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MAKING RELIGION ACCEPTABLE IN COMMUNIST ROMANIA AND THE SOVIET UNION, 1943-1989

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MAKING RELIGION ACCEPTABLE IN COMMUNIST
ROMANIA AND THE SOVIET UNION, 1943-1989

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
College of Arts and Sciences
at the University of Kentucky

By

Ryan J. Voogt

The University of Kentucky

Director: Dr. Karen Petrone, Professor of History

Lexington, Kentucky

2017

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

MAKING RELIGION ACCEPTABLE IN COMMUNIST ROMANIA AND THE SOVIET UNION, 1943-1989

This dissertation focuses on religious gatherings in communist Romania and the Soviet Union, 1943-1989. Church was one of the few opportunities for voluntary associational life and is invaluable for the study of power, ideology, and belonging in an everyday social setting. This project is based on archival documents and memoirs, uncovering how state officials and religious representatives struggled to establish religious practice that would be acceptable to all. Although ideologically atheist, state officials regarded some religious gatherings as acceptable and others unacceptable, but not due to utterances of beliefs or performance of traditional sacraments, but because of social aspects: how people related to one another, what kinds of people came, the settings of the gatherings, and affective characteristics like enthusiasm, engagement, and authenticity. Even though believers participated in religious gatherings for their own reasons, state officials policed them as contests for mobilization.

This project compares the cases of the Romanian Orthodox Church and Reformed Church of the Transylvanian region of Romania and the Russian Orthodox Church and the Baptist Church in the Moscow region of the Soviet Union. Based on comparisons, the role of a Church's culture in shaping church-state relations becomes clear. Officials largely considered traditional Orthodox hierarchy and rituals as religiously unproblematic, but they underestimated the power of such features of Orthodoxy to endure and mobilize successive generations. The hierarchical nature of the Orthodox Churches did not preclude spirited negotiations over acceptable Orthodox religiosity, but non-conforming or innovating priests were marginalized relatively easily. Protestant Churches have had a more entrenched custom of decentralization in governance and Scriptural interpretation, factors which presented officials with difficulty in centralizing the management of such churches and which at times led to protracted interpersonal battles and inner-church divisions. One such case sparked the Romanian Revolution in 1989. Officials in Romania and the Soviet Union handled the problem of religion very similarly in defining the acceptable limits of religious activity in practice, but virulent attacks on religion in the Soviet Union prior to WWII made for a stronger lingering religious antagonism there after the War than in Romania, where Orthodoxy was at times incorporated into the state's nationalist discourse.

KEYWORDS: Romania, Soviet Union, Communism, Religion, Orthodox Church

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June 15, 2017

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I am also thankful to my wife, Shannon Voogt, who originally encouraged me to leave my cubicle behind and find something I enjoyed. She might not have done so had she known it would have taken us and our children across Eastern Europe, but I'm glad that we agree it is better this way. I'm thankful that we have done this journey together, and let's hope this is not the end of our adventures.

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A Note on Transliteration and Translations

For Russian transliteration, I have used the system employed by the Library of Congress, except that я is replaced with ia, й with i, and ё with e, as is customary. Some Russian terms are commonly anglicized, such as *Moskva* (Moscow) and *Oblast'* (oblast), and I have tried to follow such conventions. For Russian places with gendered or adjectival place names, like *Moskovskaia Oblast'*, I have chosen the simpler form of "Moscow Oblast." Oblasts are similar to provinces.

There are several Russian religious terms to note. I have translated *upolnomochennyi* as "commissioner," although most others have preferred to use "plenipotentiary," an accurate, if cumbersome equivalent. *Initsiativniki* can be translated variously as "initiative group" and "initiativists"; *orgkomitet* as "Organizing Committee"; *Sovet* literally means "council," but is commonly translated as "soviet" for certain governmental bodies. *Dvadtsatka* has as its root *dvadtsat'* (twenty) but is in the nominative form with a diminutive ending, like a "fiver" or "tenner," but without a corresponding English equivalent, I have kept the original throughout. *Glasnost'* means "openness," and *perestroika* means "restructuring," but as policies under Mikhail Gorbachev, the Russian terms are commonly used.

Officials in Romania and Russia use the cognate "cult" (*cult* in Romanian and *kul't* in Russian), but the connotation is not expressly negative as in English and can be rendered as "religion" or "denomination" as well. Those religious groups that English-speakers might designate "cults" are generally referenced in Romanian and Russian as "sects." Thus I have translated Romania's *Departmentul Cultelor* as the Department of Religions.

In Romania, many names of localities have Hungarian counterparts. I have used the Romanian names even when the content is focused on Hungarians to reduce reader confusion. I have, however, put the Hungarian name at first mention for Hungarian readers. In the case of the Greek-Catholic Church, officials refer to those who joined the Orthodox Church as "*reveniți*" (lit. "the returned"), and those who did not join as "*nereveniți*," or the "non-returned." This use of language was to indicate that the incorrect path was away from Orthodoxy and the correct one was back toward it. I have chosen to replicate the use of such wording within quotations to show the construction of this discourse, not to agree with its underlying assertions.

In cases where the capitalization in Hungarian, Romanian, or Russian seems to be unconventional for the language or it may communicate something of significance, such as official attitudes, I have chosen to retain the capitalization in English, even if unconventional for English. However, non-capitalization was not always purposeful.

I – Introduction

The importance of religious gatherings as voluntary associations has been overlooked in contemporary research of Romania and the Soviet Union, despite the obvious coincidence of this type of associational life and major transformations in Eastern Europe. In Poland, Pope John Paul II undergirded the power of Solidarity by endorsing it; many supported Solidarity both as workers and Catholics.¹ In East Germany, the notorious Erich Honecker resigned two days after a series of stand-offs with large crowds who gathered in and around St. Nikolai's Church in Leipzig for regular prayer meetings and demonstrations; the Berlin Wall came down a month later.² In Romania, it was the defiance of a Hungarian Reformed Pastor, László Tőkés, and the support of his parishioners and other local Romanians which sparked the Revolution and Ceausescu's downfall.

Also missing have been studies of everyday religious practice in communist contexts. There have been some key studies of the Soviet case between the World Wars in which scholars have analyzed religions and religious policy at the level of institutions or leaders. There have also been histories of specific religions in communist Eastern Europe, as well as numerous memoirs by pastors and priests describing their experiences, especially if they had been in prison. Yet much of this work has given the impression that religion in the communist countries is reducible to one narrative of "atheism-persecutes-religion."

This is the first study of its kind where officials' reports have been analyzed in detail to uncover what kind of religion was problematic to state officials and why. The kind of religion that was acceptable to officials becomes clearest by identifying its negative counterpart, the unacceptable cases. These cases show that in Romania and the Soviet Union after World War II, ultimately, officials' concern about religion had much more to do with political power than it did with the veracity of ideological truths. The broad outlines of acceptable religiosity were extremely similar in both countries. The restrictions authorities enforced in their efforts to create religion-free public space included limiting religious activity to church services within church buildings and shielding youth from religious influence. Within the services, the Bible was

¹ Marian S Mazgaj, *Church and State in Communist Poland: A History, 1944-1989* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2010).

² Wendy Tyndale, *Protestants in Communist East Germany: In the Storm of the World* (London; New York: Routledge, 2016); David Doellinger, *Turning Prayers into Protests: Religious-Based Activism and Its Challenge to State Power in Socialist Slovakia and East Germany* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2014).

read, creeds were recited, traditional prayers were uttered, sacraments were performed, hymns were sung, and sermons were preached—with authorities scrutinizing sermons the most closely for acceptable content. Officials even considered acceptable “strictly religious” content, exegesis, or moralistic messages urging listeners to honesty, industry, and loyalty to the government. Aside from the obviously unacceptable—ideological confrontations of state-sponsored atheism or messages opposing the political powers—authorities considered unacceptable those sermons that advocated increased zeal, participation, or the forging of communal ties. Those that performed their religious duties in a perfunctory or didactic manner were the ones who escaped discipline or were even rewarded.

Although in attempting to describe this phenomenon I am using terms that officials did not readily deploy (“acceptable” and “unacceptable”), this is in part because in communist discourse there was no provision for certain forms of religion—it was supposed to disappear. Theorists did not debate which kinds of religion were better than others, but officials charged with overseeing religion did distinguish which ones were more problematic than others. As Moscow official A.A. Trushin put it in the case of certain problematic Orthodox priests whose registration he revoked, they had become “so enthralled” in preaching, performing rites, and “individual work with believers” that they “stepped over their borders [*perestupali svoi granitsy*] and violated soviet legislation.” Trushin, perhaps unwittingly, admitted that there were ways to transgress not just legislation, but other “borders,” as he did not identify any specific legal violations the priests had made but described how their sermons “were not limited” to “‘holy writings’ and the gospel” but touched on “moral issues” and “raising children.”³ Beyond enforcing legislation, officials drew borders and defined limits to religion in practice.

This work is unique because it is comparative across two countries and two branches of Christianity, Orthodoxy and Protestantism, to show how church cultures shaped church and state interactions. I study the situation of the Russian Orthodox Church and Evangelical Christians-Baptists Church in the Soviet Union and the Romanian Orthodox Church and Reformed Church in Romania from the end of the War until 1989. The Russian Orthodox Church and Romanian Orthodox Church have been the dominant religious institutions in their respective countries, with roughly two-thirds of citizens identifying themselves as Orthodox in Romania (13,000,000), and wild fluctuations in estimates in the Soviet case, ranging from a

³ Keston Archive, “Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report,” 1962, Archive file <KGB 53>, p. 42. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 1, Del. 58.

quarter to half the population, from 40-100,000,000.⁴ The Baptist Church in the Soviet Union was the largest protestant denomination and claimed around two million adherents, most of whom lived in Soviet Ukraine, but who were very active and visible in Moscow and the surrounding region. The Reformed Church of Romania, a Hungarian institution of around 700,000 members, is the largest Protestant denomination in Romania and the fourth largest denomination overall, after the Orthodox, Greek-Catholic, and Roman-Catholic Churches.⁵

Although Romania and the Soviet Union were ideologically atheist states from World War II until they fell, they still permitted churches to operate—however restricted religious practice may have been in believers’ or humanitarians’ eyes. Although there may have been many committed communists who envisioned a religion-free future, the postwar religious situation in communist Soviet Union and Romania can better be described as one of state authorities trying to favor certain kinds of religious activity over others. This situation requires analysis of what kind of religiosity would be acceptable in “atheist” societies, and why other forms of religious practice would be unacceptable. This work focuses on the regulation of Christianity in the Soviet Union and Romania.

Because the traditional content of Christian religion conflicted with the state ideology of atheism, it is clear that what state agents found unacceptable cannot be reduced to “religion.” Rather, what made religious practice unacceptable to authorities was the degree to which it mobilized people toward a religious affiliation or when it questioned established church or state truth claims. In their dealings with church personnel, state representatives wished for centralized churches where all participants respected the hierarchies and truths in place, even if those truths conflicted with communist ideology. If congregations maintained acceptability in authorities’ eyes, officials did not treat the religiosity of their gatherings as problematic. If the

⁴ Numbers in the case of the Soviet Union are highly disputable and subject to considerable fluctuation. Official estimates of the 280 million citizens were close to 40 million believers, but many people assume it was at least twice that number. In the Soviet Union, the pressure to deny religious affiliation was much greater than in Romania. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, those who identify with the Orthodox Church has gone from 31% to as high as 75%, according to various estimates, although the percentage of regular church attendees remains around 5%. See, for example, <http://www.pewforum.org/2014/02/10/russians-return-to-religion-but-not-to-church/>. Accessed November 6, 2014.

⁵ In Romania, there were roughly 12,000,000 Orthodox adherents in 1948. The number grew in proportion to the population as the latter increased. There were approximately two million Hungarians living in Romania, and roughly 700,000 considered themselves Reformed, and most of the remainder were Catholic.

gatherings transgressed the lines of acceptability, officials treated them as highly threatening to state power and applied extraordinary measures of surveillance and discipline against them.

Because religious gatherings were among the few opportunities for voluntary public assembly in communist Romania and the Soviet Union, they are extremely important sites for the study of power, ideology, and belonging in everyday social settings. Believers, clergy, church hierarchs, and state officials were actors in a struggle whose central battle was not “atheism vs. religion” or “us vs. them,” but the power to mobilize people. Acceptability was not related to creedal beliefs or traditional practices, nor reducible to expressions of political opposition or “dissidence.” The differences between acceptable and unacceptable religious gatherings fell along social-communal lines: what kinds of people came, the settings of the gatherings, and affective characteristics of the interactions like enthusiasm, engagement, and authenticity. Studying religious gatherings reveals that even though believers participated in them for their own highly individual reasons, state officials policed them as contests for mobilization.

Place of Project in the Field and Historiography

This dissertation project addresses several arenas of research. As a study pertaining to “religion,” it touches a number of established fields, including church histories, religious memoir and biography, everyday “lived” religion, secularization, studies of worldview, and comparative religion. But as a study of institutions and social formations, it speaks to studies of power in communist countries, including debates about totalitarianism, civil society, ideology, and sub- or youth-cultures.

Scholars and religious representatives frequently write histories of particular religious institutions. There are works pertaining to the Baptist Church, Reformed Church, and Russian Orthodox Church in Russia and the Soviet Union over the period this dissertation covers, but no history of the Romanian Orthodox Church to date.⁶ These works attempt to tell the story of

⁶ Michael Rowe, *Russian Resurrection: Strength in Suffering: A History of Russia's Evangelical Church* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1994); Walter Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II* (Kitchener, Ont.; Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1981); István Tőkés, *A Romániai Magyar Református Egyház Élete, 1945-1989 [The Life of the Romanian Hungarian Reformed Church, 1945-1989]* (Budapest: Magyarorsághutató Intézet, 1990); Dimitry Pospelovsky, *The Russian Church Under the Soviet Regime, 1917-1982*, vol. I, II vols. (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984); Dimitry Pospelovsky, *The Russian Church Under the Soviet Regime, 1917-1982*, vol. II, II vols. (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984); Jane Ellis, *The Russian Orthodox Church: A Contemporary History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986); Jane Ellis, *The Russian Orthodox Church: Triumphalism and Defensiveness*, St. Antony's Series (Houndmills [England] : New York: Macmillan Press ; St. Martin's Press in association

these churches, sometimes with brief comparative remarks to other confessions, usually with an emphasis on the politics of the hierarchies with less attention to experiences of clergy or believers. They also have tended to present a “church” perspective, lacking state archival material (often with good reason, as it was not readily available in most cases).

There are also numerous biographies and autobiographies of religious figures who lived in the time and place of this study, particularly if the subject served time in prison. The genre in such cases ranges from martyrology to evangelistic tracts to recollections. Other scholars and co-religionists have written about figures who populate the pages of this book, and those who are familiar with so-called religious “dissidents” of the Soviet Union or Romania might recognize some of the names that follow.⁷ The goal for the present work is not to add detail to the lives of prominent dissidents, but to better understand the context of their religious activity. In fact, the label “dissident” is misleading for many of these religious figures, since the term connotes one who dissents from mainstream beliefs and opinions, or more crudely, one who opposes the political regime. Although it is quite certain that all of these figures disagreed with the political regime in major or minor ways, it is also important to consider that their actions were often not first or foremost politically inclined so much as religiously situated. Their immediate (or even long-term) goals were not the overthrow of the government, but typically something like religious renewal, reform, or simply the harmony of belief and practice.

One reason outspoken or visible religious figures are labeled “dissidents” is simply because they displayed the characteristics common to other dissidents: courage in their non-conformity. There were ways that clergy could practice that would gain them rewards, namely by practicing religion in the way that state officials preferred. Rather than “dissident,” I have preferred to use the term “non-conformist,” as many of the figures who practiced religion

with St. Antony’s College, Oxford, 1996); Nathaniel Davis, *A Long Walk to Church: A Contemporary History of Russian Orthodoxy*, 2nd ed. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2003).

⁷ Oliver Bullough, *The Last Man in Russia: The Struggle to Save a Dying Nation* (New York: Basic Books, 2013); The accounts of Aleksandr Men’ are too numerous to list here, so I note the most respected accounts. Zoia Maslenikova, *Aleksandr Men’: zhizn’ [Aleksandr Men’: Life]* (Moskva: Zakharov, 2001); Yves Hamant, *Alexander Men: a witness for contemporary Russia (a man for our times)* ([S.l.]; London: Oakwood ; Cassell, 2000); Wallace L Daniel, *Russia’s Uncommon Prophet: Father Aleksandr Men and His Times*, 2016; Koenraad de Wolf, *Dissident for Life : Alexander Ogorodnikov and the Struggle for Religious Freedom in Russia* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2012); Peter Rumachik, Pavel Rumachik, and Luba Rumachik, *A Path Not Lined with Roses*, ed. Sam Slobodian, trans. Christopher J Lovelace (Maple Grove, MN: Baptist International Evangelistic Ministries, 1999); Natasha Vins, *Children of the Storm: The Autobiography of Natasha Vins*. (Greenville, S.C.: JourneyForth, 2002); László Tőkés, *With God, for the People: The Autobiography of Laszlo Tokes as Told to David Porter*. (Hodder & Stoughton, 1990); Ferenc Visky, *Szerelme Szorongat [His Love Constrains Us]* (Kolozsvár [Cluj-Napoca, RO]: Koinónia, 2004).

“unacceptably” in state eyes were doing so in religious leaders’ view as well. The comparative aspect of this project allows us to see them as part of a struggle that was common to multiple branches of Christianity in Romania and the Soviet Union.

Religion in Communist Countries

A number of historians and anthropologists have written on religion in communist countries, particularly in the Soviet Union. Scholars like Heather Coleman, Daniel Peris, Edward Roslof, and Glennys Young have written on religious topics in the Soviet interwar period.⁸ Tatiana Chumachenko, Sonja Luehrmann, Aleksei Marchenko, Mikhail Shkarovskii, Catherine Wanner, and Sergei Zhuk have written on various religious themes from the postwar period in the Soviet Union.⁹ Douglas Rogers’ account of Old Believers spanned several centuries of change, and Scott Kenworthy’s history of Russia’s most famous monastery spanned the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹⁰ This is the first study where religious ministry officials’ reports have been analyzed in conjunction with believers’ accounts toward understanding the pragmatic frameworks within which actors tried to variously resolve the tensions resulting from Soviet discourse and legislation pertaining to religion.

⁸ Heather J. Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution, 1905-1929* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005); Daniel Peris, *Storming the Heavens: The Soviet League of the Militant Godless* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); Edward E Roslof, *Red Priests: Renovationism, Russian Orthodoxy, and Revolution, 1905-1946* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002); Glennys Young, *Power and the Sacred in Revolutionary Russia: Religious Activists in the Village* (University Park Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997).

⁹ T. A. Chumachenko, *Church and State in Soviet Russia: Russian Orthodoxy from World War II to the Khrushchev Years*, trans. Edward E. Roslof (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2002); Sonja Luehrmann, *Secularism Soviet Style: Teaching Atheism and Religion in a Volga Republic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011); Sonja Luehrmann, *Religion in Secular Archives: Soviet Atheism and Historical Knowledge*, 2015; A. N. Marchenko, *Religioznaia Politika Sovetskogo Gosudarstva i ee Vliianie na Tserkovnuiu Zhizn' v SSSR [Religious Politics of the Soviet State in the Years of N.S. Khrushchev's Rule and its Influence on Church Life in the USSR]* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Krutitskogo podvor'ia; Obshchestvo liubitelei tserkovnoi istorii, 2010); M. V. Shkarovskii, *Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov' pri Staline i Khrushcheve (Gosudarstvenno-tserkovnye otnosheniia v SSSR v 1939-1964) [The Russian Orthodox Church under Stalin and Khrushchev (State-Church Relations in the USSR, 1939-1964)]* (Moskva: Krutitskoe Patriarshee Podvor'e Obshchestvo liubitelei tserkovnoi istorii, 1999); Catherine Wanner, *Communities of the Converted: Ukrainians and Global Evangelism, Culture and Society after Socialism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007); Catherine Wanner, ed., *State Secularism and Lived Religion in Soviet Russia and Ukraine* (Washington, D.C. : New York: Woodrow Wilson Center Press ; Oxford University Press, 2012); Sergei I. Zhuk, “Popular Religiosity in the ‘Closed City’ of Soviet Ukraine: Cultural Consumption and Religion during Late Socialism, 1959-1984,” *Russian History* 40, no. 2 (January 1, 2013): 183–200.

¹⁰ Douglas Rogers, *The Old Faith and the Russian Land: A Historical Ethnography of Ethics in the Urals, Culture and Society after Socialism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009); Scott M Kenworthy, *The Heart of Russia: Tinity-Sergius, Monasticism, and Society after 1825* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

There are fewer scholars of religion in Eastern Europe. In Romania, Ioan-Marius Bucur, Lucian Leuștean, and Cristian Vasile have written on issues pertaining to the Orthodox and Greek-Catholic Churches in the communist era for Romanian-speaking audiences.¹¹ Religion in the GDR has seen more English-language publication than other former communist countries.¹² As for comparative studies of religion in Eastern Europe, Sabrina Ramet and David Doellinger have been among the very few scholars to comparatively analyze religion in the late socialist and immediate post-communist context.¹³ The diversity of the region causes the topic to be pursued almost exclusively by national scholars who write for domestic audiences, making the edited collection by Bruce Berglund and Brian Porter the only relatively recent English-language publication representing the many East European countries, although it still could not include the gamut of religions in each country as well.¹⁴ This work represents the first attempt in the field at comparative analysis across state and faith lines using state archival documents.

Power, Totalitarianism, and Civil Society

In communist Eastern Europe, although officials largely wanted to keep religion out of the public sphere, it is a crucial lens for understanding questions relating to power, civil society, and social formations. Responding to stereotypical characterizations of these societies as “totalitarian” or “police states,” this research builds on the community of scholars who have demonstrated that citizens did impact their governments in important ways; the governments were not immune to social pressure, nor were they capable of “total” control.¹⁵ Yet studying

¹¹ Ioan-Marius Bucur, “Istoria Bisericii Unite (Greco-Catolice): 1944-1953 [The History of the Uniate (Greek-Catholic) Church: 1944-1953]” ([s. n.], 2002); Lucian Leuștean, *Orthodoxy and the Cold War: Religion and Political Power in Romania, 1947-65* (Basingstoke, England; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Cristian Vasile, *Între Vatican și Kremlin: Biserica Greco-Catolică în Timpul Regimului Comunist [Between Vatican and Kremlin: The Greek-Catholic Church in the time of the Communist Regime]* (București: Curtea Veche, 2003); Cristian Vasile, “Comunismul și Biserica: Represiune, Compromitere și Instrumentalizare [Comunism and the Church: Repression, Compromise, and Instrumentalization],” in *Comunism și Represiune în România: Istoria Tematică a Unui Fratricid Național*, ed. Ruxandra Cesereanu (Iași: Polirom, 2006), 171–89.

¹² Doellinger, *Turning Prayers into Protests*; Bernd Schäfer, *The East German State and the Catholic Church, 1945-1989* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010); Tyndale, *Protestants in Communist East Germany*.

¹³ Pedro Ramet, *Cross and Commissar: The Politics of Religion in Eastern Europe and the USSR* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); Sabrina P. Ramet, ed., *Protestantism and Politics in Eastern Europe and Russia: The Communist and Postcommunist Eras* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1992); Doellinger, *Turning Prayers into Protests*.

¹⁴ Bruce Berglund and Brian Porter, eds., *Christianity and Modernity in Eastern Europe* (Budapest; New York: Central European University Press, 2010).

¹⁵ Scholars like Moshe Lewin, Sheila Fitzpatrick, Lewis Siegelbaum, Steven Kotkin, Gail Kligman, and Katherine Verdery have effectively made this case. The Romanian and Soviet states and their institutions

religious gatherings still shows that the states demonstrated strong paradigms of control, making “grass-roots” gatherings extremely difficult and dependent on secretive measures.

There were, however, limits to state control of religion. Even if antagonism against religion affected the majority of Soviet and Romanian citizens, the fight against religion was never the ultimate priority for the Communist parties and had to be balanced with regard to other concerns. Nathaniel Davis argues that in the case of the Soviet Union, "The communists never considered the religious problem as being of immediate and overriding urgency. They repeatedly chose to pursue short-range political objectives even at the cost of their long-range goals. Their resolve varied according to time, circumstances, and place."¹⁶ The states did not anticipate just how durable religious participation would be, nor how successfully certain denominations or movements could attract people. Nor, more mundanely, did they anticipate how much administrative personnel and time religious organizations would require when they incorporated management of religious institutions into the wholesale management of society. The issues in need of resolution were numerous and complex, from finding cooperative personnel in leadership positions to managing clergy, to overhauling theological training, to monitoring the finances of the churches, to providing them with materials like candles, to handling requests for building construction, renovation, or use to even settling disputes within denominations. The number of petitions for church registration was often overwhelming. All of these issues needed oversight and coordination among the various levels of government bureaucracy.

The ministries of religion were limited by the lack of definition of their functional capacity and the need to always be wary of trends emerging from within the inner party leadership. For example, after Stalin granted concessions to church leaders to re-open some churches, thousands of petitions to open churches were submitted yearly from the mid-1940s until 1951, but only a fraction of these were granted. The Soviet councils for religious affairs never received guidance on how many to open. Local councils feared being labeled pro-Church,

were shaped by their tasks (they did not begin fully formed), and particular state-citizen relations were formed by their interactions. There are also a few scholars of Soviet history, such as Scott Kenworthy, Sonja Luehrmann, Edward Roslof, Daniel Peris, Catherine Wanner, and Glennys Young, who have explored the complexities of the churches and states and their dynamic relationships. An example of a scholar who employs the category of “totalitarian” as explanatory would be H. David Baer, who writes Communism “distorted the soul” when it demanded people cooperate with its construction. He argues that “official atheism for the churches was communism's totalitarian claim on society, its vision of an all-embracing socialism that allowed no place for independent institutions and associations.”

¹⁶ Davis, *A Long Walk to Church*, 238.

but they also were instructed to normalize church-state relations and open churches as needed.¹⁷ The governments of both Romania and the Soviet Union struggled to manage religious bodies effectively while balancing other governmental concerns and exigencies. Yet that does not mean that they projected weakness on this front; on the contrary, the lack of competency and potential vulnerabilities were hidden behind sporadic shows of force, the specter of police intelligence or blackmail, red-tape, bureaucratic dead-ends, and general antagonism.

Scholars have also debated the extent of atomization in communist society and whether “civil society” existed.¹⁸ It’s worth asking whether ordinary people (religious or not) found niche groups to which they felt like they belonged, or whether members of society were effectively atomized and isolated during this period. The study of religious formations speaks directly to this debate. The “associational life” found in religious formations remained an ever-present opportunity for people to mobilize around a “cause” or identity, but people could also participate in religion and remain isolated from their co-participants—a way of participation that state actions tried to foster.

This work shows how religious formations could be powerful or weak. Increased state antagonism sometimes actually helped strengthen community ties, as people needed others for bonding in adversity. This is most evident in the case of the Baptists (Chapter VIII), and the conditions that made for fragile communities is most evident in the non-conformist Orthodox groups discussed in Chapter VI.

Niche communities or societies, it seems, were always regarded by state authorities as potentially threatening. In the realm of religious practice, we find that the collective moral authority of the state collided with the potential power of voluntary associational life in religious gatherings, even though those who gathered rarely articulated large public goals or proclaimed a clear unifying platform, but simply projected a corporate desire to be free to define their own pursuits. State officials were wary of variations in church gatherings, as they presented opportunities for people to create new ways or languages of belonging. It was acceptable for people to practice religion as individuals ritualistically, but building a corporate identity and “thickening” communal relations threatened the “imagined communities” of belonging typically promulgated by the state (e.g. as fellow socialist citizens, workers, or members of the party or

¹⁷ Chumachenko, *Church and State in Soviet Russia*, 105.

¹⁸ Hannah Arendt, for example, has argued that “totalitarianism” is possible when society is atomized, when people are alienated from each other and life is highly segmented.

dominant national group). Any type of gathering could present the opportunity for people to mobilize, to form bodies of power; it just so happens that religious gatherings were among the few opportunities to do so. There were many occasions wherein believers began to speak of an “us,” but oftentimes state officials found ways to redivide the people and prevent a community from “activating.”

The legitimacy of an authority is often considered to be dependent on the believability of its ideology. Yet some scholars of the region have recently argued that ideological discourse had become empty by the 1970s in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, and that society’s focus had shifted enthusiastically toward consumption, even while citizens played *pro forma* roles in repeating the ideologies, pretending that they were meaningful.¹⁹ The late socialist period was not a titanic struggle of state ideologues and dissidents, these scholars argue; dissidents were in fact marginal to everyday society and commoners considered them to be “out of touch.” While agreeing that ideological debate lost its former urgency, my study of religious formations shows that ideas could still mobilize people as long as they appeared to be presented in “authentic” ways. This research shows that youth and intellectuals were not simply attracted to consumption and still discussed matters of “truth” in earnest. Yet state officials found certain religious gatherings threatening not because they were sites of struggle over religious or atheist “ideas,” but because they were examples of voluntary and enthusiastic corporate belonging outside of state-approved avenues—the same aspects that attracted many participants.

This work connects to growing research on aspects of social life in communist countries that have largely been ignored in studies of communist power. Contributors to the edited collection *Socialist Escapes* suggest that the communist countries endured in part due to their flexibility in accommodating all kinds of activity that early pro-communists might never have identified as compatible with communism, like tourism, music, art, camps, and other activities. A consideration of religion is missing from this collection.²⁰ Many citizens sought religious gatherings for affective qualities like “authenticity,” which was opposed to didacticism; some

¹⁹ Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006); Paulina Bren, *The Greengrocer and His TV: The Culture of Communism after the 1968 Prague Spring* (Ithaca, [N.Y.]: Cornell University Press, 2010); Juliane Furst, *Stalin’s Last Generation: Soviet Post-War Youth and the Emergence of Mature Socialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

²⁰ Cathleen M. Giustino, Catherine J. Plum, and Alexander Vari, *Socialist Escapes: Breaking Away from Ideology and Everyday Routine in Eastern Europe, 1945-1989* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015).

people sought ideologies they could believe in and act upon. There are scores of incidents in Romania and the Soviet Union in which religious gatherings became highly popular, with participants praising them as “authentic” for things like “openness” and “warmth,” comments which indirectly compared them favorably to other more scripted arenas of society and the accepted social-political discourse.

Youth have figured importantly in recent studies of the post-war period in communist Eastern Europe, especially in those of Julianne Furst and Alexei Yurchak. In each of the cases presented in this work, youth religious formations emerge, and they challenge state and church authorities, often at the same time, but not necessarily as “dissidents” intent on political overthrow so much as people wanting to have their own spaces of activity without the usual inhibitions. Furst shows how Soviet youth in the era of “mature socialism” both conformed and rebelled, were cynics and believers, careerists but also idealists. There were many visible groups of religious youth, and while they were often skeptical of those in power, being idealistic, they looked to change the scenario they encountered rather than accept it as inevitable. They sought what was “true,” but tired of pedanticism, they actively sought to facilitate non-political gatherings where the dominant tones would be ones of fun, belonging, and pushing the boundaries of established form or content. This work adds a site of youth activity overlooked to date, in the realm of religion.

Ways of Conceptualizing Religion in Communist Lands

Church vs. State?

In part because the stories of “non-conformist” religious figures who were subjected to censure and harassment reached concerned audiences abroad, many people have characterized the experience of the religious under communism as “the state persecuting the church.” This is only partly the case. Although it is true that the impulse to close churches, circumscribe religious activities, harass, torture, imprison, and kill believers, did not arise by widespread or popular demand, but from state officials and a minority of loyal, zealous citizens, the religious were not powerless. The states had many tools for justifying or covering acts of repression or violence, but they did not predetermine people’s reactions. Some victims of repression capitulated and hoped for better times, and some fought back. The playing field was never even, but how believers responded to the state had real impacts on their religious life. Believers had agency and influenced state religious policy, as subsequent chapters demonstrate.

Other treatments of religion in communist Eastern Europe have customarily yielded narratives of collaboration or victimhood, since some churchmen responded to strict limitations on religious practice by cooperating with officials. Although these do tell part of the story, they reduce complexities to an “us-them” dichotomy, and “collaborators” are derided for betraying the understood “us.”²¹ State and religious actors shared a common struggle: to define acceptable religiosity. Religious representatives often disagreed about aspects of state dictates on religion, and many called upon state institutions to resolve inner-church disputes. Relatively few believers saw their situation as so dichotomous or occupied by two monolithic entities, church and state.

Some have regarded the states’ ministries of religion (Council for Church Affairs in the Soviet Union and Department of Religions in Romania) as little more than repressive secret police organs; Russian scholar Tatiana Chumachenko describes Soviet religious officials as “over-procurators who represented the ideology of militant atheism.”²² Adherents to this view see bodies like the council as “organ[s] for control” of the church but ignore the way in which such institutions, by their existence, guaranteed a status quo relationship between the church and state, even if that status quo was subject to change. Existence of such councils acted to ensure that churches continued to exist, even if in a limited form. Although interaction “took place on official terms,” at a minimum churches could be recognized as legitimate bodies. Although far from satisfactory, the fact that officials granted churches an audience for their grievances or requests²³ meant there was a framework for religious existence, and these agencies were frequently referees between church and state bodies—sometimes advocating for church rights against certain authorities’ preferences.

Although communist leaders in the Soviet Union in the 1920s made draconian moves against the Orthodox Church to lessen its influence in governance, after World War II in the Soviet Union and Romania those in power did not attempt to isolate the churches from the state so much as transform the nature of the churches’ incorporation into the state. With each of the

²¹ H. David Baer, *The Struggle of Hungarian Lutherans under Communism* (College Station: Texas A&M Univ. Press, 2013), 3–4. Baer shows the basic division that existed then among churchmen and that remains today. He maintains such categorization, asking whether compromises with the government were necessary given such a reality, or whether church leaders “betrayed” the “true” mission of the church by cooperating to such an extent.

²² Chumachenko, *Church and State in Soviet Russia*, 8. An over-procurator is the name associated with the representative of the tsar who monitored and influenced church affairs in pre-Revolutionary Russia.

²³ *Ibid.*, 36.

religions after World War II, the states took on new roles in terms of regulating religious affairs with increased efforts in influencing, guiding, manipulating, and managing religious personnel. Scott Kenworthy noticed this discrepancy in his study of monastic life in the Soviet Union after World War II. Soviet authorities had shifted from once defining all religious belief as equivalent to superstition to defining clergy as another occupation. In attacks on monasteries in the late 1950s, for instance, officials identified “‘illegitimate’ pilgrimages and pilgrimage organizers,” as well as religious “‘fanatics,’” both of which had understood corollaries: legitimate pilgrimages and the religiously normal.²⁴

In Romania, the state may have imprisoned many religious leaders, but it also contributed to the salaries of registered clergy and theological professors and to scholarships for seminary students. Contemporary observer Miranda Villiers notes that "pensions, medical assistance, rest-homes by the sea and holiday houses in the holidays" were possibilities for clergy of the Church. As Villiers put it in 1973, "Such facts are proof that the Church is not merely tolerated within an officially atheistic, communist State, but that it has a positive role which is recognised and encouraged by the secular leaders."²⁵ The situation for churches in the Soviet Union was less amenable throughout, as even the former national Orthodox Church was almost never praised for its role in society. The Orthodox Church was allowed to receive donations and money for sale of candles or rendering of other services, but they were obliged to “donate” varying percentages to the state, particularly its “peace fund.” Yet what remained was sufficient for salaries and church upkeep, although small rural churches struggled for want of donations.²⁶

In addition to state-persecuting-church, many have seen the church-state relationship as built upon atheism-vs.-religion—a battle of ideologies. Although it is true that officials expected clergy to avoid ideological and apologetical debate or risk discipline, it is also true that officials after World War II in the Soviet Union and Romania permitted people the “freedom of conscience,” which meant that each individual could hold his or her own private beliefs. But in public, only the state had the prerogative of proclaiming official truth. As noted above, officials in the ministries of religions overlooked the fact that contrary propaganda was proclaimed at

²⁴ Scott Kenworthy, “The Revival of Monastic Life in the Trinity-Sergius Lavra after World War II,” in *State Secularism and Lived Religion in Soviet Russia and Ukraine*, ed. Catherine Wanner (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 146.

²⁵ Miranda Villiers, “The Romanian Church Today,” *Religion in Communist Lands* 1, no. 3 (1973): 4.

²⁶ Jane Ellis, *The Russian Orthodox Church: A Contemporary History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 49–52.

nearly every church service as long as the themes were self-referentially religious and did not inform public behavior beyond basic moralistic concepts like honesty, industry, and patriotism.

That church-vs.-state and atheism-vs.-religion are too reductive is made more evident in the fact that the states and the churches in question were far from unified. Much of Western history is made up of church divisions, and the communist period is one of both church unity and division. In the Soviet Union and Romania, for many believers and clergy, the most threatening "heresy" no longer came from "sects" or "schismatic" groups, but from the state and its agents. In this way, and as we will explore throughout this book, as state agents sometimes pitted themselves against believers (e.g. by sending them to prison), they inadvertently created the opportunity for believers to consider Christianity something shareable with those of other Christian confessions. Believers could now see those of other denominations not necessarily as enemies or competitors, but as co-laborers in a common struggle, and ecumenism did flourish in some circles, notably in prison.

But ecumenism was far from the norm, perhaps still unusual. Some religious representatives considered "atheist" state agents less their enemy than traditional enemies, including "sectarians," Jews, or neighboring ethnic groups. Others would not put aside traditional animosities that existed between their respective denominations. After all, confidence in the rightness of one's own tradition did not necessarily diminish, and others' heresy was not rectified by a heretical state. Across communist lands, some believers and clergy regarded church hierarchs cooperating with the state as acting as the "arm of Satan."

A significant problem in viewing the situation as divided neatly between "church" and "state" is that the state could not easily be distinguished from the church. Some church leaders were state agents, and others did not oppose serving both state and church interests. Moreover, "the church" is multiple things at once. As some saw it, the church was an institution that rendered services (performing certain essential rites), necessitating open doors. Yet "the church" can also be an informal, undefined community. Its unscripted connections of people are not synonymous with the church leaders. In many ways, church is both an institution and an amorphous body of belonging that can be universal or local.

Moreover, religious affiliations often overlap with other affiliations such as national ones, and the relative power of a religious affiliation is ever in flux. It becomes necessary to consider overlapping affiliations in this work especially as it pertains to Romania's Reformed Church. This church was almost exclusively comprised of Hungarians, and so attacks on the

Reformed Church might be regarded by some as an "ethnic" attack, whereas attacks on Hungarians were not necessarily seen as "religious attacks" since some Hungarians were Reformed, others Catholic, Baptist, atheist, and so on. In the case of Baptists in Romania, Orthodox believers often saw their growth at the expense of the Orthodox Church as threatening, but so did state agents, who considered it "a threat to the unitary and indivisible character of the Romanian national state."²⁷ In the mind of many Romanians, even so-called "atheist" ones, to be Romanian was to be Orthodox. For nationalists in Romania and Russia, evangelical denominations were considered Western and non-traditional, and therefore, non-Romanian or non-Russian. State agents often paired with Orthodox representatives in combatting loss of churchgoers to such protestant denominations. Beyond nationalism, state agents may have also been concerned for churches with "Western" connections mobilizing people.

Niche in the Field: Religion as Site of Associational Life with Power to Mobilize

Scholars Bruce Berglund and Brian Porter-Szűcs perceptively noticed a major deficiency in the field of Christianity and religion in Eastern Europe, that "archive-based, historical research into East European Christianity in the modern period has been largely absent from the scholarly literature." They also noted the need for "a critical reconsideration of the analytical categories and teleological narratives that have previously obscured the actual experience of religious life and faith."²⁸ Although there are scholars of "everyday" or "lived" religion who have attempted to get outside the confines of theological (intellectual), institutional (church), or biographical lenses for studying religion,²⁹ this field is not well established in the discipline of history for East European or communist contexts.³⁰ The present work is an attempt at redressing this deficiency.

My focus is on one particular aspect of religion: religious gatherings as sites that state officials monitored because they feared that such gatherings encouraged alternative identities and ideologies as well as voluntary mobilization of citizens. By making the gathering the central

²⁷ Ioan-Marius Bucur, "Church and State Relations under the Communist Regime: The Case of Romania," in *Religion and Political Change in Europe: Past and Present*, ed. Ausma Cimdina (Pisa: PLUS, 2003), 171.

²⁸ Berglund and Porter, *Christianity and Modernity in Eastern Europe*, xiv, 2.

²⁹ See, for example, the works of the following scholars in American and British contexts: David D. Hall, ed., *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997); Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Congregation and Community* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997); Grace Davie, *The Sociology of Religion: A Critical Agenda*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2013).

³⁰ Marion Bowman and Ülo Valk, eds., *Vernacular Religion in Everyday Life: Expressions of Belief* (Bristol, CT: Equinox, 2015). Folklorists and anthropologists have been much more rigorous in applying theoretical developments to this region than historians.

lens of focus, one can move beyond considerations of why people go to church or participate in religious activities. It becomes unnecessary to determine exactly what people believe and how that relates to what a “church” believes. A study of religious gatherings demonstrates that religious associations are live, in-flux organisms with partly constraining – not predetermining – cultural patterns and traditions. Religious life is not restricted to institutions or hierarchs but is dynamic and responsive to historical changes and conditions.

The word “community” deserves definition. As sociologist Craig Calhoun puts it, “community suggests a greater 'closeness' of relations than does society. This closeness seems to imply, though not rigidly, face to face contact, commonality of purpose, familiarity and dependability.”³¹ Any association may range from a simple aggregation of people to one where all participants are related by several kinds of bonds at once. The relationships and nature of those relations matter. The poles of a proper spectrum are not “individual” vs. “community,” but on the relative strengths of the bonds between people.³² Things like frequency of interaction may influence strength of community, though the bonds of “familiarity” or “common interest” are relatively weak (e.g. going to church every Sunday with the same people may cause one to act on behalf of the others there, but it may not - familiarity is not enough). Specific responsibilities carry more weight, such as being economically interdependent, or being a member of an organization with clear duties. Also potentially strong are those among relatives, among kin, as well as bonds of friendship.

People weigh the risks and benefits of their actions according to the often complicated outcomes which might result with regard to the various communities to which they belong. For instance, if one belongs to a church community but is also a citizen of a state, she must weigh the costs and benefits of upholding the expectations of one membership when it conflicts with another. That the states in Romania and the Soviet Union often seemed to suggest that strong allegiance to a church or church community was in conflict with being a citizen made for a great struggle during the whole of the states' existence.

³¹ C. J. Calhoun, “Community: Toward a Variable Conceptualization for Comparative Research,” *Social History* 5, no. 1 (1980): 111.

³² *Ibid.*, 109–20. A corporate body could be considered atomized when the links between people are weak. When ties are weak, conflict easily results in people abandoning the group. But where people are linked by many different kinds of ties rather than a single one, it becomes less likely that one will leave an association. Bonds between people may be strong or weak, and although historical ties often guide actions, they never predetermine them. In order to study a community, one must attend to the relationships that exist between the people, and the nature of those relationships.

Whether “community” existed in the churches of this study is part of the inquiry and argument of this project. I argue that generally speaking, most people practiced religion in a fragmentary way, individualistically, and this was quite satisfactory to state agents. Even where religion was gaining in popularity, the communal relations were far from durable, as the relations among people were based primarily on frequency and common interest. There are, however, a few instances from this research where the opposite seemed to emerge and true communities were formed.

Methodology

Countries and Churches Selected

Romania and the Soviet Union have adherents to Judaism and Islam, as well as several denominations of Christianity, including Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Greek-Catholic (Uniate), Lutheran, Presbyterian, Reformed, Baptist, Pentecostal Churches, as well as Seventh-Day Adventists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Unitarians. For this paper, I have chosen to compare Christian faiths that had been present and relatively widespread before the First World War.

For Romania, I have researched the Romanian Orthodox and Hungarian Reformed Churches, primarily in the Transylvanian region. For the Soviet Union, I have researched the Russian Orthodox and Baptist Churches in the Moscow region. Both territories contain around seven million people, although Transylvania is twice as large as Moscow Oblast. The Orthodox Churches in both cases are nationally predominant and very hierarchical, while the Protestant churches are widespread but historically less intertwined with the state. Comparing dominant (Orthodox) with minority churches reveals the relative role of the threat that the Orthodox Churches presented as alternative avenues for mobilizing citizens *en masse*. Adding Protestant churches reveals how differences in church cultures and traditions led to variations in state management and state relations, as well as how churches variously dealt with internal disputes.

The four faiths researched were both historically present and relatively large as well as accepted in communist times, which the Roman- and Greek-Catholic Churches were not. In both countries the Roman-Catholic Church never received complete acceptance due to its allegiance to a foreign power, the pope. In both the Soviet Union and Romania the Greek-Catholic Church (also commonly known as the Uniate Church) had a long historical presence since being formed in 1596 at the Union of Brest. In this Union, certain Eastern Orthodox Churches accepted papal authority in Rome, while maintaining much of the practices and traditions of Orthodoxy, leading

to the name “Uniate.” In the Soviet Union in 1946 and Romania in 1948, this Uniate Church was declared “reunited” with the Orthodox Church ostensibly by popular demand. In fact, this was a highly coercive maneuver whereby prominent church leaders were imprisoned if they did not “voluntarily” sign their names in agreement with the disappearance of their Church and its property. Those who wished to remain faithful to their denomination practiced underground. The importance of the Greek-Catholics in the Romanian case will be obvious whereas the geographic focus on Moscow means Greek-Catholicism is absent from the Soviet case.

I have chosen to study Christian denominations because of their religious predominance. Studying non-Christian religions, such as Buddhism, Islam, or Judaism, would add even greater depth to our understanding of communist officials’ management of religion and would likely involve issues of officials’ ethnic, racial, or religious prejudices. The issue of Jews in Romania and the Soviet Union, for example, presents several very significant variations to the study of religion in these contexts. Judaism was an acceptable religion in both countries, but problems like cultural and governmental antisemitism alongside Jewish requests to emigrate from Russia to Israel make for additional difficulties in studying state management of Judaism as a religion. Nevertheless, I have, even in the title, used the word “religion” rather than the more specific term “Christianity” because officials aimed to address the Christian religions not according to such terms as “Christianity” in distinction from other faiths, but according to a Marxist notion that all religions were equal in being superstitions doomed to fade out with a socio-economic changes in society—even if for practical reasons officials did make important distinctions.

Comparing the countries of Romania and the Soviet Union is reasonable due to their similarities in rule, and because in both countries the Orthodox Church is a central and powerful national-cultural institution. They also have leadership chronologies that make for convenient comparison. One challenge to the field of Russian and East European studies is that the region is comprised of more than a dozen countries, all necessitating language expertise and knowledge of particular histories and cultures. This reality often restricts fruitful comparative discussion, and scholars often ignore research from neighboring countries. Neither “communism” nor “religion” was a monolith across Eastern Europe, yet the region has been shaped by communist-socialist rule and the presence of distinctive religious bodies.

Sources

Several kinds of sources mitigate against a one-sided perspective. For each Church, I have used recollections and memoirs from participants of religious gatherings, such as from believers or members of the clergy, alongside utterances from officials, including secret reports, court cases, and accounts of the authorities' interactions with believers. Most of the sources have been almost unused by other scholars since the government reports were deemed secret in communist times and are still difficult to locate. In 2015 in the counties of Transylvania, only two regional archives contained such reports (Sălaj and Mureș Counties). For Soviet reports, I have used material from the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF), City Archive of Moscow (TsGA Moskv), and copies of Moscow Oblast reports (TsGAMO) made in the 1990s and held by the Keston Archive at Baylor University. To supplement the relative dearth of documents from the 1980s, I have relied more on memoirs, samizdat, and interviews with actors from both countries.³³

The reports largely come from the ministries of religion. In the Soviet Union, until around 1965, there were two ministries: the Council for Russian Orthodox Church Affairs (CROCA) and the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults (CARC). After 1965, they merged into the Council for Religious Affairs (CRA), although divisions still existed in addressing various confessions. In Romania, the agency was initially the Ministry of Religions, and later the Department of Religions.

These agencies comprised part of the apparatus of supervision, which also included police, secret police, other local officials, and even any other citizen who participated in this network of information. In both countries, the ministries had central offices to whom regional offices reported. Regional officials worked with religious counterparts of their region, and central offices dealt with top hierarchs. Although the ranking system is largely secretive, it seems to be commonly asserted that a local state commissioner, although holding an official government post, held a lower-ranking position than leading church hierarchs. All churches and church personnel had to be registered and approved by the ministries.

³³ The individuals and churches whose narratives I analyze do not fall equally in the “acceptable” and “unacceptable” category. When exploring the differences, I have found that “acceptable” was usually defined negatively: many historical actors in religious institutions discovered what was unacceptable by inadvertent transgression and subsequent discipline. Thus, many of my subjects were the transgressors of acceptable religiosity. The two categories defined one another.

Ministry officials were mostly functionaries whose primary purpose was to ensure that religious practices were being carried out according to law. They oversaw the finances of the churches as well, ensuring that they reported earnings for tax purposes and the like. They also had to approve building use and renovation for religious functions. They oversaw selection of religious personnel for any committees and the selection of important positions in deaneries or bishoprics of his territory. They also held regular hours for receiving anyone with issues or problems to discuss in the religious realm.

Organization of Dissertation

Due to the simultaneity of the events in question, the dissertation is organized variously by chronology, geography, and religious confession. The postwar eras of Joseph Stalin and Nikita Khrushchev in the Soviet Union align almost exactly with the era of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej in Romania, and the eras of Leonid Brezhnev, his aged successors, and Mikhail Gorbachev align with the era of Nicolae Ceaușescu. These two groupings of eras roughly align with both countries' shifting approaches to managing religion. In the first religious era in both countries, I take the experiences of the respective Orthodox and Protestant denominations together, but in the later Brezhnev/Ceaușescu eras, I consider the denominations separately due to the extensive non-state sources available and in order to streamline the narratives. The narratives of different faiths do intertwine at times, but they also are distinctive, representative of the particular institutions and cultures of each faith.

Chapter II tells the story of Stalin's new approach to religion and the reemergence of public religiosity in the Soviet Union. Chapter III covers Romania's communist officials' attempts at establishing the reliability of the churches until 1956. Ch. IV goes back to the Soviet Union and addresses Nikita Khrushchev's reaction to burgeoning religion and the tensions resulting from his anti-religion campaign until his removal from office in 1964. Ch. V covers the same period in Romania—still under Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej—and the state crackdown on uncontrolled religious movements until Dej's death in 1964. 1964 suggested liberalization to believers under Brezhnev and Ceaușescu, but officials instead worked at normalizing religious practices against attempts by clergy and believers to enliven or innovate them. The remaining four chapters covering 1964-1989 are separated by religious confession: the Russian Orthodox Church and Romanian Orthodox Churches make up Chapters VI and VII, and the Evangelical Christians-

Baptists of the Soviet Union and the Reformed Church of Romania appear in Chapters VIII and IX. A conclusion focusing on comparisons of the states and denominations follows as Chapter X.

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II. The Return of Public Religion to the Soviet Union, 1943-1958

By the time the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, the religious situation in the Soviet Union was very bleak. But the story of communism in Russia began in 1917 with what many would call a triumph for the Russian Orthodox Church. The abdication of the last Romanov Tsar gave the institutional freedom necessary to elect their first patriarch since Peter the Great abolished this head position of the church some two centuries prior. Just over a week after the Bolsheviks came to power in the October Revolution, the Church elected Patriarch Tikhon to the office.

But the Bolsheviks essentially nationalized all land and property, including the Church's, and it no longer was a legally recognized institution with rights or legal powers. It no longer had the right to register births or administer marriages. The Bolsheviks and the Orthodox Hierarchy were in direct confrontation at this beginning moment, with each denouncing the other in turn, either for political or ideological reasons. A physical confrontation did not truly begin until the Civil War was over, in late 1921 and early 1922. The ravages of World War I and the Civil War left people starving and dying of disease. In order to gain some revenue and help stabilize food supply and the society in general, one of the Bolshevik strategies was to insist the Church hand over its valuable goods toward this effort. The Patriarch complied by asking all parishes to give up any valuables except those used for sacraments (golden chalices for serving the Eucharist, for example, were to be held back). But this sacrifice was branded as too partial and selfish by the Bolshevik government, given the needs of society, and officials and locals were enjoined to take these articles as well. Fights ensued as believers attempted to defend their precious ritual items.

This struggle deepened. Clergy were arrested, as were bishops. The Patriarch was put under house arrest. Leftist-leaning clergy gained the upper hand. So-called "Renovationists" were favored by the Bolshevik government as a way of breaking the grip of the existing hierarchy and as an opportunity for collaboration rather than opposition. Many of the churches were handed over to the Renovationists, a group which quickly won disdain almost equal to that of the Bolsheviks among the erstwhile Orthodox leadership. After Tikhon was released from house arrest, perhaps sensing the inevitability of the Bolshevik government, he began to concentrate his efforts on the "enemy within," the Renovationists.

Attention to the Church waned slightly in 1924 and into 1928. This period was marked by an internal church struggle more than an external battle with the state. In addition to the

problem of the Renovators, Tikhon's death in 1925 brought about a problem of succession. Most of those qualified to succeed were in prison or exile. The acting head of the church was Metropolitan Sergii (a.k.a Sergius), who after his release from prison in 1927 pledged his allegiance to the Soviet government in a statement on July 24. This declaration alienated many and caused dissenters to begin to organize underground, as they felt that cooperation with "the antichrist" could not be tolerated in this fashion. Movements called the "True Orthodox Church" and "True Orthodox Christians" took shape and remained underground, opposed to the "Sergiites" well into the latter half of the century.

Evangelical denominations, however, did benefit some from the weakened role of the Orthodox Church in society, as prejudice against them no longer had state backing. In fact, since they gained most of their converts from the Orthodox Church, some officials regarded their role of weakening the Church as positive. With the power of the Orthodox Church a primary concern, officials did not target the Protestants in the USSR, which included the Lutherans, Mennonites (mainly German origin), Evangelical-Christians (Brethren), Baptists, Pentecostals, and Seventh-Day Adventists.¹ Evangelical denominations "experienced truly phenomenal growth" during the first decade of Soviet rule, increasing in numbers five or six times their size in 1917, due to relaxed controls on proselytism.²

Joseph Stalin, who had succeeded Lenin in 1924, commenced a mass drive to industrialize the Soviet Union in 1928. The relative laissez-faire of the so-called New Economic Policy came to an end, and rural churches suffered new attacks during the mass collectivization campaign. Valuables were taken, icons and bell towers were destroyed, churches became warehouses for goods, and so on. There was also violence against and mass arrests of clergy and believers bold enough to attempt to save their churches. On top of all of this, anti-religious messages and scientific materialism were promoted while religious worldviews were denigrated as vestiges of superstition.

As part of the regime's attempt to further reduce the power of religious bodies, in 1929 the Law on Religious Associations was passed. With the 1929 law, youth were prohibited from attending, and adults were prohibited from proselytizing. Officials made training or placing new

¹ Walter Sawatsky, "Protestantism in the USSR," in *Protestantism and Politics in Eastern Europe and Russia: The Communist and Postcommunist Eras*, ed. Sabrina P. Ramet (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1992), 239.

² Walter Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II* (Kitchener, Ont.; Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1981), 38–39.

priests extremely difficult, and by thinning the ranks, the government hoped that priests would not be able to do much beyond performing the basic rites of the church. Churches were forbidden from engaging in any acts of social welfare as well. The material side of churches was suffocated too, with almost absolute barriers to publishing or distributing bibles and literature, producing candles, or building or renovating. The government severely restricted the rights of religious associations, forbidding “expansion” and “expansionist” activities, a particularly problematic situation for Evangelical denominations.³ Many believers, especially elders of the church, were arrested as “kulaks” (wealthier peasants) or for maintaining contacts with co-religionists abroad. Officially, numbers declined drastically, and in reality, the denominations suffered greatly due to harassment and the incarceration and deaths of many of their leaders. The national change to a six-day week also made church gatherings more difficult. In Moscow, only one of the six Evangelical churches remained open. Although relations among Evangelical denominations were traditionally fraught with disagreements on doctrine and practice, the only Evangelical church open in Moscow attracted brave Protestants from the Evangelical-Christian and Baptist faiths in particular.⁴

Stalin leveled another attack during the Great Purges of the late 1930s. By the time of the beginning of what was to become World War II, it is estimated that in the Orthodox Church alone, since 1917 the 160,000 Orthodox clergy, monks, and nuns had dwindled down to 80,000 due to imprisonment, execution, or other coercive measures. In Odessa, scholar Nathaniel Davis writes, when the Germans entered the city they found only one of 48 churches open, with no priests. In Kiev, there were two open churches, with three priests serving (down from nearly 1,500 before the revolution). There were only some 200-300 churches open in the entire Soviet Union in 1939.⁵ It appeared that the institutional church was indeed in danger of dying out.

This chapter explores the results of the new path Stalin charted for religion during World War II and the fifteen years following, prior to Nikita Khrushchev’s anti-religion campaign in the Orthodox and Evangelical Churches, primarily in the Moscow region. Although Stalin may have anticipated that his concessions would lead only to a kind of religiosity that would be private and publicly invisible, he unwittingly created the space for religious practice that transgressed the desired limits both of communist ideologues and of pragmatic officials wishing

³ Sawatsky, “Protestantism in the USSR,” 242.

⁴ Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II*, 46–48.

⁵ Nathaniel Davis, *A Long Walk to Church: A Contemporary History of Russian Orthodoxy*, 2nd ed. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2003), 12–13.

to “satisfy” people’s “religious needs.” Perhaps Stalin believed that relatively few would wish to continue religious practice, but the number of petitions to open churches and subsequent religious activity made the management of the religions an overwhelming task for officials. By 1947 the Orthodox and Baptist Churches were mobilizing people in large numbers, and officials could observe that they were more than outlets for vestigial superstition, as officials typified religious practice. Even pragmatic communists wanted at most religious practice that would be characterized merely by ritualistic participation in a weekly service, whereas hardliners and idealists regretted Stalin’s concessions to religion, since to them, it remained incompatible with communism. This tension would endure largely unresolved until the late Gorbachev era.

By 1948 the possibility of registering churches closed as the regime no longer welcomed the religious openings, but officials were now faced with the problem of normalizing religious practice. According to communist ideology, religion was supposed to disappear. The problem for officials was explaining why it was not only not declining, but “activating” in both the Orthodox and Evangelical Churches. Their response was to blame priests, pastors, and “active” members as the agents, and characterize “ordinary” believers as the ones influenced by them. This describes the scenario officials faced until the death of Stalin, but also the years following, including the first several years under Khrushchev until roughly 1958.

Stalin’s Wartime Concessions

Stalin’s policy shift during the war is what changed the bleak trajectory for the Orthodox and Evangelical Churches. From the war’s beginning, church leaders urged the faithful to support the war effort against the very real threat of the rapidly advancing Nazis. Some churches reopened without legal authorization, but also with a tacit understanding that it was acceptable for the extraordinary times. Upon the Nazi invasion, Metropolitan Sergii had immediately made patriotic and anti-German proclamations, urging believers to support the cause against the invaders, even drawing on historic and religious discourse about the holiness of the Russian (not Soviet) cause.⁶ Evangelical believers did not publicly reflect on the hardships caused by state persecution during this time, but focused instead on the hardships of the war and the supposed evils their fascist enemies were committing against their co-religionists.⁷ But believers in occupied territories noticed that the Nazis allowed churches to reopen. In Kiev,

⁶ Dimitry Pospelovsky, *The Russian Church Under the Soviet Regime, 1917-1982*, vol. I (Crestwood, N.Y: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984), 194–99.

⁷ Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II*, 55.

some twenty-five churches reopened during the several-year occupation.⁸ Not that all was ease and light behind enemy lines, but this was one “benefit” for some believers during occupation and a boost to Nazi propaganda.⁹

Concessions in the Orthodox Church

By the fall of 1941, as the Nazi Army marched steadily eastward, Stalin saw fit to stop his fight against religion. Anti-religious propaganda ceased, and the League of the Militant Godless was disbanded.¹⁰ But religiosity was still largely underground. Sergei Mechev was one priest who went underground in 1927 in reaction to the Sergiite proclamation (see above). He often visited the home of professor and scientist Nikolai Pestov, who was a scholar of theological topics in secret, until Mechev was arrested and executed as a supposed conspirator in 1942. Pestov’s daughter, Natalia, witnessed the many clandestine meetings and interactions with people whose parents were underground, arrested, or killed, and their family was acquainted with other followers of Mechev (called Mechevites). She recalls how “At the beginning of the war every priest who visited our home was either arrested, exiled, or disappeared who knows where.”¹¹ Early in the war, state agents viewed clandestine activity as akin to conspiracy. A priest who will be featured below, Mikhail Trukhanov, was a student in 1941 and was arrested for “organizing a circle for studying the bible” at a public institution.¹² He was not tried, but simply sent to prison, where the warden, when meeting him, remarked, “you are really a Christian? Ha-ha-ha!!,” as though Trukhanov was a rare, even comical remnant of a dying breed.

What truly changed matters for religious practice was a meeting that Stalin held on September 4, 1943—after the pivotal battle that the Soviet Union won at Stalingrad—to which he invited foreign minister Vyacheslav Molotov, future head over church affairs Georgii Karpov (a former NKVD colonel who presided over religious cases, arresting and persecuting problematic religious personnel), and the three remaining heads of the Orthodox Church,

⁸ Davis, *A Long Walk to Church*, 16.

⁹ For more on church openings under German occupation, see Volume I of Pospelovsky. He writes that German policies conflicted here: anti-Slavic racism, preference for non-Russian nationalities for collaboration, and the indisputable boon to German favor that opening churches wrought. Pospelovsky cites evidence of massive revival of religiosity behind German lines, many church openings, baptisms, reemergence of priests, etc. See pp. 224-246.

¹⁰ Daniel Peris, *Storming the Heavens: The Soviet League of the Militant Godless* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

¹¹ N. N. Sokolova, *Pod Krovom Vsevyshnego [Under the Blood of the Most High]* (Moskva: Izd-vo, Pravoslavnoe bratstvo sviatogo apostola Ioanna Bogoslova, 1999), 13.

¹² Mikhail Trukhanov, *Vospominaniia: Pervye Sorok Let Moei Zhizni [Recollections: The First Forty Years of My Life]*, ed. V. A. Zvonkova, vol. 1, 2008, 78.

Metropolitans Sergii, Aleksei, and Nikolai. Stalin quizzically questioned why they seemed inactive as of late, inviting them to come out of the shadows. Stalin consented to their request to elect a patriarch,¹³ even encouraged them to act quickly, and four days later there was a gathering of bishops—many of whom had suddenly reappeared from arrest or exile—where they elected Sergei patriarch, filling the position that had been vacant since 1925 due to state restrictions. Stalin also granted his consent for theological training of additional numbers of clergy for desperately understaffed churches, journal publication, consecrating bishops, ordaining additional priests, and producing now-scarce candles.¹⁴

Although it might appear that Stalin made these concessions in order to better ensure Soviet loyalty at a time when it was of utmost concern for the war effort, thus demonstrating that he knew that many citizens still longed for more religious access, his concessions were offered only after the war appeared to be favoring the Soviet Union.¹⁵ In addition, scholars have noted, Stalin might have also felt that loyal Church hierarchs could play a very important role in international relations, as well as domestically. They could demonstrate Soviet religious tolerance to the world (particularly the Allies), and also help rein in churches located in newly-acquired or Soviet-desired territories to the West.¹⁶ Stalin was willing to sacrifice ideological constancy during WWII, as Catherine Wanner, puts it, to “merge sacred and secular goals” for the war effort. The Church likewise issued letters that urged people, based on their religious convictions, to support “the Motherland.”¹⁷ Yet it should also be noted that far to the east of the front, very few churches opened. Most of those that opened had proximity to the Western front, demonstrating that for Stalin, this was to shore up loyalty where it mattered most.¹⁸

¹³ In the world of Orthodoxy, each Autocephalous (i.e. National) Orthodox Church has its own Patriarch, who stands at the church’s head. Beneath him are the ranks Archbishop / Metropolitan, Bishop, Archpriest, Priest, Deacon, Laity (there are more distinctions and sub-rankings than this, but these comprise the major ranks). In Orthodox Churches, a Synod or Council is theoretically over the hierarchy, but it is often comprised of the leading hierarchs as well.

¹⁴ Davis, *A Long Walk to Church*, 17; Pospelovsky, *The Russian Church Under the Soviet Regime, 1917-1982*, 1984, I:201–2. There is much more intrigue to this meeting with Stalin than I can present here.

¹⁵ Scott Kenworthy, “The Revival of Monastic Life in the Trinity-Sergius Lavra after World War II,” in *State Secularism and Lived Religion in Soviet Russia and Ukraine*, ed. Catherine Wanner (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 119.

¹⁶ Dimitry Pospelovsky, *The Russian Church Under the Soviet Regime, 1917-1982*, vol. II, II vols. (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984); Davis, *A Long Walk to Church*.

¹⁷ Catherine Wanner, *Communities of the Converted: Ukrainians and Global Evangelism, Culture and Society after Socialism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 55–57.

¹⁸ Pospelovsky, *The Russian Church Under the Soviet Regime, 1917-1982*, 1984, I:206. Pospelovsky notes that two cities to the East with populations over one million, Gorky (Nizhny Novgorod) and Sverdlovsk (Yekaterinburg), had in operation three churches and one church, respectively.

Evidently, Stalin now saw the Church as an institution that did not threaten his authority but as one capable of being, as Scott Kenworthy puts it, “co-opted to serve the legitimacy of the Stalinist state.”¹⁹

The government formed the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church (CROCA) at the level of the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union as an information-gathering and monitoring organ, tracking all religious affairs and ensuring that the Church abided by Soviet legislation. The Church also had to receive approval for all personnel moves, thus even the appointment of the Patriarch had to receive approval, thereby allowing the government leverage in managing church affairs.²⁰ The head of the Department of Religious Cults, Karpov being its first, reported to the Central Committee. Below Karpov were those who presided over certain oblasts, who in turn had raion- (district-) level functionaries. Those at this lower level were grouped into commissions who operated at a level analogous to executive committees of the city and district-level councils (or soviets). Commissioners were to know the laws and amendments of the USSR, but in reality, they closely followed the instructions of their superiors, and ultimately of the head of the Council, who guided their interpretation and application of the law.

Karpov was charged with forming the Council and acting as go-between for the church and state. Karpov’s Council was supposed to monitor and guide church-state relations, and its primary tasks included reporting on the Church to the state, and relaying state wishes to the Church.²¹ Part of the Council’s reporting was to include statistics and recommendations for future state actions.²²

For its part, the episcopate (i.e., the bishops) of the Orthodox Church accepted the Council and the compromises proposed by Stalin and his representatives. They were given a voice but were required to support the state and its political positions. What was expressed as a “preference” or “recommendation” by the Council in reality was more like “guidelines for action” for the Church.²³ Church leaders were granted some freedom to travel abroad with the understanding that they would promote state interests or express state concerns. The bishops were the ones through whom the Council would exert its influence over the broader church

¹⁹ Kenworthy, “The Revival of Monastic Life,” 124.

²⁰ Pospelovsky, *The Russian Church Under the Soviet Regime, 1917-1982*, 1984, 1:214.

²¹ T. A. Chumachenko, *Church and State in Soviet Russia: Russian Orthodoxy from World War II to the Khrushchev Years*, trans. Edward E. Roslof (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2002), 15.

²² *Ibid.*, 17–18. See this section of Chumachenko's work for much more detail about the Council.

²³ *Ibid.*, 36.

activity; they would supply those under them with guidelines and discipline the non-conformists.²⁴

It was Church leaders' fears of the terrors of the 1930s, T.A. Chumachenko argues, that "compelled [them] not only to avoid overstepping the limits of permitted activity but also to continually thank the Soviet regime 'for the freedom given to all religious associations' and to consciously spread an obvious lie by exaggerating the church's well-being in the country."²⁵ The churches were not granted any new legal status; rather, their improved position was based on "resolutions, instructions, circular letters" which were rarely publicly seen.²⁶ This was likely a strategy of Stalin's in order to prevent any constitutional or pragmatic limitations to his future dealings with the churches, a situation church leaders probably sensed and tried to respect.

Churches gradually opened, and the Church consecrated more bishops and ordained more priests to fill the many vacancies. In mid-1944 the Theological Institute reopened in Moscow, shortly after Sergii's death. Aleksei succeeded Sergei as Patriarch in 1945, and later that year the churches were granted certain legal rights, such as leasing or owning objects and property. The Patriarch requested that the great Trinity-Sergius Lavra (monastery) be returned to the Church for "spiritual and patriotic" reasons, and CROCA granted the request in 1946.²⁷ The problem of Renovatism and the Sergiite schism diminished, as time and a sufficiently harrowing degree of persecution now brought the remaining leadership and clergy into submission and sufficient unity.

People petition for churches, exposing state tensions

People petitioned to open Orthodox churches in large numbers. Churches did not open automatically but required that a petition be submitted by a group of twenty people from a given locale, along with some sort of justification (such as no nearby church or the nearest church is at capacity) that warranted an additional one in a district. From the time that commissioner A.A. Trushin²⁸ started working on January 1, 1944 until July 1, 1947, there were 1,722 petitions for opening 390 churches across the Moscow Oblast and City. Most of the

²⁴ Ibid., 46.

²⁵ Ibid., 52.

²⁶ Ibid., 85.

²⁷ Kenworthy, "The Revival of Monastic Life," 126.

²⁸ For more on Aleksei Alekseevich Trushin, see Edward E. Roslof, "'Faces of the Faceless': A.A. Trushin Communist Over-Procurator for Moscow, 1943-1984," *Modern Greek Studies Yearbook* 18/19 (2002): 105–25. Roslof notes that Trushin had experience working with Karpov before and was probably his pick for the important post. Trushin served for over four decades as commissioner for Moscow Oblast.

churches in question had stopped functioning in 1938-40, with some stopping in 1931-1937 and others supposedly even in 1941. But only 55 churches were approved to open during that three-and-a-half year period, as some 60-70 of them were actively being used for other purposes and could not easily be handed over, and another 80-90 lacked “convincing grounds” for opening, such as too few petitioners. With many of the petitions being repeat requests, it is difficult to ascertain on what grounds the remaining 175 or so churches were rejected.²⁹ In the first quarter of 1947, the Executive Committee of the Moscow Oblast received 86 petitions for opening 73 churches, fifteen original ones with 58 repeat requests. Some petitions did not represent large groups of people, but they complained about distances of ten or more kilometers to the nearest church, a formidable distance indeed when transport was spotty, requiring many kilometers of walking.³⁰

Officials analyzed each petition based on the proximity of other churches, the number of believers, and the number of times requests had been repeated. Across Moscow Oblast (not including the city proper) in 1948, there were 1,070 churches not being used as churches, with 855 occupied in some other capacity, while 215 were available to be re-opened as churches. In 1918, there had been 1,492 churches in operation compared to only 124 in 1948. There were five districts (*raiony*) and eight cities without active churches compared to 52 districts and eight cities with active churches. Citizens from all districts and cities submitted requests for openings. In the city of Moscow, all churches were occupied – none were “free” to be handed over without new arrangements.³¹

Officials and functionaries were not all of the same mind in responding to petitions. Chumachenko argues that CROCA chief Karpov, when trying to carry out Stalin’s wishes, would sometimes defend believers’ interests in conflict with local authorities, who often had no interest in making space for religious activity, but had a vested interest in keeping things as they were, especially if the building was being used for state purposes.³² Tension arose from the goal of the Religious Council, since it aimed “to preserve normal church-state relations and to improve them for the good of the Motherland.”³³ But what was “good” for the Motherland, and when did it overlap with what was “good” for religious bodies? What was “good” for the

²⁹ GARF, f. 6991, op. 1, d. 192, 73-74.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 11-14.

³¹ GARF f. 6991, op. 1, d. 337, 52.

³² Chumachenko, *Church and State in Soviet Russia*, 8.

³³ *Ibid.*, 10.

Motherland or for the churches was a matter of opinion and therefore highly contentious, and Stalin's WWII shift was not well received or implemented on the local level by many atheist officials. "At best," writes Chumachenko," the majority of local authorities tolerated that policy only as temporary and necessary due to the extreme situation of World War II." Despite even direct orders by Stalin, some officials delayed the opening of churches and seminaries, and only dogged persistence (perhaps including bribery) got certain institutions open, while the example of the Trinity-Sergius Lavra shows that having the backing of Stalin and Karpov is what made its opening possible.³⁴

Old manners of dealing with believers and clergy in the 1930s (rudeness, heavy-handedness) carried over into the newly formed Council, and those who had a history of experience in religious affairs were often appointed as local agents.³⁵ Local commissioners tracked and approved all potential appointments for church positions, placement of clergy, and admission to theological education. Information about such persons was obtained from the police organs, and commissioners might then accept or deny an appointment or admission.³⁶

But not all state representatives approved of such a council for religious affairs. In 1946, the head of Agitprop (whose job was to promote atheist and materialistic ideologies) severely criticized the work of the Council, accusing the Council of overstepping its bounds and representing church interests rather than state interests. This criticism came despite the Council's plea that they acted only in accordance with government instructions. According to Agitprop officials, the Council was supposedly exaggerating the extent of religiosity of the people and should be more wary of clergy, whom Agitprop considered unpatriotic. Agitprop attacked the Council for not producing the conclusions that ought to exist—namely that religiosity was on the decline and patriotism on the rise.³⁷ It appears that Stalin allowed the tension between the ideologues of Agitprop and pragmatists of the Council to persist.³⁸ His non-interference may have stemmed from his ambivalence toward resolving the inherent tension between communist ideology and religion alongside the pragmatic concerns of maintaining a content population.

³⁴ Note that this approach was not uncommon in the Soviet Union. One example is that in the 1930s when the state supported women in non-traditional roles, local leaders tried to sabotage this.

³⁵ Chumachenko, *Church and State in Soviet Russia*, 25.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 113.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 88–90.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 125.

There were tensions on a more local level as well. The new government line supporting religion made it “untimely,” in Trushin’s view, to convert a certain church into a “club,” for example, though some years earlier such a conversion would never have been opposed by a government official.³⁹ On the other side, despite supposedly having Stalin’s tacit consent, believers were getting frustrated by their inability to register their church communities. In districts without legally approved prayer houses (the name for Evangelical churches), Evangelical believers were meeting without authorization, risking sanctions. In the Orthodox Church, informants also notified the Council of certain people identified in Moscow Oblast who were not registered or did not have the proper authorizations but had been carrying out religious activity or conducting rites. Some of these were coming in from beyond the Moscow region, as evangelists and pastors often traveled between congregations. In such cases, Trushin passed the information onto the police and requested the results of their investigation.⁴⁰

Petitioners were not appeased by the fact that fifty religious communities had been registered in Moscow Oblast from 1944 to 1947, with over 150 before that, since those were not their churches.⁴¹ Believers requested “Comrade Stalin” aid them in getting church authorizations after petitions met rejection or simply went unanswered.⁴² One group asked “Dear Comr. Stalin” to listen to their request to open a church in their village which was closed in 1938 and was currently functioning as a mill. The nearest church to them was supposedly 50 km away.⁴³ Repeated rejection seemed to have the effect that the number of requests gradually went down each year.⁴⁴

Although believers had to battle local officials and representatives from CROCA to get churches open or positions filled, newly opened churches had to struggle to stay open in the face of a barrage of bureaucratic obstacles, and bishops had to face bureaucracy when making personnel moves. Nevertheless, local officials no longer had free rein to pursue an obviously anti-religious line. Even though security organs arrested religious individuals who were suspected of disloyalty to the regime, what mattered now was public reputation. In 1947 Karpov

³⁹ Keston Archive, “Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report,” 1949. Keston Archive, “Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report” 1957, Archive file <KGB 81>, p. 171. Original archive name and fond number illegible, but from Op. 3, Del. 2.

⁴⁰ Ibid., Archive file <KGB 80>. Original archive name and fond number illegible, but from Op. 3, del. 1.

⁴¹ GARF f. 6991, op. 1, d. 192, 9.

⁴² Ibid., 91.

⁴³ Ibid., 14.

⁴⁴ GARF f. 6991, op. 1, del. 646.

instructed commissioners that there should not be “interference in internal church life by representatives of soviet organs.” Apparently authorities were “sometimes forgetting that the church in the USSR is separate from the state” and so they were “carrying out meddling in the inner life of the church.” One example was of a local chairman of the executive committee who called in a local Rector and ordered him to remove the warden.⁴⁵ Yet state representatives did not cease meddling in church affairs because they had to constantly deal with the tensions caused by state needs for building use, their ideological commitment to communism, the law, instructions from superiors, and domestic and international reputations. In short, officials needed to appear not to meddle in church affairs, but a variety of governmental policies required them to do so.

In territories newly gained or regained during the war, Stalin still needed to assert authority where it had not been or where it had waned during the occupation. He even hoped to rely on church leaders of the Orthodox and Evangelical Christians-Baptists Churches based in Moscow in reasserting control in areas like Ukraine. The Orthodox Church was called upon to manage the entire Greek-Catholic Church of Ukraine, as it was declared “re-united” with the Orthodox Church in 1946, and all properties and parishes were handed over to the Orthodox Church.

The clandestine religious activity that characterized the period until Stalin’s policy shift did not disappear entirely, though Natalia Pestova noticed that as the war continued, the situation generally relaxed. Even “Mechevites” were above-ground, attending the Church of the Holy Prophet Elijah on Obydenskii Street.⁴⁶ Yet the years of intense harassment and persecution made churchmen and laity wary, as they knew that the rule of law existed less on paper than according to someone’s whim. So “activation” depended on relationships of trust, as people found out about dynamic priests by word of mouth. After the war when Pestova wanted advice on some important life questions, she “heard that in one of the churches in Moscow there is the kind of priest who gives proper answers and advice to anyone who turns to him.” She traveled across town and waited nervously, hoping that what she had been told was true, and relieved when the rumors proved reliable.⁴⁷

Religious antagonism remained. Pestova attempted to keep her beliefs hidden for fear of repercussions at school, and her answers to questions still had to demonstrate a command of

⁴⁵ Ibid., 23.

⁴⁶ Sokolova, *Pod Krovom Vsevyshnego [Under the Blood of the Most High]*, 35.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 79.

Marxist-Leninist principles. Living in such a vast city as Moscow, she sometimes attended week-day services without fear of being seen by her classmates, especially if the church was not near school grounds. Hearing that the Liturgy of a certain church “differ[ed] very much from the usual, that many [we]re admiring its unusual chants,” she decided to pay a visit. Yet when there, she met eyes with one of her professors. They now had secret knowledge that could be used against one another, so once outside of the church, they, without needing to discuss the matter, “pretended that we did not see each other (as in those years was expected).”⁴⁸

Religious figures with backgrounds too compromising also kept themselves hidden, and Pestova’s family had relationships with many such people. The Marfo-Mariinsky Convent on Bol’shaya Ordynka in Moscow had been closed long before the war, but they were close to one of its former nuns, to whom they often gave housing, as well as to one of its former spiritual fathers. The nun had a codename and false history to help cover her, and she and Pestova would often go together to visit this spiritual father, who lived outside the city and was occupied in the religious underground.

Stalin’s concessions to the church made an immediate impact for those wishing to join the clergy. Orthodox believer Dmitrii Dudko (a priest featured below) wanted to become a priest, an impossibility before the war, but late in the war he read in the newspaper that in Moscow The Theological Institute was now open and that classes were being offered. He applied and was accepted. In 1947 the seminary moved its instruction to Zagorsk (Sergiev Posad), and Dudko happily studied there, glad for the changes that made church work a possibility for a young man like him.⁴⁹

The Orthodox Church, though not having the quantities of churches, clergy, or participants of before the 1930s, was no longer at death’s door. Churches were not re-opening quickly, nor without all kinds of hassles,⁵⁰ but by 1947, one could witness crowded churches, ringing church bells, religious processions, and the like.⁵¹ It was too early for anyone to know, however, whether the religious situation was becoming normalized in any way, as policies could shift in a moment.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 87.

⁴⁹ Dmitrii Dudko, *Podarok ot Boga: Kniga v Piaty Chastiakh [Gift from God: A Book in Five Parts]* (Moskva: Izd. Sretenskogo Monastyrja, 2002), 43; Oliver Bullough, *The Last Man in Russia: The Struggle to Save a Dying Nation* (New York: Basic Books, 2013), 32.

⁵⁰ Davis, *A Long Walk to Church*, 20–23.

⁵¹ Chumachenko, *Church and State in Soviet Russia*, 190.

Concessions in the Evangelical Christians-Baptists Church

Being relatively small, Protestant denominations were addressed less immediately than the Orthodox Church. About eight months after the Council for Russian Orthodox Church Affairs (CROCA) was established in 1943, in 1944, the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults (CARC) was established for covering the remaining religions, listed as Armenian, Old Believers, Catholic, Greek-Catholic, Lutheran, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, and “sectarian organizations,” according to its original formulation. The Protestant-Evangelical denominations were lumped together as the lattermost.

A few months later, leading representatives of Evangelical and Baptist Churches, at officials’ covert insistence, decided to merge into a unified council, a structure that unsurprisingly coincided precisely with the wishes of Stalin’s government. On October 26, 1944, forty-five delegates met in the Central Baptist Church in Moscow, with travel, accommodation, and provisions provided by the state. Unification of the Baptist and Evangelical Christian denominations was supposedly the unanimous wish of the delegates. As scholar Walter Sawatsky noted, for decades these groups failed to form a union, but with the aid of Stalin’s government, they resolved their differences in a matter of hours.⁵² Stalin and others evidently wanted to replicate the single institution structure of the Orthodox Church for the many Evangelical denominations. To them, the “command structure” of the Orthodox Church with its rigid hierarchy and culture of “submission” (deference to authority) was convenient as long as the patriarch, metropolitans, and bishops were cooperative, to whom clergy were expected to submit. For Protestant denominations, there was no command structure; they were decentralized, and the formation of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians and Baptists (AUCECB) in 1944 was the first step toward creating a hierarchical structure for the Protestant churches. The Council was over the Senior Presbyters (who oversaw districts) and Presbyters (heads of churches), and theoretically, the Council was formed by democratic vote of representatives from the churches.

The AUCECB brought together Evangelical Christians and Baptists, and soon after some Pentecostals joined—though the ECB leadership imposed its bias by requiring they cease the practices of speaking in tongues and foot-washing during services—as did Mennonites later. Most existing church communities joined or petitioned to join the Council to obtain legal status,

⁵² Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II*, 78.

though some preferred to remain underground. The Council was intended to oversee and discipline the churches, its leaders and practices. The state had to approve its leaders.⁵³

This Council signified the new legal status of the erstwhile “sectarian” denominations that had not been recognized in the 1930s. Forming a union had not been something church leaders had been discussing at the time. Baptist believer Aleksandra Ivanovna Mozgova was the typist at the initial AUCECB conference in Moscow in 1944. She noted that many former church leaders were in prison, not invited, or not present, and the new ones had made decisions, it seemed, “in the offices of the Council of the Affairs of Religious Cults and of other bodies.”⁵⁴ Yet, these new leaders were known figures from within the Evangelical and Baptist Churches, not outsiders.

When the new commissioners for the Council for Affairs of Religious Cults (CARC) met for the first time in 1944, the leadership reminded them that the CARC was there, fundamentally, to ensure compliance of religious organizations with the legislation and act as the branch of the government that handled all affairs related to legal operation of religious organizations.⁵⁵ Even though the Orthodox Church represented the majority and was re-established and granted its own Council body first, by law there was no state religion with rights over another. Instead of Stalin’s precepts of 1929, those emphasized included Lenin’s basic principles of the law of separation of church and state and of school and church, and people’s right to the freedom of personal religious conscience.⁵⁶

Even though the Orthodox Church was *de jure* on par with all others, CARC Commissioners witnessed how their leaders esteemed the Orthodox Church more highly, a reversal of its fate in the earliest years of the Soviet Union. In this meeting, Council leaders provided the commissioners with a ready-made narrative to guide their attitudes toward the denominations under their care. In the Orthodox Church during the time of the attack of “Fascist Germany,” Metropolitan Sergei of the Orthodox Church “unambiguously announced to all of his believers the danger that started to threaten the Soviet Union and mobilized all of his believers to resist the German invaders,” with the result that the Orthodox Church displayed great “patriotism.” But the “Muslims, Armenians, Old Believers, evangelical Christians and Baptists, such religious organizations like Roman-Catholic, Greco-Catholic and Lutheran Churches, instead

⁵³ Wanner, *Communities of the Converted*, 57; Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II*.

⁵⁴ Georgi Vins, *Three Generations of Suffering* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1976).

⁵⁵ GARF op. 3, d. 12, 13.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* op. 3, d. 12.

of the mobilization of believers to resist the German invaders, openly went over to their defense, starting to greet them like liberators from the Bolsheviks and almost entirely started to serve the interests of German imperialism.” And when the Red Army came to “liberate” them, certain representatives from these religions in these Western regions did not welcome their liberators.⁵⁷ It seems commissioners were to consider them as foreigners within, a potential fifth column not to be trusted as “one of us;” CARC leaders did not tell commissioners that many representatives from these religions did enjoin co-religionists to resist the Nazis.

The precise cause of the shift in discourse which elevated the Orthodox Church is unclear. It may have stemmed from lingering pre-Soviet prejudices that saw the Russian Orthodox Church as a national, and therefore nationally trustworthy, institution. Stalin’s government was indeed shifting in a more pro-Russian nationalist direction at this time. Jews, for example, though far from pro-Nazi, were not praised for being “patriotic.” The post-war era saw a more pronounced departure in discourse from the liberal-leftist ideologies of the 1920s toward anti-Semitic and nationalist sentiments.

CARC leaders told CARC commissioners to be in close cooperation with the leaders of these religions, since collaboration was needed for predictable religious practice:

First of all, every commissioner must be occupied with studying the political-moral situation of the head workers of the religious cults. Without knowing the kind of political physiognomy of every given leader of a religious association, his kind of moral situation, it would be very hard for this commissioner to work on the given religious cult, keeping in mind his relatively frequent communication with the leaders of religious cults in daily practical work. Until now almost no commissioner has been occupied in his work with these exceptionally important issues of the present.⁵⁸

They were given instructions for the proper procedures in registering religious communities. Last, they were reminded that in their relations with clergy, they “must not be permissive of elements of familiarity and obsequiousness”—whether on their part or that of the clergy—but instead “conduct themselves with a feeling of dignity” as representatives of the Council.⁵⁹ In other words, they should not let leaders bribe or persuade them to be soft in their work managing religious institutions.

It took the commissioners some time to get normalized relations established, as it seems they did not have proper records of churches, especially those that had formerly existed.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 18–19.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 29.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 60.

In Moscow Oblast the new commissioner, Comrade Besshaposhnikov, was working on simply counting all of the churches, especially those that had been closed. His counterpart at CROCA had been working on it for two years now, and he had only been at it a few months. His requests to other local bodies for assistance in this task went largely unanswered, it seems. Starting with the Old Believers, he traveled around, district by district, asking whether they had any closed churches. Jewish communities were his second priority, and Protestants, it appears, third.⁶⁰ Although his focus was on the Old Believer and Jewish communities, his superiors warned him to keep his eye on “sectarian” activity. Events that “evangelical christians-baptists” were organizing outside of Sunday services in which children and youth were participating in programs tailored for them troubled officials, who instructed commissioners to “disperse/dismiss the community” with a “notification of the Council.”⁶¹

It seems that Besshaposhnikov did not act aggressively on his comrades’ warning, at least if his reports are any indication. Despite not even having established the basics of the religious landscape, every commissioner was nevertheless supposed to write quarterly informational reports for their own office and local Party-Soviet leadership, and the reports were to include statistics of registration, financial matters, notes on clergy, as well as the activities of religious organizations and the work conducted by the commissioners.⁶² But one official, Comr. Sadovskii, took the fledgling commissioner to task: “Tov. Besshaposhnikov communicated nothing, literally nothing about the activities of religious organizations in Moscow and Moscow Oblast.” Although the commissioner had written about his tasks and what occupied his time, his audience wanted to know much more precisely the status and activity of each religious organization.⁶³ He was to be their eyes, but his reports left them feeling blind.

Early on, Besshaposhnikov allowed a few churches to register. Moscow Central Baptist Church was registered in 1945, not a surprise given it had been the only Evangelical church remaining in Moscow prior to 1944. Its registration application claimed 4,600 members, and the church’s physical capacity was listed as 1,500.⁶⁴ In Kiev Oblast, dozens of Baptist churches were registered in 1945.⁶⁵ But to register Evangelical churches was complicated. According to guidelines, communities were not supposed to gain registration without having a clergy-

⁶⁰ Ibid., 210–12.

⁶¹ TsGA Moskv, 1945-53, f. 3004, op. 1, d. 2, 4.

⁶² GARF f. 6991, op. 3, d. 39, 3.

⁶³ Ibid., 6–7.

⁶⁴ GARF f. 6991, op. 4, d. 352, 33.

⁶⁵ Ibid. d. 407.

member attached to the community. It was not supposed to be permissible for “sectarian” groups to simply choose someone from among themselves who lacked any verifiable qualifications, so this kept them (or was supposed to keep them) from being registered, since Evangelical denominations had not customarily required theological training. The state’s preference was to have clergy approved by a church’s “center” (in this case, the AUCECB), so that the training of clergy could be tracked by state officials.⁶⁶ In addition, registration required a minimum of twenty signatures, the building needed to have all verifications done for sanitary and fire safety, after which the “religious center” would need to grant its approval, followed by the Council and the local executive (oblast/raion) committees.⁶⁷ ECB communities needed to overcome several bureaucratic hurdles before being granted legal status. Until then, believers would either have to join up with an approved community, or simply take the risks of unauthorized gatherings.

Yet, the consequence of Stalin’s opening doors was a blossoming of church activity among Evangelical believers. Numbers attending church rose dramatically, and leaders and pastors now faced dizzying demands of under-staffed churches and requests to visit, preach, or baptize. In fact, AUCECB leader Zhidkov was calling for religious restraint from evangelists, worrying that there were renegade pastors conducting activity or preaching messages that would not be endorsed by the AUCECB leaders.⁶⁸

Government Less Conciliatory Toward the Churches

In terms of Stalin’s use of the Church, however, it appears that 1948 was a “turning point.” The war and the most chaotic years following had subsided. The congeniality Stalin had shown toward the Orthodox hierarchs waned. The Church had proved useful during wartime, but now it needed to prove usefulness to Stalin “even in peacetime,” as scholar Dmitry Pospelovsky argues. Even in September 1944 the Party (CPSU) Central Committee decree called for “renewed antireligious efforts” by means of propaganda, but acts had not accompanied these words as yet. Governmental concessions stopped, but they did not give way to terror, and some hardline communists resented the concessions they felt had only been only justifiable in

⁶⁶ TsGA Moskv f. 3004, op. 1, d. 2, 1-4.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 19–20.

⁶⁸ Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II*, 59.

wartime.⁶⁹ Religion was still ideologically “incompatible” with communism—“even in the flexible Stalin’s application of it”—as Pospelovsky puts it.⁷⁰

If Stalin’s meeting with Orthodox Church hierarchs in 1943 had been, as Pospelovsky argues, a sort of “quid pro quo” where “a relative liturgical freedom and tolerance for the Church” would be exchanged for serving the regime’s “foreign policy interests and propaganda”⁷¹ evidently the “relative liturgical freedom” was poorly defined. It is hard to imagine that Stalin desired burgeoning and publicly visible religiosity. Perhaps he believed that the weakened state of the Church by 1943 meant that his concessions would only result in a modest number of churches opened, services held at predictable and limited times, that only older generations still clinging to disappearing superstitions would attend, and religiosity would end there. But by 1947 the churches showed themselves to be sources of power for the ways they could mobilize people. Since domestically churches were not limited to being simple outlets for “satisfying” people’s “religious needs” but were animating people toward identities and ways of belonging at odds with those purportedly aligned with communism, state agents would need to police religious practice more strictly to minimize its mobilizing power.

Management of the Orthodox Church

The number of Orthodox participants increased each year of the 1940s, plus more people were taking part in rites like baptisms, weddings, and burials. Trushin noted in Easter of 1948 that “All active churches, both in the city of Moscow and in the oblasts were strongly overfilled with those present.” Plus, there were people surrounding the churches and milling about, many of them young people, whom informants characterized as mere “onlookers.”⁷² The spectacle of some 12-13,000 estimated at the Easter service at Elokhovskii Sobor on Spartakovskaya Street, with 9,000 in the church and 4,000 outside, must have caused officials considerable consternation, as the pragmatically-granted concession was for people to “satisfy their religious necessities,” not for a spectacle of religiosity.⁷³ Christmas participation was not quite that of Easter, but still thousands attended each of the bigger churches.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Kenworthy, “The Revival of Monastic Life,” 131.

⁷⁰ Pospelovsky, *The Russian Church Under the Soviet Regime, 1917-1982*, 1984, II:312.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, II:301–2.

⁷² GARF f. 6991, op. 1, d. 337, 24.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁷⁴ GARF f. 6991, op. 1, d. 496, 5.

Although the opportunity to open churches had quickly disappeared, reflecting the Council's intention not to "promote a revival of religious life,"⁷⁵ evidently enough had changed to afford significant religious renewal. Nearly every church was growing in the Soviet Union in the 1940s and 1950s, and state leaders were concerned. Anti-religious propaganda and the bureaucratic obstacles to church activity did not dissuade believers as desired, and church influence was only growing.⁷⁶

Commissioner Trushin, assessing "the state of religiosity" in the city and oblast in 1950, equivocated. He wrote that it was "very hard" to answer the question of how the state of "religiosity" compared with the wartime period, but he did admit that it had not "sharply declined."⁷⁷ In a stock phrase that Trushin used in consecutive reports, he most certainly distorted the truth of the situation when he declared that "by observations and discussions both with members of the church councils, rectors of the churches, as well as site visits with local councils and party organs, it can be judged that religiosity and interest in the church has gradually declined." This was backed up by the claim that attendance, participation in rites, and revenue all went down,⁷⁸ although even his own evidence elsewhere had pointed to the contrary. Trushin allowed the tension between reality and wishful thinking to remain, as the Marxist claim about religious obsolescence was supposedly a scientifically incontrovertible fact. Trushin justified why religion was only "gradually" declining (or not declining at all) by arguing that "the more the population departs from the church, the more priestly servants and churchmen try to exert their influence on the surrounding population."⁷⁹ He also suggested that choirs (evidently separable from the religion itself) were what was attracting people.⁸⁰

Commissioners attempted to portray religiosity as on its deathbed, only kept alive by artificial means. One "cause" of its persistence was younger priests "activating" congregations, and state agents took note of eager seminarians. Dmitrii Dudko was an unsuspecting young seminarian, not understanding the limited nature of Stalin's concessions. During his classes on preaching (homiletics), the professor "scolded him in front of the students," saying "for some time I have noticed you have an anti-soviet stench. You give one or two sermons and have already become proud - you want to alter everything." The professor unwittingly illuminated

⁷⁵ Chumachenko, *Church and State in Soviet Russia*, 127.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁷⁷ GARF f. 6991, op. 1, d. 646, 34.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 77, 189.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 189.

what unacceptable religiosity looked like, the desire to change, dynamize, or not submit meekly to the status-quo. This kind of religiosity was “anti-soviet” because it did not signal submissiveness and was unsafe in its creativity.

Dudko was then interrogated by state agents about some “controversies” about which he had no idea. Being a “village boy, not knowing worldly trickery and cunning,” he had given some of his poems to an inquisitive fellow student, in which he wrote what “he thought and felt,” including politically.⁸¹ As the secret police offered rewards, manipulated, or urged students to assist secret service agents for the good of the country by informing them of any unpatriotic acts, Dudko’s poetry provided unpatriotic sentiments as evidence to arrest him, even if it was his public demeanor that made authorities wary of him.⁸² Agents arrested Dudko while he was away from the Seminary, around Eastertime of 1948. Agents, with help from informants, gathered information about visitors, scrutinized interactions, and monitored priests’ activities in the functioning churches and seminaries.⁸³

State agents did not want engaged priests like Dudko “activating” congregations. In one village, the attendance in an Orthodox church had dwindled to 150, but within four months, a certain Priest Sorokin under age thirty had it up to 800 attending, including some youth. Still, informants explained the increased attendance as resulting from the priest’s sermons urging congregants to attend more regularly, insinuating that believers would not without spiritual manipulation. He visited various homes, and the commissioner claimed that he visited the home of the party secretary of the kolkhoz, and “ignoring his protests, held a prayer service in the home,” and “for a long time kept urging Comr. Vavilin to ‘venerate the cross.’” Whether or not this happened, the anecdote effectively demanded officials act, since this was a clear violation of the laws on freedom from proselytism. The commissioner requested that the Patriarchate remove Priest Sorokin from the register, and the Church did. His parishioners apparently pleaded for Sorokin to be returned, not accepting his replacement. To try to pacify them the patriarch sent an archbishop, who upon arrival found some 700-800 there to demand Sorokin’s return. The archbishop argued Sorokin could only “gain such authority among the believers” because he urged regular attendance, youth participation, and organizing a choir. That the people might have wanted these things was not discussed,⁸⁴ and apparently not the point.

⁸¹ Dudko, *Podarok ot Boga*, 44.

⁸² Bullough, *The Last Man in Russia*, 46.

⁸³ GARF f. 6991, op. 1, d. 192.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* f. 6991, op. 1, del. 774, 24-25.

In the city of Moscow, priest Vsevolod Shpillar, having previously emigrated, arrived back from Bulgaria in 1950 and became Rector of Nikolo-Kuznetskaya church. He was not young, but middle-aged, but he acted like one fresh with new energy in the eyes of the commissioner: “By all his activities and behavior Shpillar strives to strengthen the church parishioners and spread his influence on the surrounding population.” His predecessor Smirnov, noted the commissioner, also had worked zealously in promoting religious education, in getting a strong church choir together, and even having the bells rung out “powerfully.” As he saw it, Shpillar—like the “obscurantist” Smirnov who died in 1950—was continuing the efforts, “often delivering sermons, spreading religious propaganda.”

Officials were wary of Shpillar’s confidence, since people had come to like him and were attending church more often. Informants also observed that on Shpillar’s name day - despite being a work day - some 600-800 worshipers gathered at church, and many of them presented him with gifts. The report-writer claimed that Shpillar had actually instigated especially active church members to have the parishioners gather for his name day.⁸⁵

Thus, despite claims of a “gradual” reduction in religiosity, Trushin expressed concern about the “activation” of certain churches in the Moscow region, with an eye for the “methods and tricks [*priemami*]” of clergy that were “already well-known to us, namely: by the establishment of additional services, the frequent giving of sermons, strengthening of the choir, supporting of the clean-up and comfort in church, etc., etc.”⁸⁶ Although Trushin named a few priests, he treated the problem somewhat generically, as more of a problem of widespread reactivation than of specific priests, and he also focused blame on the general conditions of post-war effects (presumably people seeking religion as a consolation) and the youth of priesthood, but not on the general condition of people’s persistent interest in religion. In official discourse, church activation only occurred due to spiritual manipulation.

In 1951, there was still a vexing number of petitions to open churches, some of them still directed to “Comr. Stalin,” but officials’ ambition to approve them had ceased. After all, wasn’t it enough? Shouldn’t they be satisfied by now, commissioners wondered?⁸⁷ The remaining groups still trying to petition after repeated rejections were pretty well isolated from

⁸⁵ Ibid. f. 6991, op. 1, d. 774, 108 (1951), d. 1254, 43 (1955); Keston Archive, “Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report,” 1960, Archive file <KGB 27>, p. 19-20. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 5, Del. 29.

⁸⁶ GARF f. 6991, op. 1, d. 904, 69.

⁸⁷ Ibid. f. 6991, op. 1, d. 337, 124.

others doing the same thing, separated by a lack of awareness of one another and distance. Officials could easily deflect blame onto other bureaucratic barriers and prevent disappointed believers from knowing where to lay blame for their failed petition.

It is worth noting, however, that the battle line was not simply between believers and state officials. Churches had conflicts and problems of their own, and they often relied upon the Religious Council to sort them out. Some 150 complaints reached the desk of commissioner Trushin in 1951 from one parish alone, with the primary dispute dealing being about the church money box, with accounting procedures and use of the money. Warring groups, including the executive organs and the clergy, the auditing commission and the warden, and disputing groups from within the church, complained against each other to the Commissioner, asking for a resolution, with some believers complaining that the patriarchate was not dealing with their problems.⁸⁸

More common were disputes that arose between the warden (whose function was Church caretaker, manager of resources, and go-between for clergy and parish) and the rector (the head priest), and congregants usually took sides with one or the other and would then fight amongst themselves. Such disputes were important for commissioners to track because although “Sometimes these squabbles and conflicts have a positive effect, i.e., positive in the sense that a part of the believers, seeing the creation of disgrace in church, cease their attendance,” the opposite outcome could also occur, that “from the duration of the conflict more and more partisans were gradually engaged, the consequence of which resulted in activation of parishioners.”⁸⁹

Churchmen themselves invited state officials to “meddle” in church affairs, as hierarchs did not always respond as they wished to problems or conflicts. In disputes, commissioners observed that hierarchs almost never reacted to initial complaints, but only after the conflict had taken on “a protracted character.” Then the Church would typically just transfer the rector to another congregation, as the warden was usually a long-time resident of the community.⁹⁰ Priests who wanted to make some changes had to have an amenable warden, as wardens were not afraid of using their local authority to make complaints or denunciations against a priest they did not like. For many churchmen, the Church’s relationship with the state was not

⁸⁸ Ibid. f. 6991, op. 1, d. 904, 109-110.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 113.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 115.

reducible to church-vs.-state, as their interactions with Council officials helped normalize relations and legitimized the authority of the Council in religious affairs.

In dispute situations, a commissioner like Trushin could only do so much, as his position stipulated that he “in no measure interferes in inner-church affairs.” Therefore, he would simply recommend petitioners to take their concerns to the local bishopric or the patriarchate. If the situation seemed to “go outside the borders of the church,” then he would “undertake corresponding measures through the Moscow patriarchate.”⁹¹ Commissioners, if they had to, would call upon church hierarchs to immediate action, such as to transfer a priest, which was a simple solution that did not render the priest unemployed. Commissioners did not wish to meddle, but nor did they want the passivity of Orthodox hierarchs to allow inner-church disputes to become conflagrations, as they preferred church life free from activation—whether due to conflicts or zeal.

Management of the ECB Church

As noted above, at first the attention of the commissioner for the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults (CARC) was tracking and cataloguing Old Believer, Jewish, and Muslim communities. The Evangelicals were temporarily ignored.⁹² Finally, in the second half of 1948, Besshaposnikov made a proper accounting of the Moscow Baptist Church, estimating some 3,500 members from a range of ages, but weighted toward older people. Officials also noted that a few hundred came from neighboring towns, especially for Sundays with communion (the Eucharist) or religious holidays. Between the first two counting periods, although a few members died, they also gained around 260, 200 of whom came from other faiths, and 60 from new baptisms (because Baptists stress a “believer’s baptism,” the 200 were likely already of an Evangelical faith, whereas the other 60 probably were either Orthodox believers baptized as infants or new Christians). Relying on the church’s numbers, the commissioner estimated that over the past four years the church lost about 1,000 to the combination of deaths and those taken from the membership roll for various reasons—“not a bad sign” to him—, but he felt the need to study it more. It was most likely that either the initial membership tally was inaccurately high, or the more recent membership total was too low, since all subsequent data consistently

⁹¹ Ibid., 116.

⁹² TsGA Moskvyy f. 3004, op. 1, d. 5; d. 6.

showed church growth. Otherwise, the commissioner had no problems to note; all was in order.⁹³

Although he had initially neglected them, Besshaposhnikov declared in 1949 that “The most active religious community is the evangelical Christians-baptists and seventh-day Adventists. They have a tendency for growth and expansion, not only at the expense of the members of a believers’ family or of those who had [previously] departed from the community, but also due to the involvement of new members from other sectarian groups and denominations.” But his presentation of the numbers was at a minimum confusing, but perhaps purposefully misleading, as this report indicated a loss of 1,300 over the last four years, a claim which would not correspond to the earlier claim about their tendency for “growth and expansion.”⁹⁴ His report in 1950 seemed more accurate when it noted growth of nearly 2,000 members since 1945, half from other faiths and half from new baptisms. Many of the new joiners were supposedly originating from the Pentecostal Church, although at this time, many Pentecostal leaders were reneging on the 1944 decision to join the AUCECB and were no longer advocating registration. It could be that the commissioner falsely claimed this significant number of Pentecostals joining the Council to somehow support the notion that ordinary Pentecostal believers preferred official registration and loyalty to the Council rather than to their denomination, or it may have been accurate.⁹⁵ Workers, like shopkeepers, nurses, cleaners, and factory workers, constituted a “significant number” of those being baptized. A worse sign for Besshaposhnikov was that there were also examples of people with more advanced education or professional careers attending the ECB church in Moscow (even requesting a secret church wedding), plus young people were regular participants in services.⁹⁶ To state officials, religion was supposed to be intellectually untenable and irrelevant to youth.

The church in Moscow was averaging 1,500-1,800 attendees (above official capacity) at their two Sunday morning services and 1,000-1,200 on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday evening services.⁹⁷ They also had a sizeable 120-person choir. This evident popularity necessitated that the commissioner explain: “The evangelical christians try to make the prayer meetings accessible and attractive not only to their own members, but also to foreign visitors. Teaching

⁹³ Ibid. f. 3004, op. 1, d. 14, 15-17, 35.

⁹⁴ Ibid. d. 16, 3.

⁹⁵ Ibid. d. 18, 20-21.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 90-91.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 116.

on evangelical themes does not tend to be protracted and does not tire the listeners.” The popularity existed despite changes officials imposed to lessen the attractiveness of the services. In the past, services would likely have featured teachings, prayer, choral songs accompanied by organ, soloists, poetic readings, and personal stories told by members. But now, they were enjoined to carry out “a few simplifications,” with the only music to be sung by choir or congregation, and teachings were only done by those who were the officially approved pastors. Solos, “declarations,” and stories from life “did not tend to happen.” Yet officials observed, “the religious society continues to grow.”⁹⁸ The demographic scenario was not pleasing either, as the ratio of men was increasing. Religious Affairs officials statistically tracked the profile of attendees, and they tended to stereotype the average church-goer as an older woman without advanced education or profession. Thus when religious participants did not fit stereotypes with regard to gender, education, professional status, or age, officials noted it with apparent concern.⁹⁹

In 1950 the commissioner still asserted that the Baptists were growing only from among family members, Pentecostals, and other “sectarian groups.” He also provided his ethnographic account as to how someone new might view the service—perhaps he or a colleague visited it for the first time. Visitors would

observe the simplicity in the conversations between members; members only call each other brother or sister; they themselves can participate in joint singing; the teaching and preaching is in an accessible form; they understand it. Summoning them to lead a sober way of life: to not consume alcoholic drinks, they don’t smoke tobacco, they don’t unsettle family life, and so on—it especially resonates among women. The teaching is of moral support, and in certain instances material help is also arranged on the part of certain members of the community...

One woman was overheard saying that she had been invited a few times and attended, but worried that with Orthodox parents still alive, whether she “could really do this,” but she felt that “nevertheless it’s better” at the Baptist church.¹⁰⁰ She showed more concern for family opinions than Soviet ones.

⁹⁸ TsGA Moskvyy f. 3004, op. 1, d. 20, p. 23. The use of the word “foreign” evidently connotes from visitors from abroad, such as visiting diplomats interested in attending a Protestant church service in Moscow.

⁹⁹ This argument is explored in greater detail further on. Note that the same holds true in the case of Romanian officials from the Department of Religions.

¹⁰⁰ TsGA Moskvyy, d. 20, p. 23.

Apparently the prayers of the congregation were sometimes led by members, especially from among the most active members (“the *aktiv*”), and this concerned Besshaposhnikov. One such activist in his prayer “asked the lord god, that he would turn to the true path those who are in attendance for the first time.” After this “incident,” presbyter (an ordained senior pastor) Orlov (and, notably, a leader from the AUCECB) “declared” that corporate prayer will only be led in the future by the preachers. Also problematic, one member of the Council of AUCECB, Goliaev, tended toward “polemical attacks,” and another, Karev, was the kind of person that “the intelligentsia understands.”¹⁰¹ For officials, this religiosity was teetering on unacceptability, since engaging in apologetics and attracting intellectuals was not what religion was supposed to do. When those occupying the pulpit tried to persuade attendees to change their mind or faith about something, it was certainly moving away from the idea of “personal conscience,” which ought to be free from infringement by religious “propaganda.”

While the Moscow Baptist Church was growing, a few smaller communities of the ECB Church were seeking registration around the oblast.¹⁰² Active groups of non-registered Baptists petitioned to open churches, but they were being denied. While the Council and the government wanted registration for the sake of regulation and surveillance, they did not want more churches.¹⁰³ Registrations were granted very reluctantly, and with every possible bureaucratic obstacle placed in the way. The dilemma was that denying registration led to unauthorized religious gatherings for which state agents could sanction participants. When believers moved underground, surveillance was more difficult.

With popularity, growth, and petitions it might be easy to assume that the “Evangelical Christians-Baptists” were one harmonious group, moving and growing in common mind and spirit. But fractures threatened to break the union. As mentioned above, Pentecostal leaders sparred frequently with the leadership of the AUCECB, who tried to impose guidelines on the Pentecostal Church that stripped away some of its particularity (e.g., speaking in tongues).¹⁰⁴ State officials even noticed that the members of the Council had discrepancies between them, meaning they were not so united in the Council that gave them a legal standing. At the pulpit in Moscow’s Baptist Church, the commissioner wrote, lead pastors “from time to time” “channeled

¹⁰¹ Ibid. d. 24, 8.

¹⁰² Ibid. d. 18, 30.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 135.

¹⁰⁴ Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II*, 62.

poisoning” [otravlenie] against fellow leaders.¹⁰⁵ One might assume that Protestants shared a common “enemy,” a common “they” (the state) who could be accused of the obstacles faced in routine religious practice, but it was not enough to permanently erase their own differences or struggles over leadership.

The initial euphoria of the openings in the Evangelical churches also met a cold shoulder from state representatives. The official publication of the AUCECB, the *Fraternal Herald (Bratskii Vestnik)*, ceased publication from the latter half of 1949 until 1953 for unexplained reasons. Church leaders invested noticeable energy toward stifling the effervescence of the churches, and contact with fellow denominations abroad ceased. Local officials were given freer hand to make restrictions, as for example, the main Evangelical church in Kiev was confiscated, and the other three were forcefully joined together into one building.¹⁰⁶ Evangelical believers once again began to fear persecution.

The Stalin-Era Trajectory Continues after His Death

Scholar T.A. Chumachenko was right to argue that in Stalin’s final years, from 1948 to 1953, he made a noticeable move toward increased repression of church liberties, and the persecution even intensified in the year following his death. It appears that Stalin no longer considered the Orthodox Church as useful diplomatically, as the face of the Church provided little gain for an increasingly cold relationship with the Western powers.¹⁰⁷ It could also be that Stalin was annoyed at the “lack of thankfulness” of the believers, as displayed by the persistent barrage of petitions, the spectacle of large numbers attending church, and the undesirable dynamization of priests and believers alike. It was distinct from the obsequiousness displayed by the leading hierarchs in international contexts.

Although Stalin may have dealt brutally with the church in the past and only partially opened the door to religious practice, Trushin reported that after “the illness and then end of Iosif Vissarionovich Stalin, in the [Orthodox] churches of the city of Moscow and Moscow Oblast by order of the church center, special church services were organized. At the beginning services were held for the recovery of Comr. Stalin, but after the funeral, every church did a requiem.” These services took place with “a large conglomeration of people,” and rectors all gave sermons

¹⁰⁵ TsGA Moskv f. 3004, op. 1, d. 29, 4.

¹⁰⁶ Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II*, 63. A 1959 report from Kiev Oblast claims there are four EXB churches in the city of Kiev, so it is not clear what the situation really was, or if churches reopened before 1959.

¹⁰⁷ Chumachenko, *Church and State in Soviet Russia*, 123.

about “the life and activities” of Stalin. The Patriarch did the same in his church, and during his sermon, a “great part of the believers standing in the church were crying.”¹⁰⁸ Even in the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults report, the commissioner mentioned the death of Stalin and that all churches held services for him. But since he did not provide any specific examples of denominations or churches, it might cause one to question how evidence-based this claim was.¹⁰⁹

People had appealed to “Comrade Stalin” while he was alive, and they still tried to appeal to his name after his death. In the petitions to open churches that were submitted after Stalin’s death, some of them even quoted excerpts from talks by Patriarch Aleksei and Metropolitan Nikolai, referencing their claim that when the “church center appealed to Comrade Stalin with any kind of request, that all requests were satisfied.” Therefore, they asserted, their request to open a church should also be satisfied; they had faith in his name and hoped it carried weight with officials.¹¹⁰

Religious Management Continues

But the name carried much less weight than inertia and the officials still in power. Council for Russian Orthodox Church Affairs chief Karpov, whom Stalin had appointed, continued the Stalinist trajectory. Karpov described what the ideal church leader would be in one report to the Council: “The Council is not interested in having diocesan bishops in the USSR who would be energetic and theologically educated men. A certain number of cultured and theologically educated hierarchs is necessary, however, for the church’s work abroad and to represent the church [to foreigners].”¹¹¹ In short, there was to be window dressing with as little substance as possible. As I.I. Ivanov put it as he reviewed the work of the Council for Russian Orthodox Church Affairs in 1956, “Send the more obscurantist and reactionary [bishops] into monastic retirement and assign others who are more loyal and less fanatical in their place. ... The old saying, ‘Like priest, like parish,’ is used for a reason.”¹¹² If religion would be permitted, it should at least be subservient to state goals.

¹⁰⁸ GARF f. 6991, op. 1, d. 1037, 30.

¹⁰⁹ TsGA Moskvyy f. 3004, op. 1, d. 29.

¹¹⁰ GARF f. 6991, op. 1, d. 1037, 30-31.

¹¹¹ Chumachenko, *Church and State in Soviet Russia*, 116. The quotes are Head of Agitprop Suslov’s, probably to help Karpov undergird his assertions to the Council.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 144.

But now officials were faced with a surprising degree of interest in religion across the populace, even among “target” audiences for Soviet propaganda: professionals and youth. The 1940s and 1950s marked a major increase in applications and interest in attending the Orthodox seminary among young men, some of whom had secular degrees.¹¹³ A CPSU Central Committee resolution of July 7, 1954 was concerned that youth were attracted to the ROC and other sects due to “high quality sermons, charity work, individual indoctrination and the religious press.”¹¹⁴ More dynamic priests like Vsevolod Shpiller were claiming a relatively high percentage of converts to Orthodoxy. Troubling for state officials, however, was that many were converting in reaction to existential crises from non- or anti-religious environments. Such people saw an increasingly visible church, experimented with participation, and perhaps later were baptized.

Perhaps because it was difficult to keep religion benign and uninteresting to future generations, certain officials stood opposed to any kind of religion at all. Without Stalin’s guidance, it appears that 1954 saw many more instances of harassment of religious personnel at the instigation of certain pro-government organizations like local branches and committees of the Party, Komsomol, the *Znanie* Society (The All-Union Society for the Dissemination of Political and Scientific Knowledge), and trade unions. Certain youth were physically bullied, and members of the above organizations who were religious or wanted to avoid confronting religion might have faced demotion or expulsion.¹¹⁵ Some of these voices increasingly scrutinized the work of the Council after Stalin’s death, and Moscow commissioner Trushin was not exempt from the accusations that Karpov and his team were too soft on religion. Whereas Karpov still saw the Orthodox Church as useful, opponents in the Communist Party saw the Church as incompatible with communism and as its clergy as politically unreliable. The increase in anti-religious propaganda in 1954, however, was met by opposition in the Church and dominant figures in government like Molotov, and Stalin’s trajectory held.¹¹⁶

Yet officials still expected adjustments in CROCA. In Trushin’s work, for example, Karpov’s office noted “insufficiencies”: his reports were “poor” and “uninteresting” because they did not provide “concrete activity of the clergy toward strengthening the influence of the church;” he also tended toward “wide generalizations” and often failed to give the precise

¹¹³ Pospelovsky, *The Russian Church Under the Soviet Regime, 1917-1982*, 1984, II:323.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, II:328–29.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, II:331.

