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Shining Lights in a Crooked Generation: The Experiences and Impact of Soviet Evangelical Youth

A Thesis Submitted

by

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Abstract

Despite facing severe pressure from their secular surroundings, Soviet evangelical youth displayed resilience and creativity throughout the Soviet era, becoming key figures in the preservation and growth of the Russian Baptist church. Up until now, western scholars have largely ignored this story or treated it peripherally. This research seeks to address this gap by examining the experiences and impact of Soviet evangelical youth. Throughout the Soviet period, the content of the evangelical youth experience remained essentially unchanged, focusing on fellowship, service, and Bible teaching through preaching, singing, and poetry readings. The period from 1908 – 1929 became a foundational one for future evangelical youth, establishing both the themes of evangelical youth activity and state policy towards this activity. During World War II and the post-war period, evangelical youth navigated the challenges of pacifism, legal restrictions on youth baptism, and the 1961 split of the evangelical union. Engaging in the turmoil and opportunities of this period, many young believers joined the emerging underground evangelical movement, laying the foundations for youth engagement in the movement through samizdat. From 1970 – 1991, this underground movement became a primary force in the evangelism and religious education of youth, allowing evangelical youth to engage with Soviet society on an individual, local, and regional scale. The experiences of these youth laid the foundations for the post-Soviet evangelical church, shedding important light on the opportunities and challenges facing the Russian evangelical church today.

Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, **among whom you shine as lights in the world** …

—Philippians 2:15 – 16 (NKJV)

Contents

Abbreviations

AUCECB	All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists
CCECB	Council of Churches of Evangelical Christians-Baptists
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency (U.S.)
CPR	Council of Prisoners' Relatives
CRA	Council of Religious Affairs
GPU	State Political Directorate
Komsomol	All-Union Leninist Young Communist League
KGB	State Security Committee
MGB	Ministry of State Security
NKVD	People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

Chapter One

Introduction

> For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal eight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. **For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal**.
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> —2 Corinthians 4:17 – 18

During the 20th century, many western observers seemed to view the Soviet Union as an enormous monolith of grayness. Like a black-and-white movie, gray Soviet citizens trudged to work under grim skies, listening to mundane radio propaganda and living dull lives punctuated only by the redness of bloody government purges. However, this view of the Soviet Union misses the complexities, the colors, the jokes, and the relationships that made life survivable to the average Soviet citizen. Against the apparent grayness of the Soviet experience, bright splotches emerge in the shape of parents scrabbling to give their children better lives, dissidents dreaming of a free society, and Christians faithfully holding to their beliefs.

Like a Technicolor film, the story of Soviet evangelical youth brings light and color to modern understandings of the Soviet experience. Soviet evangelical youth successfully endured the Soviet system, not only surviving but thriving under it. In the process, they bequeathed an invaluable legacy of faithful experience to the post-Soviet generation of believers. Despite facing severe pressure from their secular surroundings, evangelical youth displayed resilience and creativity, becoming key figures in the preservation and growth of the Russian evangelical movement.

Throughout the Soviet period, the content of the evangelical youth experience remained essentially unchanged. Focused on fellowship, service, and Bible teaching through preaching,

singing, and poetry readings, youth activity built on the foundations laid during the pre-revolutionary period. Beginning in the 1920s, state attempts to control the activity of young believers shaped the course of the evangelical youth experience, both restricting and provoking their engagement with society. Ultimately, however, evangelical youth creatively adapted to the limitations of the Soviet system, discovering new ways to live the Christian life by creatively pursuing opportunities for fellowship, spiritual growth, and evangelism. Denied the legal right to organize or hold meetings by the 1929 Law on Religious Organizations, young believers responded by gathering in informal settings, often under the guise of birthday parties or other celebrations. Restricted from visibly active participation in church life, they engaged in practical acts of service to their communities. Denied permission to publish Christian literature, they engaged in the underground printing movement which emerged during the 1960s.

Both secular and evangelical sources trace the roots of Russian evangelicalism to three separate movements which arose in the Russian Empire during the late 19th century. In Ukraine, revivals among German Mennonites led to the development of Stundism, an evangelical movement incorporating both Ukrainian and German believers.[1] In the Caucasus, a Baptist movement emerged, building on the legacy of the Molokans, a group of dissenters from the Russian Orthodox Church.[2] In St. Petersburg, an evangelical revival swept the Russian aristocracy, resulting in Pashkovism, a movement named after its primary leader, Colonel Pashkov.[3]

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[1] Samuel J. Nesdoly, "Evangelical Sectarianism in Russia: A Study of the Stundists, Baptists, Pashkovites, and Evangelical Christians, 1855 – 1917" (PhD diss., Queen's University, 1971), 47; S. N. Savinskiĭ, *Istoriia͡ Evangel'skih Khristian-Baptistov Ukrainy, Rossii, Belorussii (1867 – 1917)* (St. Petersburg, Russia: "Bibliia͡ dlia͡ Vseh," 1999), 17.

