place at the homes of members.[27] Some of the organisation's alumni subsequently founded the organisation *Saf Islam* (*Pure Islam*) in 1981, possibly the most prominent unofficial union-wide Muslim youth organisation in the USSR.[28] Muslim enlightenment (*prosveshchenie*) and revival of Islamic traditions were their central concerns, and the members of the organisation were unsatisfied with the leadership of the official Islamic administration in the country, because it served the atheist Soviet regime.[29] *Saf Islam* reprinted pre-revolutionary Tatar Islamic literature in samizdat and established networks of unofficial Islamic schools in Central Asia and the Caucasus, and during holidays, they organised gatherings for Muslim youth from all regions of the USSR. Their international student network helped bring Islamic literature and contemporary publications in Arabic into the USSR and made works by Islamic scholars from the USSR known to audiences abroad.[30]

Spiritual journeys in focus: three perspectives

The following sections highlight the journeys of three converts in the 1970s and 1980s, with a glimpse into the 1990s. Whether they embraced Islam in the Soviet period or after 1991, these stories demonstrate the importance of the late Soviet decades in their trajectories.

Valeriia Porokhova

Valeriia Mikhailovna Porokhova was born in 1940 in the town of Ukhta in the RSFSR, in a family of hereditary Russian aristocracy. Porokhova's father was executed during the Stalinist terror, and her mother, as the wife of an "enemy of the people", was only able to return to Moscow with her daughter during Khrushchev's "Thaw". She was an educated woman, and Porokhova herself also loved learning and teaching.[31] She had a great talent for languages, and after receiving her degree from the Moscow State Pedagogical Institute for Foreign Languages (MGPIIIa), she taught at the Moscow Institute for Engineering and Physics and studied at the Department of Philosophy of Moscow State University (MGU).[32]

As Porokhova recalled in an interview, she was pretty, slim, with long blond hair in her youth, and she believed at that time that her future was in acting. However, she soon realised that "God had something else in store for her".[33] In 1975, she married a Syrian man, a graduate of the faculty of Shari'a at Damascus University and a student at the Moscow Automechanics Institute. Porokhova grew up in an Orthodox Christian family, and her marriage to a Muslim man did not stop her from pursuing her own religious path. She wanted to be baptised in the Saint Catherine's

cathedral in Leningrad (Saint-Petersburg), following her mother's example, and did so in 1981.[34] As she began to study the Bible more closely, however, she noticed many contradictions, and the first doubts arose within her. Porokhova also became increasingly interested in the Qur'an at that time, and as she later recalled, "I read the Qur'an and at a certain moment I felt an insight that came to me from within. With all my heart I felt that I am a Muslim and that there is not a single word in this book that my heart does not agree with". Together with her husband, she decided to move to Damascus in 1985, where she converted to Islam and adopted the Arabic name Iman.[35]

In Syria, Porokhova became more familiar with Arab culture and read extensively about philosophy, religion, and the history of the Islamic world. Between 1985 and 1991, when Porokhova lived in Damascus, she continuously worked on an exegetical translation of the Qur'an. She explicitly wanted to

> … create a translation of the Qur'an into Russian, not by someone who observes from the sideline, but by someone who truly believes what they preach. Only then is it possible to convey its essence, its meaning, without bias or prejudice.[36]

Porokhova sought to convey both the content and the form of the original Arabic text. She chose to translate in verses because she felt that poetry gives one access to something higher, something divine. She later remembered how she felt that she was not the one who wrote the verses, but that they wrote themselves, and she realised that "the translation was sent to her from above".[37] It is thus clear that Porokhova strongly believed that although knowledge was very important, a true understanding of Islam was not only an intellectual, but also an emotional and bodily experience.

Porokhova's Qur'anic translation received an overwhelmingly positive reception. Already in 1989, Islamic studies scholars Said Kiamilev and Aleksei Malashenko wrote a review of the first verses that had been published, and they praised the author for undertaking such a challenging task, and for her knowledge of the Islamic world and the Qur'an itself. They commended the boldness of her translation, which they ascribed to the fact that "Valeriia Porokhova is a philologist by training, and in her style one can recognise the traditions of her noble heritage, where women of all generations were highly educated and wrote poetry themselves".[38] The reviewers believed that the translation would be pleasant to read for experts of Arab culture as well as for those who were interested in Eastern spirituality or who appreciated poetry.[39] Indeed, the widely respected Al-Azhar University in Cairo approved Porokhova's translation as canonical in 1991, and it has become one of the most widely used Qur'an translations in Russia.[40]

It is therefore not surprising that a work of this quality, written in Russian in a language that was accessible and that spoke to the mind and the soul, became a profoundly important introduction to Islam for many converts across the post-Soviet space.[41] She became an active member of numerous academic and other national and international organisations, and her work received several prizes over the

course of the 1990s. She received an award "For spiritual unity" from the Muslim Spiritual Administration of the European part of Russia in 1998, and an award for her "Service to the Fatherland" from the Russian Academy of Sciences in 2002.[42] Until the very end of her life, Porokhova remained committed to interreligious and intrareligious dialogue, and to making Islam and the Qur'an understandable and accessible to anyone who wanted to learn about it. She passed away in September 2019, at age 79.

It is important to note that the accounts of Porokhova's journey and work (including her own) were clearly gendered. Whereas sources regarding the male protagonists in this chapter focused primarily on their work and ideas, in Porokhova's case, they involved numerous references to her marriage and family and implied that her conversion to Islam was informed exclusively by her marriage to a Muslim man.[43] This is a common assumption specifically for female Muslim converts, and one which downplays their own active spiritual search and personal accomplishments. Porokhova's husband's role even appeared in accounts of her work on the translation of the Qur'an, for example, in an interview that mentioned that she had done her work "under careful supervision of her husband and the indisputable authority of Islamic theology doctor Zuhaili, the author of a 16-volume Quranic exegesis".[44] Another interview, while acknowledging and foregrounding Porokhova's accomplishments, still foregrounded her hospitality as a hostess, and her good taste in the decoration of her home.[45] Numerous interviews and articles also centred on Porokhova's views about the rights of women in Islam.[46]

Despite these gendered particularities, however, Porokhova's work and journey had an immeasurable impact on Russia's Muslim community and inspired numerous Muslims and non-Muslims to learn more about Islam and the Islamic world. Although Porokhova was a convert and learned about Islam only later in her life, her widely respected Qur'anic translation and first-hand experience of the Middle East in the late Soviet period gave her a great deal of authority as a Muslim and as a woman. Her positionality and life story gave her a unique vantage point and made her work appealing to a broad interethnic, interreligious, and interdisciplinary audience.

Viacheslav Polosin

Viacheslav Polosin was born in 1956 in Moscow. Already as a young boy, he was quite interested in learning and was a truth seeker. In a widely known piece entitled "Why did I become a Muslim?", which he wrote for the journal *Indeks* in 2000, Polosin looked back on his long personal and spiritual journey.[47] He grew up in a non-religious family, but already in his childhood, Polosin believed in the existence of a God, whom he could turn to and who guided him in difficult times. In order to "find out the truth", he became a student at the department of Philosophy of Moscow State University. He disliked the Soviet authorities and system, and this was mutual. Therefore, Polosin finished his degree with difficulty and became another member of the "generation of street cleaners and janitors", as Boris Grebenshchikov[48] famously coined it.

Polosin recalled that his decision to pursue Orthodox Christianity as an adolescent in the 1970s should be seen as "a strong rejection of the lies of [Marxist-Leninist] materialism and a choice for the church whose doors were open", rather than a conscious choice of this specific religion.[49] His applications to the Orthodox spiritual seminary were rejected twice, forcing him to earn some money by translating religious literature from German. Only at the third attempt, was he admitted to the seminary, and he was ordained priest in 1983. Unable to obtain a license to serve as a priest in Moscow, Polosin found a position at a church in Dushanbe (Tajik SSR), where the authorities used to send "unreliable" individuals. Although being part of the Orthodox Church had appealed to him as a way to counteract Soviet atheism, Polosin soon started doubting the church's practices. It disappointed him that his main activities were not intellectual and spiritual but rather centred on the performance of all sorts of rituals requested by (what he considered) "superstitious people". These rituals, which in Polosin's opinion strongly resembled pagan practices, had become central to the church's practices and "created within [him] a profound sense of ambivalence between [his] personal faith and [his] public role".[50]

Polosin's encounter with the elderly Tajik sheikh mentioned in the opening quote of this chapter, who told him that he had "Muslim eyes" and predicted that he would become a Muslim, touched Polosin deeply. He did not pursue this path further at the time, as he did not know much about Islam yet, but it was an important moment for him. Moreover, his internal doubts about Orthodox Christianity persisted. His license to serve in the church was revoked in 1985 because of alleged disobedience to the authorities, and Polosin was forced to earn his living once more as a translator for several years. Only in 1988 did the Gorbachev regime "amnesty" disgraced priests, and Polosin started working in the city of Obninsk, in the Kaluga region. He became an increasingly influential public figure, as he was elected a member of the Congress of People's Deputies of the RSFSR for the Kaluga region in 1990, and in 1991, he became the chairman of the RSFSR's Supreme Soviet Commission for Religion, for which he helped draft the text for the new Russian laws on freedom of religion.[51] Although official state atheism was relegated to the past with the collapse of the USSR, Polosin sensed that the Church was still primarily concerned with the restauration and reopening of church buildings and the performance of rituals for money, rather than with "enlightenment" and struggles against "superstition". With time, Polosin increasingly felt like a "sorcerer" and a political lobbyist for the Church and less like a priest. For this reason, he decided to resign from his church duties in 1991.[52]

After these events, Polosin realised that he needed a break to understand himself and his worldviews better. He obtained a PhD degree (*kandidat nauk*) on church-state relations in the USSR and extensively studied ancient Christian texts and Christian theology. Polosin realised that there was no divine revelation in Christianity, and he rejected the practice of saint veneration and the role of priests as mediators between God and the people. Meanwhile, he also began to study the Qur'an – in the translation by Valeriia Porokhova – and eventually concluded that the next and last true prophet after Jesus Christ was Muhammad. Polosin was impressed by the Qur'an's poetic style, the depth of its content, its predictions of the future, and

the scientific precision of its insights.[53] He received the degree of *doktor nauk* in Philosophy of Religion in 1999, and as he had become further immersed in Christian and Islamic theology for both his academic research and personal spiritual search, he felt increasingly drawn to Islam. He particularly appreciated that Islam merged the human and the divine in harmonious unity, and that it considered freedom, equity, and community not only as personal virtues but also as norms for Muslims' conduct in every sphere of life. Eventually, Polosin and his wife officially announced their conversion to Islam in May 1999, and he adopted the Muslim name Ali.[54]

In a later interview, Polosin emphasised that most converts, including himself, do not actually convert from one religion to another. He stressed:

> … already years before I became a Muslim, I became disappointed with Christianity, and especially with the rituals I had to perform as a priest. If I had continued performing these rituals, while not believing in them, it would have been hypocritical and deceitful …. Disappointed, I began to search for a new form, a new path towards the Truth. I did not stop believing in God, but did lose faith in rituals …. The only earthly expression of the right path I found in Islam. But this was not a conversion, like a switch from one party to another. This was a journey in which I obtained a completely different version of God's religion.[55]

Polosin's point demonstrated the profound importance of all the different elements of his long journey and search for truth and meaning, and the crucial role of his experiences with Christianity in his later turn towards Islam.

Sergei Moskalev

Sergei Moskalev was born in 1958 and grew up in Moscow. After losing his mother at a young age, he lived with his father and brother on Arbat street. His spiritual journey began when he was still a boy, and the many ideas and individuals he has encountered since then all helped shape his intellectual and spiritual trajectories and made him the influential mystic and Sufi that he is today.