¹¹⁶ Kenworthy, “The Revival of Monastic Life,” 137.

situation of the churches.¹¹⁷ Commissioners' reports had to respond to political trends and demands.

Commissioners for the Council of Russian Orthodox Church Affairs were no longer overwhelmed by the number of petitions to open churches, as submissions had dwindled. But without the issue of petitions, Trushin's reports lacked focus and were repetitive or formulaic. Now some churchmen were asking about adding buildings, electrifying the parish, and other such modifications. Trushin tended to simply copy passages from earlier reports, for example replicating exactly the same passages on Vsevolod Shpiller in 1955 from five years earlier about his dynamic activity and name-day, thereby giving the impression that there were no new problems, just the same ones as before.¹¹⁸ It was indeed true, however that the state line on religion was unclear at this moment, so either Trushin wanted to play it safe by regurgitating old material, or he simply felt he could get away with being lazy.

The Growth of ECB Churches

Among the Evangelical churches, Stalin's death did not bring a warming of church-state relations. In fact, anti-religious propaganda in the press increased briefly in 1953 and 1954 but was held in check by Khrushchev. It seems Khrushchev, who was battling for power, did not endorse the unleashing of anti-religious propaganda that some others in leadership desired at the time.¹¹⁹

In the management of the Evangelical Christians-Baptists Church, the year following Stalin's death featured the same issues: disagreements between the members of the Council, the Moscow church still growing each quarter, more unregistered groups across the oblast, and more requests for registration.¹²⁰ Unlike the Orthodox Church, Evangelical communities were growing in places where they had not historically been, but there were only a few registered churches in the oblast.

At the Christmas service in 1953 in the Moscow Baptist Church, the commissioner drew attention to the participation of many youth under 25, especially young women, although he also noted that all activity was within the law.¹²¹ There were lists and lists of people who had taken part in baptisms recently. Once the weather had warmed sufficiently, hundreds had taken

¹¹⁷ GARF f. 6991, op. 1, d. 1145, 175-176.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. f. 6991, op. 1, d. 1254, 43.

¹¹⁹ Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II*, 64-65.

¹²⁰ TsGA Moskv y f. 3004, op. 1, d. 36.

¹²¹ Ibid. f. 3004, op. 1, d. 46, 3.

part in the past year, with dozens getting baptized at once. Each participant was listed according to name, birthday, address, and occupation, and these were submitted to the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults. It must have been an experience not only for believers to witness dozens being baptized in a river with crowds on the shore, but it also must have made an impression on the commissioner to receive pages of names of people recently baptized.¹²² The church was visibly growing and mobilizing people.

Easter of 1955 was a major affair once again for the Central Baptist Church in Moscow. They held five gatherings, on Saturday night, Sunday morning and evening, and two more on Monday. At the main gathering an estimated 2,200-2,400 attended. Each of the seven pastors preached for fifteen minutes, including the head of the Council Iakov Zhidkov, and the choir or congregation sang in between. The church was full, and people filled the corridors and everywhere where they could fit.¹²³ The same went for Easter of 1956—it was more than full. Yet, noted the commissioner, “all holiday prayer gatherings passed in full order.”¹²⁴ He did not offer plans of action or explanations in response to the growing popularity of the Evangelical Christians-Baptists Church. (It should be noted here, however, that the primary concern for the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults during the 1950s to this point had been Jews and Jewish communities; in that way, Protestant groups were of secondary concern). As with the Orthodox Church, state agents had no clear directive for what to do with increasing religious practice, as sporadic anti-religious propaganda was having little effect.

Khrushchev, De-Stalinization, and Flourishing Religion

In the mid-1950s, religious life was blossoming, even flourishing in the Orthodox and Baptist churches in Moscow and across the oblast. With statistical and visible evidence to suggest religiosity was increasing in popularity, this flourishing became a worrying prospect for those advocating a Marxist-Leninist-Materialist-Atheist-Communist state.¹²⁵ Many believers or clergy who had received ten-year sentences during or after the war were being released in the period following Stalin’s death, and many who had received 25-year sentences received reductions, and still others received amnesties or judicial reviews that resulted in rehabilitation. This meant that in the mid-1950s, many active church leaders, pastors, and believers were

¹²² Ibid. f. 3004, op. 1, d. 48.

¹²³ GARF f. 6991, op. 3, d. 673, 28-29.

¹²⁴ Ibid. f. 6991, op. 3, d. 674, 18.

¹²⁵ Mikahil V. Shkarovskii, “The Russian Orthodox Church in 1958-64,” *Russian Studies in History* 50, no. 3 (2011): 72.

released into their former communities.¹²⁶ The release of prisoners after Stalin's death, says anthropologist Catherine Wanner, "infused these isolated evangelical communities with new vitality."¹²⁷ Just as with Stalin's wartime concessions, this release of prisoners helped boost religious life in the Soviet Union.

One of the beneficiaries of Khrushchev's amnesty was Mikhail Trukhanov, who had been arrested in 1941 for organization of a bible study, released in 1949, and re-arrested shortly after Stalin's death. He had been falsely accused of being "the leader of some kind of nuclear gang who had decided to drop an atomic bomb on the Kremlin," an incredibly serious charge for which he received a ten-year sentence. Due to Khrushchev's amnesty he was released and rehabilitated in 1956 from his status as a political prisoner.¹²⁸ Having only grown in his faith and desire to enter the priesthood in prison, now as a 42-year old he immediately applied to the Moscow Theological Academy but was denied for "unknown reasons." He managed to receive ordination, however, by drawing on personal connections. A friend who was close to a bishop in Chernigov agreed to ordain him in March 1958, thus providing a way for Trukhanov to enter the priesthood.¹²⁹ Prison and seminaries released new priests to the Orthodox Church. Recent seminarians differed from the priests compromised enough to survive the terrors of the 1930s, as some benefitted from real attempts by Orthodox leaders to cultivate a dynamic theological education after Stalin's concession.¹³⁰

Khrushchev also gave a boost to religion when he denounced the "personality cult" of Stalin and his excesses. The speech he made in a closed party congress in February 1956 denounced the direction Stalin had taken the party and promoted a more idealistic Leninist model. But having criticized Stalin, who had become so identified with the Soviet Union and the Party, he also dealt a blow to any idealized conception of the party, opening the possibility for alternative ideals to find the light of day. Part of Khrushchev's process of de-Stalinization also

¹²⁶ Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II*, 65.

¹²⁷ Wanner, *Communities of the Converted*, 55.

¹²⁸ Trukhanov, *Vospominaniia: Pervye Sorok Let Moei Zhizni*, 1:261.

¹²⁹ Mikhail Trukhanov, *Vospominaniia: Ne Mogu ne Govorit' o Khriste: Besedy, Propovedi, Vospominaniia: Materialy k Zhizneopisaniiu, Chast' II 1956-2006 gg* [*Recollections: I cannot not Speak of Christ: Conversations, Sermons, Recollections: Materials for a Biography, Part II, 1956-2006*], ed. V. A. Zvonkova, vol. 2, 2008, 39–40. But the only available parishes were outside of the city of Moscow, and for family reasons pertaining to his wife, he was not free to move. Without a parish he would not be admitted to the Academy.

¹³⁰ Pospelovskiy, *The Russian Church Under the Soviet Regime, 1917-1982*, 1984, II:320. See more on Pospelovskiy's analysis of the efforts of Patriarch Aleksii and others to switch the emphasis from secular learning to "spiritual" learning.

produced a sort of “thaw” where works whose publication would have previously unthinkable were now gaining public audiences.

The release of many prisoners from the Gulags after Stalin’s death, Khrushchev’s denunciation of Stalin’s excesses, and the relative “thaw” that eventually allowed works like Solzhenitsyn’s *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* to be published did not “satisfy” the desires of the religious, but only seemed to encourage more people to explore religion. Scholar Nathaniel Davis also postulates that Khrushchev’s modifications to the pension system “allowed many older believers to retire and worship without fear for their livelihood.”¹³¹ Once retired, the older generation felt free to participate in religious activities without fear of repercussions. But even young people did not fear as generations before.

Not coincidentally, some young people who had not spent their growing years with any connection to the church had become curious about religion and its claims. In 1956, for example, seventeen year olds Aleksandr Il’ich Borisov and his friend decided “it was time to put an end to our ignorance” and see what religion really was for themselves, deciding to visit an Orthodox Church, a Baptist Church, a synagogue, and a mosque. When they entered the small Orthodox church on Briusov Lane off of Tverskaya Avenue in Moscow, the service was already in progress as they unwittingly went in through the side doors, entering next to the choir. He was surprised to see among the choir members men and women with “intelligent” looks, and “not old.” He regarded it as something unusual to witness what he perceived to be a mix of solemnity and intimacy among the participants.

Yet as the young men stood gazing, they heard hushed talking about them, the “spies” who came in, and at “such a time” too. “Confused and upset,” Borisov and his friend slipped quietly back out the door. This ended their religious quest for the time being, but two years later Borisov took his godmother’s suggestion to try an Orthodox Church again.¹³² The priesthood and the monasteries were attracting more youth who wanted to pursue a career in the Church, what some considered a portent of the inability of Soviet ideology to convince the next generations.¹³³ There were youth, particularly intellectuals, who were raised in an idealistic culture but who were looking to ideals other than communism to capture their imagination (though joining the Orthodox Church presented its own obstacles to curious youth, as we will

¹³¹ Davis, *A Long Walk to Church*, 29.

¹³² Aleksandr Il’ich Borisov, *Poblevshie Nivy: Razmyshleniia o Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi [Whitened Fields: Reflections on the Russian Orthodox Church]* (Moskva: Liga-Foliant [u.a.], 1994).

¹³³ Kenworthy, “The Revival of Monastic Life,” 140–41.

explore in detail in Chapter VI). Even if youth were a small percentage, the problem commissioners had to address was the increasing popularity of religion.

In the Orthodox Church

In 1956, Trushin was still commissioner for CROCA in Moscow Oblast, and despite Khrushchev's more liberal line, not all state organs were satisfied with his work. Trushin's colleagues from the Oblast Executive Committee criticized his work, saying "In your report you did not write anything about work with clergy, about the situation and activity of religious communities in the cities and village locations, about measures of the clergy toward strengthening and expanding of the church and of parish activities, as well as about material-economic activity of the church." Trushin had also failed to catch wind of the changing politics in 1956: "In addition, in your report neither did you write about the reactions of the clergy to events which took place during the reporting period. For example, about the personality cult of Stalin ... It's necessary to look at how the clergy reacts to political events and communicate this in your accounting-informational reports."¹³⁴ As leader, Khrushchev's example was to be followed. How church leaders and commissioners now regarded Comrade Stalin signaled their allegiance to the current line.

In his next report, Trushin made sure he included some more information on this subject. He wrote about how his visits with various clergy were also opportunities to discuss "political topics" in addition to inner-church ones: the personality cult of Stalin, the statements of Josip Tito, and recent events in Hungary and Egypt. He noted that "an overwhelming majority of the servants of cults are loyally disposed to the measures of the party and Government and correctly orient themselves to issues of the international situation."¹³⁵ Trushin did not go in to details, only suggesting that all was in order.

Also in response to the demand of his readers, Trushin produced a special report about the increase in "preaching activities." In it, Trushin noted that having more young clergy and training on preaching in seminary were increasing religiosity. He described sermons as "spreading church ideologies," and they were "directly or indirectly calling believers to zealously relate to Christian doctrine." In the Orthodox Church, the liturgy was the primary focus, but homilies were expected on Sundays and especially high church holidays. The problem was increasingly one of content: "sometimes their sermons are not restricted to only 'pure'

¹³⁴ GARF f. 6991, op. 1, d. 1361, 67.

¹³⁵ Ibid. f. 6991, op. 1, d. 1469, 24.

interpretations of so-called priestly writings and the gospel. At the end of their sermons they often touch upon moral issues, raising children, relationships to work and of person to person, calling to attend church more often and accept ‘the holy sacraments’, and etc. etc.”¹³⁶

Extemporaneous or premeditated sermons with anything other than purely religious matter were unacceptable and unsafe. State representatives regarded ritualism as benign because they saw it as disconnected from the territories over which communist ideology was supposed to prevail, including morality, education, child-rearing, social relations, and even how people spent their time.

But alongside this special report, Trushin’s other reporting only referred to a generic “activation” of churches in 1957, but without any correlating explanations, insights, conclusions, or suggestions.¹³⁷ Again, state organs were disappointed: why did he only keep to the “facts?” His readers were struggling to know what conclusions to draw because he was not providing insight as to the real situation and conditions.¹³⁸ Whether officials were worried that religion was flourishing, or their comments mark the first heralds for the anti-religious campaign to come,¹³⁹ they wanted on-the-ground detail, concrete trends, not generic or recycled phrases from earlier reports.

Officials primarily had to deal with the numbers of adults attending church more than youth activity, although state agents had been concerned for several years already about younger generations’ interest in the Church.¹⁴⁰ The problem was not an increasing number of churches, as church openings had been basically capped since 1948.¹⁴¹ Attendance *en masse* was highly problematic, as on Sundays and religious holidays, state officials witnessed huge numbers of participants, and in some cases, cathedral capacities of 5,000 were being exceeded. Whereas a few thousand visited the Trinity-Sergius Lavra outside of Moscow on feast days in the years following its opening, by 1956 ten to fifteen thousand pilgrims attended.¹⁴² In September

¹³⁶ Ibid., 30.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 44.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 98.

¹³⁹ Kenworthy and Roslof have noted increasing anti-religion propaganda and activity prior to 1959-1961, the dates traditionally given to Khrushchev’s anti-religion campaign. Yet it only could have been called a campaign later. See Roslof, “‘Faces of the Faceless,’” p. 116 and Kenworthy, p. 143 as examples.

¹⁴⁰ Pospelovsky, *The Russian Church Under the Soviet Regime, 1917-1982*, 1984, II:329. A CPSU Central Committee resolution from July 7, 1954 claimed that the Orthodox Church and “sectarians” were attracting youth and the need for a response by state bodies.

¹⁴¹ Keston Archive, “Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report” 1959, Archive file <KGB 26>, p. 120. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 5, Del. 28.

¹⁴² Kenworthy, “The Revival of Monastic Life,” 132.

1958 on the holiday of the Feast of the Cross, at the “Pimen” Cathedral, which has a capacity of 4,000, some 8,000 were estimated to have attended, and 39 baptisms were performed.¹⁴³ On Sundays, and especially on special holidays, “all Muscovite churches were overflowing with those praying, but in some churches believers, not fitting in the building, stood outside within the church yard.” This situation was observed at churches outside the city as well. Perhaps people sensed a thaw after 1957, as there were 49 petitions to open twenty-two churches in the first half of 1958, and another fifteen oral petitions were made to the commissioner.¹⁴⁴

As before, state agents needed to place the blame on someone for “activating” these citizens; they continued to focus on the influential ones rather than those seeking influence. Again officials raised the issue of preaching, claiming that theological institutions had been putting more emphasis on “the subject of homiletics” and offering training in “drafting church sermons,” which they identified as having a marked influence on church attendance. Preachers were being trained in how to conduct themselves at the pulpit, use their voices – all with the effect of improving “religious propaganda,” which was made more effective by priests recognizing the need to “adapt to modern conditions” and “the modern environment.” Priests had been “considerably strengthening their preaching activities,” such that the services were almost always accompanied by a sermon, the “goal” of which was “animating interest in religion.” It is curious that officials would describe the recent sermons as problematic for increasing interest in religion, as though otherwise, sermons did not do so. Trushin’s informants noted that priests were no longer just talking about “eternal life after death,” a comment which suggests that certain topics like immortality were considered esoteric and therefore benign. The classic rites (baptism, marriage, confession), which were supposed to be mere rituals, were now being “accompanied by explanations of their ‘divine meaning.’” To Trushin, sermons were crossing lines of acceptability, and he repeated earlier phrases about sermons straying from “‘pure’ interpretations” and engaging in discussions of morality, child-rearing, work, and relationships while encouraging attendance and participation in rites.¹⁴⁵

Trushin provided some new names this time. Priest Solertovskii, who had been serving in the Church of St. John the Warrior in Moscow, reportedly commented that few had remained with the church, in particular youth, “who strayed like sheep from the herd,” but that he, as

¹⁴³ Keston Archive, “Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report” 1958, Archive file <KGB 50>, p. 73. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 1, Del. 44.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 119–20.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 77–78.

their “pastor” will “preach the word of god, in spite of any hardships, stopping at nothing and not afraid of any persecution.” He praised donations for the renovation of the church as “establishing comfort for those visiting and the kingdom of heaven for yourselves.” After adult baptisms, he gave speeches with words of advice (*naputstvennye rechi*). At a recent baptism of a young woman, he remarked, “You have been reading newspapers, novels, and do not know the word of god. Now, when starting in christian faith you read the bible, study the prayers, go to the church of god and listen to the word spoken by your pastor, who leads you on the true path.”¹⁴⁶ To Trushin, priests should not be heightening their own importance or that of religious “truth” in people’s lives.

One priest of the village of Turbichevo, Tomashevich, before the start of the service was “meeting youth at the entrance, suggesting they go closer to the altar [...]” Another, a priest in Dmitrov, at the end of the service was “talking affectionately (*laskovo*) with the parishioners, patting kids on the head, praising the fact that they came with their mom or grandma to church, reminding the latter to obey parents and adults.” Upon his arrival in the village for services, “they [were] running up to him and he [was] giving them candy and sitting them in his car, promising to drive them around after.” Another priest would remind parents of the “necessity to bring children to church and teach them prayers.”¹⁴⁷ State agents found it undesirable that the next generation would see a religious figure so positively.

A priest in the village of Novoselki was another. His predecessors were the types who “didn’t linger” at the church, thus “believers visited it passively” and income and earnings of the priests “were insignificant.” From the start the new priest added services during the week and improved the choir. From the “more fanatic believers” he borrowed money and improved the church. “In his very first sermon” he declared that he would not assess fees for his services, since he worked “not for money, but for ‘faith in Christ.’” Trushin tried to paint a dark view of this, saying that the people were paying him in cash, and that way, he could “reach in with his filthy hands” and take what suited him without claiming it for tax purposes.¹⁴⁸ Anti-religious propaganda at the beginning of the Soviet Union often painted priests as money-grubbing, and these narratives were routinely used by officials whenever the issue of a priest’s handling of money arose or when he seemed interested in enlivening church life.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 78.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 116.

¹⁴⁸ Keston Archive, “Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report” 1959, Archive file <KGB 26>, p. 123. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 5, Del. 28.

One of the main problems Trushin cited in this report is that “in many congregations” after priests finished their sermons, they walked about the parish and “directly and indirectly, summon[ed] the believers to treat the Christian faith zealously.”¹⁴⁹ To him, the acceptable case was that a priest would finish his purely religious homily and avoid direct contact with (or influence on) believers. Only in such a case would believers visit church “passively,” as believers of Novoselki did before their current active priest was serving. For religion to remain acceptable, Trushin believed, it should be characterized by distance and indifference, not familiarity or intimacy.

Trushin, as before, explained the increased church activity by writing “clergy and churchmen [we]re trying to extend their influence on the surrounding population and intensify the activity of their congregations.” This “intensification” was manifested by “offering additional services, the strengthening of singing choirs, by maintaining cleanliness and comfort in the church, the widespread practice of walking about the parish, with frequent appearances with sermons, and etc. and etc.” “Young clergy” were considered the main instigators, and some 170 were in the Moscow Oblast who recently finished seminary. Some of these had “middle [i.e. technical] and even higher secular education,” meaning they were not the ignorant priest of socialist imagination.¹⁵⁰

Trushin also believed part of the problem was that the scientific-atheist propaganda wasn’t keeping up with religious propaganda, which was all too quickly “adapting to current conditions.” Promoters of religion were not giving into the obsolescence which was supposed to be their destiny. In addition to simply repeating the concern for young clergy and their training, Trushin wrote about state efforts to track visitors to further monitor influence, as well as to make note of priests visiting one another, to track any bonding that might be taking place among them.¹⁵¹ His report a year later in 1959 added the concern that more people were applying to join the monastery too, and this also needed attention.¹⁵² Again Trushin repeated the concern from a year ago about the increased work with youth and children, about priests

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. 1958, Archive file <KGB 50>, p. 99. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 1, Del. 44.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 114–15. Among the young priests they noted, two would eventually rise to great prominence (and will be featured below). Deacon Aleksandr Vol’fovich Men’, the report noted, was born in 1935, studied in Irkutsk Agricultural Institute until 1958, and was recently ordained (98). Gleb Pavlovich Yakunin, like Men’, studied at the Irkutsk Ag Institute and had moved to the Moscow area. He was listed among the “new recruits” from the seminary (143).

¹⁵¹ Keston Archive, “Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report” 1958, Archive file <KGB 50>. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 1, Del. 44.

¹⁵² Ibid. 1959, Archive file <KGB 26>. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 5, Del. 28.

patting children's' heads, etc., but without names attached as with last year. Also, children of school age were noted at various services, and some were serving as altar boys in the services and "doing confession and taking communion after the services."¹⁵³

An issue that was gathering increasing state attention was that of choirs. Trushin noted: "One of the methods and techniques of clergy and churchmen seeking to extend their influence on the surrounding populace and step up the activity of the church is the pursuit of strengthening the choirs. For this reason churchmen have lately been paying greater attention to the issue of selecting personnel necessary for them [...]"¹⁵⁴ First they put more energy into sermons, and now into choirs, which were improved by attention to hiring a conductor and singers. Officials analyzed the composition of choirs according to gender, age, and employment status. Ten people from the All-Russian Theater Society were named as singing in choirs, seven from the State Musical-Pedagogical Institute, ten from the State Committee on Radio and Television Broadcasting, four from the Ensemble of the Soviet Opera, four from the Moscow State Conservatory, and so on, with other affiliations and people listed with their full names and birthdates. Like those with the above professional affiliations, commissioner Trushin found it "completely unacceptable" that "pensioners, receiving state pensions, [were] continuing to work in churches, receiving for this additional monetary remuneration."¹⁵⁵ He saw such people as demonstrating loyalties mixed between church and state, their flirtation with church a sort of thankless betrayal.

One example where "religious workers and churchmen" were "seeking to extend their influence and intensify churches" was in the Rizhskii district, where several churches were spending money and hiring professionals for choirs.¹⁵⁶ All-Saints Church was one of Moscow's churches which was experiencing the most "congestion." Quite a few were being baptized there, informants noted the presence of many children particularly on the eve of the new school year, and holidays were particularly crammed. The church income had increased the last few years, and subsequently, they have put more funding toward a choir and church upkeep. Toward spreading its "influence," All-Saints spent more than 600,000 rubles—a considerable sum—in 1958 on the choir, which enlisted 34 singers. Among this group a few were named,

¹⁵³ Ibid., 126.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 81.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 87.

¹⁵⁶ Keston Archive, "Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report" 1960, Archive file <KGB 27>, p. 16. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 5, Del. 29.

including a pensioner, a housewife, but also a singer in the theatrical society, a wife of a party member, and a singer in a choir of a local school of music.¹⁵⁷ This was an example of an activated, religious, and socially diverse body of people. To officials, communism should not have competitors to its universal appeal.

Another example of the problematically active church life was the lone church in Baumanskii district, the Bogoyavlenskii Cathedral, which often attracted large numbers in large part due to the fact that this was Patriarch Aleksii's cathedral. Protopresbyter and manager at the Patriarchate Nikolai Fedorovich Kolchitskii also served at the Patriarchal cathedral. Officials considered him "very crafty" [*khitrii*] and was said to "have a large influence not only on a number of workers in the center of the city, but also on the surrounding population." He "often g[ave] sermons" in front of visitors and "strongly care[d] about their religious-moral education." One "young woman" was overheard in another Cathedral "telling a group of believers her impressions" of Father Kolchitskii, that he was an "incessant fiery preacher of God's word who is able to ignite the hearts of the listeners by his teachings," and that she "loved to visit" Father Nikolai's Cathedral.¹⁵⁸

Kolchitskii supposedly put forward considerable effort toward the improvement of the parish and was reported to have said that he wanted to improve the building not just because visitors attend there or because it was the cathedral where the patriarch served, but because "where everything is clean, comfortable, warm, light and magnificent, people are willing to rush there, and not leave." He was reported to have spent "considerable effort" on putting together a "good and powerful church choir" which at the time of reporting had recently been drawing not just believers but some others who expressed their visit to the church as a result of "their desire to hear a good choir of singers." In addition to the Patriarch, Kolchitskii, and the choir, some five other priests served, a few of whom also were quite active and had influence on the "surrounding population."¹⁵⁹

In Leninskii Raion, there were five churches, twenty-one servants of the church (priests and deacons), and 85 people considered active church functionaries (*v tserkovnom aktive*), of whom 46 were pensioners, fifteen were homemakers, and twenty-four were workers. Trushin

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. 1959, Archive file <KGB 26>, p. 144-145. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 5, Del. 28.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. 1960, Archive file <KGB 27>, p. 18. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 5, Del. 29.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 19. Trushin mentioned Vsevolod Shpiller and his church again, but still with the same copied information from 1950. Shpiller was indeed still popular, but Trushin had no new quotes or facts as evidence (19-20).

then named some of them, including professor of an architectural institute, emergency services dispatcher, school employee, welder, master at a building trust, locksmith foreman, and cleaning woman. Among the pensioners were listed former employees of a blood transfusion institute, two bookkeepers, a nurse, a cashier, and a head of a department store. He named the three churches that were best attended in the district and with the highest number of participants in rites (baptisms, weddings, etc). Officials were getting more serious about discovering the inner details of these churches, their composition, and the sources of their popularity. Trushin was finally giving more details and names.¹⁶⁰

But a state response was as yet inchoate. By 1959-1960, holiday church gatherings were massive. In January 1959 all-night services were held for Orthodox Christmas, and over the two days, “all churches in the city of Moscow were filled with believers.” The most popular were the evening services, although some night-time ones were very popular as well. They tried to estimate numbers based on how many people were thought to be occupying a square meter, how large the churches were, and the fact that they were completely full. The author estimated that over the Jan 6-7 period, some 150-180 thousand attended Orthodox liturgy, but he offered what was evidently a consolation to his readers with the claim that the “overwhelming majority (85-90%)” were middle- and upper-aged women, but “only 10-15% were men of old age.” Also of note were visits by some foreigners at one particular cathedral. Although there were “no incidents of any kind noted,” there was the troubling spectacle of an increased number of poor people mingling around major churches, sometimes as many as fifteen to thirty.¹⁶¹ The spectacle of crowds was bad enough; there were not supposed to be people so poor as to be begging the charity of believers, since in communist society, there were not supposed to be any impoverished groups or need of charity. Later that year, even the feast of the Annunciation brought an estimated 90-100,000 Orthodox believers to church, this time 90-95% were middle-aged and older women, 5-10% were men. Easter crowding was as bad as or worse than Christmas.¹⁶²

Officials frequently mentioned that the composition of attendees was made up of a majority of older women as a sort of consolation. This fit several biases of theirs, it seems. First,

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 20–22.

¹⁶¹ Keston Archive, “Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report” 1959, Archive file <KGB 26>, pp. 8-10. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 5, Del. 28.

¹⁶² Ibid. 1960, Archive file <KGB 27>, pp. 54-58. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 5, Del. 29.

officials associated older people with superstitions and dying customs, of which religion was one. Second, officials clearly were more concerned about male participation, showing that they incorporated a gender bias that saw men as of more consequence in Soviet society. Although the above statistics did show the predominance of older women, officials were not unconcerned about the spectacle of large numbers of attendees as well as poor beggars. The problem in essence was that the Orthodox Church was popular once again.

In the ECB Church

Evangelicals comprised a fraction of Orthodox believers, but they experienced similar trends. At the Easter services of 1956 at the Evangelical Church in Moscow, there were the same preachers, same services, but even more people than 1955. This year, “the prayer building was overcrowded,” with 2,400 “or a little more” in attendance at the main Sunday morning service, and people had to huddle outside the entrances.¹⁶³ Even the preceding Holy Week services were packed. Thursday morning had 2,200 attend (most were thought to be from the suburbs, commuting to work), and the evening service had 1,900. On Friday’s morning and evening services, 1,000 and 1,500 were there, respectively. At Saturday’s night service, 2,200 came. On Easter Sunday, there were eight sermons, with choral or congregational singing in between at three services, with a total of 4,500 in attendance. On Monday, two more services brought in 1,900. Despite this kind of mobilization of believers, however, the commissioner only remarked that “All prayer gatherings passed in full order. No violations of any kind were observed.”¹⁶⁴

Where violations were occurring was in the regions beyond the Central church of Moscow, at locales scattered across the country. In 1957 the “center” (Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults) sent a circulatory letter to its oblast commissioners about issues going on countrywide. Signaling what local inspectors should focus on, the letter drew attention to and provided examples of Evangelicals’ work among youth, applications for new churches, opening prayer houses (presumably without official approval), disseminating legislation on religious life (perhaps about constitutional religious rights), and other such developments.¹⁶⁵ Moscow Oblast inspectors in turn echoed this perception of an increase in unregistered Baptist activity in the region lately, as well as the setting up of new prayer gatherings. Many members of the Moscow

¹⁶³ TsGA Moskv f. 3004, op. 1, d. 55.

¹⁶⁴ GARF f. 6991, op. 3, d. 765, 22.

¹⁶⁵ Keston Archive, “Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report” 1957, Archive file <KGB 186>. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 1, Del. 40.

congregation were leading this activity across the oblast, especially “from the youth.” The commissioner counted sixteen groups involving 820 people in early 1958, causing him to conclude that “The Evangelical christians-baptists and Pentecostals developed broad measures and major activity over the last two years.”¹⁶⁶

One such emerging community was in the city of Dedovsk, a medium-sized industrial town over an hour’s commute from Moscow in the Istrinskii and Krasnogorskii districts. Probably due to information provided by a certain presbyter Karpov, officials learned that I.N. Krylov, a 60-year-old from Kalinin Oblast, reportedly baptized a total of eighteen people on two occasions in Dedovsk in 1956.¹⁶⁷ What they did not mention was that a group of Baptists had been gathering there for some ten years already and had been requesting registration for the past six years.¹⁶⁸ After Baptist believer Vasiliy Yakovlevich Smirnov built a house on Pushkinskaya Street in 1946, a small group gathered there several times a week for prayer, bible study, and singing. Eventually, they could not fit, so he removed a wall to make half of his house one big room. As many as 200 packed into this little dwelling at once in the mid-1950s.¹⁶⁹ Young Petr Rumachik, who married one of Smirnov’s daughters, was ordained as a minister in Dedovsk in 1955. An older man, Aleksei Fedorovich Iskovskikh was the first head pastor while they still met in homes.¹⁷⁰

Once again in 1956 a group of twenty-five filed a petition to open a church in a “private” dwelling on Pushkinskaya Street, the very home owned by Smirnov. State organs rejected this petition due to the fact that the home did not meet “sanitary and fire conditions.” It did not matter that, according to officials’ information, a group of some 20-40 was already gathering and would continue to gather twice a week, Saturday and Sunday evening in Smirnov’s home.¹⁷¹ The reality was probably that meetings were held more often and involved more people, but state representatives had no incentive to make registrations reflect the existing reality so much as the desired future one, which was ideally no churches at all, but only a few sparsely attended ones as a pragmatic second-best option.

¹⁶⁶ GARF f. 6991, op. 3, d. 766, 17.

¹⁶⁷ TsGA Moskvyy f. 3004, op. 1, d. 64, 9.

¹⁶⁸ Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II*, 186.

¹⁶⁹ Personal Interview with Nikolai Vassilievich Smirnov and Nina Stepanova Smirnova, May 24, 2015.

¹⁷⁰ Peter Rumachik, Pavel Rumachik, and Luba Rumachik, *A Path Not Lined with Roses*, ed. Sam Slobodian, trans. Christopher J Lovelace (Maple Grove, MN: Baptist International Evangelistic Ministries, 1999), 5–6.

¹⁷¹ GARF f. 6991, op. 3, d. 766, 17.

The Baptist community in Dedovsk was growing, whether officials would allow it to register or not. Their baptisms in the mid-1950s occurred in the open, and one time they baptized as many as 40.¹⁷² But political winds were shifting again. Regular attenders started to notice state representatives mingling outside or even attending some of these gatherings beginning in 1958-1959.¹⁷³

Officials seemed to have ready explanations for the burgeoning of the Baptist communities by 1958: “the free propaganda and activity of preachers” from among Baptists and Pentecostals, the “connivance and encouragement” of certain leaders, insufficient activity of local authorities, and the need for more information about the preachers and groups involved. Making tracking difficult for officials, ECB preachers often traveled between communities and oblasts, as was the case in Dedovsk, where the one who baptized eighteen had some connections to Kalinin Oblast.¹⁷⁴

The Evangelicals’ decentralized activity was highly problematic for officials. The commissioner noticed the “considerable number of these preachers” (probably a good number were lay-preachers) who would hold baptisms or prayer meetings all over the oblast.¹⁷⁵ He also characterized them as having an “active group [*aktiv*] of believers” who held meetings in homes. Another general report from 1958 covering all of the religions mentioned that the problem lately was the Baptist church’s spread across the region, unique among the religions. With more and more wanting to be baptized, the bottom line was that the phenomenon was growing each year.¹⁷⁶

Of the “violations of Soviet legislation” in ECB churches, officials mostly blamed those who “spoke in the capacity of leaders and preachers” from the Evangelical Christians-Baptists denomination. Even the leader of the Council and Baptist minister at Moscow Central, Zhidkov, was apparently overheard remarking that “it’s not so important who baptizes, but it’s important who is baptized.” This reflected the custom of the Baptist church where “a significant number of such preachers provide for the growth of the religious association of the evangelical Christians-baptists, conducting the rites of baptism and organizing prayer meetings in different populated

¹⁷² Personal Interview with Nikolai Vassilievich Smirnov and Nina Stepanova Smirnova, May 24, 2015.

¹⁷³ Rumachik, Rumachik, and Rumachik, *A Path Not Lined with Roses*, 6.

¹⁷⁴ GARF f. 6991, op. 3, d. 766, 24.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 98.

areas of Moscow Oblast.” That they were even traveling around was nothing less than the attempt to spread religious propaganda.¹⁷⁷

The commissioner characterized Baptists as using “the most varying forms and methods” and even “accounting for local conditions and individual characteristics of each person.” Such techniques succeeded in drawing “women and youth” in particular “into their midst.” Even though believers sensed a changing religious climate and took a more clandestine approach, they grew in numbers, but authorities still noticed their gatherings “hidden” in apartments of believers and “often in the forest.”¹⁷⁸ In Dedovsk, while still wanting to have an officially registered prayer house, believers had been working with youth. On a monthly basis youth were invited for Sunday festival-events, which featured solo and choral singing, dramatic readings and so on. Officials concluded that these measures ensured the faith would stay alive while convincing some of them to become the next generation of preachers.¹⁷⁹

State agents had a better handle on ECB churches in the cities than the oblasts. At Moscow Central Baptist Church, not only was the sanctuary often crowded with more than a thousand at each, foreigners also frequently attended this church (it was the church of choice for many Protestant visitors from the West).¹⁸⁰ All of this was legal and authorized. In the case of the delegations and foreign visitors, it was the job of ministers of the Moscow Church and leaders of the Council like Karev and Zhidkov to accompany them as tour guides, and all these interactions were observed and recorded.¹⁸¹ In Kiev, there were four church communities in the city with attendance around 1,700 where there were several sermons and readings by believers at their two to four services per week. In Kiev Oblast, there were 94 smaller Evangelical Christians-Baptists communities, around 6,000 people. Average attendance ranged from 30 to 80% of members at these churches (quite good) and approached 100% on holidays.¹⁸²

One person who attended a Baptist Church in Kiev in the latter half of the 1950s was young Natasha Vins, along with her family. Her father was an electrical engineer and her mother a teacher, and she recalls boarding the bus on Sunday mornings, as fellow Christians greeted

¹⁷⁷ TsGA Moskvyy f. 3004, op. 1, d. 64, 6-9.

¹⁷⁸ GARF f. 6991, op. 3, d. 767, 36.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, f. 6991, op. 3, d. 768, 21-22.

¹⁸¹ TsGA Moskvyy f. 3004, op. 1, d. 29.

¹⁸² GARF f. 6991, op. 3, d. 1160, 6-9.

each other and chatted. Her parents and grandmother sang in the choir.¹⁸³ But these would become the “good old days” before long. By 1959, Khrushchev’s anti-religion campaign was beginning. The Vins family and the Baptist believers would encounter increasing harassment in the coming years, when simply traveling to church as a family with young children would no longer be ordinary religious activity, but underground activity.

Conclusion

Stalin’s invitation during World War II to the Orthodox and Evangelical Christians-Baptists Churches to “reactivate” resulted in religious effervescence in both Churches. Both denominations featured extensive petitioning for church registrations, increased attendance and new converts, and new, young clergy to fill growing needs. As noted above, although during the war officials regarded the Orthodox Church in particular as useful for helping rally the people, afterward its ideological incompatibility became more visible, as was the reality that it offered an alternative avenue for belonging, identity, and power. Churches were still necessary, however, to Soviet officials if they wished to claim to foreigners that there was freedom of religious conscience in the Soviet Union, and they could be useful for aligning people with state interests and for allowing people to “satisfy their religious needs” as private individuals.

Stalin wanted to permit “religion” to satisfy individuals, but not for individuals to form groups. In the Soviet Union, individuals were granted the freedom of a personal conscience, but not the right to a communal identity or belonging other than as Soviet citizen. State representatives did not want to accommodate groups’ demands for more churches, as they represented belonging and power. People petitioned for churches to open in groups, and in groups state representatives would have to approve or deny them—either way potentially increasing their sense of communal belonging.

In communist societies, there were not supposed to be collectives of people wanting to be religiously active. According to Marxist ideology, any remaining religiosity under socialism or communism was supposed to be a passing vestige, populated only by isolated remnants of the disenfranchised bourgeoisie—not emerging groups and certainly not new generations or converts! Because socio-economic changes were to render religious content meaningless, only the formulaic and ritualistic aspects would be left behind. State representatives regarded

¹⁸³ Natasha Vins, *Children of the Storm: The Autobiography of Natasha Vins*. (Greenville, S.C.: JourneyForth, 2002), 3.

ritualism as benign because they saw it as disconnected from spheres that mattered to them, including morality, education, child-rearing, social relations, and leisure time. They underestimated just how much people found religious rituals powerful in terms of offering enduring meanings and frameworks for communal identity and belonging.

Even if they misunderstood why churches continued to attract people, they endeavored to monitor churches for signs that religiosity was exceeding individualistic ritualism, which they considered quiet church life. Practically speaking, acceptable religiosity for officials was having predictable church services, abstract sermons, and little social interaction among the few participants, who, at best, were mostly older women whom many officials stereotyped as the most acceptable type of participant. The worst case scenario was an active church attended by youth, men, and professionals with a priest or pastor engaging the people and animating them toward greater participation and religiosity. Such a scenario thereby made religion a competitor to the Soviet cause since it meant that religion could be universally appealing and mobilizing.

In their work trying to normalize religiosity toward something that resembled aged clinging to a dying ritual, officials acted as though certain believers or clergy were to blame for “activating” church life. They scrutinized seminarians, priests, pastors, active laypeople, and those in monasteries *as individuals* potentially responsible for animating crowds.¹⁸⁴ They ignored the agency of believers as audiences and communities and as well as the agency of religion itself to attract people.

In the Evangelical Christians-Baptists Church, as in the Orthodox Church, attendance and participation grew after 1943. The number of young clergy and even youth interest was on the rise. Despite some elements of a cultural thaw at the top levels of government in the late 1950s, religion did not experience a warming of relations with government officials. By 1958-1959, the government was in the process of promoting a new line, one with a goal to stem the tide of Baptist growth and burgeoning Orthodox religiosity. Officials would not call this new line “persecution,” but “measures toward liquidating violations of the soviet legislation on cults.”¹⁸⁵ What officials did not predict well, however, was the effect that new attacks on religion would have on these religious communities, especially their subsequent level of mobilization, as the chapter on Khrushchev’s anti-religion campaign will demonstrate.

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¹⁸⁴ GARF f. 6991, op. 1, d. 192, d. 337, d. 496, 13.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.* f. 6991, op. 3, d. 768, 41.

III. New Romanian Government and Renegotiated Religion, 1945 – 1956

As the Soviet Union gained authority in postwar Eastern Europe in the late 1940s and 1950s communist authorities made attacks on religious institutions resembling those in the 1920s and 1930s in the Soviet Union. Levels of violence, arrest, and church closings varied by country, but the goal of subduing church authority politically and ideologically was the same.¹ Yet coercive measures by state agents to gain the submission of church representatives in Romania gradually waned in favor of finding a balance between control and service to state goals. Frontal attacks were increasingly seen as harming a state's global or domestic reputation by making citizens or international audiences indignant. Moreover, as Nathaniel Davis notes, some officials believed that religion was supposed to die away on its own given the right socio-economic conditions and should not necessitate such attention.² Thus, as in the Soviet Union, authorities in Romania attempted to prevent the church from internally thriving, even while it at times promoted the church as a tool of national mobilization. But unlike in the Soviet Union, in Romania, the process of gaining ascendancy over the church was not as protracted, thoroughgoing, devastating, or deadly.

By 1947 Soviet-backed Romanian communists had gained hold over the offices of power, and the incarceration or execution of church leaders continued as needed for the new ruling powers to feel sure that the churches submitted to them and to redefine what would be considered acceptable religious freedoms and practices. As part of deepening its control across society, in 1947 the Communist Party began to forcefully reorganize Romanian institutions according to Stalin's soviet paradigm and ensure loyal personnel occupied positions of power. Industries and commerce were nationalized according to the economy of central planning, and collectivization also commenced. Opposition parties were liquidated, as were all independent media. All education was nationalized; religious schooling was forbidden.

Yet religious life in the Orthodox and Reformed Churches in Transylvania, the two Romanian churches of focus for this study, continued despite the rise of the communist party. The Churches maintained their traditional hierarchies, which included the patriarch, metropolitans, and bishops in the Orthodox Church and two Bishops, under whom are Deans, who administer a given diocese, then clergy, and laity. The Reformed Synod was theoretically

¹ Nathaniel Davis, "Religion and Communist Government in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe" (Dissertation, Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, 1960).

² Davis, *A Long Walk to Church*, 6.

representative and a check on the Bishops. Churches were still open for services, and seminaries remained, yet not without new distinctions that state authorities, with the expected cooperation of church leaders, began to make between acceptable and unacceptable religiosity. Officials reworked the laws pertaining to religion and religious organizations, and they identified which religions would be granted legal status.

Yet state agents defined acceptable religiosity in response to unanticipated events and movements, not just according to legal or ideological concepts. They further defined religious unacceptability when they encountered stubborn religious movements or personalities, for example, and when the unsuccessful 1956 revolution broke out in Hungary. Such occurrences led authorities to assert greater control over religious movements that had been somewhat neglected previously, especially within the Hungarian Reformed Church (the Transylvanian region of Romania was and is the home of a significant Hungarian minority, and many of them adhere to the Reformed Church). In this chapter, the state's and churches' efforts to establish religious normalcy and the potential problems that always threatened to disturb it are the primary focus.

New Regulations on Church Life Cause New Tensions

The Need for Reliable Cadres: First Crackdowns

In 1947, before any new legal measures pertaining to religious life were drawn up, the emerging communist authorities looked to elevate the power of those who were loyal and strip power from those seen as dangerous. The pro-Communists were extending their power and authority in Romanian society, and part of this process included scrutinizing religious leaders and personnel, just like all other leading figures in society, for the degree of their loyalty toward the emerging regime. Many hierarchs and prominent clerics from the Orthodox, Roman-Catholic, and Greek-Catholic Churches were imprisoned, as well as a select few from the other churches as well. The arrests, imprisonments, and even executions were often swift and extra-judicial. As scholar Cristian Vasile discovered, the prevailing attitude was “it's better that we arrest ten non-guilty than let one villain escape.”³ Yet this does not mean that the emerging

³ Cristian Vasile, “Comunismul Și Biserica: Represiune, Compromitere Și Instrumentalizare [Comunism and the Church: Repression, Compromise, and Instrumentalization],” in *Comunism Și Represiune În România: Istoria Tematică a Unui Fratricid Național*, ed. Ruxandra Cesereanu (Iași: Polirom, 2006), 172.

authorities simply applied blanket criteria without scrutinizing people on an individual basis, just that they tended toward caution when it came to the reliability of cadres.⁴

Roman- and Greek-Catholic hierarchs were the hardest hit by this scrutiny, in large part because the emerging, Eastward-facing communist government would not tolerate the Church's connection to an outside, Western power (the Vatican). Representatives of the Catholic Church had long denounced communism and the Soviet government, and more recently, Pope Pius XII had not denounced Soviet enemies, the Nazis, sufficiently to gain Stalin's trust.⁵ In Romania, all of the Roman-Catholic bishops were arrested, many were executed, and the five dioceses were reduced to two. The existing Patriarch Nicodim was ill and died in 1948, although some would claim potential foul play on the part of the emerging authorities. A rapidly rising figure, Ioan Marina, was installed as Patriarch Justinian of the Orthodox Church, having been only a parish priest up to 1944. His ascendancy to Archbishop and Metropolitan of Iași and then to Patriarch of All Romania likely stems from his hiding communist activist (and by 1947 General Secretary) Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej when he escaped from prison in 1944 during the War. The new Patriarch was given more power of oversight and interference in the lives and work of those beneath him. Numerous church academies, seminaries, and schools were closed.⁶

1948 Religious Policy and the Legal/Theoretical Framework

The "Law of Religions"⁷ of 1948 subsequently outlined the legal framework for religious life in Romania, and the Constitution of 1965 merely added details to this framework, which would last the entire communist period. Articles from these statements had the appearance of guaranteeing freedom of conscience and religion while leaving significant room for the state to manage cases as needed according to the more sophisticated layers of religious acceptability. Article 30 of the Constitution declared: "Freedom of conscience is guaranteed to all citizens of

⁴ Arhivele Naționale ale României, Fond "C.C. al P.C.R. - Sectia Administrativ-Politica," Dos. 23, 1947, 7–12.

⁵ For a detailed archival study of the roles of the Soviets, Romanian Communist government, and Orthodox Church with regard to the Catholic Churches, see Ioan-Marius Bucur, "Istoria Bisericii Unite (Greco-Catolice): 1944-1953 [The History of the Uniate (Greek-Catholic) Church: 1944-1953]" ([s. n.], 2002); Cristian Vasile, *Între Vatican și Kremlin: Biserica Greco-Catolică în Timpul Regimului Comunist [Between Vatican and Kremlin: The Greek-Catholic Church in the time of the Communist Regime]* (București: Curtea Veche, 2003).

⁶ Vasile, "Comunismul Și Biserica," 179.

⁷ In general I choose to translate the Romanian word "cults" as "religions." The Romanian original does not carry the same negative connotation as it does in English, as "cult" signifies "sect." There does not appear to be justification for a cynical reading of this label; "denomination" or "religious confession" might be appropriate translations.

the Socialist Republic of Romania. Anybody is free to share or not to share *religious beliefs*. *Freedom of religious worship* is guaranteed. Religious creeds are free to organize and function. The organization and functioning of religious cults is regulated by law.”⁸ Denominations needed to be pre-approved by the Ministry of Religions (*Ministerul Cultelor*) to be legal, and there were fourteen approved and legally sanctioned religious denominations during the communist period, with no recognized religious associations beyond those major denominations.⁹ The Ministry of Religions was charged with issuing licenses for pastors and granting permission for the construction of religious facilities. As long as the denomination, building, and clergy were pre-approved, congregations could gather together for weekly worship.

But by and large, taking the "Soviet model," the churches were "driven from the public space, from schools, hospitals, institutions of charity, army and prison [...]." Whether the regime even wished to suppress all "religious sentiment" and to what extent the regime was "atheist" is a matter of debate, as is the extent to which the Church could have influence in the public sphere.¹⁰ As Keith Hitchens puts it, the guarantee of "religious conscience" to individuals was put into tension by the fact that the state made communal religious practice a "public concern" subject to its scrutiny and discipline.¹¹ Nevertheless, there was a legal framework within which religions could practice, which provided a legal discourse that religious personnel could draw on

⁸ Foreign Relations Department of the Romanian Orthodox Church, *The Romanian Orthodox Church Yesterday and Today* (Bucharest: Publishing House of the Bible and Mission Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church, 1979), 29–30; *Religious Life in Romania: Essential Information*. (Bucharest: The Consultative Council of the Religious Denominations in the Socialist Republic of Romania [Using the Press of the Biblical and Missionary Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church], 1987), 7. Italics in original. The 1987 version translated "conscience" correctly.

⁹ Dennis Deletant, *Communist Terror in Romania: Gheorghiu-Dej and the Police State, 1948-1965* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 89. There were 60 recognized associations under the previous law of 1928. The fourteen legal religions included: The Romanian Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Reformed Church (also known as the Hungarian Reformed or Calvinist Church), the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession (Lutheran, Saxon-based), the Lutheran-Evangelical Synodo-Presbyterian Church (mostly Hungarian-speaking), the Unitarian Church (not to be confused with the Uniate Church, which was declared nonexistent), the Old-Rite Russian Orthodox Church (known as "Old Believers" in Russia), the Armenian-Gregorian Church, the Pentecostal Church, the Baptist Church, the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, the Open Brethren Church, Islam, and Judaism. All denominations listed above following the Lutheran Church were quite small, with believers numbering less than 100,000 each for most of the communist era. Over the same time period, the Romanian Orthodox boasted some twelve to fifteen million believers, the Catholics one to two million, and the Reformed Church about 700,000-800,000. The Lutherans counted between 100,000 and 200,000, most of its adherents Saxons. A note on numbers: as would be expected, all of these numbers are disputable. Certain denominations often claimed more members than the state would tally. Consider these to be relative sizes.

¹⁰ Vasile, "Comunismul și Biserica," 187.

¹¹ Keith Hitchens, *A Concise History of Romania* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 256.

to negotiate approvable religion. Although one might be led to think that the resulting question would be where the line between “legal” and “illegal” religious practice was, this does not correlate to “acceptable” and “unacceptable” religious practice. The legal framework established in 1948 was very basic and left most definition to an on-the-ground, needs-based interpretation. Religious management was not about an objective interpretation of the law and its words, but rather, “the law” was often wielded as a cudgel for disciplining those whom the authorities had identified as potentially problematic according to their own notions of acceptability. Legality was part of the window dressing. What needs definition is the historically fluid line between acceptable and unacceptable religiosity in the eyes of state and church authorities as it was defined by their actions and writings, and as it changed over time and space according to contexts.

This question of just what constituted “normal” or “acceptable” religious practice informs the various “cases” which follow. Rather than attempting to present a linear picture of events, of “what happened” followed by “what happened next,” what follows is an analysis of the attempts by state and church officials, in negotiation with each other and with clergy and believers, to define and regulate acceptable and unacceptable religiosity.

‘Reunification’ of the Orthodox Church

Some religious institutions were simply illegal. Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormons, and most notably, the Greek-Catholic Church were not given legal standing. The Greek-Catholic Church was a church of some one and a half million in the Transylvanian region. Also known as the Uniate Church, it came to being in the sixteenth century at the Union of Brest when many Orthodox hierarchs accepted some aspects of the Catholic Church, including papal primacy. In recently acquired parts of the Soviet Union, church and state authorities already had cooperated in the plan for the “Uniate” Church to renounce its union with the Vatican and “reunite” with its “mother” Orthodox Church in 1946. In Romania, the same basic thing occurred, with the process beginning in earnest in August 1948.¹²

Apparently at state agents’ suggestion and Patriarch Justinian’s agreement, the hierarchs and clergy of the Greek-Catholic Church were supposed to voluntarily rejoin the church, but when no bishops agreed, state agents used intimidation, threats, and arrest to coax

¹² Vasile, *Între Vatican și Kremlin*. See Vasile’s monograph for comprehensive research on the broader international and geopolitical situation of the Greek-Catholic Church.

lower hierarchs and clergy into signing forms indicating their desire to join the Orthodox Church.¹³ The authorities wanted as many Greek-Catholic clerics as possible participate in this “reunion,” but they considered the bishops “dangerous,” “fanatic,” and “adversarial” and not amenable to such an act.¹⁴ They arrested all eight of the bishops, many of whom had urged Greek-Catholic believers to stand firm in their beliefs and had threatened those who agreed to the union with excommunication. Most died shortly after under unknown circumstances.¹⁵ Nevertheless, a celebration was held to commemorate the occasion on October 21, 1948, in Alba Iulia. Thousands of believers were present to commemorate the occasion expressing the “religious unity of Transylvanian Romanians,” who were throwing off the “tyrannical” Habsburgian legacy.¹⁶ The Greek-Catholic places of worship and monasticism thereafter belonged to the Orthodox Church.

The “reunion” of 1948 was a carefully staged drama. The plan for reintegration included a phase where a certain delegation of pro-union Greek-Catholics traveled about collecting signatures, first from those “who already were shown to be favorable and who are sure, then to those over whom they are able to put some pressure based on existing material. They will get as many signatures as they can.” “Material” that could pressure was probably equivalent to blackmail in many cases. The whole effort was to take place “without noise, with vigilance, preventing any troubles, keeping watch for hostile elements, preparing the ground for sustaining the action of returning to orthodoxy as well as sustaining the signed priests [...]” Next to follow was a big gathering of Greek-Catholic priests on Oct. 1 in Cluj, where one of “the most determined and best speakers” of the previously chosen delegation was to read “the proclamation of returning to Orthodoxy” and to put it to a vote.¹⁷ As for the one Bishop scheduled to be present, Iuliu Hossu, he “will be supervised with great attention the whole

¹³ For much more detail, see Bucur, “Istoria Bisericii Unite.”

¹⁴ Arhivele Naționale ale României, Fond “C.C. al P.C.R. - Sectia Administrativ-Politica, Dos. 3, 1948.

¹⁵ The history of these circumstances, of the roles of state and Orthodox Church representatives, has been studied in more detail by other scholars focusing on the Greek-Catholic Church and their uniquely tragic plight. See, for example, Vasile, “Comunismul și Biserica”; Vasile, *Între Vatican și Kremlin*; Cristian Vasile, *Istoria Bisericii Greco-Catolice sub regimul comunist 1945-1989: documente și mărturii* [*The History of the Greek-Catholic Church under the Communist Regime 1945-1989: Documents and Testimonials*] (Iași: Polirom, 2003); Bucur, “Istoria Bisericii Unite”; For this episode, see Ioan-Marius Bucur, *Din istoria Bisericii Greco-Catolice Române: (1918-1953)* [*From the History of the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church: 1918-1953*] (Cluj-Napoca: Accent, 2003), 208.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 215.

¹⁷ Arhivele Naționale ale României, Fond “Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor – Direcția Studii (1945-1963),” Dos. 3, 1948-1951, 124-125.

time.” After the intended favorable result for the “return” to Orthodoxy was achieved, the next day the delegation traveled to Bucharest to be received by a big welcoming party, and on Sunday, an urgently called Orthodox Synod would be held in which the Synod would welcome their wayward brethren back into the fold. On the 10th of October, the following Sunday, every religious service “in each Greek-Catholic parish” was to be “devoted to returning to Orthodoxy.” After the service, the appeals of the delegation from Cluj and from the Patriarch were to be read. In these announcements “the meaning of returning to orthodoxy will be shown, also accentuating the fact that, in reality, as witnessed even in the religious service just heard, there is no difference between the two Romanian churches.”¹⁸ While many expressed loyalty to the “reunion,” state security agents tracked, intimidated, and arrested those who would not “reunite,” trying to ensure they join the Orthodox Church or leave the priesthood, but not practice Greek-Catholicism clandestinely.¹⁹

In this effort of “reunion,” we see the first major action of cooperation between the state and church toward creating the idea of a unified “Romanian” church. Yet clergy and believers would not be so easily persuaded, even if the leaders cooperated. After the “reunification” of 1948, the “Greek-Catholic problem” became (and remained, for the next fifty years) a problem of and within the Orthodox Church. Although commissioners from the Ministry of Religions would label the difficulty associated with enforcing this union among clergy and believers simply one of attempting to ensure that hierarchs and clergy promoted this union (assuming believers blindly followed leaders), believers made their own determinations as to the “truth” of the situation.

General Regulation of Denominations and Their Influence

Authorities did not interfere fundamentally in the “ideologies” of the Orthodox Church, in its rituals or doctrines, but they meddled heavily in its operations as an institution, in its ability to manage itself or extend influence. Agents heavily scrutinized Orthodox hierarchs and priests, and those they deemed “dangerous,” “reactionary,” or “adversarial” toward the regime in positions of power were initially arrested in 1947 and 1948. Yet even after this first wave, the authorities were still concerned about the reliability of certain bishops, Archpriests (protopopi), and priests. In the patriarchate, officials felt “the majority are elements hostile to the regime,”

¹⁸ Ibid., 126-127.

¹⁹ Bucur, *Din Istoria Bisericii Greco-Catolice Romane*, 208–12.

and “reactionary elements” were being appointed and engaging in “propagandistic” measures toward “strengthening religion.” Among the metropolitans and bishops, “In appearance they all have an attitude of understanding with the state,” but officials were still concerned about Metropolitan Bălan and Bishop Colan of Cluj. Among priests, there were some “hostile elements on the frontier” in Timisoara, and “many reactionary priests” in the capital, Bucharest, who “preach from the pulpit with implicit meanings [*subînțeleșuri*]” and were trying “to attract people toward the church.” It would take time to build the kind of relationship where authorities could trust that church representatives would act according to their principles of acceptable religiosity.

While the churches were being combed and sifted for reliability, the Ministry of Religion itself was still forming (not to mention the new communist government as a whole): it was a ministry-in-progress still trying to reckon with the myriad issues it faced involved in trying to establish the loyalty of the religions. The various sectors of the government had to harmonize their respective duties, and they had to resolve unexpected tensions or misunderstandings that arose between them, often on the fly, such that meetings were even characterized by “having a spontaneous character and minutes were not being drawn up.” The Ministry of Religions, outside officials believed, “was managing with difficulty, not intransigent enough, sometimes yielding to these difficulties or finding a solution to them too late.” As for some of the inspectors within the department, the majority was comprised of “bourgeois and petty bourgeois elements,” and “very few inspire trust in the tasks in which they are entrusted,” working “superficially without political orientation.” In short, there was much work to be done on all fronts in the early years in the arena of religion management.²⁰

But even while the Ministry was forming itself, a whirlwind of changes had swept across the religious landscape. The Ministry of the Interior had carried out hundreds of arrests and caused dozens of deaths, many clergy had quit or fled, and scores of believers switched faiths. It happened at such a pace that the Ministry could not keep up. In 1950 the Ministry recognized its need to recover information about the dismissal of Orthodox priests over the years, as the priesthood was very large. But it took time, effort, and personnel to start tracking who worked where, since when, who had quit, retired, stopped due to illness, etc. Having moved past subduing leaders and establishing reliable cadres, the Ministry was gradually making the minutia

²⁰ Arhivele Naționale ale României, Fond “C.C. al P.C.R. - Sectia Administrativ-Politica,” Dos. 113, 1950, 3-4.

of the religious world its prerogative, starting to define “normal” religious practice. Also, with the focus on the largest denomination (now even larger with the Greek-Catholic Church incorporated), many smaller or more marginal religious movements avoided the brunt of the Ministry’s gaze at this time.

Religious Activity Scrutinized

The desired outcome of the wild post-war years for both the state and churches was normalcy; the Ministry of Religions wanted some sort of normalization of religious affairs, and church leaders wanted to know what to expect from the body that oversaw their activities. Although this process of normalization could be seen simply as a governmental attempt to centralize and consolidate religious institutions and religious practices to make them more contained and more observable (controllable), it still remains to be answered just what kind of religiosity the Ministry of Religions considered centralized, consolidated, controllable, safe, or simply: acceptable.

Given that each church presented its own history, culture, institutional structure, and personalities, there was no single formula or seamless transition toward cooperation with state policies and state officials. Rather, the process of learning to cooperate was negotiated differently among the churches due to the impact of such variables as institutional culture, practices, and personalities. Those denominations that tended toward models of hierarchy and submission found the transition less rocky than those that operated according to decentralized or democratic models, for example. Yet in all churches, the leaders were the first ones subject to scrutiny, followed by the clergy.

When analyzing the reliability of churches, Ministry officials often wrote about them in contradictory ways. Sometimes officials praised Church cooperation and other times they expressed distrust. In a report from 1951, Ministry officials reported that the Orthodox Church (or BOR, *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*) as a whole maintained a “position of collaboration” with the regime “in all actions,” including encouraging workers to conform to the state plans and in demonstrating support for propaganda campaigns like “the fight for peace.” This was a communist slogan that was intended against the supposed war-mongering of the capitalist-imperialists of the West (against supposed Western aggression in Korea), and religious personnel were enjoined to let their religious compatriots at home and abroad know that they supported the fight for peace. Officials observed “small aberrations” by “certain elements from

the clergy”; some sympathized with “the kulaks or with the disposed classes,” encouraged by fellow “enemies of the regime” and even by “a few from the central bishopric.” And as for the over twelve million Orthodox believers (representing 84% of believers country-wide), officials felt that they were “not militant members of the denomination, but just preservers of certain religious traditions.” They “put up little active resistance both to the non-orthodox movements as well as toward other worldviews,” leading this official to characterize them as having “an attitude of passive religiosity.”²¹ Ministry officials, therefore, considered the bulk of the population to be loyal.

The BOR leadership cooperated in many ways, especially self-regulating its practices. In a Synod meeting of 1950, the times for Vespers and Liturgy became standardized, as well as the times for parish meetings or catechism.²² Ministry Officials desired stricter scheduling of religious services to ensure predictability and ease of monitoring. The BOR also complied with state demands to overhaul the training and education of the clergy, as officials characterized the “atmosphere” of theological schools as “mystic – fanatic,” encouraging “blind obedience,” offering very little “civic education,” and having a faculty that was “reactionary.”²³ Officials aimed to shape theological instruction with professors and courses that emphasized fulfilling the duties of liturgy and sacraments without mysticism alongside loyalty to the government and attention to government-initiated civic efforts.

In another generalizing report soon after, Ministry officials said that “most [clergy] are giving help to patriotic actions” like the “fight for peace” and supporting local authorities on the agricultural plan. In terms of internal church discipline of priests, there were no “grave aberrations,” but the BOR’s disciplinary wing “left much to be desired” because it was too severe at times. Certain officials felt church discipline had the “tendency to become instruments more and more by which the central leadership of the bishoprics sanction – with exaggerated severity and sometimes even unfounded on church violations – priests particularly known by their activities as being more attached to the regime.”²⁴ So whom did state officials trust? They

²¹ Arhivele Naționale ale României, Fond “Minsterul Cultelor și Artelor – Direcția Studii (1945-1963),” Dos. 6, 1951, 1–2.

²² Arhivele Naționale ale României, Fond “Minsterul Cultelor și Artelor – Direcția Studii (1945-1963),” Dos. 6, 1950; Arhivele Naționale ale României, Fond “C.C. al P.C.R. - Sectia Administrativ-Politica,” Dos. 113, 1950, 2.

²³ Arhivele Naționale ale României, Fond “C.C. al P.C.R. - Sectia Administrativ-Politica,” Dos. 113, 1950, 2.

²⁴ Arhivele Naționale ale României, Fond “Minsterul Cultelor și Artelor – Direcția Studii (1945-1963),” Dos. 6, 1951, 9, 11.

apparently trusted the bulk of believers, but they were not at the point of trusting the reliability of all of church leadership.

Orthodox clergy did have complaints early on under the new regime, but they tended to be of a material nature. The revenue for priests mostly went down due to changes in giving among the people, a situation related to upheavals in agriculture and a drop in attendance. The clergy were trying to take measures to get more people to come to church—not necessarily for religious “indoctrination,” but for more elemental concerns. The complaints Ministry officials overheard or received had to do with salary and fees, and nothing relating to specifically religious-spiritual matters emerged.²⁵ The state paid one-third of the salaries of registered priests, making their authority in the registration process more than simple meddling.

The dynamic issue of trust-mistrust is evident in one internal report of the Ministry of Religions from 1953. The report writers characterized the Orthodox Church as emerging from a history of supporting the “bourgeois-landlord” regime and promoting an “unhealthy mysticism,” both of which aimed at the “subjugation of the masses.” Although they did not define it precisely, officials used the term “mysticism” negatively to connote the situation wherein clergy or believers displayed a marked emotional enthusiasm for spiritual matters and emphasized spiritual considerations over and above issues of the everyday, “natural” world. But now more positively, the current BOR displayed a “loyal attitude toward the regime.” The believers, however, they categorized as “not active, but resistant,” as evidenced by the proliferation of certain movements within the Orthodox Church. There were the stylists (*stiliști*), Romanian Orthodox believers who insisted upon the Old Style or Old Rite (*Stil / Rit Vechi*), which was the use of the traditional Julian calendar instead of the modern Gregorian one adopted by the Orthodox Church in 1923 (not to be confused with the Old-Rite Russian Orthodox Church, which was legally approved). Officials characterized them by “bigotry and refractory ideas of progress.” The Lord’s Army, a home-grown Orthodox renewal movement, was another movement whose participants resisted communist leadership, and officials characterized it as “sectarian, dynamic.” One more major issue officials noted within the BOR was the “reintegration of the Orthodox churches of Transylvania” (i.e. the disbanding of the Greek-Catholic church)], which the authorities euphemistically referred to as the abolition of the “concordat” with Rome for the “liberation from the domination of the Vatican.” The act of “unification on 21 Oct. 1948,” and

²⁵ Ibid., 2, 13.

what followed was simply the “consolidation of reintegration.”²⁶ By 1953, more so than reliability of hierarchs or clergy, the issues of uncontrolled movements within the Orthodox Church and managing the “return” of the Greek-Catholic Church formed the core “problems” of the BOR.

In the eyes of state officials, each Church presented its own particular “problems,” but they were not all equally problematic. In the Catholic Church, the issue of relations with the Vatican and unreliable hierarchs came first. In regard to the Reformed Church, state officials mentioned one movement, “Bethanism” (featured below), but otherwise the main problem was the “essential importance of catechism” to the Church in line with its tradition of doing catechism with youth prior to their confirmation. Officials’ assessments of the approved “neoprotestant” churches (Baptist, Pentecostal, Brethren and Seventh-Day Adventist) was the harshest. Their presence in history was explained as an outcome of the “conditions of degradation of bourgeois societies,” and they were characterized by “recruiting members from the exploited strata,” by “very active proselytism,” by being “dynamic,” by “constant motion and effervescence,” with “maintenance by foreign funds,” by “individual propaganda and by small rings,” and as “apparently rationalistic, [yet] mystical in substance.”²⁷ This kind of religiosity was precisely the opposite of state officials’ desire for religious practice to be predictable, banal, preferably static or even dying out. In fact, the neoprotestants became the paragon for undesirable religiosity, against whom other religious manifestations could posture favorable status: non-recruiting, non-proselytizing, stable, without innovations, lacking foreign interference, without charismatic leaders and grassroots gatherings, and “rational”—replacing any kind of mysticism or spirituality with the supposed level-headedness of science, analysis, and common sense. That all of the religions professed a supernatural being, a monotheistic “God,” at the center of their core beliefs, was evidently acceptable to state officials when these beliefs were expressed in rituals or a predictable manner. Having a “god” that remained confined to prescribed limits sufficiently naturalized the supernatural. “God” was, in this sense, supposed to be akin to a superstition or quaint custom that made little determination in terms of how people should act here, now, or in the future.

²⁶ Arhivele Naționale ale României, Fond “Minsterul Cultelor și Artelor – Direcția Studii (1945-1963),” Dos. 18, 1953, 16. Also of concern are their relations between the BOR and other orthodox churches outside of Romania. Surprisingly, monastic life was not mentioned among top priorities in this report, but emerges later as a focus of concern.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 17–18.

In the minds of the Ministry officials composing the report, each denomination basically fit into one of three categories – “Denominations whose leaders and believers almost in the majority are alongside the regime and collaborate with it on the major acts which it undertakes,” religions “which could be alongside the regime, though they’re impeded to this by their leaders,” and religions which “are categorically against the regime of popular democracy.” Although they do not explicitly categorize each denomination, it seems they saw the BOR as belonging to the first, the Catholics and Reformed to the second, and the neoprotestants to the third. This statement is also telling for the way that it placed a relative importance on the role of church leaders rather than everyday believers in tipping the balance toward cooperation.²⁸

Eliminating Non-recognized Movements

Neoprotestantism was a sort of “disease” that religions could potentially carry, and it could then activate. The 1948 governmental regulation of religion forbade organizations and movements, whether within or outside of the officially recognized church institutions. State officials expected church leaders to ensure that their clergy and flock were not encouraging or participating in any such movements. Both the Orthodox and Reformed Church had such formations, the Lord’s Army and the Christian Endeavor (CE) Society, respectively. Participants in these movements considered them as intra-church movements that complemented or supplemented their membership and activity in the official church by enlivening faith practice or affording activities not typically offered in their local church expression. But officials considered such movements undesirable for the power they represented, as they existed somewhat outside the command structure of the churches. Communist authorities wanted clear lines of command and limits to the number of bodies or church representatives with whom they would need to interact.

Lord’s Army

The Lord’s Army was an organization that was started by Metropolitan Bălan after World War I with the goal of enlivening religious practice within the Orthodox Church in Transylvania, where the Church was not predominant. Perhaps in response to emerging protestant movements in Romania, in response to some changes in modern life, or for specifically Orthodox concerns of Bălan’s, he partnered with priest Iosif Trifa in developing the movement known as the Lord’s Army, aided in part by their publication *Lumina Satelor* (The

²⁸ Ibid., 20.

Light of the Villages), which Trifa served as editor. Lord's Army meetings featured lay reading of the Bible, learning contemporary hymns and songs, and opportunities for lay faith-testimonies.

But Trifa and Bălan had a falling out, and eventually the Orthodox Church defrocked Trifa. Yet Lord's Army circles had already spread across Romania but were largely associated with Trifa rather than with Bălan. Even after his death in 1938, the schism within the Army that occurred after Trifa's defrocking remained, as some adhered to Trifa's legacy and others wished to remain within the Orthodox Church. By the time of communism, then, the Lord's Army was not officially accepted within the ranks of the Church, nor did it have separate legal status, nor was it united under one leader. In 1949, the Orthodox Synod named it as forbidden from further operation. In addition to such "missionary associations," all kinds of organizations, including even those of a diaconal nature for serving the sick, orphans, or elderly, were banned.²⁹

Instead, in 1949 Patriarch Justinian proposed and the Synod approved the creation of a Parish Committee, something within the official ranks of the church and managed by the local parish. The head was to be a clergyman, and it was to preside over all church activities, such as organizing a choir, helping the needy, mission activities, etc. Yet for these activities, the parish committee was to use only materials officially approved by the BOR, such as the Holy Scriptures, the songs of the Holy Liturgy, or other official books for catechism. Thus pamphlets published voluntarily or songs composed by laymen were also forbidden. To be acceptable, Orthodox religiosity was to be centralized.³⁰

By this time, the Lord's Army had become particularly popular in Transylvania and Moldavia. There were groups scattered across these regions, with varying sizes and enjoying differing levels of support from and integration with Orthodox priests and hierarchs. A simple decree by the Synod did little to limit the mass of activity that had been going on for years, although participants adapted to the times by attaching different labels to the same activity (e.g. instead of Lord's Army gathering, "catechism conference"), or by simply trying to limit its visibility.

Ministry of Religions director Ion Nistor wrote a lengthy update on the state of the Lord's Army in Romania in 1950. He presented scores of examples of widespread activity, often with detailed information. The Synod's decree was being broken repeatedly, without systematic

²⁹ Arhivele Naționale ale României, Fond "Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor – Direcția Studii (1945-1963)," Dos. 6, 1949-1959, 1.

³⁰ Ibid., 2.

sanctions. No matter what the gatherings were now being called, many of them still featured banned activity such as “songs and sermons improvised by laymen or of the defrocked priest Trifa.”³¹ Their other problematic aspects included holding services outside of Sundays and holy days, having clandestine meetings, and being “sustained by mystic and reactionary elements from among laymen and from among the clergy.” In addition to fostering “unhealthy mysticism,” “there are numerous reactionary and hostile elements who try to use religious belief of the masses in order to estrange them from the regime.” Here, Nistor was participating in delineating unacceptable religiosity according to pronounced interest in spirituality and renewal, and he linked this to being against the regime, which was by definition “progressive.” Also, it seems that from the beginning state officials regarded religious activism as a product of the scheming of clergy, not as something that was an object of people’s longing.

The Lord’s Army, however, was much more than simply an inner-Orthodox problem. Such decentralized religiosity meant that some groups “introduce practices foreign to the orthodox dogmas and canons,” had “lay preachers who are altogether similar with neoprotestant preachers,” and “sing in groups, in churches and in specific houses, hymns foreign to orthodox liturgical songs.” Indeed, it seemed that this form of religiosity led people away from that which was acceptable (and Orthodox) toward something undesirable: “by these practices [they] get closer to the neoprotestant denominations, the Lord’s [Army] thus becoming a path for these denominations.”³² Because they both encouraged lay participation, modern hymns, Bible study, prayer, and lay testimonies, all that was needed for Army members to convert to neoprotestantism was for their adherents to coningle.

The “problem” was undoubtedly one of social control and mobilization. From the point of view of the Ministry of Religions, as exemplified by Nistor, the Lord’s Army

cultivates initiative and independence toward church authority with regard to religious songs, the interpretation of the Bible, and preaching by laic elements. In particular, preaching by laics – among the most essential neoprotestant elements and among the most foreign to the orthodox concept [*concepția ortodoxă*] – is the consequence of non-recognition of the priesthood. The adoption of this custom by ‘The Lord’s Army’ and the bringing of it, now, in the parish committees and in the life of the parish, will bring an alteration and a devaluation [*știrbire*] of the concept of the role of the priest. Besides, the lack of

³¹ Ibid., 28.

³² Ibid., 29.

orthodox theological training of the lay preachers leads to confusion of all kinds in interpretation by them of religious notions.³³

Decentralization only led to anarchy, in the minds of the Church and State authorities (the Lord's Army had "given enough proof of unhealthy and anarchic mysticism"), and both had interests in maintaining authority. In the words of Nistor, the Lord's Army, by "logic," had those "elements" which led to "the non-recognition of sacerdotal [priestly] authority" that the Orthodox Church established (and which evidently the Ministry now respected). Keeping all of this in mind, Nistor thought that "it is easy to foresee that if appropriate measures are not taken, the B.O.R. may wake up in the future with some internal upheavals, hazardous for its unity." Clearly, Ministry officials wanted Orthodox unity not religious "upheaval." Without the "necessary guidance," Lord's Army participants might switch to neoprotestantism or engage in "disobedience, indiscipline, and criticism" "in larger proportions" than currently was the case. Nistor did not offer much by way of solution except to propose a special meeting of the Ministry to discuss controlling LA activities. He also suggested that the publication *Lumina Satelor* have its content and title changed, since it was too heavily associated with the Lord's Army.³⁴

The Ministry had to attend to the current leaders of the Lord's Army, beyond its general characteristics. When Trifa had been defrocked, those who remained with him (called by some the Trifist Army) leaned closer to the neoprotestants, whereas other Lord's Army members tried to remain closer to the Orthodox Church according to its original intent. After Trifa's death in 1938, Traian Dorz had emerged as one of the few broadly-known Lord's Army leaders. He had been a leading figure in Army publications, along with Trifa's son, Titus. But the divisions remained despite having Dorz as a recognized leader. Dialogues between these two camps had reached an impasse, and the Church's banning the LA did not bring them together even though those in the pro-Orthodox camp like Dorz now had even less reason to entrust themselves to the Church leadership. Despite Dorz's wish to keep the Lord's Army closer to the Orthodox fold, state and church leaders evidently did not consider his activities acceptable because he represented an organization that these authorities regarded as having characteristics too similar to neoprotestantism. To authorities, these religious groups operated according to what they

³³ Ibid., 30–31.

³⁴ Ibid., 31, 29. This report of 19 September 1950 was signed by Ion Nistor, then Minister of Religions, shortly before his arrest and condemnation in the fall of 1950, a reminder that the Ministry itself was still in flux.

called “anarchic” principles, as people had the power to vest authority in others democratically, not subject to clearly identified offices or avenues of control.

But the effect of the abolition in 1948 led even more away from the Orthodox Church, as “this sympathy [for the neoprotestants] became more powerful in the ranks of the Army who had not been leaving the Orthodox Church [...]” and “its members converted heavily to the ranks of neoprotestants.” Now, there were three groups: Trifists, former-Lord’s-Army-neoprotestants, and Orthodox-leaning Lord’s Army members, where the former two were trying to attract the latter. All of this had to remain underground.³⁵ Even before the official ban of the Lord’s Army in 1948, Dorz and some other Army representatives were invited to a meeting in 1946 at which they were essentially publicly ridiculed by Metropolitan Bălan.³⁶ Dorz, who was firmly pro-Orthodox, felt that neoprotestants were “profiting by this hatred” of anti-Army Orthodox priests, that they were “stirring up the brothers against the Church and attracting them with any kind of promises.” He called it the greatest “temptation” the LA had faced in its history, that it would “lose forever the healthy orientation and purpose” for which it was founded. This meant that Dorz felt entrapped on two sides by hostile Orthodox priests and proselytizing neoprotestants.³⁷ Yet he carried on, showing a lack of consideration for state opinion by working with youth. In October 1947, he organized a week-long bible school in Chiuești for youth, some of whom then went on mission-trips.³⁸

Yet with the changes in regime, authorities did not overlook such activities. Dorz was arrested just before the new year of 1948 and was released in April. He had been too active publishing, meeting, and proselytizing in prison. In his police file in 1950, it was written about him that he was a “good organizer,” “very crafty,” and that he knew how to lead the organization “under different forms,” all of which made him “a dangerous element for the current regime.”³⁹ He was put in prison again in 1950 for a year. In 1951, to reduce his being followed, Dorz left his homeland of Bihor for Simeria in the region of Hunedoara, where Lord’s Army gatherings began to take place with greater regularity in the surrounding region over the

³⁵ Ibid., 109.

³⁶ Traian Dorz, *Hristos - Mărturia Mea: scurtă și sfântă povestire a vieții mele sau Istoria unor Cântări Nemuritoare [Christ - My Testimony: a short and sacred story of my life or the History of certain Immortal Songs]* (Sibiu: Oastea Domnului, 2005), 179.

³⁷ Ibid., 323.

³⁸ Ibid., 184.

³⁹ Corneliu Clop, *Traian Dorz în Dosarele Securității [Traian Dorz in the Files of the Securitate]* (Oradea: s.n., 2012), 149.

next two years. He, along with leaders Cornel Rusu, Ioan Opreș, and Ioan Florea were arrested toward the end of 1952 and spent the next four years in prison, “guilty of hostile activity against the regime, done within the Lord’s Army.” This group of leaders had been specifically tracked for the two previous years and had several informers, and a local priest’s declaration against them served the judicial proceedings.⁴⁰ The *Securitate*, the state’s secret police organ, had for some time worked on tracking Lord’s Army activity by recruiting people as participants, and they counted on local priests and recruits who posed as participants to supply information.⁴¹

During this period, Lord’s Army gatherings had to adapt to a changing religious landscape. In many ways, the “center of the Army”⁴² was wherever Dorz was, and what’s more, adversity did not necessarily act as a complete hindrance to the prospering of the Lord’s Army. At first, after the Lord’s Army was declared illegal and in light of the first wave of arrests (including Dorz on Dec. 31, 1947), their gatherings were “more timid,” more scattered, often late at night, and “camouflaged.”⁴³ With Dorz re-arrested in 1950 and again in 1952, meetings continued, though some stopped participating out of fear. Those who remained, however, bonded through shared adversity. Continuing to meet illegally “created a state of fearlessness, of spiritual effervescence which was increasing.” Although Army activity diminished in some places during this period, there were even some areas in which it activated for the first time. It was energizing in some ways that they had a leader whose travails resembled the Apostle Paul, because as soon as Dorz would be released, he would start writing again, and it seemed like he would not be held in chains due to their prayers. In the Lord’s Army, there was an “awareness of unity, an awareness of brotherly solidarity,” and it was growing. Trouble was more than simply “trouble,” but a situation that was also accompanied by “help,” and therefore camaraderie, of others.⁴⁴

In a report to the Central Committee of the Communist Party on the status of the various religions in Romania in 1951, a certain C. Bădău summarized the Lord’s Army as active despite being abolished, and that “in some localities” its adherents were “functioning masked as a church committee.” Also, its “power center” was in Sibiu and “sustained by Metropolitan

⁴⁰ Ibid., 150–73.

⁴¹ Ibid., 152–55.

⁴² Ioan Beg, *“Un Bun Ostaș al lui Hristos”: Fratele Valer de la Ciula [A Good Soldier of Christ: Brother Valer of Ciula]* (Simeria: Editura Traian Dorz, 2003), 87–88. Beiuș, Simeria, and Sânicoadă were the main places he lived.

⁴³ Ibid., 83.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 85–86.

Bălan,” who did not yet abolish *Lumina Satelor*.⁴⁵ In several instances, officials mention Bălan and Sibiu as sustaining the Lord’s Army, perhaps suggesting that Bălan still liked the idea of the Lord’s Army, even if he did not like its leaders or its current form. Although the number of supportive Orthodox priests was declining, the Lord’s Army was “surviving measures of abolition” by being active “clandestinely” or “being camouflaged.” One report was brave enough to reflect on how the Orthodox Church, especially in Transylvania and Bukovina, had deployed “an incorrect application of abolition measures” toward the Lord’s Army, from which the “situation came about that a large number of former members of the respective association left the Orthodox Church, crossing over to the neoprotestant denominations.”⁴⁶ It may have been easy for officials to criticize in hindsight “incorrect abolition measures,” that forbidding the Lord’s Army pushed adherents underground or toward neoprotestant groups, but they did not offer a more compelling alternative course of action.

State officials offered their own narrative of the developments of the Lord’s Army. As they saw it, the Lord’s Army was set up by Bălan as a means of offering Orthodox believers alternatives to the sects emerging after the First World War. Although he was originally Bălan’s right-hand man, Trifa supposedly erred by getting more and more mystical and propagandistic in his running of the publication *Lumina Satelor*; he “started to lead the Army independently from the Orthodox Church and from the line on which the founder had given it initially, with the tendency to transform it into a ‘mini church.’” The state considered it “the most powerful missionary movement organized in Romania and it was not exceeded in effects and also in scale except by the spontaneous eruption of mysticism caused by Petrache Lupu.” Petrache Lupu was a simple villager of Maglavit who spread the word about specific conversations he had with God in 1935, and as a result, tens of thousands flocked to him and Maglavit in response to his call to repentance and the possibility of receiving healing. One of the Lord’s Army’s problems was “a slow slip” toward “the style of religious life of the mystic neoprotestants,” with many Soldiers eventually switching allegiances to the neoprotestants, in particular the Pentecostals. In addition, “the religious moral climate created by the activity of the Army was as favorable as possible for any kind of action with obscurantist tendencies and even with the tendencies of

⁴⁵ Arhivele Naționale ale României, Fond “C.C. al P.C.R. - Sectia Administrativ-Politica,” Dos. 113, 1950, 2. Bălan’s role is unclear. Despite his earlier falling out with Trifa and the movement as a whole, many reports still pointed to him, or at least “his” bishopric in Sibiu as sustaining the movement.

⁴⁶ Arhivele Naționale ale României, Fond “Minsterul Cultelor și Artelor – Direcția Studii (1945-1963),” Dos. 6, 1951, 15.

fascist reactionary resistance.” Officials were able to paint the picture of the Lord’s Army as composed of two harmful, however distant, tendencies at once. First, they described it as neoprotestant in nature, as too mystical; and such an over-focus on spiritual realms meant its proponents deliberately ignored scientific-materialistic “facts” (obscurantism). At the same time, they broad-brushed it as fascist since some Army adherents had also dabbled in the movement known variously as the Legionary (Legionnaire) movement, Iron Guard, or Legion of the Archangel Michael, a movement encompassing some mixture of advocacy for Romanian nationalism and the Orthodox Church in opposition to communism, capitalism, and Jews. Because of such a purported stain, “the continuation of the activities of the Association of the Lord’s Army certainly presents a real peril both for church life and for new cultural and political orientation of the people.” This is why “even the leadership of the Romanian Orthodox Church decided to proceed with abolition of this association.”⁴⁷ Perhaps surprisingly, state officials were concerned with dangers to church life and readily identified common interests with the BOR.

Even certain officials at the highest level felt that a solution to the Lord’s Army “problem” would be for the Orthodox Church to adopt the Lord’s Army under its umbrella. They wrote that the former organization should somehow be incorporated into the parish committee, as this would prevent the undesirable scenario of switching allegiances (e.g. to the neoprotestants). In short “different disruptions and perilous deformations will be avoided.”⁴⁸ This suggestion would be considered seriously in the late 1950s, but not just yet.

It was a battle of allegiances. If Trifists and former-Army-neoprotestants were trying to convince Army participants to join their ranks, Army members were still trying to influence non-participating Orthodox. A pilgrimage or religious festival was one opportunity in which believers would gather, presenting an opportunity for interaction. When an Orthodox pilgrimage to a monastery and gathering occurred in the region of Arad in 1954, the Ministry’s local commissioner was present with his colleagues to monitor and report on this particular event. The commissioner inquired of the pilgrims where they were from, whether there were any Army members among them, and whether their local parish was “contaminated with neoprotestants.”

⁴⁷ Arhivele Naționale ale României, Fond “Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor – Direcția Studii (1945-1963),” Dos. 6, 1949-1959, 107-108.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 110-111.

All participants were supposed to have obtained permission to attend the pilgrimage from their archpriest.⁴⁹

This particular pilgrimage happened to feature several dubious incidents. First, the three commissioners from the Ministry of Religions division in Oradea who were present found out that there was a gathering at a spring featuring an orator, when typically only a priest, hierarch, or monk preached in Orthodox contexts. The content of his “oration” was “religious freedom which today can no longer be restricted by any state, arguing that the divine power is greater than any law made by people. God rules over all things on earth, only that people for this have to be believers and this is demonstrated by prayer, gatherings and repentance, leaving behind all bad things.” The commissioners went to ascertain exactly who this “citizen” orator was, and when they got his information and asked him about his “motive” for doing this, he replied that he was “a true believer of the church and leads a life of a true Christian” and that some of those who were sick or suffering there but believed in God “drove him to speak about the divine power.” The commissioner determined, “in short,” that the man was “a Lord’s Army fanatic.”⁵⁰ Fanatic was another effective epithet for the unacceptably religious, the overly zealous.

The lead commissioner discovered that there were LA adherents present, and that several priests seemed to be supporting LA activity. He also found out that during the times when no services were being conducted, the pilgrims stayed in groups “on the edge of the forest, around fires, passing the time with church songs from the Lord’s Army.” Not that the whole thing was purely holy, as a number of youth held a large dance which 350 attended, and the commissioner felt that they “had in view a certain promiscuity” and that another “immoral scene” arose when a large group of women bathed naked in the spring for healing, covered only by a sort of “apron.” He had told the bishop last year that this should stop, and yet “the same immoral spectacle” occurred again. But for all of these “scenes,” the commissioner could not identify any specific LA leader. As a counterweight to such manifestations, he was quite satisfied by the “good sermon” of Archpriest Engiș Vasile, who signaled political reliability by referencing international affairs like Indochina (perhaps the French evacuation of the former colony) and internal issues such as the “performance of workers in the summer” and the “fulfillment of obligations toward the state and covering the significance of the [national holiday] of the 23rd of

⁴⁹ Ibid., 158.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 159.

August.”⁵¹ This sermon was “good” in the direction of its summons: not toward spiritual zeal, but deference for the governing bodies.

The following year the same event occurred, with what the commissioner felt was “more accentuated” LA activity, but the LA songs and testimonies by some laymen were restricted to the late evenings. Despite all the efforts by commissioners and clergy to have a full schedule of events to limit any Army opportunities, at night they were still active. But the commissioner did not mention any specific incidents this time.⁵² It’s also worth mentioning that pilgrimages were permitted as Orthodox customs, despite the potential they held for interaction and influence between pilgrims, clergy, monks, and even agitators from among fringe movements.

More often than during such special events, people were gathering in local churches and homes. In Mureş County, for example, there was a regular gathering in private homes in “an unregulated way” of LA people characterized by “ecstatic zeal and acute mysticism.” The reporting commissioner viewed their meetings with skepticism as a gathering of social oddities, since they stressed “eternal life, ignoring the life in which workers live / they do not drink a single kind of drink, do not smoke, do not eat meat do not take part in fun activities, but in conclusion are dedicated totally to ‘so-called eternal life.’” The priest’s account was that he was trying to “attract them to the church and bring them out of this state of bigotry / unhealthy mysticism but they are exhibiting resistance.” Not smoking, drinking, or eating meat (during fasts) was a sign, to officials, of anti-social behavior. As they saw it, people who did not conform to social norms were not politically reliable either. The commissioner took the situation to the local organs of state to develop measures to stop their gatherings, and as to the church’s responsibility, the local orthodox priest “will continue with measures of explanation and attraction.” The commissioner also made sure that the local archpriest was informed of all known Army activity in his diocese.⁵³

Beyond advocating measures by priests to discourage Army activity, Ministry officials also benefitted from infiltration of the Army for further information. In Alba County, the local commissioner uncovered a Lord’s Army group, so he acted. He focused in on the director of the school, whose deceased father had been a priest, “verified” him as “a trustworthy citizen,” and

⁵¹ Ibid., 160–61.

⁵² Ibid., 230.

⁵³ Ibid., 169.

convinced him to “enter among the Soldiers, pretending that he too accepts their type of view of the religious problem.”⁵⁴ From here, he hoped this informer could provide him with more details concerning the participants and the content of their gatherings, which would prove useful in the event of any disciplinary proceedings. It is not clear how successful this recruitment was.

But examples from commissioners country-wide only served to demonstrate that the problem was far from controlled. A 1955 Ministry report provided an overview of new LA activity which had been discovered in the regions of Arad, Bucharest, Iasi, Cluj, Craiova, and Hunedoara. They identified a new leader in the Hunedoara region, and elsewhere a retired party member was discovered hosting Army meetings. At another Army meeting, some Brethren (one of the approved neoprotestant denominations) participated and even evangelized, while the local priest failed to act in his “cowardice.”⁵⁵ In short, officials were trying to block the spring, but it seemed that damming one source only produced new bursts of LA activity elsewhere. Until officials determined whether Army activity demanded more aggressive response, Army activity would continue.

Bethanists

If the Lord’s Army was the most unacceptable religious movement of the Orthodox Church, that of the Reformed Church was clearly what officials labeled the “Bethanist” movement. The Bethany Society was another name for the movement affiliated with the Christian Endeavor (CE) Society and originally formed as the Young People’s Society of Christian Endeavor and started by Francis Edward Clark (1851-1927), an American Congregationalist minister. What began as a gathering of young people in New England eventually came to encompass tens of thousands of societies and some three million members across the globe (including a group of Reformed Hungarians in the early 1900s in the Austro-Hungarian Empire). The society had as its goals to deepen the Christian life of its members and service to God while deepening their relationships with one another.

By the time religious life became more restricted, there was lively participation in CE (if not in numbers, at least in quality) in several regions of Romania. Ferenc Visky was a young minister and just married when he and his wife decided to cross the border into Romania from

⁵⁴ Ibid., 171.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 207, 218, 222.

Hungary after World War II ended. He and his brother-in-law, Antal Papp, had been shaped by their participation in CE events in Hungary, and Visky had decided to start his career where his father had lived, and where his brother-in-law Antal lived, in northern Romania.

In 1947 Visky got a position as an associate pastor in Salonta (Nagyszalonta). The church gave his family living quarters on a floor of an old school. They didn't find close connections with anyone for months and missed their congregation back in Hungary greatly. He was rarely given a chance to conduct the service, though he enjoyed working with children and youth in their religion class, as this was still a compulsory aspect of the local school (the education reform hadn't happened yet).⁵⁶

Visky remembers that the "official stiffness dissolved" after a period, and he was even allowed to preach from time to time. The head pastor eventually granted Visky permission to hold a bible study in the church conference room. Popularity caused the room to be "packed," so they requested the sanctuary for the meeting (as many as 600 came, even people of other faiths).⁵⁷ The head pastor also allowed additional evangelical services on Tuesday and Friday evenings, and he himself would sometimes attend. When the head pastor gave Visky the chance to preach during Sunday services, the church became "crammed." The local Dean Aladár Arday took a good view of it at first, while the head pastor looked at it less favorably. What was Visky doing to attract these people? According to one of his friends, he "took up the battle against sin," he "chastised, he chided, and wonder of wonders, his preaching drew crowds."⁵⁸

Most other pastors and leadership regarded Visky and his activities with suspicion or passivity, but a small group of like-minded pastors began to meet periodically. The quarterly official gatherings of pastors were not a place for "friendly relations," Visky recalls. The other pastors and leadership largely regarded him and his activities with suspicion, and he felt "the ice of our isolation" from them. But, a few pastors heard what Visky was trying to do and sought a friendship with him. Sandor Szilágyi was one of them. He showed up in their kitchen around four o'clock in the morning one time, and when Visky came out to identify the source of the noise, Szilágyi said, "I heard that you are believing people, so I thought I could come to you at any

⁵⁶ Ferenc Visky, *Szerelme Szorongat [His Love Constrains Us]* (Kolozsvár [Cluj-Napoca, RO]: Koinónia, 2004), 74–75.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁵⁸ Sándor Karczagi, *Az Utolsó Erdélyi Gályarab: Ébredésről, Történelemről és Irodalomról [The Last Transylvanian Galley Slave: On Revival, History and Literature]*, ed. Krisztina Berke (Kolozsvár [Cluj-Napoca, RO]: Koinónia, 2010), 68–69.

time!"⁵⁹ Szilágyi invited Sándor Karczagi, who was a teacher at the time, and a few other pastors from the nearby counties came too. With every meeting their "unconditional trust" of each other grew, as did their commitments to religious practices. They met for an entire day once per month, reading the Bible and talking.⁶⁰ But it wasn't just "exegesis," but their thoughts, struggles, and difficulties of personal and familial nature. They sang, ate, confessed, prayed and teased each other. "This was more than friendly company," says pastor Sándor Karczagi, "We formed a very tight community."⁶¹ They considered these gatherings necessary, as "the official [institutional] opportunities were far from satisfying the desires for a deeper community" but instead served the purposes of "furthering the communist ideology" among the clergy.⁶²

Visky's brother-in-law, Antal Papp, was well known in his town both as a very successful farmer and as highly religious. Thus when it was time to choose the president of the collective farm in his home village of Agraş (Egri), a debate broke out. The people seemed to only want one person, Antal Papp, to be the president of their collective. The party committee was not sure what to do—they did not want to invoke the ire of the people, who said the only condition which they stipulated before engaging in "communal agriculture," was if the president was this, as Visky quipped, "kulak-list leading, Reformed-believer Antal Papp." Working against him was the fact that he had had five servants who worked for him previously, but to his credit he not only had paid fair wages but built houses for them; in his favor, therefore, was that "he did not exploit them, but raised them from poverty." Aware of the official atheism of the state, Papp felt compelled to note the following to the committee: "There is a yet more serious exclusionary reason as well: I am a believing Christian man, and I want to remain so. It's not possible to serve two masters." The committee consulted each other, and still decided to name him president in consideration of the people's wishes. Papp spoke up: "'Comrades, I declare before you, and don't forget this: if a conflict will arise between the politics of the party and its direction and my faith and the will of my Lord Jesus Christ, I tell you beforehand: I will choose the will of Jesus Christ, my Lord.'" As for the committee—probably quite uncomfortable—, "[s]ilence was the response."⁶³

⁵⁹ Visky, *Szerelme Szorongat [His Love Constrains Us]*, 78. Their friendship would last until Sandor's death.

⁶⁰ Karczagi, *Az Utolsó Érdélyi Gályarab*, 70–71. Other participants included István Szűcs from Tamáshida, Sándor Gönczi from Nagybánya, István Nagy from Vadász, and Evangelical József Esszig.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 72–73. See also Visky, *Szerelme Szorongat [His Love Constrains Us]*, 78.

⁶² Visky, *Szerelme Szorongat [His Love Constrains Us]*, 78.

⁶³ Ferenc Visky, *Anti* (Kolozsvár: Koinónia, 2005), 33–34.

Having been chosen, Papp led the collective in accordance with his expertise and his faith, not fearing consequences. One of Papp's decisions was that the village would not work on Sunday. He was permitted this display of faith because he was able to get his village to always provide the demanded quota. He also attracted negative outside attention because he was instrumental in re-building the tower onto their church. His village was performing very well, but perhaps too well, in fact, since his faith and good performance were both so visible.⁶⁴ Papp was publicly mingling faith with communist initiatives. Even if production stayed high, would the authorities tolerate it?

Similarly, János Fekete, father of eight and pastor in Crăciunești (Nyárádkarácson) led bible studies and religious education, while knowing how such activities were viewed by the state. Like Papp, he did not avoid the public sphere and led the effort to bring gas to the village.⁶⁵ He was an active pastor and community member, and neither of these were kept secret.

Cobbler Jenő Nagy was converted during the Second World War and became a member of CE in the Târgu Mureș (Vásárhely) area. Due to the lack of pastors during wartime, with the bishop's approval he began holding services in the area. After his work-day was done, he would hold bible studies in various villages. Commissioned by the local pastor, he also held bible studies in a bakery, which the owner let for this purpose. This work continued with the regime change. In the first half of the 1950s, also at the invitation of the local pastor, he held a one-week evangelism series at one of the major Reformed Churches in the city of Târgu Mureș.⁶⁶ He also held "evangelism weeks" in the surrounding region, in Pănet (Panit), Câmpeniță (Mezőfele), and Crăciunești, and elsewhere. Some pastors would even meet with him – although he was a layman – and seek advice or ideas for evangelical work.⁶⁷ His abilities as an orator and reputation as a strong believer gained him opportunities to carry out the kinds of activities typically only the prerogative of ordained clergy. Fellow CE participant and Reformed Pastor László Szóke recalls that from 1948 to 1958 there were many demands for CE leaders like them

⁶⁴ Ibid., 52–53.

⁶⁵ Ferenc Visky, ed., *Bilincseket És Börtönt Is: Dokumentum-Kötet [Chains and Even Prison: Document-Collection]* (Marosvásárhely: Kóinónia, 1996), 51–52.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 152. The pastor was Gábor Adorján of Gecse úti Reformed Church in Marosvásárhely.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 156.

in the Mureş region, in preaching, holding bible studies, or presiding over other religious holiday-type events.⁶⁸

In Zalău (Zilah) as well, a CE group emerged and became active in the 1950s when several lay people had renewal experiences.⁶⁹ They met weekly, prayed, and studied the bible in homes. They also tried to visit the sick and help each other, but not in an institutionalized way. Some also participated in “quiet day” gatherings at the Viskys and gathered with others at Antal Papp’s home for New Year celebrations.⁷⁰ This group connected with other CE groups by letter, meetings, or unofficial conferences such as those held in conjunction with a wedding or baptism of a CE participant.⁷¹ The movement, though not large, was active in a range of cities and villages in Transylvania, and pastors and lay people were increasing in their religious activity.

These CE-related gatherings, with people like Visky, Szilágyi, and Nagy at the charismatic center, increased in popularity as more were invited or became interested. The “quiet day” gatherings grew in number to ten pastors, and then their wives began to meet with each other too for bible study. They once had 70 in attendance. Eventually more laity took part in these monthly “quiet days” (*csendesnapok*) than pastors.⁷² These opportunities were rare for the homo-social bonding that they afforded, where men shared intimately with men, and women with women. Participants from different regions would get together more rarely, but they too found it encouraging that their movement was alive and healthy.

Yet while their community was growing, times had changed. Although no longer meeting officially as CE members, their unofficial gatherings were clearly purposeful and popular, and for that reason, suspicious. CE participants regarded the purpose of the CE Society to be renewal of the church, including both members and superiors (and participants), but most of the other clergy and church leadership found the mobilizing power of this movement threatening, especially since its energy did not emanate from the institutional core, but its

⁶⁸ Ibid., 200.

⁶⁹ Shopkeeper Béla Balogh and farmer Sándor Jakab both of them had renewal experiences in the early 1950s in CE-related activities led by local pastor Bálint Török and a watch repairman named József Porcsalmi.⁶⁹ Balogh and Jakab started becoming active in the CE groups around Zilah. Other regular attendees included father and son Miklos Püsök Sr. and Jr., who were both masons, a farmer named Samuel Boda, and two women, Anna Kisváradi and Ida Holocsuk.

⁷⁰ Dezső Buzogány and Csongor Jánosi, *A Református Egyház Romániában a Kommunista Rendszer Első Felében: Tanulmányok és Dokumentumok [The Reformed Church in Romania in the First Half of the Communist Regime: Essays and Documents]* (Budapest: L’Harmattan Kiadó, 2011), 302.

⁷¹ Ibid., 303. He mentions visiting the Lutheran and CE participant Jozsef Halmen several times, for example.

⁷² Karczagi, *Az Utolsó Érdélyi Gályarab*, 72–73.

periphery. In 1948 when such societies were forbidden, certain church affiliates joined the rhetoric of the state, calling participants of the CE Society “Bethanists” (a short-hand rendered from Bethany Society) and describing them as serious threats to the church. After Visky had been pastor for many months in Salonta, his fellow pastor confessed to him: “Until now I have been listening to you like a police detective. I was searching for something that I could catch you in, what kind of heretical doctrines you're preaching. What is it that you're saying against our creed, what are you stirring up against the church. The dean sent a kind of accusatory letter against you. At first I too suspected you, but ultimately I realized that the accusations are unfounded. I am hearing the pure reformed teaching from you.”⁷³ Since 1948 when such societies had been forbidden, any layperson or clergy member now had the power (even “duty”) to “snitch” on people affiliated with such evangelical movements, and so the risk of association increased.⁷⁴

Prior to the Communist era, the Reformed hierarchy had tolerated the CE movement, but it was never supported officially and brought under the church umbrella, a situation that left participants vulnerable once the state outlawed such extra-church formations. In the Târgu Mureş region, Pastor László Szőke noted that they customarily sought prior approval for any extra-curricular church activities from the bishop, but when they stopped receiving authorization, they continued to do the same evangelical activities anyway. They did not feel that such activities as reading the bible, praying, singing, and talking should be clandestine, nor did they fear being reported, despite knowing they had informers in their midst.⁷⁵ In the Zaláu group, for example, one of its regular attendees turned informer, as did the brother of the leader, Porcsalmi.⁷⁶

The church leadership – including local Deans or the Bishop – were active in warning those engaged in “Bethanist” activities to cease; they were not simply silent or passive. CE-participant and pastor János Lőrincz, while on an extended sick-leave for a serious illness he had suffered, continued visiting families as he was able in the Cluj area. In 1950 Lőrincz received a warning from his dean, Dezső László, who reported that “the authorities had noticed [his] comings and goings and considered [him] the traveling secretary of the then banned CE Society.

⁷³ Visky, *Szerelme Szorongat [His Love Constrains Us]*, 76–77.

⁷⁴ Visky, *Bilincseket És Börtönt Is*, 11.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 200.

⁷⁶ Buzogány and Jánosi, *A Református Egyház Romániában a Kommunista Rendszer Első Felében*, 301.

He suggested that I enter congregational service as soon as possible.”⁷⁷ The responsibilities of a parish pastor plus the requirement that parish pastors receive permission to leave the parish would restrict his freedom to travel (and thus, influence). Another restriction was that the bishop had the power to relocate assistant pastors, as they were directly under his management. The bishop relocated Visky in 1950 and in 1956, each time to a smaller or more rural parish. Likewise, Valentin Török of Abramuți was found by the local religious affairs inspector to be engaging in “bethanist” activities. The Church thereby transferred him as punishment to a parish in the Cluj region that boasted only 20 Reformed families (“the majority old”), as “he would not be able to continue his bethanist activities here.”⁷⁸

Despite being relatively small in numbers, “Bethanism” was one of the state’s primary concerns pertaining to the Reformed Church in the 1950s. During a 1952 visit with Bishop Vásárhelyi an official from the Ministry of Religions noted that one of the main problems in the Reformed Church was “The bethanist problem known under the name of C.E. (Christian Association) [sic].” In his report, the official expressed concern for Church and State reasons, although its danger was put as vaguely as could be: “This movement has an unhealthy mystic character and is hostile to the Reformed confessions, and under the mask of religion within the church, an enemy propaganda is made against the regime in an indirect way.”⁷⁹ “Enemy propaganda” was a vague catch-all, probably referring to what officials called “obscurantism,” promoting worldviews that conflicted with scientific-materialism. Further pointing to the state concern for the Bethanist movement, the department had a list of all the priests in the Reformed Church, and next to the names of some were written some cautionary labels – one had “kulak” written, another “fanatic,” another “bigot,” but the most common one was “bethanist.”⁸⁰

A 1953 report summarizing the situation in the Reformed Church noted that overall, things were better than before when “duplicity” had marked church dealings with the state. State representatives now found the two current bishops to be loyal, and their recent efforts in

⁷⁷ Visky, *Bilincseket És Börtönt Is*, 110.

⁷⁸ Arhivele Naționale ale României, Fond “Minsterul Cultelor și Artelor – Direcția Studii (1945-1963),” Dos. 63, 1953, 22.

⁷⁹ Arhivele Naționale ale României, Fond “Minsterul Cultelor și Artelor – Direcția Studii (1945-1963),” Dos. 41, 1952, 9.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 23–32.

leadership and their influence over the priests and believers satisfactory.⁸¹ Yet mystic movements like Bethanism were still a danger, and in 1953, the Church's battle against such "reactionary" elements—those not actively supporting a pro-communist agenda—was ongoing. Although observers said that it did not grow over the last year, it did not "disappear" either, being "sustained by a bunch [sic] of reformed priests." The report-writer asserted that young priests who had graduated from seminary tried to promote this movement in their parish "under cover of certain loyal actions," and examples of this might have been the local public successes mentioned above by CE participants Papp and Fekete. The Ministry "enlightened the leadership of the reformed church" about the "turmoil among believers caused by the bethanist current," (by "turmoil" read "enthusiasm") and the leadership responded "by measures of punishment of the guilty servants," like punitive transfers. The Ministry promised to "follow the bethanist priests, but in the event that they persist, they will propose to the leadership their removal from the clergy." Although not a large movement, the Bethanist movement was considered "important by the danger which it could constitute if it would spread, its principle characteristics being a combination toward an unhealthy mysticism and propagation of passivity and disinterest with regard to worldly matters."⁸² In short, Bethanists were transgressing the boundaries of acceptable religiosity, leading people away from social expectations toward more enthusiastic and active religious participation. To state officials, normative religiosity meant religion should be of secondary importance; otherwise, religious zealots demonstrated their lack of political and social reliability toward communist agenda.

⁸¹ Arhivele Naționale ale României, Fond "Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor – Direcția Studii (1945-1963)," Dos. 63, 1953, 7. Primary concerns included replacing certain personnel, clamping down on mystic movements (i.e. Bethanism) and catechism aberrations, encouraging involvement in the fight for peace and supporting the agriculture campaign, and shaping the orientation conferences. These issues represent the concerns over the entire period in dealing with the Reformed Church. Concerning personnel, it was absolutely essential to have cooperative cadres in the ranks of Church leadership. For example, the writer mentions that in one case a dean was elected, a "suspect element, mystical and fanatic, who is well watched by local organs and who was detained by the state organs."⁸ As for catechism, which was the opportunity for clergy to "indoctrinate" youth, officials worked hard to ensure that at least catechism would only happen at certain times of the week and without any pressure being applied to youth or parents for attendance. The "fight for peace" and agricultural campaigns were examples of the responsibilities placed on clergy to represent state ideas and efforts as community leaders and representatives. As pertains to the conferences, these were frequent and mandatory meetings for pastors where topics chosen in conjunction with church leaders and ministry officials would be promulgated and discussed.

⁸² Arhivele Naționale ale României, Fond "Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor – Direcția Studii (1945-1963)," Dos. 63, 1953, 9–10.

It was essential to have the cooperation of the church leaders in combating inner-church movements like Bethanism. This is why state officials were increasingly pleased with the cooperation by Reformed Church leaders, who in the eyes of the state authorities in the first five years had only done the bare minimum to support state trajectories and efforts, occupying a position of “intransigence.” Good Bishops and Deans demonstrated the requisite attentiveness to state slogans and trajectories to the clergy, particularly at conferences. At the time of the 1953 report, for example, in certain regions church leaders had gotten pastors to respond quite vocally to initiatives like having a vote against imperialist powers using bacteriological weapons in Korea, whereas in other regions, leaders were struggling to mobilize pastors to participate in the “fight for peace” committees.

“Mystic” movements such as “Bethanism” undermined state guidance, as they offered more starkly contrasted worldviews that did not incorporate state slogans and elevated the role of the supernatural in everyday life. Whereas acceptable religiosity safely cohabitated with state slogans by keeping somewhat to the background compared to state slogans and state campaigns, clergy were called “mystics” when they did not incorporate such language or signal political reliability. In Oradea, for example, of 97 pastors, thirteen were considered as having “negative manifestations” and five had “even openly hostile manifestations,” meaning that they had acted or spoken in such a way that they were singled out as politically unreliable. Such priests were deflating enthusiasm for state efforts, and the local inspectors believed this scenario was “absolutely in connection with the existence of the bethanist movement.” In Arad, certain pastors there did not “collaborate with the local organs” satisfactorily due to leadership: “the respective dean is inadequate, having hostile manifestations toward the regime.” For the coming year of 1954 in the Reformed Church, therefore, the Ministry would need to focus its attention on: “a) supervision of the bethanist movement; b) settlement of the cases of the inadequate deans.”⁸³ As officials saw it, the problem of influence and mobilization came down to leaders – both church leaders and the leaders of such movements as Bethanism.

The way pastors became suspected of “mysticism” or “bethanism” was not just by attending Bible studies. At this time, the way to signal reliability to the state was to join in the promoted rhetoric, for instance joining in the “fight for peace.”⁸⁴ The pastoral conferences, although “guided” by church leaders and usually attended by local representatives of the

⁸³ Ibid., 12–13.

⁸⁴ Visky, *Szerelme Szorongat [His Love Constrains Us]*, 110–11.

Ministry of Religions, were nevertheless gatherings where ideas, attitudes, and allegiances could be conveyed. There was typically a “theological” theme as well as a political-social one of current state interest (e.g. promoting the “fight for peace,” or celebrating the achievements of socialism, etc.), and the degree to which pastors engaged or displayed enthusiasm for the state’s themes was often regarded as a projection of their private opinions as well. At a regional conference in October of 1956 one pastor spoke up against the expected discourse, saying that “first of all they should be Calvinists and not materialists.” Later, a pastor called for further support for “the rehabilitation of priests, ...recognition of the bethanist movement,” and for the “intensification of religious belief.” The inspector was frustrated that these latter comments were said; the Dean, who had gone outside, was “not active enough” in combating the “negative manifestations and attitudes” at the conference.⁸⁵

Yet for all their failure to deploy the correct phrases or signal allegiance, and for all of the warnings and disciplinary transfers, Visky and others continued their work in the 1950s, but not without changing their methods. Instead of organizing specifically CE-related gatherings, they would invite each other for events that did not need specific approval and were simply part of life, like weddings, baptisms, and name-days. They would arrive at the designated spot and meet prior to or following the weekend event, having bible studies, singing, and discussion. It is unclear how long their activity would have been tolerated, as the 1956 revolution attempt in Hungary changed the course of events precipitously.

Conclusion

The new communist government’s process of establishing country-wide authority included subduing the societal power of the churches, a phenomenon that occurred across Eastern Europe at this time to varying extents. When the Soviet government did the same in the 1920s and 1930s, the results there were much more devastating and deadly for believers and church leaders. In terms of the severity of coercion, the situation in Romania during this period were more analogous to the same period in the Soviet Union when Joseph Stalin enlarged the opportunities for the religions to reestablish themselves but with significant limitations (see Chapter II). In both countries, officials aimed to promote church leaders loyal to the government

⁸⁵ Arhivele Naționale ale României, Fond “Minsterul Cultelor și Artelor – Direcția Studii (1945-1963),” Dos. 53, 1956, 44, 46. Note that although Protestants in Romania typically use the word for pastor (Romanian *pastor*, Hungarian *lelkipásztor* or *lelkész*), Romanian officials used the word priest (*preot*), showing the influence of Orthodox on officials’ language.

and demote or punish those who resisted. They both treated the Orthodox Church in particular as internationally useful for bolstering government reputation and domestically useful for restricting the societal power of religious manifestations the state considered problematic, like the Greek-Catholic Church and Lord's Army movement. But the Orthodox Church was not unique for its usefulness, only its size and societal presence. State officials likewise promoted church leaders in the Reformed Church who were loyal and expected them to participate in stamping out effervescent religious movements, as the case of Bethanism reveals.

But Romanian communist officials as a whole lacked the antagonism, severity, or determination in the first decade of communist rule that Soviet officials projected during the same period. In the Soviet Union, there was the legacy of two decades of church-battling and purges, with many of the same perpetrators remaining as officials after the war. In Romania, many church leaders were imprisoned or killed for political reasons, and citizens fell afoul of the authorities for resisting government initiatives like collectivization, but officials for the most part did not target church leaders or believers out of a baseline religious antagonism. Rather, officials from the Ministry of Religions clearly had the goal of guiding religion toward that which they considered more acceptable—away from mysticism or dynamism to a regulated predictability.

IV. Soviet-sponsored Anti-Religious Campaign and Church Divisions, 1956-1964

In 1959-1960, what has become known as Nikita Khrushchev's attacks on religion, or anti-religion campaign, became obvious. Although over the course of 1958 to 1964 the campaign had periods of aggressive anti-religious propaganda and action as well as relative inactivity, the results were extensive. The number of Orthodox churches went from upwards of 13,000 down to around 7,500, the number of clergy declined significantly, most seminaries were closed and admissions at others reduced, and greater tax burdens were levied at churches and priests.¹ Those who participated in Evangelical Christians-Baptists (ECB) communities that had been repeatedly denied registration by state authorities now faced sanctions for "illegality," and many leaders or pastors of such churches were imprisoned.

Unlike Stalin's efforts toward weakening religiosity in the 1930s, Khrushchev did not use mass imprisonment or execution—although hundreds of priests and believers were arrested, sent to camps, or exiled—but preferred continual doses of antireligious and scientific-materialist propaganda alongside bureaucratic oppression in the form of personnel moves and the "consolidation" and closure of churches. Hooliganism also appeared according to local initiative. Ukraine was a target area, having been left relatively alone earlier but boasting more than half the registered churches in the USSR. In this chapter, Khrushchev's attacks and then their consequences are viewed with particular attention to Moscow Oblast, taking the Orthodox and ECB churches in turn.

Yet the fruit of the anti-religious drive would be bitter for Khrushchev and other officials, as unforeseen consequences—namely a religious dynamization—nullified any state "gains" at the expense of the Churches. Mass church closings and harsher regulations galvanized an opposition, creating vocal critics.² But what's more important, the weakness of Orthodox and ECB church leaders' response toward persecution of religion and their seeming complicity animated priests and believers in both churches. Many Baptists expected their Church to follow their tradition of separation from the state, but they believed the cart of the Church had

¹ Scott Kenworthy, "The Revival of Monastic Life in the Trinity-Sergius Lavra after World War II," in *State Secularism and Lived Religion in Soviet Russia and Ukraine*, ed. Catherine Wanner (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 142; Nathaniel Davis, *A Long Walk to Church: A Contemporary History of Russian Orthodoxy*, 2nd ed. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2003), 33.

² Catherine Wanner, *Communities of the Converted: Ukrainians and Global Evangelism, Culture and Society after Socialism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 59.

become hitched to the horse of the state, and both were heading in the wrong direction and in need of reform. The resulting inner-church divisions remained for most of the communist era, as later chapters explore.