[2] Paul D. Steeves, "The Russian Baptist Union, 1917 – 1935: Evangelical Awakening in Russia" (PhD diss., University of Kansas, 1976), 1 – 5.

[3] Steve Durasoff, *The Russian Protestants: Evangelicals in the Soviet Union, 1944-1964* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1969), 42 – 46.

Although geographically separate, these groups held similar beliefs regarding Scripture, salvation, and the church. All three groups emphasized "the authority of Scriptures, the universality of man's need for salvation, the free grace of God which provided for justification of the believer through faith in Christ, and the necessity of living a morally pure life."[4] The movements in Ukraine and St. Petersburg initially sought to remain within the Orthodox Church, but they were eventually encouraged, either by persecution or by the advice of Protestant believers, to withdraw from the Orthodox Church and form their own congregations.[5]

Over time, the southern groups became known as Baptists, while the northern group became known as Evangelical Christians.[6] Baptist congregations united under a single banner in 1884 at Tavriche, creating the Union of Russian Baptists.[7] In 1909, the Evangelical Christians followed suit, creating the All-Russian Evangelical Christian Union.[8] Despite these separate names, however, the two groups remained very similar in doctrine and practice. Indeed, both contemporaries and modern-day scholars consistently viewed them as part of a single Russian evangelical movement.[9] Considering this precedent, and the groups' consequent union in 1944 under the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (AUCECB), this study will view both the Evangelical Christians and the Baptists as a single movement.[10]

For the purposes of this research, "evangelical" will refer both to the denominations and congregations, which at one point held membership in the All-Union Council of Evangelical

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[4] Steeves, "The Russian Baptist Union," 50.

[5] Heather Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution, 1905-1929* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005), 16 – 17; Lawrence Klippenstein, trans., ed., "Johann Wieler (1839 – 1889) Among Russian Evangelicals: A New Source of Mennonites and Evangelicalism in Imperial Russia," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 5 (1987), 50.

[6] Savinskiĭ, *Istoriia Evangel'skih Khristian-Baptistov (1867 – 1917)*, 10.

[7] Durasoff, *The Russian Protestant*, 47 – 48.

[8] Ibid., 55.

[9] Ibid., 64; Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution*, 8 – 9; Nesdoly, "Evangelical Sectarianism in Russia," 44, 53.

[10] Walter Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1981), 49.

Christians-Baptists (AUCECB), and to those denominations and congregations that held similar doctrinal beliefs as the AUCECB but chose to remain separate from the union. Published in 1966, the AUCECB Confession of Faith listed beliefs common to all Protestant Christians, including the Trinitarian nature of God, the divinity of Jesus, the authority of Scripture, and salvation by grace alone through the atoning death of Jesus Christ.[11] In addition to these fundamental beliefs, the AUCECB held to doctrines unique to the evangelical movement, including the necessity of spiritual rebirth, the church as composed solely of the regenerate, and believer's baptism.[12] Soviet denominations, which held to these beliefs included the Baptists, the Evangelical Christians, and the Pentecostals.

Early works on Soviet religion offered broad analyses of the topic, often to the exclusion of substantial discussion of Soviet evangelicalism. Several of these early works either focused primarily on the Russian Orthodox Church or provided a general summary of all religious groups in the Soviet Union.[13] Serge Bolshakoff's *Russian Nonconformity* (1950) is an exception to this rule, providing a succinct summary of the various "nonconformist" religious groups in Russia during the 18th – 20th centuries.[14] These groups included unrecognized off-shoots of the Orthodox Church, such as the Priestless and the Old Believers, as well as Roman Catholics and various Protestant groups.[15]

Although focused on a broader portrayal of Soviet religion, Walter Kolarz's *Religion in the Soviet Union* (1962) similarly spends time examining the fate of Soviet evangelicals,

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[11] Alexander de Chalandeau, *The Theology of the Evangelical Christians-Baptists in the USSR: As Reflected in the Bratskii Vestnik* (Chicago: Harper and Co., 1978), 60 – 62.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Nicholas Timasheff, *Religion in Soviet Russia: 1917-1942* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1942); Walter Kolarz, *Religion in the Soviet Union* (London: Macmillan, 1962).

[14] Serge Bolshakoff, *Russian Nonconformity: The Story of "Unofficial" Religion in Russia* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1950).