At age 12, Moskalev had his first encounter with mysticism, and in particular with yoga. This was in 1970, when the documentary film "Indiiskie iogi. Kto oni?" ("Indian yogis – who are they?") played in the movie theatre *Khudozhestvennyi* in the centre of Moscow, and as Moskalev later recalled, it was this film that introduced many people in the Soviet Union to the phenomenon of yoga.[56] The political relationship between India and the Soviet Union was good at the time, and sometimes such official atheist Soviet journals as *Nauka i religiia* and *Sel'skaia molodezh'* even published asanas (body postures) in that period.[57] When Moskalev found a book with asanas in a local Moscow bookstore at age 13, he learned and actively practiced many of them, and this was the beginning his life-long devotion to yoga.[58] Moskalev's interest in spirituality and mysticism was further spurred at age 15, when his friends gifted him a number of books, which he studied extensively. Among them were the book *Okkul'tizm: pervonachal'nye svedeniia* (*Elementary*

Treatise of Occult Science) by the French esotericist Papus, and the book *Dzen*, which he learned was the famous treatise of Kashmir Shaivism.[59]

Moskalev's love for reading and critical, non-mainstream views led him to skip school on a regular basis and eventually to be expelled from his secondary school. He decided to go to the Moscow book traders' school instead, to pursue his love for books. In a later account, Moskalev emphasised that it was important to remember that because of the severe shortage of information at the time, people continuously had a "healthy thirst for knowledge" and read whatever they could get their hands on. In a time and place where information was scarce, the books one read, however few, could therefore significantly shape an individual's worldview and experience. In Moskalev's view, "books were everything at the time: people in the Soviet Union hunted after collected works, and if you had connections with the distribution of books, you were in the epicentre of cultural life".[60]

Moskalev learned more about mysticism as a "way of life" when he was 16. At that time, he was a hippie. He met a group of young people who worked as janitors outside the Epiphany Cathedral at Elokhovo, who were followers of the Hindu yoga teacher Paramahansa Yogananda, and serious practitioners of yoga, meditation, and breathing techniques.[61] Moskalev joined their group, and when one of his new friends told him that he was a vegetarian, Moskalev followed his example, amazed by his friend's physical health and strength. He has been a vegetarian ever since.[62] This illustrates once more the major role that such individual encounters played in the development of his ideas and worldviews.

A few years later, at age 18, Moskalev sought to develop himself further by sharing his interest in mysticism with like-minded individuals on a more intellectual level. He joined the underground mystical group "Kontekst". During the Soviet period, the group's participants created illegal translations of esoteric and psychological literature. At the group's gatherings, Moskalev became acquainted with other influential intellectuals such as Vitalii Mikheikin and Valentin Kuklev. Moskalev argued that

> … this was an elite club, an outlet for Moscow artists and intellectuals …. For creative people it was difficult to live within the rigid frameworks of that time …. We gathered with 12–15 people in Vitalii Mikheikin's home and discussed who reads what, who listens to which classical music, how each of us defined a particular term …. The discussions were amazingly interesting, inspiring – the participants were very intelligent people, with PhDs.[63]

In Kontekst, the young Moskalev thus explored mysticism and esotericism on an intellectual level and enjoyed exchanging ideas and literature with the members of his seminar. His fond memories of the group meetings also demonstrate the importance of the space and intimacy of these meetings on his experience and growth, and the emotional dimensions of exploring mysticism and esotericism.

In the 1970s, when interest in a wide range of spiritual practices became increasingly widespread in the Soviet Union, Moskalev also embraced Sufism. The book *Sufiiskoe poslanie o svobode dukha* (*A Sufi Message of Spiritual Liberty*),

published in 1914 by the well-known Indian musician and mystic Khazrat Inaiiat-Khan (1882–1927),[64] laid out the foundations of Indian Sufism. When this book began to circulate again in the USSR in the 1970s, Moskalev and many others became acquainted with it.[65] Inspired by this book, Moskalev embraced the Indian Chishti branch of Sufism, to which Inaiiat Khan belonged. It was born out of the South Asian Mughal Emperor Akbar the Great's desire to create a religion that would unite all the citizens of the multireligious empire, combining elements of Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. Mystical practices were crucial in creating harmony among all these traditions; for instance, Sufis adopted yoga practices, and Hindus borrowed elements of zikr and various elements of Sufi philosophy. This mutual borrowing made the boundaries between these religious cultures less rigid.[66] In the 1970s and 1980s, inspired by what he had read and by the "scents of the East",[67] Moskalev also travelled to Central Asia to learn more about Sufism. When he first visited the region, he realised that he had been quite naïve and that his understanding of Sufism and Islam were out of touch with the complexities on the ground. Only after travelling and interacting with Sufis more extensively did he gain a better understanding of what it actually meant to practise Sufism.[68]

Moskalev's approaches to Sufism also fit quite well with the spirit of ecumenism, interreligious dialogue, and the desire to combine various traditions, which were widespread among young people in the late Soviet period. Therefore, although Moskalev acknowledged that Sufism's ancient mystical-philosophical traditions evolved in close connection with Islam, he saw Sufism mainly as a form of mysticism, which borrowed from a variety of religious and spiritual traditions – one that was a way of life, more comprehensive and organic than organised religion; one based on values rather than on a religious system with strict rules.[69] Moskalev believed that independent thinkers were more likely to find satisfaction in Sufism than in organised religions: he emphasised that with

> … the explosion of available information and the spread of available printed materials, an informational space developed in which people are no longer satisfied with simple truths …. Sufism is not a dogmatic teaching in this regard; it is rather a way of knowing, a form of philosophy, love for wisdom …. Sufism attracts people who strive towards wisdom and understanding, but this has never been a mass phenomenon, neither in history, nor today.[70]

Although Moskalev did not subscribe to Islam as an organised religious system, the way it has been practiced most commonly across the (post-)Soviet space, he did consider Sufism a part of the larger Islamic tradition. And although official Islamic structures have often viewed Sufism as heresy throughout history, Moskalev argued that "the most important, bright, and impactful aspects of the spiritual life and culture of the Muslim East were connected to Sufism".[71] Sufism, then, is a tradition that challenges the boundaries of what does and what does not qualify as Islam. Its flexibility, non-dogmatic nature, and emphasis on the unity of being matched closely with Moskalev's deeply personal search for truth, his desire to connect mind and body, and his strong commitment to ecumenism.

Conclusion

This chapter sought to demonstrate the importance of the late Soviet spiritual journeys of three Russian intellectuals who all, in different ways, encountered and embraced Islam. Their life histories, which display differences as well as striking similarities, illustrate the diversity and fluidity of late Soviet spirituality and religious seeking. Their stories show the importance of contingency – the various places, people, and literature they encountered in their lives – in shaping their individual ideas in different directions, yet the similarities between their journeys illustrate that they were also in many ways a product of their time and location in late Soviet Moscow. They also demonstrate the critical role that the late Soviet intelligentsia played in the resurgence – and reshaping – of religion and spirituality in the 1970s and 1980s. This challenges both the claim in Soviet propaganda that religion was only an interest of old and uneducated people during that period, and the widely held notion that this surge in spirituality and religiosity started only after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. All three protagonists – Porokhova, Polosin, and Moskalev – would become central figures in the "boom" of interest in Islam and Sufism within the early post-Soviet Russian intelligentsia, but it is impossible to fully appreciate their stories and impact without a careful consideration of their formative years in the 1970s and 1980s.

Notes

1 Ali Viacheslav Polosin, *Priamoi put' k Bogu* (Moscow: Ladomir, 2000), 8.
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3 Polosin and his then-wife first publicly announced their conversion to Islam in an interview in the journal *Musul'mane* (no 3.) in 1999.
4 Juliane Fürst, "If You're Going to Moscow, Be Sure to Wear Some Flowers in Your Hair (and Bring a Bottle of Port Wine in Your Pocket): The Soviet Hippie 'Sistema' and Its Life in, Despite, and with 'Stagnation'," in *Reconsidering Stagnation in the Brezhnev Era: Ideology and Exchange*, eds. Dina Fainberg and Artemy Kalinovsky (London: Lexington Books, 2016), 123.
5 Juliette Galonnier, "Moving In or Moving Toward? Reconceptualizing Conversion to Islam as a Liminal Process," in *Moving In and Out of Islam*, ed. Karin van Nieuwkerk (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018), 63–64.
6 Mathijs Pelkmans, "Introduction," in *Conversion after Socialism: Disruptions, Modernisms and Technologies of Faith in the Former Soviet Union*, ed. Mathijs Pelkmans (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), 12.
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16 Martin, "'My perepechatyvali vse…'," p. 94; Fürst, "If You're Going to Moscow," 126–127.
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19 Fürst, "If You're Going to Moscow," 136.
20 Juliane Fürst, *Flowers through Concrete. Explorations in Soviet Hippieland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 171.
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22 Fürst, *Flowers Through Concrete,* 276.
23 Geidar Dzhemal', *Revoliutsiia prorokov* (Ekaterinburg: U-Faktoriia, 2003).
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58 Blagova and Fedorova, "Sovetskie mistiki."
59 Blagova and Fedorova, "Sovetskie mistiki."
60 Blagova and Fedorova, "Sovetskie mistiki."
61 Over the course of the 1970s, more countercultural youths were able to leave their regular jobs and take on odd irregular jobs such as janitorial work to accommodate their spiritual practice. Moskalev also did this.
62 Blagova and Fedorova, "Sovetskie mistiki."
63 Blagova and Fedorova, "Sovetskie mistiki."
64 In the 1990s, when it was possible to go abroad, people were able to renew the contact with the followers of Inaiiat-Khan in the West and in India, including with his son who lived in France and the Netherlands. His followers also visited Russia. In 1991, the book was republished with quite a large circulation, 50,000 copies, providing more people access to the teachings of Sufism.

65 Valerii Emel'ianov, "Interv'iu: redactor knig Khazrata Inaiiat-Khana Sergei Moskalev rasskazyvaet ob universal'nom sufizme, filosofii i iskusstve Inaiiat-Khana i ikh sviazi s Rossiiei," 2 February 2012, https://www.portal-credo.ru/site/?act=news&id=89591 (last accessed 20 March 2022).
66 Emel'ianov, "Interv'iu."
67 Sergei Moskalev, "Voskuraniia dervishei," *Nauka i Religiia* 37, no. 11 (1995): 42–43.
68 Sergei Moskalev, Interview by author, Zoom, 29 June 2021.
69 Sergei Moskalev, "Znat', videt', byt', ili chto takoe sufizm?" *Nauka i Religiia* 36, no. 10 (1994): 30.
70 Emel'ianov, "Interv'iu."
71 Moskalev, "Znat', videt', byt'," 30.

13 The Entry of Indian Spiritual Movements into the Cultural Space of Soviet Latvia in the 1970s–1980s[1]

Solveiga Krumina-Konkova

Introduction

Religious life in Latvia is unique in its diversity, and this equally applies to the 20th century. The 1935 census showed that about 55 per cent of all residents of Latvia regarded themselves as Lutherans, 25 per cent as Roman Catholics, about 9 per cent as Russian Orthodox, a little more than 5 per cent as Old Believers, and almost 5 per cent as Jewish. Several minor Protestant denominations (Adventists and Pentecostals), the re-constituted pre-Christian religion *Dievturi*, and the Muslims were also active.[2] Since the 1920s, spiritual movements related to India have also been operating in Latvia, such as the yoga movement, Buddhism, the Roerich Society, and others. However, almost all religions and spiritual movements lost their leaders and significant numbers of their adherents due to the persecutions of the Soviet regime after the occupation of Latvia and other Baltic states in 1940 and during World War II. The persecution continued after the war; only its methods changed: arrests and detentions in the Gulag were replaced by psychological manipulation and active anti-religious propaganda campaigns. Despite the policy of the Soviet authorities to restrict the activities of religious organisations, however, Latvia remained an important religious and spiritual centre in the 1960s–1980s.