Khrushchev's Attacks

Although church influence and religiosity was on the rise (See Chapter II), it is not entirely clear why Nikita Khrushchev commenced a frontal assault on religious life in 1959-1960. It may be that he believed that complete communism was achievable and that religion remained a major vestigial obstacle to eliminate. It may also have been an attempt to "assert ideological leadership" after creating ambiguity in denouncing Stalinism.³ Another possible reason which had little to do with the activities of lay believers but ultimately hit them hardest of all, is that Khrushchev and other high officials perceived an increasing "defiance" in behaviors and statements of Orthodox Church heads Patriarch Aleksei and Metropolitan Nikolai of Krutitsy and Kolomna.⁴ In addition to these plausible explanations, I contend that the impression had grown among party leaders that religion had become too prominent of an alternative, enthusiastic site of communal belonging, its incompatible ideology notwithstanding. Party leaders feared a situation where church leaders, clergy, and believers were increasingly resisting a church life marked by inferior status and utter submissiveness as gratitude for being allowed to exist.

Although the order of importance of the above in Khrushchev's and other leaders' minds is not certain,⁵ it is clear that he sensed that the institution of the church was not under a firm enough grasp, and that more aggressive moves would be expedient. General Marxist ideology stated that the final socioeconomic phase of development, from a socialist society to communist one would be accommodated by a disappearance of "superstition" and "religion." If

³ Davis, *A Long Walk to Church*, 33–34 "The best answer [as to why Khrushchev launched the antireligious campaign] seems to be that Khrushchev really did dream of leading the USSR to full and true communism by 1980."

⁴ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁵ T. A. Chumachenko, *Church and State in Soviet Russia: Russian Orthodoxy from World War II to the Khrushchev Years*, trans. Edward E. Roslof (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2002), 148; Mikahil V. Shkarovskii, "The Russian Orthodox Church in 1958-64," *Russian Studies in History* 50, no. 3 (2011): 71. In terms of political maneuvering, as Chumachenko argues, it was not Khrushchev but others who instigated the tougher stance against religion, and that he did not stop the "hard-liners" from winning over those who argued for religion's usefulness. She postulates that Suslov, who was considered "'the nation's chief ideologist' by the orthodoxy of his thought", advocated a "hard line" against religion. He helped write the Central Committee's resolutions and likely wrote in his preferences. See also Shkarovskii for more on leading ideologists in Khrushchev's government.

there were adherents to the Marxist faith, they evidently did not trust this to happen without a struggle.

One piece of the problem was thriving religiosity; the other was the atrophy of propaganda. A correspondent for *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, V.D. Shaposhnikova, wrote a letter in 1958 to M.A. Suslov, chief of Agitprop (the body overseeing government propaganda) in which she worried that with regard to some Baptist preachers whom she observed, “we [advocates of scientific-atheist propaganda] are very weakly armed against such a force.” She lamented that “we do not know the place of religion in contemporary life” and that attempts by some atheists to counter religiosity were merely “general phrases and well-known citations from the classics of Marxism-Leninism.” Suslov also excerpted other parts of the letter: “At the Museum of the History of Religion and Atheism in Leningrad, all is *routine and stagnant*.” and “Lectures of the Knowledge Society lack atheistic ammunition, [they are full of] dogmatism . . . [and] bitterly disappointing for the listener.”⁶

The situation, therefore, was not a void of ideology, but that official ideologies were for the time being failing to mobilize or animate people. Religious ideologies were only some of the alternatives available for public adoption (others could include, for example, discourses about “democracy” or “freedom”), but religious ones were among the most common ideologies presented as alternatives. Clergy bold enough to engage listeners at an ideological level, those who preached with conviction in favor of a religious worldview and against an atheist one sometimes attracted people in good numbers, despite the obvious danger in doing so (as we will discover particularly in Chapter VI). As ECB scholar Walter Sawatsky points out, state propaganda in the 1950s aimed at “the incompatibility between religion and science and the opposition between communist and religious morality.” But, it also often jettisoned rationalistic argumentation in favor of “slander, scandal-mongering about the clergy, and accusations of collaboration with the Nazis.” Such messages, he argues, “strained the credulity of the population in general.”⁷

Yet officials did not admit that citizens did not necessarily become mobilized only—or even primarily—due to convictions about ideological “truth” communicated by clergy or Soviet propagandists, but in large part due to the affective nature of gatherings, people’s experiences of belonging to something new, different, or “authentic.” When people gathered voluntarily and

⁶ Chumachenko, *Church and State in Soviet Russia*, 149–50.

⁷ Walter Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II* (Kitchener, Ont.; Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1981), 135.

enthusiastically for a religious gathering, that meant that it was a site of power. Sensing this, state representatives combatted it as such, using techniques common to the entire postwar period to disrupt religious community formation. In the Orthodox Church, this meant primarily isolating the priest from the congregation. In the Baptist Church, this meant bureaucratic obstacles to legalizing their gatherings, followed by fines or imprisonment for illegality.

The anti-religion campaign only became obvious over time, revealed by the actions of state representatives and church leaders; there was no official announcement of a new line on religion, perhaps to avoid provoking domestic or international reactions. It was internally signaled when members of Agitprop scrutinized the work of the Council for Russian Orthodox Church Affairs (CROCA). In line with Khrushchev's denunciation of some of Stalin's excesses in his secret speech in 1956, some officials regarded Stalin's concessions toward the church as a result of the "cult of personality" which made room for deviations from socialist ideology. Some regarded CROCA and its counterpart, the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults (CARC), as aberrations in and of themselves. Although it is probably too simplistic to see the struggle within the government as between advocates of a war against religion and defenders of a normalized relationship between church and state, certainly opinions seemed to gravitate toward one of these two poles. At a minimum, critics of the Councils argued, the Councils should invest much more effort toward limiting religiously zealous bishops and priests and replacing them with more deferential ones.⁸

Officials of CROCA and CARC began to reveal the new line to churches within their jurisdiction increasingly in 1958 and 1959. Officials dealing with the ECB Churches focused on the younger generation and their attendance and participation in churches. To officials, religious conviction was a personal matter to which only adults could subscribe, whereas children needed protection from superstitious influence. Childhood attendance was widespread among Protestants, less so in the Orthodox Church. In January 1959, Kiev Oblast commissioner A. Oleinikov did not likely fool anyone when he promoted more severe restrictions against youth as protecting adults: "Since children attending prayer house in reality only hinder adult persons praying and distract them from prayer, it will be strongly recommended to parents to not bring children of preschool and school age to prayer houses." Borrowing from the biblical narrative, he also recommended that "On the basis that Jesus Christ himself was baptized at age 30, starting in 1959, as a general rule people younger than 30 years of age will not be allowed to

⁸ Chumachenko, *Church and State in Soviet Russia*, 144–45.

engage in religious rites.”⁹ Given that baptism was customarily pursued by adolescents, this threat may only have been tongue-in-cheek to make the standard age of eighteen seem like a concession to believers. State officials also advocated paying attention to children of active Protestant believers outside of church:

Children and youth from among believers who study in educational institutions ought to be surrounded by attention in our public schools and institutions of higher education in order that, above all, they receive knowledge according to the curriculum, also conduct with them individual work—educating them in the spirit of atheism [...], attracting them to [state-sponsored] societies. Children and youth from sectarian families love music, to play on various instruments. [We should] show interest in their lives beyond the walls of educational institutions, and so on.¹⁰

But it was not going to be easy. Baptists integrated their world of faith into the larger Soviet world around them. They were living the Soviet life, the exception being their faith. As the commissioner in Kiev put it, “unfortunately it remains a fact that the sectarians have so adapted to the level of our life, that when we conduct major political work among the masses, still somehow very, very little is directly affecting their activity [...]”¹¹ The commissioner was correct in that Evangelical-Baptist communities were growing despite government-sponsored political work. They were still petitioning for approvals for prayer houses in order to obtain legal authorization.

Although Karpov remained the head of CROCA during 1959, a 1960 decree from the Supreme Soviet had him retired,¹² and the semblance of normalized relations with the Orthodox Church seemed to disappear.¹³ His removal appears to have stemmed from having relations with the Orthodox Church that hardliners against religion deemed too cozy. Metropolitan Nikolai was soon put under house arrest (and died not long after in dubious circumstances).¹⁴ Churches and seminaries began to close, officials stripped priests of authorization, and so on. Yet officials never made public any resolutions adopting a harsher line, as historian Tatiana Chumachenko puts it, “in Soviet society as a whole the boundaries had ‘dissolved’ between

⁹ GARF, f. 6991, op. 3, d. 1160, 21.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 23–24.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 71.

¹² Daniel H Shubin, *A History of Russian Christianity, Volume IV: The Orthodox Church 1894 to 1990, Tsar Nicholas II to Gorbachev's Edict on the Freedom of Conscience* (New York: Algora Pub., 2006), 165.

¹³ Chumachenko, *Church and State in Soviet Russia*, 164. This is Chumachenko's theory, and I agree with her argument.

¹⁴ Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II*, 139.

laws, resolutions, orders, and instructions.”¹⁵ In general, utterances by state officials focused on a return to Leninist principles and existing legislation, framing the situation as churches running amok, wantonly violating the legislation without repercussions. State discourse suggested officials felt it time to simply enforce the existing laws out of deferential respect for the Constitution, but in reality, it appears the Constitution was just a piece of paper when inconvenient, but the law when it buoyed present desires.

Also subject to attacks were the monasteries and convents, which state agents targeted for being the centers of spirituality and destinations for pilgrims. At the Pochaev Monastery in Ukraine, for example, in 1961 state agents took possessions, forbade visitors, harassed monks and demanded they leave, and when they did not, they were dragged out, beaten and arrested.¹⁶ Historian Dmitry Pospelovsky argues that whereas in ordinary parishes "real contact between laymen and priest outside the church services is highly circumscribed, not only by the extremely busy schedule of the priests but also by the laws banning religious instruction and 'propaganda' outside the church walls," in monasteries, there was less control. People sometimes spent holidays at monasteries, allowing for interactions of longer duration. It was also a scene for exchange of information among pilgrims, priests, and monks, a situation "distasteful to the Soviet regime, with its attempts to atomize society in general and the Church in particular as much as possible."¹⁷ Historian Scott Kenworthy notes that monasteries operated in a sort of legal loophole, as their establishment and operation were not subject to the same terms of registration as churches.¹⁸ This top-down anti-religious campaign was a process of stricter delimitations between acceptable and unacceptable religious practice.

New Line on the Orthodox Church Revealed in Moscow

To get a closer look at what this looked like at a local level in the Orthodox Church, the reports of Moscow Commissioner of CROCA A.A. Trushin are illuminative. Now sending his reports to the new head of CROCA, Vladimir A. Kuroedov—who as a regional party official was an outsider to religious affairs—(as well as to A.S. Pankratov of the Moscow Oblast Committee of the CPSU and to N.V. Petukhov, secretary of the executive committee of the Moscow Oblast

¹⁵ Chumachenko, *Church and State in Soviet Russia*, 186.

¹⁶ Michael Bourdeaux, *Patriarch and Prophets: Persecution of the Russian Orthodox Church Today* (New York: Praeger, 1970), 97–118.

¹⁷ Dmitry Pospelovsky, *The Russian Church Under the Soviet Regime, 1917-1982*, vol. II (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984), 345–46.

¹⁸ Kenworthy, "The Revival of Monastic Life," 144.

Soviet), his work reflected the turn in religious attitudes. He started his report in 1960 by acknowledging that he was “directed” in a recent meeting toward a “deeper study of the position and activities of the church, as well as its limits.” From this directive followed these “events”:

“1. Via the leadership of the bishopric administration, churches were forbidden:

- a) To be occupied with charity work;
- b) For ministers of religion to attract people under 18 years of age for serving in the churches;
- c) In churches the position of warden [*zavkhoz*] is abolished, which has allowed the ridding of some people who were the most active workers in the direction of activating the activities of the church.”¹⁹

These restrictions were very significant for communal life of the church. Officials considered charity both as theoretically unnecessary in socialist society and practically undesirable since it expanded the public role of the churches. These initiatives also mitigated against cross-generational participation and the self-organization and self-management of church life. It appears that the position of warden was not abolished as Trushin wrote here, but that wardens now had to receive local authorities’ authorization before being approved for the position. Many authorities were not interested in churches’ criteria of good wardens, but in citizens who would be loyal in carrying out authorities’ wishes. Trushin noted other steps “undertaken,” including a reduction of the total number of ministers, and the closing of churches. Automobile use, church renovation, and church building construction was further “bureaucratized,” something that “deterred churchmen to a certain extent.” Last, “the most stringent measures” were being taken against those violating laws on religion.²⁰

In another report, Trushin also made mention of three other prohibitions: religious institutions could not accept persons who have not done military service to prevent avoidance; clergymen were forbidden from holding services, baptisms, consecrations of residences and other rites at a home of believers without having consent from all members of the family to limit the power of singular religious believers; and monasteries were forbidden from receiving persons younger than 30 in hopes that young people would establish themselves in careers.²¹ The Council was, in essence, getting tough: no more easy paths, no more unpunished violations,

¹⁹ Keston Archive, “Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report,” 1960, Archive file <KGB 57>, p. 2. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 1, Del. 50.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 1960, Archive file <KGB 27>, p. 25-26. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 5, Del. 29.

and only the most bureaucratized of relations and services providing for the barest religious necessities would be permitted.

Churches all across the USSR now came under scrutiny, and those that the state regarded as “superfluous” were closed. Oblast by oblast, local inspectors appraised the state of the churches and decided that some were no longer in need of registration, taking into account their history, date of registration (most registered just after World War II), and some basic statistics on their size or clergy. Those church communities most likely to lose registration were the smaller ones in village settings. From 1959-1961 in Kiev and Moscow Oblasts, only churches in outlying regions tended to be stripped of registration. It seems officials had to respect the fact that churches in the city were too crowded and would affect too many people to close them, as demand had outstripped supply since the War. The power of remote rural churches to mobilize people was much less than popular urban ones.

Typical state justifications for revoking registration included lack of attendance, no priest in residence, or a dilapidated place of worship beyond reasonable repair. There were sometimes photographs of the buildings as evidence, and they were certainly not all architectural landmarks or picturesque onion-domed mini-cathedrals, even looking makeshift or barn-like in some instances. In their reports, inspectors assessed the possibility that stripping registration would cause local backlash. The answer was formulaic: “Believers of [TOWN A] may satisfy their religious needs in the religious community in [TOWN B], located at a distance of [X] kilometers from [TOWN A].” Sometimes, they would add some details as to the availability of bus, automobile, or local trains for transport. In rural settings, the closest churches were often far beyond walking distance, and the convenience of transport was exaggerated by the officials.

While scrutinizing the religious landscape, commissioners needed to shape perceptions of the religious situation. Moscow commissioner Trushin contended that the impression that all churches had a large attendance was “incorrect”; rather, some only served a few elderly women, a fact that was self-evident to Trushin of the harmlessness of closing a church. He saw churches, especially village ones with small attendance and no extra services as destined for “self-liquidation,” only to be kept open by getting a new priest every year due to the fact that the “executive organs are basically absent” in monitoring church life, although he did not make clear what role he thought they should play in this.²²

²² Ibid., 1960, Archive file <KGB 57>, p. 15-16. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 1, Del. 50.

Trushin felt that poorly-attended churches also existed by “artificial means” of the patriarch’s support, whose “excess priests feed” on these churches like “swine at the trough.” Rather than serving a viable spiritual function since attendance was weak, such churches only served “mercenary goals.” Elsewhere, he had indicated that such villages contributed too little to support priests well, making them want to leave as soon as possible, only for their duties to be carried on by new appointees. He reminded readers that closing these “feeding troughs” would to “a certain extent” restrict “the spread of religious propaganda among the surrounding population.” In his analysis, Trushin simply grabbed at any criticism he could, not noticing the contradictions. On the one hand, religious propaganda would decline, but on the other, an insignificant number was attending. Likewise, churches served the mercenary appetites of clergy, but the small ones had too few parishioners to even support priests adequately.

In Trushin’s scan for superfluous churches, for example, he found one in a village where fewer and fewer were reportedly attending, and the income was too little to support a priest. Another reportedly had only five to seven participants on Sundays and fifteen-twenty on holidays, plus the building was “dilapidated.”²³ When analyzing another poorly attended church, one official noted: “The nominal members of this religious community mainly consist of people who live in the neighboring (Podol’sk) district (*raion*). From residents of the local village there are only two people in the community.”²⁴ For officials, churches should only reflect the immediately surrounding population; one’s parish was supposed to suffice for “satisfying religious needs.”

One of “many” Trushin discovered, in a village in Narofominsk district, was a church that reportedly only held services on Sundays and holidays, and attendance “already does not exceed 3-5 people.” Even during winter or on holidays, when there was nothing else to do, no more than 20-30 were said to gather, and correspondingly, the income was very low. They were on their fourth priest, each of whom had been banished there for misconduct of some sort (“drunkenness, immoral behavior, and so forth”). Its core participants were kolkhozniks and homemakers but it had visitors from neighboring villages to prop it up. The nearest church was, according to Trushin, some seven and a half miles away—close enough.²⁵ The policy of closing small rural churches attended by older women also contradicted officials’ view that such

²³ Ibid., 6–7.

²⁴ Ibid., 16.

²⁵ Keston Archive, “Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report”, 1960, Archive file <KGB 27>, p. 38-39. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 5, Del. 29.

churches were the most benign and threatened the state the least. Officials like Trushin were really only able to make statistical gains on lessening religion by closing such churches, not great victories against religion's ability to mobilize people.

That the power of churches to mobilize was a concern to officials is revealed when Trushin looked for churches located in close proximity so that "whose [church] closing would not need to cause the mass discontent of believers" as they could point believers to a nearby option. He argued that it would be "expedient" to have local authorities "study such opportunities" and "make their own suggestions to the highest authorities," but without generating the impression of "some kind of campaign to close churches."²⁶ Officials were concerned about public backlash. An example was in the Balashikhinskii district, where one church had good attendance at around 400, but with fourteen other functioning churches and two larger ones in the nearby vicinity, he slated this one to close, as there would be sufficient options to still "fully satisfy the needs of all believers" in the region.²⁷ Trushin wanted to maximize statistical victories while minimizing vociferous public reactions.

But then, there remained the problem of some very active churches, whose activity Trushin usually blamed on younger priests. Due to deaths, loss of registration, and a reduction in approvals for ordination or theological training, the total number of priests was declining, yet the Council intended to reduce the number of priests further; there were simply too many. The number of newly ordained priests in the oblast up to 1959 had been averaging around twenty, but was only nine in 1960.²⁸ Furthermore, Trushin and other officials felt that certain churches employed too many priests, as with the case of one in Podol'sk which had five serving, and the two lead priests were attracting new people; Trushin even listed eleven recently "activated" participants. They held morning and evening services every weekday, and around 200 attended regularly, and on Sundays and holidays more than 3,000 were attending. The priests were very busy, having baptized two to three thousand each year and having conducted around 60 weddings. This concern suggests that officials' philosophy was that it would be better if priests were so busy fulfilling the basic requirements of their job (services, rituals) that they lacked time or energy to encourage any additional religious activities.²⁹

²⁶ Ibid., 47.

²⁷ Ibid., 6–7.

²⁸ Keston Archive, "Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report", 1960, Archive file <KGB 57>, p. 10. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 1, Del. 50.

²⁹ Ibid., 18–19.

Trushin's department noted services where informants reported children in attendance, and in response to these "abnormalities" he made then-Metropolitan Nikolai aware, who sent letters to church leaders reminding them that it was forbidden to attract children under 18 to services.³⁰ Due to the other big change, the forbidding churches from picking their own wardens (whose job was to ensure that everything was managed, working, and supplied) and requiring their authorization, Trushin perceived an overall drop in church activity. Now only people who were members of the church council—the lay governing body of each church that had to be officially approved and registered by local organs—could undertake such activity, making it much easier to control or monitor.³¹

Getting tough on enforcement meant there were many violations that Trushin had to pursue. He conducted an "inquiry" into "the violations of soviet legislation" committed by clergy and churchmen in 1959. There were many renovations undertaken without proper authorizations, and many building materials were acquired "illegally." This happened because bureaucracy was extensive, materials were hard to obtain by official means, and local executive committees often overlooked such incidents. Some parishes had acquired automobiles and received authorization from the police and traffic division, but the Council was supposed to authorize automobiles for religious organizations.³² At a minimum, church activity was to be bogged down in as many layers of Council bureaucracy as possible.

Trushin was able to find cause to unregister several priests. A certain Priest Petrov, as part of his being too active, was doing special "exorcisms" for "tainted" persons, doing special prayers over certain people. He led recruitment of young women for the church choir and for young men to serve during services. He also procured two automobiles without consent and two houses for the parish. Another priest put additions on to church buildings without consent and hired somebody without authorization. On the holiday of Christ's Baptism, Priest Orlov of Pokrovskoe showed up uninvited at the house of a collective farm-woman (*kolkhoznitsa*), where, at a gathering of *kolkhozniks* and "without permission," he began to make a prayer. When asked to leave, "he did not obey and sprinkled the gathering with holy water." Hierdeacon Markov of Serpukhov, was stripped of registration because a complaint was submitted by two concerned parents who wanted protection for their sons "from the activities

³⁰ Ibid., 29.

³¹ Ibid., 32.

³² Ibid., 24–32. See also <KGB 27>, p. 24.

of the hierdeacon, who was engaged in corrupting" (*razvrashenie* – poisoning their minds).³³ When there were tensions within families or communities, officials advocated for those wanting a religion-free life.

Alongside stricter church control, state officials increased propaganda and agitation. The recent emergence of the anti-religious magazine *Science and Religion* (*Nauka i Religii*) was one effort, but Trushin was concerned about the propaganda being ineffective. One priest was overheard saying that whereas they used to fear prison and a life of begging, now they're concerned about "feuilletons" (i.e. critical essays or articles). One informant noted that the Rector of Il'inskaya Church in Serpukhov was "sometimes unscrupulously referring to the state and delivering denunciatory sermons concerning morality in our capital. In addition he often comes out in sermons refuting anti-religious articles and feuilletons, where he allows for sharp attacks on the authors." Another priest was bold enough to tell the congregants not to believe that "paradise on earth" was being built, and that the five- and seven-year plans were of the antichrist.³⁴ Perhaps articles from *Science and Religion* were only galvanizing opinions into two dichotomous camps, atheism vs. religion, something that could animate religious fervor.

In his quest to follow the government line, Trushin looked for what he thought were the easiest pickings to unregister or unauthorized. In doing so, however, he selected the two extremes: either he removed from authorization those churches that were smallest and most benign, or he found priests to unregister who most visibly contradicted state propaganda or broke the law. In doing so, however, he still defined normal, acceptable religiosity between the two.

ECB Churches Face New Situation

In the ECB churches, believers had petitioned consistently to register their church communities, as probably around two-thirds of them had failed to gain registration. Registration had only been granted between 1947 and 1948, although officials from CARC nevertheless claimed that all religious societies had to register per the law.³⁵ But the new line was that CARC and other state organs no longer insist that "illegal groups" (i.e. groups that were unregistered, for whatever reason) register, but "to fight with them" using the legal measures of state organs

³³ Keston Archive, "Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report", 1960, Archive file <KGB 27>, p. 35. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 5, Del. 29.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 35–36.

³⁵ Michael Bourdeaux, *Religious Ferment in Russia: Protestant Opposition to Soviet Religious Policy* (London; New York: Macmillan; St. Martin's P., 1968), 5.

in order to “liquidate” the existing illegal houses of worship and “not allow their revival.”³⁶ State officials had long prevented more churches, but it was now definitive that instead of providing a path toward legal operation, they would rather take measures toward eliminating ECB activity altogether by the punishment of its participants.

What some believers considered “attacks” on religion, the All-Union Church of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (AUCECB) leaders euphemistically framed as ensuring legality and reorganization. In the summer of 1960 AUCECB leaders, in response to either direct or indirect pressure from state agents, issued changes to church statutes supposedly to conform to the 1929 legislation. They essentially admitted that state representatives were taking seriously laws that had otherwise been only periodically enforced. These changes were circulated to church elders to inform them of the need to end such violations which had previously occurred due to “insufficient knowledge” of the legislation. The changes included an end to children attending services, mission activity and proselytizing, baptizing someone under eighteen, charity work, meetings outside of regular church services, poetry reading, and youth trips.³⁷ In addition, the statutes relegated even more power to the AUCECB, whose leaders were to be elected at “special conferences of responsible representatives” instead of democratically at a Congress. These leaders were also given the power to appoint senior presbyters, who were given power over churches to appoint ministers.³⁸ Traditionally, these were positions decided democratically by laypersons, not appointed. These measures clearly aimed at more concentration of power in Moscow in the ECB Church “center.” State and church representatives also increasingly referenced the recently passed Article 227 of the Penal Code, which stipulated up to five years in prison or exile for leading any religious activity or teaching in such a way that “harm[s] the health of citizens,” “encroach[es]” on the “rights of individuals,” “prompt[s] citizens to refuse to participate in social activity or fulfill their civil obligations,” or “enticing minors” to participate.³⁹

1961 in the Orthodox Church: the Process Continues

In 1961 Trushin’s efforts toward “limiting illegality” continued. He was “guided” by a resolution of the Central Committee from January 13, 1960, and by “recommendations given at the All-Union conference of Commissioners of the Council [of the Affairs of the ROC] in April of

³⁶ Keston Archive, “Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report”, 1960, Archive file <KGB 27>, p. 62. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 5, Del. 29.

³⁷ Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II*, 139; Wanner, *Communities of the Converted*, 66.

³⁸ Bourdeaux, *Religious Ferment in Russia*. See Appendix I.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

the same year” to work toward “the liquidation of violations by clergy and churchmen of the legislation on cults, the deep study of the activities of churches, as well as [efforts toward] their restriction.”⁴⁰ As the Moscow Oblispolkom (Oblast Executive Committee) put it to Trushin in 1962, at the heart of the new approach to religion was the goal of creating an environment free of “religious prejudices and superstitions that still prevent some Soviet people from fully expressing their creative energies.” The “concrete tasks of scientific-atheistic education of workers” (not “attacks on religion”) aimed simply at the “liquidation of violations of Soviet legislation on cults” and “strengthening of monitoring the implementation of legislation on cults.” Officials knew these were euphemisms for trying to minimize religiosity without calling it that.⁴¹ Trushin’s plan in 1961 was to begin with concrete problems, like bureaucratizing automobiles and church renovations, and then to move toward “reducing the activities of churches and ‘total composition’ of clergy.” Trying to posit his actions as a process shared with church leaders, he mentioned the “prohibition by the eparchate organs” of charity work, of attracting anyone under eighteen years of age, and of employing a warden.⁴²

Trushin worked on “establishing staffing levels of clergy,” as some churches, like All-Saints Church in Moscow (featured below), had as many as seven serving, a situation which “should not be tolerated.” With so many priests, each one would hold services a few times during the week, but the rest of the time priests were free to “‘work among believers,’ serving their various needs.” Trushin asserted that “From the patriarch we must achieve the establishment of staff at such levels so that in certain churches it would be reduced by 2-3 clergy.” Again, the Church’s own center would appear to “voluntarily” reduce its own staff. Officials calculated that priests’ numbers would diminish when seminaries were restricted, certain priests’ registrations were removed, and priests retired or died. Nevertheless, there remained the problem of young priests and those who would graduate from the Theological Seminary.⁴³

⁴⁰ Keston Archive, “Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report”, 1961, Archive file <KGB 52>, p. 2. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 1, Del. 53.

⁴¹ Ibid., 1962, Archive file <KGB 191>, p. 14. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 1, Del. 57.

⁴² Ibid., 1961, Archive file <KGB 52>, p. 19. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 1, Del. 53.

⁴³ Ibid., 11–12. Trushin noted, for example, “Priest Dudko D.S., born 1922, native of Bryanskoi Obl., secondary education. From 1945 to 1948 studied in MDS [Moscow Theological Seminary], then was arrested on Art. 58 p. 10. In 1956 he was released and again accepted for study at the academy, which he finished in 1960. Prior to study in the seminary and academy he worked in the kolkhoz.” Dudko would cause many problems for officials, as Chapter VI will show.

Trushin noted that some priests “were warned for attempted violations” and “excessive activity,” although he did not name who warned them. Some were warned for “the performance of religious rites in the homes of believers,” others for attempting to buy a car without proper authorizations, and one Priest Kostiuik was “warned for attempting to establish a new ‘order’ in the church, expressed in the conducting of additional services and the artificial lengthening of the duration of church services.” “Former deans” Orlov, Fedorov, and Stefanko were warned for “the excessive practice of visits” in churches under their jurisdiction with the purpose of doing services, as well as encouraging other “excesses” Trushin did not specify.⁴⁴ Trushin reported that it was the citizens who reported these “excesses,” as nearly 50% of complaints and declarations from the past year had information about the activities of clergy and other churchmen, and perhaps these helped inspectors identify cases warranting their attention.⁴⁵ Trushin’s activity focused on narrowing the limits of Church practices to priests conducting the liturgy and rites in a perfunctory manner.

Orthodox Church Leaders Conform to New Line

Although we do not know exactly what transpired behind closed doors in meetings between state officials and leaders from the Orthodox Church, Church leaders were evidently compelled to respond. As a result, in July 1961 the Patriarch’s office invited the Bishops to St. Sergius Monastery, where they discovered they were convening for a most unusual Council [*Sobor*] of Bishops with no pre-knowledge of the purpose of the gathering.⁴⁶ At the meeting, the membership of the Holy Synod was expanded to include Chief Administrator of the Moscow Patriarchate and Chairman of the Department of Foreign Relations, both positions whose occupants state organs scrutinized heavily for evidence of loyalty to state wishes, Archbishop Pimen (future Patriarch) and Archbishop Nikodim. With three positions held in Moscow, this effectively reduced the influence of the Metropolitans of Kiev, Krutitsy and Kolomna, and Leningrad. At the Patriarch’s invitation to not deliberate on his proposals, all present agreed.

The next curious agenda item was to fundamentally rework parish administration by granting fewer powers to priests and more to the local laity. The Patriarch mentioned numerous “complaints” submitted by “people” against clergy who were insinuated in the “full decline”

⁴⁴ Ibid., 27.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 38.

⁴⁶ Michael Bourdeaux, “The Black Quinquennium: The Russian Orthodox Church 1959-1964,” *Religion in Communist Lands* 9, no. 1-2 (1981): 20.

of church life, but he said nothing about the role of bishops in shepherding the clergy. Then, as a samizdat chronicler in attendance sardonically noted, the Patriarch concluded parishes could “only be saved by... the laity!” The Patriarch did not comment on the strangeness of the situation whereby complaints to state officials justified more power to untrained laypersons. Whereas for ages, bishops and those they appointed oversaw parishes, now, the Parish Councils of Twenty (*dvadtsatki*) were given the power to make decisions about priests’ and others’ employment, and church buildings.⁴⁷ Since the 1920s, the law indicated that if people desired to have a religious society of some sort, they were to form what was called a “*dvadtsatka*,” or “twenty.”⁴⁸ This “twenty” was not only the number needed to form a religious society, but as decided by the Bishop’s *Sobor* in 1961, according to state wishes, this group would now hold the powers for the parish and elect an executive committee with a warden, assistant, and treasurer, to whom the priests would answer.⁴⁹ Significantly, members of the executive committee had to have CROCA approval.

The bishops also defined the limit to acceptable religious practice for priests: “The senior priest of a church is responsible for spiritual leadership of parishioners, for overseeing the grandeur and conduct of the liturgy, and for satisfying the religious needs of parishioners in a timely and conscientious manner.” As Chumachenko argues, the idea was that the priest should be merely a “hired hand” of his parish.⁵⁰ The way that officials and church leaders dealt with priests demonstrated that “spiritual leadership” meant precisely conducting the liturgy and rites in proper form without embellishment or efforts at attracting or energizing believers.

Instructions to 1963 Commissions Reveal Acceptable Religiosity

Even in this anti-religion campaign, religion was granted a place in society. Even when state agents wished to further limit religion, unacceptable religiosity had the corollary of acceptable religiosity. Particularly illustrative of the dominant attitudes among representatives of state during the attacks on religions were the instructions for certain new “Commissions” that

⁴⁷ Ibid., 26–27.

⁴⁸ This group would make an agreement with the local executive committee about the use of a piece of state property, namely a church building. Other locally interested parties, such as the collective farm, must also make an agreement for the use of such property for the religious community. The parish would pay applicable taxes, insurance, and fees for ongoing use. All agreements should be sent (for review, presumably) to the local soviet executive committee.

⁴⁹ Pospelovsky, *The Russian Church Under the Soviet Regime, 1917-1982*, II:336.

⁵⁰ Chumachenko, *Church and State in Soviet Russia*, 187.

were set up to help track religious activity.⁵¹ The tasks assigned to these “Commissions for Assisting District Soviets and their Executive Committees, in Supervising the Observance of Legislation on Cults” differed little from the duties of the Commissioners of CROCA and CARC. Evidently officials intended the Commissions to expand the work of surveillance over religious associations. These commissions were supposed to determine the extent of all religious activity, their “degree of influence” on people, degree of participation in religious baptisms, weddings, and funerals, the efforts by clergy to have influence—including “adaptation to new conditions”—, youth participation, the effect of religious holidays on work production, and the “composition” of “the most active members” in churches. Only listed after these was the charge for the commissions to watch for any violations of Soviet laws. That it was mentioned this late and separately indicates that the law—in the eyes of these state representatives—was inadequate to prohibit the spectrum of religious activity they deemed undesirable; ensuring legal compliance was only one aspect of state surveillance. In short, officials created the Commission to “make concrete suggestions for limiting and weakening the activity of religious societies and servants of the cult (within the framework of the law).”⁵²

One major aspect of state meddling in church affairs was trying to ensure that the parish committee have people on it who would respond reliably to state wishes. The executive committee of the *dvadtsatka*, whose head was the warden, had to be approved by the local city or county soviets, who were encouraged to deny registration to a certain *dvadtsatka* if it was composed mostly of “elderly people, illiterate fanatics to whom we cannot entrust State property.” Local state bodies were dissuaded from allowing “employees of the church, priests, precentors [i.e. choir director], watchmen, cleaners, grooms, stokers, drivers, those who make the communion bread, bell-ringers” as members of the twenty. In short, they should have no

⁵¹ Keston Archive, “Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report”, 1962, Archive file <KGB 191>, p. 14. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 1, Del. 57. Just how active these were is debatable, but during the Brezhnev era, Trushin frequently referenced the commissions and the need to improve them. See Chapter VIII in particular. Pospelovsky had believed these had disappeared relatively quickly (337), but that does not seem to be the case in all oblasts or districts, even if their actual efforts were minimal in many cases.

⁵² “Secret Instructions on the Supervision of Parish Life,” *Religion in Communist Lands* 1, no. 1 (1973): 31–32. The people who would comprise these commissions were to be “politically educated,” ideally be members of the local *soviets*, “workers in cultural and educational institutions, in financial bodies, organs of popular education, propagandists, pensioners, workers in village *soviets* and other people from amongst the local activist groups.”⁵² How many would be involved in the commission’s work depended on the extent of religious activity, whether legal or illegal in nature. Executive committees of the respective city/*soviet* would approve the commission, and also the secretary of the local executive committee should be a member of the commission.

obvious interest in church life and were scrutinized for age, education, and profession. Although the parish was to elect the executive body, the local commissioners “should participate in the selection of the executive organ’s members, and choose people *who carry out our line.*”⁵³

Clearly, the goal of these commissions and instructions was to have religious associations headed by people whose primary unassailable loyalty was to state wishes. Church functioning should be led not by people who might naturally care the most, but by people who might be indifferent or even antagonistic toward the religious association. Although the commissions may not have been as active as state agents desired, the instructions and emphases outlined here correlate directly with that of CROCA, the CRA, and religiously antagonistic state agents more broadly.

State agents wanted their meddling in local church affairs to harmonize with meddling at the level of Orthodox Church leadership. Already in 1960-1961, observers recognized that Metropolitan Pimen (later Patriarch) and Archimandrite Nikodim (later Metropolitan and astonishingly only thirty-one when appointed head of the church’s foreign affairs) seemed to fall most in line with state directives. Later research did identify them, and Patriarch Aleksei, as KGB agents with code-names—a feature state leaders clearly required for holding such positions.⁵⁴ These three presented no obstacles to the anti-religion campaign, touted religious freedom to foreigners and abroad, and allowed zealous bishops, priests, and wardens to be replaced by others with histories of drunkenness or of involvement in other scandals. As one example, a “protégé” of Nikodim and Pimen, Bishop Ioann, helped close churches, replaced devout priests with drunkards, and offended believers on several occasions in the Kirov region. Believers’ complaints to the Patriarch were never answered.⁵⁵ It is true that the KGB pressured nearly every clergyman to inform. Deputy chairman of the KGB Anatolii Oleinikov said in 1990 that 14-20 % of priests whom agents requested to work for the KGB refused, and for this reason were not promoted. The higher up in the hierarchy, the more willing or beneficial the participant had been to state agenda.⁵⁶

⁵³ Ibid., 33. Italics in original Russian text.

⁵⁴ Christopher M Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Sword and the Shield: The Mitrokhin Archive and the Secret History of the KGB* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 490–91.

⁵⁵ Bourdeaux, *Patriarch and Prophets: Persecution of the Russian Orthodox Church Today*, 143.

⁵⁶ Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The Sword and the Shield*, 490.

The Consequences of the Attacks

The basic result of the state's anti-religious campaign was the decrease in churches and clergy. Across the Soviet Union, the total number of Orthodox Churches and clergy was reduced by more than half, and nearly 200 Baptists had been imprisoned for so-called "violations" of Soviet legislation.⁵⁷ The two Orthodox Theological Academies remained, but instead of eight seminaries, there were now three. The 63 monasteries and convents in 1958 were reduced to nineteen.⁵⁸

In Moscow Oblast in 1961, another twelve churches were closed, leaving 192 active churches.⁵⁹ Trushin commented that church closings led to "the departure of believers" and the "streamlining of the church network." In some locations, supposedly there "were no complaints, protesting about the closing of their church." But in most cases, there were complaints and petitions, "but only in the first days," and after "relevant work in the locations, the complaints ceased." With only four requests to open churches in the previous year, people must have understood the religious trend of their times.⁶⁰ A chronicler of events from the Kirov Oblast, Boris Talantov, noted examples where local officials or groups of people barged into churches, drank sacramental wine, destroyed property, offended believers, had priests and wardens de-registered, and closed churches. Complaints by believers were met by threats from various state agents or officials.⁶¹

But rather than instilling fear, these acts mostly instilled resentment among the people, harming the trust and loyalty of otherwise dutiful citizens.⁶² Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign also produced unintended consequences in the Churches, first in the Evangelical Christians-Baptists Church, and later within a segment of the Orthodox Church. In fact, as Catherine Wanner argues, Khrushchev's efforts "inadvertently revitalized evangelical communities," a situation that compelled state agents to adopt a new approach under Leonid Brezhnev (see Chapter VIII).⁶³ A belligerent group of believers, says Sawatsky, "turned this

⁵⁷ Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II*, 138; Pospelovsky, *The Russian Church Under the Soviet Regime, 1917-1982*, II:349–50.

⁵⁸ Kenworthy, "The Revival of Monastic Life," 144.

⁵⁹ Keston Archive, "Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report", 1961, Archive file <KGB 53>, p. 5. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 1, Del. 58.

⁶⁰ GARF f. 6991, op. 1, d. 1970, 6.

⁶¹ Bourdeaux, *Patriarch and Prophets: Persecution of the Russian Orthodox Church Today*, 126–35.

⁶² Pospelovsky, *The Russian Church Under the Soviet Regime, 1917-1982*, II:358; Bourdeaux, "The Black Quinquennium: The Russian Orthodox Church 1959-1964," 20.

⁶³ Wanner, *Communities of the Converted*, 66.

second big assault on religion into an embarrassing failure for the state.”⁶⁴ The state had not anticipated such a refusal of believers to comply with their own church leaders. They had underestimated the independent ethos of ECB believers and congregations, whose model was less one of submission to leaders and unerring continuation of tradition as in the Orthodox Church, but of leader-servants and the democratization of the interpretation of truth.

AUCECB Response to Attacks Divides Baptists

In the Evangelical Christians-Baptists Church, around 300 churches (most were probably not registered) were closed in the first half of 1961 alone, and dozens of believers had been arrested.⁶⁵ In terms of religiosity, AUCECB leaders reminded believers and church leaders that “the chief goal of religious services at the present time is not the attraction of new members but satisfaction of the spiritual needs of believers.”⁶⁶ Religion should not whet new spiritual appetites, but soothe individual adults’ private convictions. As part of this tougher line, the staff of the Council was purged, and people like AUCECB typist Aleksandra Ivanovna Mozgova, who had worked on the Council staff since its inception in 1944 and belonged to the same central Baptist Church in Moscow as the AUCECB leaders, were asked to retire or leave.⁶⁷

But the pruning that the leaders did in response to state initiatives only encouraged new off-shoots to grow, as two tendencies within the same Church clashed due to Khrushchev’s anti-religion campaign. One tendency within the Church was centralization. When the Soviet Union helped form the AUCECB in 1944 (See Chapter II), this creation of a leadership structure favored centralization (positively seen as “paternal,” negatively as “authoritarian”⁶⁸), but this structure was built on top of what traditionally was a decentralized movement with lay-organized churches based on people’s trust in local pastors’ and elders’ ability to interpret the Bible. In contrast with the Orthodox Church, religious authority was more democratized, creating additional potential for leadership clashes. What’s more, the leaders Iakov Zhidkov, Aleksandr Karev, and others were relatively old—in their 60s and 70s during the campaign—whereas those who would object to the declarations of the AUCECB in 1961 were generally younger, in their 30s and 40s. Younger believers had received educations shaped by idealistic communist thinking

⁶⁴ Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II*, 132.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 131.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁶⁷ Georgi Vins, *Three Generations of Suffering* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1976).

⁶⁸ These two words were used in Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II*, 159.

while coming of age in churches with less oversight after World War II, whereas the leadership knew more intimately the bleak realities of the 1930s under Stalin.⁶⁹

Two church leaders, Aleksei Prokofiev of Kharkov and Gennadii Kriuchkov of Tula Oblast, backed by supportive groups of believers, spearheaded a protest to the new statutes promulgated by the AUCECB leadership, and word of this movement spread. In August 1961, a delegation delivered a letter to the AUCECB leadership condemning the new restrictions, and this “initiative group” (*initsiativniki*) called on them to “repent” of their sins. Shortly thereafter, participants in the initiative group distributed a letter as widely as possible to all ECB congregations, asking them to reconsider the AUCECB statutes and repent. Indeed, the decision of the AUCECB leaders to simply comply with the new state guidelines stimulated some to respond with abhorrence; after all, some believers felt that certain stipulations—like forbidding evangelism, baptisms of those under eighteen, and the participation of children—were contrary enough to their practices and beliefs that they simply had to reject them, and they tried to convince their leaders of the same. Calling the new instructions highly “antievangelical” (which they indisputably were), the initiative group tried to rally others to their side in rejection of the new measures. They used samizdat to inform and give instructions to their followers.⁷⁰ What was brewing was their own “schism,” not unlike the Sergiite schism in the Orthodox Church in 1927. Both schisms were characterized by a rejection of certain church authority due to compliance with state authorities, followed by underground activity. Whereas the decisions by the Orthodox Bishops in 1961 were accepted by priests and believers (for the moment, or at least tacitly) with little or unobservable protest, a sizeable number of Evangelical-Baptists were determined to change things, even if it embarrassed the AUCECB leaders or divided the Council.⁷¹

At the church in Dedovsk in Moscow Oblast, where officials had long denied them registration, the leaders of this church decided not to accept the new guidelines stipulated by the AUCECB leadership, creating a new degree of problems. During the anti-religious campaign, this community was forbidden to meet because they did not have a legal right and were fined

⁶⁹ Ibid., 177.

⁷⁰ Walter Sawatsky, “Protestantism in the USSR,” in *Protestantism and Politics in Eastern Europe and Russia: The Communist and Postcommunist Eras*, ed. Sabrina P. Ramet (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1992), 244–45.

⁷¹ Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II*, 140.

and threatened.⁷² In 1961, the main leaders of the church, Vasiliy Smirnov, Aleksei Iskovskikh, and Peter Rumachik were arrested and given five years exile in Siberia. It was a difficult time for this local church, as some forty believers switched allegiances to the AUCECB out of fear of potential repercussions. Also, because officials determined the use of the dwelling for religious gatherings to be illegal, the Smirnovs had their house taken away from them. They were permitted to rent the smaller half from the state, while the larger side became a library. Smirnov's wife received some wages for keeping the library heated, enough to pay the house rent.⁷³

With their leaders in exile, the believers in Dedovsk had to be even more secretive. The community often met in the forest, but state agents frequently discovered these meetings too. It even happened that police collected the believers in trucks and dumped them somewhere far away, forcing them to find their way back.⁷⁴ Baptisms were secretive as well. Baptism as a rite is very important to Christians in general, but since Baptists practice a "believer's baptism," they customarily immerse youth or young adults. Baptists in the Soviet Union customarily did so in a body of water, and with the new stipulations regarding age limits and overall increased state vigilance, baptisms were now increasingly done at night or in remote locations.⁷⁵ They had to employ a "secret language" to spread the word. In 1961 a group connected to the Dedovsk church was going to be baptized, and they agreed to meet at a certain pond during the night. But information found its way to the police, who arrived at the scene. The women formed a line to block the police's way to the men, who were regarded as the instigators and leaders of such events, and the men tried to escape. Despite dangers, the Baptist believers of Dedovsk were gathering several times a week, and people were routinely "repenting" (i.e., confessing need for salvation and committing to the Baptist faith). That they'd have to travel or meet in new and changing locations did not deter this community, but even excited its participants as they felt a sense of purpose and belonging.⁷⁶ Fear or obligation did not compel them to comply with new guidelines.

In 1961 in Kiev, the parents of Natasha Vins and her younger brother Peter told them one evening that they could not accompany their parents to church any more, no longer

⁷² Peter Rumachik, Pavel Rumachik, and Luba Rumachik, *A Path Not Lined with Roses*, ed. Sam Slobodian, trans. Christopher J Lovelace (Maple Grove, MN: Baptist International Evangelistic Ministries, 1999), 6.

⁷³ Personal Interview with Nikolai Vassilievich Smirnov and Nina Stepanova Smirnova, May 24, 2015.

⁷⁴ Rumachik, Rumachik, and Rumachik, *A Path Not Lined with Roses*, 14–15.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁷⁶ Personal Interview with Zinaida Mikhailovna, May 24, 2015.

allowed due to the recently stipulated rules about youth attendance. Yet not long after, they were once again going to church, but not in the city. The two hours of riding buses, trams, and trains ended at a station in the woods, with some 30 others exiting as well. They came to a clearing where blankets were spread, and then they had church: singing, preaching, and praying—with her father, Georgii Vins, now one of the ministers.⁷⁷

Although initially exciting, this decision marked a new path for the Vins family, and Natasha Vins noticed the transition from what had been a relatively “carefree” religious life to the beginnings of “a harsh period of persecution that was to last several decades.” Her parents explained that they had decided not to yield to “pressure from the atheistic authorities” and to “unbiblical demands.” By having such meetings, joining what they called “the persecuted church,” her father’s arrest was likely.⁷⁸ With Prokofiev arrested in August 1962 and Kriuchkov in hiding, Vins was also in danger.

The Baptists who did not back the decisions of the AUCECB differed from average Soviet citizens in a fundamental way. Alexei Yurchak and Wanner have argued that most people related to the Soviet regime with “a certain compliance that might not have risen to the level of active endorsement but was at least an acquiescence to the system and its rituals of affirmation.”⁷⁹ These “breakaway” Baptists generally would not affirm the regime in such a perfunctory manner, but instead engaged in discussions of ideology and “the truth.” When they criticized the leaders, the reformists preferred to accuse the AUCECB of “deviating from the truth.”⁸⁰ They tried to fashion the battle as one for truth, upon which church principles were based. The AUCECB leadership made it less a battle of truth, though, than a supposed desire by trouble-makers to create a schism. They questioned who was at fault for undoing the unity founded in 1944. To them, unity was predicated upon submission. The legitimacy of their leadership was not in need of proof; it was an unassailable given.⁸¹

The Reformists who were breaking away from the AUCECB drew a strict line and threatened to excommunicate those who did not rescind the 1960 statutes. They formed an “*Orgkomitet*,” or Organizing Committee in efforts to bring about changes to the AUCECB statutes and, having only been accused by AUCECB leaders of doing the work of “Satan,” they

⁷⁷ Natasha Vins, *Children of the Storm: The Autobiography of Natasha Vins*. (Greenville, S.C.: JourneyForth, 2002), 5–6.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁷⁹ Wanner, *Communities of the Converted*, 86.

⁸⁰ Bourdeaux, *Religious Ferment in Russia*, 33–35.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 39–40.

then wrote a list of twenty-seven persons to be excommunicated from the Church and unworthy to be its ministers or representatives.⁸² The Reformists based their authority on the widespread support they received from congregations, showing the democratized nature of ECB power and truth.⁸³

State representatives were alarmed at the activities of the initiative group, and Commissioner Trushin did not wish for a breakaway church. Trushin “more than once recommended to the leaders of the religious community in Moscow to call to order the raging [разбушевавшихся] sectarians,” but the AUCECB leaders had not responded as he wished by 1963: “At first the leadership of the society did not give serious attention to the behavior of the young sectarians and reasoned thusly: ‘the young Baptists are full of spiritual enthusiasm and by their own activity want to resemble their older brothers [i.e., “us”]; all of them are eager to be preaching the word of god. It goes without saying that we will call them out for a conversation and over a cup of tea will put them on the right path.’”⁸⁴ Arrests and harassment against Reformist leaders increased, and informants against them were often other believers who aided the state in identifying breakaway churchmen.⁸⁵ Soviet journalism depicted these men as obscurantists, fanatics, parasites, peddling anti-soviet messages, enticing youth, and promoting separation from society,⁸⁶ essentially describing them as cult-like rather than legitimate religious expressions (such views of evangelical Protestantism had antecedents from the Orthodox Church).

But these “young Baptists” were stubborn and insisted their demands be met. State organs continued to pressure the renegade churchmen. Georgii Vins was demoted in his job, his wife was let go from her job, and even young Natasha Vins was shamed in front of her classmates and required to see the principal and her assistant twice a week for “atheistic instruction.” She felt completely alienated from her classmates.⁸⁷ As she would not change her views, the harassment increased, her mother was criticized in a private meeting, and a court case was opened to deprive her parents of parental rights for their children, to put them in a

⁸² Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II*, 187.

⁸³ State agents helped in this process of centralization. In December 1963, four Baptists were tried in the Altai region, found guilty of causing harm to society because “they analyzed various biblical texts, permitted arbitrary incorrect interpretations, criticized and did not accept the new constitution of the AUCECB,” (Ibid., 191).

⁸⁴ TsGA Moskv, f. 3004, op. 1, d. 81, p. 27.

⁸⁵ Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II*, 192.

⁸⁶ Bourdeaux, *Religious Ferment in Russia*, 22–23.

⁸⁷ Vins, *Children of the Storm*, 8–9.

state orphanage.⁸⁸ Although the move was not carried out, agents of the state were clearly not threatening lightly.

Although those belonging to unregistered churches had the disadvantage of threats, harassment, or arrest, they had the advantage of offering programs for children and youth, like choirs, musical ensembles, poetry reading, and group gatherings.⁸⁹ As Catherine Wanner argues, ECB religious gatherings offered the benefit of providing community and leisure, offering free participation in singing or ensembles and “regular face-to-face meetings” when they studied the Bible. “In this way,” Wanner writes, the church or home-as-church “not only became a sacred place, but it also functioned as something of a total institution, the hub of social, leisure, often professional, and of course, spiritual needs.”⁹⁰ Occasions for celebrations also afforded opportunities for Baptists to hold religious gatherings, and the woods also added an aura to events that bonded people together. Many believers found spouses at such events. Natasha Vins had a community of youth to which she belonged: “At school I always felt so different from the rest of the kids since I was the only Christian in my class. But here [...] everywhere I turned there were Christian kids!”⁹¹ She began to attend a “Sunday school” class on Tuesday evenings in another’s home. Children had to arrive and leave individually so as to not attract attention. Here, the kids shared their struggles at school, and they prayed for each other, something that she felt lifted her spirits.⁹² Their rejection in wider society made it possible to find an intimate community of fellow travelers outside it. In 1963, probably around one-third of Baptist communities rejected the new rules, and their daring position not only did not dissuade people from joining them, they were evidently flourishing in the freedom of making their own rules.⁹³

In spring of 1963 the forest service that the Vins family attended was finishing when policemen arrived, shouting for the “illegal meeting” to cease. When the people surrounded the choir members and preachers in an attempt to block their arrest, the police used violence to take some of them. After this, more care was used for planning services. Only a couple of people would know the time and place, and others would meet them at a bus stop and be given further

⁸⁸ Ibid., 11.

⁸⁹ Michael Rowe, *Russian Resurrection: Strength in Suffering: A History of Russia’s Evangelical Church* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1994).

⁹⁰ Wanner, *Communities of the Converted*, 77.

⁹¹ Vins, *Children of the Storm*, 13.

⁹² Ibid., 15.

⁹³ Rowe, *Russian Resurrection*, 148. Rowe suggests two-thirds rejected the proposals, but from my estimation, roughly 1,000 communities of 3,000 initially sided with the CCECB when it formed in 1965.

instructions. But within a couple months another service was interrupted - some 150 were there. The police forcefully made their way in and detained nineteen, including Georgii Vins. He was threatened and his employer demanded that he resign.⁹⁴

These acts by state agents reflect the concerted effort of officials to deflate this movement, starting with its leaders. Around 200 would be arrested from across the Soviet Union between 1961 and 1964, especially among active members of Orgkomitet. In response, believers formed a “Council of Prisoners’ Relatives” to address the needs of their loved ones in prison and the families left behind. Samizdat increased considerably, as in the 1964 Council of Prisoners' Relatives began issuing publications documenting news of arrests, trials, and treatment in prison.⁹⁵

AUCECB leaders presented a façade of normalcy and did not readily address the great divide, while the Reformists’ demands were ignored, hardening the division. That the reform group was able to command considerable following also meant the evangelical tradition of authority being scrutinized according to scriptural interpretations of the Truth was stronger than the tradition of humbly submitting to a supposed authority. When AUCECB authorities did nothing to uphold the causes of churches trying to legally register, preach, evangelize, baptize, or welcome youth, they became extremely vulnerable to attack and disloyalty.⁹⁶

Although the leaders of the respective groups were at complete odds, the registered and unregistered groups had some degree of cross-fertilization, as there were some who were members of registered congregations but were allied with acquaintances from unregistered communities. There were many who continued attending the Central Baptist Church in Moscow but did not agree with the choices of the denominational “center” and signed their names to letters opposing the decisions of the church and Council leadership.⁹⁷ But the Central Baptist Church in Moscow, whose ministers also were the main leaders of the AUCECB, remained with the Council. The AUCECB remained intact as an institution.

The KGB went to great lengths to place its people within breakaway groups, but believers used their own devices to assess others’ trustworthiness (they did not trust leaders of the Council, for example). When a certain visitor from Moldavia visited Natasha Vins’ church, wanting to join, the congregants listened with skepticism to his stories of getting permission to

⁹⁴ Vins, *Children of the Storm*, 16–17.

⁹⁵ Bourdeaux, *Religious Ferment in Russia*, 49.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 47–48.

⁹⁷ TsGA Moskv, f. 3004, op. 1, d. 88.

study in England. After an initial meeting, they later “plied the newcomer with questions,” and when they found “he could not answer the simplest question about his faith,” they concluded he “was not a believer at all.” Many assumed he was a KGB agent.⁹⁸

As one of the most active and vocal leaders of the *initsiativniki*, Georgii Vins was a wanted man. The congregation of Vins’ church had proposed that he live in others' homes and then helped support the Vins family. He visited other churches around the country. Pressure remained on young Natasha Vins as well. Her teacher tried to turn her classmates against her by saying that she was ruining the reputation of the class and harming the cause of the state. Often shunned, she was even beaten up by some boys from her class.⁹⁹ The Reform Baptists were transgressing the norms of religiosity officials desired, and in response, state representatives were trying to get them to conform using isolation and exclusion. Such techniques served to increase the importance of the local church community.

Trushin Deals with Persistent Orthodox Religiosity

In the Orthodox Church—as in the Evangelical Christians-Baptists Church—the increased state-directed antagonism toward religiosity and religious participation did not necessarily dissuade people from continuing to engage in religious activity. Rather, Trushin’s reports are dominated by the state’s continuing role in religious management. The campaign did, however, put heavier burdens on Trushin to present the religious situation in ways consistent with the intended trajectory of the campaign and to become more specific in delimiting acceptable from unacceptable practices in priests’ activities.

Even during this anti-religion campaign, Trushin read petitions regarding inner-church disputes that asked for his mediation. Many of these “inner-church” problems fell under the jurisdiction of the patriarchate, but Trushin had to follow up with such petitions to make sure they were not causing major disturbances in churches. The Council also continued its onerous work of reporting church finances, a duty which always involved investigating irregularities that had to be reported to the finance minister (for instance, one priest's income tax was being paid

⁹⁸ Rowe, *Russian Resurrection*, 146. After finishing his studies in England he was given a position of power with the ECB's international department, which regulated foreign travel of ECB leaders and itineraries of ECB guests.

⁹⁹ Vins, *Children of the Storm*, 19–20. Interestingly, her grandmother brought up the situation of a black boy in the U.S. who would get beaten up by whites for riding the school bus. This discrimination was ridiculed in the Soviet press, so she would say that her granddaughter deserved to have a policeman accompany her to protect her against discrimination and violence.

by the church which allowed him "to live very much at ease and keep three servants").¹⁰⁰ In fact, the cumbersome work of dealing with petitions, complaints, or declarations was one way in which state agents kept apprised of the religious landscape. Hundreds of such notes passed Trushin's desk every year. In 1962, he wrote that "2,060 priests, churchmen, and believers were taken in for various issues, which gave the opportunity to receive details that deserve our attention toward monitoring the activities of the churches."¹⁰¹ This implies that issues were opportunities for discovering the situation on the ground, and that Council oversight or believers' interactions with party members, police, or KGB agents allowed for information gathering.

The state also used police to help control religion in efforts to maintain a reputation of order and legality. They often wished to avoid ugly incidents provoked by antagonistic youth and maintain order, and church representatives called on state personnel to protect them in their religious observances. During Easter in 1960 one churchwarden complained that during Easter bread (*kulich*) consecration at the church located on Kalitnikovskoe Cemetery, a group of schoolchildren with communist party armbands and cameras took photos of schoolchildren who had come with Easter breads and polled them regarding "what school they studied at." Supposedly during such a poll one girl "fell and started to cry hysterically, whereas the boy threw the bread and ran off, so that among the believers indignation arose after which [the visiting youth] were forced to withdraw." The same warden reported that at night a group of around a dozen young men came in and started to "raise a commotion, laughing, and trying to sing songs," but they were removed by nearby police "at the request of the believers." "Moreover, at the time of the 'procession of the cross' teenagers who had climbed the roof of the cemetery office were shooting slingshots and throwing eggs." The commissioner did not

¹⁰⁰ Commissioners still received complaints from church people regarding "inner-church" issues, with the most common being that priests "enrich themselves at the cost of the church, they get drunk, and they lead a dissolute lifestyle." Other petitions focused on material issues of church life: buildings, building materials, materials needed for worship, etc. In 1959 a citizen sent a petition to the Moskovskoi Komitet of the Communist Party, complaining that a priest in a certain village had asked everyone in a sermon to sign a petition against closing the church, but when this was investigated, it did not appear that such a motion had ever been made but that this citizen had been fired by the priest for "hooliganism and squabbles." Another group of believers petitioned about their rector, that "he is rude with believers, gets drunk, has mistresses and steals church money." See Keston Archive, 1958, Archive file <KGB 44>, p. 9 (Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 1, Del. 44), KGB*, p. 19 (TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 1, Del. 47), and KGB 27, pp. 29-30 (TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 5, Del. 29).

¹⁰¹ Keston Archive, "Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report", 1962, Archive file <KGB 53>, p. 53. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 1, Del. 58.

receive confirmation of these events from the local head of police, except the case inside the church, which the police chief claimed was only five young men, not ten to fifteen.¹⁰² State officials did not like the persistent spectacle of mass church attendance on holy days, but nor did they desire confrontations, as these tended to reflect negatively on the anti-religion belligerents.

State Agents Combat Continued “Excessive” Religiosity

State agents were confronted not only by the persistence of religiosity, but more troublingly, by its revitalization as well. In 1960, Easter in Orthodox Churches in Moscow was still a major public event, however the commissioner might have wished to present it. On the eve and day of Easter, 16-17 April, 36 churches were in operation in Moscow. Easter services began near midnight on the 16th and lasted (with short breaks) until around noon on the 17th. Before the services, priests had consecrated Easter breads all day Saturday, from around ten in the morning until nine at night in the busiest parishes. Although such an event took place "within the fences of the church" and, the commissioner noted, with some efficiency (for minimal spectacle), by afternoon there were large queues around some churches. Bishop Pimen's church had hundreds in line at six in the evening. Trushin nevertheless asserted that "The total number of people 'consecrating' Easter breads this year was significantly fewer than Easter of last year," a situation "apparently explained by the fact that last Easter's 'consecration' of Easter breads coincided with a holiday (the 2nd of May)." Trushin was seemingly trying to console his readers by noting that among those in the queues, the "vast majority were women of elderly and middle age," the most acceptable profile of religious participants in the minds of state agents. There were reports of "people of younger age as well as children of school age who independently came," but these were "fundamentally a few," whereas others of school age came, but "were dragged by their grandmothers and parents." On Saturday around 10-11 o'clock at night "all churches in the city of Moscow were filled to capacity with worshippers," and Trushin named some churches that had several thousand worshippers at this time. Although it was very difficult to determine the number who passed through churches, Trushin said we "need to assume" it was somewhere around 300,000 people, and that some churches saw as many as 6 - 18,000 people.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Ibid., 57–58.

¹⁰³ Keston Archive, "Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report", 1960, Archive file <KGB 27>, p. 56. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 5, Del. 29.

Trushin also expressed concern that around many churches there was a "big congestion of people (numbering in the thousands) primarily of the curious, and basically it was youth (young women and young men) coming in large groups who were talking animatedly among themselves, laughing." Although informants did not notice such groups attending an Easter service, the fact that believers were filling up the enclosures of the churches, "standing with lit candles, praying to god and singing 'christ is risen,'" the possibility of influencing the young was present. Also, some 200 foreigners participated, including ambassadors from England and Japan, charges d'affaires from Greece and Denmark, a bishop from the Anglican Church, tourists, correspondents from foreign newspapers, and foreign students.¹⁰⁴ State agents wanted foreigners to witness the existence of religious "freedom," but they did not want such public religious displays to draw new participants.

In 1962 Trushin noted that people were still earnestly engaging in religious rites (baptism, burial, marriage). He saw rites as the part of religion that was "preserved foremost in people's way of life," that people attending church were "more interested in the formal fulfillment of the service, the theatricality of the divine service." Also, the singing appealed to some; the priests were what drew others. But noting that even some adults were being baptized, he wrote that "All of these facts should trouble us and we should lead a wide explanatory-educational work among the youth, explaining to them, that by such behavior they degrade the Soviet people and contribute to the propaganda of an ideology hostile to communism."¹⁰⁵

State agents struggled against the visual appeal of churches, represented by the beauty of the building, the interior, the service, or the throng of worshippers. They also chafed at its audible call to worship. One report referenced the supposed desire of workers for "quiet in the city," an effort which had been successful by limiting honking horns, loud singing, and factory whistles, but apparently "only the clanging of the church bells continues early in the morning and late in the evening." Officials supposedly had been receiving complaints from workers about this which caused them to notice that bell ringing was permitted by government regulation in 1945. Given the change in religious sentiment, Trushin mused, "it may be supposed quite timely for a proposal by the Moscow City Council (MosSovet) and Moscow Oblast Council to go to the

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 57.

¹⁰⁵ Keston Archive, "Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report", 1961, Archive file <KGB 28>, p. 74. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 5, Del. 30.

Council of Ministers of the USSR regarding a ban of churchbell ringing along with the abolition of horns from automobiles and locomotives, and factories."¹⁰⁶

While state agents grasped at acts which might lessen the visibility and audibility of religion, "the state" was harmed in this operation by its own divisions and entanglements with the churches. "The state" lacked the unanimity in motivation to resolve the "religious problem." One official happened to notice that "certain comrades of ours in consequence of complacency and carelessness wittingly or unwittingly by their own activities create the conditions conducive for churchmen for the revival of religious belief, celebration of religious holidays." One seemingly benign example of this was that store owners were selling church candles and Easter breads ("under the guise of 'spring muffins'"), a situation that they felt was fostering religious practice. Trushin did not wish to "dwell" on "careless comrades" making space for the "strengthening of churches" since the "leadership" was already informed, but he did bring up one example from the past year. "[T]hanks to careless comrades" from one district council (*raisovet*) the buildings of two churches that had been closed somehow "remained under the jurisdiction of churchmen," a situation that made it possible for them to submit new petitions to reopen them for church activities. Elsewhere, district council employees had provided believers with the necessary certificate to reopen a church. Trushin was also frustrated that locals did not block the possibility of the churches reactivating by closing churches that were decaying or lacking a priest and not holding services.¹⁰⁷ Local initiative in closing churches was lacking, and even some local officials acted diffidently at times. In 1962, churches were still being closed with regularity,¹⁰⁸ and applications to open them were very few after 1959 as opposed to hundreds in most years of the 1950s. This was a sign to Trushin that the "'need' has almost been eliminated." One of the applications to open a church in a town west of Moscow, Pavlovskii Posad, had 208 signatures on it, but Trushin dismissed it by saying the names were "almost all written by one and the same hand."¹⁰⁹ Because of the state-sponsored ideological claims about the natural decline of religion, state agents did not readily suggest that good Soviet citizens—other than old women, for whom an exception was made—would pursue an active religious life.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., Archive file <KGB 27>, 51-52.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., Archive file <KGB 28>, 248.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 1962, Archive file <KGB 103>. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 1, Del. 59.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 1962, Archive file <KGB 53>, p. 51-52. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 1, Del. 58.

Commissioners like Trushin were caught in a dilemma – they had to support the assertion that religiosity was declining, while explaining its persistence. According to official tabulations in the Oblast, there were only 300,000 belonging to an Orthodox religious organization in 136 churches, and of these, some 800 were on the “leadership teams” [aktivy] of churches, the members of committees or those somehow particularly involved. Trushin felt that the “center of atheist work must focus mainly on this category,” but the fact that 80-90% of the active ones were women who were homemakers or retired meant that they did not have employers to pressure them.¹¹⁰ Officials did not devise strategies to deal with this gendered situation, and Trushin’s reports wavered between assurances that only old women participated to concerns for religion’s growing popularity among youth. At the holiday of the Baptism of Christ in 1960 one young woman was discovered disseminating some printed religious material.¹¹¹ Officials also kept note of the participation of intelligentsia in the choirs. They had a mental hierarchy of people, with old retired women the least consequential. Evidently if youth, intellectuals, or workers became interested in religion, this was a very troubling prospect for state power, especially if some of “their own” were the ones propping up religious activity:

We cannot put up with the fact that our cadres, having received education at the Government’s expense, cooperated ‘for pieces of silver’ [Judas reference] with *popy* [somewhat derogatory term for priests], with people whose ideology is alien to us. Aren’t these facts able to worry us, when many pensioners—in their own day awarded by orders and medals of the Soviet Union—participate in church choirs, in ‘*dvadtsatki*’, are active in church and receive for this from it the corresponding bribe, thereby selling their good past for ‘a mess of pottage’ [an idiom originally referring to Esau hungrily selling his birthright for Jacob’s lentil stew]. We, of course, in these situations would prefer to prohibit them, but isn’t it our duty, the duty of party, soviet, and other societal organizations to convince these people that they are doing not-good things, that by such behavior they degrade the Soviet people and contribute to the propaganda of an ideology hostile to communism[?]¹¹²

Interestingly, Trushin and other state officials saw people as betraying “us,” the Soviet Union, when they supported the “alien” ideology of religion, even if their participation was for supposedly mercenary reasons, like singing in the choir for pay. But it was unlikely to be only for mercenary reasons that intellectuals or “good workers” went to church in the religiously antagonistic Soviet Union.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 1961, Archive file <KGB 28>, p. 247. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 5, Del. 30.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 1960, Archive file <KGB 27>, p. 6. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 5, Del. 29.

¹¹² Ibid., 1960, Archive file <KGB 28>, p. 246-247. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 5, Del. 30. Trushin’s familiarity with religious idioms is striking in this passage.

Evidence which conflicted with the fundamentals of Soviet ideology did not typically lead to officials' reassessment of their ideology. Trushin was perplexed, for example, to find that in the tiny village of Tatarintsevo southeast of Moscow, the church was made "active" by believers from the village of Ryblovo around seven kilometers away, despite the fact that the "material and cultural level" of Ryblovo was higher, boasting one of the most successful kolkhozes of the oblast. Associating religiosity with a lack of development, Trushin remarked that "It would seem the religiosity in Tatarintsevo should be higher. Yet in actuality the situation is the opposite."¹¹³ He had no explanation for the conflict that evidence presented, as his working ideological framework did not suggest people could be interested in religion for reasons independent of their socio-economic reality.

Trushin Further Defines the Limits to Acceptable Priestly Activity

As was customary throughout the Soviet period, during the anti-religious campaign too state agents especially blamed priests for instances of revitalized religiosity. One official reported that Orthodox priests were bordering on being "Jesuits" by the "sneaky" ways in which they were getting extra income. Priests were working at making choirs more "active" and were continuing to draw people into them.¹¹⁴ Trushin unwittingly admitted that believers had agency, saying "The more effectively the priest executes his role, the more success he enjoys," but he still laid the blame on priests. As an example, a certain young priest "performed the divine service well," but then when he was replaced, the new one "satisfie[d] the parishioners less": "They complain that he is old, small in stature, has a weak voice, i.e. he is not able to arrange such an effective show as his predecessor did. Parishioners started to visit church less, in connection with which, as a church warden informed officials, church income decreased."¹¹⁵ This "fact" led Trushin to conclude that young clergy were more active and better able to animate the people, and that this group was a cause of increased religiosity. This belief about younger priests was certainly connected to the state-driven closure of five seminaries. Trushin and other officials refused to acknowledge that parishioners had their own preferences or power as audiences.

¹¹³ Ibid., 249.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 73.

¹¹⁵ Keston Archive, "Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report", 1962, Archive file <KGB 53>, p. 41-42. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 1, Del. 58.

In contrast to priests whom officials found religiously acceptable, “active” priests paid “special attention” to “preaching, fulfilling religious duties and conducting individual work with believers.” For state agents, to put extra energy into religion was to cross the line of acceptability. Trushin claimed that some such priests became “so enthralled with this work” that they “stepped over their own borders and violated soviet legislation.” Although we see here how Trushin admitted the existence of a line between acceptable and unacceptable religiosity, it is clear that “soviet legislation” existed as ready recourse any time priests got religiously “enthralled.” Indeed, Trushin bragged, “their actions were stopped in time” thanks to intervention by officials. As a result, five priests were stripped of their registration and an additional fifteen “trying to violate the legislation (while performing rites), were strictly warned.”¹¹⁶

The content of sermons was one area in which priests might transgress the line of acceptable religiosity. Although Orthodox priests often preached from texts distributed by the hierarchy, Trushin reported that “some of them have more often begun to speak out with different sermons,” whose content was “not limited only to interpretations of so-called ‘holy writings’ and the gospels” but were “trying to address issues of morality, raising children, and so on.” One priest, Fadeev, was stripped of registration for these reasons. Fadeev was connecting the problem of “hooligan acts” of youth to “people forgetting god” and not “raising them in a religious spirit.” Priests were also “taking measures such that rites performed in the church (baptism, wedding, confession) [we]re accompanied by explanations of their ‘divine meaning.’” One village priest, way on the far east edge of Moscow Oblast reportedly “tried to address political questions” when the primary message of one of his sermons was that “all of life went ‘according to the precepts of Christ, that Christ has long wanted an abundance of blessings for mankind.’” How was this priest political? Life was to go according to the “precepts of Lenin” – not Christ.¹¹⁷ The above examples ran contrary to the tame, private, ritualistic religion officials desired, as topics escaped the boundaries of abstract expansions on “holy” texts.

If the above messages were posited as too oppositional, messages which too intimately framed religion and communism together were also discouraged, since the point was not a happy coexistence of the two in the future. Some priests were “attracting the attention and trust of believers” by “affirming their loyalty” to the Soviet state and even saying that “religion

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 42.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 42–43.

not only didn't interfere with the building of communism, but the opposite – it helps it." The problem with building a picture of compatibility was that then people were no longer deterred from attending; there were no ideological barriers.¹¹⁸ This is a contrast with the case in Romania, where a symbiosis of the Church and State was much more commonly accepted, even if official ideology did not harmonize materialist and religious worldviews.

Addressing Problem Priests

In open churches, priests still conducted the liturgy and delivered homilies, and people attended the services and took part in church rites. The cases of Mikhail Trukhanov and Aleksandr Men' demonstrate that even during the anti-religious campaign, remote rural parishes and churches in central Moscow nevertheless afforded opportunities for religious "activation," as officials put it, but that such activity quickly brought such priests under negative scrutiny from church and state representatives.

The Case of Fr Trukhanov

The church of Besevo in Moscow Oblast needed a new priest in 1960, and Mikhail Trukhanov was appointed as its rector. The outgoing rector told Trukhanov that "it's a village church, there is no congregation, people don't go. So somehow to have contact with people, you sometimes need both to drink, but maybe, to smoke with them too. Then somehow a conversation ties in, and I could say a little something then about faith or the Christian life." Trukhanov did not take this advice. After Trukhanov had been priest for a half year, his church—to the visiting former Rector's surprise—was "almost full of people."

Trukhanov animated religious life in Besevo, mainly by his fervor. He emphasized that all read the gospels and learn certain prayers. One woman recalls that his way of praying, conducting of services, and delivering sermons at every service "drew parishioners to him from nearby areas." When believers of the nearby towns of Kashira, Stupin, and Ozyory heard from one another "that in the village of Besevo an unusual priest is serving," many came from there too. Several people became his spiritual children at this time.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 44.

¹¹⁹ Mikhail Trukhanov, *Vospominaniia: Ne Mogu ne Govorit' o Khriste: Besedy, Propovedi, Vospominaniia: Materialy k Zhizneopisaniiu, Chast' II 1956-2006 gg* [Recollections: I cannot not Speak of Christ: Conversations, Sermons, Recollections: Materials for a Biography, Part II, 1956-2006], ed. V. A. Zvonkova, vol. 2, 2008, 44–45. For years after his service there, his spiritual children wanted him to visit them for long periods, and they visited him wherever he was. They even bought a little cabin for him nearby for him to stay when there, even though he had only served there from 1960 to 1962.

In August of 1962, Fr. Mikhail was called upon to serve in the church of All Saints in Moscow because three of its priests were either on sick-leave or holiday. He did there what he did in Besevo, preaching at the service whether it was a morning, evening, or weekday service. He tried to make his sermons full of “unpretentious explanations.” He did not strive for something “special,” but “just wanted the people to have at least something they comprehended.” Perhaps for this reason even young people started attending or requesting time to meet with him.¹²⁰ V.A. Zvonkova was in her twenties and sang in the choir of All Saints in the early 1960s. At that time, she recalls, “mainly older people” went to church. When Trukhanov appeared at All Saints, coincidentally during the height of the anti-religious campaign, she noticed that he “served zealously” and that “youth came to him.” People would go to him or call him with requests for prayer for personal or health matters. They would go to his house for important spiritual discussions and decisions.¹²¹

Predictably, this “rubbed the commissioner for religious affairs the wrong way.” He likely directed the Rector and the Dean to “reprimand” Trukhanov for the fact that his preaching was “attracting young people.” Trukhanov’s impression was that it was “criminal” to attract youth at this time,¹²² and in fact although it was illegal to try to attract youth under eighteen, state agents considered attracting even young people over eighteen unacceptable, as good as illegal. Nobody questioned why youth might be attracted to good preaching, only that attractive preaching should simply not be available.

But the commissioner was not the only one upset by Trukhanov; it appears jealousy also played a role among his fellow clergy. One believer had rather liked the Rector of All Saints, recalling how “he was quite beautiful in appearance, had long hair, which in those days was a rarity; second, he was a good singer, frequently sang solo with the choir [...], served beautifully and gave a sermon. Everything about him was good.” But when the Rector and others were on leave and Fr. Mikhail came in to serve, this believer liked that Trukhanov invited people to linger as he explained aspects of the service to them and simply talked with them. As the days passed, word spread, and more people came, and “by the end of his three-month service in this church, people started to come on weekdays as for the great feast days.” The chapel was full, and, as one believer recalls, “you kept hearing, ‘And when will the father serve next?’”¹²³

¹²⁰ Ibid., 2:55.

¹²¹ Ibid., 2:213–14.

¹²² Ibid., 2:55.

¹²³ Ibid., 2:61–62.

Then, the rector returned from holiday. The Sunday evening service was full—not a normal occurrence. The service ended, but the people did not disperse immediately (also unusual), but stood there as though waiting for something. When the rector passed through, most got out of his way, and only a few stayed in his path to request a blessing from him. And still the people stayed. Fr. Mikhail was very long in coming out, probably hoping to avoid an uncomfortable scene, but eventually, as the people were clearly waiting for him, he did come out, only to have the people throng to him for a blessing. Zvonkova felt at that moment that it was like “a betrayal on the part of the worshipers,” and that the Rector “could not endure” it.

Already Monday the Rector had called with a denunciation of Trukhanov, saying that he was “rowdy, serves in a drunken state, distorts the Canon” and so on.¹²⁴ The latter was called in to the Patriarch's office, and Bishop Kiprian (Zernov) “pounced” on him:

You failed in the priesthood! You can't even do the service, but you aspire to preaching! You don't even have one class of seminary! [...] And then you still permit such an impudence that you even distort the Eucharistic Canon during the service! [...] You're always drunk! There's not a single day, as they write me, not a single day that you were sober! You incite fights at the altar! You scandalize!

It was true that he had not yet completed his theological training, but in the Orthodox Church, it was possible to be ordained as a priest or deacon prior to theological training.

The Bishop admitted that he received the accusations from the Rector and Dean, with the signature of the warden, showing the collusion of the church leaders against him. The Bishop was displeased that Trukhanov made an enemy of the Rector, and Trukhanov tried to argue that he merely tried to “speak from the soul [...] to the souls of the listeners,” and the people “feel” this and become “attracted” to him, leading the Rector to feel “envy and hatred.” The bishop scoffed at the idea that people could love him “after two-and-a-half months of service,” calling it instead “satanic charm,” “putative fervor, pharisaical performance of fasts” and overly dramatic “deep bows.” The Bishop faulted him for wanting to be “unlike other priests,” as this was evidence of “satanic pride.” He also heard from the rector that Trukhanov was adding “some kind of prayers,” but tweaking the liturgy was prohibited, warranting “investigation.” The Bishop said that by “allowing himself all kinds of liberties,” Trukhanov proved that he did “not know how to serve.”¹²⁵ Here, the Bishop signaled that a good clergyman was first and foremost concerned with conformity, not serving any particular desires of the

¹²⁴ Ibid., 2:62.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 2:56–57.

parishioners. Yet Bishops indeed needed to ensure that priests were not distorting Orthodox beliefs and practices.

Despite having served at All Saints and Besevo alone, the Bishop noted to him that "Everywhere you serve you make scandals with your colleagues."¹²⁶ Without a doubt informers were relaying some of the details of Trukhanov's service, and leaders had to explain his popularity as resulting from dubious activity on his part, not on the coincidence of a priest and a congregation wanting the same things. At All Saints, the Rector insisted Trukhanov no longer set foot in his church. He likely did not want Trukhanov's admirers asking about him any longer. Some of Trukhanov's supporters tried to advocate on his behalf and clear up the accusations. A few believers tried to get an audience with Archbishop Kiprian (Zernov) to explain that Trukhanov's removal from All Saints was because "he was unfairly slandered." The bishop's secretary would not admit them (instead they were kept waiting in a dark room until long after reception hours ended), and then warned them not to come back, "otherwise it would be bad."¹²⁷

But just as Trukhanov's downfall had come from above, surprisingly, so did his redemption. At the end of the year as Patriarch Aleksii was reviewing the situation of the priests, he investigated the curious situation of Trukhanov, found he had been unjustly slandered, interviewed him, and offered him a position under the Patriarch.¹²⁸ By March of 1963, Trukhanov had received an appointment in the church of Transfiguration in Peredelkino. His relationship with his colleagues there was better, and the Patriarch gave him his blessing to get theological education, and the Rector of Peredelkino wrote his character recommendation for him.¹²⁹ Although Trukhanov's popularity led to church and state authorities' demanding his removal from All Saints, he gained life-long spiritual children during those three months and was saved by the lack of unanimity in the Church leadership. But as we will discover in Chapter VI, state agents now identified Trukhanov as a suspect priest, and they would continue to try to rein in his religious zeal and ability to animate believers.

The Case of Aleksandr Men'

At the time of the anti-religion campaign, young Aleksandr Men' had just finished his degree at the Agricultural Institute in Irkutsk, but he was keen to pursue a career in the Church.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 2:57.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 2:235.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 2:60.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 2:75.

He served as a deacon for a priest he knew and began to study at the seminary. Two years later, he was ordained as a priest, and in September of 1960 he became priest in Alabino and was named rector there a year later. The parish there was in bad shape, as previous priests had lost believers' trust due to alcoholism and other scandals.¹³⁰ He served under a new Rector, who soon after transferred to another parish, and then so did the successive Rector. Men' became Rector in 1961, age 26.

Men' worked toward the restoration of the parish, physically and morally. Assisted greatly by the efforts of his assistant priest, the warden, and other volunteers, he organized the restoration of the church, painting of icons, and new ornamentations of the church façade. The work was made possible by the fact that state agents did not take the parish car away, and two drivers from the parish were often aiding Men' in the efforts of restoration. Despite the closing of churches under Khrushchev, news of the "excellent" restoration of the Alabino church made the local paper.¹³¹

In addition to appreciating the quality of his services, believers stayed after Vespers on Saturday evenings as Men' would explain the faith, its symbols and meanings. People would come from neighboring villages and summer dachas, since it was the only church open for several villages, but people even drove out from the relatively distant city of Naro-Fominsk. Men' also managed to attract young people to the faith in such a way that they began to become more active in the Church.

Men' reportedly had good relations with the local authorities in his district. In addition to continued permission for use of a parish car, he received approval to conduct memorial services outside of the church in cemeteries, supposedly forbidden in the Soviet Union, and he used these as opportunities to preach or explain the faith. When the commissioner questioned him about this activity, he had a stack of some 200 authorizations from the local executive committee for each service. He even helped local authorities with "economic issues" [*khoziaistvennye voprosy*], something for which they appreciated him.¹³² By just having a drink

¹³⁰ Zoia Maslenikova, *Aleksandr Men': zhizn' [Aleksandr Men': Life]* (Moskva: Zakharov, 2001), 180.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 184–85.

¹³² "Биография Прот. Александра Меня [Biography of Archpriest Aleksandr Men']," accessed July 8, 2016, <http://www.alexandrmn.ru/biogr/biogr.html>; Aleksandr Men', *O sebe...: vospominaniia, interv'iu, besedy, pis'ma [About me...: memories, interviews, talks, letters]* (Moskva: Fond imeni Aleksandra Menia : Izd-vo "Zhizn' s Bogom," 2007), 78; Maslenikova, *Aleksandr Men'*, 190–91.

with a policeman, for example, he found they could "simply and easily" talk and come to an agreement.¹³³

He did his work deliberately, aware of the "particularities" of his society—namely that religion had at best only a begrudged place, subject to antagonism from many directions. Influenced by Mechev and the Mechevites (see Chapter II on Pestov and Sokolova), he too wanted "from the very beginning" to adopt this way, which Men' says was characterized by "openness to the world and its problems." Thus, he endeavored in Alabino and thereafter to "break the ice" with parishioners in his sermons, to find "new language" that would connect to "issues that concerned people of today."¹³⁴ Men' used the gatherings at church services as opportunities for people to notice one another. He wanted to "unite the parish, to make from it a community, and not a random compound of people [...]." He also encouraged the flock to "help one another, pray together, study Scripture together, partake of communion together."¹³⁵ As rector, Men' impressed this upon the priest under him, Sergei Khokhlov, encouraging him to give sermons and talk with the people.¹³⁶

But as the decisions from the 1961 Council of Bishops to limit priests' power in the parish in favor of the laity became clear to Men' and several other young friends and priests, they were outraged. They felt they could not trust the bishops any longer as their spiritual guides.¹³⁷ Men' had been meeting regularly with other figures featured in this study, including priests Dimitrii Dudko, Nikolai Eshliman, Gleb Yakunin, essayist Anatolii Levitin-Krasnov, and others to discuss the state of Church. They kept coming back to the *Sobor* of 1961, "the connivance of the bishops," and that their superiors had put power in the hands of the warden as a fairly direct way for state bodies to manage church affairs. They perceived that at the whims of the *raispolkom* or Council for Religious Affairs, state representatives could dictate their wishes, forcing the warden to find a suitable excuse for anti-church actions.¹³⁸ They contacted Archbishop Ermogen of Kaluga, whom they witnessed dissenting from the decisions, to be

¹³³ Maslenikova, *Aleksandr Men'*, 250.

¹³⁴ Men', *O Sebe*, 85.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 94.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 108.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 111; Maslenikova, *Aleksandr Men'*, 195.

¹³⁸ Men', *O Sebe*, 127. Other priests Men' named were Nikolai Vedernikov, Aleksei Zlovin, Vladimir Timakov, and Sergei Khokhlov, his fellow priest in Alabino.

“their” bishop, and he visited Alabino and “warmly” met with them and listened to the priests’ concerns.¹³⁹

Men’s trust of the Patriarchate was further shaken after he published a theological article in the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*. The response of the Patriarchate to his article was that “we petty theologians” should “hold firmly to the patristic interpretation” and not engage in any “imitation” of the “rationalists-protestants.” In essence, the reply suggested that although his interpretation of the passage may have been correct, it was better that all things demonstrate an unwavering consistency with the Tradition of Orthodoxy, even if Men’s message might have been intended to edify believers.

Although it is unclear whether this journal article or the priestly meetings influenced Trushin’s demand that Men’ leave his parish, he reported that he found the religiosity of Men’ and his activated parish unacceptable in 1964. He identified Men’s parish among a few that clashed with CROCA’s goal of “strengthening control of observance of religious legislation.” In other words, the Council’s goal was not strengthening control of religions, but adherence to the law. In Men’s parish the Council “uncovered broad charity work,” where the church “was being used like a ‘feeding trough’” for the warden, the treasurer, the chauffeur, priest Aleksandr Men’, and a “few others.” Apparently the warden and one other parishioner admitted that they used the church “for selfish and acquisitive goals,” and they were warned about the “violations of soviet legislation.” Trushin stripped the executive organ and renovation committee of registration.¹⁴⁰ Men’s home was also searched by police, and he was temporarily accused of stealing certain historical valuables, but this problem eventually disappeared.

Trushin demanded that Men’ quit Alabino, and the warden there was also removed. Men’ found an opening in Taraskovo, and signed a contract to go there. With Men’ gone and the

¹³⁹ Maslenikova, *Aleksandr Men’*, 195. In 1965, eight bishops headed by Archbishop Ermogen submitted a statement that the decisions from the 1961 bishop's meeting led to "a disruption of church life in the parishes" and destroyed the "hierarchical principle" according to which Russian Orthodox churches functioned, as now priests had no authority, nor did the bishops, over parish life. They noted that no bishops would object to the return to clergy their traditional authority. But, the Patriarch and Holy Synod responded by declaring the "illegality of his actions" and that he and the others should renounce their statement. Yermogen took responsibility for the whole thing. Subsequently, the Kaluga Oblast Executive Committee put together a list of "unfounded" complaints about Yermogen and requested his removal to CRA chief Kuroedov, at whose behest Metropolitan Aleski of Tallinn told Yermogen that he should request indefinite leave. He did not, but requested a transfer. Holy Synod rejected this request and retired him to a monastery. See Bourdeaux, *Patriarch and Prophets*, 222-223, 317.

¹⁴⁰ Keston Archive, “Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report”, 1965. Archive file <KGB 54>, p. 89. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 1, Del. 71.

warden removed, the religious effervescence came to an end in Alabino.¹⁴¹ And never again would Men' have as favorable of conditions in which to conduct his work as he did in Alabino during the anti-religious campaign, as will be revealed later;¹⁴² his unacceptable religiosity had made him a marked priest.

Anti-religious pressure eases

Although pressure on problematic priests persisted, the centrally-directed anti-religious campaign subsided somewhat in 1963. On March 25, 1963, CROCA head Kuroedov, sent a letter to commissioners about "gross violations" by local authorities and certain commissioners in carrying out the resolution passed by the Ministers on March 16, 1961. He attacked them for not "considering the presence of believers" and "arbitrarily closing churches and prayer houses" during their "fight with religious prejudices." He claimed that many closures were accomplished "on the pretext" that certain communities had stopped their activities, or that the *dvadtsatki* or executive committees disbanded or resigned, when this was not the case. He then offered some negative examples, even naming commissioners.¹⁴³ Kuroedov was not afraid to throw his own team under the bus when the orders came from above to change policies.

Of course he defended his leadership and the Council's respect for religious freedom, noting that "more than once" the Council told them that the "closing churches and prayer houses should only be, first of all, as a result of major educational work with believers along with separating them from religion and the church." The "duty of a commissioner" was to ensure "no infringement of freedom of conscience, that insulting the feelings of believers is not allowed, that stripping registration from religious societies is carried out in exact accordance with instructions on the application of the soviet legislation on cults." His ministry was "stressing" that the "here and there" closing of churches "is nothing but a perversion of the politics of our party and of the Soviet Government on relations to religion and the church and greatly harms the issue of communist education of laborers." Using the schism that was forming among the Evangelical Christians-Baptists as a warning, Kuroedov reminded his commissioners that "any incidence of arbitrariness and of administration on relations to the church which insults the feelings of believers are used by churchmen for igniting religious fanaticism, the

¹⁴¹ Men', *O Sebe*, 135–39.

¹⁴² "Biografiia Prot. Aleksandra Menia [Biography of Archpriest Aleksandr Men']."

¹⁴³ Keston Archive, "Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report", 1963, Archive file <KGB 189>, p. 21. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 1, Del. 61.

mobilization of believers, and the strengthening of their own influence on the backward part of the population.” He reminded them that only when the believers stop going to the church and supporting it materially are they allowed to cease granting it registration. If the building must be taken for reasons of city reconstruction, then believers must be provided another place “in actuality, and not fictitiously.”¹⁴⁴ Evidently, top officials were taking more seriously the drawbacks of state authorities not complying with existing legislation, particularly in terms of the state’s domestic and international reputation. Tighter controls were not only not having the effect of reducing religious fervor as top officials desired, but leading to aggressive responses by believers.

Trushin was not among those specifically named in this un-reflexive critique of Kuroedov’s. The latter did not blame state antagonistic discourse for zealous acts by local authorities, nor did he take responsibility for unclear instructions or vague references to published laws, a scenario that could only guarantee battles. Rather, Kuroedov’s letter was an example of directing by shaming those under authority. Perhaps duly cautious, Trushin had not caused any widespread backlash by citizens in his closure of Orthodox Churches. But in the Orthodox Church, backlash from disagreeing clergy was yet to come (as successive chapters will reveal), and it would be directed primarily against the leadership of the Church and later the State, just as it was in the Evangelical-Baptist Church. Although overly zealous representatives of the government (whether commissioners or members of local executive committees) contributed to plenty of localized complaining and petitioning, by far the greatest unwanted spillover in the Orthodox Church was generated by the complicity of church representatives in deliberately limiting existing religious freedoms, as will be demonstrated later.

These utterances of Kuroedov’s probably also aimed at lessening the major debacle caused in the ECB Church. In September 1963, the AUCECB was suddenly permitted a congress (the only previous one permitted was the first, in 1944) with some 250 delegates representing the non-dissenting faction (most reformist leaders were in prison already), and the 1960 changes were relegated to “proposals,” with new statutes no longer conforming to the law of 1929 and reflecting many of the demands of the *initsiativniki*, but never referencing them.¹⁴⁵ Bourdeaux argues that the “many concessions” show the “extreme pressure” that reformists

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 23–24.

¹⁴⁵ Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II*, 209; Bourdeaux, *Religious Ferment in Russia*, 66–67.

exerted.¹⁴⁶ This, evidently, was a strategy permitted with state backing to try to keep as many churches above-ground and registered as possible by conforming to most evangelicals' wishes. Despite this move, the *Orgkomitet*—not invited to the congress—was not appeased by this implicit admission of guilt but still considered the congress invalid, since its representatives could not have a chance to deliver their statements.¹⁴⁷ For Reformists, AUCECB leaders would apparently not only need to imply that they were wrong, but to give the Reformists a voice in the denomination as well.

As for ordinary believers who were sympathetic to the claims of the Reformists, it would take time for them to trust the AUCECB again. Its leaders noted after the Congress in its publication, the *Bratskii Vestnik* (Fraternal Herald), that such a Congress represented "'a balm of consolation and peace for our churches, for there are no further reasons for arguments and mutual recriminations,'" and they also sent out a "fraternal letter" and promised to help churches register. Then, leaders traveled to visit churches, even in Siberia. Holdouts were cast as disappointments for obstructing a path to reunification. Still, officials did not yet allow ECB communities to register new churches, offering little with which AUCECB leaders could entice breakaway communities.¹⁴⁸ Plus, state agents decided to get stricter with groups who did not accept the AUCECB after the 1963 changes, since the amendments were supposed to appease the criticisms. When ECB churches continued to distrust the AUCECB's leadership or criticize it, there was no grace period for them.¹⁴⁹

Imprisonments for leaders of renegade ECB churches continued in 1964. And, still in 1964, an article appeared in *Kommunist* by Leonid Il'ichev, one of Khrushchev's chief ideologists, who wrote that no "rapprochement" between Christianity and Communism was possible, and he complained about the privileges granted during WWII, ones which were essentially illegal.¹⁵⁰ Another wave of anti-religious action was still possible in such a climate, but Khrushchev's removal in favor of Leonid Brezhnev meant a change in emphasis was likely. The anti-religious campaign had become another debacle that likely contributed to Khrushchev's demise in the eyes of other top officials.

¹⁴⁶ Bourdeaux, *Religious Ferment in Russia*, 78.

¹⁴⁷ Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II*, 142, 228.

¹⁴⁸ Bourdeaux, *Religious Ferment in Russia*, 68–73.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 78.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 93.

Conclusion

As historian Mikhail V. Shkarovskii points out, the 13,400 churches, 12,000 priests, and 56 monasteries in 1958 were down to 7,500, 7,400 priests, and 19, respectively. But, Shkarovskii writes, “the populace was more religious than ever.”¹⁵¹ When Khrushchev aimed to limit religion, he did so in response to a society that had an increasing number of people interested or active in religion since before the war. Yet at the same time, he also wished to maintain a certain domestic and international reputation that depended on how state agents treated ordinary religious citizens. State agents claimed to protect freedom of religious conscience, but they had to try to maintain a façade of such while attacking communally dynamic religiosity. They did so largely by targeting specific priests or active believers as violating the law that was couched as existing to protect the freedoms of the people. In short, they tried to isolate them and make them the “others” in a society that otherwise practiced religion quite acceptably: individualistically, privately, ritualistically, or traditionally, and always in submission to the established authorities—in this case, church hierarchs supported by state officials. As before, officials did not express the concern that even such “acceptable” religion could provide powerful means for people to find alternative identities, belonging, or ideologies.

Khrushchev and others who advocated aggressive anti-religious policies did not anticipate the force of the reactions from certain religionists. In the ECB Churches, the declarations of the AUCECB leadership brought about an embarrassing and worse situation than before Khrushchev’s attacks, as now he unwittingly created a large clandestine ECB Church animated by the most religiously zealous and using underground techniques. Clandestine and unregistered church services were problems that Brezhnev would have to address directly. Negative reactions within the Orthodox Church to its leaders’ agenda further limiting priests’ scope of activity were muted at first, but younger, more idealistic priests would find their voice increasingly after Khrushchev once it became evident that nothing was changing under Brezhnev.

The anti-religion campaign had made obvious certain unresolved tensions in Soviet society and the churches. From the state side, the campaign illuminated the tension of state-sponsored atheism and the incompatibility of religion with communism alongside a state authority dependent on having a contented populace, something that required a degree of normalization of religious practice. From the church side, the campaign exposed the spectrum of

¹⁵¹ Shkarovskii, “The Russian Orthodox Church in 1958-64,” 94.

opinion churchmen and churchwomen had regarding the best way of responding to the state's anti-church measures.

V. Romania and the Establishment of Religious Reliability, 1956 – 1964

Since the state agents' initial attempts to ensure the reliability of religious personnel during the late 1940s and early 1950s, state dealings with the religions were more focused on normalization. But the furor in Poland and Hungary in particular in 1956 caused Romanian officials to reconsider their level of trust of participants in religious-based associations.

The 1956 Hungarian Revolution and State Crackdown on Associational Life

On October 23, 1956, a group of students demonstrating in Budapest sparked a revolt against the communist authorities, causing a collapse of the communist government in Hungary. They made many demands, including the withdrawal of Hungary from the Warsaw Pact that kept it firmly within the sphere of Soviet influence. When it seemed that the revolution just might be successful, a formidable Soviet force, including tanks, crossed into Hungary and fought to retake control, which it did by November 10. Many died fighting; others were subsequently tried and executed.

There were many sympathizers with the revolutionaries among the Hungarian minority in Transylvania. While some may have seen the struggle as one featuring Hungarians for a free Hungary against Soviet-backed stooges, other Hungarians in Romania were simply concerned for the situation due to having relatives or acquaintances in Hungary. Romanian officials were monitoring the situation, and they kept sensitive ears toward the Hungarians living in Romania. There were a few public acts and demonstrations of sympathy, but more commonly, people privately listened to foreign broadcasts and discussed the situation among themselves. Some groups, more or less formal, had been occupied with "the Transylvanian question" (the problem of Hungarian minorities and the desire to re-join Hungary), so the events in Hungary and the possibility of a freer society only heightened the importance of this issue for them. Some students in Cluj even demonstrated in solidarity with the rebels in Hungary. To preempt further acts or even displays of disloyalty, Romanian officials brought to trial as many of those who

made public utterances or demonstrations in favor of the revolutionaries in Hungary as they could.¹

But arrests, trials, and imprisonments were not limited to public displays of solidarity with Hungary. In fact, just a lack of outward displays of loyalty toward the Romanian communist regime became grounds for suspicion, and Ministry of Religion representatives had been keeping track of less-than-reliable elements within the churches as well. Two Hungarian officials from the Department of Religions in Târgu Mureș wrote a special report to Bucharest dated 10 December 1956 about the responses by members of the Reformed, Roman Catholic, and (former) Greek-Catholic churches to the events in Hungary. As for the latter two, they did not have much to report of concern, but the officials found strong evidence of disloyalty in the Reformed Church.

Describing the events in Hungary as perpetrated by the imperialists who were not afraid of World War Three and who wanted to “subjugate the population,” the officials contended that people from their district, the Autonomous Hungarian Region, did not publicly express support on the street, but “quietly they were in agreement” with the goings-on there, and “this solidarity” was witnessed most prominently “along church lines.” Certain pastors prayed for the victims there, for example. But the problem of such misguided solidarity could be traced even earlier, they wrote, as visits by current and former Bishops from Hungary elicited certain unsavory opinions from the Reformed clergy and leadership in Romania. When the Hungarian Bishop Berecki visited some local church representatives in Romania, some of them privately “condemned” the bishops of Hungary, criticizing them as having “sold the church to the communists.” Also, a letter signed by pre-communist Bishop in Hungary László Ravasz circulated. In it, he supposedly called for “the intensification of actions of faith, and to hurry the resurrection of bethanism and called to action all priests, being that the most opportune time

¹ Gyula Dávid, ed., *1956 Erdélyben: politikai elítéltek életrajzi adattára, 1956-1965 [1956 in Transylvania: a Biographical Database of Political Prisoners, 1956-1965]* (Kolozsvár: Erdélyi Múzeum-Egyesület Polis, 2006) This is an excellent resource of all of the Hungarian groups from Transylvania that were sentenced and imprisoned in the 1956-1964 period, some 60 different groups of varying sizes and sentences. Has an index of all of the people sentenced with source information, group, charge, sentence, place of residence, date of birth and death, etc.

had arrived.” Two Reformed Deans in Romania were also overheard praising Ravasz while condemning current Bishops’ pandering to the communist government in Hungary.²

It was in this “atmosphere,” officials wrote, that the Cluj Bishopric of the Reformed Church convened a general assembly. Those attending the conference “did not come out openly [and discuss] the problems with regard to the events in Hungary, but in the corridor the problems were discussed in an intense and open way.” Moreover, the conference “created a psychological atmosphere” when “they held a church service of mourning” for the victims of the events in Hungary. The inspector also noticed that at a recent inter-confessional conference the Reformed clergy and dean did “not even say a word” and “not even half of the reformed clergy were present.” The dean who organized the conference did not prepare anything specific and only read a declaration made by professors at the seminary pertaining to these events. These “facts” made it clear that “with this attitude they do not serve the population but the enemies of the construction of socialism.”³ Clergy were supposed to make obvious their loyalties by defaming those engaged in “counter-revolutionary” activities in Budapest as enemies.

Based on this report, the Ministry of Religions in Bucharest wrote their own report, summarizing the situation. They expressed concern for some dubious utterances by Reformed Bishop Vásárhelyi, in addition to conveying the findings of the local inspectors from Târgu Mureș. “In conclusion,” they wrote, “from the few manifestations which were able to be collected, it becomes clear that the Hungarian Reformed clergy is dominated by a reactionary and chauvinist sentiment. This obliges the organs of the Ministry of Religions to a particular attention and vigilance pertaining to further training in a much greater measure of these priests toward action in supporting our regime of popular democracy.”⁴ The Ministry saw it as less of a religious problem, than one of political allegiances, and members of the Hungarian Reformed Church displayed their disloyalties by their ethnic “chauvinism.”

² Arhivele Naționale ale României, Fond “Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor – Direcția Studii (1945-1963),” Dos. 87, 1956, 3–4.

³ Ibid., 4–5.

⁴ Ibid., 15–16.

Instead of seeing the uprising in Budapest as violence perpetrated by “imperialists” against the legitimate government in Hungary in an attempt to “subjugate” the population, as was the party line, agents from the Ministry of Religions perceived that too many clergy reacted sympathetically with the failed rebels in Hungary. That a sizeable sector of the Reformed Church were ambivalent in their loyalties worried the authorities, since an uprising in Romania might find sympathy or even active support from within the ranks of the Reformed Church. Thus soon after the failed revolution of 1956 in Hungary, the state preemptively moved against any potentially disloyal elements within the Hungarian community, many of whom were members of the Reformed Church. There were around 60 separate trials of groups of people, all arrested and found guilty of some sort of crime, with the number of those sentenced beyond 1,200.⁵

The “Bethanist” pastors and believers might have continued their pseudo-clandestine gatherings, but the events of 1956 led to new threats. It was not a good time to be a Hungarian nor an intellectual, and it certainly was not good to participate in a pseudo-clandestine organization or network, even if the meetings had no political agenda. Although threats and pressures were present since 1948, these pastors had not been categorically imprisoned in the earliest waves that swept up Orthodox, Greek-Catholic, and Catholic leadership, priests, and laity who were regarded as threatening communist power.

⁵ Dávid, *1956 Erdélyben*; Ferenc Gazda, *Elrabolt Esztendőik: 1956-1964 [Stolen Years: 1956-1964]* (Kolozsvár: Polis, 2006); Zoltán Tófalvi, *1956 Erdélyi Mártírjai [The 1956 Transylvanian Martyrs]* (Marosvásárhely: Mentor, 2009); Dezső Buzogány and Csongor Jánosi, *A Református Egyház Romániában a Kommunista Rendszer Első Felében: Tanulmányok és Dokumentumok [The Reformed Church in Romania in the First Half of the Communist Regime: Essays and Documents]* (Budapest: L'Harmattan Kiadó, 2011). As a not atypical example, Dezső László, who was Dean in Kolozsvár (Cluj) and had been jailed for two years previously for unspecified reasons, was rearrested in 1957. This time, he was arrested and sentenced as part of the Dobai group (an association of people linked to István Dobai, a lawyer who concerned himself with the “problem” of Hungarians living in Transylvania), as some letter was found in his possession connected to the others. The prosecution did not manage to produce witnesses, and even though the prosecution asked to give him 25 years, he got five. He was released after three years when advocates on his behalf managed to get his previous two-year time counted into his five. This time, when released, he was deprived of work and not allowed to preach. He was temporarily given a job at the church archive, and was only allowed to preach in 1963. See Miklós, 135. He was one of many pastors who were jailed for their connections with other intellectuals or who made public displays of solidarity with the 1956ers in Budapest.

By the spring of 1957, the rhetoric of their church leaders and arrests of Hungarians caused these renewalist pastors to recognize that state agents were charting a new course. Church leaders now forbade pastors from visiting families, having Bible studies, or providing religious education beyond strictly prescribed catechism. Thus only by word of mouth could clandestine gatherings become known. Despite secrecy, the gatherings were still popular and even attractive to those who felt like they offered something that the generically acceptable religious practice did not. Even a non-believer like lawyer Kálmán Széplaki was attracted to the authenticity and intimacy of such gatherings that could not happen in church.⁶ Széplaki was soon arrested and imprisoned for some private writings of his, but later in prison he encountered these “Bethanists” again and continued his questioning with them.

With “sometimes one hundred or even several hundred” of those interested in revival from the Reformed Church gathering for baptisms, weddings, or name days during the months following the revolutionary attempt in Hungary, a religious affairs inspector warned one of the “Bethanist” pastors: “If you don’t realize that this is not advisable now, we will give the matter to internal affairs and they’ll take care of you.”⁷ One of the deans of the Church, Sándor Fekete, wrote articles which applied such epithets to the CE-Bethanist movement as “anti-state, anti-peace, anti-culture, against the people, its members are reactionary, counter-revolutionaries betraying the sacred cause of socialism.”⁸ Since the church’s prohibition and criticism of such extra-curricular church activities was still not being heeded, toward the end of 1957 and beginning of 1958, the “church leaders wanted to get the bethanist pastors to see reason,” urging them for “personal, family, as well as church interests” that they discontinue their meetings, and – remarks Visky sardonically – “express thanks” for the “complete freedom of

⁶ Kálmán Széplaki, *A Gáncs Nélküli Lovag [The Knight without Blemish]* (Kolozsvár [Cluj-Napoca, Romania]: Koinónia, 2012), 32–33, 49. Széplaki did not consider himself a believer but was experiencing something of an existential crisis that year. He felt he “needed to speak with someone who had a genuine faith” and to “experience what a genuine state of belief [hívőség] means, and how it’s possible to live in this world.” His sister-in-law, who knew of his desire, happened to live with a certain Aunt Ilonka “from the Bethanist circle” and at whose home this group sometimes met, and she encouraged Széplaki to talk to Sándor Szilágyi, who was still traveling around for these gatherings of believers.

⁷ Ferenc Visky, ed., *Bilincseket És Börtönt Is: Dokumentum-Kötet [Chains and Even Prison: Document-Collection]* (Marosvásárhely: Koinónia, 1996), 110–11.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 213.

religion" ensured by the state. Their reply to their fellow churchmen, however, was equally determined: spreading the gospel was "their work", and part of this work included children, youth, prayer and Bible times, and concern for spiritual welfare.⁹ State pressures brought to light the Reformed Church's internal struggle over the definition of what it meant to practice the faith.

Farmer and "Bethanist" Antal Papp had also been warned. The party secretary once said to him: "Uncle Anti, don't argue with us, for you'll see, they'll pin you as wanting to sabotage." Papp had not been respecting the proper—and now more aggressively enforced—boundaries for religiosity, so the inspector outlined them for him: "'You can do what you want at home; it doesn't worry us how many are going to your house for bible study because we know that you're not our enemy. But these people [other officials] don't know that. Nor do they know that in Bucharest, and believe me [...] they will break your neck.'" But Papp remained firm in his convictions.¹⁰ Even though Papp and the local inspector respected each other and had an acceptable working relationship, the inspector knew that those who were rounding up potentially disloyal Hungarians would not value Papp's agricultural contributions as a successful and respected head of the village collective. Papp had publicly identified himself on the wrong side of religious acceptability, and state representatives saw it as a provocation.

The warnings were not empty. After church and local Party authorities had done their part to warn the "Bethanists," in the fall of 1958 the secret service gathered up those whom they could broad-stroke as guilty, even arresting some who only had weak ties to the CE Society. On May 26, 1958, in Oradea, Sergeant Vasile Stănculescu ordered a criminal suit to begin against a "forbidden sect," in which reformed clergy participate and "stir up the inhabitants against the people's democratic system and carry out anticommunist propaganda. [. . .] they arouse the dissatisfaction of the inhabitants with regard to the law [. . .]. This subversive organization,

⁹ Ibid., 13.

¹⁰ Ferenc Visky, *Anti* (Kolozsvár: Koinónia, 2005), 55–56. "Resolved, Anti replied: 'You, Feri, are you a communist?' He answered, 'I am, and I was when it was illegal too.' 'What's your opinion,' I ask him, since he said that I should pray but not be active, 'if you're a communist, what's your opinion about the communist who's not active?' 'That's not a communist.' 'Na, I'll have you know that the Christian who does not dare bear witness to his Lord is not a Christian'."

under the mask of mysticism, recruits new cells, and the organization spreads with the emergence of new groups.”¹¹ Stănculescu had found the words he needed to frame the “Bethanists” as political dangers. Their religiosity was supposedly merely a guise for conspiratorial political activity. Visky and Karczagi were interrogated the next day, and Papp a few days later. Others were questioned over the succeeding weeks and months.

The state did not encounter church opposition to their arrest of the “Bethanists,” who had no advocates beyond their families and one another. While they were being held in prison and being interrogated, their fellow churchmen discussed them during their regular pastoral conferences. Shortly after their arrest in June, in Visky’s region of Oradea, there were three pastoral conferences. At the first, on June 11, the main theological topic was “the history of Pietism and its role in the life of the denomination,” a clear jab at the current pietistic movement, “Bethanism.” After the reading of the topic, certain colleagues “began to talk about the pastor Ferenc Visky,” but some colleagues defended him, saying “we shouldn’t speak about a man who isn’t in front of us, seeing as how it’s not nice.” Another pastor in turn “combated bethanism,” but then another followed who “sympathized,” saying that “believers should be attached as much as possible to the church.” Bishop Arday was present at this meeting, and he felt it time to speak up. He had worked with Visky as fellow pastors in Salonta. He brought up the fact that “he had many times called the pastors’ and pastor Visky’s attention to [his] having received complaints from many ranks of [state] organs, and he had called on him many times to make a turn in his church work but *he did not conform* and now he bears the consequences.” He suggested that all present “do their duty honestly because then nothing will happen.”¹² At a neighboring conference, after the opening Bible study, during their discussion of “historical problems of the Reformed Church,” a group of priests joined by Dean Kornel Szablyár “in turn condemned bethanism,” after which they moved on to discuss “atomic energy in the service of peace.”¹³ At the other nearby conference they discussed “the problem of bethanism as a tool of

¹¹ Buzogány and Jánosi, *A Református Egyház Romániában*, 113.

¹² Arhivele Naționale ale României, Fond “Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor – Direcția Studii (1945-1963), Dos. 47bis, 1958, 8. Italics mine.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 7.

division within the denomination.” The Dean, Adalbert Fodor, “pointed out that bethanism is a stage of passing from the denomination to a sectarian movement.” Those there apparently “all condemned bethanism and a type of decision was made that they will work for unity within the denomination.”¹⁴

The usual conference of Reformed ministers in the Arad area, where “Bethanists” Szilágyi, Karczagi, and Dézsi were from, was held on September 23, 1958, and here too the topic was “pietism” in the Reformed Church. These pastors were missing this time, on account of their recent arrest. An inspector from the Dept. of Religions observed that the conference was well-organized, there were no “negative manifestations and attitudes,” and thus there was not cause for him to speak. Yet he wrote that the “mood” was a bit off: the attending clergy “were very surprised at the conviction which the three bethanist priests belonging to the deanery of Arad received, showing compassion especially toward the families.”¹⁵ Even if they were not to show sympathy for such “pietistic” movements as “bethanism,” it was hard for these fellow priests to rejoice in the sufferings brought upon their colleagues and their families.

Many ordinary pastors did not know quite how to respond to the situation, since to many of them, the problem was far above them. In Câmpeniță (Mezőfele) in the Mureș (Maros) region, a locality where cobbler Jenő Nagy had done evangelism events, Pastor Ödön Nagy got a position in January 1958, not long before the arrest of the “Bethanists.” Upon his arrival there he found a small CE-renewalist group meeting there, and he had not known about them previously. The rest of the community and church-goers referred to this group as the “believers,” since they met regularly for Bible study and prayer, and contributed tithes for helping the poor or sick. They were also distinctive for not smoking or going to the bars.

Soon after Nagy’s arrival, the leaders of CE were imprisoned, and so the local group meetings in his town came into question. While other pastors insisted that these meetings stop, he advocated them because he felt their presence among the “increasingly worldly” congregation was helpful, and in fact soon “soon I myself stood among them in heart and soul.”

¹⁴ Ibid., 6.

¹⁵ Ibid., 24.

But because he allied himself with these “believers,” other pastors and the flock turned against him, regarding him as an outsider.¹⁶ Thus, “Bethanism” was one of the lines demarking unacceptable from acceptable religiosity in the eyes of state agents, but what’s more, Reformed believers were also split over its place in the Church.

Political Trials of the Non-political Religious Groups

Bethanists

Although most others who were arrested following the 1956 revolution had some sort of connection (however flimsy) to alternative politics in Hungary or Transylvania, these belonging to the CE or “Bethanist” movement had made no political statements or any utterances about other possible socio-political formations. What they had done was transgress the boundaries of acceptable religiosity and engage in unapproved religious activities, like Bible studies in homes. Although such transgressions were punishable within church processes or by the Department of Religions revoking permits, this did not happen – the “Bethanists” were tried and sentenced as political criminals.

Before their sentence, some eight months of interrogation and searches were conducted, during which nothing incriminating was found since they were plotting nothing and belonged to nothing of a conspiratorial nature. Members of the regime did not fear an imminent uprising by the “Bethanists,” but that they populated the all-too numerous category of untrustworthy subjects, an undesirable state in general and a threat to a regime that saw itself as insecure in its authority. Yet these believers were precisely charged with conspiratorial activity in mimicry of the 1956 uprising in Budapest, Hungary. They were not extant enemies, but potential ones. In Visky’s parish Cheț (Magyarkéc), the scenario did not look good in his village, as Cheț was still resisting collectivization.¹⁷ The regime wanted to further the reliability of society, and certain Christians were not aiding the process.

¹⁶ Ödön Nagy, János Hermán, and Mózes Nyitrai, *Palástban: Lelkészek Szórványban [In Cloaks: Pastors in Diaspora]* (Marosvásárhely: Mentor, 2001), 128.

¹⁷ Visky, *Bilincseket És Börtönt Is*, 211.

The interrogators pressed the “Bethanists” for contacts, especially foreign ones, as well as for the content and purposes of their gatherings (and they were never satisfied with “Bible study” or “prayer” as replies). The interrogator wanted to know “what political questions were discussed” at a couple of specific “leadership” meetings, but Visky replied that “we did not discuss any political questions.”¹⁸ Pastor Szőke of Târgu Mureș (Vásárhely) remembers the following questions:

Why do we gather to pray in houses? Why aren't we satisfied with just the church gatherings and the word preached there? Why do we give 10% of our income for missionary aims without church supervision? How is it possible to have fun at a baptism or wedding without consuming alcoholic drinks? During free time why do we turn to visiting the sick or solitary people, and not instead go to the cinema or other cultural events? Why do we not accept the dogma of materialist doctrine? Why do we encourage our children to participate in religion classes and preparation for confirmation instead of sending them to sporting and other entertainment events, or to Pioneer meetings? How is 'lay' preaching of the word permissible, when they don't have theological training?¹⁹

All of these questions tended toward uncovering just why they would be crossing the lines of religious and social norms, which the officials clearly saw as tied together. To violate religious norms was to violate social norms, which implied political unreliability and disloyalty. By not confining their religiosity to a circumscribed, ritualistic or individualistic Sunday-morning activity, the “Bethanists” demonstrated that they were animated by goals and norms other than those state and church leaders had agreed upon and tried to enforce.