[15] For more information on the Old Believers movement, refer to Georg Michel's *At War with the Church: Religious Dissent in Seventeenth-Century Russia* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

providing a historical overview of the group, as well as specifically examining the state of evangelicalism in the 1960s.[16] His findings are intriguing, shedding light on a much more diverse community than other works have highlighted. For example, he states that half of Evangelical Christian-Baptists in the Soviet Union represented non-Russian nationalities.[17] His geographical analysis of evangelical distribution, although limited to data from the 1940s – 1960s, is especially fascinating due to the lack of similar geographical data in other studies of Soviet evangelicalism.[18]

The 1970s – 1980s marked increased Western interest in the plight of Soviet evangelicals. This interest most likely contributed to the contemporary rise in scholarship focused on Soviet evangelical denominations. Scholarly works published at this time highlighted very specific periods or aspects of Soviet evangelical history. For example, Steve Durasoff's *The Russian Protestants: Evangelicals in the Soviet Union, 1944-1964* (1969) focuses on the cooperation between Baptists, Evangelical Christians, Pentecostals, and Mennonites in the Soviet Union during the post-World War II period.[19] Similarly highlighting this trend towards focused study of specific periods in Soviet evangelical history, Hans Brandenburg's *The Meek and the Mighty* (1977) focuses on early evangelical movements in the Russian Empire.[20]

Published in 1981, Walter Sawatsky's *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II* remains one of the most comprehensive studies of Soviet evangelicalism during the post-World War II period.[21] His work was also one of the earliest studies of Soviet evangelicalism to receive approbation from the general historical community. Both *Church History* and *Studies in Religion*

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[16] Walter Kolarz, *Religion in the Soviet Union* (London: Macmillan, 1962), 283-321.
[17] Ibid., 306.
[18] Ibid., 306-312.
[19] Durasoff, *The Russian Protestants*.
[20] Hans Brandenburg, *The Meek and the Mighty: The Emergence of the Evangelical Movement in Russia* (London: Mowbrays, 1976).
[21] Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II*.

/ Sciences Religieuses published positive reviews.[22] They praised Sawatsky's solid documentation and balanced analysis, with one reviewer claiming that his work was the "most extensive and well-documented general treatment of Soviet evangelicals yet available."[23] Additionally, Sawatsky's chapters on rural evangelicalism, evangelical theology, and evangelical children and youth signaled a move towards deeper analysis of evangelical daily life.

The fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 signaled a collapse in the Iron Curtain that had restricted scholarly access to Soviet archives and citizens. The opening of the archives and the availability of Soviet citizens for interviews should have marked a rise in literature related to Soviet evangelicals. However, most works published since the fall of the Soviet Union have continued to focus on broad analyses of Soviet religion.[24] As an exception to this rule, Heather Coleman's *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution, 1905-1929* (2005) provides fascinating insights into evangelical growth and influence during the early Soviet period, but much work remains to be done.[25]

Major research gaps remain in the study of Soviet evangelicalism. For example, the historical community has failed to produce a well-researched general history of Soviet evangelicalism covering the entire Soviet period (1917 – 1991). Similarly, there are no major works specifically focused on evangelicals during the purges of the 1930s, World War II, or the Brezhnev and Gorbachev years. Finally, most works on Soviet evangelicalism focus heavily on church-state relations to the exclusion of examining everyday life.

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[22] Stephen K. Batalden, review of *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II*, by Walter Sawatsky, *Church History* 52, no. 3 (Sept. 1983), 404-405; Jerry G. Pankhurst, review of *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II*, by Walter Sawatsky, *Studies in Religion / Sciences Religieuses* 12, no. 3 (1983), 352-353.

[23] Pankhurst, review of *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II*, 352.

[24] See, for example, John Anderson, *Religion, State and Politics in the Soviet Union and Successor States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Victoria Smolkin, *A Sacred Space is Never Empty: A History of Soviet Atheism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018); Sonja Luehrmann, *Religion in Secular Archives: Soviet Atheism and Historical Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[25] Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution*.

This study seeks to remedy these gaps by examining the experiences of Soviet evangelical youth from the beginning of the organized Russian evangelical youth movement in 1908 to the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. This broad chronological focus, although admittedly resulting in a more cursory look at the evangelical youth experience, is very important for understanding the full scope of evangelical youth activity during the Soviet period. This chronological focus provides a broader understanding of the ebbs and flows of the evangelical youth experience, highlighting how young believers were impacted by and responded to the changes sweeping through their society and their churches. Furthermore, this broad chronological focus is a prerequisite to any further study of evangelical youth, as it provides a framework within which to identify and interpret future topics for study.

The topic of evangelical youth is hardly unexplored territory, as various scholars have touched on it to varying degrees over the last forty years. Sawatsky dedicated a chapter of his 1981 work to evangelical youth, while Coleman highlights youth evangelical involvement during the early periods of the Soviet Union.[26] Both Howard L. Biddulph's "Religious Participation of Youth in the USSR" (*Soviet Studies,* 1979) and Juliane Fürst's "Not a Question of Faith – Youth and Religion in the Post-War Years" (*Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas,* 2004) discuss Baptist youth in their examination of youth participation in religious activities during the post-World War II period.[27] Similarly, Sergei I. Zhuk's "Popular Religiosity in the 'Closed City' of Soviet Ukraine" (*Russian History,* 2013) mentions evangelical youth multiple times while discussing youth religious "cultural consumption" during the 1960s – 1980s.[28] Michael

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[26] Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelical Since World War II*, 297 – 336; Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution*, 198-220.