In the early 1960s, the Soviet regime began to reorient its religious policy from the battle against religion to the struggle for Soviet spiritual life. According to Victoria Smolkin,

> …the ideological establishment no longer saw religion as a problem primarily because it was a political enemy or even alien ideology. Instead, religion was now understood above all as a spiritual problem. The ideological establishment began to focus on the spiritual development of Soviet society and saw the production of the "socialist way of life" (*sotsialisticheskii obraz zhizni*) as the final battleground for the Soviet soul – because it assumed that the political and ideological battles had already been won.[3]

One of the turning points in the development of the Soviet model of atheistic "spirituality" (*sovetskaia dukhovnost*) is considered to be the debate on the change

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of mission, content, and audience of the magazine *Nauka i religiia* [Science and Religion] in August 1964 in Moscow,[4] which also echoed in the Soviet republics. The "spiritual interests", "spiritual development and advancement", satisfaction of the "spiritual needs" of the Soviet people, and other similar phrases were increasingly mentioned in the central press of Soviet Latvia. Thus, the newspaper *Cīņa* [Faith] of the Central Committee of the Latvian Communist Party called for more attention to the spiritual growth of the Soviet people. It emphasised that "the breadth of the human spiritual horizon cannot be expressed in kilometres and warmth of heart – in calories …".[5] The Soviet regime began to set its values, rules of behaviour, and new rites, which were meant to encompass all the life cycles of the Soviet person, from birth to death. Of course, this system of values and rituals did not develop in a vacuum. It was called upon to replace previous religious and spiritual traditions. However, as historian Daina Bleiere noted, these new traditions "were unable to displace non-communist traditions and customs, as they were officious, boring and oversaturated by ideology, despite attempts to make them more attractive by integrating national cultural elements".[6] Moreover, this process went both ways. Previous religious and spiritual experiences also actively influenced the new Soviet life.

Those Latvian people who had living memories of life before World War II or generations who grew up after the war tried to maintain in different ways the bond with the religious and cultural traditions of the pre-war independent Republic of Latvia. Especially in the 1960s, when the Iron Curtain prevented open contact with the West, references to the lost state and its European culture were significant. The memories of the losses helped to withstand the pressure of sovietisation. In this respect, most of the Latvian population did not differ much from the Russian people described by Orlando Figes in his famous work *The Whisperers*.[7] As the memories of those who experienced the Soviet era show, they could formally follow Soviet ideological norms and rituals, even accept them as "normal", and expertly perform the language of Soviet ideology in public. However, participation in Soviet official rituals did not prevent them from leading a "parallel life". Their private life was governed by its own rules, often immersed in the memories of the pre-Soviet period and continuing the religious traditions of that time. Similarly, German researcher Günter Gaus described the former GDR as a "niche society",[8] where a separate culture developed in the privacy of people's homes. In this privacy, they were away from the pressure of conformity and could express their opinions more openly among the people they trusted.

It is worth mentioning that the metaphor of "parallel life" constantly appears in testimonies of witnesses in Latvia, who express their belief that Soviet life was not their "real life". However, here we can agree with British social anthropologist Anselma Gallinat that such metaphors "expresses a crucial point: official ideology and grassroots practices were not separated from each other. They rather seemed to exist next to one another, at times overlapping and at times diverging, but reinforcing each other's validity".[9] In this respect, the entry of Indian spiritual movements into the cultural space of Latvia is a perfect example of how the interest in

the culture of India allowed by the Soviet regime promoted surprisingly free and widespread individual spiritual quests.

Along with believers of the largest Christian churches, the adepts of several Eastern spiritual movements also continued their practice, thus maintaining the bond with the tradition of the 1920s–1930s. In the 1970s, interest in Eastern spirituality was also fuelled by ideas that gained unprecedented popularity in the West in the hippie movement and its subculture. In the late 1960s and 1970s, some new organisations, such as the Sai Baba Society and the International Krishna Consciousness Society, became known in the cultural space of Soviet Latvia.

This chapter focuses on three cases from the history of Indian spiritual movements in Soviet Latvia: the renewal of the yoga movement, the development of the first Sai Baba's group, and the Krishna consciousness movement. We will aim to find out how these movements entered Latvia and adapted to the local context. How did the supporters of these movements cope with the demands of the Soviet regime? How did they try to circumvent official restrictions? We will also try to substantiate with some examples the hypothesis that the active spiritual quests in the "parallel life" of the adepts of these movements also influenced the value system created by the Soviet regime.

The beginning of interest in Indian spirituality

A brief overview of the history of Indian spirituality in Latvia could be helpful to contextualise our topic. India occupied an important place in the history of Latvian culture already in the 19th century. Thus, the famous folklorist Krišjānis Barons wrote about the special connection of Latvians with Indian culture. He referred to the well-known thesis connecting Latvian and Lithuanian languages with Sanskrit, the ancient Indian language.[10] Latvian periodicals published extensive and informative articles on Indian culture and many texts of Indian tales, legends, and aphorisms. Indian philosophy, yoga, Buddhism, and the fashionable ideas of Russian theosophists Helena Blavatsky and Nicholas Roerich were discussed in living rooms in Riga. One of the most popular was the salon of Anna Rūmane-Ķeniņa, a celebrity, writer, and teacher. From 1906 to 1910, her husband Atis Ķeniņš, together with Augusts Saulietis, a teacher and writer, and the painter Janis Rozentāls published the journal *Zalktis* [Grass Snake], dedicated to art and literary criticism. An art salon began to form around the journal's editorial team during this period, bringing together many artists and writers. In 1920, Rūmane-Ķeniņa became acquainted with Jiddu Krishnamurti in Switzerland. This meeting sparked her interest in India, and the salon became a venue for an active exchange of views on theosophy and, through it, on Indian culture.

At the beginning of the 20th century, publications began to pay more and more attention to India's social and political problems. Readers were also informed about anti-British actions, which resonated with the revolutions in Tsarist Russia and Latvia. One of the most active inspirers of anti-British activities was the Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore, whom Latvian readers knew mainly as a poet of nature and

love. According to the Indologist Viktors Ivbulis, publications about India from the 1920s and 1930s can be divided into three groups: texts on India's socio-political and cultural life, Tagore's works and reflections on his life and work, and the numerous letters of missionary Anna Irbe.[11] The latter worked in India from 1925 to 1951 as a representative of the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church. She travelled extensively around the country and described her impressions in letters published from 1925 to 1927. One should also add to this categorisation translations from the works of Indian spiritual teachers produced by various spiritual groups of the time, such as the Latvian Yoga Society, which was active from 1928 until the end of 1940.

The Latvian Yoga Society had contacts with the Shri Yogendra's Yoga Science Institute, which studied the medical aspects of Hatha yoga, as well as with the spiritual teacher yogi Swami Sivananda Saraswati and his "Divine Life Society". Riga was the first place in Europe where a branch of Sivananda's Society was established. Among spiritual teachers of the Latvian yogis were Swami Yogananda, who introduced meditation and Kriya yoga to the Western world, and the Vedanta teacher Shri Ramana Maharshi, who revealed to the Westerners the secrets of self-knowledge.[12] Indian Vedic culture was also known thanks to the activities of the Roerich Society, the Latvian Society of Spiritual Sciences, the Society of Cosmosophy, and other organisations with an anthroposophical orientation, which were popular among educated Latvians in the interwar period.

In 1940, the Soviet regime closed all these societies, and the persecution of the most active members began. Repression also continued after World War II, when several members of pre-war spiritual organisations were arrested and convicted of anti-Soviet propaganda or included in the 1947 and 1949 deportation lists. Even when the Soviet regime softened its attitude towards some Indian spiritual movements, fear of persecution deterred surviving members from resuming open activity, and they continued their spiritual practices underground.

Interest in Indian society and culture, especially in Tagore, continued under Soviet rule. For example, Tagore's novel *Ghare Baire*, translated into Latvian under the title *Catastrophe*, was republished several times. Tagore's views on socio-political problems in India were acceptable to the Soviet regime, and his works were allowed to be published and read. In 1961, Tagore's 100th birthday was widely celebrated throughout the Soviet Union, including in Latvia. Therefore, Tagore's status as a "politically correct writer" provided Latvians with an opportunity to read his spiritual poetry, published already in interwar Latvia and available in some public libraries during the Soviet era.

The influence of Indian culture increased significantly when cooperation between the USSR and India expanded at the official level in the 1950s, especially after India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's (1889–1964) visit to the USSR in 1955.

The bilateral relations between the Soviet Union and the Republic of India strengthened even more after the visit of Nikita Khrushchev, the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, to India, Indonesia, Burma, and Afghanistan in

February 1960. In a speech in the Indian Parliament on February 11, Nikita Khrushchev emphasised that "we already see the coming of a time in the near historical perspective when Asian countries, which were oppressed colonies until yesterday, will rank among the most developed countries in the world in terms of the level of their national economic and cultural development". Khrushchev repeated the same idea at the press conference in Jakarta on February 29: "We wholeheartedly want to help the economically underdeveloped countries to eliminate the heavy legacy of colonialism and create prerequisites for rapid economic and cultural growth".[13] India's people's struggle against colonialism became one of the dominant topics in the Latvian press at the beginning of the 1960s and also determined the particular importance that was given to it in promoting the cultural relations of the Latvian SSR with the Republic of India. One example of how this topic was developed in Latvian culture was the mentioned translation of Tagore's novel in Latvian and the popularisation of his works in general. However, the development of relations with India in Latvia was also determined by another, much more significant motivator: interest in the common and already familiar – Arian past, which had been formed in a large part of Latvian society since the 19th century.

Various organisations contributed to the making connections with India, most prominently the "Friends of India" section of the Latvian Society for Foreign Friendship and Cultural Relations, led by Latvian National Poet Mirdza Ķempe (1907–1974).

Ķempe participated in hosting Indian delegations in Latvia. Thus, she repeatedly hosted Suniti Kumar Chatterji (1890–1977), a well-known Bengali linguist and literary scholar, and helped him with Latvian history and language materials for his book *Balts and Aryans in Their Indo-European Background*, published in 1968. Chatterji visited Latvia for the first time in 1964 and showed a deep interest in Latvians' cultural and linguistic history. In 1966, Chatterji paid one more visit to Latvia and his friends to conduct a comparative study of the Latvian language and culture with the Vedic culture[14]. This purpose also promoted a similar interest in Latvian society, as several leading Latvian press publications wrote extensively about his visit.

In later correspondence with Mirdza Ķempe, Chatterji mentioned that he was greatly impressed by the intelligence of two young associates of the Language Institute, who recorded his readings in Sanskrit and other languages on a tape recorder. "One of them, who also teaches a preliminary course of Sanskrit at the university, was very interested in the Sanskrit language and Indian culture, and the other associate seemed very knowledgeable about linguistic problems and Indian life".[15] This mention accurately describes the persistent interest in the ancient culture of India, which continued in the environment of all generations of Latvian humanitarian scientists and writers even during the Soviet period.

With Chatterji's support, Ķempe was awarded an honorary doctorate in literature from Visva Bharati University, founded by Rabindranath Tagore. In a letter of condolences in connection with the Ķempe's passing, Suniti Kumar Chatterji wrote: "I think I had the great fortune to meet and get to know her. She was like a sister to me, and I was greatly impressed by her first poem about India, which I read, namely, 'The Ashes of Jawaharlal Nehru'".[16]

Ķempe wrote this poem when the ashes of Nehru were scattered over India. Ķempe's admiration for Nehru's ability to synthesise all the best that East and West could give, his political tolerance, foresight, perseverance, and courage were expressed in this poem very impressively. At the initiative of the Ambassador of the Republic of India in the USSR, it was published by all Indian newspapers issued in English and was also later translated and published in the major Indian languages.

A few years later, in September 1967, Ķempe met Nehru's daughter Indira Gandhi, then Prime Minister of India. Their acquaintance resulted in years of correspondence. Indira Gandhi wrote to Ķempe that "the sincere and good will and understanding of friends like you is the proper measure of lasting friendship between our two countries".[17]

Contemporaries remember Ķempe as an extravagant personality. On the one hand, she was a Soviet poetess with a high social status. On the other hand, she was engaged in activities that did not conform to Soviet ideology. She kept in touch with the Catholic Church, was interested in Indian spiritual movements, and held seances of spiritism. Her interest in Indian spiritual exercises dated to the 1930s, when she became involved in the activities of the Latvian Yoga Society. It is known from eyewitness testimonies that Ķempe had something like a home altar with the photo of the Indian spiritual teacher and yogi Swami Vivekananda in the centre.[18] Moreover, she thought that Vivekananda's idea of human divinity was beautiful. Legends of her telepathic contact with Sathya Sai Baba have also survived.