Visky was interrogated the most, as he was regarded as the de-facto leader and had moved from Hungary, thereby having potentially problematic foreign contacts. He was questioned in detail about the three Bethany leadership gatherings which took place in Romania, in March and September of 1949 and January of 1958: who organized them, what was discussed, what decisions were made. When asked what was discussed at the September 1949 session, Visky replied, “We talked about spiritual unity, that is to say, for pastors who feel the need to live in community with others, they need to establish relationships with one another.

¹⁸ Buzogány and Jánosi, *A Református Egyház Romániában*, 125–26.

¹⁹ Visky, *Bilincseket És Börtönt Is*, 200.

We talked about our condition relating to the Reformed Church too, in connection with which we pointed out that we wanted to work within the framework of the church, and it's important that the pastors stay in brotherly connection with each other." The interrogator wanted to know "what political questions were discussed" at this session, Visky replied that "we did not discuss any political questions at this session."²⁰ Visky made mention of that which state agents tried to eliminate, a communal-dynamic component to religious gatherings, but the interrogator wanted something more tangibly suspicious or illegal to work with for his sentencing.

The fact that not only pastors, but laypersons also attended this meeting was a concern to the interrogator, but Visky's reply that "pastors learn a lot from them" did not assuage his interrogators, as it posed a threatening view of authority and discipline that democratized religious truths instead of having them defined strictly by those in leadership positions. One of the laypersons had suggested that the organization collect money to distribute to the poor or sick, and they agreed. They also raised some money to help one present pay off some debts that he owed to the church.²¹ They had agreed to contribute their own money to aid others in need, but Pastor Lőrincz recalls how the officials framed the monetary issue, how "the donations and material support of each other was equal to societal membership dues,"²² something interrogators could use as evidence of a society, which was illegal. Erzsébet Patócs was an official at the tax office and a party member in the early stages of the regime, but she was converted through the influence of Visky. She, too, was hauled in with the others. Her accusation was "religious activity subverting the socialist order and the preparation in Romania of an uprising similar to the Hungarian 1956 revolution." Her sibling remembers one exchange clearly at the trial: "Did you often help the poor, the needy?" "Yes, often." "How much money did you give at such times?" "5, 10, 15 lei." Apparently the lawyer turned to the writer of the minutes: "Write it down. A monthly membership fee of 30 lei."²³ She got eighteen years in prison.

²⁰ Buzogány and Jánosi, *A Református Egyház Romániában*, 125–26.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 127.

²² Visky, *Bilincseket És Börtönt Is*, 112.

²³ *Ibid.*, 169–71.

The prosecution thought it most effective to focus on material support as evidence of conspiracy. When farmer Sándor Jakab was brought in and questioned by his interrogator about the “conspiracy,” he replied that “our organization consisted of Bible reading, prayer, and visiting the sick.” The interrogator mentioned the Bethany Society of Hungary, which supposedly planned the destruction of the state order, and claimed that Jakab was a member. When he refused to sign his name under these accusations, a bell was rung, and a trained boxer was brought in to help “soften” him. Many of the “Bethanists” experienced psychological and physical torture, evidently an experience common to prisoners under the Romanian communist regime.²⁴ During his hearing, a single question was raised, one intended to frame him as one of the “conspirators”: “With what did I help the poor?” Jakab felt his response (with “one or two lei, flour, bread, potatoes”) came off “slightly humorous,” since the nature of their “activity” was so clearly un-conspiratorial.²⁵ His eighteen-year sentence was a serious price for those potatoes, though it was not foodstuffs or charity, but Bethanists’ unwillingness to submit to the authorities that caused the latter to fabricate the necessary charges.

The wife of Pastor János Fekete recalls the entire process as a “show trial,” with her husband’s real crime being his “activities involving the Bible” which were “classified as anti-state organization.”²⁶ Although a cobbler, Jenő Nagy was very active in the church, even becoming a member of the synod. They came for him too in April 1958, taking all Bibles, songbooks, and evangelical writings. Left behind were his wife, who was ill, and their eight children. He too was found to belong to the CE Society, which was declared to be an “anti-state” organization that at the same time drew youth into “mysticism.” Nagy was accused of traveling about trying to create “new lawless groups in order to keep people in darkness.” In short, he was guilty of “obstructing the cultural revolution.”²⁷

Pastor Lőrincz “never dreamed that they would judge the Bethanist (CE Society) such a danger to the system.” During his interrogation, his interrogator always tried to direct things

²⁴ All of the prison memoirs I’ve read contain examples of such abuse. See, for example, the writings and confessions before the U.S. Senate by Richard Wurmbrand.

²⁵ Visky, *Bilincseket És Börtönt Is*, 56.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 51–52.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 152.

toward making them out to be a conspiratorial society, posturing them as a danger to the peaceful order. Things like a repentant or converted soul were framed by the interrogator as “recruitment” methods, and baptisms, weddings, etc. were the covers for their “underground meetings.”²⁸ At the questioning of multiple interrogators as to when he became a “Bethanist,” pastor Laszlo Szőke replied that he never was one, but just “Reformed.” But the interrogator pressed: “When were you born again?” “Easter of 1948.” “And whom did God use for your rebirth?” “Ferenc Visky.” “See! You became a Bethanist then, when you were reborn, and Visky recruited you into the Bethanists.”²⁹ Father and son stonemasons Miklós Püsök, Sr. and Jr. were arrested and questioned about being members of the “Bethanist” group, but they were not members, nor were they familiar with that name. They were Reformed believers and active in renewalist circles, but the fact that they were converted in the early 1950s and affiliated with the more active Christians of their region caused them to be lumped with the suspect group.³⁰

Indeed, Karczagi says that it was clear that their interrogator believed that they planned nothing against the regime, but another captain intimated that the real reason for their arrest was preemptive: that such “religious cliques” could become a “powder keg.” It was fear, therefore, that had these “mystics” on trial. Karczagi reflects on the problem raised by the nature of their religious activity:

They soon made sure that our spiritual revival - similar to other gatherings - could not pose a threat to the regime. Why then were there the maniacally repeated slogans: éberség – vigilență [vigilance]? Because they sensed the other. We were different from the others. We weren't afraid, we didn't abase ourselves, didn't fawn on them, didn't hate them. We didn't break under the weight of the threats. They sensed in us the inner freedom, which next to our great humility also gave human dignity.³¹

Those who were afraid would act and speak loyally to ensure their future, but the “Bethanists” were not afraid, putting their loyalty into question. Lőrincz also sensed that his interrogator

²⁸ Ibid., 112.

²⁹ Ibid., 202.

³⁰ Ibid., 180.

³¹ Sándor Karczagi, *Az Utolsó Erdélyi Gályarab: Ébredésről, Történelemről és Irodalomról [The Last Transylvanian Galley Slave: On Revival, History and Literature]*, ed. Krisztina Berke (Kolozsvár [Cluj-Napoca, RO]: Koinónia, 2010), 89–90.

“easily believed” that he was not actually a part of a conspiracy: “It could only have been for his part a mere formality.”³²

What’s surprising is that those questioned were quite frank in their responses. They named fellow participants and discussed openly what they did during meetings, never believing that honesty would incriminate them in a trumped-up charge of conspiracy. Their responses were uniform, that they gathered together on holidays or for special occasions, read the Bible, discussed it, talked about personal life, and prayed. They felt they had no reason to hide their activities, which were purely religious. Indeed, it was not the “text” – the religious words or practices – that got them condemned, but the “subtext”: their audacity, their non-compliance and non-conformance.

The problem with these believers was that they had crossed the line that state and church authorities had drawn between acceptable and unacceptable religious practice. The dynamic, communal manner in which they practiced their faith had become unacceptable in the eyes of the authorities. Püsök Jr. was told where this line was during his last interrogation, and he was given a chance to mend his ways. They wanted him to “pray at home and go to church, just don’t speak about it to others.” He replied that he did not want to be like the servant in one of Jesus’ parables who is given money to invest but simply buries it.³³ At one point during the interrogation of Lőrincz, his interrogator showed him that he too had a Bible, pulling it from his cupboard. The pastor, longing to read it again, asked him to “give it to me for half an hour, or at least for 10 minutes.” The response was: “How can you think such a thing? After all, it’s for this reason we brought you here, to forget the Bible!”³⁴ The Bible would have remained acceptable had it largely remained on the shelf, but “Bethanists” like Lőrincz gave it central importance in their everyday life. In short, they were at loggerheads about what constituted acceptable religiosity.

Those arrested, interrogated, and tried in 1958 were judged very harshly, by most accounts. Some nineteen affiliated with CE, Visky, or this network of people interested in

³² Visky, *Bilincseket És Börtönt Is*, 114.

³³ *Ibid.*, 180.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 113.

renewal received sentences, with five years the minimum, but with most of them receiving over ten years imprisonment and hard labor. Farmers Jakab and Kiss received eighteen years; farmer Papp received twenty years, as did pastors Dézsi, Szilágyi, and Karczagi; and the “ringleader,” Visky, received twenty-two years.

Pastor Zoltán Dézsi, accused of being a leader of a “Bethanist” sub-group, against Marxist ideology and against projects of the state, could not believe his ears: “Did I hear that right? I’m not mistaken? It can’t be true! Since before the judgment I speculated to myself that for what I ‘did’ I’d get at most 3-4 years. But this many? Yes – this many.” He was arrested, he believes,

because I firmly preached the hatred of sin and its elimination: the need for repentance, rebirth, the decision for Jesus, the sanctified life, both in my congregation, as elsewhere, wherever I turned, and there were those who took this seriously and did it. Because together with those pastors and non-pastor brothers who confessed and did the same things in their places of residence and work, taking different opportunities (evangelism, baptism, marriage, name-day) we met to rejoice in God's word, to confess sins, to be purified, glorify and magnify Jesus, and to strengthen in faith. " [...] This is why I was a fanatic before the authorities, a transgressor of the permissible framework, dangerous. *Because of Jesus!* And this is why severe punishment came.³⁵

Dézsi’s faith was so communally prominent that he was considered a threat to the community state agents were trying to build. But given that even those who had committed murder did not always receive as many as twenty years, why did this seemingly politically benign group of religious “fanatics” get such harsh sentences? Apparently state agents considered their brazenness in their religious activity more threatening than common crime. Even though they did not pursue political ends, because they pursued a social and communal life without subordinating themselves or their activity to their superiors (church or state), they were feared as destabilizing power structures and social norms.

³⁵ Ibid., 36.

Lord's Army

As with the "Bethanists," Lord's Army activities continued during this time, but since they were mostly Romanians, authorities did not actively identify them with revolutionary events in Hungary. Their own charismatic leaders were traveling about the country and meeting for various Lord's Army events. Although Traian Dorz had emerged as the most central leader, there were several other leaders with significant notoriety – some more locally, others nationally as well –, including the increasingly famous composer of Lord's Army songs, Nicolae Moldoveanu of the Sibiu region, the intellectual Sergiu Grossu of Bucharest, and numerous locally-known leaders like Alexandru Pop of Feleacu (near Cluj).

With Traian Dorz imprisoned since 1952, local leaders felt it prudent to meet away from the more populated locale of Simeria. Recent Army convert and enthusiast Valer Mîndroni lived in the remote village of Ciula Mare, and he had gained local fame because of his recent supernatural experience in which over the course of several days in May, 1953, an angel met him and called him to repent and join the Lord's Army.³⁶ At a gathering in his home, he shared his testimony with other Army followers and some of the locally curious. Some of his family then joined in his tears of guilt and repentance, as well as in Bible-reading and Army song-singing.³⁷ Mîndroni did construction work on his house to build a place suitable for Army meetings, and eventually more and more gatherings were held there.³⁸ Large gatherings at his home became a place where a few villagers "covenanted" to the Lord's Army. They met in all seasons, at home or at the church, on a Sunday or sometimes for periods of a couple of days. It became an "army center" for the region.³⁹

But as the change in Mîndroni's personal life produced public effects, from gatherings to testimonies to visits from other Army members, tension arose. Some actively resented the increase in piety in the village and were more than happy to assist local authorities keep track of

³⁶ Ioan Beg, *"Un Bun Ostaş al lui Hristos": Fratele Valer de la Ciula [A Good Soldier of Christ: Brother Valer of Ciula]* (Simeria: Editura Traian Dorz, 2003), 109.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 122.

³⁸ Beg, *"Un Bun Ostaş al lui Hristos,"* 130.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 135.

the movement.⁴⁰ Members of a nearby Baptist congregation were reportedly excited about the increase in religiosity, but when they tried to encourage Mîndroni and others to join them, his determined reply was that he was following the angel's instructions, who was quite specific about the name, the Lord's Army.⁴¹

Yet the Lord's Army at once existed and did not. Lord's Army gatherings were not necessarily called as such, despite featuring what were obviously Army practices, content, and personnel. Around the time of the "counterrevolution" in Hungary in November 1956, there was a big meeting in Arad, not officially as the Lord's Army but somehow as a "Sunday school," and it received approval from the Bishop Andrei Magieru of Arad. But was it "Sunday school" with Traian Dorz and other former Soldiers having traveled from other cities, the singing of Army songs, and speeches by laypeople? When questioned by the commissioners, the vicar from the local bishopric played ignorant of the whole affair, stubbornly reaffirming it as a Sunday school. The commissioners contacted the Metropolitan of Timisoara, and asked that the Patriarch be notified of the dealings by the bishopric of Arad. Had it been an isolated event, then it might have been more easily overlooked, but the commissioners also felt that LA activity had been on the rise in the bishopric in general, and that nothing was being done.⁴²

When the Department wrote a general report on LA activity across the country, they referenced this kind of activity in the Timisoara region, where Dorz was active and priests were letting people meet in the churches on weekend afternoons. LA "followers" were "camouflaged under a form of religious mission and through so-called 'Sunday schools' which are supported by the leadership of the bishopric itself from Arad." Bishop Magieru was evidently sympathetic to the Army, not just allowing meetings to occur but meeting privately with some of the leaders as well; he even dined at the home of Army leader Valer Mîndroni of Ciula after rededicating a church in his small village.⁴³ In Mediaș, a group was meeting in the evening after vespers, but called these "Church Committee Meetings" and would have some sermons, a reading from the

⁴⁰ Ibid., 143.

⁴¹ Ibid., 123.

⁴² Arhivele Naționale ale României, Fond "Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor – Direcția Studii (1945-1963)," Dos. 6, 1949-1959, 259–260.

⁴³ Beg, "Un Bun Ostaș al lui Hristos," 130.

Psalms and from a saint's life, and singing of Army songs. The local archpriest supported these "meetings."⁴⁴

Like Dorz, Alexandru Pop of Cluj had also been traveling about the country. He had traveled over the Carpathians to Suceava for a big LA meeting on July 15, 1956. Apparently Pop declared at this meeting that the Soldiers were meeting in Sibiu and Cluj with hundreds participating and priests too, audaciously declaring "nobody says anything" against it. In addition to urging them to continue meeting in Suceava, he had some Soldiers read the Bible, and they discussed it.⁴⁵ Pop also attended an August gathering at a monastery in the Timisoara region, but the commissioners and local Orthodox clergy had come up with a plan in order to limit LA influence. They had priests take turns staying "in the middle of the believers all night and speaking to them, singing to them church songs and even doing services for them at night, thus: they neutralized the preachers who waited for the priests to fall asleep and to start their activity, preaching and singing Army songs."⁴⁶

The battle lines were drawn within the church, with commissioners teaming up with anti-Army Orthodox clergy against Lord's Army adherents like Dorz and the few sympathetic Orthodox clergy. Dorz was doing his best to sway influential hierarchs. Just after Christmas of 1956, Dorz implored the Patriarch of Romania to consider their case. He argued that the former members of the Army were simply believers who want to be more Orthodox, to follow its holy writs more faithfully. He made the case that the Army discouraged the transferring of allegiance to other "sects," but only if allowed to operate freely: if the Lord's Army were heavily controlled and sanctioned for meeting, why shouldn't adherents join up with the neoprotestants, who are not sanctioned for doing the same activities in their own churches? Dorz implored the Patriarch to bring a happy resolution to the problem, saying the people will be able to love the Church and direct their spiritual energies toward its enrichment.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Arhivele Naționale ale României, Fond "Minsterul Cultelor și Artelor – Direcția Studii (1945-1963)," Dos. 6, 1949-1959, 375.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 235.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 323.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 299–301.

Prior to the Hungarian Revolution in 1956, Dorz felt as though there was an "atmosphere of general relaxation in the country," as more meetings and events passed without significant harassment. He and other Army leaders began to consider producing a publication and holding religious conferences in the cities. He did not realize that they were being "followed everywhere with complete care and attention." They held several leaders' meetings following his release from prison and move to Simeria in the summer of 1956. The "brothers" were discussing big issues like their status and relationship with the Orthodox Church, in addition to thoughts on how to best continue their work of encouraging "spiritual rebirth" while "maintaining unity of belief."⁴⁸ During the revolutionary events, on November 6, 1956, Alexandru Pop organized a leaders' meeting at his home in Feleacu, outside of Cluj, where Pop, Dorz, Moldoveanu, Grossu, and several others gathered to discuss future ideas.

Soon after, on November 25, 1956, in Vulcana-Pandele, Grossu and Dorz organized a major gathering where they expected some 2,000 participants, including many youth, but the night before – when some 400 believers were already there –, they were woken and questioned by *Securitate* agents, who then told everyone to go home.⁴⁹ Dorz and Grossu were apprehended and detained overnight. In a surprising turn, however, the next morning they were ordered to work with the Patriarchate and Department of Religions toward legalization, and until then they should not take part in any more Army activity.⁵⁰ They were told to inform everyone to completely cease activity, otherwise immediate arrest would result because their activity was, technically, illegal. The agents meanwhile blamed them for not trying earlier for legalization, saying that other groups (implied neoprotestants) operated legally. Dorz was to keep his personal *Securitate* agent abreast of his progress regularly.

Dorz and Grossu discussed their dilemma: not to try to obtain legalization would open the door for mass arrest in case of further activity and would land blame on them for not finding a legal path, but to really trust that this was possible seemed so unlikely given how they had

⁴⁸ Sergiu Grossu, *M-am Luptat Lupta cea Bună [I Fought the Good Fight]* (București: Vremea, 2006), 102.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 106–7.

⁵⁰ George Spiridon, "Tentativele de Legalizare Ale Oastei Domnului Întreprinse de Traian Dorz [The Attempts at Legalizing the Lord's Army Undertaken by Traian Dorz]," *Danubius* XXXII (2014): 383–98.

been treated and the complete absence of positive developments and feedback until now.⁵¹ But they also recognized that the status quo was not acceptable for the State, and perhaps Church and State officials wanted something more regulated. They agonized over the means and terms by which the Army could be legalized, given the fact that the BOR as a whole had been against them and was likely to continue to be.

Upon arrival at the Patriarchate, they were made to wait a long time until one of the staff priests finally inquired as to the purpose of their visit. They told him they'd like to have an audience with the Patriarch to discuss "the problem of the legalization of the Lord's Army."

-'What Lord's Army, eh? *That* little nothing doesn't exist in our country and never [did]... How is it that you just now are going after these castles in the sky?'

-'We ask you insistently to grant us an audience with His Beatitude.'

-'What for, do you think that someone would occupy himself with this silly thing? See to your own business! Go home and work up some [sort of statement]. Or do you not have anything else to do except waste your time?'

-'We were sent here by the *Securitate*. We absolutely must inform the Patriarch of this problem.'

-'If it's so, make a written memorandum and send it to him by mail. Then wait at home for the response. You can't have an audience now. Such problems are not resolved by any other way than how I've told you. Besides, the patriarch is busy now with a delegation from Yugoslavia. That's how it is!'

As instructed, they followed this meeting with one at the *Securitate* in which they were threatened and informed of all of the Army activities and meetings which had still proceeded over the past months. They realized they had an intimate informer among them who kept the *Securitate* in the know. Dorz was instructed to draw up the memorandum alone, and Grossu was warned about being active.⁵²

⁵¹ Traian Dorz, *Hristos - Mărturia Mea: scurtă și sfântă povestire a vieții mele sau Istoria unor Cântări Nemuritoare [Christ - My Testimony: a short and sacred story of my life or the History of certain Immortal Songs]* (Sibiu: Oastea Domnului, 2005), 326–27.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 329–30. The conversation as Dorz recalls it communicates much more in Romanian than I am skilled to do in English. "'Dumnevoastră ce doriți?' 'Rugăm să fim primiți în audiență la Prea Fericitul Patriarh.' 'În ce problemă?' 'În problema legalizării Oastei Domnului!' 'Ce Oastea Domnului, mă? Păi fleacul ăsta nu mai există în țara noastră, ăhăă, de când!... Cum vă treziți voi tocmai acum să umblați după

Not wanting to sign it alone, Dorz wished to consult with Grossu as his best confidant for such an activity. He was called in September 1957 by one of the officials of his case, who berated him because there were still gatherings being planned for the coming Holiday season. The official accused him, saying that it was "clear now that you are all against any kind of legalization," and that the Lord's Army "likes anarchy and disorder, being that you are a bunch of insubordinates and enemies of social order," and that "you do not submit either to the State or the Church." He gave Dorz a "last chance" to write a memorandum for legalization over the next week. When Dorz wondered whether his statements would carry weight given he held no official legal title as a leader, the agent told him to do it in his own name and in that of those who "still think and believe like you."

Dorz was in Bucharest soon after, and he gave a copy of the memorandum to the *Securitate* official, who told him to now go to the Patriarch. This time, when he arrived, the priest waived him in courteously and opened the door directly to His Beatitude, who in turn welcomed "'brother Dorz'" "with open arms." The Patriarch expressed the strong desire to help resolve "the problem" but reminded Dorz that such things must be done according to the "existing statutes for the organization and functioning of the Orthodox Church." He handed Dorz a copy of these statutes and told him to read it, study it, and on this basis to try to find a legal way for the Lord's Army to operate. Dorz then wrote a new memorandum and got many other of the "brothers" to weigh in. He had found a strategy: to make use of the permitted branch of the Parish Committee whose concerns could be "spiritual problems of the parish... mission and moral activities necessary to the parishioners." But the problem was how to allow the Army – however it would be called – to operate even in the case of unsympathetic or uninterested priests, so that it did not depend on their direct support even though such activities still had to have the necessary authorization to be considered part of the Parish Committee and not a para-church event.⁵³

cai verzi?' 'Vă rugăm stăruitor să ne înștiințați pentru o audiență la părintele patriarh.' 'Dar ce, credeți voi că se mai ocupă cineva de prostia asta? Vedeți-vă de treabă! Mergeți acasă și lucrați ceva. Ori n-aveți nimic altceva de lucru decât să umblați degeabă?'"

⁵³ Ibid., 331–333.

The debates and discussions among Lord's Army leaders toward gaining some sort of recognition intensified. In October 1957, Dorz and some other leaders including Moldoveanu wrote again to the Patriarch, trying somehow to gain recognition or legalization for the LA. Referring to the rules passed by Synod in 1949, they argued that the Lord's Army could fit into the existing framework of the Orthodox Church. They noted that these rulings referred to the provision for the creation within Parish Committees of "Missionary Circles," which were intended for "helping the priests at catechism with a view toward strengthening faith and moral sense of the believers, equipping the church and supporting the works of Christian mercy." They argued that the attributes of the Mission Circle corresponded precisely to the activity of the LA, and that the Army henceforth be called the Mission Circle. This left, according to Dorz and the others, only a few "details" to be clarified. The Circle's character would be "exclusively moral and missional," and its members would merely be "obliged to live a completely moral life to be a good example to all." Mission Circle gatherings would be under parish leadership by a delegate or priest who was a member of the Circle, whose program would include prayers and readings from Scripture or other Church books, all of which would be set up by a member of the circle. Dorz and the others even proposed that to "protect" the missionary circles from "any kind of foreign and sectarian influences, which come mostly through borrowing religious songs," they would keep to the church songs and songs of the Psalms that had already been introduced officially and printed (which did exclude most of the popular songs of the Lord's Army), and the same would go for written material.⁵⁴ Not long after the letter, Dorz met with the Patriarch and showed him a formal proposal about the Missionary Circle. He promised to show the Minister of Religions the text as well, and he had reasons to hope that the Patriarch was amenable.⁵⁵ Dorz was trying to align the LA with state and Church notions of religious acceptability.

As the process continued to drag on without concrete affirmative responses by church or state authorities, Dorz began to grow suspicious of this never-ending process. He eventually

⁵⁴ Arhivele Naționale ale României, Fond "Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor – Direcția Studii (1945-1963)," Dos. 6, 1949-1959, 341-342. Signed Oct 18, 1957 by Dorz, Ioan Bălăuță, Silviu Hărăguș, Petru Popa and Nicolae Moldoveanu.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 346.

consented to pressures from Army participants to meet, even while continuing to play the legalization game. There were reports of youth gatherings in the Oradea region, and Department of Religions officials in Bucharest wanted to know more: the exact localities, a profile of those attending (age, gender), names of the local leaders, whether they are supported by any local priests, the names of any other church staff who support, in what buildings meetings are held and when, whether they travel in groups to other localities for events of any kind, measures taken by the commissioners for stopping their activity, and actions taken by church authorities.⁵⁶ Department officials felt their should-be partners, clergymen of the Orthodox Church, were frustratingly passive. Clergy had their own excuses: in one town, Beiuș, the local Church was tolerating and even encouraging LA activity in order to “counterbalance the activity of the Pentecostal Church which in this location wreaks havoc.”⁵⁷

But did evidence show that allowing Army activities countered neoprotestant growth? A commissioner from another part of Oradea wrote in December 1957 that although the LA had started as a “counter-balance” to the neoprotestants in his area, it turned out to be nothing more than a “breeding ground” for them. Despite being illegal, it remained active “wrongfully and insistently,” being “supported by priests hostile to the regime.” It was not a benign problem:

From a political point of view this anarchic group presents a permanent danger for the state, attracting and even punishing those who participate in the social and political life of our state. At the same time, the attracting of a large number of believers and youth away from their preoccupations as citizens as well as exaggeration in praying and in spreading an unhealthy exaggerated mysticism represents a lack in both the cultural life of our villagers and the realization of socialist transformation of our country.

Their activities were “fouling up adherents with an unhealthy ideology diametrically opposed to Leninist ideology's rules about the development of society.” Frankly, they were an annoyance: “this anarchic group, sustained by dishonest elements from among the clergy, puts us in the situation of taking measures to combat them;” they also “dig at the roots of the foundation of

⁵⁶ Ibid., 359.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 367.

our democratic people's state." Referring to some locales as "contaminated," commissioners like this one regarded the LA as a social ailment.⁵⁸ There is no evidence to back officials' claims that Army participants punished others for participating in state activities.

Department of Religions' officials necessarily scrutinized the role of priests in whose parishes believers participated in Lord's Army activities. In one region in Oradea two supposedly "fanatic" priests supported LA activity, one of whom had a very "dubious political past" and associations. These priests were holding what they called "Sunday School," which featured an "intense religious program," preaching, poems, and LA songs. Those at this gathering "also practice free interpretation of the bible which gives birth to misunderstandings and animosities, which leads to departure to other neoprotestant religions or founding of new groups [...]" Officials regarded this kind of activity by priests as akin to taking the lid of control off, which only led to religious anarchy. When commissioners pursued counter measures, they ran into problems since the priests insisted that the gatherings were Sunday schools, not LA meetings, and the bishopric and archpriests sympathized and did not take action, agreeing that it was a Sunday school. If state agents ever considered such gatherings to be "pulling citizens from their daily preoccupations," or "a plague for public and cultural activity," local organs could have taken legal action, but since meetings were held with an acceptable name and at acceptable times, this inhibited "local organs" from taking measures "for their hindrance."⁵⁹

But why did a few Orthodox priests support LA activities, beyond the possible explanation that the LA kept neoprotestant losses to a minimum? When one priest was questioned elsewhere about a big group meeting in which youth also participated, he replied that "these are the best believers and it would be a pity to forbid their activity." Yet this seemingly innocent response was coming from a priest whom the commissioner did not trust, considering him overly passive toward social-political duties and far from reliable in representing state interests. His "Sunday school" was only a thin covering for the practice of "unhealthy exaggerated mysticism." There was yet another group in the Oradea region, a

⁵⁸ Ibid., 385.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 386.

relatively large one supported by a priest with a history of imprisonment, who held “intense religious services, having a mania for doing confession and giving communion every Sunday and holiday.”⁶⁰ Thus, state agents were suspicious of priests who supported Army activities because all too often they themselves were unacceptably religious. State agents wanted their religiosity to be the rote performance of religious duties, but since it was too public and pronounced, they called these priests “fanatic” or prone to “exaggerations.”

In the region of Criș, “the activity of this movement has reached the peak, surpassing even the form of organization of the one who founded the Lord’s Army.” A group of 600 was meeting, carrying on activity “devoid of any scruples and defying any measures.” It apparently was “the only orthodox church in the country where laypersons preach alongside the priest,” meaning their practices “do not differ from those of the neoprotestant denominations.” Priest Turicu (who had been previously “politically condemned”) was blamed for making this group active, another priest was too sick to do anything about it, and the latest priest to arrive “promised that he will try to channel the activity of this group toward the good.” But the commissioner had “doubt that he will succeed,” since he had tried many things so far “but without result.” The only thing the commissioner succeeded in doing was getting Turicu removed as priest, which was only “a step toward improving the situation.”

“[Taking] measures against the clergy” who were overly supportive of Army activities was always the first obvious step for those wanting to combat the movement. The hope was that without support by legitimate church representatives, the movement would lose power, as some adherents would respond by “transferring to other denominations where they can be active in basically the same way, while others will be consoled and will come into line with the other believers of the Orthodox churches.”⁶¹ But the LA was not supported by a clergyman in most places but depended more on local and traveling lay leaders. Such groups would usually meet on weekend or Wednesday evenings in the church (if the priest was supportive) or at houses, singing LA songs and preaching from the Bible. In addition to regular meetings, LA

⁶⁰ Ibid., 387.

⁶¹ Ibid., 388.

participants sometimes had the occasion to attend extra-regional gatherings that might feature guest speakers like Dorz. As further deterrence, commissioners suggested priests organize Sunday afternoon services “to not give [Army adherents] the occasion to gather,” and they encouraged local organs to hold cultural events on Sunday afternoons.⁶²

In his home region of Beiuș, Dorz had preached both at the church (with Soldiers attending) as well as at a wedding, speaking “in the open air.” Leaders from another city in Oradea County (Dioșig) invited him to their community, and he said he would come for an event on December 29, 1957. The Department likewise prepared for his arrival by coordinating the efforts of the local organs and local clergy, who were to hold services in order to keep the churches and believers well occupied. Because of these efforts, the service turned into a combination of a hastily organized Vespers and a gathering of some 400 Army enthusiasts from the surrounding region, who had been planning to come for some time. Those who traveled from outside all reported coming to the village to visit “relatives.” But Dorz never arrived, causing some “unrest” among those waiting, and the rumor spread that the police had detained him. Local authorities tried to combat the rumors, saying that they detained no one and had no reports of his whereabouts. The commissioner himself did not indicate whether he knew what happened to Dorz, as he may not have known.⁶³ He may very well have been in Bucharest once again, reviewing another redaction of his legalization proposal, or he may have decided not to attend for fear of further jeopardizing the success of his proposals.

Such spontaneous larger-scale gatherings worried the Department at its highest levels in Bucharest as they tracked Army activity across the country. Officials were perplexed about the growing strength of the LA and wondered why there were still so many “dissatisfied” believers joining them. At a minimum, they agreed with the following:

1. ‘The Lord’s Army’ continues to represent a mass problem in the religious sector.
2. Both the neoprottestant denominations, as well as the forbidden sects, feed on the ‘Lord’s Army.’
3. It is not in the interest of the order of the People’s Democratic State to foster the increase of the numbers in religious organizations [who are] net hostile toward the regime by the pushing of—due

⁶² Ibid., 383.

⁶³ Ibid., 382–83.

to some dissatisfaction created artificially—a significant number of Orthodox Christians to neoprotestants and sectarians. 4. It is not in the interest of the regime that former ‘Soldiers’ continue to represent a mass for maneuvering, either for the Greek-Catholic resistance, for the mystic-anarchic movements [found in monasteries...], or for other formations which can appear, including for *stylism*.⁶⁴

Officials did have reason to suspect that there was an affinity between forbidden groups, included between the Army and Greek Catholics.⁶⁵ The officials gave reason to support legalization as a solution: “By the eventual reactivation in an appropriate form of ‘the Lord’s Army,’ not only former ‘soldiers’ who had meanwhile integrated in the sects would be restored to them, but numerous other Christians as well; in addition, ‘the Army’ would be used both for the neutralization of the Greek-Catholic resistance, as well as for the consolidation of the return of Greek-Catholics to Orthodoxy.”⁶⁶ With some officials advocating bringing the Lord’s Army into a publicly sanctioned status, surely Dorz’s legalization campaign was headed for success.

But other opinions won the day. Just as with the “Bethanists,” state representatives responded to dynamic, communal religiosity by removing leaders in an attack on the charismatic centers. Romanian scholar George Spiridon aptly observes that the *Securitate* noticed the divergences among the LA leaders, including that of the traditionalist, Orthodox-leaning wing represented by Dorz and that of the neoprotestant-leaning wing of Moldoveanu. Agents deftly applied the “divide and conquer” technique.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Ibid., 376. “[T]he way in which the outlawing of the activities of this religious association was done gave negative results both for the regime and for the church, and seeing as how in place of the number of adherents of the Army falling, it grows – although a large group of Soldiers converted to the sects – it is necessary that the whole problem of the Lord’s Army be reexamined in order for us to assess the most appropriate measures in order to quench the dissatisfaction of this large mass of believers and of the Orthodox Church, which the Lord’s Army represents and which in its totality adds up to a number of believers larger than all the denominations and neoprotestant sects together.”

⁶⁵ I found this stated explicitly in Arhivele Naționale ale României, Fond “C.C. al P.C.R. - Sectia Administrativ-Politica,” 1966-1969, Dos. 14, Vol. 1, 155, and also later in Direcția Județeană Sălaj a Arhivele Naționale, “Departamentul Cultelor,” 1974/31, October 25.

⁶⁶ Arhivele Naționale ale României, Fond “Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor – Direcția Studii (1945-1963),” Dos. 6, 1949-1959, 376.

⁶⁷ Spiridon, “Tentativele de Legalizare Ale Oastei Domnului,” 388.

Dorz made some ten trips to the capital in 1957 and worked on many redactions for legalization. He incorporated comments and suggestions, made changes as requested, had to endure long sessions with *Securitate* officials, and sometimes but not always gained an audience with the Patriarch, finding the Department of Religions official there on occasion. He believed the interest in resolving this twenty-year, pre-communist problem was "sincere" on all sides, but as this process wore on, his trust waned.⁶⁸ Meanwhile, *Securitate* officials were informing him that instead of decreasing, LA activities had increased. Apparently, the excitement at the possibility of legalization had encouraged LA activity, and local leaders relaxed, thinking less vigilance was required. Yet the agents explained to Dorz "in the most severe way that the resolution of our problem is conditioned upon our submission to the provisions of the authority of the state." Dorz was told again that acceptance of his proposals was predicated on the ceasing of LA activity - all gatherings, even at baptisms, weddings, funerals, everywhere. He was told to write, visit, do whatever he could to get them to stop.⁶⁹

Optimistic about the chances of legalization, after Easter of 1958 he pleaded with others to cease meetings. They all seemed to agree with the gravity of the situation, except Alexandru Pop, who said that they should not submit to the state, but to God, and encouraged Dorz to not be afraid. Pop thence began to hold the largest gatherings he could all over the region, and *Securitate* officials blamed Dorz as leader for allowing them, wondering how Dorz could he be taken seriously with such "disorder" going on. They said that he had to stop Pop's meetings if he was going to get anywhere; they put all of the pressure on him and continued to haul him in for interrogations, long nights of questioning. They then responded to his latest proposal for legalization, replying that any "parallelism" to the state or Church would not be allowed - no autonomy could be permitted, and his proposal should be re-written.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Dorz, *Hristos - Mărturia Mea*, 334.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 335.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 337.

Although Dorz was not entirely sanguine about the quest for legalization, the big chance arrived in October 1958, when Synod was to vote on this possibility.⁷¹ But at the Synod meeting, a surprise happened—there were two proposals for legalization, as another member of Synod stood up with an alternative, longer proposal for the legalization of the Lord's Army written by famous Lutheran pastor Richard Wurmbrand, a convert from Judaism who gained notoriety for speaking out at the 1945 congress gathered to approve the new government of Petru Groza and was imprisoned from 1948 to 1956. Wurmbrand's proposal was presented as supposedly backed by other leaders, including Dorz. This proposal suggested the legalization of the Lord's Army by forming "the Romanian Protestant Church," a suggestion which the Orthodox audience abhorred, that the Lord's Army should split from the BOR. Anxiously awaiting the results outside, Dorz was given an audience with the Patriarch immediately afterward. The Patriarch queried Dorz about this other proposal, and Dorz was shocked and defeated as he had no knowledge of another proposal; he had been blindsided. The Patriarch told him there was nothing to do now except for Dorz and Wurmbrand to try to work it out. Dorz went directly to Wurmbrand and lambasted him for doing this without consulting Dorz (only Moldoveanu), despite Dorz's discovering that Wurmbrand had done it at the behest of the Department of Religions.⁷²

⁷¹ Several of the hierarchs may have had favorable opinions of the Lord's Army and the Synod vote may have had a chance. Dorz and Pop spoke of these relations in their interrogations in 1959. Dorz says he met with Teofil Herineanu, bishop of Cluj, January 1, 1958 to "ask him to support in Synod the expansion and legalization of the activity of the Lord's Army." He claims that the Bishop promised to support this effort. He also notes that the bishop of Arad was supportive of LA leader Petru Popa. When pressed about other bishops, he says the Bishops of Timisoara and Ramnicu Valcea supported their work by permitting them to meet. He mentions the metropolitan of Iasi and Bishop of Roman as not permitting them to meet or providing for such opportunities. Alexandru Pop claimed that the Bishops of Arad, Timisoara, Cluj, and Metropolitan of Sibiu were their greatest supporters, whereas in Moldavia and Oltenia they faced more opposition. According to Pop, the supportive hierarchs allowed meetings in churches, and they or priests of the region also attended. Some of them even promised to support them in Synod. See Clop, 248-249, 294.

⁷² Dorz, *Hristos - Mărturia Mea*, 342–44. That Wurmbrand had been pressured to produce it immediately was no excuse to Dorz, who felt the former should not have thought he could help the LA without discussing it with Dorz.

What's more, Dorz arrived home to find that a Youth Conference was being put together by Pop, again without his prior knowledge. This was yet another example of anarchy, since such an incendiary event as a mass youth rally was the most brazen thing the Lord's Army could organize at such a sensitive time. Dorz had tried to discourage people from attending Pop's event, and a rift developed between them too. Not long after, Dorz was summoned to Bucharest where the Minister of the Interior Alexandru Drăghici himself asked him why such meetings like Youth Conferences continued and informed Dorz that legalization could not happen; Drăghici would see to it that "they" would "wipe out" the Lord's Army.⁷³

Dorz's efforts were defeated. It appears that Department of Religions' officials and *Securitate* personnel colluded in making the Lord's Army look anarchic by cleverly suggesting an alternative proposal be drawn up by Lord's Army affiliates who had ideas opposed to Dorz's. Although the Patriarch seemingly backed Dorz, the Lord's Army supporters were divided by the multiple proposals, and they still had Lord's Army opponents among the Orthodox hierarchy with whom to contend.

The leaders of the Lord's Army were soon united, however, by the state: in 1959 agents rounded up those leaders whom Dorz had listed (at their request) as those who might oversee the various districts of the future redaction of the Lord's Army. People started to be arrested across the country, and Dorz heard about them and awaited his turn, which came in March, 1959. From March to November he was interrogated, after which he was tried along with others from Cluj. Dorz was warned in his interrogations to not make any references to God or Christ, reminding him that he'd "spoken quite enough about that until now to others."⁷⁴ Dorz received sixteen years, despite having endeavored to follow state instructions toward legalization. The vision-inspired convert and local enthusiast of Ciula, 57-year old Valer Mîndroni, received fourteen years for "crime of conspiracy against the social order." The sentences ranged from three years to twenty, plus hard labor.⁷⁵

⁷³ Ibid., 347.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 353.

⁷⁵ Corneliu Clop, *Traian Dorz în Dosarele Securității [Traian Dorz in the Files of the Securitate]* (Oradea: s.n., 2012) See Clop for all of the details on the trials, arrests, and biographical details on those arrested.

Dorz believed that the leaders' meeting at Pop's home on November 6 and 7, 1956, was also pivotal. While Sergiu Grossu and some others were waxing eloquent about the future, the seeds of division had grown roots. Moldoveanu and a couple of others favored increased independence from the Orthodox Church, something Dorz dubbed "sectarianism," but they did not dwell on these tensions at this meeting. In the general "euphoria" in discussing future plans, they did not pay attention to Moldoveanu's "silence," nor Pop's frequent exiting of the house to cars parked outside. Apparently Pop was missing a couple of hours during the nighttime hours of their discussion, but returned with the next day's newspaper with the latest news of the revolution in Hungary, inviting commentary. And the others, "naive and gullible," walked into the "sly trap" without suspicion (ostensibly voicing incautious opinions).⁷⁶ Dorz came to believe that this meeting at Pop's was held only through Pop being in some sort of collaborative relationship with the authorities; Pop was able to travel around and held meetings of all kinds at the behest of the authorities, and then informed on everyone involved.

Dozens of Lord's Army leaders and active members were arrested and sentenced in the fall of 1959. Even Pop had been arrested. Pop, according to Dorz's account, seemed particularly upset, declaring that the authorities had made some sort of mistake since he had been

In Cluj, there were twenty-two Army leaders sentenced, including Dorz, Alexandru Pop, Nicolae Moldoveanu, Petru Popa, Constantin Tudose, Ioan Capătă, Valeriu Irinca, Cornel Rusu, Gheorghe Precupescu, Ioan Opreș, Gheorghe Condruț, Nicolae Marini, Gheorghe Chișu, Ioan Dan, Vasile Lavu, Gheorghe Munteanu, Gavril Mureșan, Arcadie Nistor, Lazăr Mortici, Tache Grădinaru, Gavril Giugiu, Alice Eugenia Panaiodor (who was not an Army participant but a helper to Wurmbrand in Bucharest and friend to the Grossu family). In Timișoara, thirteen were sentenced: Ștefan Necoară, Cornel Silaghi, Stelian Cună, Pavel Dragomir, Moise Dance, Ilie Stepănescu, Adam Magiar, Petru Terlai, Lucia Magiar, Irina Pîrvan, Silviu Văsuț, Gheorghe Neagu, Gheorghe Ionescu. This group was not condemned for conspiracy against the social order as with the other groups, but for "agitation toward disobedience of the laws" (47). Most of these received ten years, some nine, one eight, and two received five. The Deva group of eleven included Ioan Marcu, Ilie Marini, Ioan Mișu, Valer Mîndroni, Dan Cioarca, Ioan Jicăreanu, Ilie Floarea, Iuliu Bernat, Gheorghe Bregar, Ilie Hothazi, Dumitru Bolog. This trial made the Lord's Army out to be a "subversive organization" with a dubious past and current activity, with "counterrevolutionary plans". They were all accused of participating in the "conspiracy" (53). In their trials, the prosecution accused several of legionnaire activity as well, implicitly linking the Lord's Army. Marcu and Mișu are examples, both of whom got the longest sentences at 18 and 20 years each.

⁷⁶ Dorz, *Hristos - Mărturia Mea*, 324–25.

cooperating with them.⁷⁷ Perhaps state agents had made clever use of Pop in getting information and undermining unity, but his usefulness had come to an end.

Monasteries and convents, although not part of this present research, were also witnessed major attacks in 1959. Historian Deletant estimates that some 2,500 Orthodox priests, monks, nuns, and laypersons were arrested between 1958 and 1963, and others have made the accusation that perhaps 75% of the 10,000 monks and nuns were required to leave for other work, being under 50 (women) or 55 (men). Apparently the police came and even hauled many of them away at night.⁷⁸ Like the Lord's Army, monastic life (though perhaps a sort of spiritual "core" to the Orthodox Church), was at the margins of social-public life and witnessed heavy scrutiny by a suspicious communist government, despite attempts by Patriarch Justinian to mitigate it.⁷⁹

It is difficult to assess the seriousness with which Church or State leaders considered the legalization question. Spiridon says that state agents rested on the argument that a "semi-autonomous" status for the Army was insupportable, saying that a legal institution could not have such "parallelism."⁸⁰ Evidently they did not want to manage religious associations beyond the mainline denominations, where they had already taken great pains to consolidate and centralize power. Control and anarchy formed the state's conceptual binary; there was no middle.

Persistent Problems in Managing the Orthodox Church

While the unacceptably religious were gathered in prisons, church and state leaders endeavored to define and create religious acceptability and normalcy. Because vigilance was the norm, the numbers participating in these "unauthorized cults" were relatively low. The numbers of those claiming religious affiliation, however, remained very high. In the heart of Transylvania,

⁷⁷ Ibid., 355.

⁷⁸ Gabriel Andreescu and Mihnea Berindei, eds., *Ultimul Deceniu Comunist: Scrisori către Radio Europa Liberă [The Last Communist Decade: Letters to Radio Free Europe]*, vol. II (Iași: Polirom, 2014), 207–11.

⁷⁹ Gheorghe Calciu, *Father George Calciu: Interviews, Homilies, and Talks*, ed. Saint Herman of Alaska Brotherhood. (Platina, CA: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2010), 67–68.

⁸⁰ Spiridon, "Tentativele de Legalizare Ale Oastei Domnului," 388–89.

for instance, its 1956 census had revealed that of the 1.3 million residents of Cluj County, 90% reported having a religious affiliation. Of the total population, 67% claimed Orthodoxy (Greek-Catholic was not an option in the census, although the inspector estimated 77% of Orthodox believers derived from the Greek-Catholic unification in 1948), 17% Reformed, 4% Catholic, and others smaller numbers.⁸¹ Just as the existence of religious practice was “normal,” the fight to normalize religious practice remained constant and encompassed all of the denominations. The majority of religious institutions and believers were able to practice within the framework of the law and of the unwritten laws of expectations, of acceptability.

One aspect of the routine duties of a religious affairs commissioner included monitoring religious holidays, especially the biggest ones like Christmas and Easter. These were expected to be big, and any voluntary large gathering of people held the potential for something problematic. A report from the local inspector of Dej to Cluj about Christmas celebrations, for example, indicated that participation was very high, but particularly among the old. Ostensibly the teenagers were occupied with dancing and chess competitions instead. Somewhat troubling, though, was that participation was “quite high” where a “returned” (former Greek-Catholic) church and old Orthodox Church decided to exchange choirs; such voluntary innovations always needed monitoring. At all of the churches, circulars of the hierarchy—which likely contained state-promoted wishes or notice of campaigns—were read, and every service and event occurred according to the predetermined schedule, without any people expressing “dissatisfaction.” The same went for the New Year’s events. State officials did not want big processions with crosses or icons leaving the church grounds, and although a few churches in the Dej region did proceed out of the church, they did not travel a great distance.⁸² In short, the religious events in this commissioner’s region remained quite acceptable that year.

Yet a commissioner from Hunedoara questioned how to respond when Epiphany was celebrated in his region. A traditional Orthodox celebration of Epiphany featured a priest’s going

⁸¹ Arhivele Naționale ale României, Fond “Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor – Direcția Studii (1945-1963),” Dos. 12, 1960, 177. This is from the Cluj branch of the Department of Religions in their report on the state of religion in 1960 to Bucharest.

⁸² *Ibid.*, Dos. 3, 1956, 145.

from house to house, Christening with holy water (and sometimes receiving “donations” for services). Three priests in Hunedoara did so, carrying a cross, (“even in the worker’s district”), and evidently no one refused them entrance. Many joined the celebration at the river for the drawing of the holy water, but the archpriest, who had a parish with mixed “returned” and old Orthodox believers, did his drawing and blessing of the water at the bridge in the center of the city instead of at a more “isolated place” as the other Orthodox priests did. What’s more, the archpriest was reported to have used Greek-Catholic terminology with “former” Greek-Catholics, and Orthodox terminology with Orthodox believers.⁸³ Here, unacceptable practices were occurring, but the question remained as to the cost and benefit of trying to rein in such aberrations. The line between acceptable and unacceptable religiosity was sometimes blurry even to officials, who did not always pursue clarifying such issues or disciplining those engaged in activities on the borders of acceptability. What’s more, there were always other tasks and problems requiring the attention of inspectors.

Greek-Catholic Problem

Greek-Catholicism was unacceptable under the newly formed Communist government not for its style of religiosity, but for the disruption it caused to nationalistic notions of Romanian group belonging. It represented an obstacle to the idea of a historic, traditional, and nativist Romanian Church, given its relationship to the “foreign” Vatican and historic links to the more Catholic Hapsburg Monarchy. Now illegal, the Greek-Catholic (G-C) Church was problematic for state agents because it represented a site of clandestine communal belonging that could garner anti-regime and anti-Orthodox Church sympathies. A 1956 summary-list from the Department of Religions reported that “among the problems of the Christian orthodox religion, those which present more and more serious political aspects, but which at the same time held less attention of the Holy Synod and the Central Leaders of the B.O.R. in the last 4-5 years, are the following: a) the problem of the former Greek-Catholics b) the stylist problem (*problema stilistă*) c) the problem of the Lord’s Army.” The leadership had not come up with a

⁸³ Ibid., 220.

“solution” yet or discussed it in the necessary detail. The patriarchate said these issues did not apply everywhere, and as diocese-specific problems, they did not merit a Synod-wide approach. The Ministry felt that the patriarch’s response had been too soft, and that he did not appreciate how each entailed “serious political aspects which oblige a response in a patriotic sense.” They also felt he should not be “indifferent” from a “religious point of view either,” arguing that believers, clergy, and hierarchs would lose confidence in him if he did not support combating these problems.⁸⁴

Even that which had been “resolved” still appeared unresolved. There was “frequent unrest” among those Greek-Catholics who “came back” to the Orthodox faith in 1948. An inspector of the Cluj region pointed out one particularly problematic incident in 1956 when certain “non-returned” priests, headed by priest Augustin Prundus of Cluj, made connections with former G-C bishop Alexandru Rusu. They met together and convinced other “returned” priests to participate, which was “an act of undermining the act of reunification of the BOR by provocations and agitation among believers.” The authorities “took measures in time, punishing the heads of this provocation.” The department was still tracking around 130 former G-C priests who had taken up work in other fields and did not currently engage in “negative” activity, as well as a dozen or so known to be holding clandestine services in their homes or attending Roman-Catholic churches. The inspectors knew their names and addresses. In the city of Dej, north of Cluj, “the catholic atmosphere” was “especially maintained” by some 34 Franciscan monks who kept visiting “former” G-C believers under various pretexts, and the department recommended to Bucharest that this community be moved to limit continued interaction.⁸⁵ Thus, the Orthodox Church in Cluj County demanded constant vigilance to protect its supposed unity.

One way in which Orthodox hierarchs supported priests and parishes struggling with recalcitrant Greek-Catholics, Lord’s Army, or other “deviations” was by conducting “missions,” a term which basically meant the sending of some higher ranking or particularly skilled priests in

⁸⁴ Arhivele Naționale ale României, Fond “Minsterul Cultelor și Artelor – Direcția Studii (1945-1963),” Dos. 25, 1956, 1-2.

⁸⁵ Ibid., Dos. 12, 1960, 179-180.

combating such manifestations during the sermon or at other gatherings. Officials from the Ministry of Religions supported such “mission work.” An archpriest in the Cluj region called a snap conference for his priests in 1956 relating to decisions by Synod to send missionary delegations to “consolidate” the BOR.

Missions, however, usually had other target audiences. They served parishes “with many neoprotestant denominations, in parishes where the priest lost his prestige toward the believers, in parishes where the problem of returning is not yet quiet, where non-returned priests are still active against returning [...]” The archpriest implored the priests to make a catechism plan for children, and that if they failed to do so, “they will be sanctioned.” He also told them to make “a plan for sermons,” to have “good sermons” in order to “win the sympathy of believers,” as preachers from neoprotestant denominations were making inroads. He then asked the priests whether they had problems with neoprotestants and needed “the help of missionaries.” Several priests described neoprotestant activity in their parishes, but one mentioned that a Lord’s Army group “arose” in his parish. The priests seemed to agree that missionary efforts were better suited toward “combating neoprotestant denominations and forbidden sects and for reinforcing the moral life in parishes where there are many hooligans, etc.” than for “consolidating unification” in the BOR. The inspector in attendance did not interject. He felt that the “attitude of the archpriest was good simply because he drew the attention of the priests in a serious way for each of them to get to work and to do catechism regularly and good sermons and to not be found out of order by the missionaries.” The archpriest promised to supply the missionary plan and schedule, and the inspector said he would forward it on to the “local organs so they don’t make difficulties, meaning the local organs should also be aware of this problem.”⁸⁶ State and church representatives were in agreement here about Orthodox “missionaries” promoting an agreed-upon line.

The problem of consolidating the “return” of Greek-Catholics to the Orthodox Church had too many layers to lend itself to a simple missionary delegation. In the town of Luduș, constant “feuds” between the believers and clergies of the “returned” church and old Orthodox

⁸⁶ Ibid., Dos. 19, 1956, 68-69.

church led some to consider the “returned” priest Romul Popa as the next archpriest to help “weld” these communities.⁸⁷ A gathering of priests was to decide whether the current archpriest Macavei would remain in his post, or whether the priests would accept Popa as the new one.

Evidently, the surface-level situation concealed murkier dealings. Once Popa had found out that he received official metropolitan approval to be a candidate for archpriest, he informed a “returned” local priest named Vasile Samoilă, who then began to agitate among believers and priests, even deriding Macavei, while promoting Popa. Apparently priest Samoilă organized groups to go throughout the city, promoting Popa, and there were even some quarrels that broke out due to some “drunk gypsies” whom he had supposedly hired for unclear machinations. Yet when the issue was put to a secret vote at the priestly gathering, only a small number voted for Popa.

Priest Samoilă had not only exacerbated the “unhealthy environment between the returned believers and old orthodox in Luduș, but revealed himself to be a ‘hostile’ element.”⁸⁸ In retrospect, Ministry officials reflected that Popa “is not appropriate” and “would not have suited” the situation there. Eventually priest Samoilă in Luduș was sanctioned by the Metropolitan for continuing his support of the losing “returned” archpriest candidate. The local inspector reported that Samoilă also had been going from house to house telling them that he was not receiving his salary and that Macavei wanted to abolish their (“returned”) church, urging believers to stay on the side of the Greek-Catholics. The local inspector was going to make sure the metropolitan was aware of Samoilă’s activity and suggested he be transferred immediately to a region “far removed” from Luduș.⁸⁹ The proffered olive branch (post of archpriest) to former Greek-Catholics turned out to be incendiary; tensions were clearly too high for such a simple “solution.”

Even customary Orthodox practices like catechism were shaped by this struggle for “consolidation.” Catechism occupied an ambivalent place in state eyes, but also in Church

⁸⁷ Ibid., Dos. 3, 1956, 250.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 248–49.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 246.

operations. State officials did permit catechism to be carried out at the times indicated by law and as long as it was based on pre-approved materials,⁹⁰ but they also watched to make sure that catechism was not drawing in too many youth. The new archpriest of Luduș, Macavei, reported at one meeting of archpriests that every Sunday afternoon he held catechism for teenagers, and children came regularly to get “religion manuals.” The excuse for such zeal was implicit, based on the information he volunteered about his parish and deanery, which “are roamed by non-returned priests who spread the rumor about ‘the reestablishment’ of the former Greek-Catholic Church,” and that a “monk named Stef makes propaganda among former Greek-Catholics to return to the old church.” The monk even supposedly visited a “returned” priest in Iernuț, where, as in Luduș, “the resistance of the non-returned is quite powerful, being supported by many intellectuals.” Not only that, but the Lord’s Army was “in full action” in certain communities, where followers “go in groups, do proselytism, and hold public gatherings.”⁹¹

When the minutes of this gathering reached the desk of the Director of the Ministry of Religions, he requested the head commissioner of Cluj to have one of his regional inspectors verify these claims of Macavei, including his reference to “religion manuals.” A local inspector was given the task, and a few weeks later he provided a report of his own findings to his boss. After traveling to a number of different communities, he found that the Orthodox priests “do not do catechism with school-aged children at all,” and the only ones doing catechism are some “non-returned priests” who hold catechism for all believers together after the services, using the Bible as their material. In fact, the two archpriests and the Orthodox priests were merely claiming to do it “to be seen well by the new metropolitan, seeing as how he is a very severe man.”⁹² When relaying this information to Bucharest, the Cluj inspector likewise noted that “usually [archpriests] report to bishops that catechism is done regularly and as organized as possible in order to have their activity shown off before the bishops, whereas in reality, for the

⁹⁰ Arhivele Naționale ale României, Fond “Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor – Direcția Studii (1945-1963),” Dos. 25, 1956, 12.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 14. The new Metropolitan was Iustin Moiescu, who held the post for only one year after Bălan’s death until he became Metropolitan of Moldova and Suceava in 1957.

most part, the priests do not put much effort toward catechizing teenagers.”⁹³ (This was not necessary a new dynamic either, as in 1951 Ministry officials wrote that Orthodox priests demonstrated a “moderate attitude” with regard to catechism, even though “the church leadership sought to always impose new obligations in this regard.”⁹⁴) Even though archpriest Macavei justified his active catechism (however fictional) based on the presence of less desirable religious groups, the Ministry separated the issues and dealt with the problem of “unification” separately, still wary that Orthodox catechism might actually attract youth. Thus, catechism had the potential to be a problem for state agents given a particularly zealous priest, but Orthodox priests did not carry out catechism religiously, though it seems that certain hierarchs expected them to at least pretend to do so.

As the Luduș archpriest debacle showed, state authorities were keenly interested in and influential in helping the church select its leading hierarchs, and they heavily weighed the potential benefit of having a “returned” clergyman serve in some leadership capacity as a symbol of the completeness of the unification. In 1957, three major posts in the Orthodox Church needed filling. The first was Metropolitan of Moldova and Suceava, and Iustin Moisescu was tapped for that position. This left the position of Metropolitan of Transylvania and Archbishop of Sibiu open, and it seems that state organs and Church leaders agreed that Bishop Nicolae Colan of Cluj would fill that spot, then leaving his position open. For Colan’s replacement, the views were far from unanimous. Some voices favored a former Greek-Catholic because of the many G-C believers in that bishopric, but as the commissioner of Cluj noted, not just any former Greek-Catholic would inspire credibility among the priests; the position was too significant to be used only as a symbolic gesture. For instance, there were two such “returned” clergymen who had aspirations to such a position, but they were both divorced and therefore went against the Church’s stance and would not be well-esteemed by conservative clergy. The official also mentioned that it was very difficult “to cope with the delicate situation of the bishopric of Cluj” and that the person must be very adept. Bishop of Oradea Valerian was

⁹³ Ibid., 15.

⁹⁴ Arhivele Naționale ale României, Fond “Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor – Direcția Studii (1945-1963),” Dos. 3, 1951, 10.

considered, but they worried that he would not inspire trust either, as a rumor was spreading about him that he “had a hot temper, was a womanizer and that he might have tried to lure a young woman who was in the audience, but that she might have hit him with her shoe.” Such rumors would make it “very hard for him to find the necessary trust and authority in Cluj.”⁹⁵

A few weeks later, the opinion on Colan’s appointment in Sibiu was solidified, and the commissioner noted that “all priests, both the old orthodox as well as the returned ones,” agreed that Colan would be well suited to the post since he understood “the local problems.” Many “returned” priests had hopes that Colan’s departure would mean that they’d get a “returned” clergyman as bishop. The commissioners were scanning all of the circulating opinions and rumors, helping to identify and assess the potential reception that a particular priest or professor might receive if chosen.⁹⁶ The position was eventually offered to a former Greek-Catholic priest named Teofil Herineanu, who had not been part of the discussion earlier on. (Herineanu would hold the post until his death in 1992, and the position was even promoted to archbishopric.) Herineanu immediately caused concern among the inspectors during his initial tenure. He unfortunately “introduced a series of new innovations in the denomination which produced discontent among the priests,” who apparently bristled at changes, perceiving them as coming at the initiative of an outsider. He was actively promoting activities which worked to “strengthen mysticism among the priests,” such as encouraging increased times for meditation, even at orientation and administrative conferences.⁹⁷ On March 5, 1961, when the nationwide elections for deputies to the Grand National Assembly and People’s Councils was to take place, Bishop Herineanu wanted to preach a sermon outdoors using a megaphone about the creation of the world (despite the commission’s recommendations to the contrary). Only “at the insistence” of other hierarchs (a vicar, adviser, and director) did he renounce his intentions, as they convinced him “that the subject was not suitable for such a big day.” Also, in a certain church “Ave Maria” was being sung with Herineanu’s knowledge, but he did not take decisive

⁹⁵ Ibid., Dos. 16bis1, 1957, 1.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 4–5.

⁹⁷ Arhivele Naționale ale României, Fond “Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor – Direcția Studii (1945-1963)”, Dos. 12, 1960, 178.

action, forcing “the organs of the state to resolve it.”⁹⁸ Whether state organs found it worth their time to find those responsible for singing a Catholic song is unknown, but this was the trade-off of the symbolic gesture of having Herineanu as Orthodox Bishop – he was likely to serve in his own way, perhaps introduce innovations, and unlikely to pursue stamping out Greek-Catholic vestiges with vigor. Yet he remained for the duration of the communist period.

Indeed, the process of “consolidating” the unification was arduous, a constant up-hill battle. Fifteen years after the unification, parishes were still being found using former Greek-Catholic “ritual books,” despite the fact that all former Greek-Catholic parishes were supplied in 1951 with Orthodox equivalents at the order of the Patriarchate. With some 400 former Greek-Catholic parishes in the region of Cluj alone, commissioners found it “very difficult to enumerate correctly” all those who were using the old liturgical book, for example, but they had a list of more than 80 known parishes and priests still using the forbidden materials.⁹⁹

In a report from the Department of Religions in 1963 summarizing the status of this unification, the writer noted that at first, certain “returned” priests were rewarded with advantageous posts and parishes (without exceeding the proportion of Orthodox priests, since they “contributed their assets as well to unification”). Yet certain Orthodox were guilty of “selfishness and envy,” and by “denunciations, instigations, defamations, etc.” were influencing the actions of their church and state authorities, who were not “realiz[ing] and analyz[ing] the specific situation.” As a result, the situation swung to the “other extreme,” as many “returned” priests were gradually removed from good parishes and put in weak ones, resulting in “massive downgrades” for “returned priests” in Sibiu, Oradea and Cluj. The report writer complained that many of them were “condemned and even arrested, which has been continuing with greater passion.” He named a couple of “personally well-known cases,” such as the sentencing of two former archbishops. Evidently only at the “intervention” of the Department of Religions were these sentences altered,¹⁰⁰ perhaps to prevent worsening the process of “reintegration.”

⁹⁸ Ibid., Dos. 103, 1961, 68.

⁹⁹ Ibid., Dos. 15bis, 1963, 20–22.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 38.

The Department's concern was that if measures were not taken immediately, the tendency for pro-Greek Catholic priests and believers to mistrust the Orthodox would cause them to "show solidarity," resulting in "ruptures within these institutions" and a process that would be "difficult to restrain." The unnamed report writer thought it possible to "normalize" and stabilize the situation. The author asserted that local state authorities had analyzed the situation "with complete discretion" when they gathered information from "unhappy" "returned" priests as well as from those Orthodox displaying "open envy" toward "returned" priests. Given this knowledge, the Department thought the coming fifteen-year anniversary of unification on October 21, 1963, would be a good opportunity to have conferences, discussions, and sermons on the "problems of unification," but also to promote and support those who had contributed. He proposed a "letter of gratitude" from the Dept. of Religions to "the most representative collaborators" in this action (patriarch, metropolitans, bishops, eventually others as well), as well as letters of gratitude from bishoprics to protohierarchs, priests, and other "more representative" ones, to pursue the resolution of the "conflicts between returned and old orthodox." He proposed that "pardon" should be sought at the "superior bodies" for "returned" but later arrested priests (36 of them). He also urged the Dept. of Religions to consider any other measures for "normalization and consolidation" in order to lessen "animosities" which were "gradually tightening, and perhaps even in an organized way," because otherwise, it could lead to "grave consequences."¹⁰¹

Unauthorized Movements – the Specter of Neoprottestantism

Church and state vigilance was also necessitated by constantly arising "aberrations," "abnormalities," and "violations" at the other margins of the Orthodox Church. Off-shoots and sects could and did emerge, and church and state representatives cooperated against such formations.¹⁰² The Lord's Army was still operating on the margins. About 1000 people were still

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 38–40.

¹⁰² Arhivele Naționale ale României, Fond "Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor – Direcția Studii (1945-1963)," Dos. 5, 1959, 9-10. In 1959, for example, the inspector of the Oradea region informed the higher-ups in Bucharest that a trial took place in Oradea, where fourteen citizens were tried and condemned for taking part in a millennialist group. They were considered "dangerous for the regime." A Cluj inspector also

estimated to be regularly participating across Cluj County (but there were certainly more), despite the imprisonment of its leaders. One of the reasons such gatherings persisted, authorities believed, was because Orthodox priests supported them “for fear that these believers would switch to neoprotestant cults.”¹⁰³ Thus the problem was a complicated mess of priorities. The worst-case scenario was the growth of neoprotestant groups, meaning that the only redeeming quality of the Lord’s Army might be that at least the Orthodox believers would remain within the Orthodox Church, even if teetering on sectarianism.

But the lines were blurry. Although the Lord’s Army gatherings were recognizable for singing particular songs (with supposedly “legionary melodies”), evidence also revealed that many who were interested in the Lord’s Army were also seen at prayer houses of Pentecostals, for example. Also disturbingly similar to neoprotestants, Lord’s Army participants were witnessed “doing proselytism, going in groups to orthodox churches from other parishes.” The inspectors were able to list the names and addresses of many Lord’s Army participants.¹⁰⁴

If the inspectors knew names and addresses, then the barrier to further limitations was not one of knowledge. Rather, the barriers to action were more material: they mentioned that due to the “drastic reductions in spending on travel,” the inspectors could not maintain watch over all the “harmful” religious activity in the region. They were especially concerned about their lack of resources to combat the growing neoprotestant menace: “Negative aspects of proselytism, baptism, travel from one location to another and other [aspects] from neoprotestant religious life and of forbidden religious groups are too frequent and these

reported in 1959 that another group was condemned, belonging to the Reformist wing of the Seventh-day Adventists. Although the state reluctantly granted Seventh-Day Adventists status in 1948, “All members of this sect are educated in an extremely unhealthy fanatic spirit, with lengthy fasts, strictly vegetarian diet, renunciation of married life – presenting a grave social danger.” To these believers, communism was the reappearance of the “beast” of the Paris Commune and “American imperialism” would destroy the communist powers in a coming war. They were holding clandestine meetings lasting one or two days in various places around the country. Although it is unclear exactly how their sentence was formulated, members of both the Oradea Millennialist and Cluj Reformist groups were given relatively long sentences, fifteen to twenty years.

¹⁰³ Ibid., Dos. 12, 1960, 181.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 186.

[groups] profit from the situation that they cannot be watched by us.”¹⁰⁵ Authorities had arrested the main leaders, but they simply did not have the resources to monitor and respond to every Army gathering across Romania. Every governmental action needed to be weighed in terms of priority, cost, personnel, and potential benefit. Authorities had no concrete plan to deal with this movement beyond continuing to gain information on existing enclaves, pressure priests and Orthodox hierarchs to inform and denounce the Army, and fine those they caught or imprison leaders who emerged. But these actions would not suffice to stop the movement, as we will discover further on.

Religious Normalcy Mostly Achieved

Although state officials wished for a unified Romanian Church, the Orthodox Church, and for church leaders of all denominations to present a unified front in their public utterances and attitudes both in Romania and abroad to foreigners, they were nevertheless wary of spontaneously organized ecumenical events. A commissioner reporting on Sibiu made mention of a case of “suspicious” religious activity there, namely a locally organized ecumenical church activity that included Orthodox (but former Lord’s Army participants), Baptists and Pentecostals. There was singing at these services, presumably including songs of Lord’s Army origin, and a gathering was held with “prayer for the unity of all Christians.” Such activity would need proper permissions, and somehow the organizing Orthodox priest had received permission from a retired archpriest (a questionable approach), and even after state and church representatives had debated the issue, they phoned Patriarch Justinian, who granted the organizing priest permission to continue. Later, inspectors found that this priest had had an audience with Justinian previously, revealing the complex layers of control and permission that enveloped such questions of acceptable religiosity.¹⁰⁶ Such an episode, although rare for the time, is interesting in itself and as a harbinger of a problem that would resurface with more power in the last decade of the regime: although publicly praised and promoted within proscribed boundaries,

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 187.

¹⁰⁶ Arhivele Naționale ale României, Fond “Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor – Direcția Studii (1945-1963),” Dos. 3, 1956, 261.

ecumenism was suspicious when grassroots in nature because it then it represented the potential for religion or Christianity to serve as an alternative communal identity or path to belonging, from which people could be mobilized toward actions or slogans that originated independently of the established state or religious powers. Ecumenism was intended to be organized in a top-down fashion to ensure that it had state belonging and identity as its gravitational center.

Despite the myriad problems in the religious realm, most Orthodox and Reformed priests, most of the time, were not posing problems for the Department of Religions or for church leaders. In Cluj, for example, Orthodox priests were more of a help than a hindrance: "Orthodox priests at orientation conferences for the most part speak in the discussions and treat the problems of social interest with more loyalty than the other denominations. As a result, the priests in turn guide the believers of the parish, mobilizing them around actions of social interest. Likewise the believers of this cult also show themselves loyal toward the popular democratic regime, fitting within the laws of the state."¹⁰⁷ They fit into a particular socio-political order and used their own status and influence to promote such an order. As mentioned above, the main "problems" with the Orthodox Church were not really with the Orthodox Church at all, but with foreign elements (so to speak) within the Church, namely the "non-returned" Greek-Catholic believers and clergy, sectarian formations like the Lord's Army, and those who were "crossing over" to neoprotestant denominations.

The commissioner of Cluj did mention one imbalance, that there were a few "inadequate priests" in large urban parishes with dubious backgrounds (like Legionnaire), whereas there were some loyal priests in "weaker" parishes, and that efforts should be made to switch the places of the two, especially relocating the former to rural parishes.¹⁰⁸ In the case of priest Gheorghe Ramba, the situation was as it should be. Ramba had been arrested for being involved in Legionnaire activity and served time in the first half of the 1950s. After release, he decided to pursue the priesthood and started seminary in Sibiu in 1957. But at the beginning of

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., Dos.12, 1960, 178.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 179.

his third year in 1959, the rector called him in, reporting that “the *Securitate* is pressuring me to kick you out” due to the undesirable links between Ramba's background and chosen profession. But the rector offered to recommend Ramba to the vicar of the Cluj episcopate so that he might get a parish there immediately and finish studies from a distance, thereby lessening the intermingling of negative influences. The plan worked: he was ordained at Bogata de Sus in the county of Cluj and received approval from the Department in Dec 1959.

But this was far from a choice position. It was quite a remote, small, and poor village, and without public transport. So he picked up his bags and began the ten kilometer walk from the last stop. He had a walking companion for some of the journey who informed him that things were “going badly with the church, the people are not able to give their contributions.” His mood did not get a lift from this information, nor did his bags from his future fellow villager.¹⁰⁹

When he arrived, he found that in the village few homes had flooring and there was not electricity. The church in Bogata was made of wood and “very deteriorated.” The same went for the parish house. There were about 200 families in his village and the neighboring Calna, also part of his service, and he switched locales of his service each Sunday. Having finished his distance learning, he then passed exams and received a license. He was also permitted by the local secretary of the Popular Council to build a new house, in part, he thought, because the secretary was a believer. All formalities were taken care of, and his house was even built with electrical capabilities in the event of its provision in the future. The next task was the church in Bogata, which was in very bad shape: it housed bats, rain came in, pigeons occupied the tower, and the Holy elements froze in the chalice due to no heating. He tried for several years to get approval to fix up the church, but responses were always delayed and negative. He traveled all the way to Bucharest, where they reported that they never saw any requests relating to his

¹⁰⁹ Gheorghe Ramba, *Memorii și Învățăături de Credință Ortodoxă [Memories and Lessons from Orthodox Faith]* (Făgăraș: Agaton, 2013), 31.

parish, but by spending several days there, he got approval and returned to Cluj. The church was torn down, work on a new one began, while services were held in neighboring Calna.¹¹⁰

Priest Ramba's story is a fine example of religious normalcy. State agents kept an eye on problematic views and influences (like the stain of Ramba's Legionnaire participation), and they accepted that such priests received placement in the worst parishes. Communist authorities even granted approval to renovations and construction of religious buildings (although perhaps lacking in motivation at times). Such religious activity did not threaten the status quo, the normalcy of religious practice in communist society.

Most work involving the Orthodox and Reformed Churches had become routine. When the election of deputies was taking place in March 1963 in the Banat, a commissioner reported on the church role in supporting this governmental event. The church leaders circulated letters, and these were read at churches in anticipation of the elections. In sermons or at the end of the service, in Orthodox, Catholic, and Reformed Churches "religious servants reminded believers about elections," about the candidates, and local plans, some even doing so several consecutive Sundays. Apparently each of the churches conformed to the service times indicated by the circulatory letter so as not to cause any interference with the elections, and several of the churches even agreed to postpone serving the Lord's Supper to a week later so as to minimize the duration of the service on election Sunday. Many of those offering evening services shifted them later, when elections would be completed.

There were just a few aberrations. A Romanian Orthodox priest decided not to have a service at all, since he thought "as such no one will come to church." A Reformed Priest was guilty of not saying a thing about the elections. Evidently, both extremes were problematic in the eyes of the commissioner, not just the uncooperative Reformed pastor. It was best to "collaborate in a sincere way with the local organs," which included maintaining religious normalcy and making religious and state events somehow complementary, not mutually exclusive. If the priests did that, then local authorities representing this atheist state would be satisfied enough to remark that "the work done by the religious servants connected to elections

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 32–34.

was well appreciated.”¹¹¹ Indeed, the Department of Religions wished for order, even the kind instituted by the churches. Department officials sometimes referenced church canon in disputed cases.¹¹² The Department had no interest, apparently, in undermining the authority it had vested in the Church.

In the Reformed Church, on the whole, the believers were considered “loyal” toward the issues of the state, not “fanatics” in their religious life, and satisfactory in their relations with Orthodox believers in mixed areas. Yet, there was still some cause for concern. Although the clergy attended their orientation conferences, “the social problems are treated superficially, and a greater accent is put on things of a religious character.” They sometimes neglected to invite the local organs to them, and unfortunately even the obligatory minutes of the conferences were believed to be partly “fictional,” not illustrating the actual discussions. Last, Reformed priests “consign[ed] more interest in religious education of the believers than the Orthodox priests,” especially in their catechism of children and preparation of teens for confirmation. This situation was regrettable for sure, but also too customary to change without significant struggle and backlash.

In 1960 Department of Religions personnel still considered it worth recalling the effects of the “counterrevolution” of Hungary in 1956 when “certain” pastors, Seminary professors, and students displayed “hostility” toward the regime and “sympathy” to the counterrevolutionaries,

¹¹¹ Arhivele Naționale ale României, Fond “Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor – Direcția Studii (1945-1963),” Dos. 26, 1963, 6–7.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 45–46, 49–50. When a priest had asked to be transferred from his hilly, remote parish to one in Bucharest due to his increasing physical weaknesses and his son’s tuberculosis, the director of the Dept. of Religions referenced the statutes of the Orthodox Church: “In general, the Orthodox church canons forbid clerics from any hierarchical rung to head from one bishopric to another, but even from one location to another location contained within a respective bishopric,” and since they were ordained to a specific parish, “they cannot dissolve this connection simply by their desire, but only by the authority of the bishop on whom it depends.” The commissioner noted that the BOR statutes and regulations “are recognized by the Department of Religions” and thereby supported. If a bishop were to provide him with a letter of dismissal and recommendation, he could transfer (also assuming he had served a certain number of years, held the appropriate qualifications for the post, and so on). To obtain a certain level within the priesthood, exams are required, and a priest’s bishop must sign a document verifying that he has achieved a certain level. Also, to transfer from one bishopric to another, both bishops must approve of it and provide documents correspondingly.

and had contacts with “reactionary elements” from Hungary. The situation did improve with the “restructuring of the teaching staff” at the Seminary in addition to the arrests, and the inspectors now considered the situation in the church to be “normal” without “displays of hostility.”¹¹³

For the Lord’s Army, a new phase had begun, and local inspectors witnessed the immediate effects of the arrest of these leaders.¹¹⁴¹¹⁵ Mîndroni, who had risen to prominence in his region due to the story of his supernatural encounter, supposedly died of heart failure in prison in March of 1960, only a few months after his sentence. As for the meetings in his small town of Ciula, the “shock” caused by the many arrests and then death of Mîndroni sucked the momentum out of the movement. No new leader appeared in the village to replace him.¹¹⁶

In Prison: Opportunities for New Christian Communities and Tensions Arise

Although the Romanian state attempted to disrupt the influence of unacceptably religious leaders on ordinary believers by imprisoning them, what is remarkable is that they created an opportunity for the unacceptably religious from various denominations to meet. The Reformed “Bethanist” pastors and laymen imprisoned in 1958 almost universally mention the new relationships they made with Christians of other confessions and the mutual encouragement this sometimes provided. Most of those whose memoirs I studied mentioned a frequent and deep connection with fellow Christians across denominational lines, and the trust and mutual respect that these interactions taught them. This is not to say that all believers saw eye-to-eye with one another, as cross-denominational and even intra-denominational encounters sometimes meant a furthering of divisions.

Nevertheless, the imprisoned Reformed believers were often placed in cells or assigned to work in divisions with acquaintances. After the sentence, Dézsi, Visky, Szilágyi, Papp, Karczagi, Sándor Jakab, and Sándor Kiss were placed together in the same cell. Dézsi – similarly to Szilágyi,

¹¹³ Arhivele Naționale ale României, Fond “Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor – Direcția Studii (1945-1963),” Dos. 12, 1960, 182.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., Dos. 6, 1949-1959, 440.

¹¹⁵ Arhivele Naționale ale României, Fond “Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor – Direcția Studii (1945-1963).

¹¹⁶ Beg, “*Un Bun Ostaș al lui Hristos*,” 187.

Karczagi, and Visky - recalls, "We spent an unforgettable eight months here together, 240 quiet days, the studying of the Word, rejoicing in the Lord, thanksgiving for the past, and in spiritual preparation for the years ahead of us."¹¹⁷ They had a routine that included taking turns leading devotions, prayer, and discussing various topics. On Sunday mornings they would have a church service, which they would take turns leading. From time to time they would celebrate the Eucharist as well (by reserving small pieces of their rations). Once they were separated, this practice was continued to the degree that it could be. Sometimes they would discreetly worship together in the ward or standing in the courtyard. Some of the time this practice would be conducted with fellow Romanian Christians, in Romanian or Hungarian as befitted those present. At times Dézsi felt he truly did have the experience of "One Body."¹¹⁸ János Fekete relayed to his wife after his imprisonment that "the communal spirit was good - in secret we held church services and shared the Lord's Supper."¹¹⁹

A large number of prisoners were sent to work on the canal for the Danube Delta near the Black Sea, a major excavation project that used forced labor in brutal (deadly) fashion into the early 1960s.¹²⁰ But "in the folds of the delta slave-life [prison-life] there were opportunities for regularly held church services," as during summer afternoon breaks, they "laid down on the grass, formed ourselves into smaller groups, and we could meet [...]." They didn't have a Bible, couldn't sing, gather in large groups, or look like they were praying, but "Laying in the grass, propped up on our elbows, the sermon was spoken with the greatest naturalness. Truly deep explanations of the Word and testimonies were heard." These were their "Services in disguise."¹²¹ Not only "Bethanists" gathered, and not only pastors preached. Sometimes even "simple church members" such as farmer Sándor Jakab would preach.¹²²

¹¹⁷ Visky, *Bilincseket És Börtönt Is*, 37.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 42–43.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 51–52.

¹²⁰ Some sources claim that forced labor ceased on the canal project by the early 1950s, but the memoirs of those who were imprisoned from 1958-1964 includes numerous accounts of being shipped to the delta to work on the notorious canal project.

¹²¹ Karczagi, *Az Utolsó Erdélyi Gályarab*, 103.

¹²² Széplaki, *A Gáncs Nélküli Lovag*, 52–53.

The lawyer Kálmán Széplaki, whose contacts with believers was minimal before he was imprisoned for his personal fictional writings in 1959, referred to the Danube Delta labor camp as his “theological university.” He found a group of believers by accident when he overheard them discussing the situation of Ferenc Visky, whose imprisonment and familial situation he had heard about while in freedom. There he enjoyed the sermons and teachings of Karczagi, Jakab, Szilágyi, and Dézsi.¹²³

The imprisoned Reformed believers found a particular affinity with imprisoned Lord’s Army believers. Karczagi met members of the Lord’s Army while working on the Delta, one of the “other gifts” of his years there. As a Reformed Christian but also a participant in the CE movement, he found in them a kindred spirit. Karczagi felt that like the CE, the Lord’s Army did not promote breaking away from congregations while longing for renewal.¹²⁴ Farmer Sándor Kiss likewise mentions, “We had especially deep connections with the members of the divisions faithfully remaining in the Orthodox Church – the Lord’s Army – since we too remained, like them, in the church even despite the persecution.”¹²⁵ Dézsi was in the sick ward at one of the prisons with well-known composer and Lord’s Army member Nicolae Moldoveanu, as well as some other believers. Moldoveanu composed songs and verse, and he taught them.¹²⁶ Several other Reformed believers mention the Lord’s Army with fondness.

But some Reformed believers developed close relationships with believers from other faiths as well– Greek-Catholic, Catholic, mainline Orthodox, Baptist, and Lutheran. Reformed Pastor János Lőrincz mentions being with Jehovah’s Witnesses, Orthodox, Greek-Catholic, Catholic, Reformed, Nazarene, Reform-Adventist, and Pentecostals at once in one cell.¹²⁷ There were others there not for religious reasons, but it is a curiosity that the state was willing enough

¹²³ Ibid., 50. . He even calls his time there a “blessing,” since he could join other “believers in God in one place” (45).

¹²⁴ Karczagi, *Az Utolsó Érdélyi Gályarab*, 110–11. Interesting how Karczagi characterizes the LA: “For them the Sunday morning liturgy, the rich-voiced songs of the priest [öblös] were not enough; they hungered for the Scriptures. They went to church, listened to their priest, whatever muddle he said. But in the afternoons they gathered for studying the word. They always invited the local parish pastor, who usually did not go out for their meetings.”

¹²⁵ Visky, *Bilincseket És Börtönt Is*, 82.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 39.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 126.

(disorganized enough?) to place such a cohort together. Perhaps they expected to foster division this way, given the history of animosity between denominations. Once Dézsi was separated from his Reformed colleagues in his new prison in Gherla (Szamosújvár) he got to know "dear" believers like a Greek-Catholic monk and theological instructor "who really loved us," two other reformed pastors, two evangelical pastors, a Roman Catholic priest, a Roman Catholic monk, and the assistant head of the national Franciscan Order (and others).¹²⁸ Karczagi also mentioned interacting with and learning much from the Greek Catholic priests he met in prison.¹²⁹ Visky shared a cell with the famous Lutheran pastor Richard Wurmbrand during the latter's second sentence.

During a certain period while at the Danube Delta, many prisoners were kept in the belly of a barge. There, on holidays, Széplaki recalls some "six kinds of wonderful liturgies" taking place, including "Orthodox, Greek-Catholic, and several kinds of Protestant liturgies." On Christmas or at Easter, an Orthodox men's chorus would sing and protestants would preach, and it was as though "everyone felt that something was happening here that needed quiet and to pay attention in reverence." "Not even the guards dared intervene," as the "barge became a cathedral."¹³⁰ But generally, if the relations among the prisoners became too friendly, those in charge would try to find new ways to divide them.

Indeed, although the ecumenism was at times remarkable, it was not complete. Some pastors of various denominations kept their distance. Some even refused to jointly recite something as common as the Lord's Prayer; the community depended on the personalities of those involved. In contrast to the recollections of Karczagi and Széplaki, Antal Papp recalls that although there were a number of Catholic and Unitarian priests, "unfortunately we did not have spiritual communion with them."¹³¹

For Reformed believers, there were denominations present that they decidedly did not agree with or find Christian brotherhood in, the Seventh-Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses

¹²⁸ Ibid., 38.

¹²⁹ Karczagi, *Az Utolsó Erdélyi Gályarab*, 90.

¹³⁰ Széplaki, *A Gáncs Nélküli Lovag*, 54.

¹³¹ Visky, *Bilincseket És Börtönt Is*, 165.

and sometimes the Unitarians. Sándor Jakab said they “lived in community” with all kinds of believers, but they “could not accept the teachings of the Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Unitarians.”¹³² “Bethanists” Béla Balogh and Sámuel Boda once shared a cell with fifty Jehovah’s witnesses. Balogh recalls that “other than the Jehovah’s witnesses, with everyone, every denomination and nationality, God’s Spirit worked unlimited, deep, true community.”¹³³

Although the Reformed Believers above recalled quite warmly the religious-community life in prison, particularly mentioning feelings of unity with members of the Lord’s Army, it is interesting to discover that the head figure of the Lord’s Army, Traian Dorz, remembers interactions with fellow believers much more bitterly. Like the “Bethanists,” many LA participants found themselves in common cells. But unlike them, they seemed to carry the baggage of previous disagreements into the cells, despite their common chastisement from the state.¹³⁴

In fact, Dorz shared a cell with his enemy and supposed informer Alexandru Pop, when one day a Hungarian Reformed pastor, the “Bethanist” Sándor Szilágyi, was transferred to Dorz’s cell, glowing from his experiences with his brethren as well as with LA leader Nicolae Moldoveanu and Richard Wurmbbrand (whom Dorz decidedly did not consider brethren). Szilágyi was excited to share a cell with Dorz, whose name he recognized and who might be able to share something with them. But Dorz did not like what Szilágyi said, and he felt that Szilágyi took sides with his opponents within the Lord’s Army. According to Dorz, they had major arguments in prison and did not reconcile. For his part, Szilágyi recalls his time with Lord’s Army members glowingly, saying “our hearts beat together wonderfully, given we want one thing,” and that we are “true brothers to one another, in Christ completely one; neither language nor religious difference can separate us.”¹³⁵ Dorz found not oneness, but difference.

¹³² Ibid., 57.

¹³³ Ibid., 22.

¹³⁴ Dorz, *Hristos - Mărturia Mea*, 374–77.

¹³⁵ Sándor Szilágyi, *Boldog Rabságom [My Blessed Imprisonment]* (Kolozsvár [Cluj-Napoca, Romania]: Koinónia, 1997), 68.

Dorz later had a chance to be with many of his “brothers,” including Moldoveanu, whom he regarded as adhering to dangerous teachings.¹³⁶ They remained deeply divided, with Moldoveanu accusing Dorz of pursuing a nationalist line, and Dorz accusing him of adhering to a "satanic theory" that would only lead to “chaos, disorder, anarchy, and mess.” Dorz endeavored to counter all of the "foreign" ideas which opposed "our doctrine and faith," and he considered Moldoveanu one of the greatest progenitors of this pseudo-protestantism (though at the same time considered him highly unoriginal, merely borrowing from Wurmbrand and others of his ilk).¹³⁷

Later, other “Bethanist” pastors joined the cell which contained Dorz and Moldoveanu. Dorz complains of suffering through tortuous days of hearing their thoughts and songs. The disputes between these “brothers” culminated in a heated debate, in which Dorz and Moldoveanu each accused and insulted the other, with dozens of other prisoners witness to the shouting.¹³⁸ For Dorz, the cause of unity was hopeless with most of those whom he encountered in prison, as all he could see were differences, not common ground. His starting point of unity was agreement with him.

Thus it would be wrong to suggest that prison was a place of complete fraternity among the peoples and religions; this was not the norm for all, whether believers or otherwise. Many believers experienced a hardening and isolation in prison, and some would declare that they did not want a God who would let them be imprisoned like that, away from wife or family. And yet, it does seem to be a striking aspect of the collective memories of the group of Reformed believers imprisoned in 1958 that they could find some spiritual strength in each other and in members of other faiths. When struggling, there were usually fellow believers to encourage them, Visky recalls.¹³⁹ In many cases, state attempts to reeducate these believers toward acceptable religiosity were far from succeeding.

¹³⁶ Dorz, *Hristos - Mărturia Mea*, 383.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 388–90.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 391–93.

¹³⁹ Visky, *Bilincseket És Börtönt Is*, 41. Dézsi, for example, was noticed by a Romanian believer (specific denomination not given), who warned him that he was straying from God, and encouraged him to “fast and pray.” He followed his friend’s instructions and found a deeper peace before God.

While these pastors and believers were in prison under various pretexts, their families, friends, and fellow believers made do as best they could. Visky's wife and seven young children were among the least fortunate. They were exiled to a prison-village in the remote Bărăgan region where they lived in a hut. Survival was precarious at times. There were "priests from several denominations" in the village. Julia Visky recalls that "We tried to fellowship with them and share the Word of God, but this was only possible with one or two of them." Whereas some considered the family outsiders or "heretics"—a relatively common view of Orthodox adherents of Protestants—other fellow prisoners gave them aid.¹⁴⁰ Upon her husband's sentence, Janos Lőrincz's wife was fired from her job, but when she tried to get new work, the stain of her husband's criminality kept her from being accepted; she was advised to divorce her husband. Yet, she got lucky once when applying at a sewing operation and they failed to ask for the document which would have revealed her husband's unsavory history. She also took packages all the way to the Bărăgan to help the Visky family in exile, even though she didn't even speak Romanian.¹⁴¹

But then in 1964, to the great joy of the imprisoned believers and their families, the arrested "Bethanists," Lord's Army leaders, and many others were granted an amnesty at the behest of the new leader, Nicolae Ceaușescu, whose youth and act of amnesty seemed to promise a brighter future for targeted believers. Yet as prisoners were being released in July of 1964, prison wardens asked them to sign a declaration, denouncing their previous behavior. Jakab and Szilágyi, for example, although torn by the decision, refused to sign, and so it was typed into their folders that they had "grown stronger in faith."¹⁴² They were still let go. Over the course of the following decades, those who passed through the crucible with their faith and a community of believers intact continued their religious activities and communal activity. The links formed among Christian believers were significant because in many cases they laid

¹⁴⁰ Julia Francis, *The Orphans and the Raven: From a Mother's Autobiography* (Bartlesville, OK: Living Sacrifice Books, 1989), 62–63.

¹⁴¹ Buzogány and Jánosi, *A Református Egyház Romániában a Kommunista Rendszer Első Felében*, 345.

¹⁴² Visky, *Bilincseket és Börtönt Is*, 59.

groundwork for grassroots ecumenism not only for those who had been imprisoned, but also for subsequent generations of believers.

Conclusion

Communist officials took note of the uprisings in Poland and Hungary in particular and reacted by taking note of places in society where associations still seemed to have the power to mobilize people, and one of those forms of association was religious life. Officials scrutinized participants in religious activities that lacked political ambitions and considered those a threat who were acting independently of church leadership structures. This demonstrates that officials largely trusted church leaders and depended upon the religious custom of deference to leaders to help establish a greater reliability among clergy and believers. By 1960, although religious management still presented ongoing maintenance issues, officials did not seem to regard the Orthodox or Reformed Churches as politically threatening, and it appeared that they had, for the most part, established a religious normalcy that was acceptable to them.

VI. Muscovite Intelligentsia, Late Socialism, and the Limits to Orthodox Innovations: 1964-1987

The Russian Orthodox Church in the time of the Soviet Union faced and adjusted to numerous changes in the society. Although efforts by churchmen from the 1920s until 1943 would be best described as designed for survival, this does not characterize the periods following Stalin's encouragement of the Orthodox Church during World War II (See Chapter II). Particularly under Leonid Brezhnev beginning in 1964 until Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of "glasnost" (openness) in 1987, state and church leaders cooperated in attempting to normalize religious life and practices in communist Soviet Union, against which abnormal and unacceptable religious life and practices were also defined. Because church and state leaders generally cooperated in defining and enforcing what was "normal" and "acceptable," those within the Orthodox Church attempting renewal or innovation struggled against both bodies.

In this chapter, I demonstrate how several Orthodox priests in the Moscow region made attempts to enliven or renew church life in their parishes and among wider circles of the intelligentsia, but how such dynamic activity always led to heavy scrutiny and punishment of those involved. This dynamic activity was regarded as problematic because it was essentially voluntary and communal in nature and ambition, rather than hierarchical and submissive. Church and state leaders seemed to agree that popular innovations were always potentially destabilizing for the existing socio-political order. Although all church services featured "religious propaganda," authorities only deemed those religious leaders and communities "unacceptable" for their pursuit of activity marked by enthusiasm, mutual authenticity, and openness. They seemingly deemed acceptable the performance of rituals, as though they were banal acts by individuals done to satisfy their own consequences. Officials did not comprehend the power of Orthodox rituals in constructing alternative identities or creating the possibility for alternative imagined communities for adherents. But Soviet authorities did find effective ways to reduce communal strength in non-conformist Orthodox circles by attacking one of the pillars—the leaders (usually priests), showing the relative fragility of these particular religious communities.

In 1964 Nikita Khrushchev was deposed by his rivals largely due to the capricious and aggressive nature of his reforms, and Leonid Brezhnev became the new General Secretary of the Communist Party. In the sphere of religion, the numerous church closings, imprisonments, and

state-led propagandistic attacks against religion—sometimes even accompanied by desecration of church property, getting drunk on sacramental wine, smashing and burning of icons and religious literature, and the sawing down of crosses—generated enough resentment that many considered Khrushchev’s attacks on religion another one of his so-called “hare-brained schemes.” The reputation of the state internationally and domestically suffered, as many believers and non-believers alike sympathized with the plight of the religious as victims. The attacks were in the name of replacing the darkness of religious superstition with the light of scientific truth, but they all too often resembled hooliganism. As Dmitrii Pospelovsky argues, these methods also harmed “civic and political loyalty,” as many believers had to now practice underground, and “concealed, uncontrolled religious practices were socially more dangerous than an overt and hence controllable Church.”¹ Even before Khrushchev was deposed, on July 27, 1964, Kuroedov communicated to his commissioners the problems that local authorities had been causing believers, who then distributed complaints abroad about “persecution” of the church by the state.²

Khrushchev’s attacks were not only problematic for the reputation of the state, but for the representatives of the institutional churches as well. Even while acts that could be characterized as “hooligan” were occurring across the country (not to mention church closings and increased restrictions to religious practices), church leaders made no public condemnation but continued to tout religious freedom and the unmatched justice of the Soviet Union. Even while the state attempted to extinguish the flame of religion across the country, religious representatives were spreading the message abroad that all was well, and foreigners were invited to sample the Soviet Union’s religious beauty in well-choreographed tours.³ These

¹ Dimitry Pospelovsky, *The Russian Church Under the Soviet Regime, 1917-1982* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984), 358.

² Keston Archive, “Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report,” 1964. Archive file <KGB 187>, pp. 4-5. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 1, Del. 65. Kuroedov warned commissioners that “Any infringement of the rights of believers [...] inevitably intensifies religious attitudes, leads to igniting religious fanaticism and complicates the work toward detaching believers from religion.” As “negative” examples of such instances, he noted that 190 churches were closed in Odessa Oblast from 1960-1964, something that only led to “intensification of religiosity.” Getting Moscow Commissioner A.A. Trushin’s attention, he wrote that “illegal closing of churches took place in Moscow Oblast as well,” citing an example of a church boasting the attendance of thousands on holidays “according to the reasoning that mainly residents of an industrial zone visit it, the interests of whom do not need to be taken into account.” Despite CROCA opinion, the local authorities closed it anyway, until CROCA authorities had higher organs intervene (7).

³ Nathaniel Davis, *A Long Walk to Church: A Contemporary History of Russian Orthodoxy*, 2nd ed. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2003).

brazen acts of duplicity would make many more Soviet citizens—religious or not—sympathetic to the criticisms leveled by an increasing number of religious non-conformists, most notably Gleb Yakunin and Nikolai Eshliman in 1965.

From the beginning of Brezhnev's leadership until glasnost under Gorbachev, the features of the interactions among state and religious bodies and believers were fairly consistent: sporadic persecution of individuals and communities who were seen as too active or too dynamic in terms of participation; increasing interest in religion among intellectuals and youth; an overall decrease in violent or murderous acts by the state toward religious enemies; increasing religious dissent featuring appeals to the law and democratic values; increasing reliance by the state on intelligence and surveillance; and pressure on religious leaders to promote Soviet propaganda abroad. Although these features will be represented below, the main focus of the chapter will be to demonstrate that what made religiosity unacceptable in the eyes of state and church authorities was when clergy and believers pursued communal religiosity, as opposed to simple church attendance in the name of personal conscience.

Changes in Soviet society created the conditions to make communal religiosity more desirable. The Brezhnev era and that of his successors Yuri Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko comprise the so-called period of the "gerontocracy." Even their successor Gorbachev labeled the period as one of stagnancy. Scholars, including Julianne Furst, have come to call this the era of "mature socialism," when revolutionary fervor gave way to enjoying the fruits of socialism,⁴ while the system seemed to decline in vigor and in its ability to compete with the capitalism of the West.

If the economy and state ideology had lost momentum, it does not mean that all areas of Soviet life had become stagnant. "Mature socialism" left room for nascent movements to flourish, including youth sub-cultures and political, environmental, and even religious movements, necessitating that one of the main arteries of Soviet authority – the surveillance of the secret police – kept pumping, with no signs of slowing down. Both the Orthodox and Baptist Churches witnessed an effervescence during this period – but not from the offices of the bishops or denominational leaders. While the institutional churches mirrored the "aging maturity" of the state leadership, the organism of the church received new life from among its clergy and laity. The response of the state and institutional church to dynamic religious life

⁴ Julianne Furst, *Stalin's Last Generation Soviet Post-War Youth and the Emergence of Mature Socialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 2–4.

remained constant: to alienate and marginalize those leading or participating in the burgeoning and dynamic religious activity in service of the “greater” good. For the state, the greater good was the maintenance of control over the population by severing spontaneously created vertical and horizontal ties. For the institutional church, the greater good was maintenance of its legality and privileges (however circumscribed they may have been), which religious non-conformists threatened.

One institutional change under Brezhnev was the reorganization of the Council for Russian Orthodox Church Affairs and the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults into the Council for Religious Affairs (CRA), although within the top leadership of the CRA, certain officials still focused on non-Orthodox religions. The exact prerogatives of the CRA were not officially made known.⁵ But evidence shows that CRA representatives had frequent interactions with church hierarchs, and the CRA functioned as the eyes and ears of state intelligence in religious affairs. They monitored religious activities and had a presence and relationship in every registered religious community. They made reports and distributed them to locally affected officials and agents.

Under Brezhnev, state organs put more emphasis on penalizing church communities for not registering by fining leaders and participants (while still not providing a path to registration), youth involvement, proselytizing, and any religious activities beyond regularly scheduled services. The form persecution took in a world of “mature socialism” was largely bureaucratic. The CRA advocated church closures much more rarely, local representatives of the state almost never destroyed or defamed bell towers and icons, and when police arrested believers and clergymen, judicial organs typically gave them a trial before imprisonment and sentences were reduced compared to previous eras. Atheist propaganda continued. It appears that the state’s goal was not to create a column of enemies so much as provide as many obstacles and annoyances as possible in the way of religious dynamism while hoping to tarnish the appeal of religion. As Pospelovsky argues, under Brezhnev, persecution was not meant to end, “only to take more civilized forms.”⁶

In addition, the state representatives continued to ensure that as far as possible, all church leadership positions be occupied by compliant persons. Bishops and clergy knew they should maintain good relations with CRA officials, as their operations depended on it. Common

⁵ Kathleen Matchett, “The Soviet Government and the Churches,” *Religion in Communist Lands* 2, no. 1 (1974): 4.

⁶ Pospelovsky, *The Russian Church Under the Soviet Regime, 1917-1982*, 397.

courtesy and gifts were never a bad idea. If a local commissioner had a positive relationship with a clergyman, he might make certain allowances or overlook things, such as reporting declining participation even if it was going up.⁷ If there was to be defiance, it almost certainly had to come from the laity or the clergy. And when it did, the state attempted to isolate or imprison such figures quickly, always under the guise of legality – either by having church leaders relocate the priests as part of routine clergy management, or, more aggressively, finding the clergy member guilty of some sort of infraction of Soviet legislation.

Because the state shifted its policies in favor of resorting to legalese and legal procedures, those inclined to public protest did as well. It is during this period that certain believers and clergymen gained notoriety (and were correspondingly harassed) for publicizing actions by the state or religious leadership deemed illegal, corrupt, or against the spirit of the Church or even the spirit of the state. This is the time of the Soviet dissidents Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's and Andrei Sakharov's fame, and many religious figures likewise gained notoriety publicly and through underground (samizdat) documents. The first Orthodox figures to make major waves were priests Gleb Yakunin and Nikolai Eshliman, who wrote an open letter in 1965 to heads of state about what they perceived to be wrongful involvement in church matters. Yakunin in particular continued to write numerous letters to various leaders both in the Soviet Union and around the world.⁸

The number of such outspoken persons grew in the 1970s, as did the diversity of the groups and movements that such persons belonged to or participated in. Even underground ecumenical movements began to form, and there was considerable cross-fertilization with other movements, like the Helsinki Watch Group. Furthermore, the outspoken religious few gained in numbers as intellectuals became increasingly interested in religion.

Policies changed minimally with the death of Brezhnev in 1982 and the subsequent rise of Andropov and then Chernenko. The head of the Council for Religious Affairs, Vladimir Kuroedov, retired in 1984 after nearly 20 years of service. His replacement, Konstantin Kharchev, showed no noticeable change in method or policy. Yet when one takes a long view of this period, one finds that the number of registered churches, number of priests, and the

⁷ Ibid., 401.

⁸ Another important figure is Boris Talantov, an Orthodox layman from Kirov province who documented and spread the word of the extent of the effects of Khrushchev's attacks on the church there. Orthodox writer Anatoli Levitin-Krasnov gained fame for his critical essays, as he actively supported figures like Yakunin and Talantov in his writings.

number of those in monasteries declined steadily (yet not drastically). There were examples of growth, but on the whole, attendance and participation declined.

Even in Gorbachev's first years, no clear changes in the state-church relationship were made. It was not until Chernobyl's meltdown and the subsequent opening (*glasnost*) of the Soviet Union that the Church experienced any sort of remarkable improvements. By the late 1980s, hundreds of new parishes had registered, youth ministries were permitted, monasteries and seminaries re-opened, and there was a basic freedom from molestation by state officials. This opening coincided with a general opening in the Soviet Union and says less about changes in the state-church dynamic specifically than about the state-society relationship. The state, by Gorbachev's lead, was gradually taking a different approach toward its citizens and their activities, and the churches greatly benefitted from that.

The attacks of Khrushchev did not disappear immediately with Brezhnev, even if the former's religious policies were "hare-brained." Brezhnev and those who followed simply applied coercion and violence differently, as their rationale and end goals differed from Khrushchev's. Khrushchev attempted to act according to the dominant ideological narrative of socialism, namely that religion and socialism were incompatible, and that religion should disappear (either naturally or with "assistance"). The Brezhnev regime, somewhat like Stalin during World War II, wished to maintain stability via a compliant populace (whose religious "needs" were being satisfied), while religious actors simultaneously served foreign policy goals of demonstrating the freedom of conscience promised in the constitution. Brezhnev, in order to maintain stability and a façade of religious freedom, granted more freedoms to the compliant institutions and leaders and aggressively hunted the non-compliant, thereby meeting his goals.

Church Services

The church service continued to be a problematic gathering after the Khrushchev era, as the tension between personal freedom of conscience and open church services and the official desire for a religion-free public was not at all resolved. It appears that state officials in the Brezhnev era simply hoped that the "needs" of believers to satisfy their desire for communal religiosity would be done in as benign a way as possible and would naturally diminish without the state needing to formulate a specific strategy. Religiosity was at its most benign when participants were few in number, of advanced age, and were not animated beyond attending religious services.

As in the 1950s (See Chapters II and IV), large crowds were attending church on feast days, and if churches were demolished, that only increased the concentration of people at the remaining ones. The best Council of Religious Affairs Commissioner of Moscow Oblast A. A. Trushin could do was to claim that “although not very significantly, some changes have occurred which in essence boil down to a reduction in religiosity,” but nevertheless, “the church still ha[d] a marked influence over a certain part of the population.” For example, he noted that on Sundays and especially on holidays the churches in Moscow (more in the city than the oblast) were filled with believers.⁹ Trushin claimed that from 1963 to 1964, fewer children were christened, fewer dead received church burials, and fewer weddings occurred in churches. Yet, even if this was the case, the changes were very modest at best, plus the reality was that “the *intelligentsia* and even people belonging to the party and Komsomol celebrate religious rituals.”¹⁰

Commissioners from the CRA pointed to several aspects of pronounced religious activity, including church choirs and monasteries. They noted that people who were “distinguished in the past,” like retired teachers, professors, doctors, and engineers, were active in the choir and even in the life of the church.¹¹ The greatest religious hotbed in Moscow Oblast in Trushin’s opinion was the Troitse-Sergieva Lavra of Zagorsk (the Soviet name for Sergiev Posad), arguably the most prominent monastery in the Russian Orthodox Church, which Stalin had restored to the church in 1945. People, including youth, would visit there for religious inspiration or teachings. On the day honoring Saint Sergei, some 10,000 believers came from the regions of Zagorsk and Moscow. Moreover, at the nearby seminary in Zagorsk, seminarians were not only being influenced by its monks and making like-minded acquaintances, but some evidently had met their wives there in the social interaction that visiting the Lavra afforded.¹² While KGB agents were a visible presence at the Seminary and they ensured the cooperation of professors and students, the Lavra did not have the same and afforded all kinds of uncontrolled interactions. But these were not the main issue, despite the symbolic importance of the Lavra. The main problems were with priests “activating” congregations across Moscow and the oblast.

⁹ Keston Archive, “Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report,” 1965. Archive file <KGB 54>, p. 93. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 1, Del. 71.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 100.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹² *Ibid.*, 76.

Trushin described the goal of the Council for Religious Affairs as “strengthening the control over observance of legislation on the cults,” not “strengthening control over the cults.” That is to say, it was supposedly their respect for law that drove them, not the desire to control. But divisions within the government impeded the elimination of violations. According to a report by Trushin in 1965, not all local organs of power were as vigilant as others. In some districts (*raiony*) in Moscow city and Oblast, clergy were baptizing children illegally, without anyone preventing this action. Plus, local governments were supposed to offer alternatives to religious holiday celebrations but not everywhere were “secular rituals and non-religious holidays” carried out with success. In 1964, representatives from the CRA delivered more than 30 lectures and presentations about soviet legislation on cults and measures toward control to various local organs, but Trushin could not be sure what effect they were having.¹³

Trushin also had to face the many complaints from citizens about what they considered the “unlawful” closing of churches. He admitted that “threats and intimidation” were used to close certain religious communities. He had identified examples of “straight meddling in internal affairs of churches” and of “rude” behavior by officials. One problematic consequence was that in certain cases complaints were distributed abroad, “which gave [foreigners] reason to strengthen slanderous propaganda in their own countries about persecution of the church and religion in our country.” To rectify the situation, the CRA took measures to “eliminate selected errors” and renew services in three different locations.¹⁴ Government representatives were far from being of one mind and spirit about managing religion, and normalcy and predictability was wanting.

Priests and their unacceptable communal religiosity

For those who regarded religion as a dying custom, more concerning than mass participation on feast days was that certain priests were attracting crowds for ordinary Sunday services, for Vespers, and even during the week. It was usually sermons that distinguished priests. “As is well-known,” CRA Commissioner Trushin remarked, “the church pulpit is the one place in our country for legal propaganda of ideology alien to us. And it needs to be noted that servants of cults of all religions very cleverly make use of this opportunity.”¹⁵ CRA

¹³ Ibid., 83–84.

¹⁴ Ibid., 84–85.

¹⁵ Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report, Archive file <KGB 87>, p. 17. Keston Archive and Library, Baylor University. Originally from TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 62, 1968.

Commissioners kept a list of problematic priests and reported them to their rectors, and local officials and security organs worked together in keeping track of their activities.

In January 1965, Trushin conducted an “on-the-ground study of the preaching activities of the clergy.” Summarizing the situation in Moscow Oblast, he was concerned about this “opportunistic activity” within the church, and he could “not claim that on this the issue the situation is more or less alright.”¹⁶ Trushin was disturbed at priests’ efforts toward “strengthening beliefs in god” (as though exceptional), the life of the church, and “ignit[ing] religious fanaticism.”¹⁷ Preaching was “igniting religious fanaticism,” for example, when priests urged people to take part in rites that strengthened the church.¹⁸ By definition, a priest was “fanatic” when he worked with energy toward enlivening church life or preaching with conviction. One priest was quoted as urging people to fast. Another encouraged them to draw closer to God. In 1964 during Lent in the city of Podol’sk, for example, the priest Kondratiuk said:

Orthodox believers! When we already stand at the threshold of the Great Lent, - and feelings of being swept away and of fear appear in our heart, what does god see in our hearts, with what are we justified before him? We are weak and faint-hearted / We wandered far from the lord, we hardly even thought about him. We need to look back and condemn the evil and dark sides of our lives. Let’s look no further to the rear, but pray more diligently, but not pray just for ourselves, but also to remind neighbors about this, our children. And now let’s pray that the lord god will grant us the cleansing tears of repentance.

To Trushin, this was an example of “adapting to modern conditions,” i.e. finding ways for their sermons to better engage audiences, and he was disturbed at this call for “strengthening of belief in god” and “call[ing] those in attendance to pray more and to attract ‘neighbors’ and children to this act.”¹⁹ That such kinds of sermons were considered exceptional is in and of itself revealing. “Good sermons,” by inference, were those that encouraged submission to church and state leaders, or were abstractions on purely religious topics that had little bearing on subsequent action.

Trushin was not fabricating his concerns – the young priests who were born and raised in the Soviet Union were not acting in the same way as those who witnessed the brutalities of the 1920s and 1930s. He was concerned about the 185 priests who had finished seminary

¹⁶ Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report, 1964, Archive file <KGB 54>, p. 104. Keston Archive and Library, Baylor University. Originally Fond 7383, Op. 1, Del. 71, 1965.

¹⁷ Ibid., 105

¹⁸ Keston Archive, “Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report,” 105.

¹⁹ Ibid., 107–8.

between 1945 and 1965, most of whom were under 40 years of age. Such pastors had “replenished the clergy.” These comprised the “strongest ideological opponent” since young clergy was “significantly more active than the old.” Thus in statistics they used the age of 40 as an important factor, keeping close track of those under 40 with less concern for those over. They were also particularly concerned about new priests who had previous secular higher education. Among those was listed was Priest G. P. Yakunin, born in 1934, who finished Irkutsk Agricultural Institute.²⁰

Trushin identified many priests from Moscow and the surrounding oblast as worth mentioning as negative examples. Vsevolod Shpiller (see Chapter II) had been one of the few priests routinely named as causing problems in the 1950s, and his name was mentioned in CRA reports only until 1968, and only with vague references to “illegal activities” at his church, or the presence of a few children and youth at the Easter Service at his Nikolo-Kuznetskaya Church.²¹ But authorities’ concern for Shpiller declined as younger priests drew their gaze for the ways they were transgressing the lines of religious acceptability. Below, I consider in particular three well-known priests, Aleksandr Men’, Mikhail Trukhanov, and Dmitrii Dudko, who have already been the subject of biographies and articles,²² but I consider them in light of their pursuit of a particular kind of religious practice and how representatives from the Council for Religious Affairs and believers viewed their religiosity.

Aleksandr Men’

Already in the 1960s in Alabino, Men’ had been doing the things that concerned state authorities. He recalled his early priesthood as a time when he wanted to “attract people” to the faith by “break[ing] the ice from the beginning, to find a new language for [...] sermons, to tie them to issues which people [were] excited about.”²³ He was “adapting to modern conditions,” in the words of state observers, and they were taking note of his sermons, and identifying him

²⁰ Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report, Archive file <KGB 54>, p. 69. Keston Archive and Library, Baylor University. Originally Fond 7383, Op. 1, Del. 71, 1965.

²¹ TsGA Moskv, 1966-1970, f. 3004, op. 1, d. 93, 30; d. 94, 25; d. 95, 14.

²² Yves Hamant, *Alexander Men: a witness for contemporary Russia (a man for our times)* ([S.l.]; London: Oakwood ; Cassell, 2000); Zoia Maslenikova, *Aleksandr Men’: zhizn’ [Aleksandr Men’: Life]* (Moskva: Zakharov, 2001); Judith Deutsch Kornblatt, *Doubly Chosen: Jewish Identity, the Soviet Intelligentsia, and the Russian Orthodox Church* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.06617>; Oliver Bullough, *The Last Man in Russia: The Struggle to Save a Dying Nation*, 2013; Nicholas Ganson, “Orthodox Dissidence as De-Atomization: Father Dmitrii Dudko and His Battle with Razobshchennost’,” *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 40, no. 1 (January 1, 2013): 90–114.

²³ Aleksandr Men’, *O sebe...: vospominaniia, interv’iu, besedy, pis’ma [About me...: memories, interviews, talks, letters]* (Moskva: Fond imeni Aleksandra Menia : Izd-vo “Zhizn’ s Bogom,” 2007), 85.

as one of the priests problematically putting “emphasis on issues of morality.” In 1964 he was transferred to Tarasovka as a demotion for his activities as rector where he led the restoration of the church and enlivened the congregation. In Tarasovka he was one of three priests under a very rigid rector, with less pay and no access to a car. Perhaps not coincidentally, no lodging or office for receiving guests could be found for him in the parish, so he and his family (wife and two young children) had to dwell at his wife’s home in Semkhoz, over one hour away on the opposite side of Moscow.²⁴

In Tarasovka, Men’ still worked to enliven church life by his sermons and activities. His sermon note-taker focused on a line from one of his Eastertime sermons, when he linked individual spiritual vitality with that of the wider body of believers, saying ““In order to transform oneself, we have to be guardians of our own heart and of the heart of the person nearest to us.””²⁵ In addition to preaching sermons on “modern” topics and trying to draw the congregants together, officials discovered Men’ to be “actively working among youth, cultivating in them a religious spirit.”²⁶ Judith Kornblatt retells the story of one young man who had planned to attend a party and even had a bottle of vodka in his pocket, but decided spontaneously to attend an Easter service, having heard about Men's parish in Tarasovka:

I was riding this train and didn't even know where the stop was. Then all of a sudden, when the train stopped at a particular station, I saw that the whole compartment got up and went out. I realized that they were probably going to this church service, so I followed the crowd. And it turned out that they walked through a field, and I saw this huge cathedral in the middle of nowhere. When I arrived, I saw it was full of people. I still had this bottle of vodka showing out of my pocket [...] I decided to turn away. But just as I decided to turn, all of a sudden I saw [an acquaintance]. He came out and said, “Oh, it's good you came. Let me take you to the choir loft. You'll see everything from there” [...], from where I observed the whole service.²⁷

Kornblatt argues that part of Men’s appeal was his attempts to draw people together, to give them a new universal way of belonging as an alternative to the Soviet one (which for many people lacked universal bonding power).²⁸ Plus, Men’ offered intellectuality and transcendence at once, a combination people evidently found attractive.