[27] Howard L. Biddulph, "Religious Participation of Youth in the USSR," *Soviet Studies* 31, no. 3 (July 1979), 417-433; Juliane Fürst, "Not a Question of Faith – Youth and Religion in the Post-War Years," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 52 (2004), 557 – 570.

[28] Sergei I. Zhuk, "Popular Religiosity in the 'Closed City' of Soviet Ukraine: Cultural Consumption and Religion During Late Socialism," *Russian History* 40, no. 2 (2013), 183-200.

Bourdeaux and Katharine Murray's *Young Christians in Russia* (1976) offers a broad examination of religious youth in the Soviet Union, but their work consists mainly of extensive excerpts from government and religious publications, containing little real analysis.[29] Although valuable, these explorations of the topic fail to comprehensively examine Soviet evangelical youth, making my current research important to the field of Soviet evangelical history.

Combined with the other works discussed in this paper, these articles reveal an interesting aspect of Soviet evangelical historiography. As with any scholars of the U.S.S.R., Soviet evangelical historians struggled to access and appropriately use primary sources. During the 1920s – 1990s, the creation of and access to primary sources served as the main limitation to research of Soviet evangelicalism. Western researchers had few opportunities to pierce the Iron Curtain and personally examine the experiences of Soviet evangelicals. Soviet believers had limited freedom to present their experiences in an uncensored way. And, of course, the Soviet government had little interest in providing an objective portrayal of religion in the Soviet Union. The opening of the Soviet archives provided some access to government sources, but historians must still exercise discernment in processing and using these sources in a way that accurately depicts the realities of Soviet evangelical life.

Within this context, the historiography of Soviet evangelicalism can be viewed as a balancing act between state and evangelical primary sources. Understandably, historians working prior to the opening of the archives displayed limited flexibility in their use of primary sources. Some works, such as Timasheff's 1942 examination of Soviet religion, relied primarily on state-issued publications.[30] Others, such as Sawatsky's 1981 publication, relied heavily on

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[29] Michael Bourdeaux and Katharine Murray, *Young Christians in Russia: The Inside Story of What is Happening Among Young People in the Soviet Union* (Minneapolis, MN: Dimension Books, 1976).

[30] Timasheff, *Religion in Soviet Russia: 1917-1942*.

evangelically-produced underground literature.[31] Biddulph's article on youth religious participation represents a potential middle-ground, incorporating both Soviet sociological studies and personal observations from interactions with young believers during his 1976 visit to the USSR.[32]

However, the opening of the Soviet archives has hardly eliminated this primary source balancing act. For example, Fürst's 2005 article on post-World War II youth religious participation is heavily based on state archival sources.[33] Although this emphasis on newly available archival sources is understandable, it creates the potential for a state-leaning bias. Zhuk's examination of youth religious "cultural consumption" similarly relies on state archival sources, but he is more careful to incorporate less state-based primary sources, such as interviews and school diaries.[34] Interestingly, he does not incorporate any evangelically-produced publications from the period. Coleman's work on early Soviet evangelicalism presents another balanced use of primary sources, incorporating evangelical and communist periodicals, various other publications, documents from state archives, and personal papers.[35] Her and Zhuk's works provide a potential guide for appropriately using primary sources to study the experiences of Soviet evangelicals.

Chapter One of this study examines key events of the early Soviet period, highlighting how these events laid the foundations for the future evangelical youth experience. The chapter opens by discussing the emergence and development of an organized Russian evangelical youth movement from 1908 – 1910. Building on the experiences of these early organizations, Soviet

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[31] Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II*.
[32] Biddulph, "Religious Participation of Youth in the USSR," 417.
[33] Fürst, "Not a Question of Faith – Youth and Religion in the Post-War Years."
[34] Zhuk, "Popular Religiosity in the 'Closed City' of Soviet Ukraine."
[35] Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution*.

evangelical youth developed and maintained an active presence in society throughout the 1920s, drawing both religious and non-religious youth to their gatherings. The newly established Communist state viewed the popularity of these "Bapsomol" and "Khristomol" gatherings as a challenge to their own Komsomol. Consequently, the 1929 Law on Religious Organizations significantly limited church engagement with society, specifically targeting religious activity among children and youth. The period from 1908 – 1929 became a foundational period for future evangelical youth, establishing both the themes of evangelical youth activity and state policy towards this activity.