The group of Sathya Sai Baba followers

Mirdza Ķempe received literature published in India, including spiritual texts, through the Embassy of India in Moscow. As a Writers' Union consultant, she occasionally gathered a circle of young people who would later become poets and lectured them about Tagore, Chatterji's research on similarities between Aryans and Balts, and gave them books from her library to read. Thus, from the end of the 1960s, the brochures of the Sathya Sai Baba movement began to circulate among so-called Ķempe's children – the young poets she consulted. These brochures were then reproduced on typewriters and distributed to trusted people. They were discussed in small home groups and became sources of inspiration.

Along with Ķempe, the Sathya Sai Baba's group also included architect Maija Grotuse, Alise Eka, a writer who was the author of unusual philosophical fairy tales, and poet Mirdza Bendrupe, an active member of the pre-war Latvian Yoga Society. Bendrupe's passion for Indian philosophical teachings was evident in her fairy tale book *Visskaistākais dārzs* [The Most Beautiful Garden] and her meditative poetry. Her intensive spiritual search resulted in the Latvian translation of Bhagavad Gita, fragments of which were published in 1994, already after her death.[19] For Bendrupe, work on Bhagavad Gita's translation was a special devotional service and only her close circle knew about it. However, this did not mean that the translation of ancient Indian texts was banned in Soviet Latvia. On the contrary, the Soviet authorities were keen to show that India's cultural heritage was

well known in the Soviet Union and made more accessible to the Soviet people. Thus, in 1985, the newspaper for compatriots abroad *Dzimtenes Balss* [Voice of the Motherland] published news about the translation of Bhagavad Gita by the doctor of philology Valdis Bisenieks.[20]

According to some unverified stories, Imants Ziedonis, one of the most popular Latvian poets at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, was also influenced by the spiritual texts of Sathya Sai Baba and other Indian gurus. In 1977, the Soviet government awarded Ziedonis the title of National Poet of Soviet Latvia. In the same year, his *Poēma par pienu* [A Poem about Milk] was published. Viktors Ivbulis emphasises that this philosophical poem was truly Indian, with the metaphors of the cow and milk referring to the relationship between mother and infant. In his view, Ziedonis' reference to the mother is connected to the ancient Indian goddess Devi and points to two aspects of Devi – Jaganmata (mother of the Universe) and Shakti (female cosmic energy). He recalls that during the Swadeshi unrest in 1904–1908, Shakti became the embodiment of the homeland.[21]

There was no public talk about the Indian motives of Ziedonis' poem in Latvia. At the same time, Latvians in exile wrote about them openly. Thus, the journal *Jaunā Gaita* [The New Walk] highlighted that for Ziedonis, milk symbolised the beginning of life, growth, emergence in all times, in all cultures, all over the world. Ziedonis' references to Sanskrit were also mentioned.[22]

However, these references to Indian spiritual texts were so veiled that they did not draw the attention of Soviet censors, and the poem was included into the canon of Soviet Latvian culture and into the high school compulsory literature list without suspicion.

The Sai Baba's students of the 1960s–1980s adopted the model of "a parallel life" – a double life of outward conformity combined with inner freedom. On the one hand, the members of this group adapted and tried to be loyal to the demands of Soviet life and its values. On the other hand, this group offered a space of dialogue between various esoteric and religious traditions. In the atmosphere of those years, the spiritual pursuits of people who belonged to this group included more than just an interest in the Vedic tradition. In their quests, fragmentary and often inaccurate knowledge of the ideas of Indian spiritual teachers coexisted peacefully with theosophical and anthroposophical teachings, texts of Christian mystics, or forbidden modern Western philosophers. Necessary conditions for the existence of such a parallel life were: first, the personalities of spiritual seekers, people for whom inner growth stood at the forefront of their interests in life; second, channels for the transmission of spiritual knowledge: personal meetings, kitchen conversations, and the study of religious literature prohibited in the USSR but often deposited in restricted sections of Soviet libraries. In the case of Latvia, the primary sources of inspiration were various spiritual journals and books published in the 1920s and 1930s.

In some respects, the group's activities were similar to the life in the "parallel polis" described by Czech political thinker Vaclav Benda. Thus, the group created and, with the help of samizdat, disseminated an alternative (underground) culture. However, there is no information that its members actively advocated for civil and political rights or formed any parallel political, economic, or educational structures.

As the interest in India was politically permissible, within certain limits, such spiritual seekers had more room for manoeuvre and the conviction that, in essence, they were not doing anything illegal. As their quests were more oriented towards personal development and not deliberately against Soviet power, the question arises for researchers of whether this underground can be evaluated according to the same criteria as the political underground. Moreover, we have not yet documented any persecutions against Sai Baba's followers or similar groups in Soviet Latvia, although the authorities were probably well informed of their existence. Unfortunately, it is no longer possible to interview the first members of the Sai Baba group and obtain more detailed information about the activities of this group.

The Yoga movement in Soviet Latvia

The second case, examined in more detail, is related to the rapid increase of interest in yoga in Latvia from the 1960s to the 1980s.

As mentioned above, the history of the yoga movement began in interwar Latvia. This tradition was not interrupted because some Latvian Yoga Society activists continued to practise yoga after World War II. There is incomplete and not yet verified information about home groups organised by the Society's old members, which operated underground. In this way, yoga classes and discussions were held, and literature published in the pre-Soviet years circulated. Already in the 1930s, each member was encouraged to reproduce the texts of yoga teachers in at least five copies. This practice developed because of the great interest in these texts and difficulties in translating the required literature into Latvian and printing it in sufficient quantities. Old members of the Latvian Yoga Society and new yoga adepts perpetuated this dissemination scheme during the Soviet years.

In the 1960s, interest in yoga also appeared in public discourse. Thus, articles on the importance of yoga exercises and breathing practices for improving health appeared in major newspapers. Publications in these newspapers were censored and coordinated with the responsible officials from the apparatus of the Central Committee of the Latvian Communist Party. Therefore, the publications show the extent to which an interest in yoga was officially permitted.

It is noteworthy that one of the first who dared to talk about yoga publicly was Imants Ziedonis. In his travel notes about Altai published in 1964, he wrote the following: "For the first time, I feel that breathing is the most beautiful process of life, not just physiological…. Now I know that from every breath I have something left, added up, accumulated".[23]

Although Ziedonis practised yoga breathing exercises mainly because he had tuberculosis in his youth and suffered from its consequences all his life, he was one of the few who tried to show the connection of yoga with cosmic processes.

It can be said that the spiritual aspects of yoga were taboo subjects at that time. There were two ways in which publications in the 1960s and the 1970s mentioned yoga. The first way was through descriptions of yogis' demonstrations in travel notes. The second way was to show the importance of yoga in medicine and the development of the human body's physical capacity.

Yoga became a fashionable word and hobby in a relatively short time. If you read Latvian fiction of the 1970s, you could encounter a comic character practising yoga. One of these stories described this character in the following way:

> Zelma was able to talk about the latest pop music and the use of lasers in medicine, Native American culinary and perspectives on energetics. She was not confused in art history, was familiar with international film scandals, followed publications on UFOs, had read books on yoga, astrology, hypnosis, palmistry, etc.[24]

We can also read more serious references to yoga in interviews with actors or other well-known public figures of that time.

The popularity of yoga grew even faster after the documentary film "Indian yogis: Who are they?" was shown in Latvia. Soviet cinematographers shot it at yoga centres in India, and Soviet newspapers mentioned that this documentary "will tell Soviet cinema viewers what is truly valuable and useful in the yoga system".[25] In the late 1970s, illustrated magazines featured specialised yoga exercises targeted for different groups, such as women or young mothers. Another direction of specialisation was health problems. As mentioned above, yoga was mostly considered a set of physical exercises and breathing practices. In 1981, the book *Joga mātēm un bērniem* [Yoga for Mothers and Children], translated from German, was published. Its easy-to-understand posture descriptions quickly became a guide for anyone interested in learning Hatha yoga asanas.

In public discourse, the spiritual aspects of yoga were mentioned very rarely and only with a negative connotation. Such was the situation until the end of the 1980s. However, the situation differed significantly in the Latvians' private sphere. Quite a large part of the public began to engage in spiritual yoga practices more deeply, starting at least from the early 1970s. Thus, for example, in public libraries in Latvia, it was relatively easy to find books on the Hatha yoga system published before 1940, which, in addition to the descriptions of asanas, also described the spiritual foundations of yoga. Nevertheless, 1970 marked a turning point, when psychotherapy began to develop rapidly in Latvia, and one of its methods, autogenic training, became more and more popular.

The boom of autogenic training

It should be clarified that the first references to autogenic training or self-hypnosis appeared in the Latvian press in the mid-1960s in several articles on the preparation of athletes for competitions. For example, an article published in the republic's influential sports newspaper in September 1965 described autogenic training as an effective way to help athletes get rid of emotional stress.[26] Many of the first articles on autogenic training were republished from the All-Union press, especially the *Znanie – sila* [Knowledge is Power] journal, but the local authors also had exciting publications. Thus, in 1966, a magazine about health published an article by Māris Budovskis, a psychologist from the Republican Dispensary of Health-Improving

Physical Culture. He described self-training as one of the effective methods of a new speciality, sports psychology, which he saw as necessary to help athletes achieve high results.[27] Interest in autogenic training went beyond sports psychology in the next few years. It was recognised as applicable to pedagogy, acting studies, and many professions associated with emotional overload. According to references in the press, this method of self-hypnosis also gained popularity among physicians, who initially learned it at the Central Institute of Medical Qualifications in Moscow.

The psychotherapists of the Republican Psychoneurological Dispensary were most active in using and popularising autogenic training. Thus, Ārija Brikša, chief physician of the dispensary, was convinced that "using autogenic training results in complete or partial relaxation, a person can prevent vascular spasms, improve blood circulation, can calm himself and fully relax. A patient suffering from neurosis can cure himself".[28]

Interestingly, the articles on autogenic training published in the Soviet period contain almost no indications about its history. Only one article republished from *Znanie – sila* includes a few sentences stating that "autogenic training externally resembles some yoga techniques developed as early as the 14th century" and that "these techniques were recommended by the German psychotherapist J. Schulz half a century ago".[29] The similarity among autogenic training, meditation, and yoga was emphasised more seriously in popularisation lectures and interviews of specialists from the Republican Psychoneurological Dispensary. For example, one of them – Aleksandrs Falkenšteins – even claimed: "Discarding the mystic that is in the teachings of yoga, however, one cannot fail to acknowledge the persistence of one method. One of the most effective yoga methods has now been called 'autogenic training'".[30] Autogenic training, often in combination with hypnosis, has been introduced as a treatment for patients after head injuries and in cases of alcoholism, insomnia, apathy, and nervousness. Referring to the method's success in reducing mental and psychological overload, calls appeared to use autogenic training for all those involved in community service.[31]

Aleksandrs Falkenšteins, Uldis Līdaks, Valdis Vītols, and several other psychotherapists actively promoted the newly discovered method. As with Hatha yoga exercises, journals increasingly published instructions and techniques for daily autogenic training. Mass sessions of autogenic training or mental gymnastics were organised in many places in Latvia. A series of lectures entitled "Learn to control yourself!" were organised in various clubs in Riga and other Latvian cities. Mental gymnastics could also be studied in depth in several groups. Thus, a "Good Mood Club" was established and actively operated at the Culture House of the Republican Trade Union Council of Latvia. Secondary school and university students took courses at the "School of Good Name" under Falkenštein's leadership. As a former auditor of this school remembers, young people got their first ideas about meditation and started practising it during classes at this school.[32] Of course, their understanding of meditation was quite approximate, but it was the first step of a deeper search. Interest in Eastern philosophy also arose in these classes. The next step was to search for the appropriate literature, using all the channels available at the

time. When the first yoga meditation teachers came to Latvia from the West at the end of the 1980s, they met many enthusiasts who had learned meditation through self-study and were now intensely interested in learning the nuances of "authentic" meditation practices. However, this enthusiasm soon waned for many because they were already accustomed to their self-created meditation practices, which seemed more in tune with their inner needs.