²⁴ Maslenikova, *Aleksandr Men’*, 202.

²⁵ Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report, Archive file <KGB 87>, p. 20. Keston Archive and Library, Baylor University. Originally from TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 62, 1968.

²⁶ Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report, Archive file <KGB 87>, p. 10. Keston Archive and Library, Baylor University. Originally from TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 62, 1968.

²⁷ Kornblatt, *Doubly Chosen*, 76.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 79.

Trushin characterized Men's congregation in Alabino (and implicitly now in Tarasovka as well) not as an enthusiastic community of like-minded believers, but as something abnormal, complaining "In whatever 'parishes' made available for him to serve, he surrounded himself with hysterics, ignited religious fanaticism, interfered in church affairs, for which he was repeatedly expelled by executive organs."²⁹ What a believer might have described as healthy church life, state representatives diagnosed as antisocial, irrational, and a social sickness. Evidently to pursue communal religiosity was abnormal religious practice, where normal religious practice was limited to one's personal convictions and individualistic participation in a church service.

Authorities also found Men' suspect for his circle of friends. As introduced in Chapter IV, Men' had been meeting with certain fellow priests with some regularity since 1962, an ad-hoc group which included at various times priests Nikolai Eshliman, Gleb Yakunin, Dmitrii Dudko, and Georgii Edel'shtein; writer Anatolii Levitin-Krasnov; and another half dozen or so. They had earnestly been discussing writing letters against the decisions of the 1961 Synod³⁰ (which severely limited the power of priests; see Chapter IV), but when Khrushchev was replaced by Brezhnev, they waited to see if a new religious line would emerge. Not satisfied by any changes, Eshliman and Yakunin decided to proceed by sending an open letter of more than 40 pages in which they described in detail what they regarded as unacceptable government interference in church life and unacceptable submission by the church hierarchs, made most evident by the decisions of the Synod in 1961.³¹ Church hierarchs almost universally condemned the letter publicly, but many younger priests and active believers were "inspired," and some even collected money in support of the courageous priests. The patriarch eventually demanded Eshliman and Yakunin rescind their views to continue serving, but they did not.³²

Because of his association with Eshliman and Yakunin, state authorities began to scrutinize Men' more intently. In 1965 agents searched his parish in Tarasovka and his home

²⁹ Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report, Archive file <KGB 87>, p. 10. Keston Archive and Library, Baylor University. Originally from TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 62, 1968.

³⁰ Interview with Georgii Edel'shtein July 3, 2004 for Voice of America Radio program, <http://www.golos-ameriki.ru/content/a-33-a-2004-07-03-5-1/657892.html>. Also on Krotov's library: http://krotov.info/spravki/history_bio/20_bio/2004_Dudko.htm. Retrieved 9/30/2014.

³¹ Nikolai Eshliman and Gleb Iakunin, *Ego Sviateishestvu, Sviateishemu Patriarkhu Moskovskomu i Vseia Rusi, Aleksiiu: otkrytoe pis'mo [To His Holiness, Patriarch of Moscow and of All Russia, Aleksei: Open Letter]* (New York: All Slavic Pub. House, 1965); Nikolai Eshliman and Gleb Yakunin, *A Cry of Despair from Moscow Churchmen* (New York: Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, 1966).

³² Men', *O Sebe*, 151–152.

Semkhoz in 1965 for samizdat of Solzhenitsyn, but they did not find it (it was there, in fact), and he was not arrested.³³ Illegal literature would have been a simple way to remove Men', but now his influence among likeminded priests and laypersons would have to be dealt with through "normal" church avenues. The rector of his church in Tarasovka, priest Serafim Golubtsov, became increasingly "quarrelsome" and was constantly producing scandals and "absurd denunciations."³⁴ Finding the working relationship unbearable, Men' cited "non-brotherly relations with the Rector" and requested that Metropolitan Pimen transfer him to a parish near his home in Semkhoz. The congregation protested his departure from Tarasovka with a petition to Pimen, but their demands were ignored.³⁵ Men's was transferred in 1970 to Novaia Derevnia, a very small parish some distance from Moscow.

Mikhail Trukhanov

If the fantasies of Khrushchev were replaced by the more "mature," sober policies of Brezhnev, this transition clearly did not stop the appearance of "fanatic" religiosity. Trushin concluded based on a "comprehensive" study on "the state of the clergy" in 1968 that priests "of all religions" were mainly "loyal" to Soviet authority, but that "most of their ideological character and mindset [were being] formulated in a different light" than a scientific-materialist one. This "mindset" resulted in the situation where "they actively [were trying] to spread an anti-scientific religious worldview, and strengthen faith in god in the surrounding population, and ignite religious fanaticism."³⁶ Among those named were Men', Mikhail Trukhanov, and seventeen others across the oblast, but there were "many others" whose names were not listed in the report.

Although he had been serving for several years already, Father Mikhail Trukhanov finished seminary in 1967, and he was given a small parish outside Moscow in Pavshino. He had a black mark against him due to his imprisonment during WWII for organizing a bible study and in 1953 on false charges of conspiracy, and he attracted church and state leaders' attention when he served temporarily at All Saints in Moscow several years prior (See Chapter IV). A small parish outside the city was probably the best he could hope for.

³³ Maslenikova, *Aleksandr Men'*, 207.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 218.

³⁵ Men', *O Sebe*, 82, 175–176.

³⁶ Keston Archive, "Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report" Archive file <KGB 87>, p. 9. Keston Archive and Library, Baylor University. Originally from TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 62.

Yet here, too, Trukhanov did what he had done before: he preached with feeling, and he met with those who wanted to meet with him. A local woman heard about him not long after he had arrived, in 1968. A relative told her, “We have a new priest - Father Mikhail, and he’s quite good. Come - you’ll like him.” Taking the recommendation, she attended the service. Trukhanov gave a sermon, and “from his service and his sermon [she] was just in heaven.”³⁷ She eventually became one of his spiritual children. According to the custom within the Orthodox Church, believers may request a priest to take them under his tutelage for further teaching and study of Orthodox belief and practice, and a priest and believer in such a relationship refer to one another as “spiritual father” and “spiritual child.” Trukhanov became the “father” to many spiritual children. One spiritual child met him when she was a young teenager. She recalls that Fr. Mikhail had “a variety of spiritual children - people of different classes: teachers, professors, and the most simple of the poor.”³⁸ Trushin painted a darker picture, saying Trukhanov skipped work often due to “illness” but then would be seen with “some kinds of women,” calling them his “slaves of god.” One of these happened to be a doctor who confirmed Trukhanov’s “sickness,” providing him with a note justifying his need to rest from work. Trushin saw Trukhanov’s monk-like asceticism as “pretending to be disinterested” in money, and officials claim he gave it to these “slaves of god.”³⁹ According to Trushin, this explained his popularity. It was common for officials to slander priests as immoral, as using their position for sordid ends.

After Trukhanov had served in Pavshino just two years, in 1969 the CRA instigated Trukhanov’s disciplinary transfer to Podol’sk for “violations of Soviet legislation on cults,” such as “gross interference in financial-economic activities of religious communities, blackmail, igniting fanaticism among parishioners,” and “excessive use” of alcoholic substances. As in Men’s case, Trushin found Trukhanov guilty of “igniting religious fanaticism” because he “often t[old] of the lives of different holy saints, summoning his listeners to renounce worldly things, remain more in prayer.” His sermons, Trushin said, “sometimes slipped into anti-Soviet fabrications,” and he passed along a report from local informants who noted that Trukhanov was “comparing the bible with literature,” and declared that “100% of truth is in the bible, but in

³⁷ Mikhail Trukhanov, *Vospominaniia: Ne Mogu ne Govorit’ o Khriste: Besedy, Propovedi, Vospominaniia: Materialy k Zhizneopisaniiu, Chast’ II 1956-2006 gg* [Recollections: I cannot not Speak of Christ: Conversations, Sermons, Recollections: Materials for a Biography, Part II, 1956-2006], ed. V. A. Zvonkova, vol. 2, 2008, 106.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 2:108–109.

³⁹ Keston Archive, “Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report” Archive file <KGB 88>, p. 16. Keston Archive and Library, Baylor University. Originally from TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 65.

literature it is only fiction and its truth is just 1%.” In addition to expressing “anti-Soviet moods,” Trukhanov’s other problem (like Men’s), was that “youth and all kinds of hysterics concentrate around him, [and he was] closely linked with the group of [Orthodox intellectuals headed by critical writer] Krasnov (Levitin).”⁴⁰

In Podol’sk Trukhanov ran into trouble immediately. After only six months, the rector had asked him to leave due to bad relations between them. The protests of the people did not help. Trukhanov wrote to the Bishop, “Because of the virtual impossibility of properly conducting worship services in conditions of constant expressions of boyish rudeness and irritability on the part of the rector, I hereby request Your Eminence about defining me as temporarily on leave [*za shtat*].”⁴¹ Despite his very short stint in Podol’sk, he had already gained spiritual children, as well as further attention from state observers. Trushin reported on the situation from a different perspective. As he reported it, the bishopric “was forced” to place Trukhanov on leave in 1969 because the executive organ of the church in Podol’sk terminated the contract. His reason was that Trukhanov had “surround[ed] himself with different sorts of hysterics, ignited religious fanaticism in the parish,” the same complaint as in Pavshino. The “Commission for facilitating control of the Executive Committee of the Podol’sk City Soviet” provided information on his “illegal activities”:

From the first days of service in Podol’sk church, Priest Trukhanov arrived in the city of Podol’sk with his numerous admirers, who together with him ignite religious fanaticism in the church and create disorder. Trukhanov delivers incomprehensible sermons, in which he often expresses that ‘the people do not have a leader and the people are like a herd without a shepherd’, ‘From all diseases only god heals’, and so on.⁴²

Although his contract was not likely terminated due to the “incomprehensibility” of his sermons (more likely the opposite), it is true that his presence created “disorder,” even if the “order” that was disrupted was predictably banal services and no community dynamism.

While on leave, Trukhanov applied yearly for positions from 1970 until 1976, but somehow he received the same reply each time from the Metropolitan: “There are currently no vacancies.”⁴³ Finally in 1976 he was permitted to serve, for a measly few weeks. In April 1976 he received a temporary appointment that lasted nearly four months due to the rector’s illness. His

⁴⁰ Ibid., 15–17.

⁴¹ Trukhanov, *Vospominaniia: Ne Mogu ne Govorit’ o Khriste*, 2:112.

⁴² Keston Archive, “Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report” Archive file <KGB 88>, p. 27–28. Keston Archive and Library, Baylor University. Originally from TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 65.

⁴³ Ibid., 2:127.

rector praised him for his service, reporting “of him it’s only possible to speak well.” But once the rector recovered, he had no more need for Trukhanov to serve there, though he recommended him as worthy to serve in another parish.⁴⁴ In early August he was given a place in Ozyory, not far from one of his first parishes in the early 1960s. He only lasted a week. He immediately suffered verbal attacks in church from a woman who yelled that he was a “bandit and a Baptist,” repeating accusations she made of him years before when he was there, that he was a “sectarian” and “not from our faith.” These scenes were enough to have him suspended and require him to give a report to the metropolitan.⁴⁵

In September, it was another parish for Trukhanov. Someone found out about his past in the Gulag and spread rumors that he was “mentally ill” and a “bandit capable of murder.”⁴⁶ He served three days in November at another parish, and in another in late November, and another in January. He wrote to the secretary of the Patriarch, complaining that “assignments for one-three days—this is not service.”⁴⁷ Soon after, in March of 1977, he was given service in the village of Pushkino, his last place of service before retirement, where he served for two years. Even though he had influence here, the years of inactivity, short stints, and transfers had truly limited his reach. Once retired, he could do even less. State authorities had found Trukhanov’s tendency to enliven church life unacceptable for the way in which he heightened the importance of the supernatural in everyday and communal life. They found that keeping him from service limited the possibility of such a community forming.

Dmitrii Dudko

While Trukhanov’s influence was being contained by refusing him a job, priest Dmitrii Dudko’s influence was reaching across Moscow. When Brezhnev came to power in 1964, Dudko was in his second parish at the Church of Saint Nikolai, his first having been demolished due to Metro construction in Moscow. His preaching was attracting crowds. One evening he had decided to cut the sermon from an evening service, and a woman said to him sadly that she had even left her child at home and traveled across town so that she could properly listen. Thus he

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 2:129.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 2:130.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 2:133.

decided that at no service would he go without giving a sermon, despite having been advised by the bishop to be “a little less zealous.”⁴⁸

People heard about Dudko and came to see what the rumors were about. It was not uncommon for non-church goers to express something like the following about Orthodox Churches: “Those that operated were largely a formality, where old women attended sterile services rushed through by ignorant priests.”⁴⁹ But in his quest for religious life, one student, Aleksandr Ogorodnikov, heard about a priest in Moscow who “was actually preaching to parishioners,” Father Dmitrii Dudko. Ogorodnikov decided to attend one of these services, and he kept coming back: “In his services, in these talks, it was like being alive [...]” Ogorodnikov contrasted Dudko’s sermons with the usual ones: ‘Sermons were [generally] censored and had to be as abstract as possible. Priests had to talk in an incomprehensible language in the sermons. It was like they were not addressing the people...’⁵⁰ He, like many others, found themselves at Dudko’s church week after week.

The church warden, which was a position that had to be approved by the CRA and not the rector since 1961, had complained to the commissioner of the CRA about Dudko, saying that he was the kind of priest “who gives a sermon every day.” To the warden’s surprise, the commissioner responded that the warden was “appealing to the wrong place,” and should discuss the problem with the rector of the church.⁵¹ Technically, this was an “inner-church issue,” and the general approach of state representatives was to try to keep it that way, encouraging superiors to discipline underlings within the church by sanctioned church avenues, without direct state involvement. The commissioner, in most cases, would have judged wisely. Usually, church staffs had discord aplenty, and most zealous priests simply yielded to their rectors when scolded or pressured. But Dudko was particularly determined.

By October of 1969, CRA Commissioner of Moscow (city) Plekhanov and the KGB were tracking Dudko,⁵² but Dudko’s troubling religious activity was just beginning. By the 1970s, Dudko was even baptizing intellectuals who were known in broader circles, often doing so in private. Writer Zoya Krakhmal’nikova was the first of her circle to be baptized by Dudko in 1971, and her husband, writer Feliks Svetov, was also baptized by him not long after.

⁴⁸ Dmitrii Dudko, *Podarok ot Boga: Kniga v Piaty Chastiakh [Gift from God: A Book in Five Parts]* (Moskva: Izd. Sretenskogo Monastyria, 2002), 151.

⁴⁹ Bullough, *The Last Man in Russia*, 82.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁵¹ Dudko, *Podarok ot Boga*, 151.

⁵² TsGA Moskvyy f. 3004, op. 1, d. 95.

By 1971-1972, Dudko was already quite well known across Moscow, and the state had to be careful not to make itself look bad by martyring him. As usual, attacks on Dudko began with fellow clergy and believers, to make the problem seem internal to the church. Authorities pressured the warden and the rector to curb his influence.⁵³ Relations deteriorated as the rector made a schedule to minimize Dudko's influence by keeping him from interactive roles, thus putting more duties on other priests. He forbade Dudko from preaching, saying that his sermons were by nature "agitation," but Dudko would stand up to preach when he served, counting on the fact that the people would support him in case the rector made a scene.⁵⁴

The warden also attempted to rein him in. Although she generally let him "do what he wanted" she complained, "Why do you give such sharp sermons, they [officials from the Council for Religious Affairs], well, call me in." She was getting an earful from several directions, as sometimes an atheist "aktiv" would observe the service, asking her, "what are these sermons that this priest is giving?" State authorities pressured her in hopes that Dudko would be sensitive to her plight. He told her to tell them that her "job" was not "paying attention to sermons" but to "the housekeeping part of the church."⁵⁵

When these avenues for pressuring Dudko did not bear fruit, authorities confronted him directly. CRA Commissioner Plekhanov sent a letter to the procurator about Dudko with accusations that Dudko might have officiated at an illegal wedding in his apartment and disseminated a "slandorous work" entitled "I believe, Lord" to a young woman whose mother filed a report.⁵⁶ In July 1972 the procurator did summon him, and the main questions centered on Dudko's interactions with youth. As Dudko defended his actions and told them that "everyone" was tired of atheistic literature and looking for something else, he touched more than one sensitive nerve.⁵⁷ Not only was he asserting the value of religion to society, he also was insinuating that the official ideologies were losing attraction and that the next generation was looking for something else. Those in the procurator's office brought up a complaint a mother submitted about her daughter's growing interest in religion due to Dudko's influence, but Dudko accused the mother of "antireligious obscurantism."⁵⁸ When he would not give information

⁵³ Dudko, *Podarok ot Boga*, 160.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 162.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ TsGA Moskvyy f. 3004, op. 1, d. 97, 164.

⁵⁷ Dudko, *Podarok ot Boga*, 174-175.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 175.

about his wider network of people, the authorities warned him that they were tracking his activities.⁵⁹

Soon thereafter, the warden reported that “a complaint was submitted about you from the procurator; they’re ordering me to terminate your contract.” Dudko was determined to “tell everything from the pulpit” the following Sunday, “when there will be a lot of people” in order to expose state meddling in church affairs.⁶⁰ He did so, and Commissioner Plekhanov interrogated him, saying “How dare you use a church platform for personal goals?” Dudko defended himself: “And how do you dare interfere in internal affairs of the church?” “We don’t interfere,” he replied, “we cannot order [priests to be removed,] we only requested.” Plekhanov brought up complaints by citizens and reports of baptisms and marriage ceremonies outside the walls of the church, and he suggested Dudko ask the Patriarchate for a new parish, but Dudko was determined to remain.⁶¹ Surprisingly, authorities allowed Dudko to continue to serve at the same church.

Dudko’s defiance only increased his prestige among the risk-loving and religiously curious, and his popularity increased yet more when he attempted something entirely new. For some time he had preached on social issues like depression, alcoholism, abortion, violence, and the lack of trust between people.⁶² He decided to go beyond preaching about topics of concern to holding question-and-answer sessions, inviting people to submit questions that he would answer in public.

The sessions began in December, 1973. The first question for his first talk dealt with the very people in the audience, where the questioner complained that old women “interfere with the young people coming to church,” and Dudko tried to reconcile generational differences.⁶³ Many questions centered on apologetics, like the existence of God. People invited others for the second talk.⁶⁴ He read testimonies of recent converts to Christianity from atheism, generating excitement of a growing community.⁶⁵ By the third talk, the church was “full to capacity.” There were many youth there, even many non-believers. Some of his acquaintances said that as they

⁵⁹ Ibid., 179.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 182.

⁶¹ Ibid., 188–189.

⁶² Bullough, *The Last Man in Russia*, 83.

⁶³ Dmitrii Dudko, *Our Hope* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1977), 14.

⁶⁴ Dudko, *Podarok ot Boga*, 191.

⁶⁵ Dudko, *Our Hope*.

were exiting the subway, “many asked how to get to our church.”⁶⁶ Dudko commented to his audience, “The atheists maintain that questions of religion are already obsolete, of interest only to the elderly. Now here’s proof to them that religion is not something obsolete, but something always new, something vitally necessary for everyone - both young and old alike.”⁶⁷ When one questioner expressed concern that the events were becoming political, he tried to maintain that “religion and politics are two different realms.” He was wrong about this, of course, and he must have known it: managing religious practice had long been the prerogative of the Soviet state.

Speakers were installed outside for the hundreds attending, and typed transcripts were distributed, even abroad. The fourth, fifth, and sixth talks “had such a wide response that people came from everywhere: from Kiev, Leningrad, Gorky, Lithuania.”⁶⁸ They were popular because they were different: participants found them genuine. His goal, he said, was not to answer all questions, since he knew his limitations, but to “arouse interest,” to get people to seek further. Also in contrast to Soviet propaganda, Dudko made it his goal to avoid giving a “stock answer,” as this would “dry up religion” and make it “seem boring and obsolete.”⁶⁹ One submitted question stated, “Father Dmitrii, why engage in polemics with atheists? It’s a needless waste of time and energy because no one is interested in their doctrine. It’s antiquated and obsolete. Better, tell us about faith.”⁷⁰ As Alexei Yurchak argues, Soviet propaganda had been losing traction and was repeated pro forma and taken lightly by many young and urban intellectuals.⁷¹ The questions indicate, however, that although some people considered Soviet ideology empty, some were still very much interested in modes of thought and belief.

The questions at Dudko’s sessions were far from the safe theological abstractions expected of religious gatherings. When Dudko answered questions usually never considered in public forums, it “astonished” youth like Ogorodnikov, who regarded the events as authentic since they lacked the predictability of other group gatherings—whether at church or state-sponsored events. Plus it was thrilling to see “people you never saw in church,” like “serious intellectuals” and Western correspondents.⁷² People of various faiths came too, Protestant,

⁶⁶ Dudko, *Podarok ot Boga*, 192.

⁶⁷ Dudko, *Our Hope*, 40.

⁶⁸ Dudko, *Podarok ot Boga*, 192.

⁶⁹ Dudko, *Our Hope*, 63.

⁷⁰ Dudko, *Our Hope*, 126.

⁷¹ Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006); Furst, *Stalin’s Last Generation Soviet Post-War Youth and the Emergence of Mature Socialism*.

⁷² Bullough, *The Last Man in Russia*, 84.

Catholic, Jewish, making the gathering feel as though it had universal appeal.⁷³ Highly problematic for Soviet authorities, Dudko was attempting to forge a communal religious identity: “Our main object is to find a common language, to find a language of love and truth [...],” something he felt contrasted with the experiences at other parishes. A fellow priest had complained to him, saying, “we’ve lost our common language with our flock. Quick, perform the service—bang! bang! bang!—and home again as fast as possible!”⁷⁴ Even his introductions to his sessions were in terms of “we.” He observed the audience and described them; he made an “us” out of individuals, commenting that even if they do not think alike, they had unity because they were coming together.⁷⁵ He believed that “these discussions are uniting us, that a kind of unwritten brotherhood is forming” among believers of various confessions and even non-believers. He tried “to emphasize that it’s not I who am holding a discussion, but we.”⁷⁶

But despite the numbers, Dudko was vulnerable. In his ninth speech, he made a slip-up: while trying not to condemn the patriarch as his questioner provoked, he did note that the patriarch was “surrounded by thousands of rows of informants,” which apparently was a “mistake” that authorities could “quibble” with.⁷⁷ To the great disappointment of those who traveled from far away, he did not do the tenth session because the Patriarch had forbidden him from continuing his service as a priest and requested a meeting.⁷⁸

In Dudko’s defense, prominent mathematician Igor Shafarevich was angry not that Dudko would be summoned by state authorities, but that the church leadership would forbid religious activity which was attracting people to the faith and give him no support, even of “a moral kind.”⁷⁹ At disciplinary meetings in the office of the patriarch, the first issue they mentioned was that it was “not church form” to conduct questions and answers. It was the form, not the content that church leaders emphasized.⁸⁰

Metropolitan Serafim justified Dudko’s suspension as a result of his “non-fulfillment of the requirements of obeying the hierarchy, violations of the Stavlenicheskaya confession, and

⁷³ Ibid., 89.

⁷⁴ Dudko, *Our Hope*, 85–86.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 138.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 161.

⁷⁷ Dudko, *Podarok ot Boga*, 193.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 196.

⁷⁹ Valery Chalidze, ed., “In Defense of Dmitry Dudko,” *A Chronicle of Human Rights in the USSR* 10 (August 1974): 23–24.

⁸⁰ Dudko, *Podarok ot Boga*, 198. It may be of interest to note that Shpillar also was granted a trip to the United States in 1975, where he defended the state of religion in the USSR. TsGA Moskv f. 3004, op. 1, d. 100.

the ignoring of church discipline, in concurrence with the apostolic canons 36 and 51.” The confession includes the oath for priests to serve in “a spirit of humility and meekness,” and to not take part in any political movements or parties. That he did not readily submit to authority and that he dabbled in political discussions made him vulnerable to such accusations. Only “repentance” would lift his prohibition from the clergy.

In a report to CRA Chief Kuroedov, Trushin noted that Dudko would no longer serve in Moscow, as a result of his “hostile activities, expressed in the systematic pronouncement of anti-Soviet sermons in front of a large collection of believers, the constant surrounding of himself by extremist youth of Jewish nationality, as well as the violations of legislation on religious cults” (issue of Jewish nationality discussed below). Dudko evidently “repented” to Serafim and promised to only preach “on Gospel themes.” On the basis of this repentance, in September 1974 Serafim gave Dudko another chance in the priesthood as assistant priest in the village of Kabanovo, boasting around 2,000 inhabitants and at the far eastern edge of the oblast, a minimum two hours’ travel from the heart of Moscow.

But the local CRA commissioner for Kabanovo, when he heard about Dudko’s “anti-Soviet activities,” refused to approve a contract for him. Only by certain “influence” of the CRA office in Moscow and the agreement of the “organs of State Security” (KGB) was his position there ratified.⁸¹ They wanted him to work there, even if the local representative did not want the problem on his plate. Upon arrival, he met with the local commissioner of the CRA, who grilled him about his past and threatened him with a “talk with Trushin.” The warden there tried to comfort him, saying, “Batyushka, don’t worry. It won’t be bad here with us. Certainly, he’s not pleased... Now just talk a little less with the people [than you did in Moscow].”⁸² In short, he was advised to mimic those priests who kept their head down and did just the minimum. To be acceptable was to not stand out.

Parish Life

Priests were not the only ones responsible for religious activity, however. Although state authorities preferred to view religious animation as the product of a priest “activating” a congregation, believers acted according to their own energy as well. As the case of Naro-Fominsk shows below, there were still groups of people working together to get churches

⁸¹ GARF, January 4, 1976, f. 6991, op. 6, d. 989, 7.

⁸² Dudko, *Podarok ot Boga*, 220.

opened, and as the case of Grebnevo demonstrates, parishioners had to negotiate to make the best of the congregations they had. Not everything depended on clergy.

Naro-Fominsk

When Father Men' had been a priest in Alabino, many believers attended from Naro-Fominsk,⁸³ about 30 kilometers and at least 45 minutes of travel time away. There was no Orthodox Church in Naro-Fominsk, and after Men's departure from Alabino, their efforts to get one reached a critical point. According to the law of 1929, if there were twenty or more who requested to form a religious association, they would be permitted registration. Of course, bureaucrats could make each step difficult. There had to be proper documentation, including local authorities' approval to use an existing building or build a new one (which should meet all fire and sanitary requirements), and the appropriate representative of the Council for Religious Affairs should approve it as well. The group in Naro-Fominsk made all efforts to successfully register over the course of the late 1960s. Their application spent months being ignored, despite repeated attempts to discover the reason for non-response by local bodies. Finally, local authorities responded by telling them they did not have proper documentation of suitable "accommodations" for their religious association. When that was addressed, the problem was that they did not prove "dire need" for such a society. This, too, was addressed. There was a church that was not in use, but if they would be refused that one, they promised to build one "by their own strength" and money.

When they still could not get local authorities to agree, in 1970 nearly 1,500 believers made an appeal to the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR, complaining that "local powers" had been using "any pretext" for refusing their applications, and that the city council "could not be but mistaken" in its assessment of the "measure and degree of [their] need," concluding that their treatment was "nothing other than the display of brute force, flouting our right which is granted by the Constitution and Law."⁸⁴

Trushin noticed that this process of trying to open a church resulted in the "activation of believers," as the nearly 1,500 signatures made evident. He complained that this effort was instigated by 30 church "activists," who went from "home to home, from apartment to apartment" to collect signatures. The commissioner found it "very surprising, that to such an

⁸³ Maslenikova, *Aleksandr Men'*, 185.

⁸⁴ Samizdat Archive Association and Radio Liberty (Munich, Germany), *Sobranie Dokumentov Samizdata [Collection of Samizdat Documents]* (Munich: Samizdat Archive Association, 1972), AC 764.

unlawful activity of churchmen in the city no one reacted in any way.” It was laypeople rather than clergy who usually undertook attempts to open churches, although customarily state representatives blamed clergy for any activation. Trushin felt that the proper reaction was for state representatives “to give corresponding guidance about strengthening ideological work among the population, as well as monitoring the activity of churchmen in the aforementioned regions.”⁸⁵ Rather than recognizing this as a need for a church, Trushin saw it as a need for increased state presence. The local paper, the *Banner of Ilich*, called these activists “charlatans on the fringes of religion.” To want a church was one thing, but to be energized enough to try for one was cause to be ridiculed as a “fringe” movement perpetrated by deceivers.⁸⁶ Their petition was not granted.

“Normal” Parish - Grebnevo

Church life in more “normal parishes” was not as animated as in the parishes of Dudko, Men’, or Trukhanov, and incidents like 1,500 signatures for a church were also rare. One can consider the village church of Grebnevo to be “typical,” insofar as typical is possible. Until 1976, it had nothing that would be considered out of the realm of the ordinary for parish churches in Moscow Oblast in the Brezhnev era.

Parishioner and Orthodox believer Natalia Sokolova felt even in Grebnevo, there was little “separation of church and state,” as the regional commissioner for the CRA “meddled in all affairs of the church.” The churchwarden had to apply to the commissioner for everything, and he either refused them or attempted to take advantage in some fashion, such as by demanding excessive payments or bribery. By now, people learned to “keep quiet” and were “accustomed to all sorts of harassment.”⁸⁷

In the forty years Natalia Sokolova lived in Grebnevo, only twice did a priest serve more than a few years at her nearby Orthodox church, which had at least two priests at a time - one served for fourteen, another for nine, but otherwise one or two years was the norm. She felt it was not accidental: “Such was the policy, they didn’t let people get used to a spiritual father,

⁸⁵ Keston Archive, “Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report,” Archive file <KGB 40>, 9, 12. Originally from TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 70.

⁸⁶ Amnesty International, Research Department and Amnesty International, International Secretariat, *A Chronicle of Current Events* 20 (1971): 247.

⁸⁷ N. N. Sokolova, *Pod Krovom Vsevyshnego [Under the Blood of the Most High]* (Moskva: Izd-vo, Pravoslavnoe bratstvo sviatogo apostola Ioanna Bogoslova, 1999), 303–304.

didn't let a priest come to know his flock. How could there be a community there?"⁸⁸ The one who served nine years, Father Dmitrii, was loved by the people. He did much to improve the conditions in the church, but this brought the ire of the district executive committee (*raispolkom*), who tried to "discredit" him with libel in the newspaper. He was eventually moved.⁸⁹

There were all kinds of factors that shaped church life, other than having a particularly zealous or talented priest. Much depended on personnel, from priests to the churchwarden to local authorities to the ability of parishioners to get along. Sokolova's husband, Father Vladimir Sokolov, was a priest in nearby Losinoostrovskii raion on the edge of Moscow. Father Sokolov was fortunate because the churchwardens he worked with tended to be believers who cooperated well and did not work independently of the rector's blessing. Even the local executive committee expressed surprise that members of the church staff weren't all submitting complaints against each other. But in Grebnevo, the situation was otherwise, where an older woman ruled as warden somewhat tyrannically. Sokolova complained that her speech was barely intelligible, and the "church fell into decay." In addition, "spirituality came to a standstill," as people "made noise" during services, had conversations, "none of the priests dared give sermons," and confession was rare - the priest would often just cover the "confessor's" head with the stole in silence, after which he or she could receive communion. The combination of priests and warden made the church unsatisfactory for the kind of religious life Sokolova was seeking, and she avoided the church in Grebnevo for a couple of years altogether.⁹⁰ For the time being, Sokolova made do with the company of some of the spiritual children of her husband, who would come to their home and help the family with their five children.

Men' at Novaia Derevnya

If the parish at Grebnevo was on life support, Aleksandr Men's parish in Novaia Derevnia was bustling with activity. He was trying to form a community out of his parish, not satisfied with having believers isolated from each other. As for his own community of priests and intellectuals, the pressure authorities put on it had effectively destroyed it. The Eshliman-Yakunin group had been broken up, and writer Levitin-Krasnov had been arrested in 1969 and was in prison until he emigrated in 1974. Men' found his friend Eshliman quite "transformed"

⁸⁸ Ibid., 270.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 271.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 358.

after the open letter affair, and relations became “superficial.”⁹¹ Yakunin had found his own place in the political-dissident movement. He and Men’ met from time to time and kept track of each other’s activities, but now their spheres no longer overlapped.⁹² Men’s friend and intellectual-priest Mikhail Meerson-Aksenov had also emigrated in 1972.

Thus, Men’s pursuit of an intellectual community marked by meetings and discussions waned. He shifted his focus to his new parish, Novaia Derevnia. Moreover, there was no shortage of people coming to his parish, including local parishioners, locals curious about the new priest, and scores of Muscovite spiritual children.⁹³ One such new attendee from Moscow, Olga Bukhina, recalls how “this little church, as many other churches of that time, had been pretty much filled with the local old ladies, but suddenly it was occupied by a bunch of young boys and girls in their early twenties.” It was awkward, especially at first, as the young people came without knowing the customs. “The old ladies” of the church looked at them, she felt, with “severe disapproval,” making the parish “clearly divided into two parts which had nothing to do with each other.” Men’, she says, was “in the middle of this.”⁹⁴

For Bukhina, as well as for many of those gathering, the awkwardness gradually diminished, as she found acceptance there. She felt that “Simple human relationships emerged from our being together in the church.” It was becoming more than an accidental gathering of disconnected individuals (which would have been an acceptable religious gathering in the state’s eyes), but “a place of tolerance and love, a place where people of different sorts could be together without killing each other, physically or morally.” To her, it was a clear contrast to the rest of social life:

The situation in the 1970s was quite depressing, politically and socially. But for me and for many others, I believe, the little church in [Novaia Derevnia] was an oasis of joy. There [was] no other place in the world for which I would be ready to get up at 5 in the morning, in the Russian winter, awfully cold, pitch dark, take the subway to the commuter train, forty minutes in the train without heat, another twenty minutes in the bus, and eventually walk through the snow to

⁹¹ Men’, *O Sebe*, 172.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 174.

⁹³ Maslenikova, *Aleksandr Men’*, 222.

⁹⁴ Olga Bukhina, *For the Jews like a Jew, for the Greeks like a Greek: the Parish of Novaja Derevnja*, August 2004. http://www.alexandermen.com/Father_Men%27s_Parish_of_Novaja_Derevnja, retrieved September 17, 2014.

the church. It would still be totally dark, not yet dawn. Obviously, something very warm existed there if I was able to do all of that on a very regular basis.⁹⁵

For people like Bukhina, this was a community, a gathering of people that she chose voluntarily, and for which she sacrificed gladly and also told others about. Numerous people went to Men' for counsel and prayer, sometimes waiting in line for confession as many as six hours, and others found somewhere to stay overnight in order to attend the early-morning confession slots.⁹⁶

Authorities were suspicious of Men's influence, they questioned those close to him, and they even suspected him of being an agent of the Catholic Church. KGB agents cast his attempts at bridging denominational barriers as his participation in an "anti-Soviet organization," according to KGB head Yuri Andropov in 1974.⁹⁷ Men' also drew a large number of people with Jewish ancestry to the church, probably due to his own heritage. Bukhina, herself a Jew, recalls that the gatherings at Men's church "looked very strange" when compared to the "'normal' church crowd." Bukhina felt that "in Russia everyone can quite easily tell who is Jewish and who is not. Russian Jews look very different from ethnically Russian people, and as a result, they are quite visible and easy to recognize in the crowd. The old ladies in the church unmistakably knew who we are."⁹⁸ The 1970s and 1980s was a time when being Jewish was a particularly marked issue, as Jewish life experienced something of a revival of interest in Jewish identity and religion. Interest in Zionism was on the rise, as were Jews' requests to emigrate. They claimed the

⁹⁵ Olga Bukhina, *For the Jews like a Jew, for the Greeks like a Greek: the Parish of Novaja Derevnja*, August 2004. http://www.alexandermen.com/Father_Men%27s_Parish_of_Novaja_Derevnja, retrieved September 17, 2014.

⁹⁶ Maslenikova, *Aleksandr Men'*, 232, 241.

⁹⁷ March 25, 1974, Letter from State Security Organs to Central Committee, signed by Yuri Andropov. Made available through private collection of Pavel Men'. In 1974, the head of the KGB, Yuri Andropov (who later served as General Secretary after Brezhnev), sent a letter to the central committee regarding an "ideological battle" the Vatican was waging against the USSR with "special interest" in "expand[ing] links with the Russian Orthodox Church." As a result of efforts by the Vatican to reach out to the Orthodox Church, certain Orthodox clergy were "gradually slipping into a pro-Catholic position, accusing the leadership of the ROC of too much loyalty to the state and unwillingness 'to use their right of protest against illegality, perpetrated by an atheistic power with respect to the church.'" To Andropov and his agents, Men' was not just a priest pursuing relationships with kindred spirits, he was at the center of a great conspiracy: "The group of pro-Catholic minded priests, headed by A. Men (Moscow Oblast), in his theological works smuggles in the idea that the ideal of church life can only be in Catholicism." They wrote that some of his writings were illegally sent to Belgium, where a Catholic press was printing them in Russian and distributing them in the USSR

⁹⁸ Olga Bukhina, *For the Jews like a Jew, for the Greeks like a Greek: the Parish of Novaja Derevnja*, August 2004. http://www.alexandermen.com/Father_Men%27s_Parish_of_Novaja_Derevnja, retrieved September 17, 2014.

existence of systemic anti-Semitism in Soviet society, but the scores denied emigration were labeled “refusenik.” Not only was the revival of Jewishness met with increased anti-Semitism, but Jews who desired to leave were sometimes branded as disloyal to the state.

Men’ and one of his spiritual children (and biographer), Zoya Maslenikova, felt that the old congregation was effectively split in two: there were those who were “captivated by the kindness, openness and eagerness of a young priest,” and those who opposed him, often articulated with tones of “anti-Semitism.”⁹⁹ In fact, it was not uncommon that if people noticed a particularly lively or active priest or believer, some might sneeringly suggest that he or she was likely a Jew, purporting that such a one was secretly trying to lure people away from “true [re: complacent?] orthodoxy.”¹⁰⁰

His diverse circle of friends, acquaintances, and parishioners made him an easy target for slander and epithets. Agents conducted a few searches, but there weren’t any “direct confrontations.” Those who only knew him a little, he says, used varying labels to describe him: “occultist, Zionist, Catholic, modernist, an agent of the authorities.”¹⁰¹ It did not much matter that these labels by definition preclude one another; such labels served to sow mistrust among the people, that such an “extremist” clearly is not one of “us.” As Judith Kornblatt argues, Men’s religiosity “was couched in the language of inclusiveness and universalism,” something attractive to an intelligentsia in search of ideals and universal values that many felt were missing from society. The problem was, however, that some saw his gatherings as a collection of ‘outcasts,’ including dissidents, Zionists, and Christians.¹⁰² Certain representatives of these groups could easily clash, as the coincidental factor which brought them together (Men’) was not enough to erase all of the tensions and issues that separated them.

Despite the efforts of a new rector in 1976 to reduce Men’s influence,¹⁰³ Men’ was not deterred in his quest to build a religious community by the slander and pressures. Because he noticed how people waiting to go to confession “saw in each other undesired opponents costing the father valuable time” and that “connections among his spiritual children were accidental and chaotic,” he decided to “organize the unreasonably sprawling, loose parish.”¹⁰⁴ The idea was to group seven to twelve people together for regular gatherings of prayer, study, and aid as

⁹⁹ Maslenikova, *Aleksandr Men’*, 222.

¹⁰⁰ Kornblatt, *Doubly Chosen*, 98.

¹⁰¹ Men’, *O Sebe*, 177–178.

¹⁰² Kornblatt, *Doubly Chosen*, 79, 82.

¹⁰³ Maslenikova, *Aleksandr Men’*, 250–251.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 235.

needed. Because such gatherings would certainly be more fodder for wild conspiracies, they adopted secretive practices: meeting places were constantly changed, and the timing of a gathering always corresponded with an alibi (state holidays, birthdays of a member or of a relative, etc.). They could not arrive in a group, nor could they leave as a group. Father Men' assisted in picking group leaders and supplying topics for study as well as reading or visual material. Evidently, the idea "caught on" and the groups were "viable," but the extent and duration is not known.¹⁰⁵ Like participants in the Seminar, Men' and his group of believers attempted to transform individual conscience into communal religious practice.

"Extra-curricular" Religious Activities – The Christian Seminar

Just as Men' attempted to forge a religious community, elsewhere in the oblast, people were looking for more than just a church service. The 1970s were marked by new, ad-hoc religious gatherings, inspired by priests like Dudko and Men'. Aleksandr Ogorodnikov, who became a frequent participant where Dudko served, was raised an atheist but had gone on a hunt for "truth"—first rejecting ideology, adopting a hippie lifestyle, then believing that he found the truth in the teachings of the Orthodox Church. But finding a suitable religious community was not easy, as simply going to church did not satisfy him. In the words of Levitin-Krasnov, seekers like Ogorodnikov, having no religious background, were "confused" by things like an unintelligible Church Slavonic and the many rituals. They "rarely" went to Church at first, preferring to read religious literature and have discussions with each other.¹⁰⁶ Ogorodnikov's first attempts at church were full of mutual incomprehension:

'Before us the Church was all old people, old people, and we were the first swallows [of spring]. One time, I went into a church in one of the provinces, and the old women tried to force me out of the church. "We won't let you close the church [...]" they said. In the understanding of these old women, a young man could go into a church with only one aim, to smash things up, to close the church. It was only when I went up at the end of the liturgy to receive communion that the old women understood. All the church was crying, they were crying. I was a new generation [...]'¹⁰⁷

Admittedly struggling against the "intellectual pride" that kept him resistant to attending church, he also struggled against "the lack of a flourishing religious community life

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 235–236. Men' called them "communions." I have not succeeded to date in discovering more on these formations.

¹⁰⁶ Alexander Ogorodnikov, *A Desperate Cry* (Keston: Keston College, 1986), 6.

¹⁰⁷ Bullough, *The Last Man in Russia*, 82.

within the Russian Orthodox Church, which deprived us of the opportunity to serve the Church actively, while the official hierarchy made no response to our appeals.”¹⁰⁸ He found that “in the Russian Church the parish is not like a brotherly community where Christian love of one’s neighbor becomes a reality, the State persecutes every manifestation of church life, except for the performance of a ‘religious cult.’ Our thirst for spiritual communion, religious education and missionary service runs up against all the might of the State’s repressive machinery.”¹⁰⁹ As Yakunin put it at the time, the Orthodox case was singularly problematic:

In the present Orthodox parish, as in the communities of no other confession, the feeling of Christian brotherhood is weakened. Paradoxical cases are encountered in the large cities. People who have stood next to each other in prayer and have taken communion from the same chalice for decades, who have watched from the corner of their eyes how each other's children and grandchildren grow, how they themselves are aging, turn out to be personally unacquainted.

As for priests, and their activities, Yakunin felt that the Orthodox Church as a whole was “turning more and more into a ‘cult-performing’ sect,” and that “many priests do not even preach, as this is not encouraged by the Patriarch, and their performance of the sacraments has been reduced to pure ritualism.”¹¹⁰

This was Ogorodnikov’s opinion too, and he looked for a new avenue. “Dissatisfied with the mere ‘performance of a religious cult,’ having no opportunity to receive a religious education, and in need of brotherly Christian relations,” he set up the Christian Seminar as a study group.¹¹¹ In August 1974 Ogorodnikov was working as a janitor at a clinic, and he used the janitor’s small and poorly heated sleeping quarters as the rooms for the Seminar. Anyone could come, and there was a variety in age, lifestyle, education, and views.¹¹² Those who traveled from great distances even spent the night there. Branches emerged elsewhere in Leningrad and Smolensk, and, as time went on, also in Ufa, Odessa, Christopol, Kazan, Minsk, Riga, Pskov, and Novosibirsk. The first meeting saw 25 people from Moscow and from other major cities, and 20-40 people typically gathered in this janitor’s quarters, but as many as hundreds attended all the

¹⁰⁸ Ogorodnikov, *A Desperate Cry*, 5.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Gleb Iakunin, Lev Regel’son, and Jane Ellis, *Letters from Moscow : Religion and Human Rights in the USSR* (Keston; San Francisco: Keston College, Centre for the Study of Religion and Communism ; H.S. Dakin, 1978), 29–35.

¹¹¹ Ogorodnikov, *A Desperate Cry*, 5.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 8.

branches combined. Word was spread by mouth among trusted acquaintances, and strangers were not accepted without the permission of trusted members.¹¹³

The purpose was discussion of wide ranging topics, with a focus on Orthodox religious and philosophical thought, much in the style of Dudko's talks. The Seminar was not a gathering of political "dissidents," as they had no ambition to make or propose changes to politically empowered bodies. It was, says Ogorodnikov, "a self-organised, informal group of friends, who wanted to get together to learn."¹¹⁴ The discussions were lively, and the energy from these meetings spread. In contrast to some church services characterized as "uninspired and wooden," participants found this seminar to be fresh.¹¹⁵ Attendee Vladimir Poresh remarks, "Those conversations, that way of life, took hold of me completely; it was all so sound, so full of meaning and depth, so full of the warmth and genuine feeling which you cannot confuse with anything else."¹¹⁶ One of the most regular attendees was a language teacher, Tatyana Shchipkova. The meetings gave her something she didn't find elsewhere: "warm Christian fellowship, completely untrammelled thinking, and total immersion in the spiritual realm." Rather than being a curiosity to "real" life, religion now took center stage. Shchipkova was satisfied to find that "Social questions were discussed only in connection with religious ones."¹¹⁷ Community and togetherness were so central to the themes and talks that one of the great conclusions that many of them came to was that "true freedom" was not pursuing one's own desires, but "to bind together in 'living forms of Christian community.'"¹¹⁸ They did not accept the Soviet view of faith as limited to individual conscience.

The State Attacks Communal Religiosity

State representatives had been doing their best to cast any dynamic religious communities as "marginal" or "fringe" and leaders as opposing "our" social norms. Thus, authorities could deal with them as though they were pursuing criminal activity. As Trushin put it in 1974, when summarizing the cases of priests and wardens stripped of registration, he

¹¹³ Koenraad de Wolf, *Dissident for Life : Alexander Ogorodnikov and the Struggle for Religious Freedom in Russia* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2012), 67.

¹¹⁴ Ogorodnikov, *A Desperate Cry*, 5.

¹¹⁵ de Wolf, *Dissident for Life*, 70.

¹¹⁶ Ogorodnikov, *A Desperate Cry*, 7.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 10–11.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

applied the blanket accusation that they were all “fanatics and extremists.”¹¹⁹ Fanatics and extremists are abnormal, undeserving of “normal” treatment and warranting discipline.

Seminar participants as Psychiatrically Abnormal

As part of its crackdown on burgeoning communal religiosity, state authorities acted aggressively against the Christian Seminar, which had been meeting for two years since 1974. Authorities labeled their meetings “anti-Soviet.” In addition to its principal leader, Ogorodnikov, the authorities began hounding the attendees as well. Detachments of police would often break in and demand evidence that they had permission to meet as well as their identification documents.

Participants were being persecuted, as usual by the divide-and-conquer (or isolate-and-alienate) strategy. In 1976 they searched participants for literature or other incriminating material, and some were interrogated, threatened, and mocked. One was failed in his exams. One member, Eduard Fedotov, was taken to a psychiatric hospital and diagnosed with “schizophrenia.” No visitors were permitted, but Ogorodnikov persisted and was eventually granted a meeting with a certain Dr. Levitsky, who reportedly told him, “I’m not against belief. Belief is a matter for a man’s conscience. But [...] for him [religion] is an obsessional *idée fixe*. Your Eduard is living in a world of illusions, and I want to bring him back to real life. [...] You can go into a church, pray, take communion - but why preach?” Levitsky’s comments are telling: it was labeled a social disorder to have religion move beyond the limited and private realm of conscience. Authorities also interned another participant, Aleksandr Argentov, and he was given powerful drugs against his consent. He was told his religious enthusiasm was a “result of a mental illness.”¹²⁰

31 participants of the Christian Seminar were hauled in and interrogated between September 1976 and April 1977; one was expertly and cruelly beaten. One woman was followed across town, pushed, harassed. One young man was taken to a psychiatric institution where he was told by a psychiatrist that “We’ll beat your religion out of you.” He was repeatedly drugged.¹²¹ The pressure worked on some, causing them to discontinue their attendance.¹²² Meanwhile, state newspapers slandered public figures like Ogorodnikov and Dudko.¹²³

¹¹⁹ Keston Archive, “Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report,” 1974, Archive file <KGB 175>, 3. Originally from TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 82.

¹²⁰ de Wolf, *Dissident for Life*, 77–78.

¹²¹ Ogorodnikov, *A Desperate Cry*, 16–17.

The Seminar still tried to meet in 1976 and early 1977, even attempting to publish some essays in a new journal called *Obshchina (Community)*, again highlighting its centrality to their existence. It was produced in samizdat form, but nearly all copies were confiscated by the authorities. A second issue was written and disseminated in 1978. Ogorodnikov was eventually fired and later arrested for “the leading of a parasitical and anti-social way of life.” He was given a prison sentence, beaten, and harshly treated.¹²⁴ Two friends, Aleksandr Kuzkin and Sergei Yermolaev, made public utterances protesting his arrest, and they were arrested. Kuzkin was sent to a psychiatric hospital, and Yermolaev and his friend Igor Polyakov were charged with “hooliganism.”¹²⁵ Many accusations were made against Ogorodnikov, including of rape (fabricated by a woman who later confessed that agents promised her a house).¹²⁶ He was eventually charged with “anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda” in May 1980.

The Demise of the Dudko Gatherings

After being dismissed from Moscow and placed in Kabanovo, Dudko did not accept the advice he had received from his new warden to avoid the limelight.¹²⁷ He was not reluctant to bring up “sensitive” topics.¹²⁸ Some ten or twenty friends, supporters, or “like-minded” people regularly came to his services in Kabanovo, carrying on “discussions,” and even staying overnight in the church lodgings. State agents noticed that “before long, here too” Dudko engaged in “anti-Soviet activities,” and that “according to tone and content” of his sermons, he was “malevolently adjusted in relation to Soviet society and the state system, being a slanderer and calumniator.” He was not only delivering such messages in sermons after the liturgy, but even after Vespers, contrary to Orthodox custom.¹²⁹

The warden tried to dissuade him, mentioning that she was sometimes summoned and questioned about Dudko, and that she was asked why he was preaching about “drunkenness and hooliganism” when he should stick to more biblical topics. When he defended his actions as

¹²² de Wolf, *Dissident for Life*, 79.

¹²³ Ogorodnikov, *A Desperate Cry*, 20.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹²⁵ de Wolf, *Dissident for Life*, 100.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 121.

¹²⁷ Dudko, *Podarok ot Boga*, 220.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 221.

¹²⁹ GARF f. 6991, op. 6, d. 989, 7-8.

necessary considering the situation, the warden told him that it was her duty “to warn him” about his sermons and “their” concern that “too many people gather at your place.”¹³⁰

Then, in December 1975 the warden terminated Dudko’s contract since she had warned him of his “anti-Soviet sermons” and that he shouldn’t “speak out against the state, but obey.”¹³¹ Some of his friends, including well-known writers and literary critics Feliks Svetov and Zoya Krakhmal’nikova and mathematician Igor Shafarevich, attempted to defend him, saying that the warden of the church was to blame. Her “behavior served as a constant and bitter seduction for the believers” to distrust him, and this behavior prevented the “flock” from drawing near to Dudko, even while he drew the “heart-felt love of thousands of believers” to Kabanovo.”¹³² Yet some local believers were also upset, arguing his sermons were not “anti-Soviet” but even helped some of the men leave behind their drinking problems. They made a petition on his behalf, but to no avail.¹³³

At this time, Trushin advocated to his boss Kuroedov that they ensure Dudko no longer serve in Moscow Oblast, or even better, to put the question to the Patriarch, “who ha[d] every reason to deprive Dudko of the priestly rank.”¹³⁴ Kuroedov in January 1976 wrote an article in *Izvestiia*, claiming that the parishioners of the church in Kabanovo “refused the services” of Dudko, “dismissing him from the church for sermons of an anti-Soviet content” and that parishioners from his two previous churches had done the same for “the same reasons.” This “pastor,” Kuroedov noted, had the support of the “West,” who declared him a “true fighter for the faith.”¹³⁵ The subtext of Kuroedov’s declaration was that “we” rejected Dudko, since he merely belonged to “them,” the Westerners. Though parishioners did support Dudko, Kuroedov’s assertions demonstrated that communal religiosity was not an acceptable path to belonging, and that Western sympathy was a path to marginalization in the Soviet Union.

Yakunin was in the same situation as Dudko: jobless, but winning Western sympathy. “The West” was a double-edged conceptual sword. Gaining Western sympathy irritated Soviet authorities due to their concern for Soviet reputation, but anyone seen as “pro-Western” by definition could be labeled “anti-Soviet,” since the two were theoretically diametrically

¹³⁰ Dudko, *Podarok ot Boga*, 225.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 257–261.

¹³² Samizdat Archive Association and Radio Liberty (Munich, Germany), *Sobranie Dokumentov Samizdata [Collection of Samizdat Documents]*, AS 2504.

¹³³ Dudko, *Podarok ot Boga*, 262.

¹³⁴ GARF f. 6991, op. 6, d. 989, 9.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.

opposed. Yakunin was trying to advocate on Dudko's behalf, but both were seen as too pro-Western.¹³⁶ Had the situations of Yakunin and Dudko remained obscure, state or church agents would have had little motivation to resolve their jobless status. But news of their ordeals had reached sympathetic ears in "the West," and Orthodox Church representatives were receiving an earful at international gatherings and by mail from people protesting that these two were denied employment. State and church representatives had an international reputation to maintain, and these two priests had become political footballs in a much larger "East-West" game of reputation.

After Dudko's termination in Kabanovo, a warden of another church approached him independently and asked him to be priest at his church. He signed a contract with her, and although the Metropolitan responded in anger, he nevertheless permitted the new appointment.¹³⁷ The church was in Grebnevo, and when he arrived, he realized that this town was in a restricted part of Moscow Oblast, where no foreigners were permitted due to the

¹³⁶ GARF, April 4, 1976, f. 6991, op. 6, d. 1192, p. 4-5. Yakunin had been prohibited from priestly work since 1970, but priests on probation were, according to "Orthodox tradition and church canon," guaranteed work in the church in some other capacity. He had been working at various posts, primarily as a watchman, at a church in Moscow until halfway through 1975 when the warden there dismissed him from work "on the grounds of redundancy." He managed to find employment as a lector in another church later that year, but the warden there terminated him after only one and a half months because Trushin had called her in and demanded of her Yakunin's "immediate dismissal." In his letter of protest to CRA Chief Kuroedov, Yakunin found it "remarkable" that Trushin did not even find it worth mentioning to the warden to not refer to him in connection with the dismissal or "not convey the details of their conversation." He also did not consider these episodes "incidental," but as the expression of the "desire to suppress any free speech in the church," as—among numerous open letters he wrote and contacts established with people interested in political freedoms—he had been making efforts to establish contacts with delegates to the World Council of Churches gathering in Nairobi in 1975. That this issue of freedom to speak within the churches was central, Yakunin argued, was confirmed by the dismissal of "the famous preacher, Priest Dmitrii Dudko" of Kabanovo, an order that apparently came "from Moscow," not really from the warden. Also, GARF, f.6991, op. 6, d. 989, pp. 2-3, 28-30. Trushin wrote a report on Yakunin to Kuroedov, providing an ugly profile on him and a history of his activities. He described young Yakunin's "cherished dream" of pursuing the fur trade, and his later rejection of that training for the priesthood. But once he switched, Trushin claimed he became a "speculator," dealing in jewelry and pornographic literature and maintaining "criminal" contacts. He was also noted to be friends with Lev Regel'son, whom Trushin labeled as unemployed and "anti-Soviet." Together, these two were engaged in attacking the hierarchy of the Church, accusing them of a primary allegiance to the state. Metropolitan Serafim advocated taking "more severe measures" against Yakunin, something that depended on an act by the Patriarch. On March 20, 1975, Trushin reported to his boss Kuroedov on the latest comments from people protesting from "the West" in order to keep him aware of the fact that people took issue with the plights of the two priests. In Yakunin's case, the CRA replied to his "protest" of being denied work that this was the domain of the church hierarchy. When Yakunin applied to Metropolitan Serafim, his response was that he handled appointments only for clergy, not church staff positions, and that Yakunin would need to find an executive committee of a church to hire him.

¹³⁷ Dudko, *Podarok ot Boga*, 268.

presence of certain “factories of particular importance.”¹³⁸ With foreign broadcasts and samizdat discussing the plight of Dudko being “deprived” of a parish, perhaps state representatives considered this a pragmatic solution.

Dudko’s position in Grebnevo began in April 1976. It was closer to Moscow, and overall a nicer parish than that of Kabanovo. Again people came, and in large numbers. Local believer Sokolova recalls that people, “starving (after a long silence),” gladly “stood for a long time and listened hard” to the words of Dudko. No one was in a hurry to leave, she recalls, and Dudko “was pelleted by questions.” Not just on holidays or Sundays, but even on weekday services the church was filled with people; youth were ubiquitous. In nice weather, tables were spread with samovars and food for a meal under the trees. During winter months, people gathered in Dudko’s lodge for a meal and the reading and discussion of Scripture. Many people of unchurched background came to faith. Thus, in the “normal” parish of Grebnevo, the local situation—in the words of Sokolova—“changed beyond recognition.” For those new to him, what they heard was “long, exciting, well-aimed preaching,” and they saw people from all over, from nearby towns, from Moscow, and from other more distant places as well.¹³⁹

The more authorities had tried to marginalize him, the greater his appeal became to disaffected youth. One such young man, “stultified by the official culture dished up to Soviet citizens like prison slop on a tray” had variously explored rock music, yoga, Buddhism, and so forth, but had heard about the renegade priest now in Grebnevo. This man remarked later that people who feared the system would go to him, since he seemed courageous: “They had heard of this priest that you could talk freely to.”¹⁴⁰ Another one remembered that Dudko’s parish was “like a place of pilgrimage. People would pray, eat, sleep, then stop for the night.” Locals contributed food.¹⁴¹

One man felt he was in a “family..., with people I could trust.” Since there were always sixty or more people, they would have to eat in shifts to fit at the table, which only fit seventeen. If they came before the services on Saturday, they would sleep there. He recalls that one morning Father Dmitrii “came out and laughed, there were so many of us. You could not even turn over in bed.” Discussions would usually last the entire afternoon on Sundays.¹⁴² Even

¹³⁸ Ibid., 273.

¹³⁹ Sokolova, *Pod Krovom Vsevysnogo [Under the Blood of the Most High]*, 360.

¹⁴⁰ Bullough, *The Last Man in Russia*, 105.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 109–110.

¹⁴² Ibid., 120.

though Dudko now lived inconveniently outside Moscow, the “discussions, and conversations, and meals” were worth the effort for Ogorodnikov and others, who felt that there in Grebnevo, “we created an independent Christian society. It is not just that we had lunch or something, we lived the life [...]”¹⁴³ In addition to preaching on themes from the gospels and saints' lives, Dudko tried to preach on “modern life.” To accommodate the large numbers of his spiritual children and the spiritually curious, he again adopted a question-answer style. In short, he was way beyond the boundary of acceptable religiosity by the way he fostered a communal religiosity that was firmly situated in contemporary life, far from what state authorities regarded as safe religiosity, individual participation in rituals.

Church and state authorities put significant pressure on this community, appointing and recalling three rectors in turn until they found one reliable or firm enough.¹⁴⁴ The tension surrounding Dudko in Grebnevo only increased in 1978 and 1979. The KGB regularly planted agents, appearing as interested youth. Police raids and searches were common. Some of his followers were arrested and held for a time. The rector made the schedule such that Dudko never served on Sundays or feast days, when there would be more people expecting a sermon.¹⁴⁵ Malicious or slanderous articles frequently appeared about Dudko or his followers, and one issue that became troublingly common was a Jewish-Russian tension.¹⁴⁶

With Ogorodnikov and Yakunin arrested by 1980, Dudko was the final outspoken high-profile Orthodox figure standing. His followers began to break up and avoid him as fear and suspicion abounded. In January of 1980, Dudko was arrested. Agents searched his lodgings, many of his books were burned, his lodging was dismantled “brick by brick,” and they dug deep in his basement, the local Sokolova recalls, “looking for any sort of installations by which Father Dimitrii could have been linked with foreigners.” Nothing was found, “except a supply of potatoes for the winter.” A sad picture of the erstwhile dynamic community in Grebnevo remained: a broken-down lodging, burnt texts, and the still-unrepaired church building, which had been charred by a fire in its interior some four years ago.¹⁴⁷

After his arrest in 1980, Dudko was kept in the Lefortovo Prison of Moscow for some time, probably as authorities planned their moves or to give Dudko ample opportunity to fear

¹⁴³ Ibid., 91.

¹⁴⁴ Sokolova, *Pod Krovom Vsevyshnego [Under the Blood of the Most High]*, 362.

¹⁴⁵ Dudko, *Podarok ot Boga*, 289.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 298–299.

¹⁴⁷ Sokolova, *Pod Krovom Vsevyshnego [Under the Blood of the Most High]*, 363. The exact timing of the fire is unclear. Dudko does not mention it, although Sokolova has it as September 1976.

what fate might await him.¹⁴⁸ Although it is unknown what precisely transpired within the walls of Lefortovo, the next time Dudko's friends and fans saw him was on television, June 20, 1980. Millions of people watched him that evening as he denounced his previous activity and "admitted" his crimes, that he worked against the Soviet state by giving the West false information about the Soviet Union.

His "confession" was devastating, as he had baptized thousands, and thousands had met him and heard him. To many, he was a solitary beacon of truth and resistance.¹⁴⁹ Some of his followers despaired so much they contemplated suicide. Even before the TV appearance, some of the previous community members, like Ogorodnikov and Krakhmal'nikova, had broken ties with Dudko and lost faith in him due to his handling of the pressures put on their community.¹⁵⁰

Thus Dudko largely passed from the limelight of religion seekers, but the authorities continued to pay attention for a time. Since Dudko had "fully recognized" his anti-Soviet activity in print and on television in June, by September 1980, he was now second pastor in the village of Vinogradovo. Guests came there, too, for talks and discussions, but in fewer numbers.¹⁵¹ Trushin still found Dudko engaging in "extremism" by his sermon content, preaching "with the goal of the excitation of religious fanaticism," and by his talks, which were "full of malicious slander on the position of the church and of believers in our country, on our reality." All of this was evidence that "as a matter of fact," Dudko's admission of "errors" last year did not mean he had changed.¹⁵²

But, the attractiveness of Dudko waned, and these were perhaps the glowing embers of a fire that was dying out. From information supplied by the Rector and members of the church's executive committee, he was having many conflicts with his spiritual children.¹⁵³ Yakunin and Ogorodnikov had broken with him for his failure to stand up for either of them at their trials. His community, his "spiritual family," was crumbling around him.

Writer Zoya Krakhmal'nikova had listened to Dudko's sermons for about a decade, was baptized by him, and at one time considered him her spiritual father. She had been collecting

¹⁴⁸ Bullough, *The Last Man in Russia*, 172.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 176.

¹⁵⁰ de Wolf, *Dissident for Life*, 123.

¹⁵¹ Keston Archive, "Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report", Archive file <KGB 93>, pp. 9-10. Originally from TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 100.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, Archive file <KGB 94>, pp. 11-12. Originally from TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 104.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, Archive file <KGB 47>, p 7. Originally from TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 113.

religious writings and finding ways to publish them abroad or in samizdat form in a journal called *Nadezhda* (*Hope*). She was arrested in 1982, but her relationship with Dudko had been faltering even before his arrest (which then fatally wounded it), and he gave false evidence against her in her trial. Her publication, *Nadezhda*, contained writings on Church Tradition, Biblical figures, miraculous icons, Saints' Lives, sermons, letters from "New Martyrs" to their spiritual children, and some articles she wrote on "the need for Christian sermons in culture." After her arrest, one of her interrogators reminded her,

'If you had only sat quietly and prayed,' the chief of the Lefortovo prison admonished in a fatherly manner. 'If you had only sat under your bed and prayed so that no one saw you. Or, if you had to, if you had simply gone to church. 'Like my grandmother; she is a believer,' said my interrogator. 'My grandmother is a believer,' said another official of the same department when he came to see me in exile. Apparently, they all, everyone has grandmothers who are believers. And they want us to believe the way their grandmothers do... [...] 'Had you behaved, no one would have imprisoned you.'¹⁵⁴

The interrogator made clear the line between acceptable and unacceptable religious practice. Had she kept her religious practice confined to her personal conscience, she would have been left alone.

The Divisions in Novaia Derevnia

State authorities managed to all but extinguish the flame of religious community life among this assortment of Muscovite intellectuals. Krakhmal'nikova's husband, writer Feliks Svetov, was also arrested, even in the surprisingly late year of 1986. Ogorodnikov and many others were finally released only in February 1987 in a general amnesty as part of Gorbachev's glasnost. As for Men', he had been awaiting his arrest. Like them, he was the subject of numerous rumors, near-scandals, and slanderous news articles. He was labeled a closet Catholic, a Jewish conspirator, and a foreign agent, among other things.¹⁵⁵ The commissioner claimed that the "extremist" Men's parishioners had complained about him "many times over the last year," and if true, their complaints revealed a division in the community. They claimed that Men' sided with his personal "adherents" against members of the church executive committee and other active believers.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Zoia Krakhmal'nikova, *Listen, Prison!: Lefortovo Notes, Letters from Exile* (Redding, Calif.: Nikodemos Orthodox Publication Society, 1993), 110.

¹⁵⁵ Maslenikova, *Aleksandr Men'*, 261.

¹⁵⁶ Keston Archive, "Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report", Archive file <KGB 94>, p. 13. Originally from TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 104.

The factions undercutting the Orthodox community there even took on a sordid nationalistic tone. Not only was Men' linked to "dissidents and extremists like Krasnov-Levitin, Eshliman, Yakunin, and others," now he "carefully conspires" by way of "grouping around him youth and in particular of Jewish nationality, who systematically gather at the church on days of his service."¹⁵⁷ They were meeting after the service, usually in his home. Some believers supposedly wrote to the Council, saying, "'Our appeal to you is due to concern for the fate of our state. We, believers, often call attention to the suspicious behavior of pr. Men', since visiting the church where he serves is a large collection of Jews, who arrive with their fat briefcases, surround Men', and after the liturgy meet with him.'"

The rector also wrote to the Metropolitan that Men' was "occupied by feverish activity" in his reading, writing, and meeting with guests, such that "sometimes the altar looks like a work office." He too, mentioned the guests with their "luggage and briefcases," and these may have insinuated illegal merchandise or literature. The rector noted that with increasing frequency "adult Jews" were baptized, having been "converted by Men'." In the next sentence, a seeming non-sequitur, but perhaps implying ill dealings, he noted that "three times" the church "was subjected to robbery." The church's executive committee forbade Men' from holding gatherings in the lodging or enclosure, but he apparently "did not always" comply. The warden complained that on days of his service there tended to be "a stream of increasingly new unknown people." She mentioned that those entering did "not always cross themselves." She also found it "strange" that these "30-40-year old people visit our church during the week, when they should be at work."¹⁵⁸

Men' was searched and interrogated several times during the 1980s, but he managed to keep from arrest. Not only was his parish not a faction-free, safe community, but his community of like-minded friends or supporters was far from stable. Those who came to him were typically transient: they would come for a time, and then fade away.¹⁵⁹ They were like spiritual tourists, luggage and all.

With glasnost, much changed for Men'. He became an enormously popular speaker and appeared in all kinds of public settings and media. But it all came to an end, however, when he was brutally murdered by an unknown axe-wielding assailant in 1990 while he was walking through the woods on his way to church. All that has surfaced has been a litany of conspiracies:

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., Archive file <KGB 95>, pp. 25-26. Originally from TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 108.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 26.

¹⁵⁹ Maslenikova, *Aleksandr Men'*, 243.

that the murder was done by an anti-Semite, that conservatives within the Church instigated it, that the KGB ordered it, or some combination thereof.

Community and Division in Grebnevo

The crowds receded after Dudko's dismissal from Grebnevo, but the charred church and dugout basement did not linger for long as a bitter symbol of a paralyzed church community. Father Ivan Zaitsev would eventually serve a six-year stint as rector (unlike the stints of his predecessors which were more commonly counted in months), and along with a new, "not yet old, and energetic" warden, they helped restore the church building. The warden also invited Sokolova's daughter to help lead a choir. During the colder months, the choir rehearsed in the Sokolova home, had dinner together, and "discussed issues;" it seemed to Sokolova that "once again a Christian community was born."¹⁶⁰

People, even the young, were once again attending church, Sokolova recalls, as a couple of the priests after Dudko were also preaching "excellent sermons." One, Father Mikhail, had a long line of people waiting for confession with him and to talk to him after the service. Despite the fact that Rector Zaitsev had helped with a lot of the repairs, people were flocking toward the younger Father Mikhail and away from him. But "they took [Mikhail] away too," another "blow on the souls of the parishioners," until Father Arkadii arrived, whose "strong voice ..., heartfelt words of his preaching, ... and look in his deep eyes" ultimately "won the hearts of the congregation." Once again, people began "to fill the church," young people too, "who followed Father Arkadii everywhere, using every minute to meet with him."¹⁶¹

Suddenly, rector Zaitsev was replaced by another, but it is not clear whose idea this was. This time, the parishioners decided to speak out. Even though crowds had not surrounded Zaitsev as they did Fr. Arkadii, they appreciated what he had done. They did not like the replacement rector, so they protested, sent letters; when these went unanswered, every member of the "staff" – the warden, the cleaners, the watchman, the treasurer, the administrator, acolyte, altar boy, the choir, the baker of the communion bread, and the repairmen – quit, except the "fire stoker." This did not impress the bishop, who told Father Arkadii simply to find others for the tasks.

¹⁶⁰ Sokolova, *Pod Krovom Vsevyshnego [Under the Blood of the Most High]*, 380.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 380–381.

On the advice of Sokolova's husband, Father Vladimir, Father Arkadii called a meeting of the *dvadtsatka*.¹⁶² The problem, however, was that there was not much of a *dvadtsatka* in Grebnevo—some had died, others had moved away, and still others were sick or unable to get out of bed. With the help of Father Arkadii's spiritual followers from nearby Fryazin, they elected new members to the *dvadtsatka*, whom locals claimed they "d[id] not trust," since they were not "our own," of the local village. In fact they were conspiring to keep the positions unfilled in hopes that the bishop would respond to their grievances. But, the new people filled the ranks of the *dvadtsatka*, including Sokolova. The new *dvadtsatka* then proceeded to nominate replacements for the positions, in the presence of "hissing old women."¹⁶³

As can be seen in this "normal village," the problems of church community life were not caused simply by meddling state officials. Church hierarchs, local leaders, and personal differences contributed problems of their own for the local church community, and individuals could do some things to change their situation, but not without significant negotiation. Although the parish was to elect the executive body (as was done in Grebnevo), the local commissioners, according to their instructions, "should participate in the selection of the executive organ's members, and choose people *who carry out our line*."¹⁶⁴ It appears the state sometimes ignored this level of complexity and opted for the simpler, streamlined method of control, where commissioners and secret service agents, together with church hierarchs, simply moved dynamic leaders and found ways to get the appropriate level of submission. State authorities did not as a rule hound every incidence of communal religiosity the same, and they did not always identify a leader worthy of arrest. Dynamic religious communities could fall apart with a simple transfer of a priest, but religious communities also struggled to get along amongst themselves in the ordinary business of religious life.

¹⁶² As discussed in Chapter IV, if people desired to have a religious society of some sort, they were to form what was called a "*dvadtsatka*," or "twenty," the number needed to form a religious society as well as the group who effectively held the powers for the parish. In theory, this group was elected locally, and a *dvadtsatka* would in turn elect the chairman, assistant, and treasurer for the parish executive committee and approve other staff positions.

¹⁶³ Sokolova, *Pod Krovom Vsevyshego [Under the Blood of the Most High]*, 384.

¹⁶⁴ "Secret Instructions on the Supervision of Parish Life," *Religion in Communist Lands* 1, no. 1 (1973): 33. Italics in original Russian text. See Chapter IV for more "secret instructions" which were disseminated in the early 1960s under Khrushchev.

Conclusion

Dynamic communal religiosity was potentially problematic for the state in several ways. First, the spectacle of a crowded room or church weakened state claims that religion was disappearing. Second, the participation of youth weakened the claims that religious practice as it existed was nothing else but a dying vestige perpetuated by the elderly. Third, the participation of intellectuals weakened the claim that religion was reducible to superstition, and that any serious scholar would find it only fodder for mockery, or, at best, an object or topic of sociological or psychological inquiry. Fourth, the occurrence of large numbers of people gathering spontaneously and enthusiastically stood in uncomfortable contrast to mandatory and largely unenthusiastic state-sponsored gatherings. Last, grassroots gatherings represented a potential political threat, as alternative identities and ways of belonging could be mobilized in the future.

The methods used by state and church officials to keep Orthodox gatherings comfortably predictable and small centered on isolation and alienation. They attempted to divide clergy from each other; publicize, permit, and even provoke church scandals; weaken the influence of clergy by poorly training, harassing, moving, or retiring them; or deter the participation of certain laity (especially youth and intellectuals) to limit religion's communal appeal.

Compared to the Baptists, for example (see Chapter VIII), community life among Orthodox believers was distinctive for the role of the priests, who had enormous influence in shaping communal religiosity by the way they conducted services, preached, and interacted with parishioners. Other than those parishioners who attended a particular parish church regardless of which priest was serving, Orthodox clergy influenced who came to church, how often, and from where. Priests could impact the degree of community among believers, but the community of non-conformist Orthodox intellectuals was centered on the charisma of the priest. Certain priests were so attractive, that not only would the church be filled by local parishioners, but veritable religious tourists would come too, to hear preaching, receive a blessing, confide in the priest, pursue him as a spiritual father, and so on.

The custom of the Orthodox Church of "spiritual father" and "spiritual child" is one example of how Orthodox communities are configured. The relationship is often defined in terms of father-child, not only in terms of shepherd-flock. This style of relationship increases the relative importance of the priest, as a parishioner's sense of belonging is more directly focused

on the priest (vertically) than on the flock (horizontally). The parish was not democratized as in the Baptist formulation, and like-mindedness was less essential. Baptists were members of a church, not children of a father. Ogorodnikov's Seminar was an attempt at democratized religiosity, but there was ultimately little to hold the group together beyond a common interest in intellectual-religious debate. Their community was weak, in Craig Calhoun's definition, as is common in most purely voluntary associations.¹⁶⁵ On the other hand, Orthodox parishes do not depend on innovations or outward expressions of voluntary enthusiasm to endure as Protestant ones often do. The reliable attendance of parishioners kept church doors open and priests employed, even if some officials or youth might have considered such gatherings rote or impotent. Rituals can be powerful factors that allow group identities and ideologies to endure.

One of the common threads among those persecuted was their pursuit of community – but not just in terms of a simple collection of people, but a pursuit of mutual authenticity and openness. The subjects studied here almost universally acknowledged the lack of these qualities around them and the need to hunt for and create them. One can sense the growing urgency the authorities felt in the face of religious gatherings. To them, it was mobilization. Priests and religious gatherings were sites of voluntary enthusiasm, and if youth were more enthusiastic about religious gatherings than state-sponsored ones, it could prove potentially disastrous. Comments by participants in Dudko's question-and-answer sessions revealed that state ideologies and apologetic debates of atheism-vs.-religion had become tiresome. More exciting was the pursuit of something done in an "open" way, with authenticity, and the emergence of a voluntary, not predetermined, "us." Theoretically, there was religious "propaganda" at every church service, but authorities only considered it propaganda under certain circumstances, namely when the profile of the participants changed from old women to youth and intellectuals, and when the affective nature of the gatherings changed from ritualistic to communally dynamic. In the era of "Mature Socialism," church and state leaders were trying to keep things the "old" way, but they were having to fight to keep new life and innovations from emerging.

Although Dmitrii Dudko and Aleksandr Men' did play particularly large roles in the Muscovite religious-intellectual community, and although authorities chose to focus only on leaders as problematic, the agency of their audiences and congregations should not be ignored. The desires of audiences made particular priests popular. The state feared the formation of new

¹⁶⁵ C. J. Calhoun, "Community: Toward a Variable Conceptualization for Comparative Research," *Social History* 5, no. 1 (1980): 105–29. See introduction for more on Calhoun's concept for analyzing community strength.

horizontal and vertical relationships for the potential power they represented, and they usually managed to weaken the communities simply by removing or isolating the leaders, not by satisfying the desires of the people with alternatives. It is also clear that state organs, although they ultimately proved strong enough to cripple nascent attempts at creating church-community life, had to be judicious when confronted with large crowds and popular events. They did not use mass violence, but wisely preferred church avenues as means of creating inner-church problems first, and if necessary, using “legal” measures to make formal accusations. They were bound to a semblance of legality and order to remain legitimate in the public’s eyes.

One way authorities isolated leaders was by labeling them as “anti-Soviet.” Authorities criticized Dudko, for example, for “delighting in any kinds of renegades [*otshchepentsi*] who are servile to the West,” naming Sakharov and Solzhenitsyn as examples.¹⁶⁶ Thus, it was not just about words, but about allegiances, communities, belongings and identities. There was a Soviet “us” that one could belong to, or a “them,” and state representatives wanted the monopoly in defining those groups.

Many have labeled the leaders of these formations “dissidents,” although this word connotes a political agenda (Yakunin emerged as the only clear dissident of the group, as he sought specifically political associations and activity). They are better called “non-conformists,” as their goals were often not political at all, but social and religious. The authorities politicized *them*. But, they overlap with more clearly identifiable dissidents like Solzhenitsyn or Sakharov in that these “non-conformist” religious figures likewise championed moral causes, like the value of morality and conscience in society.¹⁶⁷ The communist project had begun as a moral one, of righting socio-economic and political wrongs, but it lost its moral focus. Universal values and morals remained part of the discourse, but cynicism toward them and the promised future took hold especially among urban intellectuals. It also seemed to some people as though the public was increasingly engaged in individualistic quests for comforts. In this context, Soviet ideologists struggled to maintain a moral imperative for rule.¹⁶⁸

Yet not all citizens had jettisoned morality for consumerism, and many still cared about truth-claims or ideology—and not only dissidents. Those who became dissidents had grown up

¹⁶⁶ GARF f. 6991, op. 6, d. 989, 9.

¹⁶⁷ Philip Boobbyer, *Conscience, Dissent and Reform in Soviet Russia* (London; New York: Routledge, 2005), 222. Boobbyer writes that the post-Khrushchev era was marked by a “moral crisis,” where the ideology had lost its power (Alexei Yurchak likewise argues that ideology had become vacuous, but he does not assert a moral crisis).

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 223.

in a morally framed and idealistic Soviet worldview, and they based their calls to change or reform on these principles. But they often failed to find a receptive audience among party members for reform (prior to Gorbachev's perestroika and glasnost). Furthermore, as Pospelovsky notes, recent converts often lived with "an acute sensation of conflict between the teachings of Christ, on the one hand, and the policies of the Moscow Patriarchate and the behavior of its clergy, on the other." Such neophytes had not grown up living with this particular tension, and their desire for coherence either led toward attempts to reform, acceptance of duplicity, or disappointment in the Church when calls to reform went unheeded.¹⁶⁹

Many others, when faced with the crumbling moral imperative that shaped the Soviet Utopia, did not fight for reform, but simply looked for alternative utopias or social worlds to inhabit and pursue. These wanted to avoid discussions of universal values and politics altogether and found in the religious realm an escape from the realm of universals and politics to something beyond. Judith Kornblatt suggests something similar, arguing that those who came to faith in the 1980s, did so more "as a response to the emptiness and confinement of the Soviet society in which they were raised," as one of the possible "outlet[s] for escape" which also included Eastern religions like Buddhism and Hinduism.¹⁷⁰

Nicholas Ganson, in his article on Dudko, argues that priests like Dudko, Men', Yakunin, and Eshliman were fighting "Soviet social atomization," not just on a local level, but even a national and international one as well.¹⁷¹ This is a very apt assessment. Part of their appeal was their contribution to concepts of belonging that were local (the Parish), national (Russian Orthodox), and international (ecumenical-Christian). Individuals saw religion as an opportunity to belong on many levels, and intellectuals in particular were drawn to its universalism. Young intellectual Mikhail Arlov was baptized in 1964, and he considered it "as a kind of initiation into worldwide Christian culture, and not as a most important Church Sacrament."¹⁷² Christianity became appealing as an alternative worldview and culture of belonging. Even while Orthodoxy awkwardly mingled with (Soviet) promotion of Russian nationality, this chapter shows that for Soviet authorities, Orthodoxy-as-identity was supposed to be limited to an icon of nationality; it

¹⁶⁹ Pospelovsky, *The Russian Church Under the Soviet Regime, 1917-1982*, 379–380.

¹⁷⁰ Kornblatt, *Doubly Chosen*, 84–85.

¹⁷¹ Ganson, "Orthodox Dissidence as De-Atomization," 114.

¹⁷² Mikhail Arlov, *Vse k Luchshemu-- : Vospominaniia, Proza [All for the Better--: Memories, Prose]* (Moscow: B.S.G. Press, 2006), 185.

was not supposed to be either ecumenically cosmopolitan or a primary locus of local community identity, belonging, or social mobilization.

Whether one can characterize such religious-associational life as “proof” that society was not atomized or that civil society existed is less certain. These formations are best seen as loose affiliations of people who likely held a great diversity of views, yet came together for specific purposes. What united them was their coincidence in time and space, but not much beyond that. The popularity of the gatherings was itself of concern to the state, more so than the specific words that were said; it was certainly the sub-text (enthusiasm) more than the text that mattered to the state. Without a cross-sectional analysis of the participants, it cannot be determined what they thought the “text” was, but it was likely to have varied. Even if it might be difficult to provide a single label to describe what constituted the core for those participating in dynamic religious communities, the bottom line was that they could in no way be construed as state-sponsored or in harmony with the dominant state discourses. Even those acts which state authorities considered acceptable—traditional Orthodox rituals—were more powerful than officials credited them. The rituals themselves, by enduring alongside communist ideology, carried with them ideologies and ways of conceiving of the self and the group, providing ready alternatives to communist ones. Officials misconceived of submission to authority or to ancient rituals—especially when carried out by women—as weakness or impotence. In fact, by carrying on the customs, Orthodox adherents could offer an alternative way of conceiving the world once the pressure of coercion eased.

VII. Maintaining Unity in the Romanian Orthodox Church, 1964 – 1989

At first the rise to power of Nicolae Ceaușescu suggested a sort of thaw. His youth seemed paired with generosity, and over the first several years of his rule he began to build a reputation as one favoring greater liberalization and reforms, a belief which garnered support from Western leaders. His first surprising act was his general amnesty in 1964 for political prisoners, and most who were in prison for religious infractions were set free. International ecumenical relations were restored in a limited and monitored fashion. But toward the late 1970s and 1980s, Ceaușescu began to promote what Ioan-Marius Bucur describes as "neoStalinism, ideological orthodoxy and chauvinistic nationalism."¹ Yet ideological orthodoxy, implying scientific materialism, conflicted with chauvinistic nationalism, as the former was atheist in content, whereas the latter was often intermingled awkwardly with the Romanian Orthodox heritage. Two groups—people not of Romanian ethnicity and Romanians of non-Orthodox faith, such as neoprotestants (Baptists, Pentecostals, and Brethren)—were increasingly persecuted in connection with this new trajectory of Ceaușescu's.

An observer of Romanian religious affairs, Miranda Villiers, claimed in 1973 that the relatively strong relationship between the state and Orthodox Church was possible due to the "intensely national [characteristic of the Romanian Orthodox] Church," which was amenable to any nationalistic leaders. Without difficulty one could argue that the Orthodox Church served a national agenda; the church was woven into conceptions of Romanian identity lore, and the presence of the patriarch or bishops at mass gatherings or cultural events communicated as much. When the ostensibly atheist Nicolae Ceaușescu attended the village funeral of his father in April 1972, it may have been more surprising to foreigners than to Romanians: "it is an example," wrote Miranda Villiers at the time, "of the recognition given by the Romanian leaders to the cohesive power of religion in the forging of a strong national state."² As is the case with most nationalisms, state-promoted Romanian nationalism was defined against several "foreign" identities. The foreigners of the Romanian Orthodox Church included, first, the Greek-Catholic

¹ Ioan-Marius Bucur, "Church and State Relations under the Communist Regime: The Case of Romania," in *Religion and Political Change in Europe: Past and Present*, ed. Ausma Cimdina (Pisa: PLUS, 2003), 169.

² Miranda Villiers, "The Romanian Church Today," *Religion in Communist Lands* 1, no. 3 (1973): 4. Though the BOR was a force for national identity, this does not necessarily correlate with a force for spirituality. As Villiers also adeptly noted: "A Church may act as a preserver of the national identity to the detriment of its duties towards the spiritual needs of the faithful" (5-6).

Church, particularly its link with a foreign power, the Vatican; and second, neoprotestants, which were “foreign” from their roots in Western missions in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The BOR was not concerned with other historic churches with foreign aspects, like the largely Hungarian Churches, which included the Reformed (see Chapter IX), Unitarian, Synodo-Presbyterian Lutheran, and Catholic Churches, the Saxon-based Lutheran Church, the Old-Rite Russian Orthodox Church, the Armenian-Gregorian Church, Islam, or Judaism, as these were not competitors for ethnic Romanians.

Justinian had been Patriarch since 1948, and Villiers contended in 1973 that he helped foster growth: 118 priests were ordained in merely three dioceses in 1971 alone, there were 1,400 full-time students in theological schools and seminaries, and some students and scholars were being allowed to travel abroad. The Patriarchate had two regular journals published with true scholarly work. Villiers claimed that by doing its secular duties, the Romanian Orthodox leadership made room for “real spiritual rebirth,” made evident by active monastic life (there were 105 monasteries, 540 monks, and 1,443 nuns according to her records)³

But an increase in the number of priests does little to describe the reality of church life in the parishes, especially keeping in mind that many parishes were lacking priests ever since the Greek-Catholic parishes had been incorporated into the Orthodox Church following their “reunion.” Indeed, even if a Romanian-nationalist line would awkwardly promote both the Romanian Orthodox Church and ideological Marxist-atheism, this fact still does little to illuminate the everyday religious world within that Church. Romanian Orthodoxy occupied a position within the propagandistic self-advertisements of the regime and was expanding. However, rules of religious acceptability still applied to this supposedly favored Church, as state agents and Church authorities disciplined non-conformists as happened in the other faiths, a situation made most apparent by a younger generation of priests in the 1970s and 1980s who tested those boundaries.

Problems Involving the Orthodox Church Nationally and Locally

The regime change and Amnesty of 1964 did not change the religious landscape overnight, and most of the governmental functionaries remained the same. In a series of reports by the Department of Religions in the early years of Ceaușescu’s regime, officials almost never

³ Ibid., 5–6. She does not note that the numbers were much higher prior to the late 1950s.

complained about clergy and parishioners subverting communist authority or clergy who were too religious or popular. These situations occurred infrequently and over a relatively discrete period of time, as will be discussed toward the end of the chapter. Rather, the surveys pointed to problems with marginalized groups and movements that threatened the Orthodox Church and the idea of its unity and oneness. As discussed in Chapters III and V, the primary threats were the lack of “consolidation” of the Orthodox Church (i.e. the persistence of aspects of Greek-Catholicism), losing members to actively proselytizing Baptists, Pentecostals, and other “neoprotestant” groups, and sectarian movements within the Church like the Lord’s Army and stylism (*stilism*). Chiefs of the Department of Religions at the national level monitored and discussed these problems with great interest.

The above-named problems were faced by local inspectors from the Department of Religions who coordinated their efforts with church leaders and other local organs of state, and what follows is an exploration of how inspectors from the Sălaj County branch of the Department managed these problems.⁴ An inspector’s job was a busy one, given the hundreds of churches in each county. Amid the diversity of denominations found in Transylvania, an inspector needed to be familiar with differences in practices and customs and was in contact with representatives of church and state bodies alike. In Sălaj the largest denominations were the Orthodox Church, the Reformed Church, and the Catholic Church, but there were also increasing numbers of neoprotestants, and there were other unapproved religious movements like Jehovah’s Witnesses.⁵ The County, being newly formed in 1968 out of large counties as part of a territorial reorganization, needed its own apparatus for managing religious affairs. After a few years of transition, the local inspector of Sălaj had the reins of the Department’s county office. Stan Tudor was its first inspector until 1971, when Gheorghe David took over. David left for the same post in the neighboring and likewise newly created county of Bistrița-Năsăud in spring of 1972, and Ioan Roman served until fall of 1977, when Simion Achim took over.

Simply “keeping up” was the most inspectors could hope for, given the enormity of their tasks. As an example, in one month inspector Gheorghe David had some 48 agenda items to resolve: fourteen dealing with repairs and construction, ten reports that clergy or others

⁴ Sălaj County is one of the few counties in Romania that has made Department of Religions documents available for research, with files from 1968-1977 available.

⁵ I did not encounter a census of this information. I note below that the Greek-Catholic Church was the dominant one prior to the “unification” of 1948.

submitted referring to issues or people, twenty-one pertaining to personnel moves, and three miscellaneous tasks, including writing his work plans. David visited churches for nearly two-thirds of the month, reaching around 20 locations, but this was only a fraction of the county's hundreds of churches. Certain months would also require him to travel for church conferences or departmental meetings. All of these visits took time because of the slow, often mountainous Romanian roads. In addition, his regular visiting hours occupied several work days per month.⁶ If a big issue arose somewhere in the county (See Chapter IX for an example in the Reformed Church), inspectors would abandon visits and visitors. Inspectors often ignored outlying parishes due to such constraints, even in one of the least populous counties of Romania, Sălaj. Because inspectors' goals were to create predictability and normalcy, they concentrated the bulk of their attention on places where they perceived these to be vulnerable.

All inspectors across Romania shared the duties Sălaj County's first inspector Stan Tudor named as "awareness of religious phenomena and taking measures corresponding to preventing the tendency of intensifying religious life," watching out for the activity of unapproved religious groups and activity, overseeing the conferences—usually two per year for the Orthodox and Reformed Churches—aimed at training religious personnel, monitoring any overseas connections and influences, monitoring economic/financial aspects of the churches, verifying construction/repair work, and coordination with local authorities in regard to any religious problems or religious-legal issues.⁷

Inspectors monitored the affective quality of religious activities and their participants. Tudor mentioned his duty of tracking "the attitude of religious servants and believers." He also endeavored to "thoroughly" analyze "the causes which deepen religious sentiments, as well as methods and means used for the stimulation of this sentiment and the intensification of religious life in general, for each denomination in turn." Inspectors did not readily distinguish between problems of procedure and of feeling in religious activities. As Tudor put it, his goal was to "control religious personnel's compliance with regulations" as well as to "track the practices which, by their nature, harm morale or public health" and then to spearhead "combating them."⁸ Thus, state agents expected church leaders to limit practices that were

⁶ Direcția Județeană Sălaj a Arhivelor Naționale, "Departmentul Cultelor," 1971/8, 65, 82.

⁷ Ibid., 1970/5, 1.

⁸ Ibid., 3. One specific cause of "religious intensification" that Tudor hoped to counter was "the interference of some religious personnel among some believers belonging to other religions," meaning

regarded as “harming morale,” other words for an increase in mysticism, charisma, mobilization, or proselytism, all unhealthy to society.

What inspectors actually did was dependent not simply on the religious landscape or the formulation of their goals, but on the persons themselves. Sălaj County’s third inspector, Ioan Roman, wrote reports that were brief, using generic or default phrases, giving the impression that little problematic or important ever occurred. Although they shared basic responsibilities like “familiarity with religious phenomena” and preventing “the intensification of religious life,” to Roman, this merely meant that he needed to identify illegal religious groups and activity, verify financial and building matters, harmonize with local organs, and ensure that religious institutions conform to legislation.⁹

Each county had a specific religious situation, and in Sălaj County the inspectors confronted three problems of the Orthodox Church frequently mentioned at the national level: the Greek-Catholic problem, the Lord’s Army, and neoprotestant activism. Early on Stan Tudor aimed to “track” Roman Catholic priests who were serving in former Greek-Catholic parishes or who had former Greek-Catholic believers as parishioners, and he aimed to “oversee” religious events of all cults, but “especially neoprotestant cults” and their “sustained proselytizing activity.” He also was following the activities of “forbidden sects,” Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Lord’s Army.¹⁰ We will look at how officials handled these complex issues, first at the national level and then at the local level of Sălaj County.

“Consolidating Unification” in the BOR

Although it had been nearly twenty years since the Greek-Catholic and Orthodox “reunion” of 1948, the on-the-ground reality remained complicated. In the late 1960s, the General Secretary of the Department of Religions in Bucharest Dumitru Dogaru reported on the

neoprotestants among Reformed and Orthodox believers, and Roman Catholic priests who encouraged the latent Catholicism among former Greek-Catholic believers and clergy. He also had to watch out for any locally-initiated ecumenical events, since state agents highly discouraged conversions from one faith to another since they were assumed to always trend away from the historical churches. He kept an eye out for any “obvious” actions of proselytism, and for any situations where “spiritual pressure” was applied to the consciences of believers, e.g. refusing someone sacraments for any reason, using prophecies to change people’s choices or behavior. All of these were typically accusations against neoprotestants and will be explored below.

⁹ Direcția Județeană Sălaj a Arhivelor Naționale, “Departmentul Cultelor”, 1972/13, 81. David left for an inspectorate in a neighboring county also in its infancy, Bistrița-Năsăud.

¹⁰ Ibid., 10.

problem of “consolidating unification” of the BOR. The relics, the words, and the general appurtenances of the onetime Greek-Catholic churches had not yet disappeared, and to blame for this were the clergy, who were not active in combating it. Officials ignored the role that ordinary parishioners played.

Informants reported that certain customs and relics had remained. In one town that had an old orthodox church and a “returned” one, although they were both now “Orthodox,” the former Greek-Catholics only went to the “returned” church, and there was no inter-mingling; the division remained. In another parish, some of the “returned” believers attended the Roman-Catholic Easter.¹¹ Such situations occurred across Transylvania. Many priests and believers were still using the Greek-Catholic word “*spirit*” instead of the Orthodox “*duh*” (both translate as spirit, with the former of Latin origin and the latter Slavic), priests or cantors still chose certain Catholic songs, specifically Catholic prayers like the rosary were being recited, and some churches still incorporated the stations of the cross, as a practice or as art in the church’s interior. Informants also reported on other remaining décor and iconography of Greek-Catholic style, the use of Greek-Catholic ritual books instead of the distributed Orthodox ones, and groups of women who belonged to groups with names like the “Mary Society.”¹² Some churches in the northwestern city of Arad still had pews, something Romanian Orthodox Churches did not have. Even after major repairs in one church, for example, all Catholic statuettes and the stages of the cross remained; during the services, four children assisted as is customary in Catholic churches; and during communion the people stood in a row as the Catholics do, not in a queue.¹³

In the lattermost example, as was typical for officials, the state agent blamed the priest for such remnants. Yet the priests presiding over these under-consolidated churches were usually Orthodox priests, not “returned” Greek-Catholic ones, and they blamed believers, claiming they donated certain relics or absolutely insisted on having them or maintaining customs.¹⁴ Dogaru also blamed the existing hierarchs, claiming Metropolitan Colan was too sick to be active and that Bishop Zaharia of Oradea was active but “lacked the necessary tact” to

¹¹ Arhivele Naționale ale României, Fond “C.C. al P.C.R. - Sectia Administrativ-Politica”, Dos. 14, Vol. 1, 1966-1969, 95–96.

¹² Ibid., 106.

¹³ Ibid., 98.

¹⁴ Ibid., 95–96.

improve the situation.¹⁵ Duguru believed that Metropolitan Corneanu was too considerate of the wishes of some “returned” believers who wanted to find a “returned” priest to fill the vacancy left by their former “returned” priest. The regional inspector boldly told Corneanu to “no longer give satisfaction to these former Greek-Catholic believers.”¹⁶ As for the “returned” clergyman who had been promoted bishop as a conciliatory gesture to “returned” priests and to those still uneasy about the “reunion,” Bishop of Cluj Herineanu, officials felt that he “d[id] not have sufficient prestige” nor “the qualities required” to attract “non-returned” priests.¹⁷ They also accused him of not showing any “initiative” in the Cluj region toward eliminating Greek-Catholic relics or rites. He supposedly only gave a token “reprimand,” but did not take active measures to combat them.¹⁸

Yet when clergy were “vigilant” about such problems, they merely galvanized Greek-Catholic sensibilities and increased the likelihood of underground Greek-Catholic movements. Dogaru claimed that former Metropolitan Bălan and former bishop of Oradea Nicolae Popovici “had adopted an attitude of derision” toward former Greek-Catholics in the 1950s, a negative situation that influenced personnel decisions and the content of orientation courses, leading to a hardening of attitudes among the “non-returned” priests and a “more hesitant position” among those who had “returned.”¹⁹

Of the 1700 Greek-Catholic priests—according to state accounting—717 did not join the Orthodox Church, not including hierarchs, canons, and professors. Dogaru confessed that “retrospectively analyzed, the carrying out of this act contained a few gaps, the consequences of which are being felt in the present as well.” Moreover, following the reunification, “a pause of a few years [marked by] optimism and carelessness followed,” in which little was done to influence those who “did not return” to the fold of Orthodoxy. In addition, Dogaru blamed machinations by the Vatican for the persistence of Greek-Catholicism in Romania.²⁰ The

¹⁵ Ibid., 110.

¹⁶ Ibid., 94.

¹⁷ Ibid., 110.

¹⁸ Ibid., 99–100.

¹⁹ Ibid., 104–5.

²⁰ Dogaru argued the Vatican responded by increasing support for Catholics in Romania as well as ostensibly threatening to ex-communicate any priest who joined the Orthodox Church. Although most Catholics were Hungarians, they supposedly “received instructions [from the Vatican] to preach in Romanian for former Greek-Catholics.” For a more thorough treatment of the role of the Vatican, see Ovidiu Bozgan, *Romania versus Vatican* (București: Ed. Sylvi, 2000); Cristian Vasile, *Între Vatican și*

Department of Religions tried to prevent former Greek Catholic believers from attending Roman Catholic churches, but realistically it was “not possible” to prevent the “inter-mixing” of clergy or believers from the two Catholic Churches.²¹ Dogaru claimed that if the Department of Religions had not opposed preaching in Romanian at traditionally Hungarian-speaking Roman Catholic Churches, the number of Roman-Catholics would have been “much greater.”²²

“Non-returned” priests had little incentive to join the Orthodox Church. Some who chose not to join had managed to find good paying positions in institutions or in state-run enterprises, often with the help of relations or co-religionists. Their pay was better than those who “returned” to orthodoxy. This could not have been avoided, Dogaru wrote, as it would have been worse for them to be isolated or without material means, which would cause them to pursue “clandestine religious activity.” Priests serving in “returned” parishes faced a weak financial situation due to insufficient parishioner support, as in the past the Greek-Catholic Church had received considerable material support from abroad and did not depend as heavily on the support of believers.²³

The situation seemed intractable. Perhaps because state and church agents were flagging in their desire to complete the unification and doubting the importance of this effort, Dogaru reminded his readers that the 1948 unification ended the undue pressure the Vatican had over Romanians, a “Habsburgian” legacy. This reunion meant “removing from under the direct influence of the Vatican a total of around 1,600,000 Greek-Catholic believers,” whom he claimed were willing participants in this reunion. He explained religious resistance as class resistance by the bourgeoisie, that it was those with a “connection with the old political regime” or those whose positions or prestige depended on a Church “subordinate to the Vatican.”²⁴ His use of class to explain the complexity of this religious situation was highly reductive, at a minimum ignoring the possibility of working class believers having other opinions. He warned that if relics remained despite all of the “entreaties” by the state or Orthodox Church, they could be “signs of non-attachment of the respective masses to orthodoxy and could constitute a point

Kremlin: Biserica Greco-Catolică în Timpul Regimului Comunist [Between Vatican and Kremlin: The Greek-Catholic Church in the time of the Communist Regime] (București: Curtea Veche, 2003).

²¹ Arhivele Naționale ale României, Fond “C.C. al P.C.R. - Sectia Administrativ-Politica”, Dos. 14, Vol. 1, 1966-1969, 107.

²² Ibid., 111.

²³ Ibid., 105.

²⁴ Arhivele Naționale ale României, Fond “C.C. al P.C.R. - Sectia Administrativ-Politica”, Dos. 14, Vol. 1, 1966-1969, 104, 181-182.

of support for a more organized attempt, about which the Vatican is thinking, to remake the former Greek-Catholic church.”²⁵ “Non-returned” priests likewise “constituted a permanent danger” for the possibility of the “intensification” of religious life and as conduits for the Vatican, who by its many means of propaganda (press, radio, tourism, “ecumenism”), could provoke disturbances. Although the Vatican was surely concerned about the Greek-Catholic Church, he was likely exaggerating any tactical or conspiratorial maneuvers it was planning.

Dogaru argued that despite “all the difficulties,” he considered “full consolidation of the unification of the Romanian Orthodox Church” possible, aided in part by the fact that the number of “non-returned” priests was diminishing due to the simple fact that they were aging.²⁶ He felt that they had made inroads by naming certain former Greek-Catholics as bishops or vicars, replacing Greek-Catholic liturgical books with orthodox ones, offering promotions in terms of position or location to certain former Greek-Catholic priests to “regain” Greek-Catholic priests who had not “returned,” and creating a central fund to support salaries and maintenance of churches at former Greek-Catholic parishes.²⁷ Within the Orthodox Church a “permanent contact with intermediary organs” was established for eliminating Greek-Catholic remnants and urging priests to “return.”

The Orthodox Church also worked to justify this act of “reunification” in publications, conferences, orientation courses, sermons, and commemorative services: “From year to year, starting in 1948, the publications of the Orthodox Church contained numerous articles which underlined the forced character of the act from 1700 [when the union with the Vatican occurred in Transylvania], the resistance of Transylvanian Romanians against Uniate-ism and the negative consequences of it for the Romanian population of Transylvania.” Dogaru emphasized the importance of disseminating historical narratives describing the Greek-Catholic Church as having a foreign allegiance instead of giving any “impression” that it had benefitted cultural or intellectual life in Transylvania in any way. The Orthodox Church also published statements by clergy and believers who “welcome[d] the return to orthodoxy.”²⁸

The Department’s continued response, Dogaru argued, was to be unafraid to use punishment and warnings to prove that they are “not wavering” and “not indifferent” to this

²⁵ Ibid., 106.

²⁶ Ibid., 181–82.

²⁷ He did not specify whether the fund was the state’s, or the Orthodox Church’s.

²⁸ Arhivele Naționale ale României, Fond “C.C. al P.C.R. - Sectia Administrativ-Politica”, Dos. 14, Vol. 1, 1966-1969, 109, 112, 114.

process of consolidation. He noted that there were “recent condemnations,” presumably to prison, of several particularly active “non-returned” clergy, measures which “had an extremely effective outcome” in terms of discouraging any attempts at re-forming the denomination.²⁹ He felt that they must oppose attempts by the Vatican to enter into relations with the Orthodox Church, unless it would renounce any desire to have the Greek-Catholic Church reestablished.

Dogaru failed to mention, however, one motivating factor why this process of unification was slow and partial. Although Orthodox clergy serving in former Greek-Catholic parishes may have wished to have everything be purely Orthodox, and although former Greek-Catholic priests may have agreed to comply with directives to remove Greek-Catholic vestiges, both kinds of clergy depended on keeping parishioners satisfied enough to donate to the Church.

Consolidating unification in Sălaj County

When Sălaj County inspectors and Archpriest Marcel Andreescu came together to discuss problems of the Orthodox Church, “the consolidation of unification” was a common topic.³⁰ “Consolidating unification” was no small undertaking in Sălaj County. Of the 147 official orthodox parishes, only seventeen were originally Orthodox, and of the 103 filial churches (smaller and dependent on outside priestly staffing), only two were originally orthodox; the rest were “returned” from the Greek-Catholic Church to the Orthodox. Of the 113 priests serving these, 30 were former Greek-Catholic priests serving Greek-Catholic parishes, and 67 orthodox priests served former Greek-Catholic parishes.³¹ Thus, the state and Church attempted to increase Orthodox presence by having a majority of always-Orthodox priests in a Greek-Catholic area, while maintaining a noticeable percentage of former Greek-Catholic priests. Yet four main problems remained: “non-returned” priests still at large, the material remnants of Greek-Catholicism (icons, relics), a lack of effort by most priests to make Orthodox inroads in this Greek-Catholic territory, and obstinate believers.

As noted above, some Greek-Catholic priests who chose not to “return” to the Orthodox Church found alternate occupations to the priesthood. Others carried on with priestly work

²⁹ Ibid., 181–82.

³⁰ See, for example, Direcția Județeană Sălaj a Arhivelor Naționale, “Departamentul Cultelor” 1971/8, 111.

³¹ Ibid., 1973/23, 14.

underground (their activities are beyond the scope of this study).³² Generally speaking, such issues and activity were in the domain of the secret police, as such activity could be easily labeled as unauthorized and illegal, rendering an instigator of clandestine religious activity susceptible to sanction, often severe.

Relics were easier to notice than clandestine priestly activity. In 1970 inspector Tudor verified a parish in Cehul Silvaniei, only to find Greek-Catholic relics had remained “almost intact.” At another Orthodox Church in the town of Ip he could tell that “the whole was Gr. Catholic, from the icons, the gospel, books in the pews, etc.” The priest was “a young element – 28 years old – but he did not do anything to create an orthodox atmosphere at all.” He notified Archpriest Andreescu and asked that “he take measures to right the matters.”³³

In some locales, priests and churches complied in the removal of Catholic icons and images, only later to put them back in their place – perhaps done by certain believers, but with a priest who did not want to battle them. Inspectors kept a list of places where there were known remnants (e.g. imagery including stages of the cross, certain Catholic saints). They also made note if certain practices persisted, like the rosary, icons showing the heart of Jesus, stages of the cross, songs referring to Mary, etc. But people did not resist everywhere. Where construction was being done at one church served by a “returned priest,” “technical documentation” had been provided to them (probably by experts from the Orthodox Church) to be sure the result would be “pure orthodox painting.” Evidently, believers willingly donated money for these icons,

³² From time to time, rumors would arise concerning clandestine Greek-Catholic clergy and services being conducted in homes. At one point there were many rumors of a “clandestine bishop” (it could have been a Roman-Catholic Bishop, but more likely Greek-Catholic) in the town of Cehul Silvaniei, but the inspector believed that “he didn’t go through Cehul Silvaniei anymore” (Direcția Județeană Sălaj a Arhivele Naționale, “Departmentul Cultelor,” 1971/8, 81). Such a “bishop” would have been someone who had been ordained in secret by someone else (or, self-ordained), as most former bishops were deceased, well-tracked, or commonly known. More common were reports of certain “non-returned” elements carrying on illegal activity, like a certain monk in Bocșa who reportedly was holding secret services in his house, or other “non-returned” priests who were perhaps holding services in homes or as guests in former Greek-Catholic churches, using the old liturgy (1973/23, 18). For more, see Vasile, *Între Vatican și Kremlin*; Cristian Vasile, *Istoria Bisericii Greco-Catolice sub regimul comunist 1945-1989: documente și mărturii* [The History of the Greek-Catholic Church under the Communist Regime 1945-1989: Documents and Testimonials] (Iași: Polirom, 2003); Ioan-Marius Bucur, “Istoria Bisericii Unite (Greco-Catolice): 1944-1953 [The History of the Uniate (Greek-Catholic) Church: 1944-1953]” ([s. n.], 2002).

³³ Direcția Județeană Sălaj a Arhivelor Naționale, “Departmentul Cultelor”, 1970/5, 14.

having “accepted this orthodox style without any reservation.”³⁴ This may or may not have been true, as not all believers were gripped by such considerations.³⁵

In Lozna in 1974 inspector Roman found relics of a Greek-Catholic church that had not been replaced, “though they had something with which to replace them.” He brought it to the attention of Andreescu, who “promised that he will take urgent measures for replacing the respective relics.” In Poř, he found the same thing, and the priest there assured him that the relics would be taken down “in the shortest amount of time without being discussed by the believers.”³⁶ In 1975, Roman was still finding Greek-Catholic icons in two separate towns while doing verifications. The local priests both assured him they’d be taken down soon. In Poř the Greek-Catholic relics had previously been taken away, but then “at the insistence of the believers” they were put back up again.³⁷

But why was this process so slow? The “unification” had happened more than two decades before. Inspector Tudor worked in Cluj and Sălaj, both places with major Greek-Catholic histories, and in his opinion, “consolidation of B.O.R. is unfolding at a snail’s pace because the priests do not have any interest to do this work, especially because former Gr. Cat. are in the majority.” The inspector did not dwell on the fact that priests had two parties to satisfy, the authorities and the people. Removing relics or icons was difficult because believers threatened to retaliate by not donating for the priest’s salary. But Tudor believed that the priests’ malaise was shared all the way up the hierarchical ladder, leading him to conclude that this was “the most acute problem” for the Orthodox Church in the region.³⁸

Later Roman argued that passivity was normal even among those priests who willingly had joined the Orthodox faith. These “returned” priests were passive in that they did their service “in complete silence/peace,” “[a]lmost mechanically, like a simple ordinary job.” They wanted to avoid accusations of having “a position of resistance toward unification of the B.O.R.,” but if they could get away with it, “they do not budge from doing anything” to help the process, proven, he believed, by how long it was taking to remove “vestiges” of the former Greek-Catholic churches.³⁹ It was in fact rare for a former Greek-Catholic priest to publicly

³⁴ Direcția Județeană Sălaj a Arhivelor Naționale, “Departmentul Cultelor,” 1973/23, 16–17.

³⁵ See the example of Andrei Andreicuț’ family later in this chapter.

³⁶ Direcția Județeană Sălaj a Arhivelor Naționale, “Departmentul Cultelor,” 1974/31, 8, 46.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 1975/41, 97, 119.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 1970/5, 40.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 1973/23/15.

express dissatisfaction.⁴⁰ “The great majority” of “returned” believers, inspector Roman believed, had “indifferent” attitudes. His perspective was that they had “assimilated” to Orthodox rituals, without “an attitude of enmity” toward Orthodox services. On the whole, he felt that most had accepted that certain words were replaced with others (e.g., “*spirit*” with “*duh*”), and while some still were not crossing themselves with three fingers in the orthodox way, but with their whole hand, such things “[did] not impede their listening with respect” to the liturgy.⁴¹

Such were the tensions and dilemmas facing leaders, ordinary clergy, and believers in this problem of “consolidating the union” of the Orthodox Church. There were competing demands from opposing directions (leaders-believers), with clergy often in the middle, dependent on both for their livelihood. But erasing Greek-Catholicism was further mitigated by the sheer scale of the operation, the numbers of churches, the remoteness of villages, and the lack of state resources or energy to pursue a thorough-going campaign.

The Neoprotestant Denominations as Menace to Settled Society

Another problem that the Department of Religions considered a threat to a unified Romanian religiosity was neoprottestantism. The new, ostensibly more lenient Ceaușescu regime did not look any more lightly on sects, illegal or non-recognized movements, or even the officially approved but supposedly sectarian neoprotestants. Department head Dogaru characterized the neoprotestant “organizations” not just as religiously problematic, but essentially foreign, having “their centers” in the West and the U.S.A., who “influence[d] their political positions” and led them toward “their anti-state attitude in socialist countries.” Many state and church representatives saw them as threatening what was a supposed historically settled religious landscape.

In his March 21, 1966 report, Dogaru characterized sectarianism, and by extension, neoprottestantism: what begins with adhering to religious precepts with extreme rigidity (*bigotism*), fanaticism, isolation, and intolerance of other religions or concepts of life leads inexorably toward “reluctance toward culture and progress,” and “distrust or even hostility

⁴⁰ Ibid., 1970/6. For example, it was rare for an inspector to complain about the “socio-political comportment” of a certain priest (Grigore Balotă of Crișeni), who evidently was a little too vocal (not adequately obsequious) about the fact that he was “dissatisfied” and seemed to prefer what was “before the union.”

⁴¹ Ibid., 1973/23, 17.

toward the state.” Dogaru characteristically blamed group leaders, whose “principal preoccupation” was imbuing religious associations with “a dynamic character, in the sense that every believer should become a capable missionary to attract proselytes, the problems of religious life becoming the primary factor of their lives.” That religion was central to neoprotestants was made evident by their proselytizing activities, which inspectors found evidence of them doing nearly everywhere, although inspectors labeled such activity as masking the true intent of “attracting” new members “to their organization.”⁴² Here the line between acceptable and unacceptable religiosity comes into focus. To state agents, one’s religiosity should never be primary in defining one’s activities or relations. Rather, a religious worldview or ideology should be marginal in defining one’s choices or relations with others. Normative religiosity for state agents was more like a cultural affiliation, where religion would be, at most, subsumed into a society that was defined mostly by political, economic, or national terms.

Because they saw neoprotestantism as “foreign” and unacceptably religious, state agents wished to prevent Orthodox believers from changing denominations. The Department declared it “forbidden for these [neoprotestant] denominations to enroll new members who have come from other denominations, without strict compliance to the legal provisions corresponding to the forms of transition from one cult to another.” According to general religious legislation, a change in religious affiliation was supposed to occur officially through the People’s Councils (*sfatul popular*—local administrative body). People were supposed to submit change-of-religion forms to their local council, but according to actual administration, the councils no longer dealt with such matters, with the result that a permanent obstacle was in place. In fact, “such forms were not possible [to file] anymore except for some very isolated cases,” which meant that the People’s Council was “a brake on the actions of proselytism.”⁴³ Although there was a bureaucratic obstacle to an official change in one’s religion, it did nothing

⁴² Arhivele Naționale ale României, Fond “C.C. al P.C.R. - Sectia Administrativ-Politica”, 1966-1969, Dos. 14, Vol. 1, 63–64. According to Dogaru, neoprotestants proselytized with “the crowds in the markets, trains, stations, buses, mills, etc., weddings, baptisms, burials, as well as propaganda done from man to man, through visits at residences of believers of other denominations, whether in ordinary relationships between neighbors or acquaintances, whether with the occasion of random troubles or misfortunes, like sicknesses, deaths, fires, etc., which believers of these denominations use, the moments for showing their compassion, but in reality in order to use the mood of those concerned, toward attracting them to their organization.”

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 74.

to impede people from defining their own affiliation, nor churches from holding their own private rolls of registration.

Despite efforts by state agents to prevent foreign support or organized activities geared toward proselytism (beyond the Sunday service), “the mystical and proselytizing dynamism [was] still powerful.” A measure Dogaru proposed was to attempt to “liquidate” instances of “biblical instruction” that had “a character that is too pronounced.” But here, too, the Department was spread too thin and merely reactive, relying on “their own organs in the field” to pursue such cases and then “notify legal organs of state power to take measures.”⁴⁴ Reactive discipline was the constant fallback since neoprotestant denominations had legal status to operate; the state relied upon its vast secret police apparatus to make judicious decisions about which religious personnel justified discipline for conducting proselytism.

Anytime state organs took action against dynamic religious activity, they had to maintain the reputation of a regime that protected people’s right to a religious conscience, not as one that persecuted the religious. As such, Dogaru emphasized that any attempts at discipline should be made “with tact, without the character of a campaign,” and that it should not be done unilaterally in the name of state bodies, but “in conjunction and in collaboration with the leaders of the respective [legally approved] religions [...] carrying them out in parallel with a continuous work of explanation and of persuasion as to the validity of that which we request.”⁴⁵ In other words, their actions had to be couched in legal terms; they had to present themselves as respecters of the law, not persecutors of religious practice. In turn, such “sectarians” would be framed as dis-respecters of the law, and anti-social, and they would be blamed for their own marginalization. State agents communicated, in essence, if other believers can find a way to practice their religion in a way that does not conflict with the laws of our country (religiously acceptable), they can too. The request was simple, to abide by “our” norms.