Chapter Two examines evangelical youth activity during World War II and the post-war period. Navigating challenges of pacifism, legal restrictions on youth baptism, and the 1961 split of the evangelical union, evangelical youth engaged in the turmoil, the transformations, and the opportunities of this period. Participating in the religious revival that emerged following World War II, youth became active members of their churches, learning to navigate state restrictions on their activity by meeting informally and serving the church in simple, practical ways. When state pressure provoked the 1961 split of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (AUCECB) and the creation of the Council of Churches of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (CCECB), many young believers joined the emerging underground evangelical movement, laying the foundations for youth engagement in this movement through samizdat during the 1970s – 1980s.

Chapter Three focuses on evangelical youth participation in evangelism efforts from 1970 – 1991. Although harried by the state, the CCECB became a primary force in the evangelism and religious education of youth, inviting evangelical youth to actively participate in the life of their churches. CCECB activity among youth coincided with rising interest in religion

during the 1970s – 1980s, contributing to a rich period of revival for the Soviet evangelical church. Evangelical youth engaged in these opportunities on an individual, local, and regional level. On a larger scale, they broadened their experiences and impact through supporting the creation and distribution of evangelical samizdat.

Despite Soviet propaganda to the contrary, youth maintained a vital and vibrant presence in evangelical congregations throughout the Soviet period. During the 1920s, their presence was strong enough to challenge the membership of the state-sponsored youth organizations, while their activity during the 1970s – 1980s as part of the CCECB served as a continual irritation to state authorities. During the difficult times of the 1930s – 1960s, youth maintained an active, if quieter, presence in the evangelical movement, faithfully participating in the life of their congregations. Throughout the Soviet period, however, their presence and activity highlighted a consistent youth experience based on fellowship, service, and Scriptural teaching. When possible, youth engaged with society through evangelism and samizdat, but the core of their activity remained the same, focused on the fellowship, service, and biblical instruction that had served as vital elements of evangelical youth activity since the pre-revolutionary period.

Displaying resilience and creativity, evangelical youth became key members of the Soviet evangelical movement, contributing both to its preservation and growth. Their presence was especially important considering the limited opportunities for evangelism available to evangelical churches during the Soviet period. Up until now, the role of evangelical youth has largely been ignored by scholars, perpetuating the often-repeated myth that in a communist land, religion is for the old and the weak. This work seeks to restore color into the history of the Soviet evangelical church by examining the failures and triumphs, the challenges and opportunities, and the tragedies and joys of Soviet evangelical children and youth.

Chapter Two

Foundations

> There is no doubt, that new and mighty forces for evil and good are now at work in Russia … New spiritual breezes are visibly blowing over Russia; an awakening of Christian thought is visibly taking place; outward restrictions and hindrances have mostly been removed. **Now the time has come to press on with all might**.
>
> —Baron Paul Nicolay, "The Students of Russia" (1908)

The Russian evangelical youth movement entered a transformative period during the first three decades of the 20th century. Amid the upheaval, challenges, and opportunities of the late imperial and early Soviet periods, evangelical leaders and youth laid foundational stones that shaped the course of the evangelical youth movement for the rest of the Soviet period. Influenced by Ivan Prokhanov, youth led a movement based on a strong international focus, a love for music, and an emphasis on Christian literature. From 1908 – 1929, this movement grew, hindered by government persecution but never truly stopped. However, rising state resistance laid another kind of foundation. As the Soviet state watched, adapted, and grew, it laid the foundations for its policy towards evangelical youth, establishing the strictures that were to hound and harass evangelical youth for the next sixty years.

Russian evangelicals occupied a precarious position in late Imperial Russia. The law implied that Orthodoxy was a fundamental part of Russianness, raising concerns over the allegiance of those who had forsaken the Orthodox church, such as evangelicals.[1] However, change was at the doorstep, and old understandings of the relationship between religion and Russianness began to give way. The Revolution of 1905 contributed to religious toleration,

[1] Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution*, 19.

prompting tremendous growth in the Baptist movement.[2] At the same time, early 20th century Russia constituted a "vital popular culture of religious inquiry."[3] Indeed, the 1905 Revolution prompted many of the intelligentsia to return to traditional values, including religion.[4] This sudden interest in religion, combined with new religious toleration, provided evangelicals with a golden opportunity.

Birth of an Organized Evangelical Youth Movement

In early 1903, several young men began quietly considering the organization of a *kruzhok* ("circle") for young St. Petersburg believers.[5] Due to legal restrictions, youth gatherings such as this were largely secretive affairs.[6] "The idea seemed strange to many, dangerous," they recalled, "[b]ut everything that is dictated by life itself rarely … dies."[7] In August, eight of them bravely joined together to create the St. Petersburg Youth Circle of Evangelical Christians.[8] By the end of the year, their membership had doubled.[9]

Active in almost every other area of evangelical life, evangelical leader Ivan Prokhanov boldly waded into these waters as well. On January 5, 1905, he called a meeting to organize an association of "the Christian youth in connection with the St. Petersburg congregation."[10] Looking forward with heady optimism, Prokhanov painted a glorious picture of the future – a Union of Young People's Associations, complete with its own conferences, magazines, and