There are also cases when meditation techniques were deliberately used for other creative purposes. In 1982, an article about Liepāja Theater's stage director and actor Haralds Ulmanis appeared in the magazine *Liesma* [Flame] intended for youth audiences. The article mentioned that Ulmanis "also sought advice in the wisdom of yoga" and started classes of psychotechnics in the theatre while staging a play.[33] Remembering the events of that time, Ulmanis clarified in an interview that he was interested in Hatha and Raja yoga and knew about Roerich's Agni yoga. He preferred Mikhail Chekhov's directing system, where an important place was given to the ideas of anthroposophy. Based on information from various books of the 1920s–1930s found in libraries and from samizdat publications, he created multiple exercises for actors to train their imagination and "inner gestures".[34] Ulmanis has carefully preserved notes of the texts he read during the Soviet era. His notebooks constitute precious research material to understand how the specific model of spiritual search developed during the Soviet period.

In any case, it demonstrates that many Latvians considered the study of meditation practice and Eastern spiritual texts a "real life", parallel to the "Soviet life" in which they were forced to participate but which they did not accept internally. This "real life" took place in their private sphere and was not public. However, it undoubtedly influenced their attitudes towards the demands of Soviet life in one way or another.

Development of the Krishna consciousness movement

The first groups that later joined the International Krishna Consciousness Society also started with yoga and autogenic training. There are some archival documents about two such groups dated 1980 and 1986.

The first document is a KGB report on the "Krishna consciousness movement" in Riga. The document indicates that the organisational work to develop this movement began in 1979 and contained a list of members of one of the first groups. The group consisted of 11 people, over half of whom were women, of different nationalities, age groups, and professions. Among them were, for example, a student at an art school and a professional artist, a doctor and a medical worker employed in an emergency unit. Four group members aged 30 and 40 did not work anywhere, which was atypical during the Soviet era.[35]

The attitude of the LSSR state security towards the Krishna consciousness movement was markedly negative. The KGB perceived the teaching and practices of this movement as anti-Soviet. According to the conclusions of this document, the movement's adherents disapproved of the domestic and foreign policies of the CPSU and the Soviet government. The document also mentioned that the

movement's doctrine causes "a departure from active life positions" and exercises an "ideologically alien influence", mainly on the intelligentsia.

> Taking advantage of the heightened interest of a certain part of the inhabitants of Riga in ancient oriental philosophy, yoga and parapsychology, the activists of the movement are engaged in active missionary activities among young people.[36]

In 1983, the newspaper *Padomju Jaunatne* [Soviet Youth] published an extensive article about the ongoing trial of a "Krishna consciousness" group in Moscow. The article emphasised the mystical nature of the movement's teaching. Like the document mentioned above, it highlights the formation of a movement in the environment of yoga followers. The article concludes that

> …no one is against gymnastics and therapeutic fasting. It is not harmful to health and sometimes even helps when it takes place under the supervision of doctors. Something quite different begins when elements of mysticism, which herald the departure of a person from real life, are included into healing gymnastics.[37]

The authors of the article concluded that the teaching of the "Krishna consciousness" movement destroyed the psyche and that it was impossible for adepts to return to everyday life without the help of psychiatrists.

However, interest in the movement did not wane even after critical articles. In 1986, supporters of the movement attempted to legalise their activities. The attitude of the official authorities was not favourable, as evidenced by the Conclusion of the Commissioner of the USSR Council for Religious Affairs in the LSSR upon registering the independent religious organisation "Society of Vaishnavas" in Riga. The document briefly describes the group of citizens who want to register Vaishnavas' Society: they practise yoga individually, follow a diet based on the principles of Ayurveda, or have completely switched to a vegetarian lifestyle. Some of them have been recommended autogenic training by doctors. The Commissioner explains that most group members have insufficient knowledge of Vaishnavas' teachings. They

> …do not know the philosophical explanation of mystical rituals, only consider them valid for themselves and therefore use them in regular physical exercises to disconnect from the surrounding reality, plunge into themselves, to give everything up. Most are inactive, people with few contacts.[38]

The document emphasises that eating restrictions and "spiritual exercises" are not linked to specific religious teachings, including Vaishnava teachings, but are seen simply as a healthy lifestyle. However, trying to replace a healthy lifestyle with mystical views is a "socially hostile" position.[39] It should be noted that this assessment contradicted the Statutes of the Society, paragraph 3 of which stated that

the Society undertook to comply with all the laws of the Soviet state, not to evade military service, work, and medical assistance, not to interfere with the education of children at school.[40]

Finally, the Commissioner concluded that the citizens who submitted the documents cannot be considered a religious community and cannot be registered. He emphasised that the group's practices "go beyond the framework of the religious cult activities and the principle of freedom of conscience".[41]

In 1987, Juris Podnieks' documentary "Is it easy to be young?" was shown in cinemas throughout the USSR. One of the heroes of this movie belonged to the "Krishna consciousness" movement. As a result of the movie, many young people started to turn to the movement. New critical articles were written in which young people's passion for mystical rituals was called pathological.[42] However, interest in this movement did not diminish, and the first, albeit unauthorised, street processions practised by the movement's supporters were received with great enthusiasm.

The attitude of the local authorities towards the "Krishna consciousness" movement did not change until 1988 when an instruction came from Moscow to register all existing groups of the movement in Latvia. The only requirement was to prevent this movement from going beyond the private sphere. The Moscow leadership authorised worship services in apartments (but not on the streets and in public places) if they did not disturb public order.[43] Soviet officials would have certainly preferred these people to practise their faith underground.

Some conclusions

Good relations between the Soviet Union and India in the 1960s–1980s allowed for extensive cultural ties, which resulted in the growing interest of Soviet society in Indian spiritual teachings and practices.

During this period, the heritage of several spiritual movements and organisations active in the 1920s and 1930s could still be felt in Latvia. Interest in Eastern spirituality was also fuelled by ideas that gained unprecedented popularity in the West within the hippie movement and its subculture.

In response to the growing interest in Eastern spiritual teachings, the Soviet regime placed strict limits on the expression of such interest to avoid harming Soviet ideology and social cohesion. For example, Hatha yoga was only allowed as a physical culture activity. At the same time, there was an active spiritual search in the private sphere of Soviet citizens, who manoeuvred within the permitted limits or figured out ways to "legally" circumvent them.

In this spiritual underground or "parallel life", various ideas focusing on deeper self-knowledge and personal development were developed. According to memoirs and interviews published in the 1980s and 1990s, this life remained, for the most part, clandestine and coexisted somewhat peacefully with Soviet life – its norms and newly created rituals that formed a specific "Soviet spirituality".

Whether the spiritual searches of writers and artists directly impacted the creative process or unconsciously influenced them, it made their creations remarkable and unique, distinguishing them from the average works of socialist realism. They

enjoyed popularity within Latvian society, which longed for a "lost paradise" – their once-independent national state and its values. At the same time, their outward compromises allowed them to create works in the canon of "Soviet spirituality", for example, as it was with the poetry of Ķempe and Ziedonis.

Until the 1980s, the Soviet authorities intervened to repress those spiritual searches that were too visible and beyond the private sphere or too radical. They also opposed any attempts to legalise organised spiritual movements.

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14 Astrological Samizdat in the Context of (Post-)Soviet Esoteric Culture

Anna Tessmann

This chapter explores astrological samizdat of the late Soviet era as one of many manifestations of underground esoteric culture. In the 20th century, astrology was considered to belong to the sphere of private occultism, which, under the influence of the rapid development of mass media, soon became part of the global popular culture. My aim here is to look at transformations of astrological practices throughout the Soviet period, which, among other things, can be traced in some informal historical documents of non-political samizdat.

Samizdat is one of the historical sources of underground subcultures of the late Soviet era.[1] The notion mainly refers to self-published articles, books, as well as literature of various genres – from political pamphlets to poetry – banned or disregarded for political or ideological reasons. In a broader sense, samizdat sources included ideologically neutral, informal, or even illegally made print production distributed for commercial purposes like postcards or pocket calendars. Some remain unexplored, many are dispersed, and few pieces of non-political samizdat (the exception being perhaps literary samizdat) have been collected. Examining the "samizdat textual culture" methodologically is challenging, especially regarding its material and imaginative boundaries.[2] Moreover, the analysis of samizdat practices allows us to think about a variety of samizdat culture(s) which appeared in different periods of Soviet history. Historians have identified various samizdat (sub)categories: literary, political, human rights, philosophical, religious, and esoteric, which remain unevenly studied.[3] In terms of technology, samizdat also included a range of text reproduction techniques: handwritten, retyped on a typewriter, or later copied on photocopiers in small print runs, etc. Astrological texts can be viewed as uncensored publications relating to mystical as well as modern entertainment literature, primarily belonging to the circle of esoteric samizdat (although they could sometimes undoubtedly have political overtones).

Despite the fact that three decades have passed since the collapse of the USSR, there are no archival collections of (post-)Soviet esoteric samizdat. Indeed, the basis for scholarly research on astrology remains mainly oral history and occasional collecting of primary sources. Collecting amateur booklets from astrologers and purchasing them in antiquity bookshops or on the Internet appears time- and resource-consuming. It is impossible to estimate how many primary sources are

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biding their time. Just as in the case of literary samizdat, handwritten, typewritten, and Xerox copies were destroyed as soon as astrological books were (re-)published in the 1990s. For the most part, astrological samizdat has landed in private libraries and, still, it is at risk of decay. In this study, I relied on original materials that I acquired in bookstores or from astrologers themselves, as well as copies of astrologers' samizdat found on the Russian Internet. Besides, I gathered additional information on underground astrological publications by interviewing astrologers or analysing their memoirs.

In the main part, I will provide a brief historical outline based on examples of astrological use in everyday life, how this occult practice, despite being excluded from the official mass culture in the early Soviet period and being practised solely in private, has gained prominence in the late decades of the Soviet Union as a collective activity within private astrological circles. The reproduction of astrological knowledge through samizdat and magnetizdat led to a gradual demand for astrology, even in the official mass culture of the late Soviet Union. Hence, astrology appeared in the public sphere before the lifting of censorship restrictions in 1990. After that, and with the advent of mass computer technology, astrological samizdat noticeably transformed but did not disappear completely, as it continued to exist in the shape of lecture notes until the mid-2000s for the needs of astrological communities.

Twentieth-century astrology

Astrology is a set of divinatory practices that has at its core the notion of the occult or "hidden".[4] The latter's analysis in the context of esotericism may be fundamental for history studies insofar as, in Julia Mannherz's words, it "is uniquely suited to offer an entryway into the private, non-political concerns of contemporaries, which for the majority, we must assume, far outweighed their interest in governance".[5] In the Soviet Union, similarly to Western countries, astrology was a part of mass culture, which resulted from socio-political changes, such as the development of mass media and consumption. Hence, the origins of astrology in its modern form stretch back to the early 20th century at least.[6] The features of popular esoteric culture can be observed in *fin de siècle* Europe and the USA, when judicial astrology (foretelling), which enjoyed success within a predominantly female readership, took its modern shape, leaving behind previous forms of natural forecasts of old medicine and astrology-based meteorology. However, compared with other fortune-telling literature like, for instance, chiromancy or numerology, astrology never had a "big impact on the popular market" in imperial Russia.[7] In the Russian Empire's last two decades, astrology publishing, based primarily on free translations from foreign languages, caught on rapidly. In the short period between the two revolutions of 1905–1907 and 1917–1918, when censorship was abolished, many compilatory astrological books were published in Russian. At the time, new esoteric groups emerged, while old ones came out from hiding.[8] Russian newspaper and magazine advertisements from this period suggest that astrology belonged to the flourishing market of occult services: astrologers consulted clients and sold horoscopes.

The Bolshevik revolution interrupted the publishing revival of fortune-telling and occult literature, which had started in the 1890s.[9] Although this sort of literature ceased to be published after 1917, this did not mean that astrological and other divinatory practices disappeared.

A "vanishing" practice: astrology during Soviet times

Anti-religious legislation adopted in Bolshevik Russia starting in 1918, gradually restrained religious liberties and increased censorship in the educational and cultural spheres. Astrology was regarded as a form of "superstition" (*sueverie*) conflicting with "Communist morality", the latter being based on the materialist worldview. Moreover, "relicts of the past" were "ideologically harmful" because they contradicted "science, reason, and progress".[10] This coercive tendency heavily contrasted with the trend of the previous decades of the Russian *fin de siècle*, when the religious and esoteric publishing market was plentifully supplied, and, correspondingly, there were no substantial restrictions on the practice of astrology.