To state agents, as well as to many other people, a “normal” social life in Socialist Romania presumed a privatized religious conscience, contained within proper boundaries. Thus, the Department of Religions hoped to present a united front with state and church organs by pursuing “integration of the sectarian or neoprotestant believers who remain with a sectarian mentality, in unity with the whole nation, through liquidation of the ‘sectarian’ tendencies of

⁴⁴ Ibid., 75–76.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 77.

isolation from society which characterizes them.” Dogaru believed that they would gain “good results” after “close observation of the sectarians, individual contact with them on subjects related to their work or on local public actions, and clear discussions about some deviations or calling them to order.” For such tasks, Dogaru believed trade union or administrative leaders, representatives from the Popular Councils, and other activists would suffice.⁴⁶ Thus, Dogaru hoped that believers who demonstrated sectarian or proselytizing tendencies would learn social norms; they would learn the proper place and balance to their religiosity. Just as believers influenced one other, state representatives tried to use personal influence, but along a different trajectory. Dogaru advocated the state fight religious proselytism with its own proselytism.

The neoprotestant problem touched the Orthodox Church directly. When Dogaru revisited the situation in a report a couple years later on December 17, 1969, he claimed a recent intensification of activity among legal neoprotestant groups and sects that disrupted religious life. When one denomination or group became active, it created “dissension” and “unrest among believers” by “inducing all cults to intensify activity.” “Intense” religious education of believers and “especially of teenagers” was equivalent to “imprinting on them an exaggerated mysticism,” which had as a consequence “a lack of receptivity and even indifference toward the acquiring of socialist ideology.”⁴⁷ Dogaru and other officials regretted that the neoprotestants and sectarians ignored the religious norms desired by the state and other religious denominations.

The proposed measures of Dogaru and the Department were nothing new or particularly inventive. They forbade construction or repairs of homes or churches without proper approval by state organs; meeting in houses without prior written authorization of a respective church leader who has been endorsed by the Dept. of Religions; conversion from one denomination to another through baptism alone, although further requirements were left unclear; proselytizing while visiting the sick in the hospital; preaching which would incite people toward disrespecting any state legislation; distribution of literature of foreign origin; unregistered priests performing priestly activities; orchestral fanfares during church-exiting (for their potential attractiveness to others), etc.⁴⁸ These measures were not promising as obstacles since they did nothing to address the core question of what, in fact, made neoprotestant

⁴⁶ Ibid., 78.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 98.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 99–101.

associations compelling to ordinary people. The state and Orthodox Church were comparatively static and could only offer obstacles or reactive policies, whereas the neoprotestants were finding ways to animate others to joining them. Neoprotestantism was the epitome of unacceptable religiosity.

Threat of neoprotestantism in Sălaj County

When Stan Tudor helped establish the Department of Religions office in Sălaj County, he discovered that although the most common problems in need of resolution involved documenting church registration or going over the state of finances and bookkeeping, “the hardest work” was monitoring the “activities of the religions, and especially of the neoprotestant religions.” It was difficult to enforce the “religious regulations” and slow their evangelizing activities.⁴⁹ He considered neoprotestantism the biggest overall religious problem “without exception.”

This problem significantly affected the Orthodox Church in Sălaj County. When inspector Tudor met with the Orthodox archpriest to discuss pressing concerns in 1970, the “activity of neoprotestant religions interfering among the Orthodox religion” was the only one worth noting. Neoprotestants were going door-to-door, had musical groups and sometimes stereo and radio equipment, all of which served to attract youth and people of other faiths. In addition to expansion by conversions, Tudor was concerned that the families in these faiths tended to have twice as many children (or more) than those belonging to other faiths, something that also contributed to growth.⁵⁰

Inspectors were not the only ones concerned; priests were too. In one parish a priest notified his archpriest, who then transmitted the information to the inspector, that in his parish, Baptists had built a prayer house, hosted guest preachers from Cluj and Bucharest, and invited Orthodox believers to hear them. They were going from house to house, and according to the accusation, targeting females and the elderly to join them. Of course nearly everyone already belonged to one denomination or another, so any invitation would necessarily prey upon another denomination.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Direcția Județeană Sălaj a Arhivelor Naționale, “Departmentul Cultelor”, 1970/5, 40.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 41, 65.

⁵¹ Direcția Județeană Sălaj a Arhivelor Naționale, “Departmentul Cultelor”, 1970/6.

Archpriest of Simleu Victor Tăut told the inspector about a case of proselytism discovered in Sumal in 1976. A priest had passed on information about preachers who had been visiting from different cities, preaching Saturday afternoon until nighttime. In anticipation of these visits, believers went from house to house “of our believers” to invite them. Some did attend, supposedly only due to “being relatives” or “from curiosity.” Tăut regarded “their” Orthodox believers as being preyed upon. According to his report, these believers expressed that they were “disturbed by what they hear[d] there and [we]re shaken in faith” especially since “all the preachers did not avoid speaking against the Church, her practices, the priests and certain weaknesses of theirs, and that priests make requests for money [...]” The Archpriest asked rhetorically, but provocatively of the inspector, “Do these foreign [implying not local or not one of “us”] preachers have authorization to be able to go wherever and speak against whomever as they please?” He was able to provide the inspector with some names of local neoprotestants who were involved in preaching or inviting others to hear them.⁵²

Earlier, in 1971, inspector David conducted a study of people joining the neoprotestants from other faiths, since joining neoprotestants was basically the only movement from one denomination to another according to available information. He found that the Baptists and Pentecostals were “still seriously feasting” on the Orthodox Church, but that Baptists tended to profit at the expense of the Reformed Church (Hungarians), whereas Pentecostals were comprised almost exclusively of Romanians. Looking at data from 1967 to 1971 in his county, David found that despite having 120 priests, the Orthodox Church attracted only 55 people, many of whom were merely returning from a stint with neoprotestants. The neoprotestants attracted around 255 from the Orthodox Church with only 16 pastors, some of whom had no theological training. The Reformed Church’s situation was “just as sad,” as they lost 96 believers compared to 9 gains.

With the advantage in numbers of clergy that the Reformed and Orthodox Churches had, he asked, “How is it possible that a few pastors compared to around 200 priests could have such success?” He blamed the result on the “disinterest” shown by certain priests regarding neoprotestant activity, “their lack of receptivity” as well as a “mercantile spirit which gives water to the mill of the neoprotestants.” Though he found priests’ inactivity blameworthy and wished they took classes in “sectology,” he also argued that combating neoprotestants was “a

⁵² Ibid., 1976/56, 25.

duty of the Department and the organs of state” due to the fact that they “supposedly can stick those in prison who do proselytism.”⁵³

David had had some recent examples of a “mercantile spirit” in the Orthodox Church to justify his accusation. A few months prior he had received a request from Archpriest Andreescu to remove a certain village priest of Mineu Victor Varga for being “irresponsible.” He had a “weakness, that as soon as money is put in his hand he cannot bear to not spend it,” and thousands had gone missing. What made the situation worse was that Mineu had an active Baptist presence. David agreed with Andreescu, as “any deviation or lack of good conduct would be exploited [by the Baptists] to the maximum.” David and Andreescu agreed to Varga’s removal and to the priest who would replace him.⁵⁴ In addition to such blatant misuse of funds, “mercantilism” could also have been referring to the more common accusations made against Orthodox Priests, that charging for the performance of rites (baptisms, christenings, weddings, and burials) smelled of greed, and lacked sympathy for parishioners’ hardships.⁵⁵ Neoprotestant church leaders, on the other hand, did not collect money for performing rites.

Church and state leaders urged Orthodox priests to serve in the front line of this neoprotestant struggle but there were still implied limits to Orthodox activity. In Marca, inspector Roman met with an Orthodox priest to discuss the “neoprotestant problem” there. He could happily report that “the local priest [was doing] pastoral work without exceeding limits and searching via various methods to combat the activities of the neoprotestant denominations in the town.”⁵⁶ They wanted active priests who were among the people and engaged with the people, but without getting overly zealous. This was the difficult balance for those priests who did pursue religiously active service.

But there was a deeper problem that the inspectors did not wish to address. People had their own opinions, desires, and tastes, and Orthodox leaders and the Department of Religions were frankly struggling against the ability of neoprotestants to mobilize Orthodox believers. State agents did not reflexively consider how close cooperation with Orthodox clergy would only elevate the status of neoprotestantism for those who did not trust the regime.

⁵³ Ibid., 1971/8, 282-283.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 1971/10, 520.

⁵⁵ What some call greed, others might simply see as ordinary payments for services. Similar tensions arise in the Reformed Church, as its pastors also customarily charge for such services.

⁵⁶ Direcția Județeană Sălaj a Arhivelor Naționale, “Departamentul Cultelor”, 1974/31, 46.

The Lord's Army, with or without its Leaders

The other "sectarian" movement that caused Department of Religions' representatives nearly equal consternation was the Lord's Army, despite the arrest of its leaders in 1959. The Lord's Army occupied a particularly important place in state considerations because it had many of the characteristics of other neoprotestant denominations or sectarian groups, but claimed a certain affiliation with the so-called "people's Church," the Romanian Orthodox Church.

Department of Religions officials described the Lord's Army as problematic in two incompatible ways. First, as a Maramureş County inspector put it in his March 15, 1966, report, the Lord's Army was founded "by the leadership of the church in the time of the bourgeois-landlord regime" and Trifa, their front man, was a "legionary" and had transformed it into "a legionary organization."⁵⁷ It was convenient for officials to employ pejoratives like "bourgeois" or "fascist" as a way to easily dismiss this undesirable religious group, even if officials would have been hard-pressed to identify bourgeois or fascist aspects to the Lord's Army activities in the 1950s and 1960s.

On the other hand, officials described LA religiosity as akin to neoprotestantism. Common to adherents of these two associations was their "discontentment" with what officials saw as ordinary religiosity, the inspector from Maramureş explained: "The adherents of the Lord's Army are not satisfied with the religious services done by the priest and they also gather alone in their homes where they pray and certain groups sing army songs and some of them preach [...]" To officials, LA adherents were not as bad as neoprotestant believers since they were "peaceful believers, [who] do not do proselytism but are more fanatic than the rest of the orthodox believers." On the civic side, officials said, they participated properly in the cooperatives, but tended to avoid government-sponsored "public meetings," and "cultural events." Yet the religious similarities between the two movements made Army adherents "easily attracted to neoprotestant cults," especially since it was legal to participate in neoprotestant services, but technically illegal to participate in Lord's Army services. The inspector mentioned a recent case of 32 Army participants who as a group switched to the Pentecostal faith, showing

⁵⁷ Arhivele Naşionale ale României, Fond "C.C. al P.C.R. - Sectia Administrativ-Politica", 1966-1969, Dos. 14, Vol. 1, 155.

how participation in the Lord's Army did not necessarily keep people attached to the Orthodox Church by giving them the additional religiosity they desired.⁵⁸

Dogaru echoed the findings of the Maramureș inspector, even claiming that by its original intent and nature the Lord's Army tended toward separation from the Orthodox Church. He claimed that the Army's leadership, "cultivating an excessive religious preoccupation" and employing "practices" that were "exceed[ing] the permissible limits of ordinary practice of the orthodox church," the Lord's Army "expanded" and "even sought to get out from under obedience to the orthodox hierarchy." Instead of questioning why believers might be attracted, Dogaru blamed leaders for pushing the boundaries of religious acceptability, which inevitably led toward separation. Although Traian Dorz claimed the Lord's Army supported the Orthodox Church, Dogaru saw it as "a breeding ground of various sects."⁵⁹ LA gatherings for singing, prayer, Bible reading, and testimonies were not innocent communal activities but "initiated by certain fanatics" and had a "subversive character."⁶⁰

To combat the Lord's Army, the authorities continued with periodic discipline in the 1960s, such as the interruption of meetings by police, searches, and extremely large fines to those hosting meetings without having proper approval.⁶¹ From the perspective of the inspector in Maramureș, "The Orthodox priests have the duty to liquidate these groups" but their activity "weakened."⁶² There were not any innovative approaches to reducing the appeal of the Lord's Army.

Ceaușescu's ascension to power in 1964 included an amnesty to "political" prisoners, of which were religious figures like the LA leaders arrested in 1959. Upon his release in 1964, Traian Dorz considered the LA movement to be in a "state of anarchy," although activities had continued while its most prominent figures were in prison.⁶³ After release, Dorz worked in the

⁵⁸ Ibid., 155.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 70.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 71.

⁶¹ Letter from the Christian Committee for the Defense of Religious Rights in Romania, dated August 23, 1978. Archive file <RO/Ort/LA 18s>, Keston Archive and Library, Baylor University.

⁶² Arhivele Naționale ale României, Fond "C.C. al P.C.R. - Sectia Administrativ-Politica", 1966-1969, Dos. 14, Vol. 1, 155.

⁶³ George Spiridon, "Tentativele de Legalizare Ale Oastei Domnului Întreprinse de Traian Dorz [The Attempts at Legalizing the Lord's Army Undertaken by Traian Dorz]," *Danubius* XXXII (2014): 389. And even after the arrest of these leaders, three more were arrested after a meeting in 1965 in the Banat region. They were fortunate to be acquitted, apparently due to Metropolitan Nicolae Corneanu's intervention.

collective farm in the region of his upbringing, the only work permitted him. He was watched all day to be sure he did not leave the collective during work hours, but at night he wrote letters to fellow Army adherents.⁶⁴ In writing and in meetings during days off, Dorz tried to sway Army adherents toward a "healthy orientation" from their attraction to "foreign teachings," meaning to neoprotestantism.⁶⁵ For such attempts, Securitate agents periodically hauled him in to interrogate him or make threats, asking "Why do you meddle in the faith of others? Why do you not leave each to believe how he wants and to go how he likes?"⁶⁶ Evidently Dorz was not satisfied with having just the Orthodox Church and its practices.

Even though the Lord's Army failed to gain a legal status in the 1950s, to Dorz and some other adherents, Orthodox hierarchs, and state officials, the question of its status remained, as the Army continued to flourish underground, particularly in villages. Starting in 1971, Dorz renewed his former, ill-fated attempts at legalizing the Lord's Army for the good of the adherents, the Church, and the nation, as he saw it, but he pursued this strategy alone to avoid implicating and endangering others, as he had inadvertently done in the 1950s. He appealed directly to the Patriarch, whom he still regarded as a sympathizer, unlike most priests and bishops. His 70th birthday greetings to the Patriarch included a "memorandum" with a history of the Army, its struggles, and the desire for legal recognition.

In response, Bishop Coman of Oradea called a meeting with Dorz and the local inspector to instruct him and the Lord's Army generally to "'fit more completely within the life of our Church,'" and cease working "'separately from us, the priests.'" The Bishop faulted them for their marginalization, but Dorz blamed the priests for marginalizing the Army, often the most reliable members of the parish. The local inspector took offense at this idea of LA participants as positive, saying, "'Hey, how much [trouble] you cause us!'" and accusing Dorz of constant

⁶⁴ Traian Dorz, *Hristos - Mărturia Mea: scurtă și sfântă povestire a vieții mele sau Istoria unor Cântări Nemuritoare [Christ - My Testimony: a short and sacred story of my life or the History of certain Immortal Songs]* (Sibiu: Oastea Domnului, 2005), 417–18.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 414. His experiences prior to and during prison only convinced him further that the Lord's Army biggest downside was its lack of unified leadership (that it continued so well without its leaders was not altogether encouraging, apparently). Dorz himself would be and promote that unified leadership, a role further vacated by the deaths of several leaders in prison and shortly after release.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 426. He argued that a unified Lord's Army was essential to the health of the Church, and if "divisions" within the Army were not resolved, the Church would suffer, "a grave problem for the nation." Dorz argued that to not bring youth up in the faith would lead to "hooliganism, alcoholism, parasitism, terrorism..." It's unlikely the official shared his opinion about the importance of the Lord's Army, although he may have sympathized with the notion of the link between the Orthodox Church's health and that of the nation, as some officials regarded the Church's role in society positively.

“provocation” and not being able to “keep quiet.” Bishop Coman echoed these sentiments, suggesting “father-like” that Army adherents “do everything so that the church authority and that of the state will change the current view it has about you.” He wanted Army adherents to prove their “obedience,” to “[f]all nicely in line in the life of the parish,” to “be like the other believers from your village,” since it’s “our” duty “to give proof of support and obedience toward our rulers.”⁶⁷ Thus, Church and state leaders made Army dissolution the prerequisite for making requests. It is hard to imagine that humble submission would have opened any doors to change, as submission seemed more like a euphemism for unquestioned obedience and conformity.

Dorz’s previously ill-fated attempt at legalization left him wary, but over the course of the 1970s, he endeavored to sway the Church’s leaders in meetings with various hierarchs.⁶⁸ Church and state leaders had an easier time marginalizing Droz than they did the Lord’s Army. At a later meeting in May 1972, Bishop Coman dismissed the requests Dorz made for the Army, arguing that since he wrote in his own name alone, the Synod had no reason to take up the cause of a lone individual. But had he worked with others, he would have been accused of conspiring with others in clandestine work. The simplicity of his proposals—which were for local churches to be given the power to grant (or not) permission to local Lord’s Army groups to gather and sing Army songs—were still not sufficient to woo the hierarchy. Bishop Coman’s office did agree to one compromise with Dorz, to review some 30 Army songs for official Church approval, but they never responded to him after he sent them.⁶⁹

Nevertheless, the Lord’s Army was not diminishing at all due to its voluntary and decentralized leadership, by word of mouth on a local level. LA adherents were regularly gathering in homes on Wednesday, Friday, or Saturday nights or on Sunday afternoons, and they gathered *en masse* for other acceptable social occasions like baptism-parties, weddings, anniversaries, and dedications, while mixing in Army activities like singing and preaching. Local authorities could levy fines at such occasions, even at tiny gatherings of a few people reading

⁶⁷ Ibid., 439–40. Dorz is recounting others’ words here.

⁶⁸ He met with Bishop Coman of Oradea, Bishop Gafton of Argeş, Metropolitan Corneanu of Timișoara, Metropolitan Plămădeală of Transylvania, prominent Orthodox theologian Dumitru Staniloaie, among others.

⁶⁹ Dorz, *Hristos - Mărturia Mea*, 441; Spiridon, “Tentativele de Legalizare Ale Oastei Domnului,” 390.

the Bible or praying, as they lacked proper “authorization” for what authorities could label as specifically religious gatherings.⁷⁰

Lord’s Army in Sălaj

The Lord’s Army presented a dilemma to the inspectors and the Orthodox Church of Sălaj County. When Tudor was gaining familiarity with the situation there in 1970, he discovered that in the towns of Bălan and Chendrea, a group of believers had “broken away from” the Orthodox Church and passed over to the “forbidden Lord’s Army group.” A group was also known to exist in Chechiș, and there were also Pentecostal believers in some of these towns as well, making Lord’s Army affiliation more troubling because the two groups interacted with one another.⁷¹ What Tudor “discovered” would present a problem for each subsequent inspector.

Yet Lord’s Army activities had been going on for some time in these small towns, prior to Tudor’s “discovery.” The Gherman family, with eight children, had been regular attenders of LA gatherings in Chechiș for years prior to the creation of Sălaj County and its Department of Religions. Often the gatherings would occur in the middle of the night, and one of the Gherman children, Filom, attended these meetings as a youth. He recalls how some time after midnight, in the pitch-darkness of the unlit roads and paths, he and others would walk by oil lamp to wherever the gathering might be. The older participants led the way for the younger ones. Even after Gherman left for Cluj for work in 1969, he frequently traveled back to his town for gatherings. The gatherings in Chechiș were scheduled on Saturday evenings and Sunday afternoons to accommodate those who worked out of town during the week. Those who remained in town customarily also gathered on Wednesdays.⁷²

Yet unaware of the history of the movement, Tudor then brought up the issue of the Lord’s Army with Archpriest Andreescu, and asked him to travel himself to Bălan, Chechiș, and Chendrea to conduct services and “preach, to combat their doctrine and erring in a biblical way given that they participate at the service in the orthodox church.”⁷³ The inspector wished to believe that some moral pressure applied by the Archpriest would have a favorable result. In Chechiș at least, Lord’s Army believers did indeed attend church very dependably, and they would hear this call, but they were unlikely to simply halt their activity.

⁷⁰ Dorz, *Hristos - Mărturia Mea*, 456.

⁷¹ Direcția Județeană Sălaj a Arhivelor Naționale, “Departamentul Cultelor”, 1970/5, 99.

⁷² Interview with Filom Gherman, September 22, 2015, Cluj-Napoca.

⁷³ Direcția Județeană Sălaj a Arhivelor Naționale, “Departamentul Cultelor”, 1970/5, 99.

In 1971, Tudor's successor David received word that, according to a letter to the Bishop from the parish priest in Chechiș, a Lord's Army "nucleus had solidified" there, where previously there was no "evidence" of anything except believers who were "subordinate to the Church." Either he was ignorant of the reality, or he wanted to keep his role unsullied. The supposed first evidence of insubordination came when the Lord's Army held an event "provoked by a person foreign to the parish," a wedding celebration that included Army activity like singing and testimonies. The priest claimed that neither the parents of the bride nor the one hosting the party, the former church cantor, were Army participants. The priest congratulated himself that the action was "nipped in the bud," as local police arrived to break it up, and the next day the couple arrived at the Orthodox Church for the official Church ceremony, which proceeded without incident.⁷⁴ Orthodox Church representatives like this priest attempted to manage their own image by purporting control over Lord's Army activity until it was instigated by "foreigners" (non-locals) who influenced ordinary Orthodox believers. It would reflect badly on a local priest to admit that the movement was thriving in his parish and that he had little success in combatting it, which was the case in Chechiș.

There was a danger of provoking Army adherents. At a verification in the village of Sîncraiu Almaș in 1972 inspector David discussed Army participation with a new priest, whom David feared was "not yet harnessing the problem well,"⁷⁵ ignoring the fact that priests might need first to establish rapport. Soon after, the inspector discussed the problem of the Lord's Army in the towns of Bălan, Chechiș, and Chendrea with Archpriest Andreescu. As Tudor did before him, David requested that Andreescu "travel there himself and conduct services to combat them." Also, David traveled to Bălan to discuss with communist party deputy secretary the issue of believers who "broke from the orthodox church and switched to the forbidden group 'Lord's Army.'"⁷⁶ Inspectors hoped that local authorities might know the means by which such LA adherents might be successfully dissuaded from Army activity.

Having priests, archpriests, or state representatives try to pressure believers away from the Lord's Army could backfire, as by the 1960s and 1970s, many adherents suspected priests of being entangled in the Securitate, even ones who appeared sympathetic to the cause of the

⁷⁴ Ibid., 1971/10, 86.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 1971/8, 102.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 1972/13, 104, 84. Remember that most Lord's Army adherents rarely saw themselves as breaking away at all, but revitalizing their Orthodox faith.

Lord's Army. Army adherents feared priests' knowledge of the location and participants in their gatherings, as priests might inform on them if pressured by state agents to do so. Ordinary believers decided for themselves whom to trust: the historical church, however entangled, or the revival movement, however disparaged by priests. Filom Ghermon contends that in his experience, Army participants were more likely to be seen as the most morally upright and trustworthy ones in a village, rather than the priests.⁷⁷

It was far from given that believers would trust state or church representatives and their opinions of the Lord's Army. In Gîlgău Almaşului the local priest told inspector Roman about a group of fifteen women who were meeting as Lord's Army members on Sundays in various houses and were singing "songs of Mary," which suggests a Greek-Catholic link as well. (The "state organs" were notified to "follow this issue."⁷⁸) Chechiş, in addition to having a strong Lord's Army contingent, happened to also be a "returned" Greek-Catholic parish, as most parishes were in Sălaj County. An inspector from Maramureş County had claimed that the Lord's Army was gaining a foothold in former Greek-Catholic parishes, suggesting an affinity among the outlawed.⁷⁹ Believers sympathetic to the Greek-Catholic Church would not uncritically accept church or state representatives' account of the Army.

The orientation conference in Sălaj County in 1972 was an occasion for church leaders to instruct local priests in combating the Lord's Army. Priests were to "direct" members of the Army to not hold meetings "separately," but only "within the church, under the leadership of a priest." They did not say that priests had to accommodate meetings, however, just that priestly oversight was required. They discussed reinvigorating parish committees (which usually only existed on paper) as one alternative to Lord's Army participation, but that idea was evidently not pursued, most likely because it depended on the eagerness of priests to initiate such additional work. Cantors were instructed to teach more songs to help lessen this particular attraction of the Lord's Army.⁸⁰

Several priests described their local problems with the Lord's Army. One priest complained that he had members of the Lord's Army who were taught by Traian Dorz, and that these adherents "have the pretense to preach and to lead services in their meetings." He was

⁷⁷ Interview with Filom Gherman, September 22, 2015, Cluj-Napoca.

⁷⁸ Direcția Județeană Sălaj a Arhivelor Naționale, "Departmentul Cultelor", 1974/31, October, 25.

⁷⁹ Arhivele Naționale ale României, Fond "C.C. al P.C.R. - Sectia Administrativ-Politica", 1966-1969, Dos. 14, Vol. 1, 155.

⁸⁰ Direcția Județeană Sălaj a Arhivelor Naționale, "Departmentul Cultelor", 1972/15, 178-179.

offended that they pursued such activity despite being baptized and wed in the Orthodox Church. This priest tried “in many ways” to reach them—he had a choir, for example—but “they didn’t want to come.” He held vespers regularly, but the adherents supposedly did not like the texts printed by the Holy Synod, so he hoped soon to see a new book of songs as well as one for prayers. He hoped the Lord’s Army was a “passing phenomenon,” an optimistic perspective, to say the least. Another priest mentioned a recent occurrence where at a wedding of two Lord’s Army members, the godfather to one of the couple wished to preach there, but the priest did not give him permission. The godfather apparently tried to preach anyway at the groom’s house, but he was caught and fined by the local authorities. In closing, Bishop Coman “urged the priesthood to intense of pastoral work as possible.”⁸¹ In the view of Coman and others, an inactive priesthood caused people to go spiritually hungry and look elsewhere to satisfy their religious needs.

At the same meeting, inspector Roman likewise put the onus on local clergy, instructing them that Lord’s Army participants “should be warned not to be wanderers, but to remain in their church.”⁸² When a priest told Roman about some people traveling to neighboring towns to participate in Army activities, all he could offer the local priest in terms of advice was to “have a word with them,” instructing them to “participate in the religious services in the orthodox churches in the towns where they’re from.” Priestly pleadings to “be content” with Orthodox services were paired with state fines. Later that year, a fine of 10,000 Lei, roughly four times the average monthly salary, was levied on a group of twenty-three people who participated in an Army meeting in Bălan in someone’s home.⁸³

Had the Lord’s Army been the only “sectarian” manifestation in towns like Bălan and Chechiș in Sălaj County, the concern of the Bishop or inspector might have been less. But Pentecostal believers there intermingled with LA adherents. When the priest of Bălan complained about Pentecostal proselytism among (his) Orthodox believers, he also mentioned Army members meeting in houses. Inspector Roman could only note that the issue was “brought to the attention of the organs of the police who are following this issue.” The “Orthodox Church,” while struggling against these “sectarian” groups in Bălan, was struggling to

⁸¹ Ibid., 179.

⁸² Direcția Județeană Sălaj a Arhivelor Naționale, “Departmentul Cultelor”, 1975/42, 276.

⁸³ Ibid., 1976/50, June 9, October 16.

even be the Orthodox Church: it had once been a Greek-Catholic parish and inspectors found the “consolidation of the BOR” to be weak there.⁸⁴

In summary, the religiosity on the margins of the Orthodox Church was far from being controlled to the extent that Orthodox Church and state representatives desired, and threats and force of police were the usual fallback for those concerned about such manifestations. Although religious formations like the unconsolidated Greek-Catholic Church, the neoprotestants, and Lord’s Army did not threaten the dominance of the Orthodox Church or state power, by their presence they were a constant reminder to church and state leaders of the unconsolidated or incomplete nature of citizens’ conformity to a narrowly imagined Romanian nation that should be unified, among other things, religiously as well.

The Orthodox Church: The First among the Equal Religions

What made Orthodox practice generally acceptable to state agents is revealed in the reports of inspectors from Sălaj County in the 1970s. They reveal that in the minds of state officials, acceptable Orthodox religiosity was balanced: active but not zealous and having a political and social orientation marked by collaboration in public efforts and visible displays of political loyalty. How well believers and clergy conformed to these standards led to either punishment or rewards, which helped solidify the norms of religiosity further. When Department of Religions officials conducted “verifications,” in which they observed religious services—often on religious holidays but even on ordinary Sundays—and met with the head priest, their concluding statements like “I did not ascertain negative aspects” or “I did not observe anything particular” indicated they found nothing problematic.

As in the Soviet Union, attendance at services—even in mass numbers—was generally acceptable for officials if the participants were older, particularly women, and not youth. This was the case in Sălaj from 1968 to 1978. When discussing or statistically tracking church attendance, inspectors would routinely remark on the age or gender profile of the participants, making remarks like “the majority [were] older women.”⁸⁵ At larger events like Easter services, they noted the increased numbers along with the gender and age profile. After Easter of 1973 inspector Roman reported to Bucharest that this year, like last year, at the main Orthodox Church in Zalău, some 1,300 attended, approximately 850 women, 250 men, and 200 youth and

⁸⁴ Ibid., 1975/41, 70.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 1971/8, 79, 115.

that the service lasted several hours, and communion (the Eucharist) took another hour. In Jibou, where Archpriest Andreescu served, 600 came for midnight mass (400 women, 150 men, 50 youth). The next day 250 attended, then 200 the following day. To Roman, there was nothing of “peculiar character compared to other years.”⁸⁶ Roman found “no particular problems” at other big events like the consecration of a church in the village of Noțig in 1975, when some 3,000 attended, including the Bishop, a few others from his office, and several other priests.⁸⁷

A primary factor determining whether religion was being practiced appropriately was the behavior of the priest. State officials agreed with church leaders that it was better for priests to be active rather than inactive, as long as they were not overly zealous. At an orientation conference in 1972, Bishop Coman urged his clergy on, telling them

the thirst of believers is great, there are many who demand more of us, if we do not satisfy them they go elsewhere. We are obligated to make pastoral activity more dynamic [*a dinamiza*], because among the causes that generate such shortcomings is the fact that it appears that we are too static, we are not close enough to the believers.

Coman advised that priests “be active every day,” be “permanently in the midst of believers,” not leave the parish without permission, and not reduce services: “We need attentive [*conștienți* – lit. conscious] priests who know their flock.”⁸⁸ That Coman would urge more activity suggests that he perceived priests’ passivity to be a problem in the County. The inspector did not object to Coman’s call for more active priests because, in theory, a more dynamic Orthodox Church was better than people joining less desirable religious associations.

Unsurprisingly, state officials considered it proper for priests to deliver sermons that advocated loyalty to the state, but they did not condemn as religious propaganda sermons that combated other religions or were “purely religious.” Inspector Roman had no objections to the clergy’s discussion at a conference in 1974 where the theme was “Preaching in our day.” Two points arose in the discussions. First, a few priests—plus, notably, the archpriest—emphasized the special opportunity sermons presented for discussing issues touching “both the Church as well as the Fatherland.” As one priest commented, in sermons “the believers should be urged to keep in view the cooperation [*colaborarea*] which exists between the Church and society.”

⁸⁶ Direcția Județeană Sălaj a Arhivele Naționale, “Departmentul Cultelor,” 1973/21, 27, 29.

⁸⁷ Direcția Județeană Sălaj a Arhivelor Naționale, “Departmentul Cultelor”, 1975/41, entry from October 12.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 178.

Second, this same priest also noted that sermons must be very solid and thorough [*temeinic*] so as to combat any “sectarian” tendencies, a point echoed by several other priests. One warned that local neoprotestants also emphasized preaching, were well-prepared with something from Scripture, and even included elements of apologetics.⁸⁹ When inspector Achim observed services in Zalău, he wrote to Bucharest that all three priests who served presented “social content” in their sermons, trying to “attract the attention of the believers toward becoming good citizens and patriots of socialist Romania.” He concluded from his observations that “It could be said that all [Orthodox] priests [in Sălaj County] give evidence of much loyalty toward the state.”⁹⁰

Inspectors frequently noted during verifications that the sermon they heard was acceptable even if it was “purely religious,” meaning deemed religiously abstract and disconnected from concrete issues of everyday life. On a Sunday in May of 1971, David traveled out to a small town where he “supervised the religious service” of an Orthodox Church in which some 120 people took part. David remarked that “the sermon heard was purely religious and without manifestations [of anything problematic].”⁹¹ In his 1973 verification of Easter services, Roman had no problem with the many sermons “about the resurrection.”⁹² In the “atheist” state of Romania, large numbers were attending Easter and listening to sermons about the core of Christian belief – that the Son of God came to Earth, died, and resurrected from the dead. Yet evidently it was “purely religious” enough to be unthreatening.

Even catechism—the practice of teaching religion to youth—was acceptable to officials if few participated and if it was done according to regulated times. Although in Romania catechism was not officially forbidden as it was in the Soviet Union, state representatives did not prefer that subsequent generations be exposed to religious belief and practice. In a report on catechism practices across the county, inspector David noted that in the Reformed Church, religious education of youth was a “permanent preoccupation” of the ministers, and that to “attract teenagers they use disguised methods – discussions with parents, candy, pictures, etc.” But “across the county, catechism is not held in the Orthodox Church; guidance was not applied by the Archbishop of Sibiu referring to this activity.” That the Bishop had not specifically

⁸⁹ Direcția Județeană Sălaj a Arhivelor Naționale, “Departmentul Cultelor”, 1974/33, 198–199.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 1977/59, 346.

⁹¹ Ibid., 1971/8, 79, 115.

⁹² Ibid., 1973/21, 27, 29.

provided “any guidance” must have signaled to priests that it was not an essential practice.⁹³ In Sălaj, as across the country, Orthodox priests were by and large not troubling inspectors with catechism activities. Either they skipped this practice altogether, or practiced it in a way that generally avoided arousing inspectors’ concern. Preferring to focus on top-down influence, inspector Roman noted that “in general in the orthodox parishes priests do not carry out religious activities with youth within Sălaj County” and did not “cause any particular problems regarding religious life among teenagers [...]”⁹⁴ Roman did not reflect on believers’ role in catechism, as clergy who did not serve the parishioners well would be poorly supported. It may be that parishioners did not complain about a lack of catechism, and the dissatisfied ones may have been compelled to look to other religious groups to find what they desired.

In short, state officials liked it when priests refrained from “putting moral pressure on believers or on youth”⁹⁵ but they did want to have a “well prepared priest” who managed the parish well, and had a “harmonious family life, being a good example for believers.” It was even acceptable for a priest to be “loved and appreciated by the believers” as long as he was not “obsessively religious” (*habotnic*).⁹⁶

Priests could gain favor with state officials by demonstrating political loyalty and cooperation in projects initiated by the state. They demonstrated loyalty by their participation at orientation conferences, comments to parishioners, encouraging parishioners to participate in state initiatives, and readiness to cooperate with local officials, including the Department of Religions inspector. David praised Archpriest Andreescu for being “an example of how to collaborate with the local organs,” that he was in “constant contact” with the inspector and “defer[red] to him, seeing in the Department of Religions a real support.”⁹⁷ Roman reported that “returned” Priest Gîlgău of Zalău was respected by the “local organs,” because he was “mobilizing the believers in all occasions” for state initiatives.⁹⁸ Roman lauded Priest Ioan Gudea for urging believers “in all cases” to heed the authorities and to be “honest” and “to defend the common good.” Gudea also helped the local bodies in any situation asked, mobilizing believers

⁹³ Ibid., 1971/11, 10–11, 36.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 1973/21, 34.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 1975/48, 3.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 1974/33, 192–193.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 1971/8, 166. Four years later David’s successor Roman assessed Andreescu with a word-for-word copy, demonstrating that either this was formulaic or apt (or that Roman was lazy).

⁹⁸ Ibid., 1975/42, 43–44.

for local efforts. He participated in conferences, approached issues of the day “correctly,” and kept his financial matters in order.⁹⁹ To Roman, Gudea was a model priest. Inspectors also praised priests for their efforts toward “consolidation” of the unification of the BOR.

Officials rewarded good practices by writing positive evaluations for clergy when promotions were in consideration and by minimizing bureaucracy for the Church. When inspectors reviewed candidates the Church proposed for positions, they typically approved the recommendations of the Bishop’s office and only rarely scrutinized candidates more heavily.¹⁰⁰ Inspector David overlooked bureaucratic obstacles in one instance when he met a delegation of believers who were defending the construction of two Orthodox houses of prayer that had been stalled by local organs for some ten years because it had been started without official approval. Yet the local inspector was not predisposed to punish; rather, he recommended they receive approval for completion since there were not any Orthodox Churches in either of the valleys in question, forgiving the village for its “mentality lagging quite behind.”¹⁰¹ The people of another small town requested to build a new church in 1973, as the current one was in a non-repairable state, even unsafe. With the bishopric in agreement, inspector Roman forwarded the request to Bucharest, saying that he and the other local powers were not opposed. The people were planning to fund the project themselves; all it would cost the state would be a stamp of approval, which it gave.¹⁰²

One of the other “rewards” state agents offered the Church was that they tried to protect the Church’s reputation. State agents fought the Church’s loss of rapport vis-à-vis ordinary citizens. Inspectors may have done so due to personal sympathy, but it is also clear that inspectors considered it best to not give believers reason to look elsewhere for their religious needs. At an orientation conference, inspector Roman brought to light some negative

⁹⁹ Ibid., 1974/33, 192–193.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 1977/59, 308–309. As an example of the exception to the rule, when inspector Achim received the file for a Seminary graduate who was supposed to take a position in a town in Sălaj County, he wrote back to the Bishop’s office with several potential objections, wanting to maintain the “order and discipline” of his position. Achim wanted to know “who this person is,” suspicious of the fact that this candidate had refused previous offers for posts that evidently were undesirable to him. He eventually granted his authorization but noted to the national office in Bucharest the candidate’s refusal of other parishes, as well as the presence of Baptists in the parish-to-be. Inspectors wanted to be sure that the priest would be trustworthy and effective, especially in a parish that featured competition like neoprotestants.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 1972/15, 198.

¹⁰² Ibid., 1973/23, 297.

behaviors of Orthodox priests and the corresponding measures that were taken. One priest was transferred for “drunkenness and fights with various believers and citizens;” another had problems with drunkenness and a “scandal with his wife,” and two others had similar “irregularities.” “These negative examples” were regarded as causing believers “to get away from the Orthodox Church and to frequent the neoprotestant faiths and even the forbidden sects where they receive an education incomparably more retrograde, against culture, the traditions of our people, and in the end, against the state.”¹⁰³ This again highlights that to Roman, the Orthodox Church—though ideologically incompatible with Marxism—was relatively compatible with what he regarded as the education and culture of the nation.

In conclusion, it appears that the Orthodox Church was first among the equal Cults. According to official rhetoric, there was no “state” church; the state did not play favorites. Yet when compared to the other denominations, the Orthodox Church occupied a position much like the one that Russia did amid the other Republics of the Soviet Union, what Stalin called “the first among equals.” This is an obvious contradiction in terms that Stalin employed to subtly imply that Russia was equal in theory to the others, but first in actuality. The paradoxical position of the Church in Romanian society was reflected in a state publication in 1987. If the Orthodox Church was once historically favored, the publication declared, “today such a status no longer exists. Each denomination has the same rights and the same obligations.”¹⁰⁴ But a few pages later, it stated, “It is almost a postulate to say that whenever one speaks about religion in Romania one must first and foremost think of the Orthodox Church. It was and is the Romanian people's church.”¹⁰⁵ Even Ceaușescu displayed a “vacillating and at times contradictory” approach to the Orthodox Church.¹⁰⁶ He was often vehemently atheistic and anti-Christian in his

¹⁰³ Ibid., 1975/48, 13.

¹⁰⁴ *Religious Life in Romania: Essential Information*. (Bucharest: The Consultative Council of the Religious Denominations in the Socialist Republic of Romania [Using the Press of the Biblical and Missionary Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church], 1987), 9.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 12.

¹⁰⁶ Trond Gilberg, “Religion and Nationalism in Romania,” in *Religion and Nationalism in Soviet and East European Politics*, ed. Pedro Ramet, Rev. and expanded ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989), 338, 350. Gilbert argues Ceaușescu was indeed a “believer” in the socialist system and “the new socialist man,” but he pursued such ends more aggressively in the late 1970s and 1980s. Gilberg seems justified in concluding that Ceaușescu’s church-state policy during his first decade “represents a mixture [...] not based upon a clear program,” and that it “evolved over time,” responding to “opportunities and the exigencies of the day,” a “curious mix of opportunism and ideological preference.”

rhetoric, yet in 1972 he televised his attendance at his father's Orthodox funeral, "with the full rites of the Church conducted by a bishop and thirteen priests."¹⁰⁷

Ceaușescu was not alone in his ambiguous behavior. Orthodox hierarchs were ubiquitous at all kinds of state-sponsored events. Observers might have wondered at the paradox of official state atheism and materialism while promoting an Orthodox-infused nationalism. Some might have found it perplexing that Securitate officials were invited to a Monastery to celebrate Easter and that a Metropolitan might personally serve the Eucharist to five Securitate generals and their wives. Given the ideological stance of the party, it could only be the Orthodox-infused nationalism of the Communist party that contributed to the situation where, as Securitate General Nicolae Pleșiță described, "communists were intimate with the church."¹⁰⁸

Representatives of the state and Orthodox Church touted its unique place in society and history. Inspector David, using commonplace narratives, praised it for its role in the "spiritual unification of the Romanian population," the "restoration of the unity of the Romanian Orthodox Church since 1948," and creating a "local ecumenical atmosphere."¹⁰⁹ State and church agents lauded the disappearance of the Greek-Catholic Church. As the BOR said in its own publication, the regime change in 1947 "made possible the reestablishment of the unity of the Romanian Orthodox Church by the return to the traditional faith of the Orthodox Romanians of Transylvania [...]. This act of reintegration means precisely the fulfilment [sic] of a legitimate desire by the Romanians of Transylvania."¹¹⁰ Church leaders argued that the "unified" BOR was the answer to all believing Romanians' prayers (whether or not they knew it or liked it). As was declared in an Orthodox journal article and innumerable utterances elsewhere, "Through its

¹⁰⁷ Trevor Beeson, *Discretion and Valour: Religious Conditions in Russia and Eastern Europe*, Rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 350. Deletant (Ceaușescu and the Securitate, 212) and Gilberg (350) also refer to this moment.

¹⁰⁸ Nicolae Pleșiță and Viorel Patrichi, *Ochii și Urechile Poporului: Convorbiri cu Generalul Nicolae Pleșiță, Dialoguri Consemnate de Viorel Patrichi în Perioadă Aprilie 1999 - Ianuarie 2001 [The Eyes and Ears of the People: Conversations with General Nicolae Pleșiță, Dialogues Recorded by Viorel Patrichi over the Period of April 1999 - January 2001*, Dosare Lumea Magazin (Bucharest, RO: Ianus Inf, 2001), 137, 139. Pleșiță recalls Metropolitan Teoctist (future Patriarch) serving them. He tellingly muses that since he was raised a Christian, it's "difficult to say if I'm an atheist or believer. I was always that way because the Church is not a foreign body for us."

¹⁰⁹ Direcția Județeană Sălaj a Arhivelor Naționale, "Departamentul Cultelor", 1971/10, 438–439.

¹¹⁰ The Institute of the Bible and Orthodox Mission, ed., *The Romanian Orthodox Church* (Bucharest, 1967), 8.

very presence, a permanence in the life of all Romanian lands, the [Orthodox] Church has contributed to preserving the nation's unity on the Romanian territory."¹¹¹

Inspectors did not expect Orthodox clergy to express the equality of all faiths. At a conference in 1973—the 25-years anniversary of the “unification” of the Romanian Church was a cause for “jubilee.” One priest emphasized how the “ancient belief” of “our Orthodox Church” was the “most accessible medium for gaining religious knowledge.” And through the Church, “the sentiment of spiritual unity can be grown among believers, making them stay tightly united within the ancient Church, averting at the same time foreign influence.”¹¹² The inspector did not object to claims that the Orthodox Church helped forge unity among Romanians, something supposedly threatened by foreigners and their long arm of influence (e.g. neoprotestantism, the Vatican). At a conference whose theme was “pastoral methods for preserving right faith,” one priest delivered a paper arguing that for the Church to maintain its “superiority compared to the religions which slipped away from right faith,” it would benefit from priests maintaining a moral personal and family life and good deeds. A priest noted that he had been presenting the truths of the Church at advantageous events like burials to combat those attempting to “alienate” Orthodox believers from their Church, either toward neoprotestantism or “dissident” opinions. At the same time, he had been having a word with leaders of other faiths “in a local, practical ecumenical spirit,” notifying them of their “abuses” of existing legislation, such as trying to proselytize “our” believers. He also noted with pathos the tragedy of a “mixed” family, where the wife was attending a neoprotestant church, leaving the family confused about what to do.¹¹³ In Sălaj County state agents made no attempts to stand up for the minority churches vis-à-vis the Orthodox Church.

To officials from the Department of Religions, the Romanian Orthodox Church was first-among-equals even in ecumenical events, the purpose of which was not to express the equality of all faiths. A 1979 Church publication declared that the Romanian Orthodox Church was not just any Christian denomination, but the very Orthodox faith of the apostles that had survived, a “genuine Romanian miracle,” and that their Latin-derived language and Orthodox heritage positioned them equally between West and East, “confer[ring] on them a special oecumenic

¹¹¹ Foreign Relations Department of the Romanian Orthodox Church, *The Romanian Orthodox Church Yesterday and Today* (Bucharest: Publishing House of the Bible and Mission Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church, 1979), 28.

¹¹² Direcția Județeană Sălaj a Arhivelor Naționale, “Departmentul Cultelor”, 1973/23, 260.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 1976/51, 48.

vocation."¹¹⁴ A 1977 document disseminated for Orthodox orientation conferences declared that for an ecumenical spirit “reciprocal respect” between cults exemplified by “the exclusion of any forms of proselytism” was needed. The Orthodox Church was the paragon of this ecumenical spirit because as a custom it did not proselytize. Another practical way the Church established ecumenical relations was by showing support for “the fatherland,”¹¹⁵ signaling that what helped harmonize religions was having the state as their common head. Thus, the kind of ecumenism that state agents and Orthodox Church representatives praised was characterized by recognizing state leadership and discouraging proselytism.

At conference in Sălaj on ecumenism, Bishop Vasile Coman made a special appearance and gave clergy guidance as to the proper way to foster ecumenism locally. He discouraged participating in common services, as the Church did not necessarily share the same beliefs with other denominations. He emphasized that in the case of neoprotestants the Church must keep “proper distance,” as these faiths tended to be “abductors” of believers from “our” church: “Sectarian proselytism is the greatest obstacle in the path to ecumenism.” He also reminded the priests to be “permeated with the idea of religious liberty,” in that they should never force or compel someone toward Orthodox beliefs. He also mentioned as exemplary of ecumenism, ironically, the unification in October of 1948, an act which shows that the Orthodox Church “was, is, and will always be with the people.”¹¹⁶ State and Orthodox Church representatives accepted the tension found in advocating respect of others’ consciences by forbidding proselytism while elevating the status of the Orthodox Church and faith as central to myths of a unified Romanian nation over and against other faiths.

Priests Confront Religio-Political Status

There were, however, Orthodox priests who aimed not at conforming to the norms of religiosity desired by Church or state leaders, but challenging them. Yet priests discussed in this section challenged political norms at the same time, suggesting that they saw religious norms and political norms as entangled. For some priests, their challenge of the status quo seemed to stem from skepticism of state myths, and they came to see church authorities as problematically implicated with state power. For others, what began as a desire to challenge the religious status

¹¹⁴ Foreign Relations Department of the Romanian Orthodox Church, *The Romanian Orthodox Church Yesterday and Today*, 16.

¹¹⁵ Direcția Județeană Sălaj a Arhivelor Naționale, “Departmentul Cultelor”, 1977/59, 232.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 253–54.

quo led to encounters with church authorities, which then led to encounters with state authorities, leading such priests to likewise see the two bodies as problematically linked and both in need of some sort of reform. In response, the Church punished them as disrupting religious norms, while the state pursued them as political opponents.

Priest Gheorghe Calciu-Dumitreasă was one who began by challenging the religious status quo, inviting students into a deeper faith, but he blamed the philosophies of the regime for religious stagnation. Imprisoned for fourteen years without a trial beginning in 1948,¹¹⁷ he had good reason to be skeptical of state myths. While calling young people to deepen their faith, he also publicly criticized the destruction of churches in Bucharest and the Church's silence. His name helped define the camps of establishment vs. anti-establishment.

Father Calciu-Dumitreasă was professor of French and New Testament at the Orthodox Seminary in Bucharest in the 1970s. Calciu saw how incoming students "were so puzzled" that they had to take classes on Marxism and found *Securitate* personnel everywhere.¹¹⁸ He gained a following at the Seminary for his boldness in discussing issues and questions of a spiritual nature with an interest and conviction unusual among the other professors. He formed a prayer group, which lasted from 1972 until 1977, eventually reaching one hundred in attendance. Church and state representatives repeatedly threatened them and asked the meetings to stop, and even one of their meeting places was demolished, but people kept coming. In 1978 he delivered a lecture-sermon series during Lent on Wednesday evenings, calling them his "Seven Words to Youth." In these sermons, he summoned young men to take faith seriously, but his religious passion mingled with criticisms of atheism, materialism, the "bondage" of "authoritarianism," and the destruction of churches in Bucharest. Hundreds attended for seven consecutive weeks as he posited a vibrant, voluntary faith against "ready-made authoritarian statements" that were "imposed" on youth,¹¹⁹ until his superiors fired him from the seminary. Not a single

¹¹⁷ Calciu was in prison from 1948 to 1964, accused of legionnaire and anti-communist activities. After his release, he intended to study theology, and by the intervention of Patriarch Justinian, he was able to study and get a job at the Seminary. For a discussion of the debate on Calciu as a supposed "legionary," see the discussion by journalist and theologian Lucian D. Popescu, <http://www.fericiticeiprioniti.net/gheorghe-calciu-dumitreasa/920-legionarul-gheorghe-calciu-in-documentele-cnsas>, accessed 4/13/2016.

¹¹⁸ Gheorghe Calciu, *Father George Calciu: Interviews, Homilies, and Talks*, ed. Saint Herman of Alaska Brotherhood. (Platina, CA: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2010), 70.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 157–73.

professor vouched for him, and the deputy from the Ministry of Cults, the bishop, and the seminary director all asked that he be fired. The local priests did not stand up for him either.¹²⁰

Shortly after, in June 1978 a group of students “disillusioned” by the Theological Seminary in Bucharest wrote to the Patriarch. It was not what they expected as idealistic youth: “We hoped to find here a haven of peace from this troubled world; of love instead of hatred; a place of virtue; of freedom from meanness; of real spiritual life.” They considered the Rector Archimandrite Veniamin Micle “corrupt, immoral, abusive,” doing what he could to “frustrate the professors in their lecture programmes and to reduce their function to a purely administrative one.” These students considered Calciu their “guide in all spiritual matters,” while Micle created an “atmosphere of terror,” and left “absolutely no spiritual atmosphere” at the school, rather “a kind of concentration-camp of the soul, in which liturgies and Christian performance have become simply formalities.” Micle’s idea of “spiritual activities” was obedience to “his inhuman sanctions,” as for the “slightest mistake” or “the least deviation from the norm, even for a look of disapproval” they could have been “shaven to the scalp like criminals.” Students particularly close to Calciu were shaved without explanation and barred from leaving the Seminary. Professors or state agents often addressed them crudely and pressured them to inform on each other such that “now we no longer believe in each other.” Some students were even “savagely beaten” by Micle and threatened should they tell. One fourth-year student “was fiercely thrashed” in the presence of other professors, who made “not the slightest effort to control the whip.” Other professors also used the whip regularly. They begged the Patriarch to look into the real state of affairs at the Seminary and reinstate Calciu.¹²¹

But when the issue of Calciu found its way onto an international stage, his name was further politicized. Radio Free Europe, a U.S.-sponsored news agency broadcasting to Eastern Europe, began to spread news of Calciu’s treatment. Philip Potter, President of the World Council of Churches—an ecumenical international gathering of Churches started in 1948 in which Eastern Orthodox Churches participated and which sometimes served as a platform for church representatives to advocate their concerns—, wrote a letter in September of 1979 to the Patriarch with concern for Calciu. The Patriarchal office replied in November about the religious and political deviations of Calciu, that “The daily evening spiritual meditations, held by the

¹²⁰ Ibid., 73–75.

¹²¹ A Memorandum from Some Pupils at the Theological Seminary of Bucharest to the Patriarch, dated November 1978. Archive file <RO/Ort/11.3>, Keston Archive and Library, Baylor University.

professors of the Seminary for the pupils, have been transformed by Gheorghe Calciu in political fascist speeches and slander against the Church hierarchy." Calciu was supposedly "urging the seminarians not to obey" Seminary leadership, "making defamatory affirmations about Church leaders," "refusing any cooperation with his colleagues" and "propagating among the seminarians [fascist] political ideas repudiated by all the civilized world." [sic all—original letter in English]. Thus Church representatives painted Calciu's activity as deviating from religious norms and as promoting insubordination and "scorn for any Church authority." Trying to get the ecumenical body to side with their perspective, the Patriarch asked, "Which Church would let the formation of her clergy in the hands of such an adventureros [sic] person?"¹²²

The case of Calciu presented two irreconcilable narratives for people to choose from, but having two competing narratives was not something new. On one side, there were official Church declarations like:

Both Constitution and the Law for the general regime of the Cults express the principles which are the basis of the relations between the religious cults and the state. These principles are characterized by: complete freedom of conscience for all citizens; the interdiction of any religious discrimination; the guarantee of free practice of worship to members of all Churches and religious communities; the assuring to all religious cults of the right to draw up laws and rules of organization and activity according to their own dogmas and canons, as well as the right to organize the theological institutions necessary for the training of the future clergy of the cults.¹²³

Such a declaration presented a completely uncomplicated and serene picture of religious life and mimicked state declarations. In 1972 Ceaușescu declared,

The problem has arisen for our Communist Party to carry on such a policy as in no way to hurt anybody's religious feelings. We, as communists, naturally uphold a dialectical-materialistic world outlook, while we consider that we are bound to respect the beliefs of others as well. [...We have proposed] to ensure that people who share one belief or another may worship it without any hindrance . . . Naturally, to the extent to which one denomination or another does not carry on activities against the State's interests, against socialist

¹²² Philip Potter, Department for Foreign Relations of the Romanian Patriarchate. Letter exchange between the two on the case of Father Calciu, Sep-Nov 1979. <Ro/Ort/8/2>, Keston Archive and Library, Baylor University.

¹²³ The Institute of the Bible and Orthodox Mission, *The Romanian Orthodox Church*, 8.

construction, we secure every condition for them freely to unfold their activity. I can confess we have no particular problem in this respect.¹²⁴

He also added that there is "no contradiction" between constructing socialism and "the existence of religious denominations, of the citizens' rights to take religion."¹²⁵ In 1987, state publications declared falsely "No religious problems have ever existed in socialist Romania." Instead of "problems," there were merely "questions": "The relationship between the state and the religious denominations is good, with current questions being settled by talks between the state bodies and the leadership of the denominations conducted in a spirit of understanding, and mutual accommodation and in good faith."¹²⁶

On the other hand, ordinary citizens heard stories of loved ones who served times in prison, about the attempts at marginalizing the Lord's Army, the attempted erasure of the Greek-Catholic Church, stories by neoprotestants of persecution, and Seminary students witnessed the presence of the secret police in seminaries and the murky relations of priests and professors with state agents. Indeed, for many people, these were not just "religious" problems but political ones.

In the Banat, something of a phenomenon of challenging the religio-political status quo emerged. A group of priests aimed to promote animated religiosity as well as criticize state myths of the freedom of conscience in Romania. Much like other priests and pastors who came of age in the Soviet Union, these priests acted religiously and politically in a way that reflected their cultural upbringing and education that was infused with idealistic principles but disillusioned by the existing reality.

Liviu Negoita, Doru Gaga, and Marian Ștefănescu were in Seminary in Sibiu, and they shared skepticism of state myths due to experiences of harassment by the Securitate. In Seminary, Negoita saw an atmosphere of surveillance, relationships very "cautious" and "hypocritical," theological topics "neutralized" without any "mysticism" (here, spiritual dimension), and priests acting as "as simple ritualists, limited only to a cultic, exterior dimension."¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Foreign Relations Department of the Romanian Orthodox Church, *The Romanian Orthodox Church Yesterday and Today*, 31.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 31–32.

¹²⁶ *Religious Life in Romania*, 10.

¹²⁷ Liviu Negoita, *Biserica și Puterea: Document [Church and Power: Documentation]* (Timișoara: Eurostampa, 1998), 10.

They trusted the viewpoints of those disseminated by sources like Radio Free Europe, Lord's Army members, or clandestine Greek-Catholics.¹²⁸ Having witnessed bishops and priests who openly praised or collaborated with the regime, they came to believe that the church was "subservient" to the state and in certain ways not "Christian" but even "satanic."¹²⁹ Once priests in the Banat, they found like-minded priests in Cornel Avramescu, Viorel Dumitrescu (of Visag), Emil Ambruș Cernat (of Crivina de Jos) and Ioan Vinchici (of Paniova). Many of these also had upbringings or experiences with religion on the margins—participation or familiarity with the Lord's Army in particular. When they heard about Gheorghe Calciu, they had a model for their religiosity and a known spokesperson for their political views, and they advocated on his behalf at priestly gatherings, and during church services they often prayed for him and left out the expected prayers for the People's Republic of Romania or Ceaușescu.¹³⁰

This group of priests tried to enliven their parishes, thereby attracting the attention of church leaders and state organs.¹³¹ The next major act of five of these Orthodox priests was an open letter in April of 1981, a so-called "Confession of Faith" with fifteen demands, including no meddling by the state in church affairs, freeing Calciu, permitting catechism to teenagers, access of church to mass media, and the legalization of the Greek-Catholic Church and Lord's Army. Liviu Negoita, Viorel Dumitrescu, Cornel Avramescu, Emil Ambruș Cernat and Ioan Vinchici signed.¹³²

¹²⁸ Marian Ilie Ștefănescu, *Drumul Spre Adevăr Al Unui Slujitor Obișnuit [The Path toward Truth of an Ordinary Minister]* (Blaj: Centrul Cultural "Jacques Maritain," 2014), 24–29. Also personal interview with Marian Ștefănescu, September 24, 2013 and September 28, 2015. While in Seminary, Ștefănescu frequented churches of other faiths to gain greater insight, met the famous composer of Lord's Army songs, Nicolae Moldoveanu, and even began to meet with former bishops of the Greek-Catholic Church, Ioan Ploscaru and Alexandru Todea.

¹²⁹ Negoita, *Biserica și Puterea*, 11.

¹³⁰ Ștefănescu, *Drumul Spre Adevăr*, 123.

¹³¹ Letter from Comitetul Creștin Român A.L.R.C., dated September 10, 1980. Archive file <RO/Ort>, Keston Archive and Library, Baylor University. Cornel Avramescu, unpublished letter "To leaders of Western countries". Archive file <RO/Ort/LA 18s>, Keston Archive and Library, Baylor University.

¹³² Gabriel Andreescu and Mihnea Berindei, eds., *Ultimul Deceniu Comunist: Scrisori către Radio Europa Liberă [The Last Communist Decade: Letters to Radio Free Europe]*, vol. I (Iași: Polirom, 2010), 294. In April 1981 the testimony of faith appeared for the first time, written by Negoita and sent to the Patriarch, signed by Dumitrescu and Cernat. It's the first document to contest "the abuses of the church hierarchy and the total subservience of the church authorities toward the State." The Church didn't respond, only Securitate agents. Then in the fall, it was sent to Radio Free Europe, signed by them plus Vinchici, Avramescu, and Ioan Teodosiu, spokesman for Romanian Christian Committee for the Defense of Religious Liberty and Conscience (Comitetul Creștin Român pentru Apărarea Libertății Religioase și de Conștiință, or ALRC) and friends with Dumitrescu and Negoita.

To disrupt their mobilizing power, state authorities allowed church leaders to punish them as religiously problematic so as to deflate the potency of the priests' message that the state meddled in church affairs. After broad-brushing them as religiously erring, the Church isolated them from their communities to lessen the latter's mobilization in support of the priests. Their prestige depended on their status within the church, not on their status as "dissidents" trying to take down the regime (although Calciu may have obtained sufficient notoriety to have achieved such "dissident" status).

The Church used the cases of these priests to reassert the lines of religious acceptability. The Metropolitan's magazine published articles denouncing these priests' activity, saying they tried to introduce "foreign" ideas and not submit properly to church authorities.¹³³ At a disciplinary proceeding of the Orthodox Church in January 1982, they charged Negoia with "disobedience with regard to church authority," since he had not heeded the guidance of leadership or the advice of colleagues. He was said to have had "inappropriate behavior, [work performance] below expectations, not accommodating to local requirements, which created a state of animosity between priest and parishioners." He also lacked "pastoral tact" and demonstrated "deficiencies of liturgical order" (e.g. omitting the part of the liturgy which prays for the state). He was accused of not conducting catechism¹³⁴ and for saying the Church was "in a state of decadence, characterized by ritualism and servility." Fellow clergy made him out to be abnormal, saying his behavior "revolted his colleagues" and in his parish "provoked the reaction of the parishioners who requested another to do what a priest ought to be doing."¹³⁵ The president of the judicial committee remarked that "if every priest would draw up his own confession of belief, we would end up worse than the neoprotestants." Negoia also made a "mistake" in how he regarded the Lord's Army, as the correct view of it was as a "neoprotestant association" that had been dissolved. He also did not take the proper approach to the issue of BOR unity, since he sympathized with the plight of Greek-Catholics.¹³⁶ Negoia was defrocked.¹³⁷

¹³³ "Romanian Orthodox Priests Criticise Hierarchy," dated as November 5, 1981 for Keston News Service. Archive file <RO/Ort 6>, Keston Archive and Library, Baylor University.

¹³⁴ I'm not certain the details of Negoia's catechism activities. Grossu says he did display "too much zeal in his sermons, in his pastoral instruction, and in his catechism activities done among children" (Grossu, *Calvarul României Creștine*, 297). Regardless, it's an interesting accusation since not doing catechism was a commonplace lacuna among Orthodox priests.

¹³⁵ Negoia, *Biserica și Puterea*, 83.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 85–87.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 90.

Dumitrescu had been barred from the priesthood in August 1981, and he too had been shamed and condemned in front of his colleagues.¹³⁸ Vinchici was barred from the priesthood in August 1982. Gaga and Cernat faced the same fate, and all of the above were offered exile, given that they would not be able to find suitable employment with stained records.¹³⁹

Prompted by an inspector from the Department of Religions, Cornel Avramescu faced threats from the bishopric, a trial in 1982, and a prison sentence in 1983; but he was eventually reprieved. Meanwhile, church and state authorities advised his parishioners to keep away from him. The Orthodox Church tried to transfer him to Arad, but the state organs there would not accept him based on his background. Some of his flock "inundated" the Bishop with letters of support while authorities attempted to isolate him or rally the community against him. He accepted exile to the United States in 1985, finalizing his isolation.¹⁴⁰ Around the same time as Avramescu, Father Calciu—after years of brutal treatment, imprisonment, and house arrest (and appeals by sympathizers in the West)—was also exiled to the United States in 1985.

Although some priests and dissidents saw the religious world of Romania as a clash between two incompatible narratives, one of Truth and the other of Lies, one of Courage and the other of Collaboration, a dichotomous view was not necessarily the only way of approaching the religious landscape. The case of Andrei Andreicuț, now Metropolitan of Cluj, presents the situation of someone who constantly pushed the boundaries of acceptable religiosity but did not face imprisonment or exile. He is of the same generation as the exiled Banat priests, attended the same seminary, had many similar life experiences and heard many tales of the horrors of the Securitate, but did not come to the same conclusions as they.

Despite growing up under the communist regime, Andreicuț did not feel deprived of a religious upbringing. In his village of Oarța de Sus in Transylvania where he grew up, "an authentic orthodox life [*trăire*] reigned." This was the case, despite what some might consider a dark past: his village of upbringing had been Greek-Catholic. Yet the case of Andreicuț family suggests that not all saw the "reunion" tragically, as in his family, "there wasn't any nostalgia for uniatism, on the contrary." The change, apparently, was unequivocal: his parents "came back"

¹³⁸ Sergiu Grossu, *Calvarul României Creștine [The Calvary of Christian Romania]* (București [Romania]: Editura Vremea, 2006), 296–97.

¹³⁹ Andreescu and Berindei, *Ultimul Deceniu Comunist*, 2010, I:295. Vinchici did find residence and unskilled work in a "gypsy colony," but eventually accepted exile.

¹⁴⁰ "Romanian Orthodox Priests under Pressure," *Keston News Service*, no. 249 (May 1, 1986): 9; Grossu, *Calvarul României Creștine*, 298, 327.

to orthodoxy, and “died orthodox.” His mother had come from an Orthodox village originally, and perhaps his father simply did not have strong objections.¹⁴¹

Despite the presence of “atheist propaganda” in society, Andreicuț believes that he and others experienced spiritual things “perhaps more intensely” than today. He recalls the pilgrimages they made on foot, 90 kilometer walks to Bixad or Rohia, and he says that some of their religious holidays were unforgettable. These intermingled sometimes with dances. To him, the times were filled with “happiness and optimism.”¹⁴² He therefore grew up attracted to the Church, and eventually pursued it as a career after studying engineering.

Andreicuț started Seminary in Sibiu in 1976 with the encouragement and sponsorship of Bishop Herineanu. Unlike some of the Banat clergy, Andreicuț found his professors to be inspiring and liked them. While there, agents followed his activity closely. They noted little things like his singing an Army song, although he was not an adherent of the Lord’s Army but had learned some of its songs as many others did simply by its strong presence and influence in Sibiu.¹⁴³ The agents were not terribly suspicious of him because, as they noted in his file, he was a good student and obedient, not exhibiting any tendencies contrary to those desired of a theological student, and that he was a “devoted citizen.”¹⁴⁴

After finishing in 1978, he received approval from the Department of Religions and was ordained by Bishop Herineanu for a parish in the city of Turda. Being located in an industrial sector, his parish was one primarily of factory workers. The numbers attending grew gradually during his service there, and good numbers attended not just Sunday services, but weekday ones as well, especially on Friday evenings. In his file, one informant noted that people liked his services and preaching very much, and that he had a “power of persuasion,” and that “the church is crowded with believers all the time.”¹⁴⁵ One of Andreicuț’ fellow priests was Gheorghe Ramba, mentioned in Chapter V as one of an older generation who had served time in prison for legionary activities but eventually received a post as priest in a very small, remote parish and who served with considerable energy. Andreicuț and Ramba became colleagues and friends,

¹⁴¹ Andrei Andreicuț, *“S-au Risipit Făcătorii de Basme”*: *Amintiri care Dor [The Makers of Fairytales were Scattered: Memories which Hurt]* (Alba Iulia: Reîntregirea, 2001), 9–10. Note that Andreicuț use of the term “uniatism” may have a slightly derogatory connotation, although his use of it may also have been for brevity.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 34–36.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 41–44.

sharing religious enthusiasm and the suspicion and surveillance of the secret police for their burgeoning religious community.¹⁴⁶

In addition to performing his duties remarkably, Andreicuț held regular catechism. His observation was that although other denominations organized catechism, in the Orthodox Church traditions were passed on by parents' participation in the service; children and youth attended rarely. "Theoretically," there existed a "provision" for doing catechism with all ages, but from Andreicuț's observation, the priests that did religion lessons were "rare," all the more because it was not desired by "officials." Yet like the dynamic Banat priests, he started catechism due to his convictions. The Securitate did ascertain that his catechism fell within the "legal norms" of the denomination, and they did attempt to make sure they had "identified" certain people as participant-informers. According to information, he was reportedly also inviting children to services, even offering them candy.¹⁴⁷ He encouraged youth to attend church, apply to Seminary, and visit Monasteries. As he saw it, such visits and pilgrimages to particularly holy or spiritual sites "created among participants a strong spiritual connection," an obvious goal of his that was pushing the limits of religious acceptability.¹⁴⁸

Despite Andreicuț having many relations which the Securitate classified as "hostile,"¹⁴⁹ agents' basic characterization of Andreicuț was "religious fanatic." They wrote that he appeared

¹⁴⁶ Gheorghe Ramba, *Memorii și Învățăături de Credință Ortodoxă [Memories and Lessons from Orthodox Faith]* (Făgăraș: Agaton, 2013), 35–36. At this remote parish, Ramba and the villagers had started building a new church to replace the dilapidated one, and many villagers got in on the project, either working as skilled tradesmen or doing whatever tasks they could. Despite frequent inspections and cross-examinations about proper documentation and permissions, despite running out of money in 1969 once the edifice was constructed, they found the support and funds they needed to continue. During construction, he served in the neighboring village, where he helped undertake restoration of its several-centuries old church too. He stayed there for fourteen years, never receiving the needed permissions to take up a post in other bigger parishes. Yet in 1973 he heard that there was an opening in Turda, a city south of Cluj, and this time he was granted permission. After a few more years he switched to another nearby parish, also in Turda (39).

¹⁴⁷ Andreicuț, *S-au Risipit Făcătorii de Basme*, 45–48.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 51–54.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 59–60. Agents kept track of all of his "hostile" relations: priest Vladimir Teodorescu (visited America and distributed mystical books), Ramba ("formerly condemned"), Bishop Herineanu ("former Greek-Catholic"), Ioan Mitrofan (Greek-Catholic in secret), famous theologian Dumitru Stăniloae ("former legionary"), Nicolae Steinhardt ("formerly condemned, hostile element, exercises negative influence"), and other "former legionaries," formerly detained, or Catholic-connections. In 1983, while he was away his home was searched and they found a copy of Calciu's Seven Words for Youth, the problematic sermon series that prompted Calciu's dismissal (91). He also had some Lord's Army adherents among his congregation, and agents also monitored his connections with them, but he passed the acceptability test because he did not advocate their separate meetings. He felt that "we sing corporately quite enough" in

to be "a good Romanian, a good patriot, although he isn't in favor of a socialist or communist fatherland since he is determined, even to the point of sacrifice, to be active in the direction of getting citizens out from under the influence of the ideology of our socialist state."¹⁵⁰ He was called in to a meeting with the Securitate in 1979, where he was advised to "soften" his catechism, to be "more mild in missions," to cease relations with enemy persons (people with dubious labels).¹⁵¹ His mysticism and relations with potential "hostiles" prevented him from finding an open door for advanced study in Sibiu or Bucharest, or a parish in Cluj. He kept being failed for the necessary entrance exam, and the Department of Religions looked "negatively" on his proposed transfer to the Theological Institute in Cluj.¹⁵²

In 1985 he received a transfer to Alba Iulia, though his parishioners in Turda were sad to see him go. Although he resumed his dynamic service, including catechism, it seems that agents did not install microphones in his home as they did in Turda.¹⁵³ Evidently state agents considered his religiosity, though far from safely within the boundaries they desired, to not be problematic enough to warrant aggressive interventions but only an occasional warning and the prevention of his pursuit of advanced study or certain promotions. Yet by not proselytizing, avoiding political stances or pursuits, not dabbling in forbidden groups, and yielding to authority, Andreicuț found a pathway to promoting religious activity and dynamism without forceful discipline in communist Romania.

The other place religiosity remained to challenge church and state norms was on the margins, including among the neoprotestants, sectarian groups, the underground Greek-Catholics, and the Lord's Army. Though church and state restrictions alongside the ordinary duties of priestly service obstructed priests' opportunities to form close ties or develop communal life among parishioners, participating in such non-conforming groups could afford these dimensions. Although marginalized and even disbanded, the Greek-Catholic Church and the Lord's Army were able to garner deep sympathy and respect among certain sectors of the population. Many came to side with these groups' stories of persecution, including young people skeptical of authorities, and people who had suffered or whose family or friends suffered

the regular services, and he provided religious education in the form of catechism. In essence, he felt his religious fervor made the Lord's Army superfluous (75).

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 74.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 83.

¹⁵² Ibid., 87, 107.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 109.

either at the hands of state or church agents, such as neoprotestant believers. In 1977 six neoprotestant pastors and laymen in Romania put together and disseminated a document demanding freedom of conscience and condemning the persecution in Romania. In 1978, a larger group of mainly (though not exclusively) neopotestant believers established the Romanian Christian Committee for the Defense of Religious Liberty and Conscience (Comitetul Creștin Român pentru Apărarea Libertății Religioase și de Conștiință, or ALRC). Consistently among the demands of this group was the legalization of the Greek-Catholic Church and Lord's Army.¹⁵⁴

By the 1980s, the Lord's Army was in its heyday, having large gatherings and being left relatively alone. The number of active, regular participants in the Lord's Army was at least half a million people by the 1980s, with much higher numbers when occasional participants or the curious joined in. Sporadic repression did not stop the Lord's Army so much as fuel belonging and interdependence. Sympathetic Baptists of the ALRC observed that "the repressive measures—searches, discrimination, confiscation of Bibles, printed matter, literature and manuscripts—allow it to develop continually." Although repression created "apparent limitations" and increased "tension," it also led to the "efficacy" of "real spiritual activity."¹⁵⁵ In Cluj in the 1980s, a group of Lord's Army participants would routinely set up a "large tent in public areas for weekly worship" on Sunday afternoons, often with hundreds in attendance in order to evangelize. Word of mouth was the sole means for advertisement.¹⁵⁶ The Lord's Army persisted without a coherent leadership core, but that did not mean that strife and divisions had ceased amongst its longtime figureheads.¹⁵⁷ The authorities seemed to regard Traian Dorz not so much a catalyst of the movement anymore as much as a relic and a lone warrior, fighting for

¹⁵⁴ Grossu, *Calvarul României Creștine*, 126–28. Grossu has details about ALRC and their 24 demands, written by a group of 27 believers (mostly Baptist) in the fall of 1977.

¹⁵⁵ Christian Committee for the Defence of Religious Rights in Romania, ed., "The Lord's Army Movement in the Romanian Orthodox Church," *Religion in Communist Lands* 8, no. 4 (1980): 316.

¹⁵⁶ Christian Herald, "Selfless attitude of Romanian Christians," March 28, 1987, p. 16. <RO/Oastea Domnului>, Keston Archive and Library, Baylor University.

¹⁵⁷ Composer Nicolae Moldoveanu had broken with the Lord's Army in prison in the early 1960s, and Dorz remained estranged from him. Sergiu Grossu had managed to resettle in France in 1969, and reconciliation between him and Dorz only happened late in the 1980s. As for Alexandru Pop, the other former needle in Dorz's side, Dorz managed to convince Pop to publicly repent for what Dorz identified as his sins and role in Army divisions at a wedding-gathering in 1981. Dorz himself suffered a loss of reputation in the face of some LA participants, who did not quite consider him to be "the core" of the Lord's Army as Dorz did of himself.

an ideal.¹⁵⁸ In Dorz's recollections about this era, he focused less and less on the "brotherhood" found in the Lord's Army and more and more on conflicts with other adherents, with church hierarchs, and state officials. Meanwhile, the movement made its advances at the initiative of everyday participants.

As for the Greek-Catholic Church, it had its increasingly vocal advocates, even if the number of advocates was not necessarily growing. Well-known Romanian dissident Doina Cornea championed the Greek-Catholic cause, and many not of Greek-Catholic heritage like Marian Ștefănescu became sympathetic to its restoration as a human-religious rights issue. For such as these, the supposed narrative of the re-union of 1948 had not succeeded in displacing the narrative of coercion.¹⁵⁹

Conclusion

This chapter argues that for officials, Romanian religious normativity was to be the historical Orthodox Church and a religiosity that was bounded and predictable. The Orthodox Church, represented by millions of believers across Romania, hierarchs, and clergy, did not trouble the status quo of the state's management of religion, but defined it. By these groups practicing the faith largely as before the communist regime, they contributed to the stability of communist society and helped generate normative state-church relationships and religiosity.

State officials successfully isolated Orthodox Clergy just as they did Lord's Army leaders in the late 1950s and early 1960s (see Chapter V). The nascent movement among Orthodox clergy threatened to popularize alternative narratives to those disseminated in official venues about things like complete religious freedom, the "voluntary" "return" of the Greek-Catholic Church, the irrelevancy of the Lord's Army, and the unquestionable harmony of the goals of the

¹⁵⁸ Dorz was arrested in 1982, but as I see it, more due to coincidental factors than to state fear of his power. As he rode back from the yearly Iosif Trifa memorial ceremony with two active Army participants from Cluj—two brothers who happened to be transporting religious books—they were searched, detained, and imprisoned. Dorz took blame upon himself for their transportation. Dorz, *Hristos - Mărturia Mea*, 514–15; "Romanian Christians under Threat of Imprisonment," *Keston News Service*, no. 154 (July 29, 1982): 5; "Further News of Lord's Army Leader," *Keston News Service*, no. 155 (August 12, 1982): 6.

¹⁵⁹ Gabriel Andreescu and Mihnea Berindei, eds., *Ultimul Deceniu Comunist: Scrisori către Radio Europa Liberă [The Last Communist Decade: Letters to Radio Free Europe]*, vol. II (Iași: Polirom, 2014), 120–23. This is one example among a countless many in which narratives became disputed, when an unnamed priest in 1986 responded to a historical work from 1985 about the 1940–44 Horthyist occupation, and how the work referred only to the "Romanian Church," as though the G-C Church did not exist. It did not even distinguish the bishops of the time as belonging specifically to the G-C church, just named them as though there was no distinction from BOR bishops.

state and the Church. By radio, word of mouth, and samizdat, voices like Calciu that criticized Seminary training, lamented the destruction of cathedrals in Bucharest, advocated on behalf of marginalized religious groups, and promoted a deepening of faith and spirituality were gaining hearers and adherents.

But before this trend spread beyond a handful of passionate younger priests to large numbers of citizens, state officials shrewdly exiled every “discontented” priest who would go. The movement did not gain new visible heroes to replace them. People kept going to church as before, but movements like the Lord’s Army and neoprottestant denominations profited from an Orthodox Church which was heavily surrounded by state officials and led by amenable church hierarchs who proclaimed that such “malcontents” as those from the Banat served neither church nor state. It is clear that the Securitate considered the Church a very useful partner in social control.¹⁶⁰

The enormous pressure on everyday clergy to submit to their leaders and to conform should not be underestimated. The theological culture of Orthodoxy itself stresses humility and submission to elders and leaders, as well as the doctrine of “Tradition,” which says that the Tradition of the Church itself is true and binding. In the words of scholar of Orthodoxy Kallistos Ware, “The Orthodox Christian of today sees himself as heir and guardian to a great inheritance received from the past, and he believes that it is his duty to transmit this inheritance unimpaired to the future.”¹⁶¹ The Orthodox Church sees itself as the One True Church—others broke away from it,¹⁶² and that the Church is being guided across history into “all truth.”¹⁶³ Although the

¹⁶⁰ Pleșiță and Patrichi, *Ochii și Urechile Poporului*, 136–37. Securitate General Pleșiță recalls in a meeting with Patriarch Justin Moiescu asking why the Church “does not combat sectarian proselytism,” since on this matter, “the Securitate came together with the Church.” He also mentions that the “bishops of the frontier” were very important to the Interior, and their appointments demanded careful consideration, even consultation with the Central Committee.

¹⁶¹ Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963), 204. This inheritance, or Tradition, includes the following “outward expressions”: 1] The Bible, 2) The seven ecumenical councils and the creed, 3] Later (national] councils or writings of Bishops, 4) Fathers of the church, 5] Worship, 6) The Canon Law of the Church (church organization), and 7] Iconography (203-215).

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 249–51.

¹⁶³ Georges Florovsky, *Bible, Church, Tradition: An Eastern Orthodox View*, vol. 1, *Collected Works of Georges Florovsky* (Belmont, MA: Büchervertriebsanstalt; Notable & Academic Books [distributor], 1987), 106. Florovsky writes that “The true tradition is only the tradition of truth” and that “Ultimately, tradition is a continuity of the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church, a continuity of Divine guidance and illumination. The Church is not bound by the ‘letter.’ Rather, she is constantly moved forth by the ‘Spirit.’ The same Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, which ‘spoke through the Prophets,’ which guided the Apostles, is still continuously guiding the Church into the fuller comprehension and understanding of the Divine truth,

doctrine is too complex to explore at length here, it is worth remembering the force that custom (doctrine and culture) carries, and that the leaders of the Orthodox Church wield and transmit the power of these customs to subsequent generations. Consider the implicit (and sometimes explicit) threat that Orthodox believers and clergy face, that to go against “Tradition” is to leave the “One True Church,” to be a schismatic, and to be steered away from the “Truth.” It would take a great deal of self-confidence (or more negatively, hubris) to refuse to submit to one’s superiors, as to break from the Orthodox Church would be a break from orthodoxy itself (a situation shared with Orthodox clergy in the Soviet Union; see Chapter VI). In this context, “Truth” is less decentralized and democratized than wielded, as is the case in all scenarios where power is heavily centralized. With such a perspective, “Truth” is too vulnerable to leave to a common priest (much less lay-person) for debate or discussion; it would only lead, ostensibly, to anarchy, sectarianism, and disunity. It was a struggle against these threats that largely united representatives of the state and the Orthodox Church.

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from glory to glory.” Scholars reference John 16:13 – “But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth.” And, relying upon scripture which calls the Church Christ’s body, it is therefore infallible as Christ’s body is now infallible; and, for the same reason, the unity between God and His church cannot be broken. See Ephesians 5:23 – “For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior” and Colossians 1:24 – “Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.” That is to say, since Pentecost the Church has been guided into all truth. Individuals are fallible, but the Church, which is guided by ecumenical councils, is infallible (Ware, 252).

VIII. Legal Limits and Youth Religiosity: Soviet Baptists and Religious Normalization, 1964-1989

When Nikita Khrushchev was dismissed by the Communist Party in 1964 in favor of Leonid Brezhnev, the latter inherited a troublesome religious problem that resulted directly from the anti-religion campaign. During this campaign, state officials pressured leaders of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (AUCECB) to issue church statutes against evangelism and youth participation, as well as to centralize power more in the All-Union Council, thereby decreasing the power of laypersons and congregations in choosing leaders. But certain believers, in line with the evangelical custom of democratized access to scriptural truth, rejected AUCECB leaders' newly enforced line and called upon them to repent, enjoining believers to agree with their view. Attempts by church and state leaders to reconcile these groups had not succeeded by 1964, and even 1963 AUCECB overtures in the form of rescinding some of the 1961 changes did not appease the breakaway Baptists.

In this chapter, we trace the state response from the time of Brezhnev roughly until Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of "glasnost" (openness) in 1986-1987. As the ECB Council fractured, churches that chose to align with the breakaway Baptists no longer registered with the state, remaining unregistered (essentially illegal) in order to more freely pursue religious activity according to their beliefs and to demonstrate that they were not unified with the AUCECB. State officials responded by offering certain concessions to the registered churches while arresting leaders and harassing participants of the unregistered churches. Breakaway Baptists faced the brunt of the state's coercion: surveillance, fines, blackmail, harassment at places of employment, difficulties for children in schools, sometimes even the removal of children from parents.¹ Breakaway Baptist leaders eventually switched the focus of their battle away from AUCECB leaders and toward state officials, as they began to disseminate petitions defending what they believed were their Constitutional rights to separation of church and state and freedom of conscience. They also disseminated bulletins across the Soviet Union and abroad, publicizing the imprisonment of leaders and state harassment of church activity.

In addition to the problem of unregistered churches, however, state officials continued to encounter problems with representatives from the state-registered churches. The task of

¹ Walter Sawatsky, "Protestantism in the USSR," in *Protestantism and Politics in Eastern Europe and Russia: The Communist and Postcommunist Eras*, ed. Sabrina P. Ramet (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1992), 247.

enforcing normative or acceptable religiosity in these churches never ceased in this period, however dominating the issue of the breakaway churches was. The Central Baptist Church in Moscow, whose lead pastors were also the heads of the AUCECB, was particularly important to state officials because foreign guests frequently attended its services. Officials wanted to show foreigners that there was indeed “religious freedom” in the conducting of Protestant church services.

Council of Religious Affairs (CRA) official for Moscow Oblast A.A. Trushin’s struggle to normalize religious practice is a dominant theme in this chapter. His case demonstrates the many layers of bureaucracy included in the management of religious bodies and the numerous points of tension his office and other authorities encountered due to the dilemmas created by the conflicting desires of state representatives: to normalize religious practice toward its public restriction or decline while creating the perception of the state’s protection of this freedom for believers and foreigners. Because the Baptist Church was relatively small, officials’ effort toward keeping believers content had more to do with Soviet reputation than it did domestic threats to Soviet power.

1965-1969: Brezhnev Inherits ECB Problem

In early 1964 there were signals by Khrushchev and Leonid Il’ichev, one of Khrushchev’s main ideologists, that the anti-religious campaign was to continue, but these two were gone in late 1964 and early 1965. Of course there was no public state-sponsored proclamation calling for reappraisal of religion, but after Khrushchev was ousted the tone in the journal *Science and Religion* was milder. Also, some prisoners who were active believers were released in 1965. Echoing the comments of Council of Religious Affairs (CRA) chief Kuroedov in 1963, an article in *Science and Religion* noted that closing churches was not the way to make people atheists, only to galvanize them. Force did not generate true conversions to atheism, but harmed the state’s image and endeared believers to the citizenry. The article highlighted that instead of “administrative measures,” the focus of state representatives would be on “personal work.”² But religious believers who defined themselves in large part by opposition to the state and the state-sponsored Baptist Church would view any kind of attention from such bodies with considerable suspicion.

² Michael Bourdeaux, *Religious Ferment in Russia: Protestant Opposition to Soviet Religious Policy* (London; New York: Macmillan; St. Martin’s P., 1968), 93–97.

Before Khrushchev was deposed, on July 27, 1964, Kuroedov communicated to his commissioners the problems that local authorities had been causing believers, who then distributed complaints abroad about “persecution” of the church by the state. He warned them that “Any infringement of the rights of believers [...] inevitably intensifies religious attitudes, leads to the igniting of religious fanaticism and complicates the work toward detaching believers from religion.”³ He reported on citizens’ complaints, saying believers wrote that no one was concerned about their complaints, but Kuroedov’s warning to the commissioners suggested that leading officials did take them into account. Officials had to track the mood of citizens since they sensed their power depended on their loyalty. Officials were not supposed to act like those local authorities who “didn’t listen, often bullied them, insulted them, and in certain situations even used measures of repression.”⁴ From now on, he wrote, commissioners and local authorities should only remove a church’s registration if there was “actually a departure of believers from the religion,” a situation made clear by the fact that the population stopped supporting the church. If the building was no longer suitable, then another needed to be found. He also stressed that authorities cannot interfere in “inner-church affairs,” including the conducting of rites and services, or dictating times and durations of services.⁵ Just after Khrushchev was deposed, on October 15, 1964 Kuroedov issued another letter to his commissioners. He did not change any of the emphases, but only gave the commissioners detailed instructions for writing their reports.⁶ Top officials evidently wanted to ensure they had more precise knowledge of the religious situation; any change in tactics was not obvious.

1966-1969 Register the Legal; Punish the Sectarians

Kuroedov’s points of emphases, although directed to the Orthodox Church, applied to the other religions as well, as in 1966 the Council for Russian Orthodox Church Affairs was merged with the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults into the Council for Religious Affairs (CRA). Yet within the CRA, there were still officials who focused specifically on non-Orthodox

³ Keston Archive, “Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report,” Archive file <KGB 187>, pp. 4-5. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 1, Del. 65.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 11–12.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 20–24. The reports were to be divided into five parts, containing the following: general composition of churches; control over abiding by religious legislation; preaching activities and attitudes of clergy; religious rites and abiding by law that guards children from religious influence; analysis of financial situation.

affairs.⁷ The so-called “schismatics” (*raskol’niki*) of the Baptist Church, however, presented officials with a particularly thorny case that made for a difficult period of normalization over Brezhnev’s first five years. Getting believers to convert to atheism may have been the ultimate theoretical goal for many communist proponents, but for current and pragmatic purposes, state authorities still had to maintain the legal framework by which religious associations could operate. As it was, the variously named schismatics-initiativists were not in legal compliance, having rejected the legally-sanctioned AUCECB as well as registration with state organs.

The impasse that had formed between breakaway Baptists and state officials was that the “schismatics” wanted a place to worship without harassment, but they refused registration. One CRA official from the City of Moscow characterized their attitude as one of defiance: “We need a prayer house, yet your registration absolutely does not interest us. [If you] don’t give us the premises—then we will gather under the open skies!” Even though two of its spokesmen, Gennadii Kriuchkov and Georgii Vins, were from other oblasts (Tula and Kiev, respectively), they were using Moscow and Podol’sk as frequent meeting places to organize their actions. The official noted that authorities could not register associations with such “stipulations” attached to registration, nor grant permission for a prayer house when the believers in question “do not recognize the Soviet legislation on cults.”⁸

Yet of equal importance for breakaway Baptists in early 1965 were relations within the ECB church. While still battling the AUCECB leadership, the breakaways primarily referred to themselves as the “Organizing Committee” (*OrgKomitet*). In March 1965, the Organizing Committee responded to AUCECB requests for reconciliation by continuing to accuse it of serving the government’s ends rather than God’s and again called the AUCECB leadership and its followers to repent and change positions. Also, in their own publication, the *Bratskii Listok* (Brotherly Leaflet), OrgKomitet affiliates called all congregations to agree with their position.⁹ Naturally, the AUCECB did not assent to such a pathway to reconciliation.

With reconciliation within the Church at an impasse, the OrgKomitet increasingly addressed government officials, including Leonid Brezhnev, as president of the Constitution Commission. They quoted the existing public religious legislation to their addressees, referencing Lenin’s dictate in 1918 on the separation of church and state. They tried to define

⁷ Evlampii Alekseevich Tarasov was chief of the department overseeing the affairs of Catholic, Protestant, Armenian, Jewish, and sectarian faiths from 1968 until 1986.

⁸ TsGA Moskv, f. 3004, op. 1, d. 90, p. 21.

⁹ Bourdeaux, *Religious Ferment in Russia*, 98–104.

“true freedom of conscience” as well as what the “needs” of believers actually were. They claimed that the constitution did indicate such a freedom “on paper,” but “in practice” they’ve been denied it by “various instructions, administrative pressure and repressions.” They claimed that when in 1929 the resolution gave authorities the right to refuse to register religious societies while making unregistered societies illegal, this act of requiring permission but meanwhile denying it violated the separation of church and state. Subsequent interpretations of religious law by state authorities said that children had the right to a religion-free upbringing, and the state upheld the presumption that all children, being under age to comply, would wish for such a thing. The reformists argued against the state’s right to claim ownership over children’s worldviews. They also quoted UN human rights resolutions that conflicted with existing Soviet legislation. All of this was to persuade Brezhnev and others to pass legislation that would forbid state meddling in church leadership and services. They received no reply.¹⁰

The OrgKomitet submitted several petitions to Presidium Chairman A.I. Mikoyan, to the Procuracy of the USSR, and to other government bodies. In September 1965 Mikoyan actually received a delegation, but in this meeting—as in all correspondence with OrgKomitet members—state representatives warned them about their “anti-social and illegal activity.” Acting illegally supposedly disqualified them from constructive conversation. Mikoyan and other officials also tried to claim that due to separation of church and state, state officials could not interfere in what they described as an internal church conflict of leadership, which it was on the surface, if one ignored state machinations behind the scenes of the AUCECB.¹¹

Reformists did not find an agreeable path to church reconciliation, legal operation, or reduced state meddling in church affairs. Their demands unmet, the OrgKomitet decided in September 1965 to hold a conference where attendees declared the establishment of their own denomination, the Council of Churches of the Evangelical Christians and Baptists (CCECB).¹² Their move to establish the CCECB did not mean that church or state authorities would recognize it, however. Leaders Kriuchkov and Vins were in hiding during this time, knowing that state agents had been tracking their activities and fearing immediate arrest.

Unregistered churches were problems for both CCECB and AUCECB adherents, as officials had insisted that only registered groups could legally gather but had not registered any

¹⁰ Ibid., 105–13.

¹¹ Ibid., 116.

¹² Ibid., 113.

Protestant groups since the early 1950s. In response, believers from unregistered communities were meeting wherever they could. As Catherine Wanner has observed, because the state would not grant permissions for large public gatherings for rituals like baptisms or for additional meeting spaces or for new prayer houses, “a vast informal communicative network” was needed for such gatherings. As the size increased, so did the difficulty of arrangement without an informant notifying the police. This was an “ongoing confrontation” and “one that was increasingly tiresome for the Soviet state to wage.”¹³

Under Brezhnev, officials changed their strategy. In the struggle to keep religious activity limited but in the open amid increasing memberships in ECB communities, religious affairs officials began to advocate for new registrations. In 1965 Authorities in Moscow Oblast registered the first ECB communities in the oblast to add to the Central Baptist Church in Moscow, one each in the towns of Dedovsk and Serpukhov and two in villages.¹⁴ In all these cases, religious affairs commissioner A.A. Trushin—who had been commissioner for Russian Orthodox Church Affairs since 1943—argued that the numbers and influence of the “initiativists” decreased due to formal registration.¹⁵ Nevertheless, Trushin labeled adherents to the ECB faith not as “Baptist” or “Evangelical” but simply “sectarian,” suggesting a negative opinion of the faith in general. Yet some 30 “nonregistered” groups remained in the oblast, of which 10 were described as belonging to the “initiativists.”¹⁶

Despite advocating registration, religious affairs officials initiated stricter legislation on March 18, 1966, much of which seemed aimed at ECB church groups, but especially breakaway ones. The laws would punish those teaching minors or organizing any meetings outside of worship services.¹⁷ The legislation seemed directed toward the legally ambiguous “Sunday school classes,” although catechism had been expressly forbidden. The legislative clarifications heralded the next crackdown, and subsequently many leaders were arrested for violating such articles.¹⁸

¹³ Catherine Wanner, *Communities of the Converted: Ukrainians and Global Evangelism*, Culture and Society after Socialism (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 87–88.

¹⁴ The other two churches were in the village of Ivanisovo in Noginskii raion, and in Vostriakovo in Podol'skii raion.

¹⁵ Keston Archive, “Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report”, Archive file <KGB 85>, p. 15. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 55.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁷ Bourdeaux, *Religious Ferment in Russia*, 159.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 165.

CCECB leaders were equally determined to conduct religion as they saw fit. Frustrated by a lack of response to their petitions, supporters of the CCECB gathered for what might have been the largest protest demonstration in Moscow in Soviet history. On May 22, 1966, some 500-600 believers gathered outside of the Central Committee building, insisting on meeting with Brezhnev himself. Their demands included recognition of the CCECB, an end to persecution, the release of current prisoners, true freedom of religious conscience and the right to religiously educate children. The foreign press even reported on it. The group remained unanswered until nightfall. Even more came the next morning until soldiers, police, and KGB agents came to disperse them, announcing that ten leaders could remain to be received. The crowd remained, encircled by police, saying they intended to wait outside for their "brothers" to return. Eventually, state security physically forced them into buses, even assaulting some of them with blows to their heads, and detained many in prison for a time. There were crowds of onlookers who witnessed these acts.¹⁹

In the Kiev region on Sunday, May 22, while Georgii Vins was leading the demonstration in Moscow, several hundred were meeting in the woods near a certain rail station far outside the city, as they had been doing for some three years. But this group was also violently dispersed by a large contingent of state security, with reports of assaults on old women and children.²⁰ Around this time the Vins family and congregation received word that Georgii was arrested in connection with the May demonstration. Other members of the congregation were also arrested and given short prison sentences.²¹ Georgii Vins was in prison six months before his trial in Moscow, after which he received three years in prison camps.²²

After this event, state organs increased negative stereotyping of the breakaway Baptists. In June 1966 *Izvestiia* painted them as "aggressive," provocative, and making "illegal demands" instead of requests. The article noted that the schism was because the "schismatics" saw AUCECB leaders as adhering to "earthly laws" whereas they held the "laws of God" to be ultimate. Thus, said the article, "these petitioners do not want to recognize the laws of the Soviet state and do not wish to take into account the fact that sectarians are not only believers,

¹⁹ Ibid., 117–20.

²⁰ Ibid., 120–22.

²¹ Natasha Vins, *Children of the Storm: The Autobiography of Natasha Vins*. (Greenville, S.C.: JourneyForth, 2002), 22. Kiev pastor Vasily Zhurilo was also imprisoned, as well as nine others from their church in 1966. One was Vera Shuportyak, a Sunday School teacher and nineteen years old, arrested for the May petition attempt (62).

²² Ibid., 62.

but also Soviet citizens." The article characterized them as societal parasites, noting their preference only for laws like the right to pension and paid holidays. The leaders, the article claimed, were a "group of adventurers" wanting to "seize power" and the money of the church, and that the ordinary believers were being deceived by them.²³

After the "events in Moscow" "perpetrated" by the "initiativists," Party Councils met across the oblast. Even Emiliï Ivanovich Lisavtsev of the Ideological Department of the Central Committee of the Party gave a presentation on the subject. Trushin noted that even before the events there were several meetings to discuss the Baptists and the taking of measures to cease their illegal activity, perhaps wishing to suggest that he had not been ignoring the issue. He also reported that those who had "insolently refused" to stop illegal activities "were arrested and a criminal case was brought against them." Six were arrested in connection with hosting gatherings.²⁴

Trushin reported that CCECB participants held "numerous" gatherings of late, "taking the shape of demonstrations against Soviet legislation on religions, having the goal of arousing believers against Soviet authorities." Those leaders (whose names he had) who "still remained at large" met in homes and apartments, making plans for their next "illegal activities." He also noted that the Council of Churches and Council of Prisoners' Relatives had lodged complaints to "central and local party authorities."²⁵ The latter had formed in 1964 when a group of wives and mothers of imprisoned believers had met in Moscow and decided to form an association for their support. Like the reformist Baptist movement which began in 1961, those involved in this Council tried to navigate the constitutional-legal framework of the Soviet Union. Their agenda included keeping fellow adherents informed of instances of persecution and imprisonment and petitioning the Soviet government on behalf of their relatives' rights. They also kept records of these instances and actions.²⁶ The Council of Prisoners' Relatives made the same "persistent" legal demands as the CCECB.²⁷ They sometimes also sent such declarations in the name of "The

²³ Bourdeaux, *Religious Ferment in Russia*, 114–15.

²⁴ Keston Archive, "Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report", Archive file <KGB 85>, p. 13. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 55.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

²⁶ Katharine Murray, "The Council of Baptist Prisoners' Relatives: 1964-1972," *Religion in Communist Lands* 1, no. 1 (1973): 12.

²⁷ Trushin was accurate in his description of the content of both groups' petitions. They asked the 1929 decree on religious associations and certain decrees from March 18, 1966 be revoked, saying they conflict with Lenin's decree of 1918, international "norms", and their "creeds." They demanded the release of their relatives and co-believers from prisoners, imprisoned for "professing their faith." Complete

Moscow Church ECB,” which was not the same as the City Church, but the name they had given to the collection of breakaway Baptists in Moscow oblast.²⁸

In July a seminar for district and regional level officials and CRA commissioners was dominated by the problem of the “initiativists” and “ceasing their unlawful activity.” Also there was much sorting out of the tasks of the “commissions” for tracking religious activity and ensuring they abide by legislation. Some of the district commissions had collected more precise data on the churches in their districts. Trushin noted some “insufficiencies” in the work of these commissions, due in large part to their “ignorance” of regulations pertaining to religion.²⁹ This was a constant refrain in Trushin’s reporting, the inadequacies of other officials in dealing with religious problems.

Still, the CRA now had a “detailed plan” to address the unlawful initiative group. The proposed measures included explaining legislation to unregistered ECB groups and initiative-group supporters. District officials and officials overseeing propaganda and agitation all agreed to these measures, as well as to register more Baptist communities to take away at least one reason for Baptist discontent. Trushin anticipated that granting “legal rights” to Baptist believers would reduce illegal sectarian activity by getting believers “out from under the influence of Baptists-initiativists.”³⁰ As another attempt at influencing Baptists, state-published documents, as Michael Bourdeaux notes, routinely described registered Baptists using positive terms like “quiet,” “honest,” and “hard-working.”³¹ Accommodating conforming Baptists and praising them would help further marginalize breakaway Baptists, whom Trushin and other officials described as complaining, deceitful in describing the religious situation, parasitic, obscurantists, law-breakers, and extremists.

Trushin felt that discussions between officials and believers were having a “good influence.” He referenced a two-hour discussion with initiativists in Dedovsk at the end of August. After this meeting, he claimed, there developed “a rift and unrest in the group” as some started to argue on behalf of registration, others began to attend the already registered ECB church in Dedovsk, while others remained unmoved. The ECB church in the city of Serphukhov

separation of church from state, to keep state bodies from meddling in church and believers’ affairs. The “freedom of religious propaganda,” without which there is not true “freedom of conscience.”

²⁸ Keston Archive, “Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report”, Archive file <KGB 85>. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 55.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 5, 9.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 12–13.

³¹ Bourdeaux, *Religious Ferment in Russia*, 154.

also coordinated efforts to sway people back toward the ECB fold. In general, said Trushin, ECB activities “increased considerably.”³² Here, the state and the AUCECB churches shared the same agenda, a situation similar to other instances in the Soviet Union and Romania when Church leaders supported state initiatives. The Orthodox Churches supported the disbanding of the Greek-Catholic Churches in Ukraine and Romania after World War II, framed as voluntary reunions with the Orthodox Churches.

In 1966 there were around 30 unregistered ECB and Pentecostal communities in the oblast, encompassing around 700 people (see Appendix B for Population and Religion Statistics). Trushin claimed the “overwhelming majority” of such groups obeyed soviet laws pertaining to religious practice, but if the eight groups seeking registration faced rejection, this meant “favorable ground” for the initiative-Baptists, who were traveling to such places and “recruiting” believers to their side. Officials estimated the initiativists as ten groups of around 200 people, sixty of whom were in Dedovsk, the largest collection in the oblast.³³ Trushin intended to have more groups registered to make all ECB activity in Moscow Oblast more controlled.

Officials were not all pursuing the same agenda, however. Although Trushin argued that registration would “contribute to the ceasing of illegal activities of sectarian organizations, the departure of believers from under the influence of baptist ‘initiativists,’” district officials and Baptists had become quite accustomed to rejection. As an example, Trushin detailed efforts by believers in Klin to register. In 1955, they received the reply from the district council that “We do not have the possibility to satisfy your request.” In 1957, they replied that they “do not give consent to opening a prayer house and forbid gathering.” In 1961 they rejected the petition since “there should not be held any kind of group gatherings of citizens prior to registration of a community.” Despite the new religious affairs line promoting registration and the registration of two ECB communities in 1965, in 1965 the same body rejected a petition to open a prayer house again, this time because “the house was built for housing,” and therefore “cannot be used for conducting prayer gatherings.” At the beginning of 1966, the reply was that “there is no premises in Klin which can be used as a prayer gathering.” In the city of Ivanteevka, Trushin

³² Keston Archive, “Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report”, Archive file <KGB 85>, p. 14. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 55.

³³ Ibid., 25–26. Trushin wrote that of the nine applications for registration among ECB communities, Vostriakovo was registered, with those in Klin, Ivanteevka, Ramenska and Kubinka having their applications “prepared” for registration at the oblast level. The other four had been sent to the local district councils for “immediate consideration” (52).

wrote, officials similarly “rejected and rejected” requests, until it seemed the “issue of registration didn’t stir [believers].”³⁴

To further emphasize the importance of registration, on September 7, 1966, the CRA sent out a “clarification” to the executive committees of the district councils, about “the new order of registration and stripping religious societies of registration, about the opening and closing of prayer buildings and houses.” But “even now,” said Trushin, there were leading officials in places “where the registration of such groups [was] highly necessary,” who were “remaining with their opinions” that it was “better to let them operate in this way, than to register them in the 50th year of Soviet power.” To some communist adherents, registering Baptist churches was the opposite of progress. The city council of Klin had rejected a recent Baptist petition even after “several of our [CRA] written and verbal reminders.” The same happened in Odintsovskii city council, and other places. But rejections “were not quite convincing” to Trushin when they contained refusals based on the “technical condition” of the home as precluding it for use as a prayer house. Nor did he find those officials rejecting registration in Ivanteevka convincing when they told believers that soon there would be a “direct bus” to Moscow, and “they can travel there, since the distance is 27 km.” The Ramenskii council told the same to its petitioners. In contrast to the local officials, Trushin had decided in favor of each of these requests.³⁵ Officials were clearly divided in their approaches to addressing the problem of ECB religion in the oblast.

There were important links between the Central Moscow Church and these small church groups scattered across the oblast, even if officials tended to exaggerate the reliability of transportation between them. First, the church in Moscow was beyond its capacity because many in attendance came from the surrounding oblast, up to around 5,000 members by 1967. The church had grown by nearly 300 members from 1963-1967, and although officials could note that the majority came from the category of “over forty.” Perhaps officials considered that within a decade a natural decline in members would alleviate the problem. Yet at the same time, statistics of new members at Moscow church since 1967 often showed that around a quarter of new members were between ages nineteen and thirty.³⁶ Second, it had become customary that those wishing to be baptized joined others in periodic group-baptism events. In

³⁴ Ibid., 15–16.

³⁵ Ibid., 16–17.

³⁶ TsGA Moskvyy, f. 3004, op. 1, d. 94, p. 4, 10.

1966 the newly registered oblast churches had sent twenty-one believers to the “Moscow Church” to be baptized, and unregistered groups sent thirty-five.³⁷ This church was further distinguished by the fact that in its recent history, they had had over 1,000 foreign visitors from 28 countries and 26 different confessions.³⁸ For the state, allowing foreign visitors to observe a Protestant service could help to demonstrate the existence of “religious freedom” in the Soviet Union and dispel reports of “religious persecution” that concerned audiences abroad may have read. What’s more, this church was well-represented in leadership, with five of its executive body also leaders of the AUCECB, and all fifteen members of the presidium of the AUCECB preachers and organizers of the services in Moscow.³⁹

The favored status of the Moscow Church was connected to the cooperation of AUCECB leaders with state initiatives. State actors felt comfortable enough with the leadership to allow an All-Union Congress in the fall of 1966 to which believers were elected from registered and unregistered congregations as delegates, although Trushin noted that initiativists from Moscow Oblast “refused” to participate.⁴⁰ Perhaps to demonstrate to wavering believers the benefits of belonging to the AUCECB, leaders announced that the Council was now permitted to publish Bibles, song books, and its magazine in greater numbers. Trying to tarnish the CCECB reputation at the Congress, one AUCECB leader referred to them as practicing “intolerance” and looking to harm the “unity,” but claimed that only an “insignificant number” joined the group, many of whom were already returning to the Council. There were even some present as “representatives” who expressed that they were breaking with the CCECB. Official reports indicated that “the congress” declared all of the CCECB’s claims “unfounded.”⁴¹ Yet more quietly, AUCECB leaders also changed some church ordinances in compliance with earlier OrgKomitet complaints about excessive centralization, now concurring that AUCECB-appointed senior presbyters must be approved by churches and elected by bodies of presbyters.⁴²

Concessions to AUCECB churches continued in 1967, as eight communities were registered in Moscow Oblast. Trushin wrote that ten other church groups in close proximity joined up with these, reducing the number of unregistered communities to around seven.

³⁷ Ibid., 21.

³⁸ TsGA Moskv, f. 3004, op. 1, d. 90, p. 33.

³⁹ Ibid. d. 93, p. 34.

⁴⁰ Keston Archive, “Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report,” 15.

⁴¹ Bourdeaux, *Religious Ferment in Russia*, 174–76.

⁴² Ibid., 180. This confusing, three-way process was not clarified at the congress.

Probably with the help of informants, officials claimed that participation in CCECB groups decline to around 100 in the oblast, as activity had ceased in some locations and dwindled in others, without any notable increases.⁴³

To discourage CCECB activity, state agents also employed fines, the dispersal of gatherings, and arrests. Ahead of the 100-year anniversary of the Baptist Church in Russia, local officials were alerted to the jubilee and forewarned about preventing any “manifestations” in undesirable forms, like gatherings under the open air, demonstrations, and so on.⁴⁴ Over 19-20 August, 1967, CCECB groups held four jubilee gatherings with around 250 people, and in some instances, a large proportion of youth. Such problematic religiosity, alongside several “slanderous” statements CCECB representatives sent to central Soviet organs, increased the impasse between state and CCECB personnel. Listing local authorities by name, CCECB letters complained about the use of force and issuing fines (often without receipts). They persisted in their complaints about legislation, asked for the rehabilitation of those released from prison, and insisted on religious education for children.⁴⁵

But violent dispersions, arrests, and calumnious comments in newspapers were not having the effect everywhere that state representatives desired. The CCECB had gained the allegiance of roughly one-third of the ECB congregations from across the entire Soviet Union—if not in Moscow Oblast—, buoyed especially by their insistence on allowing children to attend services and have some measure of religious education of youth.⁴⁶ These congregations experienced a kind of unity with one another, with traveling pastors and publications encouraging them to hold firm to their convictions. Their shared renegade and persecuted status afforded a kind of bond in the face of adversity.⁴⁷

Georgii Vins’ mother, Lydia Vins, spent considerable time away from Kiev in Moscow since she was retired by the time of her son's imprisonment and one of the main activists in the Council of Prisoners’ Relatives. While there, she met other female relatives of prisoners; long days of trying to negotiate the prosecutor’s office or prison parcel possibilities would conclude

⁴³ Keston Archive, “Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report”, Archive file <KGB 86>, pp. 17-18. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 59.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁴⁶ Bourdeaux, *Religious Ferment in Russia*, 125–26. Lev Mitrokhin has estimated that roughly 1,000 communities sided with the CCECB initially, and there were approximately 3,000 ECB communities in 1947. I have not yet found a thorough accounting of AUCECB and CCECB numbers over time.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 136.

with gatherings of fellow believers for food and mutual support.⁴⁸ A community of breakaway Baptists was being created in shared adversity.

In the summer of 1967, the Sunday school teachers of teenage Natasha Vins' church organized a camping trip—three days in the woods—, an exciting prospect since school trips were rare. When it was time to sleep, they took turns on watch duty for discovery or break-up by authorities. They played games, sang songs, studied the Bible, read about "catacomb" Christians, and so on. Natasha Vins recalls staying up late into the night enjoying the company of fellow teenagers. But one day a group of "hunters" (without hunting equipment) came up to their fire and made inquiries as to their "camping trip." They decided to pack up and leave immediately, but they were stopped exiting the forest by a group of policemen, who told them they were under arrest, and a covered truck awaited them. They were all thoroughly searched, and the damning evidence of a "Christian camp" was found. Vins' teacher went into hiding to avoid the criminal case opened against her.⁴⁹ Vins says that she and other youth did not respond in fear, but sometimes very vocally protested their treatment as evidence of being "persecuted." They struggled to be submissive and respectful to the authorities as their Sunday school teachers instructed them.⁵⁰

The defiance of CCECB representatives was, in the minds of Trushin and other CRA officials, to be overcome by "individual work," but this often did not succeed. Baptist believer and "initiativist" N.P. Iakimenkova, who lived in a village outside Moscow, sent declarations in the name of "the Moscow Church ECB" to eleven addresses of local and central party authorities, declaring her intention to use her home for the gatherings of "initiativists." Trushin eventually got her to meet with him. She was accompanied by two other women (who refused to give their last names, though subsequently they were identified) who were present "as witness" to be able to report back to "the brothers and sisters" about their conversation. Trushin told her he called her in because of her declarations, but she denied writing them. She said that "we don't recognize any Council for Religious Affairs, which means that we do not wish to hear from you any kind of explanations." She and her attendants got up and left the office. The Procurator of the district subsequently summoned her and likewise presented the

⁴⁸ Vins, *Children of the Storm*, 30.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 53–55.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 55–56.

legislation pertaining to religion.⁵¹ "Individual work" came up against a community defined by its opposition to state authorities, and they expected state agents to try to intimidate or threaten them—which they would call evidence of persecution. CCECB participants had before them examples of family members willing to risk arrest, something that heightened the value of belonging to this group.

The wave of arrests in 1966 became the impetus for the first CCECB conference, where those in attendance discussed how to help the prisoners and prisoners' families. They kept detailed files pertaining to the prisoner's arrest, published newsletters, petitioned the authorities, and tried to organize provisions for families. Lydia Vins' home in Kiev became a guest house for other prisoner families, and "often the doorbell would ring in the middle of the night." Typical guests were mothers who left their young children behind at relatives while they sought to support husbands now in prison. A community of women formed as such wives stayed the night, when they would "pray and weep together." Vins would give practical advice on navigating the trial or prison system.⁵² Local churches would submit donations, and this way they could send packages to help supply basic needs and to offer special treats to brighten Christmas for children missing their fathers.⁵³

According to one of their newsletters in June 1968, the churches had helped provide support to around two thousand people, all relatives of the hundreds of prisoners. Periodic letters also encouraged fellow sufferers in whatever way they could. The *Bulletin of the Council of Prisoners' Relatives* was published regularly from this time, helping forge the sense of a broader community of co-sufferers, which worked to keep people from feeling isolated or alone in their situation. The bulletins contained detailed information on the cases of those arrested, transcripts of trials, statements sent to the Soviet government, and more. These were distributed broadly, even reaching foreign audiences.⁵⁴ Samizdat from religious actors joined the increasing dissemination of samizdat from across the political spectrum.

Responses by state representatives to curb this "illegal" underground church activity did not dissuade participants, but it strengthened CCECB adherents' notion of the CCECB as the

⁵¹ Keston Archive, "Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report", Archive file <KGB 85>, pp. 54-55. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 55.

⁵² Vins, *Children of the Storm*, 31. Lydia Vins, Aleksandra Kozorezova, Nina Yakimenko, Elizaveta Khrapova, and Klavdiya Kozlova were the initial ones appointed to sign the petitions they submitted to authorities.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁵⁴ Murray, "The Council of Baptist Prisoners' Relatives: 1964-1972," 14-15.

persecuted (and therefore, “true”) church and helped forge communal ties within.⁵⁵ Plus, they were gaining sympathizers abroad from advocates for human and religious rights who saw them as people of integrity, harmed by a repressive regime. State officials like Trushin sensed that only when the new state line favored compromises that appealed to CCECB supporters would the organization lose some of its power.

Although CRA officials often held up AUCECB churches and personnel as preferable to the CCECB and its followers, this does not mean AUCECB churches were unproblematic. The pastors and believers of the Moscow Central ECB Church (MoECB) frequently caused problems for CRA officials, especially beginning in the 1970s. One CRA official working in the City of Moscow believed fanaticism was a real possibility in MoECB, even if it was not the defining characteristic as it was for the CCECB as a whole. The official claimed that the church’s leaders “love to emphasize that the Christians of other confessions, for example, seventh day Adventists, Pentecostals and suchlike ignite fanaticism,” whereas members of their community engaged in culture—they “both read papers and listen to the radio, accept any kind of culture.” “But,” the official continued, “in reality it’s not so,” given that many of the “schismatics” had been “raised in the community.” Thus to become “imbued with fanaticism” remained a possibility for “the so-called clean baptists.”⁵⁶

As another example of this possibility, the official mentioned Val’ter Arturovich Mitskevich, the son of MoECB presbyter and deputy General Secretary of the AUCECB Artur Iosifovich. Although he had a “state job,” the young Mitskevich was taking more and more turns preaching, and his father was trying to turn him on this path. At a youth gathering that presumably was permitted by authorities, the younger Mitskevich called the attention of “Baptist youth” to the “atheist influences” around them and included “aspirations” which echoed “the wishes of the schismatics.” This official remarked, “And what can be expected from the young Mitskevich? He is just as fanatic as his father,” commenting that “among educated people fanatics are rarely found, but they nevertheless exist.”⁵⁷ Some officials must have felt that even though the elder Mitskevich had been approved by official avenues to hold such a post, he was not completely reliable (something he proved later). In a similar vein, officials

⁵⁵ Believers who believed they were being persecuted had in mind Matthew 5:10-12, where reward is promised for those who are persecuted.