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[2] Ibid., 25 – 27.
[3] Ibid., 54.
[4] Arto Luukkanen, *The Party of Unbelief: The Religious Policy of the Bolshevik Party, 1917 – 1929* (Helsinki: Finnish Historical Society, 1994), 53 – 54.
[5] "Iz" zhizni S.-Peterburgskago Kruzhka khristīanskoĭ molodezhi (i͡unosheskago), chto pri obshchini͡e Evangel'skikh" Khristīan"," *Molodoĭ Vinogradnik* (October 1909), 19.
[6] I. S. Prokhanoff, *In the Cauldron of Russia: Autobiography of I.S. Prokhanoff* […] (New York: All-Russian Evangelical Christian Union, 1933), 131.
[7] "Iz" zhizni S.-Peterburgskago Kruzhka," 19.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Prokhanoff, *In the Cauldron of Russia*, 131.

Bible courses.[11] He later recalled, "It was a speech of pure optimism of faith amidst conditions of pessimism."[12]

The events of the following weeks provided an opening for these dreams to become reality. On January 22, 1905, thousands of protestors marched on the Winter Palace, carrying a petition to Nicholas II.[13] In the clashes with police and soldiers that followed, hundreds of protestors were killed.[14] As news of "Bloody Sunday" swept through Russia, the country began to unravel at its seams, experiencing a spike in strikes and organized union activity.[15] The tsar sought to appease the protestors through various concessions, including a declaration of religious toleration on Easter Sunday, 1905.[16] *The Baltimore Sun* called this declaration an "Easter gift" from the tsar and praised it as "a historical event of the highest significance."[17] The decree was indeed welcome to Russian evangelicals, promising them a freedom they had never tasted. However, for the rest of Russia, it was far from sufficient, and the tsar was forced to allow the creation of a State Duma and slowly watch the empire slip out of his hands.[18]

As the Russian Empire lurched towards its demise, evangelical youth slowly emerged into the light, seeking to organize themselves. On April 13, 1908, twenty young representatives from places as far flung as St. Petersburg, modern-day Volgograd, and the Ukrainian cities of Kiev and Konotop gathered in Moscow to discuss the organization of their activities.[19] Although

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[11] Ibid., 131 – 132.

[12] Ibid., 132.

[13] Nicholas V. Riasanovsky and Mark D. Steinberg, *A History of Russia*, 9th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 365.

[14] Ibid., 365 – 366.

[15] Ibid., 366.

[16] Riasanovsky and Steinberg, *A History of Russia*, 367; Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution*, 25.

[17] "Reforms are Sweeping: Those Conferred by the Czar of Utmost Importance," *Baltimore Sun*, May 1, 1905, 2.

[18] Riasanovsky and Steinberg, *A History of Russia*, 367 – 375.

[19] Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution*, 40 – 41; "O pervom" s"i͡ezdi͡e i͡unosheĭ i di͡evit͡s" v" g. Moskvi͡e," *Baptist"* no. 10 (October 1908), 12. In his 1933 autobiography (*In the Cauldron of Russia*), Prokhanov references a 1906 "First All-Russian Conference of Christian Young People," citing this as the founding gathering

the three-day congress failed to produce a union, the representatives succeeded in electing a temporary *soviet* ("council") and made plans to settle the union question at their next gathering.[20]

The following spring, twenty-five youth circles across Russia received invitations to a congress to be held in St. Petersburg from May 17 – 19.[21] Of the twenty-eight attendees gathered on May 18th, twenty-three enjoyed the privilege of being close to home, representing four St. Petersburg youth circles and two groups in the neighboring region.[22] Of the handful of non-St. Petersburg delegates, more than half represented Ukrainian youth circles, while the remaining two delegates represented gatherings in Moscow and far-flung Baku.[23]

Indeed, due to poverty, distance, or other obligations, many youth circles were forced to send letters of apology rather than representatives. Read aloud during the congress, these letters of apology, gratitude, and Christian affection shed light on the makeup and character of these far-flung youth gatherings. In a very prompt response, the well-organized Moscow group apologized for being unable to give an immediate response, as they had not yet been able to call a general meeting to discuss the matter.[24] A Siberian youth circle expressed gratitude for the invitation but explained that "spring has begun here, and we are busy with field work."[25] Written from a small village in modern-day Kazakhstan, the letter from the Sayapin youth circle overflowed with gratitude, joy, and a palpable longing for connection.[26] Their poverty and the

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of the "Smaller Union" (Prokhanov's name for the All-Russian Union of the Christian Young People) (Prokhanov, *In the Cauldron of Russia*, 132, 189). Unless the union which arose from the above-mentioned April 1908 gathering was a separate union from the one cited by Prokhanov, it is likely that he simply misremembered some of the details of its creation.