The February and October revolutions, the Civil war, authoritarian policies, anti-religious campaigns, and repression destroyed the structures of pre-revolutionary Russian society. Many books, including religious and esoteric literature, were annihilated, banned, or withdrawn and later put into Soviet libraries' restricted sections (*spetskhran*). In the mid-1920s, the Russian secret societies and groups (Masonic, Rosicrucian, and others), some of which were keepers of esoteric and occult legacies, were persecuted; several of their leaders and members were killed or imprisoned. According to Konstantin Burmistrov, repression of those underground groups, however, had a side effect: as their members were sent to camps scattered around the country, it led to the dissemination of their ideas to the frontiers and faraway regions of the Soviet Empire. Some of the old collections of esoteric literature had a definite influence on the spiritual revival that took place from Stalin's death (1953) to the 1970s.[11] Therefore, we may hypothesise that the socio-political situation allowed for a reshuffling of the cards: in some places and settings, esoteric, occult, and astrological samizdat could be produced and disseminated.

Astrology after the Second World War

Chronologically, the production of astrological samizdat can be roughly divided into three periods: (1) post-war, from the late 1940s to the late 1960s; (2) late Soviet, from the early 1970s to the late 1980s; and (3) post-Soviet, from the early 1990s to the mid-2000s. Based on the Soviet esoteric samizdat classification sketched by historian Elena Strukova,[12] we find that the 1960s were not a time of active, specifically astrological, but rather multi-contextual esoteric samizdat networking. This indicates that astrological materials were used by a large audience, composed of both esoteric specialists and educated lay readers without specific astrological interests, unlike a few decades later. Interviews with astrologers show that esoteric samizdat was initially primarily compiled from rare books published long ago, which were subsequently prohibited or relegated to the *spetskhran*. Astrological

literature in foreign languages was also assigned to libraries during the entire post-war period in the Soviet Union, but it was inaccessible to most people.

After the Russian occult *fin de siècle,* in Soviet times, astrology survived in literary references[13] but was certainly underrepresented in the officially promoted fiction, poetry, and historical prose. Perhaps future digitalisation of Soviet literary works and periodicals will contribute to a detailed mapping out of astrology in literary or journalistic texts since such genres are usually receptive to astrology and other kinds of popular esotericism. Just as Soviet writings about magic were "produced under the headings of archaeology, literature, semiotics, folk medicine, and folklore", astrological content could be found inside historical scholarly writings and academic translations of older works.[14] For instance, natural astrology was handled in texts dedicated to astronomy,[15] various calendar systems, or medical history. In addition, astrology became part of the Soviet discourse on "true vs. false (or pseudo) knowledge/science" in amateur and entertaining astronomical books (*zanimatel'naia astronomiia*), school textbooks and reference literature.[16] There is evidence that astrology was discussed in various amateur astronomers' circles or at the All-Union Society *Znanie* regular lectures on astronomy.[17] Astrology was one of the subjects discussed in anti-religious literature and atheist books or booklets, which targeted every kind of "mysticism".[18] It might be true that interest in astrology in the 1970s did not merely imply the reading of astrological books but also arose while consuming other sorts of fringe science literature or even science fiction.[19] Moreover, in the context of the global emergence of the New Age movement during the 1970s–1980s,[20] a peculiar "renaissance" of occultism and the emergence of new religious movements, astrology played a fundamental role in the "cultic milieu", i.e. underground esoteric culture within modern (but primarily Western) societies. In the Soviet Union, however, astrological communities constituted a minor segment of the Russian New Age.

Soviet astrological samizdat: translations, reprints and compilations

A few documented references collected during my project enable the reconstruction of an amateur use of astrology in artistic and intellectual milieus in the post-war period. One example is how original astrological horoscopes in French were read and translated to entertain friends.[21] In addition, underground practitioners of esoteric teachings, who had not studied astrology in-depth, also translated and collected astrological works. One such historical testimony from the late 1970s concerns the circulation of astrological prints from the centre (Moscow) to the periphery (the Black Sea region and the Caucasus, Baltic republics, Central Asia, Siberia). Thus, Pavel Belikov (1911–1982), later archivist of the Nicholas and Helena Roerichs' family archive in Estonia, mentioned in his correspondence in 1977 a copy (*otpechatka*) of an astrological book by Marie-Louise Sondaz, which he had received from Moscow.[22] While it was not the main interest of its participants, astrological and alchemical books were read within the context of hermetic works (a corpus of mystic texts attributed to a legendary character, Hermes Trismegistus) within and around such intellectual *kruzhki* as the Iuzhinskii circle, an informal

occult group assembled by the writer Iurii Mamleev (1931–2015) in Moscow.[23] Moreover, astrological samizdat was collected in the groups that had appropriated astrological systems or elements for their esoteric or theosophical teachings or diverse psychotherapeutic or healing practices, for instance, within the Liudmila Tkachenko-Reznik's meditation group.[24]

These examples show that astrology did not disappear in Soviet culture, despite lacking broad public acceptance. However, the Soviet period has yet to be investigated in-depth; hence, all the statements are speculative until new primary documents (including archival sources) are found. In the post-Soviet era, this fragmentary presence in the public field gave astrological practitioners an argument to demonstrate the alleged continuity of "Russian" astrology throughout the Soviet period. Almost every conversation with elderly Soviet astrologers revolves around the idea of an astrological "revival" in the late Soviet Union. For them, astrology, or more precisely, astrologies, re-emerged in the late Soviet period; they do not constitute a reaction to modernity but follow a pattern of "revitalisation" of "lost" knowledge. In the same way as the post-Soviet healers and magi did,[25] they refer to the "Russian roots" of astrology and emphasise the "distinctive" character of their teachings (i.e., the Avestan School of Astrology [AShA], an invented astrological system that relates to the sacred book of Zoroastrianism *Avesta*).

However, many elements of those astrological teachings reveal a connection to or an adaptation of occult works via samizdat. Today, elderly astrologers, remembering their first experiences with astrological literature, named the translations of Papus (pseudonym of Gérard Anaclet Vincent Encausse, 1965–1916) and Éliphas Lévi (pseudonym of Alphonse Louis Constant, 1810–1875). Most prominent were the local Russian esotericists Aleksandr Troianovskii (died in 1925), a member of the Martinist Order and later editor of the journal of "occult (secret) sciences" *Izida,* and the translator and publisher Vladimir Zapriagaev. The second volume of Zapriagaev's astrological series was compiled from Mikhail Khrushchov's publications, who wrote under the pseudonym "Russian astrologer" in the journal *Rebus*. Troianovskii and Zapriagaev were prominent Russian occult publishers in the early 20th century. In Soviet times, their books were kept in a particular repository in a *spetskhran* at the Lenin State Library, yet some astrologers or their acquaintances managed to make copies of these books.[26] In the 1970s, some underground private libraries specialised in esoteric literature published before the October revolution.

Astrologer Aleksandr Zaraev (b. 1954) remembered in 2017 that the owner of one such library used to earn a little fortune from rare books. The reason was that those books cost a "sky-high price, such as 300 roubles, when the average salary was 100 roubles a month".[27] Photocopying made it possible to buy rare books and, through the sale of reprints, not only recoup the costs of the purchase but also earn additional income. According to some respondents, commercial samizdat copies were a "hard currency", reliable investments, and prestige objects.[28] The production and distribution of commercial samizdat were constitutive elements of the black market, which existed in parallel to the official Soviet model of economic planning.[29]

Examples of samizdat in the post-war period seem to have been primarily personal documents: notebooks, private correspondence, individual horoscopes, or handwritten copies of astrological books or translations. The earliest dated source I could find belongs to the genre of a handwritten youth samizdat scrapbook (*al'bom*) from Leningrad. The authors were two teenagers, aged around 13, who worked on this bricolage sketchbook for about three years, beginning in 1970. In the following years, the anthology they entitled *Biblion* was slightly modified and supplemented. One of the two boys later became a prominent "astrologer-researcher" (in his own words) and co-author of several astrological books published in the 1990s.[30] In it, astrology is placed into the context of hippie, non-conformist, pacifist, and other subcultures, attractive for adolescents. The sketchbook includes famous philosophical quotes and advertising slogans. Sometimes, it contains irony about ideological headlines in Soviet newspapers, setting them into absurd, funny contexts. In some places, it uses gallows humour and refers to suicide and drugs. Above all, it deals with a kind of "canon" of scientific disciplines (chemistry, physics), including popular psychology, foreign languages, and classical "hidden" knowledge – astrology, alchemy, or numerology. Four pages have references to astrology, some of them connected with alchemy, which is handled more closely in the sketchbook. One of the pages seems to be of particular value because it reveals the mechanisms to acquire hidden or otherwise missing information in the 1960s–1970s. The teenagers were eager readers of Soviet reference books and popular science magazines, from which they collected knowledge in bits and pieces. For instance, they found inspiration in officially published materials for their image of the colourful seven-pointed "star of the astrologers", which explained the influence of the planets on the days of the week. At the page bottom, there are two encrypted references to these sources (*The Children's Encyclopaedia, second edition* [2.1952, 437] and the journal *Science and Life* [1.1967, 54]).

Another example of samizdat based on translations from foreign languages[31] I have chanced upon is the *Manual of Astrology* (*Posobie po astrologii*).[32] According to one of my interlocutors, who has been practising astrology since the 1980s, such copies "were sold on street bookstalls (*knizhnye razvaly*) in the 1990s", right after the fall of the Soviet Union. The *Manual* has a plain green cover, and it consists of 123 one-side typewritten, partially numbered sheets. It was probably photocopied in the late 1970s–early 1980s. The typeface is downsized, and the outer edges of the pages are jagged, suggesting that two-page photocopies were made on large sheets of paper and then cut in half. The samizdat book does not contain any reference to an author or date. The first page after the table of contents includes an epigraph by the French astrologer Marie-Louise Sondaz (1889–1981): "Astrology is no longer a mystery. It is an exact science studying the mystery". This is the only name mentioned in the entire book. Most probably, the *Manual* is compiled from at least three texts. The first one consists of a paraphrased translation of an astrology work by Marie-Louise Sondaz. There are some coincidences in text and picture with the French original *L'Astrologie* (1959).[33] Secondly, the book includes various tables of zodiac signs' correspondences, based on some unidentified theosophical teachings, some of which may belong to Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov (1900–1986,

Bulgarian: Mikhail Ivanov), which again would support the hypothesis of a French origin of the compilation in its horoscopic part. Some of these tables are doubled by mistake. Some pages are designed in a pseudo-stylised handwritten font type. Finally, the third source is a translation of the Druidic calendar (perhaps from a Polish original). One can assume that the entire aesthetical concept of the *Manual* echoes in some way the recollections of one professional astrologer who spoke of astrological samizdat as primarily compiling works.[34] However, no one from the elderly astrologers (born in the late 1940s or 1950s) I have contacted has recognised the original. This reveals the marginal (even for practitioners) or perhaps the commercial character of this compilation. One professional astrologer had seen these or some equivalent texts in the 1970s, and in his opinion, the book can be dated to the beginning of the 20th century.[35] Its technology recalls the book photocopying techniques I mentioned earlier.[36] Curiously, the two text sections with descriptions of horoscopes and the Druidic horoscope can be found in an anonymous compilation entitled *Horoscopes: Zodiacal. Chinese. Japanese. Druids,* produced in 1990 in Tashkent with a print run of 400,000 copies.[37]

The emergence of astrological circles

Although individual quests for more and more "mysterious" book copies or pre-revolutionary rarities could be exciting, it was of little use without communication with other like-minded persons.[38] In the late Soviet period, from the early 1970s to the late 1980s, astrological samizdat experienced its second wave. There was a significant change: astrology became action-oriented and collaborative. Collective astrological samizdat, primarily in the shape of lecture notes and underground uncensored publications by contemporary Soviet astrologers – added to the astrological compilations and rarities circulating in the esoteric underground – appeared with the emergence of small groups or home seminars in the early 1980s. In the memory of the Avestan astrology communities,[39] such as the Saint-Petersburg Astrological school in the late 1990s–early 2000s, the former period was perceived almost eschatologically as a time of "shadow", which ended in 1989 with the era of "light", i.e. the accessible, uncensored practice of astrology.[40] The elderly astrologers recalled that from the late 1970s onwards, they started to teach underground in closed circles. At the beginning of the 1980s, individual or spontaneously organised classes or lecture series on esoteric topics were held for a small charge in the urban milieus. The increasing number of students led to a gradual specialisation of astrologers-teachers in this field, which was almost completed in the late 1980s. This also allowed for the establishment of astrological institutes and schools: both the Avestan School of Astrology (AShA), founded by Pavel Globa (b. 1953), and the Saint-Petersburg Academy of Astrology, founded by Sergei Shestopalov (b. 1950), appeared in 1989; a year later, the Moscow Academy of Astrology was founded by Mikhail Levin (b. 1949) – to name just a few.