⁵⁶ TsGA Moskv, f. 3004, op. 1, d. 90, pp. 34-35.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 36-37.

mentioned AUCECB president (until 1966) Iakov Zhidkov, and how he had a major influence on youth by helping grow a youth choir and orchestra.⁵⁸

A 1966 CRA report highlighted what officials felt were some recent examples of problematic aspects to certain AUCECB pastors' preaching. One pastor made those who did not bring anyone to church feel guilty, saying they should have done so. Another criticized the choice of a believer to marry an unbeliever, while another preached on moral topics.⁵⁹ Officials found some of these customary aspects of the religious culture of the Baptists troubling; Baptist culture did not change completely even while Church leaders tried to abide by state stipulations.⁶⁰ Mentioning unacceptable religiosity as well as large membership at MoECB as complaints, officials did not yet suggest a state response.

On the positive side for the AUCECB, Trushin and other officials processed another application for registration in Kolomna, raising the number to thirteen ECB communities in the oblast by 1969.⁶¹ But as for the CCECB, more work had been done via district councils to make lists of all people who supported the CCECB in efforts toward "liquidating" their "illegal activity." Also, "educational and especially individual work among ordinary supporters" of the CCECB was "strengthened." In such work, officials "explained" to believers that "the Soviet state does not pursue believers for their religious convictions, but by repression exposes only violators of the legislation on cults." As for leaders, "measures were taken" by "organs of the procurator, security for public order, and the court," including the prosecution and sentencing of Dedovsk leaders P.V. Rumachik, A.F. Iskovskikh, and V. Ia. Smirnov. They were charged for their activities from 1961-1968 in conducting illegal activity and writing against Soviet legislation.⁶² To try to gain conformity, state agents persistently arrested the leaders of CCECB groups.

While AUCECB groups appeared relatively stable at this moment,⁶³ the only normalization occurring in CCECB-state relations was the impasse itself, made evident by rearrests of the leaders and continued fines of those hosting gatherings. Although Trushin claimed that work aimed at strengthening observance of laws and arrest of certain leaders

⁵⁸ Ibid., 34.

⁵⁹ TsGA Moskv, d. 93, pp. 39-40.

⁶⁰ Ibid., d. 94.

⁶¹ Keston Archive, "Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report", Archive file <KGB 88>. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 65.

⁶² Ibid., 55-56.

⁶³ Ibid., 59.

meant schismatics' activity "declined somewhat,"⁶⁴ the resolve among CCECB leaders showed no signs of decline.

Trushin relied on having informants, including the crucial commissions "for monitoring adherence to Soviet legislation on religion" from fifty districts and cities across the oblast. In 1969, they submitted reports, watching to ensure that "clergy and churchmen do not conduct religious propaganda outside the walls of prayer buildings," do not baptize children without both parents' consent, oversee finances, and track participation in civic ceremonies vs. religious rites. Some studied preaching activities.⁶⁵ In these reports, commissions noted financial irregularities and failure to report earnings by Orthodox personnel, but ECB issues were largely neglected. Also, when reporting on preaching activities, Trushin and others only reported on Orthodox priests' homilies, not ECB pastors' sermons. This imbalance is not likely due to the Orthodox sermons being in some way more problematic, but some other factor, such as the considerably fewer number of Baptist communities or that perhaps the state network of information gathering was more developed among Orthodox ones.

In its report, the commission in Istrinskii district (Dedovsk) said it frequented the places of worship and tracked religious activity, even of the "baptists-schismatics." Supposedly as evidence of its efforts, the commission noted recent proceedings against Dedovsk CCECB leaders Rumachik, Iskovskikh, and Smirnov and that another was "subjected to administrative responsibility" for providing a premise for their gatherings. Rumachik followed his release from prison in 1969 with the same "illegal activities," for which the city council summoned him twice and then rearrested him.⁶⁶ The commission wished to present itself as vigilant.

But Trushin had the work of several commissions "inspected," including Istrinskii, looking for any "inadequacies." Although he criticized the commissions without distinguishing them, his critiques of commissions' handling of the problem of "schismatics" would have applied to Istrinskii especially: that its commission conducted "individual work" with schismatic Baptists

⁶⁴ Ibid., 62. Although state attention to the newly registered ECB communities was minimal, officials observed the statistics compiled by churches. Trushin noted that the majority of Baptist believers were women and over age 50. Like the past several years, in 1969 there were a couple of rounds of baptisms done in Moscow by senior presbyters, with 38 people "prepared for baptism" from the oblast, but also a nearly equivalent number of deaths.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 57.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 69.

“weakly,” ignoring preaching activity, and hardly attending prayer houses.⁶⁷ It was a convenient excuse for Trushin to blame local authorities for the persistence of unacceptable religiosity.

To gain legal standing, two CCECB groups approached the Council for Religious Affairs and other district councils to register in 1969, one led by Gennadii Kriuchkov of “the Moscow persecuted church ECB,” and Liuba Rumachik (Peter’s wife), “of the Dedovsk group of breakaway baptists.” The simultaneity of registration requests suggested to Trushin that “an underground center” was instructing them to attempt to register at local authorities, while “remaining subject to the Council of Churches ECB.” Trushin considered these attempts to register disguises for the greater effort of gaining a legal standing for the CCECB and its approach to religious laws. Kriuchkov admitted that his church would not commit to observing the law, since their religion “requires training children in religion.”⁶⁸

CRA chief of the city of Moscow A.C. Plekhanov tried to steer Kriuchkov’s group toward the AUCECB. Plekhanov asked them why they were “attracting ordinary believers” to “unlawful gatherings,” since it could result in the organizers being “brought to justice.” To Plekhanov’s suggestion that they try to register to have their meetings at the existing ECB church in Moscow, the CCECB representatives reportedly replied, “We cannot go there” because “we do not wish to be together with [AUCECB leaders] Ivanov, Karev, or the others,” since they “violate the commandments of the Lord,” citing an example of one “brother” who was encouraged by a leader to use artificial means to not have children.⁶⁹ Kriuchkov noted that although many of his fellow adherents had already been “brought to justice,” they still wanted to be “separate” from the AUCECB while legally registering. Plekhanov dismissed them, noting to them this was their “personal affair” and that “the state organs will not meddle in these relations.” To fellow officials, Plekhanov called their desire to be registered but independent of the Union a “maneuver” for “their selfish goals.”⁷⁰

Amid the continuing tension, in April 1969, leaders of the AUCECB and CCECB met.⁷¹ The supposed end goal behind this meeting was reunification, but CCECB leaders were ready to test the AUCECB representatives with incisive questions about the role of the state in shaping church

⁶⁷ Ibid., 70–71.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 63.

⁶⁹ A common stereotype of such Evangelical groups was their higher birth rate. People who opposed the spread of such religious groups not only feared their future spread by such means, but also used it as evidence of their non-conformity with what they considered more normal or modern family sizes.

⁷⁰ GARF, f. 6991, op. 6, d. 226, p. 62–63.

⁷¹ TsGA Moskv, f. 3004, op. 1, d. 95, p. 17.

ordinances, as opposed to Biblical influences. To each question, AUCECB representatives presented equivocal responses, reflective of their difficult position of needing to manage the balance between state demands, traditional religious discourse, wanting to maintain their legitimacy as leaders by being in the right, and luring the CCECB back into the official fold. CCECB members asked, given the fact that the AUCECB documents and decisions back in 1960 issuing stricter limits to religious practice for the Church were the impetus for the schism, what they thought of these now. AUCECB responses varied from reciting subsequent motions passed in AUCECB Congresses to a few who “cautiously” admitted “sinful error.” CCECB representatives also asked whether the AUCECB still maintained that the work of the initiativists was “Satanic” as they asserted before, to which representatives claimed that this was the comment of one and not their official position. Last, they questioned whether their compatriots were in prison for their convictions or for foolishness. The AUCECB reply was that zeal was good but needed to be “governed by reason” and should not lead to clashes with authorities. In short, AUCECB representatives hinted that CCECB leaders were foolish in so fiercely holding to their convictions.⁷² Ultimately, the meeting did nothing to bring reconciliation between the leadership groups. State officials had thus far failed to normalize ECB religion in a way that unified ECB adherents across the spectrum. Neither state nor AUCECB church leaders had succeeded in gaining the trust of CCECB adherents.

1970-1982: Maintaining the Status Quo in Moscow Oblast

Disciplining Schismatics for Breaking the “Law”

By 1970, state authorities felt that they had adequately met the demands of the ECB groups willing to conform by permitting registration and backing off somewhat on restrictions, which meant that those who refused registration had no excuse to pursue “illegal” unauthorized religious activity. But the main leaders of the CCECB remained unsatisfied. They wanted recognition of the CCECB and rights to youth participation before they would advocate any association with state authorities. There were still likely over 1,000 CCECB-supporting church communities across the USSR, representing more around 20,000-30,000 people.⁷³

⁷² Keston Archive, “1969 letter about meeting of AUCECB and CC churches,” Archive file <Su/Ini/6/3>.

⁷³ L. N Mitrokhin, *Baptizm: istoriia i sovremennost' : filosofsko-sotsiologicheskie ocherki [Baptism: Past and Present: Philosophic-Sociological Essays]* (Sankt-Peterburg: Izd-vo Russkogo Khristianskogo gumanitarnogo in-ta, 1997). I do not believe anyone has yet made a thorough accounting of the numbers and their change over time. Mitrokhin’s estimates must be considered approximate.

CCECB communities gained strength from their links with one another. Trushin observed that in Moscow Oblast, there did not appear to be distinctive independent groups of “schismatics,” and despite meetings being scattered across the oblast, they were “united into one group,” indicated by the name some consistently used, the “Moscow persecuted church ecb.” In one declaration, a CCECB adherent wrote on behalf of the “Council of Churches ECB of the Central Part of Russia,” representing five communities of twelve to sixty members each. Representatives from these five “put the question of their registration before authorities” since CCECB leader Gennadii Kriuchkov’s attempts to register a “Moscow Church ECB” were denied. He was quoted as saying that the alternative would be to “register us in Dedovsk or Serpukhov,” places where they already had more than twenty believers as residents.⁷⁴

Trushin wavered between two opposing characterizations of the breakaway Baptist situation, due to his awkward position of wanting to conform to other officials’ expectations (and Marx’s prediction) that religion was declining while needing to accurately report the existing religious problems. In some places, he suggested that authorities had such groups managed, claiming “schismatics” numbers had dwindled, the number of illegal gatherings had declined, and some their believers began attending the nearest registered churches instead. One official said that in his district, the “schismatics” were of advanced age and hardly met. In another, officials fined a group for meeting and conducted “explanatory work” with participants. In Dedovsk, authorities fined Smirnov for leading an illegal gathering after recently returning from detention. In Serpukhov, the official there reported that “members of the commission at all times have control over the house in which they have the opportunity to gather.” Trushin felt there was a direct link between the decline of unregistered groups and the multiple educational and explanatory meetings officials held with leaders and believers of these groups.⁷⁵

But where one page of his report sounded optimistic, another complained of the intransigence of the situation. He wrote that breakaway Baptists had become more active of late, gathering not just for “prayer objectives,” but to organize as well. Authorities found groups had been doing hidden baptisms, and some members made mention of gathering twice a week, once in a large group, once in small groups. The arrested pastor from Dedovsk, Iskovskikh, died in prison, and his body was returned to the community, after which a “large contingent of

⁷⁴ Keston Archive, “Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report”, Archive file <KGB 89>, pp. 41-42. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 68. The other three locales were Mozhaisk, Zvenigorod, and Krasnozavolodsk.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 42–43.

schismatics” attended his burial. Trushin noted that the arrested Smirnov’s sons, brothers Nikolai, Genadii, and Viktor, ages ranging from 17-22, traveled “to a gathering of young baptists – ‘schismatics’” that had been planned in the village of Zanevka. He also said that recent attempts by CCECB groups to register maintained the “firm intention” of allegiance to the CCECB and to its concept of the “separation of church and state.”⁷⁶ These facts suggest that Trushin’s department had not made noticeable progress in eliminating unacceptable religious practice.

Trushin blamed the lack of progress on the fact that other authorities’ control over their activity “weakened significantly”; in many districts officials did not know when schismatics were gathering. The local organs of Istrinskii did not inform the oblast-level or Trushin’s department about a secret baptism in the summer of 1970. “Unknown” also was the funeral of Iskovskikh in Dedovsk on Nov. 1, even though a large number of schismatics went. When other local officials were questioned about their response to an unauthorized gathering, they responded as though they regarded it a mere “trifle.” In response, Trushin said he was taking measures to inform oblast-level executive committee and party members about more measures in combatting schismatics’ illegal activity. His reporting here communicated much greater concern as he continued to cite the inadequacies of the local commissions.⁷⁷ It is unclear whether Trushin believed that they were really to blame, or whether he found it a convenient excuse to deflect any potential blame from himself.

The reality was that in many locales, such as in Kiev oblast, CCECB activity was far from declining. Georgii Vins was released from prison in 1969 after serving three years. Upon arriving home, the next forest service provided an opportunity for him to preach and tell about this last three years.⁷⁸ Authorities immediately noticed that Vins had not changed positions after his release, that he once again “was engaged in active underground work and evading socially useful labor.” He organized a meeting of some 60 leaders from various oblasts and republics, wrote three “slandorous documents,” detailing his time in prison or demanding more religious freedoms. His criticisms stressed that the state should follow Lenin’s principles of separation of church and state and cease to dictate what was acceptable in religious practice, that he and his fellow adherents could not accept laws that “contradict our christian morals.” Authorities threatened him with further prison for “parasitism” if he did not find work. That Vins was busy

⁷⁶ Ibid., 44–47.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 46, 48. See also Archive file <KGB 40>, originally TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 70.

⁷⁸ Vins, *Children of the Storm*, 71.

meeting and visiting others in connection to the CCECB would not absolve him in officials' eyes. Estimating some 50,000 adherents, he told them defiantly that when other believers decided they did not need him as a leader, he would stop. He also expressed his willingness "to suffer for the faith" and that he "didn't fear the threats of the organs of power."⁷⁹

Georgii Vins' defiance was characteristic of CCECB activity. Over the May Day holidays in 1970, Baptist churches organized a youth rally in a forest outside Kharkov, and thirty from Vins' congregation attended and met other believers.⁸⁰ Such events worked to continue to strengthen a sense of a special community among such ECB congregations, whether or not they were broken up by authorities. Natasha Vins had become involved in a variety of unauthorized youth activity, including orchestra rehearsals, Bible studies, and "evangelistic trips to small churches in remote villages."⁸¹ On June 3 1971, 30 Kiev Baptist youth were baptized in a small lake in a forest outside of Kiev (including Natahsa Vins). The entire congregation was there, as well as special guests for the occasion, "over four hundred people."⁸²

The high points and low points followed one another. On December 1, 1970, returning from a Bible study, Natsha Vins found KGB agents at her home, arresting her grandmother. They even had an ambulance ready due to her age and state.⁸³ They sentenced Lydia Vins to three years in prison for "slandering the Soviet state" in the petitions she signed, wherein she described mistreatment of Christians in prison and in church services. The witnesses were the policemen and prison guards, but no "victims" were allowed to give testimony.⁸⁴

The Council of Churches community affiliated with Georgii Vins in Kiev was repeatedly harassed by state agents, but they continued to petition state officials about their rights as believers. In January 1971, 180 people signed a petition to heads of state Brezhnev, President of Ministers A.N. Kosygin, Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet Nikolai Podgorny, General Procurator R.A. Rudenko, and Procurator of the Ukrainian SSR T. Glukh. They complained that Georgii Vins was defamed in a Ukrainian newspaper article, and that their secret "illegal" gatherings were necessary since they were constantly denied registration. They also elected Vins their pastor, but his authorization was likewise denied. They also complained

⁷⁹ GARF, f. 6991, op. 6, d. 226, p. 103-107.

⁸⁰ Vins, *Children of the Storm*, 74.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 85.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 81.

against the arrest of Lydia Vins at the age of 64. They wrote that “one cannot get around [the] facts” that there are “prisoners for the Word of God in the USSR, there are suffering families, there are dispersals of assemblies with the beating of believers, searches, seizure of religious literature and destruction of it, [and] there are children taken away for religious education.” They also noted that for nine years they have applied to state representatives on these matters without a response, but only slander in the papers.⁸⁵

In another complaint to Brezhnev, Kosygin, and Rudenko, believers focused on the breakup of wedding ceremonies, particularly on the one state organs recently broke up in Kiev oblast on June 11, 1971. Those involved had received permission to hold the wedding at the address where it took place, but even before the wedding, police had begun stopping cars and detaining people. Later, the wedding was broken up. The “*Evening Kiev*” newspaper wrote of the incident, that the wedding was bothering other citizens due to the music and singing, even though the hosts never received any complaints at the time, and the police even said they could carry on. The paper also claimed that in fact it was not a wedding since there was prayer, preaching, and singing, but that the wedding was just a foil for these activities. Believers claimed that these activities were part of the wedding custom, and that it was cruel to harass young people at such a special time. They also noted other weddings of believers in 1964, 1967, and 1970 that authorities harassed. The believers asked these heads of state to “instruct local organs to cease the humiliation of human dignity, the insult of our religious feelings,” and to “give believers the possibility to freely, on equal footing with all other citizens, carry out their Christian wedding.”⁸⁶ 163 people signed this letter.⁸⁷

Georgii Vins was arrested again and indicted October 22, 1974, although he had been mostly in hiding during this time and running church affairs underground. At his second trial January 27-31, 1975, although only a few family members were permitted in the courtroom, nearly 200 people from the congregation had gathered outside for support and prayer,

⁸⁵ Keston Archive, “1971 ECB church defends Vins family,” Archive file <Su/Ini/6/23/S>.

⁸⁶ Keston Archive, “1971 Protest at breakup of wedding Kiev,” Archive file <Su/Ini/6/3>. In 1964 fellow adherents were threatened verbally, and the wedding was broken up by physical force, dogs, and SWAT trucks. In 1967, hosts were fined at another wedding, and in 1970 police and soldiers appeared to break up another one. They also complained about a recent mass search of their community that was supposedly targeted at illegal literature, but state agents also took personal letters, notebooks, photo albums, tapes, bibles, songbooks, and copies of the journal “The Christian.”

⁸⁷ Samizdat Archive Association and Radio Liberty, *Sobranie Dokumentov Samizdata [Collection of Samizdat Documents]* (Munich: Samizdat Archive Association, 1972), AS 1111 (Vol. 15, July 1971), “Letter to Brezhnev, Shelest and Rudenko from the Kiev Community of EKhB.”

demonstrating the tight-knit nature of this community.⁸⁸ A witness at the trial described an event with hundreds of youth, “loud choral singing,” and Vins as the “preacher.” When police arrived, instructing him to stop “disturbing the peace,” Vins flouted Soviet authority by not complying but urging those in attendance to “stay on their knees.” Vins was also accused for proselytizing to hundreds of minors at various unauthorized events and distributing unauthorized publications.⁸⁹ Vins was sentenced to five years in prison camps followed by five years of exile in Siberia. As he was escorted to the police car from the courtroom, “the whole crowd of Christians surged toward the police car.” Policemen yelled at them to move aside to let the vehicle pass, but the crowd remained, singing hymns and weeping. After some time of holding the car in peaceful hostage, the crowd moved aside.⁹⁰ Such an event demonstrated yet again why state agents were wary of the power of these tight communities.

Communities elsewhere also suffered similar consequences as the group of CCECB believers in Kiev. An October 11, 1970, house meeting of CCECB believers was broken up in Liubuchany in Moscow Oblast, and many were fined. A cordon of militia, local Commissioner from the CRA Vasil’ev, and other plain clothes “vigilantes”—some of whom were evidently drunk—had surrounded the house and shouted that their praying should stop. They started pushing those gathered regardless of age or health. Some of those involved complained, “They insulted us in every way and threatened to beat us and do whatever they pleased.” Twenty-five petitioned against the unlawfulness of these acts, appealing to religious laws passed under Lenin, and not the more restrictive 1929 ones under Stalin. Trying to advocate for a certain kind of Soviet Union, they wrote, “The legitimization of such arbitrariness does not correspond to the humane and just law of our country” and asked the authorities to right this local abuse.⁹¹ Although Trushin did not reference the gathering in Liubuchany and downplayed CCECB activity in his 1971 report, he noted that gatherings often focused on drawing up statements and that

⁸⁸ Vins, *Children of the Storm*, 110–12. One of the accusations made against Vins was that he incited people to disobey Soviet law in a sermon at a wedding on August 24, 1969. The wedding was also considered a sham event: “the sectarians wished to use the pretext of a wedding to gather for an illegal meeting, which was attended by five hundred people.”

⁸⁹ Samizdat Archive Association and Radio Liberty, *Sobranie Dokumentov Samizdata*, AS 2112-2113.

⁹⁰ Vins, *Children of the Storm*, 114–15.

⁹¹ Keston Archive, “1970 Moscow ECB Church meeting broken up,” Archive file <Su/Ini/6/3>.

their fines and criminal proceedings were deserved for unauthorized gatherings and “slanderous declarations.”⁹²

With the leaders arrested, officials tried to conduct “individual work” with believers, whom they assumed would be more easily influenced. In Dedovsk, Peter Rumachik’s wife Liuba Rumachik remained active despite her husband’s arrest. Trushin described her negatively, as having “secondary education, not working anywhere, having six children from ages 1 to 12, of fanatic attitude, conducts herself defiantly with representatives of local authorities and always offers resistance [...]” Although mothers who had many children were in some cases recognized as heroes of the Soviet Union, officials feared the spread of undesirable religions due to above-average reproduction. An official noted that during “a visit” by state representatives to a gathering, “all participants stopped the singing, but she demonstratively continued to sing and in a rude manner demanded that those present support her, to offer collective resistance.” The official also noted that she gave all of her children a religious education and “systematically [took] them to prayer gatherings.” Since she was CCECB leader V.Ia. Smirnov’s daughter as well as Rumachik’s wife, family ties were also at play.

Local authorities’ attempts toward “exposing the view of life of Rumachik” among local schismatics in the Dedovsk area “brought no positive results,” since “all of them consider the Rumachik family ‘persecuted’ for faith in Christ.” Officials’ efforts to explain to Liuba Rumachik about ceasing illegal activity, about “not ‘dragging’ the children to gatherings” of breakaway Baptists, “got nowhere.” Many believers found threats about removing the children as the biggest factor mobilizing them to Rumachik’s defense. At a meeting with state agents, Liuba Rumachik told them, “You can’t frighten me, since I already heard these threats from local authorities. [...] My husband is already doing time for faith in Christ, as are other brothers and sisters. If this is not enough for you, you can put me in too.” She then “demonstratively withdrew from the office.”⁹³

The community of Dedovsk, like the harassed community in Kiev and CCECB communities from all over the Soviet Union, submitted complaints and petitions to the highest organs of state about their treatment, and they also tried to get copies of their complaints sent abroad. In August 1972 28 believers signed the complaint about the “repressions which

⁹² Keston Archive, “Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report”, Archive file <KGB 90>, pp. 51-53. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 72.

⁹³ Ibid., 54–55.

members of the community have been undergoing for 10 years.” They framed harassment as resulting from the “illegal acts of organs of local authority” who since 1960 began to “exercise administrative interference” in their church services, “insulting the feelings of believers.” They mentioned five of their members who were sentenced by the decree against parasitism, V.Ya Smirnov, P.V. Rumachik, V.F. Ryzhuk, A.L. Kaiukov, and P.V. Aleksandrov, and some of these had been tried multiple times already. Believers tried to win sympathy by noting that as each accused received five years detention, “How much grief and tears was caused through this to the mothers and young children!” They noted how Smirnov lost half of his house because they had used it for services. Although they were released after three and a half years and even “rehabilitated” under Brezhnev, Smirnov’s half of the house was not returned, and in fact, the other half was also taken away. Many of them had been searched and religious literature taken away. They continued to suffer threats of imprisonment or fines for holding their meetings.⁹⁴ CCECB believers in Dedovsk asked fellow believers for prayer but also encouraged them to expect vindication one day—if only in the afterlife—when describing their searches, fines, arrests, imprisonments, and harassment.⁹⁵

A 1973 letter signed by 70 from Dedovsk and sent to Nikolai Podgorny was even more desperate, exclaiming that the “Believers of our Evangelical-baptist brotherhood are faced today with the fact of physical destruction. Violence and terror by atheists take on the most inhuman forms. There is no semblance of any kind of freedom of conscience.” They wrote about living for years under “incessant repression” and were “no longer surprised at constant fines, dispersal of prayer meetings, false charges, harassment [at work], hounding our children in schools [...]” They felt that it was a question of “life and death” due to the recent death of a Baptist believer named Ivan Moiseev, who had apparently been mocked and eventually tortured to death in the army for his outspoken faith. Referring to their pastor Iskovskikh, the believers rhetorically asked “where the presbyter of the Dedovsk community was,” saying that “You gave his body back to us from the Lager prison camp in a coffin!”⁹⁶ The believers asked “who, not experiencing it for himself, would believe that in the century of civilization and progress there are such wild

⁹⁴ Samizdat Archive Association and Radio Liberty, *Sobranie Dokumentov Samizdata*, AS 1309 (Vol. 27, 13 Aug. 1972, 103-105), “Statement of the Church of EKHB of the city of Dedovsk to Podgorny and Rudenko.”

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, AS 1331 (Vol. 27, 10 Dec 1972, 261-262) “Appeal to all believers of the EKHB in our country from those persecuted for the name of Christ of the local church of Moscow and Dedovsk of Moscow Oblast.”

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, AS 1338 (Vol. 27 20 Feb 1973, 357-359) “Members of the Moscow and Dedovsk Church of EKHB, Statement to N.V. Podgorny....”

measures—a match for the rough middle ages—of fighting with believers?!” They complained that state organs prevented them from becoming legal, despite the last ten years of their “haunting the thresholds of all the government departments” in order to gain legal registration. Of course state agents denied them registration because they would not fall in line with state definitions of acceptable religiosity, which included no youth under eighteen participating and submission to established leaders. The only door left open to them was the one leading to “prison,” while state agents had one goal, they felt: “to destroy us physically.”⁹⁷ A few months later in 1973 the Dedovsk community made a statement about another incident, when an April 1st gathering was disrupted by police. Peter Rumachik was arrested soon after his signing of this document.⁹⁸ In May, believers from the Moscow region composed yet another letter to some twenty state entities, including Brezhnev and Kosygin, but also Kuroedov and Trushin, various heads of local soviets, and even the newspaper *Izvestiia*. They summarized the same sorts of accusations, in generalized form. They mentioned one Dedovsk official by name as “especially zealous in lawless actions” in making “the infliction of evil on believers his own favorite profession.”⁹⁹

Officials read these declarations, but Trushin was unmoved. Referring to the letter addressed to Podgorny with their fear of “physical destruction,” Trushin called the allegations in the letter “knowingly false fabrications.” Agents also knew they kept meeting, even if they did not disperse every occasion. Trushin reported that this “Moscow Church” met in the woods, and that children attended these secret gatherings. As before, these were more than “prayer gatherings,” but also featured “underground” activities including writing declarations.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Keston Archive, “1973 statement from 70 baptists in Dedovsk/Moscow region,” Archive file <Su/Ini/6/1973>.

⁹⁸ Keston Archive, “1973 Akt signed by Dedovsk church about meeting interruption,” Archive file <Su/Ini 6/3>. They had just started their service, according to the document, with some 50 people quietly praying on their knees, when police burst in, shouting and speaking rudely, demanding everyone’s information. They were not “disturbing the peace” as accused, since they were quiet and had just started. They tried to claim “inviolability of the person and the dwelling” and their rights under the law. Someone took photographs of them without their permission. Police wrote up a statement which did not correspond to the actual events and asked them to sign it. The believers’ statement was signed by Smirnov’s wife, as well as pastor Peter Rumachik.

⁹⁹ Keston Archive, “1973 Appeal from Moscow believers, details of persecution,” <SU/Ini 6/1973>.

¹⁰⁰ Keston Archive, “Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report”, Archive file <KGB 91>, p. 33. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 75.

State and CCECB church relations were trapped in a cycle. The arrests of leaders like Smirnov or Rumachik were becoming routine.¹⁰¹ The display of brute force and heavy sanctions against these Council of Churches communities demonstrated just how resilient they were in their stance against state bodies. It was a difficult and costly battle for both sides, however, as significant state personnel were drawn into managing these communities while the state's religious reputation abroad was suffering, as believers distributed their own accounts were distributed to concerned humanitarian and religious organizations.

Yet the position of the CRA still did not change. In 1973 Kuroedov sent an instructive letter about ensuring that religious organizations abide by the law. He mentioned specifically the Council of Churches, and he listed the arrests of various leaders across the USSR, including Lydia Vins, who worked for relatives of those imprisoned and wrote "slandorous" letters. He characterized the CCECB as run by leaders who called on adherents to ignore the legislation on cults and keep active within "unregistered religious society."¹⁰² In his 1974 report, Trushin had no new directions for dealing with the community in Dedovsk, nor its "slandorous" letters claiming the "physical annihilation" of their community. He also mentioned Rumachik's wife, Liuba Rumachik, and her constant "slandorous" efforts as a leader of the Council of Relatives of Prisoners of ECB."

Characteristically, Trushin thought it necessary to "take concrete measures aimed at ceasing the unlawful activities of each group of adherents of the so-called 'Council of Churches ECB,'" but he was not very concrete in his suggestions. As usual, he blamed the leaders while characterizing ordinary believers as undiscerning followers, saying that "in the groups of sectarian underground the majority of believers are composed of honest, soviet people, trapped by their political immaturity and illiteracy under the influence of malicious religious fanatics." Trushin and other officials always considered people to act in accordance with their socio-economic reality, meaning that deviations from socialist behavior (religiosity) meant that someone else was to blame as a malignant force. Thus his primary suggestion was for "individual work with believers," since he saw the battle as one between religious leaders and officials over influence over susceptible citizens. Beyond this, he called for an end to CCECB

¹⁰¹ Ibid., Archive file <KGB 91>, p. 34. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 75.

¹⁰² TsGA Moskv, f. 3004, op. 1, d. 98, pp. 93-94.

publishing and the general coordination of efforts with other authorities.¹⁰³ He also noted Rumachik's third arrest as leader of illegal activity.¹⁰⁴

That the Soviet Union signed on to the Helsinki Accords in 1975, agreeing to internationally established standards pertaining to human rights, boded well for the CCECB, but in reality, little changed. Around the same time, in July of 1975, the Soviet Government made public some changes to the articles of the constitution pertaining to religion. In 1943, Stalin had not changed the 1929 articles, only state practice. In 1962, the government apparently issued decrees (*ukazi*) pertaining to changes in these articles, but they were never made public. Analysts have largely regarded the 1975 changes as partially revealing these decrees, but with some modifications. The main "change" was that previous decrees were made articles, and the actual responsibilities of the Council for Religious Affairs were now made public. Most de jure changes only reflected prior de facto ones.¹⁰⁵

The other significant change at this time was that CRA officials increasingly pushed CCECB-leaning congregations toward registration. Their best chance for legalization remained to register as an AUCECB community or join with an existing one, as in many places legal communities existed near underground ones. A new option, however, was autonomous registration. As a concession intended to limit clandestine religiosity, it appears that around 1975 representatives of the Council for Religious Affairs began to permit and even encourage churches to register autonomously, overlooking any requirement of belonging to the officially recognized AUCECB.¹⁰⁶ Despite the fact that CCECB-affiliated communities did not have "dogmatic differences" with AUCECB churches, in the largely accurate words of commissioner Trushin, "these groups and communities do not unite only because their leaders do not get along with each other, not all are equally authoritative for ordinary believers." His impression was that AUCECB leadership and senior presbyters had lost interest in uniting with the CCECB altogether.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ GARF, f. 6991, op. 6, d. 640, pp. 90, 92-93.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., d. 1193, pp. 37-38.

¹⁰⁵ Walter Sawatsky, "The New Soviet Law on Religion," *Religion in Communist Lands* 4, no. 2 (1976): 4-10.

¹⁰⁶ Michael Rowe, "Soviet Policy toward Evangelicals," *Religion in Communist Lands* 7, no. 1 (1979): 4-12; Walter Sawatsky, "The Reform Baptists Today," *Religion in Communist Lands* 8, no. 1 (1980): 23-38; Walter Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II* (Kitchener, Ont.; Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1981) I'm relying on Rowe and Sawatsky for this information, but I have not been able to independently verify when the CRA permitted or advocated autonomous registration.

¹⁰⁷ GARF, 72.

Autonomous registration further weakened the cause of unity among church leaders, while granting the possibility of relief to those afraid of the repercussions of unauthorized church gatherings. The option of autonomous registration meant that the AUCECB was no longer the only legal path to legitimacy for protestant groups, thereby weakening its status. Also, autonomous registration was often predicated upon the applying church's admission that it held no affiliation with any overarching organization, a requirement aimed particularly at the CCECB. Thus, state authorities now had to concede a church's independence from the AUCECB, but they hoped that renegade churches would want to gather legally without fear of sanction, but at known times and locations. Some CCECB leaders and church members adopted an intransigent position against any kind of relationship with state authorities, especially since such congregations were still expected to abide by Soviet legislation in its entirety. Others felt that registration was acceptable under such terms of autonomy, as evangelical protestant movements had long histories of local church autonomy, and submission to centralized church leadership was only expected in the Soviet Union since WWII.¹⁰⁸

Gradually more unregistered ECB and Pentecostal churches gained registration without belonging to the AUCECB. Vins' congregation in Kiev took this option in 1975 while Vins was in prison, but it managed to continue its activities and education with youth. It may have been one of the only openly functioning Sunday Schools in a registered church.¹⁰⁹ Also, the number of those arrested for their affiliation with the CCECB had gradually declined since 1968. On average, the number of new arrests was less than those released.¹¹⁰

In places where there were many CCECB churches, the pressure was on respective commissioners to convince them to register, especially as AUCECB congregations, but autonomously if needed. In Moscow Oblast, Trushin had fewer CCECB communities to be concerned about than did his counterparts in the Ukrainian Republic, although some of the CCECB leaders were active in his jurisdiction. Even in Dedovsk with its history of outspoken CCECB leaders like Rumachik, in 1975, a group of around 60-70 people registered a church there as an autonomous congregation, perhaps attracted to the possibility that they could be legally authorized to gather. But not all congregants accepted the registration. As one woman put it in an interview, she had been "baptized" into this group in 1961 when it was unregistered, and she

¹⁰⁸ Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II*, 274–75.

¹⁰⁹ Michael Rowe, *Russian Resurrection: Strength in Suffering: A History of Russia's Evangelical Church* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1994), 183.

¹¹⁰ Sawatsky, "The Reform Baptists Today," 32.

wanted to remain “loyal” to it. One pastor told them that “before God,” they did not have to register.¹¹¹ As another interviewee noted, by registering, they “committed to the law entirely,” but by not doing so, they “were free.”¹¹² As it would turn out, however, even those who sided with registering did not commit wholeheartedly to the law.

At first, the move to autonomously register in Dedovsk served as a model for officials. With authorities still quite concerned about “the unlawful activities of schismatic baptists and Pentecostals,” on June 21, 1976, there was a meeting of several local and state authorities from Moscow Oblast and the city of Dedovsk, as well as representatives from the Procurator’s office, KGB, Moscow Committee of the Communist Party, and CRA. At this meeting, Trushin presented a report on the “activities of the unregistered sectarian groups and the measures taken to combat their unlawful activities in Moscow Oblast.”¹¹³ He defended his past approach, that registering twelve AUCECB churches from 1966 until 1976 “undermined the main base of the replenishment of the supporters of the schism.”¹¹⁴

By the time of the meeting, Trushin estimated that more than 100 from among those formerly unregistered now attended the autonomously registered church. Those not joining this church, Trushin said, considered themselves the “persecuted ECB church of Moscow.” At the meeting, he wanted officials from the Dedovsk area—the Istrinskii and Krasnogorskii districts—to “share experiences” of how things were now that this group had independently registered. Officials’ opinion was that although not all ties had been severed between this church’s leaders and the “underground” CCECB, people from these districts had not been seen at any of the underground gatherings, whereas before, they attended “nearly all of the gatherings.” Nor had they been signatories of any “slandorous declarations” which “schismatics” frequently sent to governmental bodies.¹¹⁵

One lesson Trushin felt they learned was that punishment alone for “underground” groups was insufficient in combating “schismatic” activity. Moreover, local authorities made things worse when they fined people for attending unauthorized gatherings, as by law, only the hosts and organizers should be fined.¹¹⁶ For “ordinary believers,” Trushin argued, “explanatory

¹¹¹ Personal interview with Zinaida Mikhailovna, May 24, 2015.

¹¹² Personal interview with Nina Stepanova Smirnova, May 24, 2015.

¹¹³ GARF, d. 989, p. 68.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 73.

¹¹⁵ GARF, f. 6991, op. 6, d. 989, pp. 69-70.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 70–71.

and educational” work was needed, but district authorities were blameworthy for not organizing it. As one example of the failure of merely “administrative measures,” Trushin told the story of a certain leader from Zhukovskii, who along with his wife, organized and attended many unauthorized gatherings. He was fined numerous times, but with no effect. Yet after officials of this region conducted “painstaking work of an educational character,” he stopped his unlawful activity, broke ties with the “schismatics,” and neither he nor his wife attended illegal gatherings. What such “educational work” entailed in this case, Trushin did not explain.¹¹⁷ Yet he did say that “experience shows” that “positive results” stemmed from carrying out such work with people at their places of work, where “their unlawful activity is condemned in workers collectives, professional organizations, at the councils of pensioners, at village gatherings, at councils of the general public, exposed through local press.” It is not clear whether authorities distinguished between educational work and social pressure or harassment. Yet such measures happened rarely, Trushin reported, and efforts in the city lagged way behind those across the oblast. It was, Trushin claimed, the “educational work” with ordinary believers and “ringleaders” of the schismatics in the Istrinskii and Krasnogorskii districts that led to the autonomously registered church in Dedovsk in 1975. From this work, Trushin claimed, their “activeness” decreased “slightly,” the number of “grave” violations of legislation diminished, and around one-third of the initial number of schismatics eventually started attending gatherings of registered religious societies. If the state wanted to “put an end to the sectarian underground,” Trushin concluded, then the necessary step was increased personal educational work particularly with Muscovites who were active in the underground.¹¹⁸ The corollary was registering communities who agreed to abide by religious legislation, featured below.

Muscovite CCECB adherents had persistently requested that the state grant it registration to meet in Moscow as a CCECB church.¹¹⁹ A group of 68 made the request in 1976, twelve of whom were residents of the city of Moscow. This group, according to Trushin’s information, was calling itself the Muscovite Church ECB and wanted to register as such in Moscow, although many of its participants were from places like Dedovsk and had not supported other registration attempts.¹²⁰ Representatives from “Moscow” and Dedovsk also

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 71–72.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 72–75.

¹¹⁹ GARF, d. 1394, p. 126.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, d. 1193, p. 3.

continued to write letters to state officials with the same basic complaints, showing the persistent links among CCECB adherents across the oblast.¹²¹

Trushin and other officials took note of the signatories to pursue “explanatory work” with them about the “untenable nature of the allegations they raised.”¹²² They also had no intention of granting their request for church registration, since this group was committed to its affiliation with the CCECB, which officials saw as a group of “schismatics” that had separated with the AUCECB and was characterized by more direct conflict with state and AUCECB representatives. The CRA agreed to reject their request due to their consistent practice of “violating religious legislation.”¹²³

When Rumachik was released from prison in April 1977, Moscow oblast authorities wanted to deny him a residence permit in Dedovsk. Trushin, however, insisted that he receive it due to the fact that his wife and six children lived there, and since he was an “‘authoritative personality’ among the baptists-schismatics” across the country, his supporters would “for sure organize their movement to his defense, using this fact for their anti-Soviet goals.” He also noted that it was still unclear how Rumachik “will behave” upon release since in his absence the group in Dedovsk had registered according to autonomous status, without CCECB affiliation.¹²⁴ Trushin’s comments at the 1976 meeting indicate that he had reason to hope that this registration would take some force out of Rumachik’s more intransigent stance against any CCECB involvement with the state as well as reduce believers’ complaints (especially to foreign audiences) that the state was persecuting them by not allowing them to register.

Despite gaining autonomous registration, the executive committee of the Istrinskii district Soviet would not approve this Baptist community’s purchase of a dwelling to be used as a prayer house. They had been meeting in various homes of participants while the district

¹²¹ TsGA Moskv, f. 3004, op. 1, d. 103, pp. 82-83. This same group wrote a letter in December 1976 demanding Rumachik’s release from prison, showing the links that existed between CCECB followers in Moscow and Dedovsk. In this letter from “The Moscow Church ECB (CC-[Council of Churches]),” the signatories asked for the end to the imprisonment and poor treatment of Rumachik, whom they said was serving a sentence “for faith in God and service in the Church.” They also mentioned the general “repression for religious conviction,” which was “a disgrace for our country, the most democratic in the world.” Dedovsk believers signed a letter with the same content, adding the complaint about the imprisonment of a certain presbyter Timofeev, as well as the fact that some of their “brothers” who were imprisoned over the last fifteen years, including V.Ia. Smirnov, N.V. Smirnov, Ryzhuk, Kruchinin, had not received rehabilitation for what had been presumably wrongful imprisonment.

¹²² GARF, 8.

¹²³ Ibid., 73.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 37.

executive committee rejected their requests with excuses, such as the district in question was “only for housing construction,” that the property in question was “already sold to a private person,” or that there already was an ECB prayer house, unconcerned about the distinctions between the AUCECB and the new autonomous one.

The community appealed to Trushin about their situation. He found the “truth behind the rejection” by conversing with the secretary of the committee, who said that among the committee there was simply a “reluctance for this religious society to have a prayer house.” Trushin argued that it was the right of the Council for Religious Affairs to decide such a matter, not the local committee, and that to reject the purchase meant that “monitoring its activities on the part of the committees of Dedovsk and Istrinskii councils is almost absent.” He considered it “necessary” to grant them the purchase a dwelling to be used as a prayer house.¹²⁵ The Council of Religious Affairs agreed with Trushin, as did the executive committee of the Moscow Oblast Council, allowing them to purchase 36b on Krasnoflotskaya Street in Dedovsk for their gatherings.¹²⁶ They saved their money to make the purchase. Trushin and other CRA officials were committed to offering legal paths for religious groups to operate.

But as for those CCECB members trying to register a church in Moscow, they had no advocate from among the state officials. By 1978, they were exasperated, complaining that they had received no response to their petition, but that they had been “subject to the severest repressions,” such as numerous heavy fines, dispersal during services, and humiliation before fellow employees at work gatherings. They demanded that the question of their registration be resolved immediately, and that they be allowed to meet. Representatives from the CRA, the executive committee of the City of Moscow, and the district executive committee in question were unanimous: to reject their request. Their reasons were many. They noted that this group acknowledged only the 1918 law of the separation of church and state but not the 1929 laws pertaining to the registration of religious organizations. This group insisted on belonging to the “illegal” CCECB, and to grant it registration on these terms would “de facto” give it recognition as an organization. The CCECB still supposedly encouraged believers to not abide by Soviet religious laws, were “denigrating the soviet way of life,” attracted “under-age” to gatherings, and its leaders were “constantly provoking ordinary believers to various kinds of antisocial activities.” Inspector A.A. Gurov of the CRA called its leaders N.P. Pozdniakov, N.P. Poliakov, and

¹²⁵ Ibid., 46–47, 50.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 43–45.

V.F. Simakin “extremists.” One official complained that Pozdniakov “distorts and distributes malicious slanderous letters with regard to soviet organs about the alleged persecution of believers for religious convictions,” and another mentioned that such types of letters were also distributed abroad (which was in fact the case). A meeting between the above leaders and CRA Commissioner of Moscow Plekhanov did not result in any change in opinions on either side.

In a 1978 letter Pozdniakov and the others mentioned they were coming to a “dead-end.” Officials agreed with them; they did not find a compromise. As Plekhanov saw it, the “demands” of the “baptists-schismatics” precluded further consideration. Although CRA officials had compromised previously in their dealings with ECB believers and even CCECB believers with autonomous registration, in this case, they would not. They saw this attempt as a “ploy” to get the CCECB and “the illegality of its activity” recognized, as well as to gain “unlimited propaganda of religion.”¹²⁷

Yet not all in the CRA were convinced that granting autonomous registration to the breakaway Baptists in Dedovsk had been positive, and Trushin found himself the subject of blame for this case. CRA chief Kuroedov received information from certain officials who claimed “serious deficiencies” in managing the autonomously registered community in Dedovsk. Kuroedov wrote that since the 1975 registration, Trushin and other local authorities had “not provided effective control” over the community’s activities, but “acquiesced in the illegal activities of pastors and believers.” Their ties with “the illegal center CCECB” remained, and they did illegal things “inspired by their leaders.” Since Rumachik—whom they identified as the de-facto leader of the CCECB after Vins was in prison—returned from his most recent incarceration, he, along with Smirnov, had been influencing the community, undeterred by its autonomously registered status. Officials blamed Trushin for not taking adequate measures in educating the believers about religious legislation. There were numerous aspects to the religious society that were legally murky, like their finances and the fact that their requests for state approval for a purchase of a premises for gatherings “were unreasonably rejected.” As a result, they’d been meeting in many different places, “essentially uncontrolled.”¹²⁸ Although Trushin had helped foster approval for a purchase two years prior, in February 1978 the congregation found that its

¹²⁷ GARF, d. 1394, pp. 121-128.

¹²⁸ Keston Archive, “Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report”, Archive file <KGB 200>, p. 1, 3. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 92.

savings for a church had been “confiscated.”¹²⁹ State agents were far from unified in their approach to religious policy.

Judging by the May 30 date of Kuroedov’s letter, what likely caused officials’ strong reaction was that on May 1-2 of 1978 the Dedovsk community sponsored “a mass gathering of sectarians” from many regions of the Soviet Union, and it “bore an openly antisocial character.” The May gathering was held at the farmstead of Ryzhuk, “converted to a prayer building without the agreement of local authorities.” Around 1,000 “sectarians” gathered there, “the bulk comprised of youth” who stayed in the courtyard. With the help of speakers, they heard sermons and poems, “many of which bore a slanderous, antisocial character.” They heard about fighting “the machinations of satan,” about bringing the news of Christ to the people, ideological preparation for those heading to the army, encouraging support of “‘prisoners’ and ‘martyrs’ of the faith,” and so on.¹³⁰

Although after this event authorities barricaded the place the autonomously registered Dedovsk community had been temporarily using as a church,¹³¹ Tarasov and others recommended that they work toward having a legal dwelling for the gatherings so that they could be observed closely. He instructed local authorities to “constant oversight” over prayer gatherings and any other gatherings of these people, and to clarify the “most active extremists-members” of this group. Also, he recommended “prophylactic measures” at the places of work and worker-collectives of these members.¹³² Kuroedov asked that Trushin be shown his “serious deficiencies” in maintaining control, although Kuroedov did not mention the obstruction of other authorities as blameworthy. To help improve the situation, “painstaking explanatory work” with the church’s members would be needed. Kuroedov called on the Department of the Affairs of Catholic, Armenian, Protestant, Jewish, and sectarian faiths to “strengthen control over the formulation of oversight” of such autonomously registered communities by CRA officials and district authorities.¹³³

Although Trushin’s precise reaction is unknown, he was certainly accustomed to the practice of officials blaming other departments for problems. His and local officials’ reaction can

¹²⁹ Rowe, “Soviet Policy toward Evangelicals,” 9.

¹³⁰ Keston Archive, “Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report”, Archive file <KGB 93>, p. 1, 4. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 100.

¹³¹ Rowe, “Soviet Policy toward Evangelicals,” 9.

¹³² Keston Archive, “Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report”, Archive file <KGB 200>, p. 5. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 92.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 1–2.

be deduced by how the church responded later. The community in Dedovsk returned all their registration papers, asking their registration to be rescinded. In July 1978, not long after the May gathering and the reproaches against Trushin, they declared that “we cannot observe [the legislation on religious cults] since its items contradict the word of god, the charter of ‘CCECB’ and our convictions.” In a declaration from October, they cited the arrests of their “brothers” as making further cooperation impossible. The *Brotherly Leaflet* from the end of 1978 featured a word from the Dedovsk church calling on believers not to register, saying that the “tactic of godlessness” was to observe all their activities and thereby “kill everything holy” in the church and deprive it of “the life of the spirit.”¹³⁴ Trushin’s office and Dedovsk officials evidently had responded with action to Kuroedov’s admonition.

During the late 1970s work in eliminating unregistered groups in Kiev oblast was not proceeding efficiently. Commissioner N.A. Mishenin had been struggling for years to convince CCECB communities to register. He had to overcome their suspicions, arguing that “no one is persecuted for their faith,” and that Vins—the local champion of the CCECB cause—had been imprisoned “for violating soviet laws as a parasite.” Oblast communities remained unconvinced and did not register.¹³⁵ Officials also struggled to convince CCECB leaders to give up their work. Natasha Vins decided to follow in her father’s footsteps - working underground in printing and distributing Christian literature, traveling all over the country to make such deliveries. To eliminate the problem altogether, Georgii Vins, along with his wife and children, were unexpectedly exiled in 1979 to the United States in a prisoner swap. By 1979, instead of hundreds of CCECB adherents in prison as there were a decade before, there were under forty. But the exile of Vins and others to the West indicated not the state’s relaxation toward the CCECB, but more a change in tactics, likely because imprisonment harmed Soviet reputation.¹³⁶ Still in 1980, despite commissioner Mishenin’s support, churches in Kiev oblast were very reluctant to register, and for those that would, bureaucratic obstacles did not disappear.¹³⁷ Despite the difficulties, some officials worked toward promoting above-ground and legally recognized religious practice, while others undermined such a policy.

¹³⁴ Keston Archive, “Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report”, Archive file <KGB 93>, pp. 1-2. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 100.

¹³⁵ GARF, 69–70.

¹³⁶ Sawatsky, “The Reform Baptists Today,” 36.

¹³⁷ GARF, d. 1888, p. 24. Mishenin mentioned one group that had been pursuing registration for seven years but was having problems meeting the requirements of the official documentation.

With Vins gone, Rumachik was the most well-known CCECB leader besides Gennadii Kriuchkov, who was consistently in hiding and evading arrest. No longer registered, the Dedovsk community was holding meetings at various addresses as well as in the forest. In 1980 Rumachik was arrested again in connection with such activity, as was Smirnov and two others.¹³⁸ Despite the arrests, in 1981, they again held “illegal gatherings” in forests and at various addresses, although its “ringleaders” Smirnov, Ryzhuk, and Kruchinin were gone. At “every such meeting,” wrote Trushin, there were “vicious lies about our country, our soviet state, and our social system.” Those joining this group were the “most extremist” people from around the oblast. As they had often done in the past before the period when they had autonomous registration, they had places and paths in the forest, even swampy areas, where they met for preaching, prayer, and singing. They did this in winter and summer, and there would even be older women with canes, standing the whole time, and usually without a meal. If they met secretly in an apartment, which they often did on Wednesday evenings for Bible Study, they generally did not sing, but if they met in a house, they sang more freely. Having as many as sixty gathering in a home could easily attract attention, however.¹³⁹

When leaders were arrested, new ones emerged. Officials claimed that Rumachik had previously “recruited” Vladimir Khomenko from a registered church in Kubinka, a son of two members of the ECB church there. He was arrested in February 1981.¹⁴⁰ When Smirnov returned for the fourth time from prison in 1982, officials noted that he and his four sons were leading the congregation.¹⁴¹

Thus toward the end of the Brezhnev era, a sort of normalcy had emerged even to unauthorized Baptist activity. Trushin continued to blame authorities for not taking any measures in response to “schismatics” who illegally held gatherings in Elektrogorsk, representative of his routine disagreement with local officials who were either inactive or obstructionist.¹⁴² Agents also continued to monitor contact between the small groups of breakaway Baptists in contact with members of registered ECB churches. After the aborted

¹³⁸ Keston Archive, “Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report”, Archive file <KGB 94>, p. 2. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 104.

¹³⁹ Personal Interview with Nina Stepanova Smirnova, May 24, 2015.

¹⁴⁰ Keston Archive, “Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report”, Archive file <KGB 94>, pp. 2-3. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 104.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., Archive file <KGB 95>, pp. 10-11. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 108.

¹⁴² Ibid., Archive file <KGB 43>, pp. 9-11. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 99. In Podol'skii district there were schismatics who periodically met, but the authorities seemed to downplay their activity and hadn't been responding in concrete or systematic, according to Trushin.

autonomous registration in Dedovsk, the oblast's five smallish groups periodically met at various addresses, but they did not wish to have contact with officials and did not wish to pursue registration. They maintained the same grievances as before (separation of church-state), and police would fine them from time to time. The "Moscow Church ECB," in which "schismatics" from all over the oblast and city participated, continued to meet in Moscow and in other locales. Local authorities were "inadequate" in stopping such illegal activity, and in their reports to the CRA they only mentioned a fraction of the gatherings for which Trushin's office had information.¹⁴³

Problems Also Remain in Managing Registered Churches

Over the same time period of 1970-1982, AUCECB churches and personnel presented their own problems, if a little less pressing or contentious ones. The early 1970s were relatively stable, and the number of registered churches remained basically constant. The Church grew steadily, but not aggressively, and the majority of participants and even new members were women over fifty, at least according to official reports.¹⁴⁴ Yet officials remained wary of the AUCECB churches, as contacts between CCECB and AUCECB members never disappeared, and because the possibility for the AUCECB to become religiously dynamic remained. Both of these concerns were realized in the 1970s in Moscow Oblast, most particularly due to the youth of the Central Moscow Church (MoECB).

Although CCECB and AUCECB leaders consistently failed in their attempts to reconcile, this does not mean that adherents to the groups maintained clear separation, nor does it mean that believers only sided with one group against the other. A CRA report in 1970 indicated that most registered Baptist churches had believers who "supported" the Council of Churches, and some advocates of the CCECB frequented registered Baptist churches for services and would read messages and statements on behalf of the organization.¹⁴⁵ At the local level, there were significant contacts between adherents to both groups, as in many cases their acquaintance predated the 1961 initiative movement. Moreover, there were churches across the Soviet Union who changed allegiances between the AUCECB and CCECB more than once. Even some who disagreed with certain AUCECB leaders or their activities but remained within the All-Union

¹⁴³ Ibid., Archive file <KGB 94>, pp. 2-3. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 104.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., Archive file <KGB 90>, p. 45. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 72.

¹⁴⁵ GARF, f. 6991, op. 6, d. 296, p. 40.

Council expressed concern for those from the Reformist movement who were imprisoned.¹⁴⁶ As one interviewee noted, whereas church leaders from the two groups did not associate, young people would come together “as friends,” and certain gatherings attracted youth representative of both groups.¹⁴⁷ Some youth were attracted to the initiativists and unregistered groups, admiring their courage and sympathizing with their roguish posture. Such sympathy concerned Church and state authorities.¹⁴⁸

Although some groups remained unregistered because they wished to freely include youth under eighteen in services, a striking feature of the 1970s was the emergence of above-eighteen unofficial youth groups in ECB churches. In the late 1960s, there were few youth involved at MoECB, and there were no groups.¹⁴⁹ Upon his return from the Army to MoECB in 1967, Nikolai Il’ich Epishin was part of a new trend: young people chatting after the service. Initially church personnel requested them to leave after the service, but eventually they had to “simply drive them out of the building.” They couldn’t remain in the church for very long after the service, but they would walk together slowly toward the metro station as their “cover.”

Before long three unofficial groups had emerged at MoECB, designated by leaders Epishin, Aleksandr Semchenko, and Aleksandr Fedichkin, and later a fourth emerged led by Vera Blinova. Each group had its characteristics – one tended to have children of intellectuals, another of proletarians, and another of people from other regions of the USSR. Each group had its own spontaneously-occurring gatherings, but eventually once a month they had a joint gathering on the balcony of the church. Many of them participated in a youth choir that was allowed to sing from time to time in the services.

Finding places to meet was difficult. Often Muscovites opened their apartments for meetings. They employed all kinds of “tricks” to meet together, like almost anybody’s birthday, and at such parties they sometimes proselytized to unbelievers, who sometimes reported them to the police. They also went on excursions and hikes or gathered at Lenin Hills or in the forest. They would pray for each other, and sometimes young people “repented” (i.e., converted to the

¹⁴⁶ Walter Sawatsky, “Russian Evangelicals Hold a Congress,” *Religion in Communist Lands* 3, no. 1–3 (1975): 14.

¹⁴⁷ Personal interview with Nina Stepanova Smirnova, May 24, 2015.

¹⁴⁸ Aleksandr Trofimovich Semchenko, “Vospominaniia Po Chetvergam [Reminiscences on Thursdays],” accessed March 2, 2017, <http://www.atsemchenko.inprogress.net/thursdays>.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. See the recollections of Nikolai Epishin for more on this. Nina Smirnova makes the same claim (Personal Interview, May 24, 2015).

faith). Gatherings—and police dispersals—became more common. But, Semchenko recalls, “it was hard to deter such energetic young people like us.”

They also started to travel in groups, visiting the small Baptist churches in the oblast, where they’d meet other youth and be allowed to participate in the service, reciting poetry and even preaching. The MoECB leadership did not allow their participation. Some of them belonged to a youth orchestra group, and they visited other Baptist congregations to play and sing. When Epishin informed church leader Mikhail Zhidkov of their initial intention to do so, he replied “[Travel] with an orchestra! They’ll immediately summon me to the KGB!” Epishin defended their trip, saying it was too late to cancel since it had been planned.¹⁵⁰ Energized by each other after services, they’d sing loudly on the trains or metro, and then enjoy trying to evade the police.¹⁵¹

Trushin and other officials noted such activity. In a 1971 report, he described how one such “youth group” of the AUCECB toured with musical instruments, and how there were performances in various towns and villages with singing, poetry, vignettes, “all with a religious content.” Trushin described the character of much of this as “undesirable” (*nepotrebnii*).¹⁵² The problem for officials was that such activity was new and not well-defined in religious legislation as the participants were over eighteen. After dispersals or comments by officials, elders reprimanded them or their parents.

Another trend that concerned officials was the “unreliability” of leaders. When it came time for a new senior presbyter over Moscow Oblast, the AUCECB recommended A.L. Kaiukov, describing him as “politically reasonable” and “authoritative” among believers. In his assessment, Trushin dissented, noting that he had once been “detailed in informing” on ECB and “schismatics” activities. He had earlier demonstrated his “loyalty” by “angrily” opposing the CCECB and by making “correct” comments about the situation in Czechoslovakia in 1968. But lately, he “closed up,” consistently knew “nothing” about CCECB activity, and denied his attendance at Iskovskikh’s funeral in Dedovsk (when official information had him there with other “schismatics”). Where once he used to “on his own initiative” provide information, he now only came “for summons,” but to every question merely replied, “I don’t know” or “haven’t heard.” He was also “covering for people” who were preaching but came from unregistered

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Keston Archive, “Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report”, Archive file <KGB 90>, p. 47. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 72.

church groups.¹⁵³ This was not the kind of person state agents wanted in such a position, as they expected complete trustworthiness toward state initiatives. Kaiukov was arrested not long after in connection with CCECB activities.

Officials routinely watched certain pastors for what they preached, such as Aleksandr Karev, General Secretary of the AUCECB until his death in 1971. Churches were routinely filled on Thursdays and Sundays because Karev was preaching, and the youth of MoECB likewise recognized him as an exceptional preacher. After Karev's death, church leaders suddenly publicly introduced Aleksei Bychkov, unknown to many of MoECB and likely hand-picked by state authorities. Although he did not seem to have theological training, Bychkov began to preach in the Central Church and soon after became the AUCECB General Secretary.¹⁵⁴

State authorities prized trustworthiness especially among the leadership of the AUCECB and at the Central Moscow Church, since they managed the visits of foreign guests who requested to attend a Protestant Church service and might participate in a Sunday morning service at MoECB. One especially important guest was President of the United States Richard Nixon, who planned to attend the church on May 28, 1972. Coordinating Nixon's visit with the religious center of the Baptists was Bychkov. The plan was that Nixon would leave in the middle of the service, after only 45 minutes, perhaps due to Nixon's busyness or to his reluctance to attend a long service featuring at least three sermons. Officials noted that he wrote in their comment book that "we could honestly pray with You in your church during the time of our stay in Moscow." He also left 100 rubles. The choir, congregation, and address by Bychkov to the President "made an impression on Nixon," who bowed three times.¹⁵⁵ A positive, incident-free visit reinforced Soviet claims abroad about "religious freedom" there, justifying state concerns for MoECB reliability.

An AUCECB Congress in December 1974 also demonstrated the reliability of the organization in state eyes. The fact alone that there had been Congresses in 1963, 1966, 1969, and now 1974 was remarkable for the Churches in the Soviet Union. Trushin's report on the event indicated that the Congress passed "in a spirit of loyalty and support of internal and external politics of the Soviet state." Delegates also "rejected the slanderous declarations of the

¹⁵³ Ibid., Archive file <KGB 90>, pp. 49-50. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 72.

¹⁵⁴ Semchenko, "Vospominaniia Po Chetvergam [Reminiscences on Thursdays]."

¹⁵⁵ TsGA Moskv, d. 97, pp. 76, 78.

leaders of the so-called ‘council of churches ECB’” and “condemned their illegal activity.”¹⁵⁶ Foreign observers noted that one of the two delegations from the CCECB was not permitted to enter because they “had not come with good will.” They likewise noticed the prevailing spirit of optimism, and that any delegates’ suggestions were very modest and cautious at best. Even the illustrious Orthodox Metropolitan Nikodim attended the 1974 Congress, demonstrating an ecumenism that would have been unimaginable decades ago.¹⁵⁷

Yet state information indicated other currents afoot as well. There were some negative “tendencies” in sermons in the ECB and the need for more control. Also, delegates spread various anonymous statements urging others to not support the AUCECB, condemning their “links with atheists,” discouraging votes for “loyal” clergy to leadership positions, and encouraging others in “the fight for the interests of the church.” The CRA’s opinion was there was not enough “control” over the registered ECB communities, and a lack of educational work with pastors and active church-members. Too often “the worst offenders, extremists, and fanatics” were not removed from leadership positions.¹⁵⁸

Although in the commonplace religious life across the oblast, Trushin said that there were not “negative tendencies” among pastors, yet “periodically hidden attitudes” of church leaders necessitated “strengthening control” over their activity. Examples included public reading of the “*Fraternal Herald*” (*Bratskii Vestnik*, the officially approved publication of the AUCECB), attendance by the traveling youth orchestra, “inappropriate” sermons by head pastors, and use of pulpit by “unregistered” preachers.¹⁵⁹ It is unclear precisely why state representatives allowed the publication but disapproved of its reading in public. As a result, Trushin intended to give instructions to district and city officials where Baptists were active, that they need to “decisively combat any attempts” by pastors to “circumvent the laws in their goals to activate religious life,” pay more attention toward educating them in “feelings of civic consciousness and respect toward soviet laws,” to “strictly follow” attempts to work with children and youth and forbid baptizing those underage, to stop youth choirs from forming, and other similar efforts.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶ Keston Archive, “Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report”, Archive file <KGB 174>, p. 1. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 85.

¹⁵⁷ Sawatsky, “Russian Evangelicals Hold a Congress,” 12–13.

¹⁵⁸ Keston Archive, “Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report”, Archive file <KGB 174>, p. 1. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 85.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

The most disturbing new manifestations of religious activity for state officials were occurring in the MoECB Church, however. Officials may have granted the MoECB a pseudo-privileged status vis-à-vis other, especially unregistered, Evangelical churches, but they remained cautious in dealing with its personnel. Although registered, CRA official Plekhanov nevertheless still referred to the entire Evangelical Christians-Baptists Church as a “sectarian religious organization,”¹⁶¹ and its participants were never far from becoming “extremists” or fanatics to officials, or at a minimum, they always bordered on being excessively active in their religiosity. On January 14, 1974, 152 believers of the MoECB signed a petition for obtaining another house of worship in Moscow, since theirs was “too full.” The petitioners noted that other ECB religious communities in smaller cities with far fewer members had more than one prayer house to accommodate, suggesting a government-inflicted injustice.¹⁶² Commissioner Plekhanov wrote to the central CRA office to inform them that “a group of extremist-minded Baptists (ecb)” wanted to open another prayer house in Moscow, since the one could not hold all those who wished to attend and—ostensibly quoting the petitioners’ words—because “the members of the community do not have the possibility of fully satisfying their spiritual necessities,” showing their grasp of accepted state rhetoric pertaining to religion. Aware of the government’s use of the church for its own religious propaganda for foreigners, the petitioners suggested that “such a circumstance leads many visiting guests of our country, as well as of overseas, to an incorrect view if the authorities deliberately do not given consent to open a second prayer house.” Officials noted that believers named Semchenko and Epishin—the youth leaders—were “the leaders of the whole deal” and collected signatures after one of the services.¹⁶³

Plekhanov’s report indicates that the youth were doing more than spending time together—they were mobilizing around church issues. Some of the young people were discovering, as Semchenko put it, that “As in any church,” even in MoECB, there was the “façade life and the backstage [one].” Those things they considered most significant were “learned in the hallways, not from the pulpit.” Because the congregation hall—with an official capacity of

¹⁶¹ GARF, f. 6991, op. 6, d. 785, T. 2, p. 4.

¹⁶² Ibid., d. 784, p. 24; TsGA Moskvyy, f. 3004, op. 1, d. 100, pp. 115-116.

¹⁶³ GARF, d. 784, p. 24.

1,500—was routinely full, they met in the hallways, often encountering visitors who had not arrived in time to get a seat.¹⁶⁴

Like Plekhanov, the AUCECB and MoECB did not have a clear mode of addressing the problems of capacity or of youth. They wanted younger generations as current participants and a guarantee of the future of the church, but they did not want them being the cause of state reprimands. Bychkov largely ignored the youth and their ambitions to meet with him. His office limited access to people from the church who wished to speak with him. His reluctance to encourage youth work likely stemmed from the fact that officials chided him for the youth's "excessive activity."

Not all leaders approached the issue of young people the same way. President of the AUCECB Andrei Klimenko showed some concern for their issues and requests, and looking back, Semchenko calls Klimenko's presidency from 1974-1985 the "heyday" of the youth movement. Even if AUCECB staff continued to treat young people curtly, Klimenko would sometimes consider their petitions. Under him they even formed something they called The Russian Baptist Union of Youth, and Semchenko established more contacts with other "youth leaders" like him around the USSR and took the risk of trying to obtain resources from abroad, like literature. Although they did not trust Klimenko entirely, the youth noticed that he avoided meddling in their affairs, and that he was not an insider in the AUCECB. As for other leaders, they "of course, did not encourage our activity, but nevertheless put up with it." Elders would reprimand them, saying that "by your actions you're closing the church!" The youth did not take such threats seriously.¹⁶⁵

In 1976 CRA commissioner of Moscow City Plekhanov noticed another leadership-youth problem. Even a veteran leader like Deputy General Secretary of the AUCECB and presbyter of MoECB A.I. Mitskevich needed correction. Plekhanov wrote to CRA chief Kuroedov about him, saying in December 1976 that he "made provocative-inflammatory attacks on the presbyteriat of MoECB" when he called for a "mass gathering of believers for discussing the activities of the ECB" instead of the perfunctory meeting of the *dvadtsatka* [the state-authorized executive body], the opening of another prayer house in Moscow, and the introduction of the practice of

¹⁶⁴ Semchenko, "Vospominaniia Po Chetvergam [Reminiscences on Thursdays]."

¹⁶⁵ Semchenko, "Vospominaniia Po Chetvergam [Reminiscences on Thursdays]."

having “benches of repentance” as was done in the Salvation Army.¹⁶⁶ Plekhanov was not sympathetic to Mitskevich’s efforts to represent believers’ wishes or church needs.

According to Plekhanov’s information, at the meeting where Mitskevich made these demands, AUCECB President Klimenko and MoECB Executive Committee President Tkachenko “tried to restrain Mitskevich, to point out the absurdity and impropriety of his speech, but he did not let up and claimed that ‘our church is squeezed’ and ‘the presbytery conducts evangelism poorly.’” Mitskevich’s own written statement to AUCECB and MoECB leaders did not refer to evangelism, but it did mention that the church was overcrowded and another was needed, that church members should be active in meeting to help decide church issues, not just the *dvadtsatka*, as well two other issues Plekhanov did not highlight but would also have been of concern to officials: that more pastors were needed to meet the needs of MoECB, and that more young preachers should be trained.¹⁶⁷

Plekhanov also complained that Mitskevich’s “onslaught” (*vylazka*) was “picked up” by his son, V.A. Mitskevich (a presbyter of another church), as well as by “extremists” of MoECB Novikov and Semchenko, who “organized signatures among their supporters under a declaration of the same statement as the content of that of Mitskevich.”¹⁶⁸ Their petition was signed by members of Moscow ECB and sent to the church’s presbytery and the AUCECB. Echoing Mitskevich, members of many years complained that, “not once” was there a members’ meeting, but the *dvadtsatka* made decisions and reports; they proposed such a meeting for that month.¹⁶⁹ In his summary to Kuroedov, Plekhanov said this group mentioned that “in the leadership of the AUCECB there is no unity.” For the CRA, who depended upon cooperative church leaders, having a group of believers democratically mobilizing behind one ECB Church leader against others threatened the established order. Though awaiting Kuroedov’s response, Plekhanov was meanwhile having the leadership of the AUCECB get Mitskevich to take back his words and meeting with Tkachenko about “taking measures,” such as conducting “explanatory work” with those who signed Semchenko’s document.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁶ GARF, d. 988, p. 223. It is unclear what Mitskevich’s experiences were with the Salvation Army, as I do not believe it was permitted to be active in the Soviet Union.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 229–30.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 223.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 231.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 223–24.

Semchenko, whom officials were now routinely labeling an “extremist,” had made himself known to officials due to organizing the two abovementioned petitions and being an independent voice within MoECB. Although participating in the officially-approved MoECB church, he did not stay above-ground in all his religious activity. In 1977, officials discovered a secret recording studio he and some others had set up in a village outside Moscow in order to record broadcasts with Christian content and music from abroad to disseminate in the Soviet Union.¹⁷¹

Semchenko was just one person whom officials identified by name, but increasingly officials began to recognize that there were more than just one or two “extremists” who had become active of late. In 1978 officials had received word and were following a group of “extremist elements and fanatic-sectarians” who were meeting and having gatherings in Moscow. They were spreading their “propaganda” among youth in particular.¹⁷² The official’s description could have referred to the so-called “schismatics” or “persecuted ECB church of Moscow,” but since there was no specific reference to schismatics (*raskonl’niki*) or the CCECB, it is possible that the complaint was directed at the MoECB.

Yet such groups likely were not exclusively of AUCECB or CCECB extraction, but perhaps mixed. Semchenko says that the most “daring” thing they did was link up with CCECB adherents, whom they referred to as the “initiativists” (*initsiativniki*) or “unregistered brothers.” He even met the renegade Gennadii Kriuchkov. The youth learned about their experiences underground, on trial, and in prison, and they adopted some of their techniques in distributing literature and recordings. They admired their consistency and bravery in the face of reprisals. Semchenko took note of Rumachik’s many prison terms, and how the church in Dedovsk went from being registered (autonomously) back to unregistered.¹⁷³

Semchenko and others continued in their efforts to change things at MoECB. By the end of the 1970s, the membership remained about the same at the Central Church in Moscow, and officials still had no solution to the problem of overcrowding, while some Baptists were trying harder than ever to gain a second house of worship. Officials noted: “In connection with such crowdedness a big group of ‘young baptists’ is striving for separation into an independent community and for the opening of a second prayer house in Moscow. Extremist elements are

¹⁷¹ Rowe, *Russian Resurrection*, 180; “Registered Baptist Youth Pastor Arrested,” *Keston News Service*, May 24, 1984, 200 edition.

¹⁷² TsGA Moskvyy, f. 3004, op. 1, d. 106, p. 133.

¹⁷³ Semchenko, “Vospominaniia Po Chetvergam [Reminiscences on Thursdays].”

rousing these overtures, accusing the loyal leaders of the baptists of inaction before the authorities.” Evidently, it so happened that the local district government of the Kalininskii district approved a request for such a group to use the upper story of a house for housekeeping needs and the bottom for services. Yet as CRA officials ultimately had to approve each request for use of building space for religious purposes, the CRA official noted in a letter to the Secretary of the Moscow City Party Committee that the district level “does not decide this issue without corresponding instruction.”¹⁷⁴ The CRA remained committed to maintaining the status quo in this situation, even if it was an issue that mobilized believers.

The problem of mobilization continued at the 42nd AUCECB Congress in Moscow in December 1979. What co-religionists from abroad in attendance perceived as a “degree of democracy and openness,” church and state leaders viewed with concern. For the first time, the delegates even refused to elect someone nominated by the AUCECB leaders, criticized the electoral procedures and debated revisions to the AUCECB statutes. The “impression” among some of the foreign attendees was that “frank” discussions arising from these democratic initiatives were “unwelcome” to the leadership. Certain delegates circulated a memorandum to the others, advocating specific changes that would give more power to the Congress in terms of being a check on the Council leaders and revisions to the statutes. The memorandum also indicated time limits “on items irrelevant to the proceedings, such as musical interludes and greetings from foreign guests.”¹⁷⁵

Where the emerging youth groups had once served as volunteer staff at the conventions, they had become involved as participants since Klimenko’s presidency. Although the Council for Religious Affairs, headed by EA Tarasov, helped organize the conference and oversaw the preparation of resolutions, Semchenko and others had their own agenda for the convention. Delegates watched as, instead of discussing the agenda of the Congress, General Secretary Bychkov “came to the pulpit and read the already adopted agenda.” Semchenko and others were upset, having agenda issues of their own that mattered to them. Semchenko penned a note to the presidium of the congress that “we are outraged by the lack of discussion of the items,” and demanded that proper procedure be followed, including discussion of the agenda. He addressed the note to Klimenko, who stopped Bychkov from reading the report, and

¹⁷⁴ TsGA Moskv, d. 107, p. 66.

¹⁷⁵ Michael Rowe, “The 1979 Baptist Congress in Moscow: A Western Observer Reports,” *Religion in Communist Lands* 8, no. 3 (1980): 188–89. The issue of reunification with the CCECB was absent.

announced, “Brothers and sisters, at the insistence of the congress delegates, let's discuss the agenda of the Congress.” Little came of the discussion, and Semchenko felt that Klimenko was able to help assuage the “outrage” of the delegates and “extinguish it.”¹⁷⁶ Later, during the time of elections, several delegates expressed criticisms against certain leaders. Mitskevich was unpopular, but he announced his retirement. Others criticized AUCECB General Secretary Bychkov, Vice President M. Ia. Zhidkov (Iakov Zhidkov's son), and Pentecostal Representative P.K. Shatrov, and the lattermost was rejected in elections, although the former two just achieved the necessary votes to be reelected.¹⁷⁷

Officials felt that this “activation” of younger generations at MoECB was in part due to the failures of leadership. Plekhanov argued that an “abnormal situation” developed there due to “the weak leadership” of presbyter M.Ia. Zhidkov, as well as “undesirable interference in the activity of the church by Klimenko, Bychkov and Mitskevich A.I.” According to officials' information, although church leaders were “educating members of the community in the spirit of observing legislation on cults, and increasing their feeling of public spirit and patriotism,” the leaders “took a position of flirting with young baptists of extremist attitude,” namely those who sought to gather separately or in additional facilities (Semchenko's memoirs paint Bychkov as not amenable to youth, making the official's reference to him in this regard as questionable). Plekhanov accused “these extremists” of getting “loyal members of the church, and above all ... the leaders” to “compromise,” but he did not specify what that entailed. Other actions by the “extremists” included “imposing ‘their’ people for the posts of presbyters and deacons” in elections, as well as proposing that the number of people in the church's executive committee be increased,” a suggestion that was “contrary to the legislation on cults.”¹⁷⁸

Officials were indeed concerned about elections to such posts, and they did their best to ensure those elected would be vigilantly mindful of state wishes. Thus “many times” CRA officials addressed the issue of the election of presbyters and deacons at MoECB, and they recommended as candidates those who had experience demonstrating that they “would be able to conduct work with a loyal attitude—exposing the negative manifestations among a certain segment of young baptists,” as well as “being occupied with their [young baptists'] education” and be reliable “in dealing with foreign representatives” at MoECB. To aid existing leaders in this

¹⁷⁶ Semchenko, “Vospominaniia Po Chetvergam [Reminiscences on Thursdays].”

¹⁷⁷ Rowe, “The 1979 Baptist Congress in Moscow: A Western Observer Reports,” 192–93.

¹⁷⁸ GARF, d. 1853, p. 33.

process of naming candidates, officials “recommended” two older presbyters from other locales, “people who in agreement with concerned authorities, would very well suit such a role.” State authorities even met with these candidates, “bringing their attention to the situation arising in the MoECB” and “the necessity in the church’s presbytery [of having] people capable of managing it [the church].” Officials felt that these two “fully agreed with the arguments about the abnormal situation in the community, insufficiencies in leadership and the weak performance of educational work among the members of the church.” In turn, officials claimed that the MoECB leadership agreed with CRA suggestions, but then later in a separate meeting held “without the corresponding agreement of the raiispolkom [the local district government],” the church leaders had put forward different candidates, electing someone else as presbyter, and as deacon, the “extremist” youth leader Epishin. Instead of giving leadership over to “loyal people,” the official complained, they gave it “into the hands of people” in a way that threatened to reduce their “influence” on the “Moscow community.” The leaders’ “double-dealing” was “reported.”¹⁷⁹

Authorities had already declared the new (and relatively young) deacon, Epishin, an extremist. His appointment did not change his behavior. A few years later authorities noted that at a meeting of baptists in Moscow, they discussed youth work within the church. Epishin said they needed it, and many agreed, but they couldn’t agree on what to do. Apparently they agreed that they had been able to attract more youth and have younger deacons and presbyters of late because “conflicts with the authorities and local commissioners became fewer.” Small-scale youth gatherings had been occurring in in apartments in Moscow. When Epishin and others asked for guidance from General Secretary Bychkov, suggesting “the Center” address “the future” of the church and a focused work with youth, Bychkov merely asked why they weren’t meeting in the church. They replied in a manner not to officials’ liking, saying that “there wouldn’t have been the kind of conditions for free exchange of opinions.” Bychkov wanted to know who organized these meetings.¹⁸⁰ It was a sign of the growing disconnect between younger generations and the aging leadership both in Soviet society at large and in the ECB Church that church and state authorities continued to blame youth-organizers rather than to reflect on the hunger of youth for the free exchange of ideas.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 34.

¹⁸⁰ GARF, d. 2588, p. 107.

But authorities' patience with youth activism was limited, and youth leaders knew they were tracked, and searches happened as well. There were also informers among their groups, which sowed suspicion, and participants tried hard to guess who they were. They employed ways to escape KGB agents by giving false information, as Semchenko avoided surveillance by dressing in disguise and walking with a limp. Before the Olympic Games in 1980, the KGB warned Semchenko to get out of Moscow, or risk arrest. Semchenko and a few others were arrested in 1982 for illegal distribution of literature, making clear that members at MoECB were not exempt from discipline if officials considered their activity illegal. This was, perhaps not coincidentally, one month before Billy Graham was scheduled to visit. Around twenty-five house searches were reportedly made among Baptists belonging to registered and unregistered churches.¹⁸¹ But such cases were uncommon among members of registered congregations.

The one response officials finally suggested to the problem of crowding and growth at MoECB was to try to discourage people with residences elsewhere from attending, as officials registered religious societies to meet the needs of those in a given district or city. CRA officials Trushin and Plekhanov agreed that members of MoECB living in the oblast (not the City proper) be directed to "the corresponding registered community of Moscow oblast." They also wanted to "take measures" to stop the baptisms of people living in Moscow Oblast at MoECB as well as presbyters from Moscow baptizing in other communities.¹⁸² Evidently the officials felt the practice of separating people according to geography would help stymie the spread of a particularly effervescent religious community, which the Moscow Church was showing itself to be.

But Trushin, while agreeing to this practice according to Plekhanov's account, expressed annoyance at following through with this plan and blamed the Church. A group was registered as an ECB church in the town of Balashikha whose founders had been members of MoECB. Like the recently registered group in Mytishchi, Trushin complained that state authorities "were forced to register" them as "stand-alone" churches due to the "caprice" of the AUCECB which started the process of the "dismissal" of people living in the oblast, "citing 'the cramped prayer

¹⁸¹ "Moscow Baptists Under Arrest," *Keston News Service*, August 26, 1982, 156 edition; "Registered Baptist Youth Pastor Arrested." According to the Keston News Service, two believers "associated" with the MoECB, Vasili Pali and Alexander Yermalyuk, were arrested in April 1982. Pali was 54 at the time and had served a sentence from 1958 to 1968. Yermalyuk was 26. Another member of the Moscow congregation, Alexander Komar, was also arrested around this time, also for distribution of religious literature.

¹⁸² GARF, f. 6991, op. 6, d. 785, p. 16.

house” in Moscow.¹⁸³ By 1982, there were sixteen registered ECB churches in all belonging to the AUCECB. Evidently Trushin resented adding to his numbers due to issues in a city church. His promotion of registration was not based on his sympathy for ECB churches, and he still wanted to keep the number of churches in “his” oblast to a minimum.

Although Trushin was “forced” to register these groups, he complained about local authorities’ “groundless rejection” of groups in Mytishchi and Balashikha attempting to register or purchase homes, since it resulted in “conflict situations between religious groups and local authorities” as well as complaints by believers. In Mytishchi, the community proposed four homes, and authorities rejected each; the situation in Balashikha was similar. One official explained his department’s actions of refusal quite simply: “We don’t want baptists to be active in our district.” Such behavior by local authorities, Trushin argued, went contrary to “the undertaken path,” causing his office to have to “defend believers” while spending time “convincing officials to observe socialist legality.” Authorities, instead of “relating to religion and church on the level of socialist legality,” were applying “unneeded red tape.”¹⁸⁴

Trushin Summarizes the Successes of the Approach under Brezhnev

Such throwback attitudes of local authorities did not, Trushin asserted, reflect his office’s attempts to normalize state relations with the Baptist churches in Moscow Oblast. Around the time Leonid Brezhnev died in late 1982, Trushin reflected on church management over the past fifteen years. In response to CRA chief Kuroedov’s complaints about the “serious problem” of Baptist believers and their “uncontrolled” activity across the Soviet Union recently, Trushin responded by claiming that this problem had been “for the most part resolved” in Moscow Oblast since 1969. Before then, he admitted, such a problem among “sectarian denominations” existed, since before 1965 there were not any registered communities, only 50 largely unmonitored groups. When thirteen were registered, other nearby groups were consolidated into these, taking care of “nearly all the baptists” active in the oblast. He downplayed the significance of recent registrations as not signaling expansion.¹⁸⁵

Trushin claimed that officials elsewhere rejected Baptist believers’ applications in order to have “favorable’ statistics,” presumably to look good by not having any ECB congregations in

¹⁸³ Keston Archive, “Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report”, Archive file <KGB 95>, p. 1. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 108.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., Archive file <KGB 95>, pp. 7-8. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 108.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 11–12.

their jurisdiction. Trushin admitted he likewise “encountered” such “resistance” until “it was quickly overcome” by Oblast authorities and party leaders from the Moscow Committee. There were some small groups remaining, but they had not submitted petitions to register lately, were too small to organize, or were sufficiently close to other registered communities.¹⁸⁶

Although his office did register ECB communities, it does not mean that he had any sympathy for their religiosity. When describing the religiosity of protestant denominations, he noted that “Sectarianism” was different from other confessions by “particular activity” and organization of religious life. The “exceptionally great influence of presbyters and preachers” shaped each community. The gatherings, he wrote, “from the beginning to the end are filled with speeches by sectarian leaders with sermons, in which they are told all sorts of parables, encouraging and frightening the listeners.”¹⁸⁷

Indeed, even though Trushin helped resolve the issue of uncontrolled activity by registering, he was still faced with “overcoming” Baptists’ “negative tendencies” and “suppressing” their “illegal activities.” The CRA had to “by decree” direct the commissioners and the district/city councils with ECB communities to try to stop visiting musical groups, and track public reading of the Brotherly Gazette. But the MoECB still played a vital role. Many presbyters of these communities told officials that they didn’t consider anything they were doing as illegal, even “citing the Moscow Prayer House, where allegedly such things are also practiced.” All of the Baptist communities were given “warnings” with “the goal of prophylaxis.” Officials also had to keep pace with the occasional emergence of anti-state rhetoric from the preachers. A presbyter in Voskresensk spoke about the separation of the church from the state, and about not needing to provide officials with “lists” of information on their church, nor “admit their presence in our gatherings.” Other pastors in other churches invited those present to “pray for our brothers who remain in prisons for faith in Christ.”¹⁸⁸ And, of course, the issue of the CCECB churches remained, so authorities had to keep tracking interactions between representatives of the two bodies.¹⁸⁹

The closely monitored Central Moscow Church was never free from spectacle either. The next illustrious visitor after Richard Nixon was the internationally known evangelist Reverend Billy Graham who visited the church and even preached there in 1982. At one point in

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 12–13.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

the service, a woman unfurled a banner which read, “We have more than 150 prisoners for the work of the Gospel,” and she had to be escorted out by security guards. Despite this incident, Graham declared that “there is a lot more (religious) freedom here than has been given the impression in the States,” causing U.S. news agencies to depict him as naïve and fooled by the Soviets into declaring precisely what they wanted.¹⁹⁰ Despite state control, the Moscow Church nevertheless presented the opportunity for people of varying attitudes toward state organs to come, worship, mingle, and even express themselves. Although agents and church representatives attempted to strictly control interactions, Graham had in fact proclaimed the Christian faith. Restrictions notwithstanding, visitors witnessed that the core of Christian practice—worship in song, reading of the Bible, preaching, and sacraments—was present at MoECB or at other congregations. They could see that there was—at least to a degree—some “religious freedom.” The trade-off for officials in stressing the importance of such window-dressing was that they simultaneously granted some power to the church.

The Trend until Glasnost

After Brezhnev’s death, there was no substantive change in Soviet religious policy until well into the Gorbachev era with the government policy of glasnost. Even then, the inertia of the decades with regard to religious policy or attitude among officials at large carried for several more years, even into the late 1980s. Brezhnev’s successor, Yuri Andropov, had long been KGB chief. Prior to the 1980 Olympics, repression of any forms of dissent increased, and the number of Christian prisoners increased substantially from 1979 through 1983. Andropov died in early 1984, and his successor Konstantin Chernenko also died one year later. With such short periods of leadership, no new change in religious policy was outlined, and officials carried on as before.¹⁹¹

The framework for understanding “sectarian” religion was a constant of the post-Khrushchev era. In 1981 a City of Moscow official summarized the law, along with the attitudes, that had prevailed the entire Brezhnev era until glasnost. Under Soviet religious law, the constitution guaranteed religious freedom. “However,” wrote the official, “some people from among churchmen and sectarians, showing extremist aspirations, especially leaders (preachers)

¹⁹⁰ Jim Gallagher, “How the Soviets Duped Billy Graham,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 16, 1982, sec. 2, <http://archives.chicagotribune.com/1982/05/16/page/A1/article/how-the-soviets-duped-billy-graham>.

¹⁹¹ Carolyn Burch, “Religious Policy under Andropov and Chernenko,” *Religion in Communist Lands* 12, no. 2 (1984): 198–201.

of the baptists-schismatics, Pentecostals, Adventist-reformists and Jehovah's Witnesses [...] unlawfully organize prayer meetings, attract those underage to them, and conduct religious education with them; they incite believers to other illegal and anti-social acts, the drafting of slanderous letters, defaming the soviet government and social system, etc." As a response to this conflict, such groups "distort the essence of these laws and knowingly spread false allegations about the alleged persecution of believers by organs of power."¹⁹²

The level of harassment against unregistered or CCECB communities varied by oblast. In Kiev oblast, commissioner Mishenin was trying to clean up his oblast's statistical profile, pursuing a much more aggressive campaign against Baptist believers. His reports indicate many examples where Mishenin told the central CRA office to take certain registered and unregistered groups off the list due to such groups "ceasing their organized activities" in various villages, due to too few members. Leaders were still periodically arrested.¹⁹³

In Dedovsk, the situation with the breakaway Baptists continued in an "unsatisfactory" manner. V. Ia. Smirnov had been arrested in 1980, age 67, and released in 1982. He resumed unauthorized meetings, so "prophylactic, explanatory, and educational work" was supposedly being conducted by unnamed state representatives with this group. Although authorities rejected their attempts to register and use facilities on many occasions, Smirnov visited the local city council and requested that he hold an Easter gathering at 19 Grazhdanskaya Street, at the home of an "extremist" known to them, Kruchinin (also previously imprisoned). Local officials granted this request, and thirty people attended a gathering that Easter afternoon. One CRA official thought that this fact "could be used in our interests" in the "goals of normalization of the activity of this group of baptists-schismatics."¹⁹⁴ The official did not explicitly state what he meant, but it appears that officials still desired to have predictable relations and predictable

¹⁹² GARF, f. 6991, op. 6, d. 2101, p. 32.

¹⁹³ Ibid., f. 6991, op. 6, d. 2134, 38-44. From Vins' former church in Kiev, a preacher Ivashchenko was accused of spreading slander against the state and was leading a community of some 400 with many "not of age." One of his charges was that in April 1976 he had a youth gathering, in which he called youth to "instruction in religion," and he had them help lead the service by song, poetry, instruments, something which "ignited their religious fanaticism and taught religion." Later, in some of the publications that he assisted in, he made "slanderous" comments such as "'the atheists decided to put an end to faith in god by physical methods.'" He was also given to criticizing the "adherents of the legal movement of Baptists AUCECB" and those who condemned fellow believers to prison. He called on his listeners to "'not occupy themselves with those having political authority, but to occupy themselves with godly things,'" that they should "'serve only god,'" not the authorities. He was given three years under one charge and four years imprisonment plus four years exile under two other charges.

¹⁹⁴ Keston Archive, "Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report", Archive file <KGB 46>, p. 2. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 110.

religiosity that could be routinely monitored. But little changed with this community until well into the Gorbachev period. The Dedovsk community remained in its “illegal” state in the 1980s, as did the “persecuted” Moscow church.¹⁹⁵ Rumachik had been sentenced to five years in 1980, and his sentence was extended. He was finally released “early” from his extension in February of 1987 as part of amnesties under perestroika.¹⁹⁶ Officials continued conducting educational work with CCECB leaders about religious law and the need to register. Fines for holding unauthorized religious gatherings continued.¹⁹⁷

If the CCECB were incorrigible in refusing to submit to other authorities, AUCECB churches also consistently presented problems until glasnost. Trushin named the most common problems in Baptist churches in a 1983 report: incorporating children into services; conducting religious activity outside church walls; avoiding registration; having unwanted content in prayers and sermons that was against “our” activities or incited violation of laws; maintaining contact with CCECB personnel; introducing “new teachings” in the church that were impacted by foreign literature, radio, and tourists; displaying “unhealthy or antisocial moods” by pastors; and having unauthorized church meetings.¹⁹⁸ The examples of such problems over the early 1980s were relatively minor.¹⁹⁹ The AUCECB was evidently sufficiently acceptable in the eyes of officials that, even if its churches presented problems, they still would steer CCECB adherents toward the institution and its rules.²⁰⁰

If monitoring churches for acceptability was endless, the problem of the quality of state oversight seemed equally intractable. In 1983 at the end of his career, Trushin was still

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., Archive file <KGB 41>, p. 2. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 111. See also Archive file <KGB 42> (TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 114).

¹⁹⁶ Peter Rumachik, Pavel Rumachik, and Luba Rumachik, *A Path Not Lined with Roses*, ed. Sam Slobodian, trans. Christopher J Lovelace (Maple Grove, MN: Baptist International Evangelistic Ministries, 1999), 87.

¹⁹⁷ Keston Archive, “Council for Religious Affairs of Moscow Oblast, Report”, Archive file <KGB 42>, p. 7, 19. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 114.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., Archive file <KGB 47>, pp. 1-2. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 113.

¹⁹⁹ In the town of Mytishchi, the presbyter was fined for allowing “an unknown person” to read a sermon without approval by the city’s executive committee. An ECB group in Lukhovitsi had been actively trying to register lately, another issue authorities needed to consider. In Voskresenskii district someone from the ECB church was leading a group of seven in “underground” activity, including meeting at an apartment for prayer gatherings. Such activities were fined. Ibid., Archive file <KGB 42>, originally TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 114; Archive file <KGB 48>, originally TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 116; Archive file <KGB 49>, p. 20, originally TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 119.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., Archive file <KGB 49>, p. 20. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 119. In the city of Serpukhov one of the goals of the local commission there was “directing [ECB baptists’] activities” toward getting those in a neighboring village “out from under the influence of the ‘council of churches’ ecb and the inducement of their entry into the Serpukhov community.”

complaining about district authorities and commissions for monitoring religion, vexed that only a third of such district committees submitted information on time; some finally did late, and a few never submitted. Some were conducting lectures on atheism, as would have been hoped by officials, but such activities did not seem to relate to noticeable change in religious behaviors.²⁰¹ In 1985, G.D. Romanov reported on religion in Ramenskii district, asserting that despite 850 lectures on atheist topics, more educational work was needed, since "Religious ritualism over the past years is almost not shrinking and remains high" and "introduction of new civic ceremonies goes slowly, often uninterestingly, formally." Such efforts to replace religion had been failing, and it is reasonable to believe that Romanov was exaggerating the extent of such educational efforts. Romanov, like Trushin, blamed village commissions' work as "weak" with many "errors," alongside a lack of "specificity" in the plans of many of these commissions. As for unregistered "sectarian" groups, his explanation was "insufficient educational work." Perhaps if these efforts were "strengthened," Romanov suggested, then the results would be different.²⁰²

Thus despite Trushin's retirement in 1984, there was no noticeable change in CRA policy across Moscow Oblast,²⁰³ and the religious situation was not uniform in all regions, as it depended on local authorities and CRA personnel. For example, around the time of the Chernobyl disaster that would prompt Gorbachev's initiative toward more openness, a church in Odessa had agreed to be registered, but then renounced its registration due to state interference. In response, the local council demolished its building in April 1986, even though the church had paid for the building itself. For Easter they were meeting in a home, and this gathering was "brutally dispersed by a special police detachment," which responded by "forcing the Christians out of the house and pushing them into buses."²⁰⁴ But even after the turn in 1986 toward more openness and amnesties for political-religious prisoners under Gorbachev, there were still arrests of believers, fines, and break-ups of gatherings.²⁰⁵

Until the mid- to late-1980s, youth groups were restricted, yet above-eighteen youth activity was common for MoECB youth. They couldn't meet as youth in the church until the mid-1980s or do anything as youth in MoECB, but they could participate in the second choir at times or in the orchestra. The service was otherwise set, as were the preachers. On weekends and

²⁰¹ Ibid., Archive file <KGB 47>. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 113.

²⁰² Ibid., Archive file <KGB 49>, p. 26. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 119.

²⁰³ Ibid., Archive file <KGB 48>. Original archival source: TsGAMO, Fond 7383, Op. 3, Del. 116.

²⁰⁴ Rowe, *Russian Resurrection*, 200.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

holidays groups traveled to services first in Moscow oblast, but eventually to Riga, St. Petersburg, Brest, the Volga, the South of Russia, and other places according to what their modest “youth budget” afforded. They were often gone from Friday until Monday morning, and churches allowed the services to extend as they recited poetry “without restrictions.” They were welcomed as “the Moscow youth,” and in meeting other young Baptist believers, many found spouses in this way. Semchenko, prior to his arrest, had enjoyed Riga best of all, as he found things “a little freer” there, noting that even formerly imprisoned *initsiativniki* managed to register a church.²⁰⁶

Although a change did not happen immediately with glasnost or perestroika (Gorbachev’s policy of restructuring), the overall trend from 1987 until the fall of the Soviet Union was clearly in the direction of more freedoms for the Evangelical Churches. Across the Soviet Union, baptisms took a marked jump from around 7,089 reported in 1986 to over 11,000 in 1989, and over 150 churches were registered. The process of choosing AUCECB leaders became more directly democratic, as representative delegates elected these positions instead of council members in the Congress of 1990. Delegates tellingly “demanded changes in the [Congress] program, reducing the number of greetings from visitors and musical items in order to allow more time for discussion and debate.” The discussions during the Congress had a noticeable “openness and directness” pertaining to issues like evangelism, youth ministries, and charity. In the past, these would have been almost entirely taboo.²⁰⁷ Delegates also voted to decentralize the AUCECB, even renaming it the Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists of the USSR, granting more autonomy to regional and local leaders, who would not be appointed from above, but elected from below. Publications also increased. They composed a letter to Gorbachev advocating the legalization of Sunday schools and other church activities, as well as supporting an expected new “Law on Freedom of Conscience.”²⁰⁸ Although they could not have known that state-sponsored atheism would soon disappear, Baptists responded to societal changes with institutional changes that they largely agreed reflected their Church culture and beliefs. The same was occurring with numerous institutions across the USSR.

²⁰⁶ Semchenko, “Vospominaniia Po Chetvergam [Reminiscences on Thursdays].”

²⁰⁷ Michael Rowe, “Soviet Baptists Engage in Perestroika,” *Religion in Communist Lands* 18, no. 2 (1990): 184.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 187.

Conclusion

Michael Bourdeaux pointed out decades ago the similarities between the April 1965 Kriuchkov-Vins document from Baptist believers and the Nov-Dec 1965 Yakunin-Eshliman documents from Orthodox priests. They both were intellectual, framed in legal terms, and called for less state interference in church matters. Both pairs boldly, without fears of reprisal, signed such documents intending church reform, not necessarily schism. In both cases, church leaders asked the authors to retract, and in both cases, support of the authors spread.²⁰⁹

But ultimately, the non-conformist Baptists garnered a large following that led to a schism, whereas the non-conformist Orthodox priests were effectively marginalized without mobilizing followers. Those priests who persisted in refusing to conform were banned from the priesthood. Although state officials succeeded at gradually whittling away at the base of supporters of the CCECB, they had to reckon with a cohort of loyal adherents who had based their existence upon opposition to the AUCECB and state authorities.

In the case of the Baptists, the traditional protestant culture of decentralized interpretation of Scripture trumped the tradition of submitting to church authority, rendering a split. But even after the schism within the AUCECB and Central Moscow Church, the leadership had to contend with competing contingents within the church, afforded by the Baptist Church's traditionally democratic structure. Like the Reformed Church in Romania, the Baptist Churches also had traditions of pastor-choosing and voting that proved contentious on several occasions. Trusted lay believers or untrained pastors could rally members of their congregations against Church leaders' wishes if they could make convincing justifications. In the Orthodox Church, to debate truths was, in effect, to question Church authority, thereby limiting dialogue. When attempting change, Orthodox reformists took seriously the consequences of contributing to disunity in the Orthodox Church, which could include defrocking or schism. Protestant discourse, by contrast, has not dwelled on the problems of schism, and church fracturing and divisions have been consistent features of Protestant history. In Protestantism, parties can vie for power by accusing each other of going against Scriptural truths, of being the arm of Satan, etc, as was the case in the Soviet Baptist Church.

Baptists saw themselves as a worldwide denomination, a minority religious group within the USSR, and a historical victim of persecution. Their group identity was robust: with their

²⁰⁹ Bourdeaux, *Religious Ferment in Russia*, 185, 189.

status threatened, the local church served as a refuge. This applied especially to the Breakaway Baptist groups. Recollections of those active in breakaway circles commonly contain references to the intimacy found in belonging to such a group, and the identification of fellow adherents as family (beyond the use of the common familial terms of address among believers, i.e., brother or sister so-and-so). One interviewee mentioned that to her, the congregation in Dedovsk was “like family, where people knew each other’s wishes, desires.”²¹⁰ Nina Smirnova, daughter-in-law of the often-arrested Vasilii Smirnov, said that the relationship among them was “like brothers and sisters, especially in times of persecution.” Persecution increased the importance and strength of the community. Orthodox congregations, being geographically (parish) based, did not form based on the intense like-mindedness of parishioners—nor do they split due to disagreements. The Orthodox communities studied in Chapter VI that became dynamized were usually centered on a particularly charismatic priest. Such a priest’s removal often caused parishioners to object, but an enduring group identity was not forged in such a scenario.

The emergence of youth groups in the ECB church in the 1970s resembles youth interest in the Russian Orthodox Church and Romanian Reformed Church (see Chapters VI and IX, respectively). Thus a distinctive feature of unacceptable religiosity during this time for state officials was burgeoning youth participation. In each of these cases, there were youth encouraging the dynamization of religion, and in doing so, they often confronted church and state leaders. A notable feature of their confrontations, however, is that they often did not fear arrest as previous generations had done, partly emboldened by older generations’ stories of arrest and imprisonment. ECB youth expressed pride that as “protestant” youth they did not readily abide by the rules and would congregate as youth after services at MoECB, getting together “almost every day.” Semchenko writes that in the face of threats or police action, they “rejoiced” in their “defiance” and “love of freedom.”²¹¹ Nina Smirnova recalls “never really being afraid as youth.”²¹² In all of these cases, young people were trying to find ways to gather together as co-believers without the didacticism of church leaders or restrictions of authorities.

It is also worth mentioning that the level of violence officials employed against youth was relatively limited in the case of Reformed and Baptist believers, but seems to have been more aggressive against Romanian and Russian Orthodox Church youth. Dmitrii Pospelovsky

²¹⁰ Personal interview with Zinaida Mikhailovna, May 24, 2015.

²¹¹ Semchenko, “Vospominaniia Po Chetvergam [Reminiscences on Thursdays].”

²¹² Personal interview with Nina Stepanova Smirnova, May 24, 2015.

makes an important point that authorities dealt with non-conformist priests more aggressively than pastors of Baptist churches, arguing that much more was at stake in the Orthodox case: “no matter how active, the Baptists and other sectarians remain on the fringes of Russian culture, while the Orthodox Church is seen by the Soviets as a potential threat to their monopoly of power.”²¹³

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²¹³ Dimitry Pospelovsky, *The Russian Church Under the Soviet Regime, 1917-1982*, vol. II (Crestwood, N.Y: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984), 425.

IX: Pastors, Their Congregations, and Revolutionary Potential: The Hungarian Reformed Church, 1964 – 1989

The Hungarian Reformed and Catholic Churches have long been the dominant denominations for the significant Hungarian minority living in Transylvania, where Hungarian-Romanian relations have often been poor amid changing political landscapes. When the communist party was trying to extend its control over society in the late 1940s, it imprisoned and even killed many of the most important church leaders and bishops in the Orthodox, Catholic, and Greek-Catholic Churches, and the latter was “united” with the Orthodox Church, under duress. But the approximately 700,000-person Reformed Church did not suffer the extent of arrests at first as much as steady pressure by state agents in the process of aligning the Church with the state vision of acceptable religiosity. As will be argued below, the kind of Reformed religion officials found acceptable was un-nationalistic yet traditional, and traditionalistic over and against any attempts at revival or innovation. The failed revolution attempt in Budapest in 1956 had caused state agents to worry about the loyalty of Hungarians, and so they imprisoned many active or prominent members of the Hungarian community on charges of “conspiracies” in a preventive act against potentially “disloyal elements” (See Chapter V).

One such group of people imprisoned in the post-1956 crack-down was a group of Reformed Pastors and believers who participated in a revival movement that before the war was known as the Christian-Endeavor (CE) Society, or sometimes the “Bethany” CE Society (*CE Bethánia*) and labeled the “Bethanist” group by antagonistic state and church agents. The most active leaders and participants in this group of “Bethanists” had been arrested, tried, and imprisoned (falsely accused as conspirators) with ten- to twenty-year sentences in 1958. Yet when Ceaușescu came to power in 1964, he granted an amnesty to “political” prisoners, allowing for the release of many people who were imprisoned primarily for their active religiosity but charged for political crimes. Many who had been imprisoned as “Bethanists” did not give up attempts at revival, nor did state agents cease to be wary of them.

Reformed Church leaders and state authorities—specifically the Department of Religions—continued to try to marginalize this specific renewal problem. But during the Ceaușescu era, the potential danger “Bethanism” posed for authorities who desired predictable and acceptable forms of religiosity was exceeded by other aspects of Reformed Church life. One

such problematic aspect was the power that local congregations had to choose their own pastor, which came into conflict with church and state authorities' desire to control and power to interfere in managing personnel according to their own wishes. This congregational "right" was subject to contest in two episodes explored below, and in one incident this contest (however virulent) ended with an embittered congregation and deflated pastor, but the other led to the uprising in Timișoara, the spark to the Romanian Revolution of 1989. These cases will serve to illustrate the potential for powers to collide, as the decentralized democratic process of pastor-choosing and people's voluntary participation in church life could clash with a command-oriented state and state officials' desire to guide church life as well. These cases also demonstrate the at-times symbiotic relationship of the Reformed Church and state in communist times, when feuding camps within the Reformed Church called upon the Department of Religions to help settle their disputes. Often, the Department was willing to help mediate in order to maintain its goal of "normal" religious practice. "Acceptable" religiosity would not attract citizens toward any communal effervescence generated by nationalism or revival, and it would avoid scandals that would discredit the Reformed Church as a state-sponsored institution.

A Qualified Amnesty for Imprisoned Pastors

A Greek Catholic priest remarked to a Hungarian pastor upon Ceaușescu's amnesty and the release of imprisoned clergy in 1964: "We're now going from this cramped cell to a more spacious cell. But just remember, that, too, is a cell!"¹ Most of the released "Bethanist" pastors received positions, never at the congregations from which they came, but as associate pastors in small congregations.² By having this status, Hungarian Reformed clergy remained directly under the authority of the Bishop, who could move them at his discretion, without reference to the head pastor, the congregation, the presbytery, or the diocese. Church and state authorities coordinated their efforts toward placement of these pastors, and threatened re-incarceration if they did not from this point forward "give signals of their loyalty." Moreover, they still had to

¹ Ferenc Visky, ed., *Bilincseket És Börtönt Is: Dokumentum-Kötet [Chains and Even Prison: Document-Collection]* (Marosvásárhely: Kóinónia, 1996), 244.

² Ferenc Visky eventually settled as an associate pastor in Hegyközpályi/Paleu (Bihar County) and retired in 1982. Sándor Szilágyi became a pastor in Bósháza/Biușa (Sălaj County), and served until his retirement in 1977. After prison Karczagi spent the next 25 years in Mezőbaj/Boiu (Bihar County), 1965-1989. None of these reformed pastors left their church or country, although many from other denominations tried to emigrate. Some Protestants of other denominations even received money from concerned brethren abroad to leave. See Visky (1996), 247.

endure some combination of interrogations, threats, temporary incarcerations, house searches, the taking of written materials, and the strict watching of their interactions.³ During Sunday services, there was always an informer who tracked the goings-on and words of the preacher. The one considered the “ringleader” of this group of “Bethanists,” pastor Ferenc Visky, had as his organist an informer who kept track of what he said in public. Assured that any wrong moves might mean a trip back to prison, pastors also served as a perpetual cautionary tale to others to refrain from pursuing active communal religious life. Visky recalled the routine humiliation that followed his “release” at local diocese meetings: “There was almost never a gathering of pastors in which the issue of the bethanists was not raised. The favorite moments of the diocese meetings was the mocking of the ‘devout’ pastors [. . .].”⁴ Thus, their amnesty was a conditional favor, a “pause in punishment” more than a clearing of their guilt.

In March 1966, the inspector from the northern county of Maramureş provided an update on the “Bethanists,” whom he described as “formed from the most mystic and most fanatic Reformed believers who are not satisfied by the religious services done by priests in the churches, meeting separately at their homes where they pray, sing and some of them preach. By this they are considered sectarian and their group is forbidden.” The inspector apparently considered the “Bethanist” problem a duty shared with the Church, arguing that it “remains as a duty for us to supervise the[ir] activity” but that “[other] Reformed priests have the duty to eliminate this group.” The inspector named Sándor Szilágyi, Sándor Karczagi, and Zoltán Dézsi, as well as farmer Antal Papp (see Chapter V), all of whom had been in prison, but active once again. Papp was apparently already leading a group of 26 back in his hometown of Agriş (Egri). Despite their “quite intense proselytism,” the inspector tried to assert that “our new social-political conditions” in the villages meant that the “socialist consciousness of the peasants” was raised to the point where most ordinary citizens regarded the “Bethanists” as “enemies of progress as well as enemies of the socialist regime.”⁵ His wariness and the facts of their activity, however, sheds doubt on his assertion.

The Four Main Problems of the Reformed Church

The problem of revival was just one of the problems of the Reformed Church. Due to the particular features of each Church (e.g., religious practices and traditions), each institution

³ Visky, *Bilincseket És Börtönt Is*, 244.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 245.

⁵ Arhivele Naţionale ale României, Fond “C.C. al P.C.R. - Sectia Administrativ-Politica”, 144, 155–56.

related differently to the political regime and its Department of Religions. The religious culture of the Reformed Church consistently presented four main problems that constantly tested the boundaries of religious acceptability: the renewal movement of “Bethanism,” the traditional practice of catechism for youth, Hungarian nationalism, and local democratic procedures in pastor-choosing. More than financial issues, sermon content, creeds, beliefs, religious rites, or crowded religious holiday services, these were the thorns in communist officials’ religious sides.

The problem in the Reformed Church most similar to one of the Orthodox Church was revivalism, as the “Bethanist” movement was an inner-church renewal movement like the Lord’s Army group of the Orthodox Church (see Chapters III, V, and VII). Unfortunately for state officials, “Bethanism” was not a problem gone forever, even if the problem pastors of the 1950s had been as marginalized as possible. As was standard procedure for pastors released from prison, the bishops placed the released “Bethanist” pastors in remote or decaying congregations, meaning that church and state representatives had less to worry about.

Bishop Papp told the released “Bethanist” Sándor Karczagi that he “should never even hope to end up in a city-congregation.”⁶ The intellectually-inclined Karczagi was first placed in the kind of village where there was no transportation, electricity, police, post, people of higher education, or passable roads in winter. The previous pastor had only lasted a few months, yet the congregation actively attended church and helped repair the parish.⁷ Likely due to his weakened condition from prison, he soon developed a serious lung infection that put him on a nine-month sick leave. He was then placed in Boiu (Mezőbaj), where “few went to church” though they insisted on there being a pastor, not for holding church services, but for burials. The people busied themselves with agriculture, and not even in winter did he succeed in gathering them for Bible study or choir practice however much he visited families, attended people on their sick beds, and worked on confirmation for those over nine. Karczagi’s disappointments and frustrations as village pastor were not at the hand of the state, its agents, or persecution, beyond their keeping him there due to the stain of being an unacceptably religious pastor, a “Bethanist.” The best way to keep his religiosity within proper boundaries was to find him an unreceptive audience.

⁶ Visky, *Bilincseket És Börtönt Is*, 76.

⁷ Sándor Karczagi, *Az Utolsó Erdélyi Gályarab: Ébredésről, Történelemlről és Irodalomról [The Last Transylvanian Galley Slave: On Revival, History and Literature]*, ed. Krisztina Berke (Kolozsvár [Cluj-Napoca, RO]: Koinónia, 2010), 119–20.

Ferenc Visky's parish situation was similar. He was placed in Paleu (Hegyközpályi), an isolated village with a known weak congregation, where few went to church and with "many alcoholics." A typical Sunday service would feature only a few from the village and some friends of his from other locations.⁸ In Visky's diocese, beyond the catechism or confirmation classes (which were stipulated for specific ages and held at specific times), no religious education, Bible studies for youth, family visitation or spiritual care was typically allowed (some exceptions were granted by church authorities, however). Evangelical events and prayer weeks were also forbidden, and usually adult Bible studies were only permitted "within the framework of a commonplace liturgical church service, without remarks or discussion." In such a situation, discussion-based Bible studies and times of prayer had to be held secretly, in homes.⁹ But such a scenario plus the constant presence of informers rendered it difficult to make church a place of authenticity.

Visky was forced into retirement in 1983 by Bishop Papp. Quite ironically, when one of the local heads of the party found out that he was to be retired, she voluntarily traveled to Bucharest to complain about this, saying that his presence in the village was completely positive, and that work discipline and production were higher because of his influence. The reply in Bucharest was that this was the wish of Bishop Papp, and his wish must be respected. Perplexed, the woman returned to the village, knocked on the door of Visky, and reported to him what she had tried to do on his behalf, but that his own bishop's wishes took precedence.¹⁰ Visky may have been good for the village, but ultimately, his activity would ever be "Bethanist" at heart – an unacceptable variety of religiosity. Moreover, this example shows just how important a high-ranking church leader was, whose opinions were weighed more heavily than local civil authorities'. The power of bishops will be seen in more detail in the case of Zaláu, below.

The second major problem that officials faced in managing Reformed religiosity was catechism, the traditional practice of the church where parish pastors met with youth of specific ages to teach them Reformed doctrine and prepare them for confirmation, at which time one could become a full member of the church and receive the Eucharist. Catechism was a problem because it was a practice where the transmission of religious belief was intentional, seen as a less passive form of transmission than regular attendance at Sunday services. There were other

⁸ Interview with István Halmen, March 27, 2015.

⁹ Visky, *Bilincseket És Börtönt Is*, 246.

¹⁰ Interview with Levente Horvath, April 10, 2015.

sites of influence as well, like Bible studies, youth groups, the visiting of families by pastors, but at the instigation of officials, church leaders agreed to discourage priests from pursuing these activities.¹¹ Catechism, however, remained.

State agents considered catechism an annoyance because—although regulated by law—it ran contrary to the spirit of the law, which desired freedom of individual conscience without pressure wrought by practices like proselytism or “indoctrination.” Presenting religious content to youth overstepped this ideal. Officials therefore saw clergy as peddlers of religious propaganda, so they would often complain that pastors were applying direct and indirect pressure on parents in sermons and after the services during the informal greeting times when they encouraged catechism.¹²

To aid management of catechism, Department of Religions officials stipulated the times and locations for it to take place. In Sălaj County, the acceptable time was from 2:00 on Saturday until 2:00 on Sunday, during the months of the school year, in the parish building. Pastors had to fit catechism within this window if they wanted to avoid reprimands or sanctions. At a minimum, Department of Religions inspectors ensured that catechismal practices were done in accordance with the law, but they also kept an eye out for any evidence that particular gatherings were becoming too dynamic.

Sălaj inspector Gheorghe David, who always tended toward scrutiny, did not find too much to worry about. As examples, the pastor of Simleul Silvaniei, Gheorghe Vidits, had quite a number of youth attending and being confirmed, but the inspector “did not observe effort in attracting children or unpermitted practices on the part of the priest.” In another parish, Boghis, Francisc Gall was also holding a Bible study in which many youth were participating on Tuesday evening and one on Thursdays for adults, which was “extra indoctrination compared to other parishes.” But, after discussing the issue with the priest, David saw Gall’s side of the story: “Bible study had to be introduced to counteract the Baptists of the town who were attracting his

¹¹ There were occasions where Bible studies, youth gatherings, and family visits occurred, but these were not the norm and without a doubt state agents had reliable informants among the participants. Because church and state leaders discouraged family visits, many priests except the most determined discontinued such activity (some might have been relieved to not have to do it anyway). Bible studies had to be held in parish buildings at known times, and state agents ensured that someone was present to ensure that these remained “purely religious,” preferably filled by a pastor’s didactic utterances as opposed to dynamic, open, communal discussion. Bible studies required, at a minimum, the parish priest’s participation. It’s not clear whether a pastor needed a superior’s approval (he may have in Bishop Papp’s bishopric, but not Gyula Nagy’s, for example).

¹² Direcția Județeană Sălaj a Arhivelor Naționale, “Departamentul Cultelor,” 1973/24, 190.

believers and that since he's doing this thing he no longer has people turning to the Baptists."¹³ Even among protestant denominations, officials preferred the historically traditional ones.