[20] "O pervom" s"i͡ezdi͡e i͡unosheĭ i di͡evit͡s" v" g. Moskvi͡e," 12.

[21] "Vtoroĭ S"i͡ezd" Soi͡uza Khrisīanskoĭ Molodezhi v" g. S.-Peterburgi͡e, 17 – 20 mai͡a 1909 goda. Pos"i͡ezdnyi͡a vospominanīi͡a, vpechatli͡enīi͡a, malen'iī͡a dumy," *Molodoĭ Vinogradnik* (July 1909), 15 – 16.

[22] "Otchet" o vtorom" s"i͡ezdi͡e predstaviteleĭ ot" Kruzhkov" Khristīanskoĭ Molodezhi v" S. Peterburgi͡e -- s" 17 po 19 Mai͡a 10-0 g.," *Molodoĭ Vinogradnik* (July 1909), 7.

[23] Ibid.

[24] "Vtoroĭ S"i͡ezd" Soi͡uza Khrisīanskoĭ Molodezhi v" g. S.-Peterburgi͡e," 22.

[25] Ibid., 25.

[26] Ibid., 25 – 26.

long journey to St. Petersburg made sending a representative impossible, they explained, but, "We would like to see all of you, the whole Second Congress, on a [photograph] card … [indicating] the first and last name and place of residence of each representative. Send the card to us with the cost. We will pay for everything."[27]

The delegates in attendance established an ambitious program for the young union. They spent much of the first day discussing the charters for both Christian Youth Circles and the Christian Youth Circle Union.[28] After a discussion that stretched almost until midnight, the two charters were accepted by the delegates.[29] The next morning, the representatives settled several smaller questions, including the legal name of their union ("The Evangelical Union of Christian Youth") and the creation of a youth periodical.[30] The congress selected representatives from seven cities to serve on the Literary Commission that would run the periodical, titled *Molodoi Vinogradnik* (The Young Vineyard).[31] After settling additional questions regarding the sending of missionaries, the reporting of funds, and the selection of a union seal, the congress closed with plans to reconvene in Kiev during the 1910 Easter celebrations.[32]

Even amid the joy of the gathering, though, there were hints that the political situation in Russia was still far from perfect. On his way to represent the Tiflis youth gathering, S. Belousov was arrested in Odessa along with other believers.[33] Although released after a week, he still arrived in St. Petersburg too late to participate in the congress.[34] Letters sent around this time from the Youth Union to believers in Odessa referenced at least two instances of believers

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[27] Ibid., 26.
[28] "Otchet" o vtorom" s"i͡ezdi͡e predstaviteleĭ ot" Kruzhkov" Khristīanskoĭ Molodezhi," 8.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid., 8 – 9.
[31] Ibid., 9.
[32] Ibid., 9 – 11.
[33] "Vtoroĭ S"i͡ezd" Soi͡uza Khrisīanskoĭ Molodezhi v" g. S.-Peterburgi͡e," 27.
[34] Ibid.

suffering imprisonment for their beliefs, with one arrest incorporating almost two hundred believers.[35] With an optimism that would ring hollow in the coming years, the young believers in St. Petersburg sought to encourage those in prison: "[T]hese events are the last convulsions of the old system and are unlikely to be repeated."[36]

Foundations of the Evangelical Youth Movement

Published monthly, *Molodoi Vinogradnik* became not only a source of encouragement and connection for young believers but also a window into the daily lives of evangelical youth circles. Writing from Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Siberia, young believers eagerly shared stories of the challenges and triumphs they experienced as they sought to serve Christ in their communities. These stories reveal the concerns, thoughts, and aims that would lay the foundations of Soviet evangelical youth activity.

During their annual meeting on August 6, 1909, the St. Petersburg Christian Young Men's Circle gave a report of their activities over the past year. As of August 1, the group contained sixty-four members.[37] Over the last year, they had held forty-eight prayer meetings, fifty-four "calling meetings," two "evenings of Christian love," twelve "reporting-discussion" gatherings, and one joint gathering with the Christian young women's group in their city.[38] Their activities represented a wide range of focuses, but particularly emphasized the printing and distribution of literature.[39] They sold literature during special gatherings, distributed it for free to those in the poorer neighborhoods of St. Petersburg, and established a library fund to buy and

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[35] Ibid., 29 – 30.

[36] Ibid., 30.

[37] "Iz" zhizni S.-Peterburgskago Kruzhka," 20.

[38] Ibid. Multiple letters and reports refer to "calling meetings" (*pryzyvnye sobranii*) but none of them provide a clear definition of the meetings or their purpose. Based on context and the number of people who attended, it is likely that these were evangelistic-type events with periodic calls to repentance and salvation. (See, for example, "Opisanīe Bakinskago S"i͡ezda Kavkazskoĭ molodezhi (26 – 28 Sentiabria͡ 1909 g.)," *Molodoĭ Vinogradnik* (January 1910), 21 – 29.)