In addition, the interest in astrological divination has amplified due to the active spread of other types of esoteric or mystic samizdat where astrology became part of new types of text compilations, often combined with spiritual treatment by psychic

healers and other magic specialists. Thereby astrology was either present as a specific esoteric teaching or was incorporated into existent ones. Astrological samizdat publications became indispensable educational material and a reliable channel for contacts between individuals and groups interested in New Age teachings and occultism. Moreover, astrological horoscope descriptions were incorporated into other kinds of non-astrological samizdat. For instance, the socio-political and literary magazine *Journal of Independent Views "12",* published in Pskov in the late 1980s, included texts for every zodiac sign.[41]

Lecture notes (*konspekty*) of underground astrological house meetings (*kvartirniki*) played a significant networking role. One female participant in an astrological circle taught by Aron Tsirkin (1926–2021) in the pavilion of the Gor'kii Park in Moscow in the mid-1980s remembers that the lectures were held during the daytime at weekends.[42] The people who attended them came from elsewhere. They would not necessarily share the values and participate in the practices of the club Healthy Family, founded by Tsirkin and his wife Aleksandra Gurevich, which offered courses in cold strengthening, jogging, yoga, healthy diet, and alternative healing. With their traditional talk and chalk style, the astrological lectures required students to take notes of the teacher's mostly monological lectures. The course programme (if there was one) was based on a discussion of the 11th-century Al-Biruni's book *Kitab at-Tafhim (Book of Instruction in the Elements of the Art of Astrology,* translated from Arabic and published in Russian in 1975), giving references to the texts by Aleksandr Kaminskii (alias Avessalom Podvodnyi, 1953–2018) and other Moscow astrologers. Tsirkin had a systematic approach: apart from astrology, he introduced other occult sciences like numerology and chiromancy. The only material used by the students in addition to their notes were photocopies of the Russian ephemerides,[43] which the students had bought to chart horoscopes.

The ephemerides are astronomical tables that include coordinates of the Sun, the Moon, the planets, and other astronomical objects and information for their regular intervals. Astrologers use astronomical ephemerides as tools for calculations while creating different kinds of charts (for instance, natal (birth horoscope), horary (relating to the exact time of a question), electional (choosing the perfect time for an action, etc.). Astrologers with a technical background had to use astronomical ephemerides and modify them in relation to the location they take into account.[44] The ephemerides, which were purchasable from the mid-1980s, were necessary to produce horoscopes, and for this reason, they were in great demand among Russian astrologers. The astrologer Boris Izraitel' (b. 1960) remembers that in 1984 he borrowed a copy of American ephemerides from an acquaintance just for three days.[45] Having no choice but to copy or memorise them, he decided to photocopy the whole book. It was costly because the operator in the copy room of the scientific institute where Izraitel' worked did this illegally and asked for 20 kopecks per page:

> In the 1980s, a cinema ticket cost 20 kopecks, and a book of ephemerides consisted of 600 pages. It was as if I was immediately deprived of 600 trips to the cinema. On the other hand, 600 pages multiplied by 20 kopecks was my nominal salary as a junior research assistant of 120 roubles. Furthermore, in

> this coincidence, I immediately discerned the hand of Providence. Therefore, I decided that bargaining was not appropriate. The next evening, I carried my first Ephemerides home, bouncing joyfully. They faithfully served me for ten years until I bought my first personal computer.[46]

After the mid-1980s, photocopies of astrological ephemerides were available for sale at lectures and astrology courses at a reasonable price.[47]

From the early 1980s, samizdat production consisted of various processes: audio recording, transcription, typewriting, correction, photocopying, and spreading of photocopied lecture notes among interested audiences. Therefore, it combined both samizdat and *magnitizdat* practices. Until the mid-1990s, horoscopes were charted and coloured by hand. While the lecture notes of Tsirkin's astrology students have faded into the past (unfortunately, no one can find any samizdat copies or booklets of his group), the lectures which other prominent astrologers, such as Mikhail Levin, Pavel Globa, and Avessalom Podvodnyi, gave in the post-Soviet period were published relatively quickly, in the early 1990s.

Hybridisation and decline in the post-Soviet period

Most of my interviewees identified 1989 as the turning point for Soviet astrology. Publications in Soviet newspapers and periodicals were allowed, and astrologers were granted official permission to appear on television and radio.[48] The late 1980s was the period when astrology teachers started developing different strategies to legitimise their science and gain public acceptance.[49] Astrologers began giving interviews in the Soviet mass media, which made their teachings more visible. Simultaneously, the public lectures led to the publication of a wide range of old astrological materials, samizdat lectures, reprints, and compiled booklets. As astrology experienced a boom in the book market from the early to mid-1990s, astrological samizdat began to recede. However, with the spread of computer technologies in the post-Soviet period, astrological computer samizdat lasted until the mid-2000s. First, the lectures were taken and retyped on a computer. Then, they were either maintained in an electronic form or printed or photocopied and distributed to the interested public or collected for personal use.

The example of Pavel Globa, the most prominent public astrologer in the post-Soviet space, and the network of the AShAs give an idea of how the (illegal) samizdat practices contributed to the emergence of stable communication structures, groups of interest and, during the liberalisation period between 1989 and 1994, to new educational business models. In the 1970s, Pavel Globa, like many other representatives of the Russian intelligentsia, was interested in history, religion, and esotericism. He actively collected and consumed esoteric samizdat literature. Gradually, due to his performance skills, astrological knowledge, and increasing interest in occultism, Globa was invited to teach at private houses. Globa's oldest students, who later taught at various AShAs, dated those gatherings back to 1982.[50] Globa gave lectures in various closed (*uzkie*) groups in Moscow and Leningrad in the early 1980s, and this communication pattern gave rise to an entire corpus of

handwritten or tape-recorded lecture notes. In the mid-1980s, he got occasional commissions for lectures at houses of culture, which went along with a proliferation of astrological texts and records. Starting in 1989, Globa gave public talks at educational venues accommodating thousands of people. Such public lectures continued until 1992–1993. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Globa travelled throughout the post-Soviet space, where he continued to give astrological lectures. Private individuals organised these; a few were later involved in teaching astrology themselves, for instance, Nikolai Koroviak (b. 1957), Tamara Ziurniaeva (1948–2018), and Aleksei Min'kov (1960–2020) in Saint-Petersburg. The organisers recorded the lectures and wrote or typed them down later. Usually, the lecture texts were duplicated and distributed for a small sum to cover the printing costs. However, in the heyday of public astrological performances, self-published literature and copies engendered profit.[51]

Conclusion

As we have seen above, astrological samizdat documents reveal some functions and materiality of popular occultism in everyday life and within a non-political esoteric urban scene in the large cities of the late Soviet Union. The analysis of the small collection of astrological samizdat texts in this study has made it possible to understand how astrology was used from the post-war era to the mid-2000s: as underground entertainment literature, collaborative activity, and, finally, it was entirely or partly integrated into new business models on the post-Soviet esoteric market. The further study of astrological samizdat and *magnitizdat* should enable us to re-discover long-forgotten actors of esoteric groups and structures. However, much more investigation is needed. Future research of archival materials and memoirs may help flesh out the specific historical contexts of the production and dissemination of these texts and identify occult/esoteric communication channels within Soviet society and through the Iron Curtain. Moreover, what may be extendedly studied are the particular esoteric subculture and the genealogies of the esoteric vocabulary of the Soviet New Age[52] contained in occult and astrological samizdat texts. In these, one can sometimes trace bizarre teachings and testimonies of nomadic, cross-roading identities in the (post-)Soviet cultic milieu.

Notes

1 There is a large amount of scholarly research on etymology, (pre-)history, production, and diverse socio-political implications of Russian/Soviet samizdat. One of the recent studies on samizdat culture is Josephine von Zitzewitz, *The Culture of Samizdat: Literature and Underground Networks in the Late Soviet Union* (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021).

2 Ann Komaromi, "Samizdat as Extra-Gutenberg Phenomenon." *Poetics Today* 1 29:4 (2008): 629–667, here 660.

3 See, for instance, different classification types in Aleksei Piatkovskii, "Ocherki istorii samizdata," 2012. *Gefter* http://gefter.ru/ar-chive/5757 (last accessed 30 March 2022) or Aleksandr Suetnov, *Samizdat. Bibliograficheskii ukazatel'* (Moskva: Tsentr obrazovatel'nykh programm Instituta novykh tehnologii obrazovaniia, 1992).

4 Concerning astrology, there are a large number of definitions depending on its historical developments or cultural status. Most difficulties are related to the polythetic character of astrology because of "first, its diversity; second, disputes over its definition between its practitioners and external critics; and third, differences of opinion between its supporters concerning its nature". See Nicholas Campion, "Astrology." In *The Occult World*, edited by Christopher Partridge, 592–602 (London: Routledge, 2014), 592. Scholars have often argued that astrological interpretations or horoscopes are historical documents containing various divinatory concepts interpreting confluences between the cosmos and terrestrial events. As such, they use a specific symbolism (above all, planets, Zodiac signs, and their changing relations, called "aspects"), reflecting current historical events and processes.

5 Julia Mannherz, *Modern Occultism in Late Imperial Russia* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2012), 19.

6 The British historian Faith Wigzell claimed that, although the Russian history of fortune-telling books shared many features with that of other European countries and the USA, the special type of Russian 18th-century fortune-telling compendia, including local traditions influenced the subsequent course of development of print publications in the period of "vigorous revival", 1890–1917. See Faith Wigzell, *Reading Russian Fortunes: Print Culture, Gender and Divination in Russia from 1765* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 16f.

7 Wigzell, *Reading*, 38. The scholars of fortune-telling and occultism dealt merely with printed documents and described the *fin de siècle* astrology in terms of both metaphysical and boulevard astrology (what echoes even the emic concepts like "high" and "low" esotericism). The first is a "fashionable occultism", which "permeated the atmosphere of upper- and middle-class Russian society" (see Maria Carlson, "Fashionable Occultism: Spiritualism, Theosophy, Freemasonry, and Hermeticism in Fin-de-Siècle Russia." In *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture*, edited by Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, 135–152 (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1997), 135), whereas the second stood closer to the fortune-telling practices and texts of "lower classes" (ibid) as well as "vulgar" literature. The latter was considered a part of the entertainment industries, which had launched the idea of leisure time from the beginning of the 20th century onwards (see Julia Mannherz, "The Occult and Popular Entertainment in Late Imperial Russia." In *The New Age of Russia. Occult and Esoteric Dimensions*, edited by Birgit Menzel et al., 29–51 (Berlin; Munich: Otto Sagner, 2012), 27). In this sense, looking back at the past, we also may speak about *longue durée*, or the connections to the culture of Russian *fin de siècle* at least (compare, for instance, a regular astrological part included in each issue in the elitist esoteric journal *Izida* (1909–1916) vs. the vast market for cheap fortune-telling booklets, including horoscopes (Wigzell, *Reading*, 108).

8 Konstantin Burmistrov, "Topography of Russian Esotericism: From Moscow to Harbin and Asunción." In *Capitales de l'ésotérisme européen et dialogue des cultures*, edited by Jean-Pierre Brach, Aurélie Choné, Christine Maillard (Paris: Orizons, 2014), 76.