When subsequent Sălaj inspector Roman composed a report on catechism covering the previous five years, from 1968-1973, the numbers of children attending catechism and getting confirmed had declined (I see no reason to assume falsification here). Since officials regarded youth work as the "guarantee of the future of the religions," a decline was a positive development for anti-religious officials, but it certainly was not declining at an extraordinary rate.¹⁴ When it came to confirmation, Roman felt that the practice of confirmation was generally carried out according to the law and did not pose any particular problems, nor even any "aberrations," such as failure to correspond to the prescribed dates and times.¹⁵ Roman liked that Orthodox priests in his territory did not do catechism; the Reformed Church, however, had a "system of religious indoctrination much more vast and varied – catechism, confirmation, Bible studies, for which supervision is much more cumbersome." Roman believed the baseline religiosity of Reformed believers to be higher than the Orthodox Church, including attendance and active participation both in villages and cities. But within the spirit and letter of the law, Roman felt that pastors almost universally offered catechism and confirmation according to "free consent," without pressuring parents and children, a claim that contradicted the standard line that pastors "indirectly" pressured parents by reminding them to send their children to catechism.¹⁶

It was not the specific content, the doctrine, of catechism that concerned officials. They did not scrutinize what was being taught. In addition to the basic fact of the "religious indoctrination" that was occurring, the practice of catechism helped ensure that future generations would consider themselves *Reformed believers*. Thus, "being Reformed" would remain an identity and community of belonging that could easily conflict with the identity of one as a citizen of Socialist Romania.

If officials could optimistically consider catechism as a didactic practice in which youth could, ideally, participate unenthusiastically, not all communal religious practices were benign. When Roman observed a service at Pentecost at Zoltán Fejer's Church in Vârșoț (Varsolc), the Lord's Supper was served, and 123 took part, including a balance of men and women, younger

¹³ Ibid., 1971/11, 9–10.

¹⁴ Ibid., 1973/24, 189.

¹⁵ Ibid., 1973/21, 36.

¹⁶ Ibid., 1975/48, 3-4.

and older. The young women were dressed up in white outfits, including beads and bows of green and red color (Hungarian national colors). The youth were found to “participate with regularity” at the services, and the pastor “handle[d] the indoctrination of the youth” via the ordinary denominational activities like catechism and confirmation. Given the active participation of youth in what was not only a religious community but an ethnically marked one as well, inspector Roman endeavored “to watch more often the activity carried out by priest Zoltán Fejer, in order to be held accountable and for measures to be taken in consequence.” He also informed the “appropriate” local organs, who “promised to follow closely the activity of the reformed priest, and he will be held accountable in an opportune moment.” Given that certain Reformed pastors used measures to “stimulate” youth participation in services, including maintaining traditions like certain traditional clothing or putting up Christmas trees in the church, Roman proposed a customary response, the promotion of alternative activities featuring educational or cultural content to be organized for youth.¹⁷

The third major problem in religious management was Hungarian nationalism. Specifically religious practices like catechism, confirmation, and the Lord’s Supper on high religious holidays helped foster a sense of “us,” a community of belonging. These practices reinforced a cultural institution and cultural identity, in this case a religious one. Yet, there was also an at-times parallel, at-times overlapping cultural identity: that of Hungarian-ness. Some congregations made an effort to increase participants’ awareness, acknowledgment, or embrace of the idea of Hungarian ethnicity. Hence traditional dress, colors, and the like were aspects of one of the three main potential problems of the Reformed Church. Any emphasis on ethno-national cultural products might smell of “nationalism” or “chauvinism” to a state official, and these were not considered apolitical. Because of this “problem” that the Reformed Church shared with the mostly-Hungarian Roman Catholic Church, the Department of Religions was compelled to work among clergy to “prevent any kind of nationalist manifestations in their activities,” a “duty” that required them to be “very vigilant and be careful that not a single element with hostile intentions finds propitious terrain within religious organizations.”¹⁸ This was a serious issue at the beginning of the deepening of communist control,¹⁹ during and after the 1956 revolution in Hungary (see Chapter V), or sporadically according to particular pastors’

¹⁷ Ibid., 1973/24, 235, 190.

¹⁸ Direcția Județeană Mureș a Arhivelor Naționale, “Departamentul Cultelor,” 1965-1983/345, 109.

¹⁹ See documents from Fond 594 (Ministry of the Interior), especially files from 1946-1949 dealing with the Reformed Church.

or congregations' ambitions. One example that will be explored below of the latter is the case of the "revolutionary" László Tókéš in the 1980s.

The final main problem of the Reformed Church was that congregations still had the power to choose their pastor from among those who held appropriate credentials. After finishing seminary, gaining state and church authorization, and serving sufficiently as an associate pastor, a Reformed minister could be called by parishes to serve in the capacity of pastor. Candidates for available positions often preached as guests in a parish with a vacancy, or delegations from congregations in need visited other churches to observe a particular candidate. But officials (rightly) saw this decentralized process as creating the possibility for "dissension," factions, and "anarchic manifestations" between layers of power represented by the bishopric, deaneries, pastors, and congregations.²⁰ Below will be two examples where factions and a loss of church and state control will be featured, in the city of Zalău in the 1970s and in 1989 in Timișoara.

Yet problems that arose from pastor-choosing were not entirely uncommon. Mureș County had its own pastor-saga in Ganești (Vámosgálfalva) in the late 1960s, where, due to a scandal involving a pastor and a young student in the after-hours of catechism, the position became vacant. Another pastor had had his eyes set on this post for some time, having grown up in the area with relatives in Gănești. He had many supporters in the town, and these tried to immediately call him to the position without the usual deliberation. But not all members were convinced, and these wished to go through the entire process whereby pastors would be observed and chosen by the customary vote. What transpired was a scandal for the church: several years of tension, defiant parishioners locking church doors, accusations of ballot-fixing, visits and complaints by parishioners to the Department and Bishopric, the naming of a temporary "administrator" to help de-toxify the congregation, and hours and hours of surveillance and report-writing.²¹ In this case, the problem for officials was not excessive religiosity but a caustic social environment caused by an inner-church dispute that impeded the cooperation of the people in carrying out normal public-social functions. Rather than "persecution," state officials did their best to help bring about a healthy solution. They preferred a quiet religious life, not just free from excessive zeal, but from inner-church hostilities and scandals as well.

²⁰ Direcția Județeană Mureș a Arhivelor Naționale, "Departamentul Cultelor" 1965-1983/345, 244.

²¹ See documents from the Departamentul Cultelor from 1966 on.

Unremarkable Religiosity

Focusing on the “problems” state representatives faced in managing the Hungarian Reformed Church, however, takes attention away from the fact that most of the time, in most Reformed Churches, religious practice was quotidian, predictable, and acceptable in this “atheist” state. Struggles with religious life were not absent, but they fell comfortably within the boundaries of normal religious practice and did not confront the status quo of the relations between the church and “atheist” state.

Most Reformed clergy did not generate causes to concern state officials, and most did not warrant any particular attention for overstepping the boundaries of acceptable religious practice. Most services, sermons, catechism activities, and the like did not threaten state authority or even state ideology. Most of the people in this study are featured because they did overstep in some way, thus foregrounding them in officials’ documents. The case of Ödön Nagy is one such example of someone whose activity was insufficient to make him the subject of reports from the Department of Religions (though knowing the extent of police surveillance, he likely had a file with the *Securitate*).

Nagy served in three parishes during the reign of Ceaușescu until his retirement in 1976. He was in Câmpești (Mezőfele) for around ten years, from 1958 to 1968, in Solocma (Szolokma) from 1968 until 1970, and then finally in Neaua (Havad) until his retirement in 1976. His tenure at Câmpești was marked by tension and division within the community, as some of them resented his encouragement of the active believers alongside his supposed disdain for the “worldly” members, and one presbyter seemed to have the backing of a number of others when he disparagingly remarked in a meeting that Nagy was trying to make Adventists out of them. Nagy complained that they were “misers” and “arrogant.” His next appointment in Solocma was more positive in terms of his relations with the parish, but he claimed he had been deceived by his predecessor there with regard to the living conditions, ones he found detrimental to his family’s health and cause to seek a position elsewhere. In Neaua, he encountered a parish in a “deteriorated state” materially and religiously, and his six years there were spent in executing normal church functions and undertaking renovations. He claimed Neaua had many “divisions,” but he did not describe efforts he undertook to heal them, if any.²²

²² Ödön Nagy, János Hermán, and Mózes Nyitrai, *Palástban: Lelkészek Szórványban [In Cloaks: Pastors in Diaspora]* (Marosvásárhely: Mentor, 2001), 129–38.

Nagy's travails were not caused by meddling state agents, but by various difficult pastor-congregation scenarios that could not be traced back to state machinations so much as situations that were common before and after the communist era. Religious zeal and congregational harmony was not the norm. Rather, the case of Nagy exemplifies the ordinary stuff of religious practice in communist Romania. As was argued and explored at length in the case of Orthodox priests in Chapter VII, most Reformed pastors, most of the time, performed their religious duties according to expectations, in the realm of religious acceptability. Inspectors mentioned Reformed priests as contributing in significant ways to social plans and programs. In addition, when pastors attended the routinely scheduled and mandatory "orientation" conferences, their comments on the "sidelines" were observed, but informers found they made comments which were mostly loyal and supportive.²³

Church Democracy and Revolutionary Potential

Even if the "Bethanists" no longer carried out activity under a specific name following their release, due to their being derided by state and church representatives in the trials of the 1950s, in publications, and at orientation conferences, "Bethanism" was now firmly established as a concept and a pejorative. "Bethanism" emerged as the paragon of unacceptable religiosity in the Reformed Church, as made evident by the fact that László Papp, who became Bishop over the Oradea district after the 1964 amnesty (and lasted until 1989), often deployed the term "Bethanism" for its discursive power in his handling of church affairs. Papp was particularly aggressive in rooting out communal activities beyond Sunday worship, including Bible classes, choirs, informal worship or prayer gatherings, calling them "pietist deviations."²⁴ What follows is a particularly illustrative case of the ensconced concept of Bethanism-as-unacceptable-religiosity in an incidence that also demonstrates the potential democratic (or according to church and state leaders, "anarchic") power found in the Reformed Church's institutional culture. The events below provide important context for understanding later ones connected to the beginning of the Romanian revolution in Timișoara in 1989. The same raw ingredients that made for revolutionary potential in 1989 were present in the 1978 episode which follows. Both

²³ Direcția Județeană Sălaj a Arhivelor Naționale, "Departamentul Cultelor," 1975/48, 4, 12.

²⁴ "Church Life in Romania," *Religion in Communist Lands* 17, no. 4 (1989): 357. The personalities of church leaders like bishops and deans did matter and have an impact in certain ways. There were two bishops over two districts in the Reformed Church (Nagyvárad/Oradea and Kolozsvár/Cluj). In the 1970s and 1980s, the two bishops were Laszlo Papp and Gyula Nagy, respectively. Bishop Nagy did not encourage these activities either, but did not hound their proponents as Papp did.

instances involved a major confrontation featuring a complex web of clergy, believers, religious leadership, and state officials, but only in 1989 would the conflict spread beyond the congregation.

Just after Christmas in 1970, the pastor of a 4,800 member church (though only a fraction participated regularly) died. He was pastor of the main Reformed Congregation and seat of the deanery in the medium-sized city of Zalău (Zilah) in Sălaj County. Perhaps surprising to those who adhere to a strictly totalitarian view of the Ceausescu regime, there was a democratic opportunity in pastoral selection in the Reformed Church, and theoretically, the bishop could not oppose a congregation's call or selection of a pastor if it was made by vote of the congregation in a meeting. This institutional process that granted congregations the "right" to choose or "call" their own head pastor (whereas assistant pastors were placed by the bishop) persisted under communist rule. The group of elders, called the presbytery, would invite pastors to preach as guests, choose a candidate (theoretically by vote), and then offer him or her a "call" to be their pastor. This process, with its authority located locally, meant that the church leadership and state officials left some degree of power in the hands of the people, whose whims might be undesirable but backed by a legal democratic procedure.

In February a group from Zalău traveled to the small town of Almașu to hear the preaching of József Sinka to consider him as a candidate. Even before the service, this group of fourteen met with him and asked him whether he'd accept a call to Zalău, and he said he would. The pastor and his wife invited them back to their home after the service, and served them coffee and brandy 'to warm up.'

The inspector from the Department of Religions in Sălaj County at the time, Gheorghe David (see Chapter VII), wanted to find out "who the person of the priest Iosif [József] Sinka [was]." He found out that Sinka's village had many "sectarians" like Baptists, Pentecostals, and Jehovah's Witnesses, but that "his power to convince is not that brilliant." Sinka's son was a student at the Theological Institute in Cluj, and during an excursion to Czechoslovakia in 1969 he managed to flee to Western Germany, where he still was studying theology. Sinka's articles in various magazines, David found, "tended toward bethanism." The Sălaj County executive organs had "reservations" about him, and the local organs, the bishop, and the inspector all agreed that since the called priest would be the dean as well (with Zalău as the seat of the county and the deanery), they certainly could not have such an unreliable element with so many potential

negatives serving in such a role.²⁵ They required someone with clearer evidence of reliability, and Sinka lacked it on more than one front.

Later that month the presbytery of the congregation was going to meet about choosing a priest, and since the bishop would be unable to make it, the clerk asked the inspector whether he might attend the meeting. Inspector David, however, knew he could not be seen as interfering, telling the clerk that “it’s not good for me to take part.”²⁶ This was an internal church process. At the vote, they chose Sinka.

Although it appeared the presbytery had found their man, their little “warming” toast of brandy ended up costing them dearly, and the brandy was just what the church and state officials needed to avert having an unreliable element as Dean and pastor in Zalău. The Reformed Church’s rules of pastor-calling declared that if the potential priest “bribed, bought votes, or made unlawful or illicit promises in writing or orally, personally or through a delegation, if he indulged the selectors,” or “if the called or chosen priest in other ways employed unlawful methods like: hospitalities, offers of alcoholic drinks, of money,” etc., the selection would be void.²⁷ In April Bishop Papp came to Zalău and was joined by a team of representatives to investigate the situation. They looked over Sinka’s case and decided to “exclude him from the candidacy” due to the violations (the conversation in his house, and the serving of brandy). Sinka protested that “they were against him,” but the commission insisted upon following proper procedure.²⁸ Drink and procedure did not mix.

Yet the presbytery insisted on Sinka as their man, forcing the bishop to respond. The presbytery already did not like or trust the bishop, and a couple of elders in particular fomented the fight, criticizing the Bishop and justifying themselves. Bishop Papp tried to get a temporary pastor to stabilize the situation. Considering the existing assistant pastor Ernest Nagy “lacking in capacity for guidance,” he appointed Gheorghe Vidits, “a capable and dynamic man” as “Managing Priest” in Zalău.²⁹ When the believers found out, they responded by not permitting

²⁵ Direcția Județeană Sălaj a Arhivelor Naționale, “Departmentul Cultelor,” 1971/11, 74.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 1971/8, 65.

²⁷ Direcția Județeană Sălaj a Arhivelor Naționale, “Departmentul Cultelor,” 1971/11, 73.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 75.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 75–76. As part of the process of Vidits’ appointment, inspector David wrote up an assessment of him: married, one child, only has cousins abroad, and they are only in Hungary, was never sentenced. He is well liked and cooperates or supports local initiatives; he maintains connections with local authorities and the inspector. Since he started his current position as pastor in 1968 no more Reformed believers have joined up with neoprotestants. No evidence of “disloyalty”. He is liked by his colleagues, is “modest”.

Rev. Vidits into the church—whose appointment as “Managing Priest” they considered unprecedented and “an entirely illegal function.”

In May inspector David traveled to Oradea to discuss the matter with the bishop, as the situation was spiraling out of control and getting ugly. The inspector asked Bishop Papp to clarify some rumors David had heard, namely that he had threatened to close the church and abolish the position of their priest, and that those who refused to give up on Sinka would have disciplinary proceedings taken against them with charges of “hooliganism.” Others complained that Papp was trying to replace their “traditional rights” to choose a priest “in a democratic spirit” with a “foreign” procedure.

In response, the bishop replied that he “will not give in to certain anarchistic persons” since the possibility might create a “dangerous precedent for the church.” But, he promised to keep it a church problem and would not “implicate” either the state organs or Department of Religions. He said he would not insist on Vidits and allow Ernest Nagy to remain in the position of temporary administrator of the church. The bishop ensured the inspector that he was “concerned” about the situation.³⁰ The inspector, although a state representative, could not dictate to the bishop, although one might think his status as a church representative made him lower.³¹

The same scenario—with a democratic process and popular wishes in conflict with the meddlesome and authoritarian Bishop Papp while inspector David tried to mediate—was also taking place in the choosing of the replacement Dean, now that this position had been separated from that of head pastor of Zalău. The locals had their preferred candidate, Carol Virág, who was a local pastor and was currently serving as secretary in the Deanery. But Papp had his preferred candidate, Pál Várگا, of another deanery altogether. Papp wanted Várگا to help shape the Deanery to Papp’s liking, as opposed to Virág, whom he disparagingly accused of sympathizing with “bethanism,”³² even though Virág had not been active in “Bethanist” circles.

Inspector David did not actively support Papp’s meddling in this affair, so Papp brought in support. A dean of another county, Kornel Szablyár, wrote a “declaration” about Virág for the benefit of the authorities, which Szablyár suspiciously noted was “unconstrained and

Could be “considered” for future positions of power since he is in good standing with Bishop Papp. He is not a “fanatic,” meriting promotion (p. 126).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 78.

³¹ Some have argued that high-ranking church leaders should also be considered high-ranking members of the secret police, since there is considerable evidence for the power and information they wielded.

³² Direcția Județeană Sălaj a Arhivelor Naționale, “Departamentul Cultelor” 1972/16, 226–227.

uninfluenced by anyone.” He claimed he had heard of someone named “Virág” with “ultra-pietist traits, bethanist inclinations” linked to “Visky and others.” At his next parish, he claimed Virág was “in the attention of both the church tutelary bodies and of others (local and regional),” and that although he was a “conscientious priest” who performed his duties, he was guilty of “conduct[ing] himself extremely closed with regard to any local authorities, not collaborating with the People’s Council.” He characterized Virág as “totally passive” politically, uninterested in supporting improvements for the citizens, not participatory in the church conferences, and when confronted about these matters, Virág supposedly responded in a “sarcastic” and “scoffing” manner, causing superiors to be “uncertain” about him.³³

Yet when David did his own verification of Szablyár’s and Papp’s accusations, he found that Virág was a “smoker,” something “the bethanists did not do.” As to the accusation that he “would not collaborate as needed with the local organs,” David found that “he collaborates even quite well,” and that what he had observed “obliges us to see that he has changed.” David was concerned about the effects Papp’s meddling would have. Papp had somewhat scandalously already disallowed from candidacy another local favorite and interim Dean, Zoltán Fejer (mentioned above as having popular services with Hungarian colors) for reasons not given in the documents, causing Fejer to promise he’d refuse further service in the deanery at all. Virág promised to refuse further service if Papp’s favorite Várگا was chosen, citing past grievances with Várگا. The currently serving treasurer also promised to quit if the outsider Várگا was appointed. Despite the reality of a democratic choosing, the candidates, officeholders for the deanery, and local pastors were all prepared for Papp’s favorite to win.³⁴

In fact, when the ballots were counted, Virág won. But Papp told inspector David that “he will never let the bethanist play his tricks.” Papp’s plan was to “call the chosen priest, Carol Virág, in to him and to send him in front of the discipline consistory where he should justify by what means he obtained the majority of votes,” as Papp had “evidence” that a supportive pastor conducted “propaganda in favor of [Virág].” The inspector tried to caution the Bishop, replying that “in my opinion much wisdom and tact is needed.” David wanted to avoid “creating an unhealthy environment among the priests,” as well as the result that “the new leadership team would constantly be under a state of tension.” Although the inspector could agree with the Bishop that the choice of Virág was not preferable to Várگا, he felt that “going on this path

³³ Ibid., 330.

³⁴ Ibid., 227–28.

will be even worse”: “the animosities” that are “smoldering” will “take root,” meaning that Papp should try to “win” them over, not “push them aside.”³⁵ A representative of the atheist state was trying to smooth relations in the Reformed Church, even when the Church’s own head was not. But the bishop got his wish, as Virág backed down without a fight, ultimately at the expense of Papp’s reputation in the Zalău Deanery.

Meanwhile, the congregation in Zalău still needed a pastor. The bishop informed inspector David that on March 21, 40 people went to hear the pastor in Teaca, Kálmán Adorján, as a possible candidate. Using the same pejorative as before, the bishop “remarked that the respective person was bethanist or had a connection with them.” But the inspector found that the “competent organs” of the respective county “are of the view that the priest could occupy the post, they have nothing against it.” The question lay with the Bishop to decide. The presbytery had asked David if he had anything against Adorján (“to not lose time and to resolve for once the situation”). His opinion was, “Taking into account that it is only about the function of priest in Zalău parish, I personally consider it worth Mr. Bishop using this opportunity to put an end to the undesired situation in Zalău parish.”³⁶

Despite whatever reservations Bishop Papp may have had about this “bethanist” Kálmán Adorján, he evidently gave his consent.³⁷ He had long ago worn out the patience of the presbytery and was wearing out that of the inspector as well. The distrust and animosity within the Reformed Church exceeded any animosity between the Department of Religions and the Church; in fact, both sides of the church confided in the state representative, David, and asked for mediation.

Thus, in mid-1972 the Zalău congregation officially called Adorján, while Papp’s favored candidate Pál Varga became the Dean, the latter according to the wishes of the Bishop, the former less so. Despite the candidate for pastor having a less-than perfect religious profile in the state’s or church leadership’s eyes, in the end, the local church and its presbytery managed to get someone they wanted by a spirited negotiation with church and state authorities. This contest occurred due to a democratic process that held over from pre-communist times and was respected as legitimate by the authorities (yet far from unmolested by church leaders!). Yet the

³⁵ Ibid., 228–29.

³⁶ Ibid., 229–30.

³⁷ Because inspector David of Sălaj County took up a post in a neighboring county at this time, some of the hoped-for files documenting the final stages of this process are not there, making the final stages of the presbytery’s call of Adorján unclear.

choosing of the Dean and new pastor in Zalău Deanery was only the beginning of a protracted and spirited battle. An acquaintance of Adorján's warned him that he was entering "a hornet's nest,"³⁸ but he came anyway, not knowing that his coming there would far from resolve the problems, but only create new ones.

Starting in 1972, Adorján's rapport developed quite well with the congregation. The church had services or gatherings nearly every day, and as many as 80 came for Bible studies. Adorján's wife re-started the choir with permission of the dean. Over a thousand sometimes attended the church on festive Sundays. From 1975 until 1978, however, Adorján and his congregation experienced nothing but hardship and difficulty. In 1975 one of his goals was to undertake heating the church for wintertime, but Bishop Papp replied that "since our ancestors bore the winter cold, [you] should too." They decided to go by another route and take it upon themselves, without support of the Bishopric. Later that year the issue of the heating was investigated at the instigation of church and state authorities, and he was fined by the investigating parties for "irregularities" in the purchase and installation of a heating system.³⁹

In fact, several of his own congregation provided information about "irregularities" in his activities to the bishop, and inspector Roman and local officials from the civil Popular Council were also notified. In addition, in his own parish house, he was accused of "bethanist activity – studying of the Bible," and other local pastors were also present, including two of his friends as well as former "Bethanist" convict, Sándor Szilágyi. Also (supposedly), he received visitors in 1974 who delivered Bibles, but since these Bibles "[did] not coincide with the current Bibles being used," foul play of some sort was insinuated (e.g. unauthorized delivery to others). The church's money-collection boxes were supposedly unlawfully lying in Adorján's home, suggesting that perhaps he was taking from them. A former chaplain of the church passed along the information that Adorján had typed out copies of pages on his typewriter used for catechism and confirmation without official pre-approval. In addition, he supposedly received money from each teen participating in confirmation but did not declare this income for tax purposes from 1973 through 1975. With this money, he ostensibly bought a television, rugs, and furniture, while "the organist" (his wife) purchased a vacuum cleaner. Last on the list was that he

³⁸ László Miklós, *Akik Imádkoztak Üldözőikért: Börtönvallomások, Emlékezések [Those Who Prayed for Their Persecutors: Prison Testimonies, Memories]* (Kolozsvár [Cluj-Napoca, Romania]: Erdélyi Református Egyházkerület, 1996), 25.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

neglected to have the necessary “legal forms” filed for the heating installation in the church, and he did not make proper reports of foreign visitors.⁴⁰

It is difficult to assert the truth of the situation, whether all of these in fact occurred, or whether such “technicalities” might have been easily overlooked or handled otherwise. But it is clear that the bishop was not hesitant to take disciplinary measures, and the vice president of the local Popular Council and the “local organs” of the county were not “opposed to measures which are expected to be taken by the Reformed Bishopric of Oradea” against Adorján.⁴¹

By the bishop's recommendation, the Department revoked Adorján's work permit in February 1976. Adorján managed to get his permission back in May.⁴² Adorján and his yet-loyal elders were at loggerheads with Papp, and Roman remained in the middle and acted as mediator by telling all parties to keep this inner-church problem within the church. The bishop created additional problems by having the pastor's checking account frozen to prevent deposits of his wages, a situation Adorján and some others from the church circumvented on the side while pleading for the account to be reopened all the way until 1977. Papp was even overheard declaring that he wanted to find something wrong, so that “they could hit [Adorján] with at least two years [in prison].” Adorján often had to go in for interrogations and hearings, while the congregation helped to provide for the family's needs.⁴³ In Adorján's opinion, “Despite all of this, or just because of this, the church was full every Sunday, for Bible study even 200 came.” The congregation was with him. Signatures were collected on several occasions for his defense, numbering as many as 3,000.⁴⁴

In June of 1977, a delegation of two supervisors from the bishopric, the dean, and a priest of the local deanery came for “the handover and takeover” of the parish from Adorján, an act which “did not succeed” because Adorján and his supporters flatly refused to vacate. Since the appropriate church avenues were not successful, Roman had to inform city- and county-level “competent organs” about the situation. The following week, Adorján and Roman met, and the pastor informed the inspector that “he had gone to the Department of Religions [in Bucharest], where he was given an audience, saying that he was advised to make an appeal with

⁴⁰ Direcția Județeană Sălaj a Arhivelor Naționale, “Departamentul Cultelor” 1975/43, 50–51.

⁴¹ Ibid., 52.

⁴² Direcția Județeană Sălaj a Arhivelor Naționale, “Departamentul Cultelor”, 1976/50, 93.

⁴³ Miklós, *Akik Imádkoztak Üldözőikért.*, 26.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 27.

regard to his transfer, expecting to receive a path for resolution.”⁴⁵ Adorján was using the complex layers of authority to his advantage by negotiating among them.

At a subsequent meeting with the Bishop, Adorján reported that the “essence of it was, 'If you leave Zalău, I will have every church and civil proceeding against you stopped.’”⁴⁶ This statement indicates that the problem was not his “aberrations,” but his presence and influence in the congregation in Zalău itself. They would not begrudge placing him in a smaller parish, nor would they begrudge the congregation a more “acceptable” minister.

Yet the congregation begged him and his wife to “carry out [their] service and not give in to force” at a December 31 meeting in which more than 2,000 were in the church. But since Church avenues had failed to remove Adorján, the bishop called for the state authorities to remove him from his position and the parish. Meetings in January of 1978 with the county police, the religious inspector, and the city police had the same message: he should “obey the bishop.” But meanwhile, 50-60, even as many as 100 members of his congregation were routinely present around the parish to try to prevent his forceful removal, creating a tense environment. On the seventeenth of January the Dean arrived to his home with some 40 police and secret police personnel, but he was not at home.⁴⁷ Some 30 younger men even accompanied him to the chief prosecutor, who told him that he must “leave Zalău.”

When Adorján met the head of the Department of Religions in Bucharest along with inspector Roman (who had been ordered to follow him everywhere, even up to the bathroom door on the train), the two Reformed bishops were there already. They wanted him to leave his post willingly, while he wanted them to admit that he was innocent and claimed that their steps to remove him were unlawful. Eventually Department of Religions Chief Ion Popescu threatened him, saying that if he would not renounce, he would be detained, his wife would be thrown out of the house, and the five children from their school. Drained by the battle and unwilling to endure further threats, he decided to give up.

At the farewell service on January 29, there were 2,100 people in the church, including many “leather-jacketed” *Securitate* and police officers.⁴⁸ The years marked by congregational enthusiasm were swallowed up by an unyielding church-state alliance with its divisive informers. A few days later he handed over his parish, though the congregation did not give in so easily.

⁴⁵ Direcția Județeană Sălaj a Arhivelor Naționale, “Departamentul Cultelor”, 1977/58, 76–77.

⁴⁶ Miklós, *Akik Imádkoztak Üldözőikért*, 27.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 28.

Some of them had decided to lock up the church and the pastor's office, declaring to the authorities “we are awaiting the return of our pastor, and then we'll open up the church.” The police and *Securitate* used their sources to identify the leaders of the “rebellion,” fined them for “disturbing the peace,” and re-opened the church. About two months after Adorján left, services started again with a temporary pastor, and those who attended services were obliged to hear negative allusions to the Adorjáns for some time after their departure. By October 1978 the congregation had chosen a new pastor to whom the authorities granted permission.⁴⁹

During this ten-year period in one Reformed congregation, the potential power of the democratic institutions (however compromised or circumscribed) in the church become visible. The power to choose a pastor and keep him was formidable, but such power could be limited by disciplinary proceedings, denying necessary authorizations, and freezing a bank account. Yet church or state officials had to proceed with care in limiting the power of democracy, lest they antagonize the believers and their pastor enough to cause them to bond together in defiance.

As we will witness below, the same raw ingredients that would make for revolutionary potential in 1989 were present in 1978 as well: a younger, dynamic, and stubborn Reformed Priest, a loyal and determined presbytery and congregation, the same extremely stalwart and tactless Bishop Papp, and certain democratic processes within the Reformed Church (more or less) respected by church and state authorities. But these ingredients alone do not make a revolution; they only create the potential for a confrontation. In 1978 there was simply not enough anti-state antagonism among the general population to mobilize the masses for a protracted struggle, since “The State” or Ceausescu had not been identified by the masses as “Enemy No. 1” or as responsible for all grievances. The grievances in Zalău were considered localized; they were not universal enough to unite strangers beyond the Church community. Just over ten years later in Timișoara, the church and state authorities would not be so lucky – although just how the fight of a stubbornly nationalistic Hungarian Pastor named Laszlo Tókécs could become a “Romanian” cause remains a puzzle to be explored below.

Renewal Reemerges on the Margins

Although the “Bethanists” were kept under watch in rural parishes, the “embers of revival” did not fade out; not everyone was dissuaded from pushing the limits of acceptable religiosity. In the years after cobbler-evangelist Jenő Nagy was released from prison in 1964 with

⁴⁹ Ibid., 29.

the others, on many Sunday afternoons some 35-40 youth gathered together at his house. But the authorities visited him and forbade him from holding such large gatherings, forcing the worshippers to get more creative. Those who attended such gatherings did so simply as “believers,” not as “Bethanists,” and teenage attendee István Halmen grew up seeing himself as a “believer” (as opposed to simply “Reformed” or “Lutheran,” for example) whose faith meant more than just a family or religious affiliation. At the gatherings, they read the Bible, discussed it, and sang (but not too loudly), and they always had a sort of ready excuse for their meeting, such as someone’s birthday. But as youth, they found excitement in the gatherings and did not really fear the consequences. Being a part of a group brought good feelings, “as in a family” or like “home.” As teenagers, they voluntarily held their own meetings apart from their parents, since they regarded it as an opportunity for gathering as friends.⁵⁰

Youth interest in “community life” increased in the 1970s and 1980s, and the children of those imprisoned in the late 1950s often actively pushed the boundaries of acceptable religiosity. Like the young Orthodox priests from the Banat (see Chapter VII), many of the youth were skeptical of church leaders, having parents or friends’ parents who had been unnecessarily harassed. The children of those imprisoned were barred from higher education in many cases or could not get the bishop’s approval for theological studies or placement.⁵¹ Some pastors even tried to provide a sort of “underground seminary education” for interested youth who sought more than what the Seminary offered.⁵²

This group of believers customarily used the occasions of official holidays like New Year’s, the First of May (Labor Day), and August 23 (celebrating the liberation from fascism in 1944) for gatherings. Already in the late 1960s Ferenc Visky had started holding gatherings, and word spread by mouth. Taking their own means of transportation, guests ate together and slept wherever there was space. Participants saw Visky’s home as a “true pilgrimage site” where “youth from every part of the country flocked,” and many of the imprisoned “Bethanists” were there as well. Their activities were “kept strictly within the parish and church buildings” to minimize the risk of repercussions.⁵³

⁵⁰ Halmen, interview.

⁵¹ Visky, *Bilincseket És Börtönt Is*, 245.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 246.

⁵³ Dezső Buzogány and Csongor Jánosi, *A Református Egyház Romániában a Kommunista Rendszer Első Felében: Tanulmányok és Dokumentumok [The Reformed Church in Romania in the First Half of the Communist Regime: Essays and Documents]* (Budapest: L’Harmattan Kiadó, 2011), 353.

In 1976, some youth spent time bicycling around the countryside looking for a suitable place to have hidden camps, and they found Lacu Leșu (Lesi Tó) which was 35 kilometers from the train station. Two weeks later, they had their first camp there.⁵⁴ They paid strict attention to being as secretive as they could, but informers were common. Technically, they were there for camping, as tourism was not forbidden. Pastors, their families, lay persons, and youth played, swam, and hiked. But they also sang songs and studied the Bible. For these latter activities, they usually went into the woods, away from the gaze of any others, but sometimes they encountered shepherds with their flocks. Visky recalls that “the state security and militia too often stepped in right during Bible study, requested documentation [for show their right to gather], but there was nothing to show them.”⁵⁵ They were ordered to gather only by the lake, since it was publicly visible.

The re-emergence of this active group of believers—albeit not going by a specific name—did not escape the notice of state agents. In an August 1977 report, the inspector noted that “once again a trend of reemergence of the bethanist movement has been observed.” State agents had caught them “openly” meeting, as well as speaking at a burial and at a consecration of a church. In addition, “at large parishes, vacant, in Tg-Mureș,” some “known bethanist elements” were being chosen to fill them.⁵⁶

Although active “believers”—whom state and church authorities still labeled “bethanists”—still suffered harassment in the 1970s and 1980s, the pitch was not what it was in the 1950s. All of those formerly imprisoned had to face periodic interrogations and vague threats that another prison term awaited them, and there were moments in which they feared a wave of arrests followed by show trials, but state authorities preferred to use “intimidation” and warn them to simply “believe what [they] believe” but not keep up the close relationships.⁵⁷ Although state representatives were not beyond deploying show trials or violence, they had to weigh the costs on an international scale. The state was enjoying some of the economic benefits of an improved foreign reputation (Romania was granted “Most Favored Nation” status by the

⁵⁴ Halmen, interview.

⁵⁵ Ferenc Visky, *Anti* (Kolozsvár: Koinónia, 2005), 83.

⁵⁶ Direcția Județeană Mureș a Arhivelor Naționale, “Departmentul Cultelor,” 1965-1983/345, 108.

⁵⁷ Kálmán Széplaki, *A Gáncs Nélküli Lovag [The Knight without Blemish]* (Kolozsvár [Cluj-Napoca, Romania]: Koinónia, 2012); Ferenc Visky, *Szerelme Szorongat [His Love Constrains Us]* (Kolozsvár [Cluj-Napoca, RO]: Koinónia, 2004).

U.S. in 1975), and believers had an ever-increasing network of communication that kept those in the West apprised of anything resembling religious persecution.⁵⁸

The focus of authorities' violence, rather, was on the younger generation, whom they evidently considered more dangerous.⁵⁹ But because authorities used retribution more sparingly, many youth who were active in believers' circles looked fondly at the late 1970s and 1980s and felt that they shared a true religious community. As one such young man put it, "From the point of view of my spiritual life, it meant a lot that there was an opportunity to meet and live our faith as youth."⁶⁰ Another said that as youth, they grew tired of having to remain a passive audience and did not want to simply keep their heads down and be quiet. They sensed that what made church acceptable was when one authorized person spoke while the others listened, but this scenario did not allow for authentic, open discussions where youth could debate or question.⁶¹ Thus, the void sent them looking and made gatherings marked by authenticity and openness all the more attractive. Last, that elements of "risk" and "a little conspiracy" were aspects of voluntary, unauthorized youth gatherings made them all the more attractive to certain youth and helped bond them, leading many of them to feel that never in their lives did they enjoy such "close" and "lively" friendships as they did at this time.⁶²

Religious, Ethnic, and National Mobilization in Timisoara

The final episode of this project brings us to the Hungarian Reformed Church in Timișoara (Temesvár), where several strands of this story come together: "believer"- "bethanists," church democracy, obstinate clergy (again Bishop Papp, but this time with László Tótkés), youth, and revolution. This episode will demonstrate that state agents were right to worry about managing religion and keeping it benign.

Youth who had parents with problematic histories were routinely barred from pursuing careers in the humanities, arts, or education (locations with more potential for ideological influence), and as such, some of the children or relatives of the imprisoned "Bethanists" found themselves studying for degrees at the technical university in Timișoara. Visky's son András

⁵⁸ The work of the Keston Institute is only one such example. The correspondence they received from contacts across Eastern Europe rose dramatically during the 1970s.

⁵⁹ The sons of some of the active believers, for example, feared more aggressive intimidation. Kálmán Adorján Jr. and András Visky were both physically beaten by *Securitate* agents.

⁶⁰ Buzogány and Jánosi, *A Református Egyház Romániában*, 354.

⁶¹ Halmen, interview.

⁶² Interview with Péter Visky, September 16, 2015.

(now a well-known writer), Sándor Szilágyi's grandson of the same name, and István Halmen had come to Timișoara to study engineering, but while there, they took part in the religious life of the Reformed Church. Halmen had come from Târgu Mureș (Vásárhely) where he had been an active participant in the youth groups that centered around Jenő Nagy and later Kálmán Csiha. But in Timișoara, the pastor at the Reformed Church was a somewhat notorious figure, Leo Peuker, whom many considered a so-called "Red Priest," someone whose support of the regime so far outshined his interest in spiritual or religious matters that the authenticity of his faith might be called into question. A typical church service featured some twenty widows along with a small group (up to ten) of these "believers," or spiritually inclined youth, who considered it part of their faith commitment to attend church. The youth found Peuker's preaching "boring" and "extremely weak," and since they "couldn't get anything out of it," they sought additional sites for religiosity.⁶³ Thus with a dead congregational life, minimal church attendance, and certainly no youth group, Halmen and others participated in the youth activities of other protestant denominations, like the Baptists. Sometimes they would travel to hear Ferenc Visky preach.⁶⁴

Yet in time, emboldened by each other, Halmen and András Visky approached Peuker and asked him the most unlikely of questions: could there be a youth group like there was in Kálmán Csiha's church? And as a sort of communist miracle, Peuker agreed! (N.b.: Peuker and Bishop Papp supposedly did not get along. Peuker had designs on the Bishopric but was overlooked in favor of Papp, and it seems they did things to antagonize each other. In this case, Peuker may have allowed a youth group out of boredom or to be an annoyance to Papp's attempts to limit any extra-curricular religious activity.⁶⁵) During the first year of this youth group, Peuker attended each gathering. Although the youth were allowed to talk, he made sure to didactically correct each one of them after they spoke. The following years he assigned his assistant pastor to this duty, but as the assistant pastor would change often, the youth group gained momentum, and the fresh-from-seminary pastor became more like a guest.⁶⁶

By the early 1980s, there were several youth groups in the Timișoara region, with Reformed, Catholic, and Baptist or other protestant denominations each having one. Many

⁶³ Interview with Sándor Szilágyi, April 1, 2015.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Halmen, interview; Szilágyi, interview; László Tóké, *With God, for the People: The Autobiography of Laszlo Tókés as Told to David Porter*. (Hodder & Stoughton, 1990).

⁶⁶ Halmen, interview.

youth participated in more than one, giving rise to a sort of ecumenical-Christian-youth culture.⁶⁷ Then a new assistant pastor, László Tókéš, was appointed by Bishop Papp, and Tókéš did not come to be passive.

One of Tókéš' responsibilities was to oversee the youth group, but he evidently did not value this opportunity (in his memoirs, he does not find it noteworthy enough to mention it among his activities, only complaining that he was not given the pulpit). In fact, those attending the youth group as a place of spiritual openness and authenticity found their new assistant pastor to be quite uninterested in spiritual matters compared to activities of a more ethnic character, and his attitude toward the "believers" was not particularly congenial. People like Halmen felt they "had more in common with Romanian believers than with nationalist Hungarians" like Tókéš, for whom the church was more of a bastion for Hungarian national identity.⁶⁸

But Tókéš' appointment was far from an accidental, uncomplicated affair; his placement in Timișoara was purposeful, and he came with baggage. In fact, it seems quite likely that Bishop Papp made Tókéš there as an assistant to annoy his former rival Peuker, as Tókéš had shown himself to be a thorny figure. In seminary, he and some friends campaigned to get the student body to be filled by elections instead of professorial appointments in hopes that it would respond to student desires, but this only got him into trouble. As a young assistant pastor in Dej (Dés), he started a Bible study that he catered to youth, and its topics were not strictly religious.⁶⁹ He then started a "study group" as a place for people to discuss ideas, and he also initiated many cultural activities (often of a distinctly Hungarian character). He became very popular with his congregation, and they tried to appoint him as a "permanent" assistant pastor,

⁶⁷ Szilágyi, interview.

⁶⁸ Halmen, interview; Helmut David Baer, "Ethnicity as a Theological Concept: The Thought of Laszlo Tokes," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 35, no. 3/4 (Summer/Fall 1998): 471. Of course Tókéš was not exceptional in this regard; there were many groups and enclaves in which people participated and discussed concerns of a national character, featuring a "save the Hungarian minority" type of ethos (interview with Péter Visky, September, 2013). The agenda for such nationally-minded gatherings involved discussion of what might be done in support of the Hungarian minority in Transylvania because many Hungarians were anxious about what they perceived as increasing marginalization and persecution in Transylvanian life.

⁶⁹ Tókéš, *With God, for the People*, 47–48, 52–53. Over 100 were typically coming to these weekly gatherings that featured dialogue, where they would engage in discussion on a wide variety of topics chosen by the students, in obvious contrast to the "one way," "unilateral interpretations" usually found in state-sponsored learning environments. They also had personal sessions as well, where individuals would share about their own lives and struggles. In order to make the events more likely to be continued, he made sure to advertise these as Bible studies, not as youth events, but the overwhelming majority of participants were youth.

free from the bishop's power to transfer him, but the bishop transferred him anyway, citing the congregation's appointment as uncanonical (while they cited *his* move as uncanonical). Tókéš refused to accept his new appointment and instead retreated to his parents' home, where he wrote letters complaining of his mistreatment. The congregation of Dej wrote in support of him, visited the bishop, shunned the head pastor and asked for his removal, and then tried to elect Tókéš head pastor, but church and state authorities would not allow it.⁷⁰

When Tókéš arrived in Timișoara in July 1986, the church was operating in the manner more or less preferred by the state: poor attendance, no dynamism, and predictable. Leo Peuker was doing his job well. Tókéš describes the services as "reduced to a bare minimum [...] to forms and rituals."⁷¹ For their residence, Tókéš and his wife were given a small room (essentially a closet) without a bathroom or fireplace, even though they were expecting a baby.

Although Tókéš was not winning over the hearts of the particularly active youth "believers" with his sometimes insensitive teasing and disinterest in spiritual matters,⁷² he was winning the hearts of some others in the congregation. He occasionally had the opportunity to preach on Sunday afternoons at the remote church site (the Gyárváros Prayer-house), a second site of the church further out in town where afternoon services were held. But without much to do, he decided to visit people in the parish. At first these visits with parishioners were tense and awkward. After a few weeks passed, a few had the courage to speak up. One noted to him that Peuker warned them about Tókéš as a "rebel, an enemy of the State" and that if they "associated" with him, "it could be harmful."⁷³ The strategy was clear: to keep Tókéš isolated from them.

One family of regular attenders invited the new assistant Tókéš for dinner after noticing how he "sat there on the pastor's bench moping and not getting to talk in the pulpit." They heard about his struggles in Dej with the authorities and how he was placed under Peuker's watch. In little informal meetings like these, they say, he began his work of "the enlistment of

⁷⁰ Felix Corley and John Eibner, *In the Eye of the Romanian Storm: The Heroic Story of Pastor Laszlo Tokes* (Old Tappan, N.J.: F.H. Revell, 1990), 85–87. The head pastor, Jozsef Láposi, warned Tókéš that his activity was "drawing too much attention and disturbing the quiet life of the church." The local police agents interrogated participants of Tókéš' activities until Tókéš decided to withdraw from his involvement in the cultural activities. It seems increasing numbers of informers helped destroy the camaraderie and intimacy of the Bible study.

⁷¹ Tókéš, *With God, for the People*, 84.

⁷² Szilágyi, interview. Tókéš reportedly teased some of the participants beyond what some considered inoffensive.

⁷³ János Antal and Joel David, *Rev. Revolution* (Orefield, Pennsylvania: Partium Press, 2009), 66.

the scattered congregation,” and invited them to participate at the remote Gyárváros Prayer-house.⁷⁴ Though not allowed to preach, do burials, or baptize, and only permitted some of these afternoon services, people felt that “Laszlo brought an entirely new spirit, [...] and more and more people started to come,” including youth. They held a Christmas program with poetry readings at the prayer house which youth and parents attended.⁷⁵

Members of the congregation grew sympathetic toward Tókécs, for his past fights and current plight, especially the very poor living situation for them and their baby. More and more felt inclined to support this young pastor, seeing him as energetic, capable, but disenfranchised in his desires to make something better out of their congregation. Even in the busyness of the first Christmas season of Tókécs’ service in 1986, Peuker undertook all of the responsibilities, as it was unusual for a pastor to scorn the help of an assistant. But in a surprise turn of events, Peuker soon suffered a stroke and died.⁷⁶ Tókécs was summoned to the bishop’s office at the beginning of 1987, and Papp warned Tókécs while also trying to entice him with offers of future power and influence should he behave. Despite his past and record of disloyalty, he was allowed to remain as pastor, with the understanding that it was “probationary.” He was expected to obey his elders, in return for which he would be given the position in full.⁷⁷ The position of head pastor was left unfilled, as the Bishop wanted to keep control of Tókécs and the position.

The Tókécs family moved into the parish from the tiny Sacristy, and his efforts expanded. He wrote letters to those who had not been attending. His sermons started drawing in more and more people.⁷⁸ Tókécs put energy into catechism and confirmation classes, writing letters to encourage parents to send their children, and as in Dej, he organized non-Sunday services and other celebratory services with various “special activities” for important religious days. It seemed to happen all too often that during services or events the electricity was switched off, but they learned to bring candles and felt that the celebration was “more uplifting and beautiful” this way.⁷⁹ Obstacles only heightened a sense of community and belonging, and this

⁷⁴ Máté Tókécs, *Egymás Tükrében: Soha Nem Hallott Vallomások egy Forradalomról [In Each Other’s Mirror: Never Before Heard Testimonies about a Revolution]* (Oradea: Editura Imprimeriei de Vest, 2004), 150. This is a collection of participants’ testimonies, compiled by the son of László Tókécs.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 152–53.

⁷⁶ Some sources say he collapsed with a heart attack, others say it was a stroke.

⁷⁷ Antal and David, *Rev. Revolution*, 69–70.

⁷⁸ Tókécs, *Egymás Tükrében*, 150.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 137.

community implicitly or explicitly contrasted with the threat of informers and the unreliability of the state in just keeping the lights on.

People were “inspired” by him to get involved, and they became devoted to him. People who had only attended on high religious holidays started attending with increasing regularity. One woman decided to leave her good-paying job and work for the church as a cleaning woman, so inspired was she to make changes in her life. She then began helping the Tókécs family in many small ways, getting things for them and running errands.⁸⁰

He attempted to preach in a “direct and fearless” way, and some who were not members – or even Hungarian – came to hear him preach. Many were drawn to the way in which he would preach on issues that were “relevant to their everyday lives.”⁸¹ Tókécs not only confided his battles with the bishopric to friends, he would even report these from the pulpit at times, and word spread around town of a young minister who would say things one never expected to hear. It also helped that the contrast was great, as the previous priest had a picture of Ceausescu in his office and held services for a handful of people. Now Romanians and people of other faiths were coming (neoprotestant women were identified for their bonnets).⁸² University students spread the news, and students with other religious backgrounds, including Baptists, Catholics, and Orthodox, attended the church as well.⁸³ After some time had passed, the church was so full that two services were being held, and loudspeakers were installed to reach those who could not enter the church building.⁸⁴ At Easter they did not fit in the church, and speakers were put up for those who could not fit.⁸⁵ Evidently the leadership of the pastor mattered—people were coming.

Tókécs inspired gatherings like an evening of Jenő Dsida readings (famous Hungarian poet) and joint services with Catholics, Baptists, and Pentecostals. The congregation also organized an ecumenical celebratory event in which Catholics and Reformed believers held a joint service with Hungarian and German priests participating and poetry being read. But the gatherings were not strictly “Hungarian.” There were times when parts of the service were conducted in Romanian, and one time an Orthodox priest and choir came and conducted the

⁸⁰ Ibid., 166–70.

⁸¹ Corley and Eibner, *In the Eye of the Romanian Storm*, 115–16.

⁸² Tókécs, *Egymás Tükrében*, 120.

⁸³ Corley and Eibner, *In the Eye of the Romanian Storm*, 116.

⁸⁴ Tókécs, *With God, for the People*, 96–97.

⁸⁵ Tókécs, *Egymás Tükrében*, 161–62.

service.⁸⁶ State representatives feared such spontaneously organized ecumenism, however (see Chapter VII).

The Church initially supported renovations in 1988, but the reactions by church and state authorities in late 1988 and early 1989 took a more serious and threatening turn. Clearly, the religiosity of this parish was transgressing the lines of acceptability. In November 1988, counteracting months of work and planning, the authorities put a stop to their church reconstruction plan, which had become necessary due to the now-crowded church. Tókécs was frustrated, as “It was something that bound the church together, that built up our identity as a community of people. To stop the rebuilding would have been a serious setback to our growth as a fellowship.” He responded as he had in the past: he called the move “illegal,” and he “refused to obey.”⁸⁷

Feelings of enthusiasm, community, and commitment increased. Attila Csóke says that things started getting exciting in 1988-89, and around March 1989, “I made up my mind that on Sundays I too will go to the church service—if only because at last there was someone who even publicly dared stand up for the right toward the authorities, and especially that he was Hungarian too. [...] For if we Hungarians do not help one another, then we wait in vain for someone else.” Then his parents and friends came too.⁸⁸ The church had become a place where some of them felt that “as Hungarians” they could band together.

The issue of being Hungarian was central to Tókécs, and he was not alone. Supposedly because Tókécs had joined with János Molnár (his former colleague at Seminary and partner in rebellion there) in writing a manifesto against what they perceived as Ceaușescu’s systematic destruction of Hungarian villages (his so-called “systematization program”),⁸⁹ Papp decided to

⁸⁶ Ibid., 137–38. Others say that Tókécs himself preached in Romanian a few times to accommodate increasing numbers of Romanians in attendance.

⁸⁷ Tókécs, *With God, for the People*, 116.

⁸⁸ Tókécs, *Egymás Tükrében*, 204.

⁸⁹ Seminary friend and fellow student-activist János Molnár had been relocated to the same deanery as Tókécs and lived in neighboring Arad county, in the town of Borossebes/Sebiș. Molnár and Tókécs would meet periodically, and they decided they must oppose Ceaușescu’s systematization plan, which was to reorganize settlements, sometimes by destroying villages (and some contend it had a particular focus on Hungarian villages). Using their contacts in all Reformed deaneries, they urged them to present a document they had written protesting the plan. Pastors were to sign it and it would be passed on to the bishop as a symbol of Reformed Church opposition to this plan. They distributed it to “willing” readers in other deaneries, and Molnár read it in the Arad deanery (but no one dared read it in any other one). Fellow pastors were quite alarmed and agreed that something needed to be done. Most of them signed the memorandum that was to be sent to the bishop. This activity was subsequently halted, and they were brought in for interrogation. Molnár was questioned by the bishop, who did not seem concerned about

discipline him by removing him from Timișoara. On March 9, 1989, Administrator of Synod Gyula Eszenyi chastised him for his activities and for failing “to maintain the required relations” with religious ministry officials.⁹⁰

On April 1 they were informed that he was to be removed from his position, but Tőkés decided that he would not give in. On April 13, the deanery’s disciplinary committee voted to have him suspended and disciplined. His accusations included “disturbing the life of faith” and “serious violations endangering the peaceful life of the congregation.”⁹¹ Church life was supposed to be benign. On May 21, the local presbytery “resolved to support [Tőkés] with a new petition” which opposed his transfer and used their “statutory right” to appoint him as full pastor.⁹²

Tőkés and his supporters had a sophisticated system for distributing letters across the border to Hungary and concerned people in the West, in attempts to publicize their struggle.⁹³ Starting in April, Tőkés never went anywhere without being accompanied by some friends or colleagues (to serve as bodyguards, deterrents, or witnesses).⁹⁴ Even to conduct a burial, he was always accompanied. The attempt to isolate and deprive the Tőkés family only heightened the communal response.

On August 28 the Department of Religions revoked his permit for this position. Heightening tensions, a member of Tőkés’ church and head of the renovation project, Ernő Újvárossy, was found dead after mysteriously vanishing in September. He was known to have been threatened by the *Securitate*. Tőkés made a rare exit from his apartment to conduct this funeral, where agents photographed the thirty or so who were brave enough to attend. Other members and elders suffered attacks in the streets by unknown assailants.⁹⁵ On October 20, the

the destruction of churches. They were interrogated and threatened for this activity. Molnár was then allowed to emigrate to Hungary, and Tőkés’ other accomplice, Béla Balogh, changed his opinions on the matter and now toed state line. In addition to meeting with Molnar, Tőkés would often meet with Béla Balogh, Ferenc Bányai, and Ferencz Józsa. It turns out that from 1983-1989 Bányai was informing on Tőkés to the *Securitate*. The secret service was also apparently aided by the husband of Tőkés’ sister, Eszter, who kept watch over family affairs. See Corley and Eibner, *In the Eye of the Romanian Storm*, 132, Tőkés, *With God, for the People*, 106–110, <http://erdely.ma/hirek.php?id=30551> Accessed 11/15/2013, Árpád Szóczy, *Timișoara: The Real Story behind the Romanian Revolution* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2013), 341.

⁹⁰ László Tőkés, *Temesvár Ostroma 1989 [The Siege of Temesvár 1989]* (Budapest: Hungamer, 1990), 21.

⁹¹ Corley and Eibner, *In the Eye of the Romanian Storm*, 157.

⁹² Antal and David, *Rev. Revolution*, 106.

⁹³ Tőkés, *Egymás Tükrében*, 155.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁹⁵ Corley and Eibner, *In the Eye of the Romanian Storm*, 183.

city court wrote an eviction notice for Tókéš, as he had disobeyed church authorities in their transfer of him.⁹⁶

The Presbytery traveled to Oradea to meet the bishop, but they were kept waiting; he was “busy with foreigners” all day. The next Sunday the congregation collected signatures petitioning for Tókéš to remain, putting their names, addresses, and phone numbers. Two from the congregation delivered it to their Dean in Arad.⁹⁷ Soon thereafter on November 2, the electricity went out at night in their neighborhood, and four masked men burst in to the parish home, armed with knives. A scuffle ensued, Tókéš was wounded, but finding several guests (bodyguards and witnesses) there to help repel their attack, the assailants fled.⁹⁸ Tókéš’ wife yelled for the *Securitate* agents who had been keeping permanent watch outside their home to come and help, but they were curiously unresponsive.⁹⁹

Tókéš received word that on Friday, December 15, 1989, he was to be evicted by force because he had refused to vacate his post and apartment as ordered on August 20. He announced this impending action to the congregation on Sunday the tenth and invited them to come and witness this “illegal act.” That morning, Tókéš appeared at the window to find several dozen people there, many of whom were older women. He suggested they go home, and there were some feeble attempts by police to ask the people to leave, which only led to angry exchanges. But the crowd grew. By 1:30, there were “hundreds.”¹⁰⁰ In addition to the ones from Tókéš’ congregation who were there initially, onlookers and other curious people joined them as news of the situation spread. Romanians outnumbered Hungarians toward late afternoon, and students came as well.

A little after six the pastor and his wife appeared in a window, and they began to speak with the congregants in Hungarian. A Romanian university student named Ion Iştván, having heard about this spectacle, had come for himself to see what was happening. So that he could understand what was being said, he shouted out, “in Romanian too!” Tókéš told them that “They want to evacuate us, not today, but they will tomorrow...” Several of the Romanians replied at once, “Never. We won’t leave you!” Iştván said they found themselves shouting as if it were “against the political regime,” so badly did they want to induce some sort of change. The

⁹⁶ “Struggle and Construction Temesvar (Timișoara), 1989: The Twentieth Anniversary of the Regime-Change,” accessed April 2, 2014, www.temesvar1989.ro.

⁹⁷ Tókéš, *Egymás Tükrében*, 137–38.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 151.

⁹⁹ Tókéš, *With God, for the People*, 139–40.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

crowd gained courage, people mingled, chatted, and “were smiling, as if from our looks too we would have understood one another.”¹⁰¹

By nightfall, the crowd numbered over one thousand. Earlier in the day, a few present had worried that they were too few, and that provocateurs would be sent into the crowds to create chaos. They had come up with the idea of asking the local Baptist congregation to join them, and Pastor Dugulescu was willing. After just an hour of asking them to come on the 15th, many of his congregation were joining them at their church.¹⁰² A Reformed church member, Lajos Varga, had mentioned to a Pentecostal colleague (“with whom our congregation had close ties”) what was to happen on Friday, and urged him to ask his congregation to support them, and a group of them were there too.¹⁰³ The Mayor came, met with Tőkés and a small group of his supporters, and agreed to Tőkés’ requests in exchange for Tőkés’ assistance in driving the crowd away.¹⁰⁴ But when they announced this from the window, the crowd remained suspect and would not leave. The crowd was beyond Tőkés’ control.

In the large evening crowd, some youth suggested singing hymns that were familiar to the Protestant denominations. “Silent Night” and another popular carol were sung in Hungarian and Romanian.¹⁰⁵ At one point, people began to sing the old Romanian national anthem, *Deșteaptă-te române*, (“Awaken, Romanian”). Certainly Tőkés’ neighbor Miescu was not the only one pondering the regime changes elsewhere in Eastern Europe in the months prior: she says that “we became emboldened for a possible opportunity of liberation.”¹⁰⁶ Scenes like a young man climbing atop the stopped trolley, banging on it, and shouting “Down with Ceausescu! May the Revolution live!” made it evident that this had gone far beyond an anti-eviction gathering of some loyal parishioners. Chanting began, and not all were displaying passivity. A young woman named Krisztina Balaton says that this event was almost like a “good party” to her and some of her friends. As “youth, we really enjoyed this,” she recalls—being

¹⁰¹ Tőkés, *Egymás Tükrében*, 181.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 128, 258; Peter Dugulescu, *Repenters*, ed. Kathleen Tsubata, trans. Dorothy Elford (Jesus the Hope of Romania, 2004), 197–99. Dugulescu had never personally met Tőkés, but they now “felt very close to one another” because of their situations (Dugulescu had suffered an assassination attempt on his life when the driver of an empty truck tried to run him over).

¹⁰³ Tőkés, *With God, for the People*, 15.

¹⁰⁴ Tőkés demanded that the eviction order be revoked, his broken windows repaired, and a doctor permitted to see his pregnant wife.

¹⁰⁵ Petru Dugulescu, *Ei Mi-au Programat Moartea [They Scheduled my Death]* (Timișoara: Marineasa, 2003).

¹⁰⁶ Tőkés, *Egymás Tükrében*, 159.

together, lighting candles. She did not fear provocateurs or informers.¹⁰⁷ As night fell, most of the older generations headed for home, and during the night the *Securitate* came with clubs and drove most of the crowd off, but by morning it had regrouped there.

Being Saturday, it was easy for a crowd to form, as some from yesterday returned to the scene, and many others had heard about it and wanted to see for themselves. After the Saturday service at the Baptist Church, a good number of the 2,000 or so that attended his church then spilled out toward the trolley stop, some taking part.¹⁰⁸ Tőkés appeared and said that the eviction notice was nullified, and people cheered and began shouting rhythmically, “Freedom, freedom, freedom, for the pastor and people.” By five o’clock, the time when water cannons were rumored to appear, some 5,000 were there. Tőkés suggested they leave, not to “risk their lives” for him, but they wouldn’t go.¹⁰⁹ Rather than a “figurehead,” Tőkés felt as though he was “a prisoner of [the crowd’s] anger.”¹¹⁰

Other gatherings were now popping up, and a crowd formed in the city center. Anti-government chanting, especially “Down with Ceaușescu,” mingled with hymn- and anthem-singing. Rumors of impending violence were spreading as people witnessed ranks of police and other armed militia forming, and soon violent altercations were taking place, as fire trucks arrived to blast the crowds with water. Panic broke out, people began to respond by throwing stones and bottles, as groups skirmished and chased each other amid shouts and slogans.¹¹¹ People fled to new locations, and across town there were scenes of wrecking Ceaușescu’s portraits and burning the books attributed to his authorship.¹¹² By morning, government forces had controlled the territory and the city was in a sort of lock-down, although Timișoara would become the rallying cry for the next stage of the revolution in Bucharest just days later.

During Saturday night, a group of friends and relatives stayed the night with the Tőkés family. Around three in the morning, after the crowds had been driven away from the parish, agents broke into the Tőkés’ apartment, where those present were beaten by trained agents and hauled off to prison.¹¹³ Tőkés was taken to the job he had been assigned, in the village of Mineu (Menyő).

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 223.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 260–61.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 183.

¹¹⁰ Tőkés, *With God, for the People*, 155.

¹¹¹ Tőkés, *Egymás Tükrében*, 185.

¹¹² Ibid., 188.

¹¹³ Ibid., 224.

Mineu was a remote village many hours away that had lacked a pastor for four years. The parish, located at a dead end of a road, had been set up for his arrival, with devices, guards, and lights all in place to keep an eye on him.¹¹⁴ Having just been arrested during the night and driven to Mineu that Sunday morning, he was instructed to give a sermon to “his very new and terribly spooked congregation,”¹¹⁵ although he was ordered to clean the blood from his face first.¹¹⁶ This moment is an interesting picture of religious life in Romania: guards, guard dogs, barbed wire, churchgoers instructed to unpack Tóké’s things, and the order from the secret police to give the people a sermon (it appears that there was not a service that morning amid the chaos, as instead they focused on unpacking the belongings, and the villagers gathered around Tóké to meet him and hear his account of the events).¹¹⁷

The bungling manner in which authorities handled his transfer was due to the tensions present in state management of religion. Trying to manage religion while keeping it from becoming attractive or sympathetic, authorities depended on religious leaders to enact their will. But because religious leaders did not have physical coercion at their disposal, state authorities sometimes had to step in. Yet Papp was more than a puppet; on many occasions as bishop his will had been heeded. Bishop Papp represented certain church interests, not just state interests, and these interests often overlapped.

Conclusion: Communal Religiosity and (Dis)respecting Authority

The resemblances between the Adorján and Tóké incidents are so striking that they make evident the fundamental difference: one episode remained an inner-church problem, whereas the other ballooned into a city-wide protest. The difference, clearly, had little to do with the particularities of the immediate church problem (since they were the same), but with the determination of Tóké and the ripeness of the moment to make what was a particular, “inner-church” problem, a universal one. Romanian university student Ion Işţvan recalls that he, like most of his colleagues, were against “the system” and they constantly discussed the situation and listened to foreign radio broadcasts. They were excited when they heard about this courageous priest who was not backing down in the face of pressure. They identified with him as a battler against a universal problem, assumed his disappearance was immanent, but

¹¹⁴ Szóczy, *Timișoara*, 306.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 320.

¹¹⁶ Corley and Eibner, *In the Eye of the Romanian Storm*, 32.

¹¹⁷ Szóczy, *Timișoara*, 323.

became even more excited when it seemed that the spark caused by Tókéš had become a conflagration. The awareness of events across Eastern Europe indeed created a state of expectation at this time. Iştván (as did Miescu, above) says many of them felt that the time was pregnant with potential, having heard about neighboring states.¹¹⁸

It is also worth considering the importance of the immediate locale as well: Timișoara, the cultural center of the Banat. For reasons too complex to explore here, not only were inter-ethnic antagonisms lacking there, but what is more, Romanians and Hungarians alike boasted of the inter-ethnic and ecumenical fraternization as a beloved and traditional feature of life in Timișoara and the Banat. Although this was ostensibly a “Hungarian” or “Reformed” problem that might have elsewhere prevented the event from gaining broad support, in Timișoara it became a badge of honor that people could band together even as “others.” The mayor had supposedly tried to implore the Romanians by saying, “if the Hungarians want to stand here, that’s their business. This is their church. Whatever happens, they’re chauvinists! But you Romanians, go home!” But many shouted back, “we’re not leaving!”¹¹⁹

In their accounts of the events, several people echoed the above sentiments. Romanian neighbor of Tókéš Ion Roman claimed that “Timișoara is the kind of city in which it never caused a problem that you are Hungarian, Serb, Romanian, or Jew.” There, the “hate” that was in other cities “did not exist.”¹²⁰ Friendships commonly spanned such differences. Student Ion Iştván received news of Tókéš from a Hungarian friend with connections to Hungarian sources.¹²¹ And although these Romanian students found out this was a gathering of Hungarian parishioners in support of their pastor to prevent his eviction, they were not deterred. Eventually, members of the congregation offered them candles and explained the situation, and a community of trust formed among those who chose to remain instead of just fearfully hurrying past (as many did). Iştván recalled the excitement and the smiles, that “something secretive bound us,” proudly reflecting that “we did the first, most important step toward the cohesion of the nationalities and ultimately among people, toward solidarity.”¹²²

Ferenc Bárányi (as did Lajos Varga above) emphasized the cross-denominational respect they shared, already evident in the life of the Reformed Church in Timișoara prior to the

¹¹⁸ Tókéš, *Egymás Tükrében*, 179.

¹¹⁹ Dugulescu, *Repenters*, 197.

¹²⁰ Tókéš, *Egymás Tükrében*, 163.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 179.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 180, 182.

revolution, starting with cross-denominational youth group participation, followed by Tóké's organization of ecumenical church services with Orthodox, Catholic, and other Protestant denominations. Bárányi noted that at Tóké's request Petru Dugulescu managed to gather members of his Baptist congregation, and "arm in arm" they were singing *Hora Unirii* (a song-poem about Romanian unity) in front of the church. Bárányi sums up how that day, commonalities overcame differences: Rather than "lingual, ethnic, religious antagonism, there were only embittered oppressed people, from whom the bitterness erupted and the uprising broke out."¹²³ A "Hungarian" inner-church problem could mobilize masses in 1989 Romania.

Religious institutions, by their very nature, always carried the potential for mass mobilization predicated on a different identity and way of belonging than those promoted and desired by representatives of the state. In this respect, communist officials wary of communal mobilization were quite right to try to keep "law and order" among the religious bodies. They were right to constantly police the boundaries of religious acceptability due to this potentiality, not because of a danger of a mass-church forming and rising up as a church, but because any site of corporate dynamism and corporate belonging could become a site for mass mobilization, irrespective of the particulars of the original contours of belonging. Spontaneous ways of gathering (e.g., as "Romanians" against Ceaușescu) could occur at any moment, only needing the spark that voluntary religious communities could offer.

But it was not a guarantee that religious bodies would provide such a spark. Most clergy, believers, and religious communities were far from sparking anything. In fact, in the case of Tóké, it's not clear to what extent the power of religious identity and belonging is distinguishable from ethno-national identity and belonging. The so-called "Bethanists," for example, are examples of believers and youth who were mobilized for religious reasons, but they rejected ethno-nationalism as central to their identity and belonging. Unlike Tóké, they never tried to mobilize people for a cause predicated on defiance of the church and state; their goal was communal religiosity. But Tóké was unique for making his defiance against the Church-State nexus a cause around which he attempted to mobilize people. Because of this explicitly defined opposition, when church and state officials fought him together, side-by-side, each institution enforcing that which was in its respective sphere, Tóké thereby could offer a mass appeal, far beyond the particulars of his quite small case.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 187.

This chapter further illuminates what we discovered in the previous chapters as well, that as bodies, what are called “the Church” or “the State” were simply too layered to be reasonably considered singular actors. Clergy, church leadership, and congregations were prone to horizontal and vertical fracturing, and problems often arose without any state meddling. Yet as we have also seen elsewhere, disputes between clergy and leadership became most virulent when clergy considered their church leaders as simple puppets responding to “state” interests that in their minds opposed church interests. In communist contexts, church leaders defended their choices as ultimately allowing churches to keep doors open or at least mitigate state meddling. The managing body of religious affairs, the Department of Religions, gained legitimacy when church staff and laity turned to it as a body to mediate its disputes.

From its side, “the State” was equally layered and was represented by officials across the spectrum of religious sentiment, ranging from amenable to hostile. State agents were perpetually caught in a bind between wanting to minimize religiosity while recognizing that outright attacks usually only alienated the population from its other goals. State representatives usually tried to promote, therefore, a middle road that tried to affirm the “freedom of religion” within certain “safe,” or “acceptable” boundaries. Religion was appropriately benign when it tended toward predictability or ritualistic or individualistic participation; renewal, scandal, and heightened attention to ethnicity threatened to mobilize people. In short, state representatives were not flatly “anti-religion” so much as in favor of control, and to the extent that church representatives undergirded that control, they were very much “pro-religion.”

X. Conclusion

Acceptable Communist Religion

The answer to the question of what kind of religious practice communist officials in Romania and the Soviet Union considered “acceptable” was revealed in their everyday management of churches. Although in theory officials supported a religion-free society, pragmatically speaking, officials considered religious practice acceptable when it was individualized, ritualistic, formulaic, or predictable. In fact, religion was supposed to remain “purely” religious and be separable from the rest of society. When people’s religiosity became animated beyond such confines and when communities began to form out of individuals, state officials endeavored to restore religious practice to its acceptable state.

The reason why it is important to make distinctions and to recognize that for pragmatic purposes, Romanian and Soviet officials tried to normalize a particular form of religious practice, is because it illuminates the nature of communist power in these societies. Communist power was built upon a basic undergirding of a materialist ideology that officials needed to maintain to keep the political structure from collapsing, but it did not require all people to hold those ideological convictions privately. That religious practice and its essentially incompatible truth-claims could remain in these societies without necessarily threatening the structure is fundamentally important. Officials seemed to believe that religious truth claims did not threaten communist power when they were proclaimed in ritualistic, formulaic, predictable, traditional, or historic ways, as then it was easy for officials and the religious alike to consider religion as separable and distinct from the rest of life. Officials acted as though what was “purely religious” did not interfere in the workings of society and politics. If religion could be restricted to concepts that did not mobilize people, then it was not a powerful social force.

Yet officials underestimated the power of truth-claims embedded in rituals to endure and provide lasting frameworks for alternative communal identities and ideologies. Officials believed that when they saw elderly women participating in Orthodox rituals, that the Orthodox Church was disappearing. However, the Church and belief endured, as successive generations were mobilized by its established cultural structure. In the case of the Russian Orthodox Church, as historian Gregory Freeze has argued, the Soviet state may have succeeded in reducing the

presence of the Church, the power of parish priests, and church attendance, but there was an increase in the laicization of the Church alongside unregulated religious activity.¹

In each Church studied in this work, there were divisions amid the layers of church power made up of leaders, clergy, and believers. There were disagreements over proper practice, content, the role of renewal, personnel, and more. In the case of the Baptist Church in the Soviet Union, disagreements led to a division that has remained to the present day. In the other cases, the church hierarchies remained largely intact, supported by state officials. Non-conforming clergy or believers were successfully quelled or marginalized. In the case of László Tóké's congregation in Timișoara in 1989, the inner-church division mobilized other citizens into a mass protest against the regime, so ready were citizens to identify church and state powers as of the same ilk.

It is also worth noting the peculiar place of ecumenism during this period. Although church division has been an obvious piece of this historical narrative, ecumenism—the willing cooperation of people from differing faiths—also emerged spontaneously. Ecumenism was something of a fad of global Christianity in the postwar period, and delegates from churches in communist countries were conspicuous participants in the World Council of Churches (est. 1948) and tried to improve the reputation of religious freedom in their home countries at WCC events. But the research presented here makes clear that spontaneous ecumenism largely emerged on the margins: in prison, the underground, or at the initiative of non-conforming priests or pastors. While Romanian and Soviet officials supported official ecumenism as window-dressing to good church-state relations, they—along with church leaders—discouraged and attacked grassroots ecumenism for its mobilizing power.

Unacceptable Religion as Challenge to State and Church

Not just state officials, but even church hierarchs, clergy, and believers were in dispute over what constituted acceptable religious practice. It was not a simple line of division falling between state and church. State representatives often did not agree with one another about the proper treatment of religion in these ideologically antagonistic states, nor were they always properly synchronized in carrying out plans that they agreed upon. This division is more obvious in the Soviet Union, where some authorities tried to forcibly bring about the decline of religion and willingly flouted supposed legal provisions for religious believers, while others emphasized

¹ Gregory L Freeze, "From Dechristianization to Laicization: State, Church, and Believers in Russia," *Canadian Slavonic Papers Canadian Slavonic Papers* 57, no. 1–2 (2015): 16.

believers' legal options or the harm done to government reputation by aggressive anti-religious action. The poor cooperation between local officials and religious affairs officials is most obvious in the case study of A.A. Trushin of Moscow Oblast.

Church representatives were not unified in conducting religious affairs either. Leaders—even when hand-selected by officials—did not always work in unison, nor did leaders, clergy, and believers as a rule submit to one another or always cooperate. In both countries and all faiths studied, believers disputed their hierarchs' decisions, and clergy voiced opposition to their superiors' decisions. In the cases of the Reformed Church and Baptist Churches, public protests and demonstrations resulted.

In response to the common assertion that there was no freedom of religion in these countries and that the "state" persecuted the "church," one can say that indeed there was not the extent of religious freedom that those sympathetic to religion or religious rights would expect in the democracies of the West and many acts by officials against the religious would be appropriately described as persecution. Yet such descriptions are incomplete, and when describing the entirety of lived religion over the whole course of the communist experiment in Romania and the Soviet Union, inaccurate. One would misunderstand the reality of "religious management" in these countries if one assumed that the 1930s under Stalin was the same as the 1970s under Brezhnev, or that a church's destruction or desecration describes the whole trajectory of events. Furthermore, much of what is typically labeled "religious persecution" should be considered "political repression." Religious persecution most appropriately describes those acts that were done on impulse of anti-religious feeling, and although religious antagonism persisted throughout the period and motivated many actors and acts, it does not describe the whole of state-church relations. State punishment of religious figures was usually not the result of an official's anti-religious impulse so much as concern over religious influence. Religious leaders were not the only ones repressed, as they were not the only ones having influence.

Officials recognized that only when citizens felt compelled to go beyond private convictions in search of ways of belonging and identifying themselves *as groups* would they threaten the legitimacy and authority of socialism/communism and its way of defining society and power relations. Religion was one possible alternative avenue for group-formation, even if "religion" was not always indistinguishable from other at-times overlapping group identifiers like nationality, ethnicity, or youth. Non-conforming religious groups of Reformed believers in

Romania at times were indistinguishable from non-conforming nationally minded Hungarians. Non-conforming groups of believers who were young also gathered as young people, something that attracted youth independent of religious aspects.

Thus the nature of religious freedom postwar in Romania and the Soviet Union was related to the dynamic nature of religion as an ever-possible site for communal belonging and mobilization. Religious gatherings can vary from being the assemblage of independent persons attempting to, as officials called it, “satisfy their religious needs” for personal reasons, to a community marked by linkages between people who are aiming to act as a group, not just independently. When the linkage was only through a dynamic priest or pastor, officials could disempower the community by his removal. When the linkages were greater, perhaps reinforced by people’s identification with nationality, ethnicity, or youth, the religiously-informed communities could be stronger.

Because communal activation was dynamic according to variations in personality, age, experience, and more, researchers can attend to changes over time in the situation of religion in communist lands. As Scott Kenworthy observed in his study of the Trinity-Sergius Lavra over the decades, under Stalin after World War II was the time with the most freedom of action for monks and leaders, but that their autonomy was always heavily circumscribed.² Some hierarchs, clergy, and believers tried to stay safely within the limits, others tried to push the boundaries, and still others named the limits and spoke out defiantly against them.

Those religionists in positions closest to state authorities—whether leading hierarchs, church wardens, or others—whom some might label as “collaborators” or as too compromised, have often been the subject of scorn from co-religionists or observers who expected a different standard. Many have subsequently been identified as collaborators with the KGB or *Securitate*. Some choose to judge them harshly by pointing to their lack of fortitude and complicity in carrying out state wishes. Others are more conciliatory in their assessment, pointing to instances when such people acted as “shields,” doing their best to maneuver against state attacks in ways that would minimize the damage to their churches. It must be noted that only a few exceptional individuals would see good in such a situation or have been dedicated to the cause of the destruction of religion. People were caught between competing powers and

² Scott Kenworthy, “The Revival of Monastic Life in the Trinity-Sergius Lavra after World War II,” in *State Secularism and Lived Religion in Soviet Russia and Ukraine*, ed. Catherine Wanner (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 150.

wishes, and it was nearly impossible to resolve the tensions generated by authorities' demands for surveillance against fellow churchmen, backed by threats against themselves or loved ones.

Religious Cultures and Varied Responses to State and Church Pressures

The basic pragmatic approach of officials in Romania and the Soviet Union of carrot and stick (reward the compliant, punish the non-compliant) is most apparent in the case of the "outgroups" that officials, along with disapproving church leaders, identified in the churches. In the Reformed Church, the paragon of unacceptability was the "Bethanist" group, the evangelical and renewal-minded pastors and believers who were punished and subsequently referenced by church and state leaders as the negative exemplar of unacceptable religiosity. For the Romanian Orthodox Church, state leaders found most Orthodox clergy to be amenable to marginalizing supporters of the renewal-minded and communally dynamic Lord's Army or the disbanded Greek-Catholic Church. In the Soviet Baptist Church, adherents to the breakaway Council of Churches (CCECB) group made the division between themselves and the official Baptist Church (AUCECB) and the state as obvious as they could. Although there were groups of people participating in non-conforming religious activity in the Russian Orthodox Church, there was no organization or community sufficiently defined by itself, by other churchmen, or by state officials to have a name as in the other cases. Such non-conforming groups were usually named by the priest at the center of it all, or simply as "extremists" and "fanatics"—labels that were applied to all activists within the above-named outgroups.

Yet there is a danger in drawing definite lines of religious acceptability between the dominant Church group and the "outgroups" named above. The lines between "acceptable" and "unacceptable" were not just between the registered and unregistered churches, or AUCECB and breakaway CCECB, in the Baptist situation. One could be unacceptably religious as a lone member of the clergy without any group affiliation simply by dynamizing the religious or communal atmosphere. What's more important than identifying or naming specific outgroups is the process by which officials and religious representatives defined acceptable and unacceptable religion. The groups identified in the present study belong to the specific churches and regions studied; other regions and other churches would yield different individuals and groups.

Although the Churches shared the commonality of having non-conforming, religiously unacceptable participants, differences in religious culture figured importantly in the era in terms

of church-state relations and inner-church disputes. The differences between Orthodox and Protestant religious cultures are evident. Historically and during the communist era, the Orthodox Churches have favored the centralization of truth-claims and power, seeing the two as interwoven. Generally speaking, to assail the one is to assail, by implication, the other. The culture generated in the wake of Martin Luther's public denunciation in 1517 of what he considered corruptions in the faith—Reformation Culture—has generally prized pastoral and even lay interpretation of Scriptural truths, and with that, more democracy in church governance. But it also has led to almost countless church divisions as well.

The hierarchy of the Russian Orthodox Church in the postwar period avoided the major division that occurred in 1927 due to Sergei's proclamation of loyalty to the communist government. Sergei's proclamation was a problem with two interdependent aspects, that he did something many considered "untrue," thereby delegitimizing his authority. When truth and authority are centralized, when either is sufficiently compromised, both can be implicated. The communist parties in the Soviet Union and Romania centralized truth and authority, such that both became publicly delegitimized at the same time. Gorbachev's attempts at open debate and democratic reforms merely undermined the entire communist structure built upon a centralized ideology and system of command.

Due to this culture of centralization, the circle of Gleb Yakunin and Dmitrii Dudko, in their attempts to make changes in their churches, could easily be marginalized by church authorities, who tarnished them as not submitting to church authority and tending toward schism. In examples from the Romanian Orthodox Church, too, hierarchs demanded submission before they would consider Traian Dorz's requests. Yet it was a trap: the hierarchs also could define submission as they pleased, and in this case, for Dorz to submit was for him to give up his ambition to strive for something he believed to be true. Orthodox discourse emphasizing the dangers of schism and the need to submit mitigated against change initiated from below or within, but it did not preclude attempts.

Naturally Baptist and Reformed Church leaders also tried to marginalize threats to their authority or truth-claims and called on non-conformists to submit. But Protestant church culture offered a counter discourse, namely that the interpretation of truth was not the domain of a select few but a historical right. The pastor-choosing battles in the Reformed Church are an obvious example of this. In the standoffs waged by parishioners, elders, and pastors against hierarchs, the former called upon their historic "democratic rights" to choose their own pastor,

engaging state-backed hierarchs in fierce battles on two major occasions. In the Soviet Union, lay pastors' call on Baptist Church leaders to "repent" was predicated upon the democratization of Scriptural interpretation, and the breakaway Baptists rallied hundreds of congregations to their side. In addition, their historically decentralized churches and traditions of democratic leader-choosing led to battles and divisions within the church. Yet the corollary to democratization and decentralization was disunity and publicly-visible fracturing.

Other aspects to religious culture were just as important, although less obviously marked by the Reformation. In both countries Orthodox believers were the historical majority. For this reason, the local parish had not traditionally been a refuge so much as a "kiosk" for local religious participation. Being a minority group, some above-ground and especially breakaway Baptist groups saw attacks on one member (e.g. a pastor) as an attack on all (both locally and internationally) and employed an "us vs. them" mentality. Since Reformed believers in Romania were almost entirely Hungarian, an ethnic minority, this meant that an attack on one (being Hungarian) could mean an attack on all. Certain nationally-minded groups were most obvious around the 1956 revolution and during Ceaușescu's increasingly anti-Hungarian acts of the 1980s. Orthodox believers struggled to form a cohesive group identity, as the category "Orthodox" was too broad, and schism was anathema to almost every Orthodox believer. Often "Orthodox" and "Russian" or "Romanian" were used interchangeably. Lacking a church-community-as-refuge mentality, Orthodox communities beyond the standard delivery of expected rituals proved to be not as durable as those among Baptists. If it was the quality of a priest or liturgy which drew people to a particular Orthodox church, then the priest could be moved and choir disrupted, for example. If it was a commonality of ideas and interests which drew priests together or intellectuals together, then when state agents became aggressive, the communities buckled under the significant pressure. Having a concrete "us" or "them" can help maintain group identity, and the Orthodox world largely lacked compelling or mobilizing versions of these on localized scales.

With its religious culture long built on identity and its status not in danger (at least historically), for the Russian Orthodox Church the kiosk model of church as a dispenser of religious goods thrived, making it more likely that people might "shop around" for the best product in bigger cities. Although Orthodox believers might have had reasonable justification for seeing themselves (like Baptists) as "victims" or "in danger" given the dominant atheist discourse and limitations in religious life, such a perspective was mitigated against by the

awkward alignment of communist states with national identity. National identity—particularly in Romania³, but also to some degree in Russia—could still incorporate Orthodox tradition.

In both Romania and the Soviet Union, evangelical protestant denominations and other modern variants of Western origin like Baptists, Pentecostals, and Jehovah's Witnesses represented the end of a religious spectrum that officials deemed most problematic after World War II. Officials saw the "sectarian" Protestants as linked to Western (bourgeois) societies by mentality and money, but they also considered such religion problematic for its emphasis on proselytism, for being dynamic and active, and for having religion dominate adherents' identity and worldview, making them "obscurantists" and "reactionary." Such communities offered obvious competition to communist worldview by accentuating active belief that translated into action and promised a future paradise.⁴ Such religious communities stressed believers' abstention from the world in direct confrontation with communist emphasis on all citizens' social activity, which was to demonstrate adherence to communist ideology and power. So problematic was such religiosity to officials that they supported Orthodox and Reformed attempts at preventing the loss of believers to such groups.

State Cultures and Varied Responses to the Problem of Religion

Just as religious responses to the problem of religion in these states varied between and within religions, states responded differently as well. For the countries of the Eastern Bloc, despite the heavy institutional influences of the Soviet Union, one cannot speak of a common religious policy or situation for believers beyond the basic recognition of the increased limitations and repressions against those who publicly opposed communism. Each state had its own mixture of historic church traditions, anti-religious policies, personality differences, and awkward coexistence of significant religious participation alongside atheistic ideology. In fact, it is difficult to group the various states according to strict patterns, as religious tradition varies across the region. In the case of Poland the Catholic Church and Pope John Paul powerfully confronted the communist government and its actions there. But there are too many countries and denominations to make sweeping comparisons, and not all had obviously dominant religious institutions. Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary and Yugoslavia

³ Lucian Leuștean, *Orthodoxy and the Cold War: Religion and Political Power in Romania, 1947-65* (Basingstoke, England; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

⁴ Catherine Wanner, *Communities of the Converted: Ukrainians and Global Evangelism, Culture and Society after Socialism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 7.

were each religiously distinct, as were Soviet Republics like Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Ukraine. What this research presents is only a small piece of the religious picture in Eastern Europe, and the fact that they could all be put into the same category of religiously unfree or persecuted only conceals what would surely be diverse realities. Comparative Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Protestantism in a transnational perspective, for example, would tell us much more than a study of a single denomination in a single country. The present work has been able to comparatively examine the problem of religion in communist lands such that the commonalities and variations in state and religious cultures become illuminated.

Religious Gatherings as Incidental Sites of Mobilization

In addition to its contributions to narrating the experiences of several religious institutions and state approaches to religious management in regional and historical perspective, this study addresses the conceptualization of religion itself. First, it aims to view religion not just in terms of belief systems, but in terms of collections of people. All too often religion has been regarded as separable from society, as though it is nothing more than a collection of ideas, beliefs, or simply a perspective. What this study makes clear is the way religion functions according to a spectrum of relations, ranging from individualistic and consumeristic to communalistic. For some, religion means expressing personal beliefs, but it can also create the possibility for powerful associations of people who consider themselves a community defined by common identity and purpose. It has the potential for impressive mobilizing power, and therefore its study cannot be so easily relegated to intellectual-theological histories or the margins of human society.

In the same way, communism was more than a set of ideas, and the problem of religion was more than an intellectual battle of atheism vs. religion. While people may tend to identify communist parties or religious denominations by their specific ideas or worldviews, people can act within such bodies without having unity in terms of ideological knowledge. Although beliefs or ideology may be founding principles just as girders form a foundation, people can move and act within those structures without being fixated on the precise details of that foundation and what it was intended to support or affirm.

Both communist parties in Romania and the Soviet Union depended on at least a façade of legitimacy for communist ideology. It is no easier to say how many people truly “believed” in communism any more than it is to say how many people truly believe in, say, certain theological

truths. It could be that more people “believed” in religious truths in these countries than truly “believed” in communism, but this did not as a rule cause communism’s collapse. Yet what officials in the Soviet Union and Romania perceived—though perhaps not directly admitting it—was that while privately held convictions did not threaten public (communist) truth claims or power, mobilized groups of people proclaiming alternative truths could delegitimize those claims and those in power. This in part explains why youth movements in many communist East European countries in the 1970s and 1980s were active and treated by officials as threatening: youth (as they often do) threatened to expose the façade of belief by ignoring it, mocking it, for looking for other, more “genuine” alternatives. Religion was just one such avenue by which youth acted in this way. Others included consumer culture, political activism, and environmentalism.

Hence, the problem was not religious “ideas” but religious “bodies.” Forms of communication include not just the use of words, but gestures and “body language” as well. People “sense” body language or feel that gestures communicate messages while sometimes lacking concrete evidence to be able to justify such beliefs. This is how officials largely operated in discerning acceptable versus unacceptable religiosity. Officials could perceive enthusiasm, social energy, openness, and authenticity, without having concrete evidence that something had become illegal or stipulating precisely what made such activity unacceptable. Gatherings featuring such “body language” were threatening because people were being mobilized and forming relationships, but officials defined such gatherings as problematic by other means: identifying anti-state utterances (which would be punished even without surrounding enthusiasm), labeling such activity as “fanaticism” or “extremism,” or the manufacturing of politico-conspiratorial links. The clashes over beliefs, ideas, and legality were the surface of battles for identity, belonging, and power. Many believers and clergy attempted to exploit this lack of official or legal clarity by posturing unacceptable behavior using acceptable terms. Attempts by Lord’s Army adherents to rename their organization’s activities while not changing the essence of this activity is one such example.

The success of communism in Romania and the Soviet Union was indirectly dependent on officials’ accommodation of religion. Had officials taken a harder line in preventing religious gatherings (like the Soviet Union in the 1930s), religion would have been more underground, but it would have been able to present itself as an even more distinct alternative to communism. Even with state oversight and control, religion was important for how it created

opportunities for people to mobilize, and it offered an avenue for people to express alternative allegiances that could call into question the overall legitimacy of communism in society. Communism fell because enough people felt it was not making good on its promises for a certain kind of society, and it seemed alternative political structures offered more attractive futures. However, as in the case of Tórkés, religious communities were sometimes strategically poised to offer an alternative community that could provide strength to anti-communist activity. Yet in most cases, the accommodation of religion and the cooperation of church and state leaders seem to have had more negative lasting effects on the religions than on the politics. Post-communist religious institutions have been fraught by debates over the meanings of collaboration, debates about hierarchs who remained after the regime change, and continuing schisms between the established church institution and nonconformist groups.

Appendix A. Abbreviations

ALRC – *Comitetul Creștin Român pentru Apărarea Libertății Religioase și de Conștiință*
(Romanian Christian Committee for the Defense of Religious Liberty and Conscience)

AUCECB – All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists

CARC – Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults

CCECB – Council of Churches of Evangelical Christians-Baptists

CE – Christian Endeavor Society

CPSU – The Communist Party of the Soviet Union

CRA – Council of Religious Affairs

CROCA – Council for Russian Orthodox Church Affairs

ECB – Evangelical Christians / Baptists

G-C – Greek-Catholic

MoECB – Central Moscow Evangelical Christians-Baptists Church

LA – The Lord's Army

ROC – Russian Orthodox Church

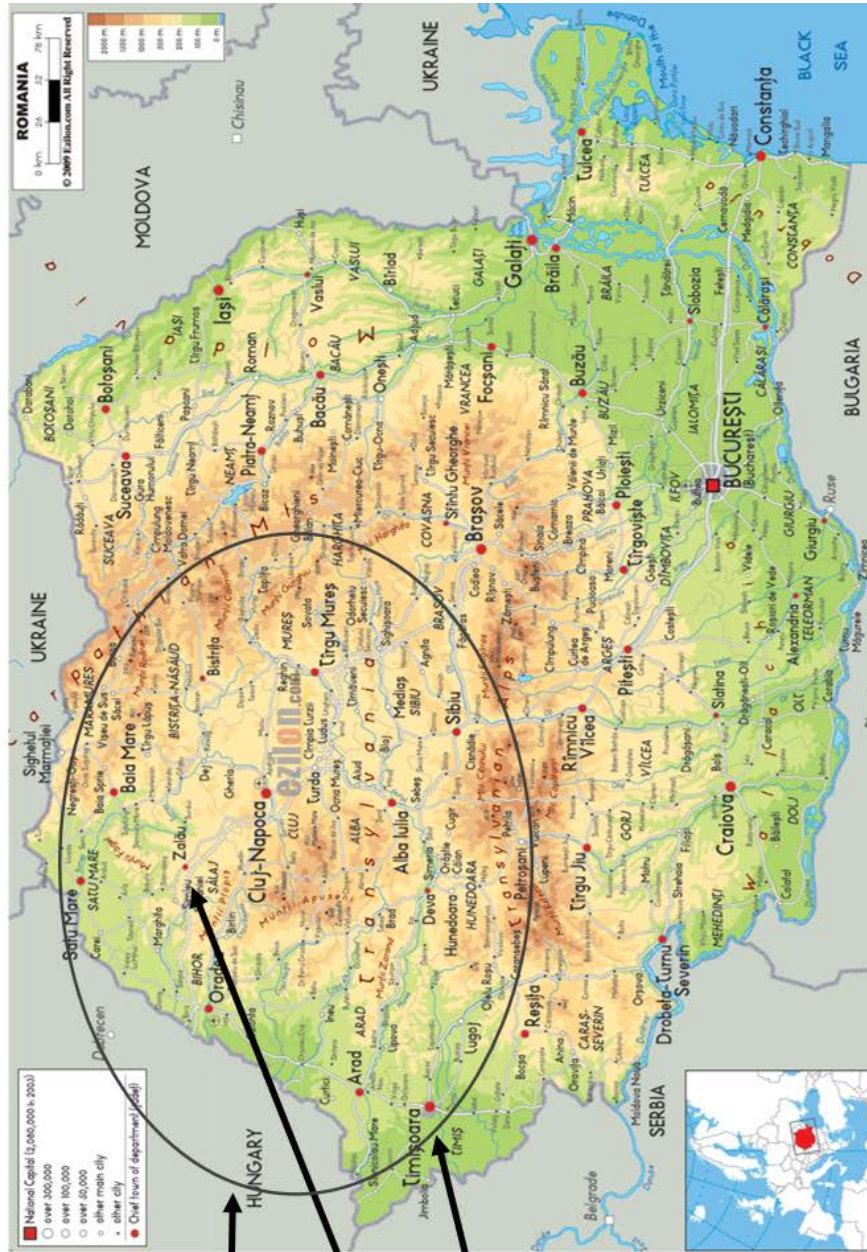
BOR – Romanian Orthodox Church (*Biserica Ortodoxă Română*)

Appendix B. Population and Religion Statistics

1. The Soviet Union (Note – the Soviet census did not track religious affiliation, making estimates vary widely)
 - a. Population of the USSR: 260 million in late 1970s; 286 million by 1989
 - i. Orthodox Church: 10,000 churches in 1945, 14,000 in 1950, and 7,500 in 1965; 40,000,000 – 100,000,000 believers
 - ii. Evangelical Christians-Baptists Church: over 2,000 registered churches (prayer houses) in 1958, with more than 200,000 members and anywhere from 700,000 to 2,000,000 registered and unregistered believers in the late 1980s
 - b. Population of Moscow Oblast: over 6 million in 1979; 6.7 million by 1989
 - i. Orthodox Church: 134 churches (175 in 1958) with 70-80,000 visitors (according to 1968 CRA report).
 - ii. ECB Church: 12 prayer houses, over 1,000 members (according to 1968 CRA report). Number of participants higher.
 - c. Population of the City of Moscow: 8 million in 1979, almost 9 million by 1989
 - i. 36 Orthodox Churches in 1958, 43 in 1967 (CRA reports)
 - ii. 1 Central Baptist Church – 4,000-5,000 members and regular attendees
2. Romania
 - a. Population of Romania: 18 million in 1960; 23 million in 1989
 - i. Orthodox Church: ~12 million in 1960; ~15.5 million in 1989
 - ii. Reformed Church: ~700,000 members throughout the era
 - b. Transylvania: 5.7 million in 1948; 7.6 million in 1989
 - i. Orthodox Believers: 1.6 million in 1948
 - ii. Greek-Catholic Believers: 1.7 million in 1948 (subsequently repressed)
 - iii. Reformed Believers: 650,000 – 700,000

Appendix C. Reference Maps

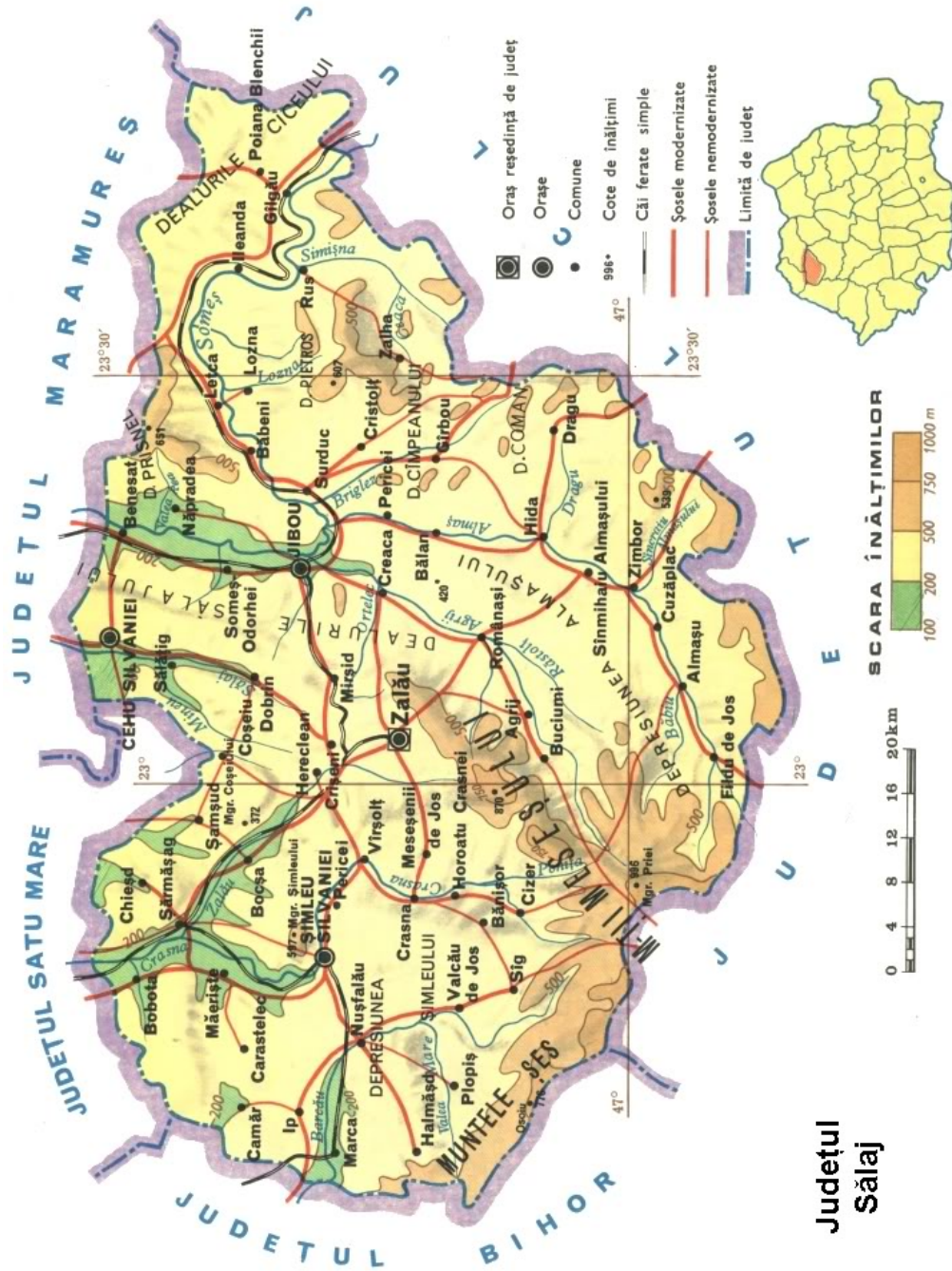
1. Romania (<http://www.ezilon.com/maps/images/europe/physical-map-of-Romania.gif>)



Transylvania
~40,000 sq miles
Zalău
Timișoara

Appendix C. Reference Maps (continued)

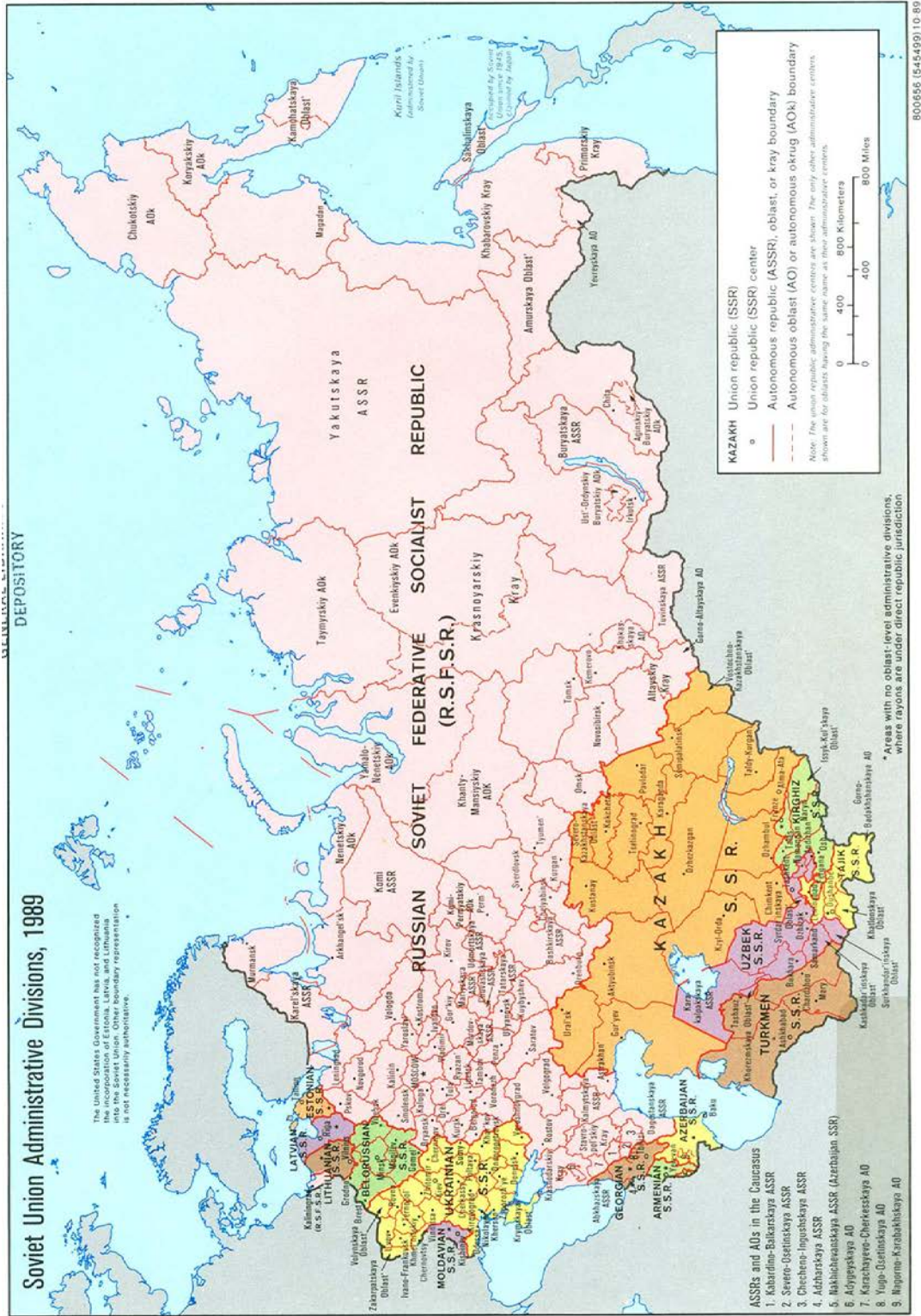
2. Sălaj County, Romania (<http://pe-harta.ro/judete/Salaj.jpg>)



Appendix C. Reference Maps (continued)

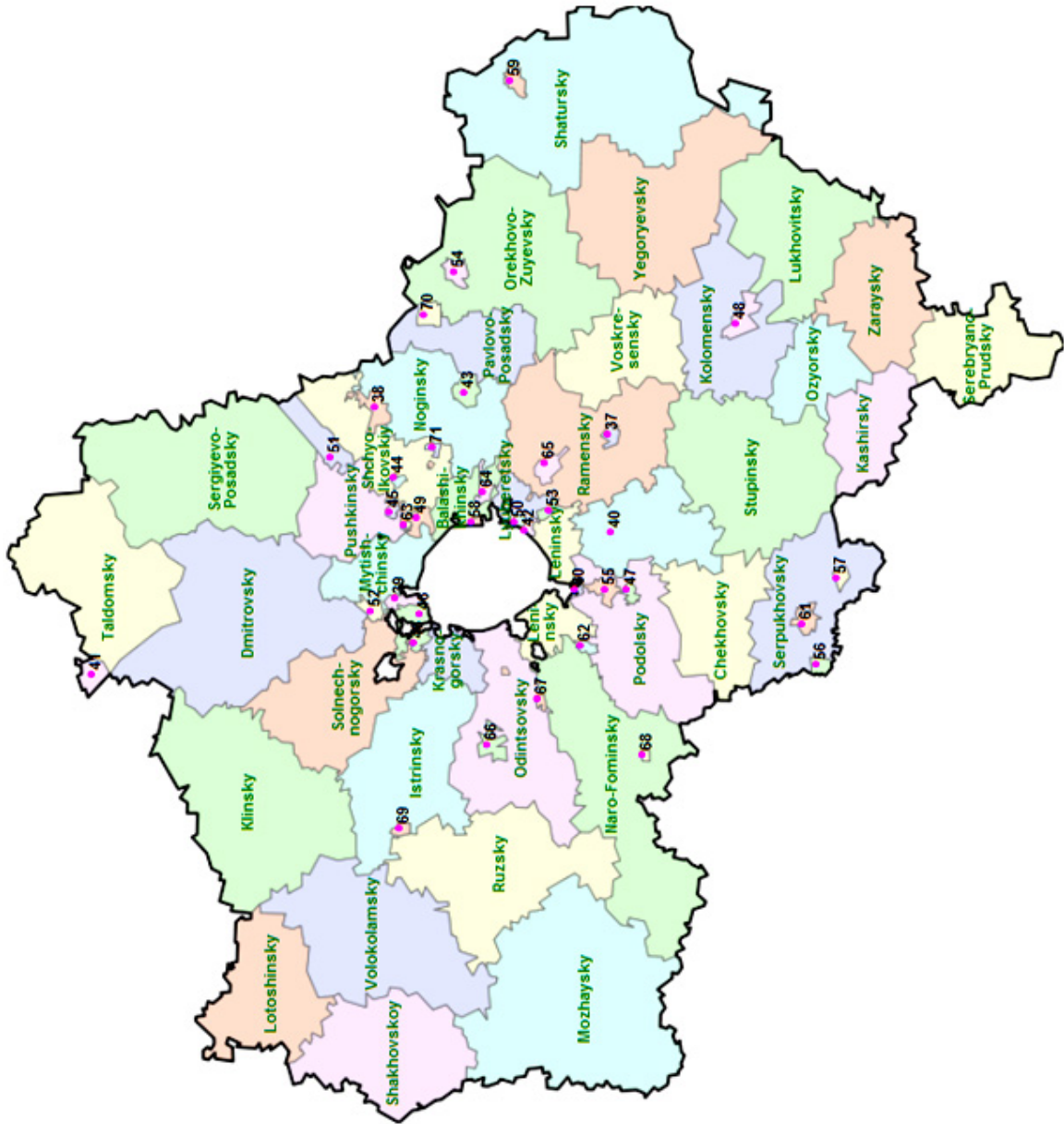
3. Soviet Union

(<http://www.worldatlas.com/upload/c3/ea/1f/soviet-union-administrative-divisions-1989.jpg>)



Appendix C. Reference Maps (continued)

4. Moscow Oblast (<http://marianna-ivanova.com/img/ministerrus/rus50-map.jpg>)



Appendix D. Cast of Characters.

These notes are for figures who make frequent appearances in the text but are not famous historical figures (e.g., Gorbachev) or lack titles to their names to distinguish them (such as “Bishop”).

Adorján, Kálmán—Pastor in the Reformed Church, Romania.

Andreicuț, Andrei—Romanian Orthodox Priest since 1978, becoming Bishop of Alba Iulia in 1990, then Metropolitan of Cluj.

Avramescu, Cornel—Romanian Orthodox Priest in the Banat region, exiled to the United States in 1985.

Bychkov, Aleksei—General Secretary of the AUCECB from 1971-1990 and presbyter at the Central Moscow Baptist Church.

Calciu-Dumitreasă, Gheorghe—Romanian Orthodox Priest, arrested in 1979, and exiled to the United States in 1985. Considered by many a foremost anti-communist “dissident.”

David, Gheorghe—An official with the Romanian Department of Religions working in Sălaj County in the early 1970s.

Dézsi, Zoltán—Pastor in the Reformed Church in Romania and arrested as a “Bethanist.”

Dorz, Traian—A leading figure in the Lord’s Army after World War II.

Dudko, Dmitrii—Russian Orthodox Priest in the Moscow region who gained a following in the 1970s among youth and new converts to Orthodoxy.

Dugaru, Dumitru—Secretary General of the Department of Religions, 1957-1975.

Dumitrescu, Viorel—Romanian Orthodox Priest in the Banat region, exiled to the U.S. in 1982.

Epishin, Nikolai Il’ich—Youth leader in the Central Moscow Baptist Church.

Eshliman, Nikolai – One-time priest in the Russian Orthodox Church and signatory along with Gleb Yakunin of the “Open Letter” to Patriarch Aleksii in 1965.

Grossu, Sergiu—A leader in the Lord’s Army after WWII until his migration to France in 1969, where he founded *Catacombes* publishing.

Iskovskikh, Aleksei F.—One of the pastors of the Baptist church in Dedovsk. He served multiple prison sentences, dying in prison in 1970.

Karczagi, Sandor— Pastor in the Reformed Church in Romania and arrested as a “Bethanist.”

Karev, Aleksandr—leader of the Evangelical-Christians Church and General Secretary of the AUCECB from 1944-1971. Also a renowned preacher in the Central Moscow Church.

Karpov, Georgii - head over Russian Orthodox Church affairs from 1943-1960 and former NKVD colonel who handled the cases of problematic religious personnel

Klimenko, Andrei – President of the AUCECB, 1974-1985.

Kriuchkov, Gennadii (Konstantinovich)—Of Tula Oblast, one of the founding participants in the Initiative Group (*initsiativniki*), *Orgkomitet*, and breakaway CCECB group.

Kuroedov, Vladimir Alekseevich—President of CROCA and then the CRA, 1960-1984.

Levitin-Krasnov, Anatolii Emmanuilovich—Religious writer of Orthodox faith and “dissident” who emigrated out of the Soviet Union in 1974.

Lőrincz, János—Pastor in the Reformed Church in Romania and arrested as a “Bethanist.”

Men’, Aleksandr—Non-conformist Russian Orthodox priest and prolific theological writer, murdered in 1990.

Mitskevich, Artur Iosifovich – Deputy Secretary General of the AUCECB, 1956-1979 and presbyter of MoECB. His son, Val’ter, also became a leading figure in the Church.

Moldoveanu, Nicolae—A leading figure in the Lord’s Army after WWII and prolific writer of spiritual songs.

Nagy, Jenő—Cobbler and evangelist, arrested as a “Bethanist.”

Nagy, Ödön—Pastor in the Hungarian Reformed Church in the Mureş region.

Negoita, Liviu—Romanian Orthodox Priest in the Banat region in the late 1970s and early 1980s.
He was exiled to the U.S. but returned to Romania in 1985.

Papp, Antal—Farmer, village elder, and one of the arrested “Bethanists.”

Peuker, Leo—Reformed Pastor in Timișoara until his death in early 1987.

Plekhanov, A.C.—He seems to have been a commissioner for the CRA for the City of Moscow in the 1960s and 1970s. I did not locate his file in the state archive as an employee of the CRA.

Pop, Alexandru—A leader in the Lord’s Army until his imprisonment and falling out in 1959.
Note to be confused with Alexandru Pop, Orthodox Priest of Arad in the 1980s.

Ramba, Gheorghe—Romanian Orthodox Priest who served with Andreicuț in Turda in the 1980s.

Roman, Ioan—Inspector with the Department of Religions in Sălaj County in the mid-1970s.

Rumachik, Petr—Pastor of the Baptist church in Dedovsk and active leader of the CCECB.
Imprisoned five times.

Semchenko, Aleksandr—Youth leader in the Central Moscow Baptist Church.

Sinka, József (Iosif)—Pastor in the Reformed Church whose candidacy for the vacant pastorship in the Reformed Church in Zalău caused considerable inner-church dispute.

Ștefănescu, Marian Ilie—Romanian Orthodox Priest in the 1980s and sympathizer with many other Christian expressions, including the Lord’s Army, Greek-Catholicism, and Protestantism.

Szilágyi, Sandor—Pastor in the Reformed Church in Romania and arrested as a “Bethanist.”

Tőkés, László—Pastor in the Reformed Church whose congregation in Timișoara helped initiate the uprising there in December 1989.

Trifa, Iosif – along with Metropolitan Bălan, one of the founders and leading figures of the Lord’s Army until his death in 1938.

Trukhanov, Mikhail V.—After two prison terms, he became a Russian Orthodox Priest who served from 1960-1979 in a number of parishes for short durations.

Trushin, A.A.—Commissioner for CROCA and CRA of Moscow Oblast from 1943-1984.

Vins, Georgii—Baptist minister of Kiev who was one of the founding participants in the Initiative Group (*initsiativniki*), *Orgkomitet*, and breakaway CCECB group. He served multiple prison terms and was exiled to the U.S. in 1979.

Vins, Lydia—Mother of Georgii Vins and one of the founders and leaders of the Council of Prisoners’ Relatives since 1964. Was imprisoned in 1965 at age 64.

Vins, Natasha—Daughter of Georgii Vins and in adolescence and adulthood became an active participant in the underground Baptist church until the family’s exile in 1979.

Visky, Ferenc—Pastor in the Reformed Church and leading figure in the Christian Endeavor movement, dubbed “Bethanist” by state and church organs.

Wurmbrand, Richard—Famous Lutheran pastor from Romania, served multiple sentences in prison and was ransomed in 1964 after Ceausescu’s amnesty. He then lived in the U.S.

Yakunin, Gleb—Russian Orthodox priest and well-known political dissident. Along with Nikolai Eshliman, he was one of the signatories of the “Open Letter” of complaint to Patriarch Aleksii in 1965. Was forbidden to serve as priest in 1966.

Zhidkov, Iakov I.— President of the AUCECB, 1944-1966 and presbyter in the Central Moscow Baptist Church. His son, Mikhail, also became a leading figure in the ECB community.

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F. "Departmentul Cultelor"

Sălaj County Branch of the National Archives (*Direcția Județeană Sălaj a Arhivelor Naționale*)

F. "Departmentul Cultelor"

Russia

State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF)

F. 6991, "Sovet po delam religii pri sovete ministrov CCCP"

Central State Archives of the City of Moscow (*TsGA Moskvyy*)

F. 3004

United States

Keston Archive and Library, Baylor University, Texas.

Note: The Keston Institute was founded in 1969 under as the "Centre for the Study of Religion and Communism," and the Revd. Canon Michael Bourdeaux was its central figure. The center aimed to study the situation of the religions in communist lands, with a focus on gathering and analyzing primary documents. The Archive and Library now represent one of the key archives for those studying religious topics in communist Eastern Europe. For this work, the archive had among its collections copies of reports from the Council of Religious Affairs pertaining to Moscow Oblast, scanned in the 1990s.

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Halmen, István; March 27, 2015. Youth participant in the 1970s-1980s of CE Society ("Bethanist") activities.

Horváth Levente; April 10, 2015. Pastor in the Reformed Church of Romania and youth participant in the 1980s of CE Society ("Bethanist") activities.

Mikhailovna, Zinaida; May 24, 2015. Member of the ECB Church in Dedovsk.

Smirnov, Nikolai Vassilievich; May 24, 2015. Son of V. Ia. Smirnov, Dedovsk ECB Church pastor.

Smirnova, Nina Stepanova; May 24, 2015. Member of the ECB Church in Dedovsk and daughter-in-law of V. Ia. Smirnov, Dedovsk ECB Church pastor.

Ștefănescu, Marian; September 24, 2013 and September 28, 2015. Formerly a Romanian Orthodox Priest (1980s), later Greek-Catholic priest.

Szilágyi, Sándor; April 1, 2015. Grandson of Sándor Szilágyi, CE Society ("Bethanist") pastor.

Visky, Péter; September 16, 2015. Son of Ferenc Visky, CE Society ("Bethanist") pastor.

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