9 Wigzell, *Reading*, 17.

10 See Victoria Smolkin, *A Sacred Space Is Never Empty: A History of Soviet Atheism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 5. Compare also with, for instance, an ideological metaphor of superstition later coined by Iosif Grigulevich of superstition as a "spiritual moonshine" (*dukhovnaia sivukha*), a kind of sedative in bourgeois society causing "fear and powerlessness in the face of social phenomena and processes" (Iosif Grigulevich, *Proroki "novoi istiny": Ocherki o kul'takh i sueveriiakh sovremennogo kapitalisticheskogo mira* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1983), 204).

11 Burmistrov, "Topography", 80.

12 Elena Strukova identified two periods of active production of esoteric samizdat in the second half of the 20th century. The first one is connected to the post-Stalin era, especially to Nikita Khrushchev's cultural Thaw between the 1950s and 1960s, whereas the second period of esoteric samizdat activities began in the early 1980s. The birth

of the Soviet samizdat movement reflected global changes, especially the rise of a significant number of counterculture currents in Western countries. See Elena Strukova, "Ėzotericheskii samizdat v SSSR: K postanovke problemy. Tezisy soobshchenii," 02.12.2010. https://www.shpl.ru/readers/centr_sotcialino_politicheskoy_istorii/funds3/kollekzya_netraditzionnoi_pechati/research_methodological_work/kruglyj_stol_ezotericheskij_samizdat_v_sssr_2_dekabrya_2010_g/tezisy_soobwenij/strukova_en_ezotericheskij_samizdat_v_sssr_k_postanovke_problemy/ (last accessed 30 March 2022).

13 Undoubtedly, there were other transmission channels to preserve and disseminate astrological symbols, as we are aware of several examples in painting, music, and theatre.

14 See William F. Ryan, "Magic and Divination: Old Russian Sources." In *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture*, edited by Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, 35–58 (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1997), 37.

15 One of the most balanced scientific views on astrology can be found in a book by astrophysicist and historian of astronomy, Boris Vorontsov-Vel'iaminov, *Essays on the History of Astronomy in the USSR* (1960), which described the emergence of astrology in Russia based on various examples of foreign collections and almanacs.

16 See, Anatolii Tomilin's (Bazol'), *Astronomy for Fun* (1970), *Cosmogony for Fun* (1975).

17 After the perestroika, some astrological courses were organised in the framework of *Znanie* (E-mail correspondence with L, Perm', May 2021).

18 For instance, prominent authors of popular criticism on religion, mysticism, and superstitions who wrote on astrology as a pseudoscience were the scholar of religion and atheism Mikhail Shakhnovich (1911–1992; *Modern Mysticism in the Light of Science*, 1965) and the physicist and popular scientist Aleksandr Kitaigorodskii (1914–1985; *Reniksa*, 1967/1973). The same category of literature also includes Grigorii Gurev's books such as *Astrology and Religion: The Story of a Misconception* (1940), republished under the title *The Story of One Misconception. Astrology Before the Court of Science* in 1970.

19 In the 1970s, the theory of human biorhythms, developed by German physician Wilhelm Fliess (1858–1928) in the late 19th century, experienced a second wave of popularity in the USA, Western and Eastern European countries in the 1970s, and in the USSR in the early 1980s. In the eyes of many esoteric seekers, physical, emotional, and intellectual biorhythms charted with the help of some rotating circular systems to the moon phases could relate to aspects in astrology (cf. Aleksandr Zaraev, *Put' k zvezdam. Kogda goroskopy sbyvaiutsia* (Moscow: Ėksmo, 2017)). For instance, a Hungarian booklet on biorhythms by László Détári and Veronika Karcagi *Bioritmusok* from 1981 was translated and published in the Soviet Union in the series "In the World of Science and Technics" of the *Mir* publisher in 1984.

20 Olav Hammer, "New Age Movement." In *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism*, edited by Wouter Hanegraaff. In collaboration with Antoine Faivre, Roelof van den Broek, and Jean-Pierre Brach, 855–861 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 855.

21 Iuliia Nel'skaia-Sidur (1940–2006), teacher, writer, and sculptor, wife of Vadim Sidur, wrote in her diary on 3 April 1968: "I spent the whole evening translating to Marina from a French booklet (*knizhonka*), 'The Astrologer', under what sign she was born and what her character was like. She kept wondering at how accurate it was. I, Dima and Lemport were born under Cancer, Silis – Gemini, Ėdichka – Pisces, Marina – Bull [*sic*], Iura Levitanskii – Aquarius, Marina's *shez* – Libra, Zhen'ka Zvereva – Sagittarius, my and Dima's mums – Scorpio. A lot of similarities. I was somehow rambling since Marina is an appreciative listener" (see Iuliia Nel'skaia-Sidur, "Vremia, kogda ne pishut dnevnikov i pisem …" Khronika odnogo podvala. Dnevniki 1968–1973. Sostavlenie, podgotovka teksta, vstupitel'naia stat'ia i komm. V. Volovnikova (Moscow: AIRO-XXI; Saint-Petersburg: Aleteiia, 2015), also in *Prozhito*, https://prozhito.org/person/565 (last accessed 30 March 2022)).

22 Pavel F. Belikov, *Nepreryvnoe voskhozhdenie. Sbornik k 90-letiiu so dnia rozhdeniia Pavla Fedorovicha Belikova (1911–1982)*. T. 1. (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi Tsentr Rerikhov, 2001).

23 See, for instance, Marlene Laruelle, "The Iuzhinskii Circle: Far-Right Metaphysics in the Soviet Underground and Its Legacy Today." *The Russian Review* 74:4 (2015): 563–580.
24 See Zaraev, *Put',* 47: The teaching incorporated esoteric practices of contact with planetary spirits and used astrological terminology.
25 Galina Lindquist, *Conjuring Hope: Magic and Healing in Contemporary Russia* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2006), 38f.
26 See also Joseph Kellner, "The End of History: Radical Responses to the Soviet Collapse." PhD. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2018, 38f; M. Sh., Interview by the author, Saint-Petersburg, November 2018. Aleksandr Zaraev (*Put'*, 38) recalled: "In the *spetskhran* I came upon books of great astrologers: Troianovskii, Zapriagaev, Papus, Éliphas Lévi, who were translated [*sic*] into Russian. These books represented the Russian astrological standpoint (*pozitsiia*) or they were resonant with it. I had started opening up to astrology at that time, it interested me a lot". Curiously, the storage of astrological books in *spetskhran* is also confirmed in Soviet official publications. Anatolii Tomilin (*Zanimatel'no ob astronomii,* 33) quoted in his book an unnamed manual of astrology "from the beginning of our century" that "is handed out at the Saltykov-Shchedrin Public Library in Leningrad 'for scientific purposes only'. So, no kidding". Tomilin added that he had tried to chart a horoscope during a couple of months there, which ultimately failed. The astrologer Pavel Globa, in the first edition of his programmatic book *The Living Fire* (1995), reflected on the history of "Russian astrology" and mentioned first Troianovskii and the occult journal *Izida* (see Pavel Globa, *Zhivoi ogon'* (Moskva: Vagrius; Iauza, 1995)).
27 Zaraev, *Put'*, 44.
28 D, interview by the author, Moscow, November 2018.
29 Zitzewitz, *The Culture*, 87.
30 S & V, interview by the author, Saint-Petersburg, September 2019.
31 Despite the fact that most of the translators of esoteric samizdat cannot be identified, history has preserved the names of some of them, for instance, Mikhail Papush (b. 1942), who provided the first translations of Dan Radyar's astrological books and actively distributed foreign psychotherapeutic literature in the 1970s.
32 I purchased this manual in October 2019 on "Avito" (Russian website of classified ads) in Saint-Petersburg.
33 Marie-Louise Sondaz. *L'Astrologie* (Paris: Buchet-Chastel, 1959).
34 V, interview by the author, Denver (online), April 2021.
35 E-mail correspondence with L, Moscow, May 2021.
36 In one passage of his book, Aleksandr Zaraev recalled exactly this process (Zaraev, *Put'*, 44).
37 L. Dadabaeva (ed.), *Goroskopy: Zodiakal'nyi. Kitaiskii. Iaponskii. Druidov* (Tashkent: Ësh gvardiia, 1990).
38 Zaraev, *Put'*, 47.
39 The communities in the big cities of the former Soviet Union where the prominent astrologer Pavel Globa taught in the 1980s resurfaced in the 1990s as so-called Avestan Schools of Astrology (*Avestiiskie shkoly astrologii*).
40 Anna Tessmann, "On the Good Faith: A Fourfold Discursive Construction of Zoroastrianism in Modern Russia." PhD diss., University of Gothenburg, 2012.
41 I would like to express my thanks to Ms. Elena Strukova for the pictures of copies.
42 K, interview by the author, Moscow (online), April 2021.
43 The most efficient and accurate ephemerides were considered to be the American ones by Neil Michelsen. See Anna Tessmann, "New Age Astrology in the Time of Computer Technologies." *New Age in Russia* (research blog), 6 September 2019, https://newageru.hypotheses.org/1338 (last accessed 30 March 2022). Later, the ephemerides began to be calculated by astrological computer programs.
44 L, interview by the author, Moscow, November 2018.

45 He is referring to one of the first two editions of the American Ephemeris collection compiled by the IBM-engineer Neil Michelsen, who founded "Astro Computing Services" in 1973 in San Diego: *The American Ephemeris for the 20th Century: 1900 to 2000 at Noon* (1980, 1983).
46 Boris Izraitel', "Nachalo puti. Interes k astrologii: pervye uroki". Website of Boris Izraitel', 2019–2021, https://izraitel.com/путь-профессионального-астролога/ (last accessed 30 March 2022).
47 E-mail correspondence with L (Perm'), May 2021.
48 V, interview by the author, Denver (online), April 2021; M & K, interview by author, St. Petersburg (online), May 2021.
49 Here I agree with Galina Lindquist (*Conjuring Hope*, 24) who, discussing post-Soviet healers' effectiveness, claimed that "what practitioners try to secure is not simply a business niche; they also try to carve out for themselves an acceptable social identity and a worthy place in the moral domain. The strategies of legitimation that are used to these ends are indispensable for practitioners' self-construction as attractive and desirable, as charismatic individuals".
50 Tessmann, "On the Good Faith", 40.
51 M & K, interview by the author, St. Petersburg (online), May 2021.
52 The anthropologist Anna Ozhiganova, who has conducted many participant observations in the post-Soviet cultic milieu in the 1990s, noted that such prominent esotericists as Avessalom Podvodnyi, Aleksandr Sviiash, and Sergei Lazarev had worked out a synthetic, "particular language of esoteric subculture", which used and still uses philosophical, psychological, bioenergetic, and occult terms (Anna Ozhiganova and Iurii Filippov. *Novaia religioznost' v sovremennoi Rossii: Ucheniia, formy i praktiki* (Moscow: Institut ėtnologii i antropologii RAN, 2006), 252). For instance, she sees in Avessalom Podvodnyi's teaching elements of esoteric language appropriation from Daniil Andreev's *The Rose of the World* (ibid). Almost at the same period, I could trace some of Andreev's terms in *Avestan astrology* (see Anna Tessmann, "Astrozoroastrismus in modernen Russland und Belarus." MA thesis, Ruperto Carola University of Heidelberg, 2005). This shows an evident and lasting influence on the Soviet esotericists by Andreev's ideas and vocabulary. The same tendencies of striving after common esoteric language among contemporary New Agers may be observed in the current time. By long-term studies of the "Anastasia" movement, the anthropologist Iuliia Andreeva has outlined the most recent trends of the Russian New Agers to share global New Age vocabulary (see Julia Andreeva, "Verbal Clichés of Followers in the 'Anastasia' New Religious Movement." *Anthropology & Archeology of Eurasia* 57:2 (2018): 88–106). As the anthropologist Svetlana Tambovtseva has also shown, even when the New Age communities try to invent their own "proper language", they are subliminally forced to borrow esoteric terms to be accepted in the contemporary cultic milieu (Svetlana Tambovtseva, "Kabbalisticheskaia germenevtika i utopicheskaia komparativistika VseaSvetnoi Gramoty." *Gosudarstvo, religiia, tserkov' v Rossii i za rubezhom* 4 (2019): 69–101, here 84).

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