[39] "Iz" zhizni S.-Peterburgskago Kruzhka khristīanskoĭ molodezhi," 20.

send books to poorer youth circles.[40] The group also displayed an interest in assisting the poorer residents of their city, helping with the September 1908 cholera epidemic, working with the poor, and setting aside money to aid "the fallen and the people of the streets."[41]

Outside of St. Petersburg, most youth circles maintained a simpler range of activities. A youth circle in Kiev reported that their group gathered once a week on Mondays, spending half of the service in prayer and "edifying and calling meetings" and the other half in studying Scripture.[42] In Kharkov, the youth circle helped fund evangelism efforts and started a library for their circle.[43]

Especially eagerly awaited were the special evening gatherings, such as the "evenings of Christian love" organized by many youth circles. Writing only a few months after the second congress, Roston-on-Don reported an upcoming youth *prazdnik* ("holiday") and invited youth from other cities to join.[44] Plans for the gathering included displays of needlework by the young women of the groups, public essay readings, an open library of spiritual literature, and music.[45] Although not specifically listed as an evening of Christian love, this description aligns with many of the other gatherings that went under this name. For example, an evening of Christian love held in Baku around the same time included sermons, reports on the status of the youth circles in the area, and singing.[46] A Simferopol evening of love incorporating guests from other

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[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid., 20 – 21.

[42] G. I. Aksenov"-Shilanov", "2-oĭ Kīevskīĭ kruzhok" molodykh" li͡udeĭ Evangel'skago ispovi͡edanīi͡a," *Molodoĭ Vinogradnik* (November 1909), 16 – 17.

[43] "Po povodu polugodovago sushchestvovanīi͡a Khar'kovskago i͡unosheskago kruzhka vi͡eriu͡ishchikh" evangel'skikh" khristīan" 1909 god"," *Molodoĭ Vinogradnik* (March 1910), 19 – 20.

[44] "Pis'ma," *Molodoĭ Vinogradnik* (November 1909), 17 – 18.

[45] Ibid.

[46] "Opisanīe Bakinskago S"i͡ezda Kavkazskoĭ molodezhi (26 – 28 Senti͡abri͡a 1909 g.)," *Molodoĭ Vinogradnik* (January 1910), 21 – 23.

Ukrainian cities included reading letters from other youth circles, praying, singing, eating, and listening to sermons, Scripture and poetry readings, and testimonies.[47]

The most difficult gatherings were those called to say goodbye to members of their youth circle. In September 1909, the Ekaterinoslav church and youth circle gathered to bless Yakov Hodiusha before his long journey to the Alliance Bible School in Berlin.[48] The church choir joined the young believers at the train station to sing together before Hodiusha left.[49] The same year, the St. Petersburg Youth Circle held a similar gathering to bless I. B. Semenov who was also leaving for the Alliance Bible School in Berlin.[50] These gatherings highlight the love that these young believers had for each other.

In addition to separate activities, youth circles often participated in general church activities, playing important roles in the lives of their congregations. For example, the Kharkov congregation commissioned their youth circle to hold services in two neighboring villages and entrusted the young men with hosting Sunday School efforts.[51] The youth responded readily, using the funds of their youth circle to organize a December children's gathering.[52] In St.

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[47] [Shestopalov", A.] "Vecheri͡a li͡ubvi v" Simferopol'skom" i͡unosheskom" kruzhki͡e 1-go I͡anvari͡a 1910 goda," *Molodoĭ Vinogradnik* (February 1910), 20 – 25.

[48] "Pis'ma," 19. In 1905, the Alliance Bible School (*Allianz-Bibelschule*) was established in Berlin "for the preparation of evangelists for eastern Europe" (F. Roy Coad, *A History of the Brethren Movement: Its Origins, its Worldwide Development and its Significance for the Present Day*, 2nd ed., (Exeter, UK: Paternoster Press, 1976), 197). The purpose of the school was to "train believers and send them back to their homeland to advance the faith" (Christopher Lee Thompson, "The Life and Writings of Erich Sauer (1898-1959): His Relationship to and Influence Upon American Dispensationalism" (PhD diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011), 18). Considering that Roy Coad mentions the martyrdom in Siberian prisons of Russian graduates from the school, it is likely that at least some Russian graduates of the Alliance Bible School returned to Russia to fulfill the school's purpose (Coad, *A History of the Brethren Movement*, 198).

[49] Ibid.

[50] "Ki͡e ot"i͡ezdu I. B. Semenova v" Germanii͡u," *Molodoĭ Vinogradnik* (October 1909), 23.

[51] "Poi͡ezdka br. Ḟ. M. Trosnova. (Prodolzhenīe)," *Molodoĭ Vinogradnik* (January 1910), 16; "Po povodu polugodovago sushchestvovanii͡a," 19 – 20.

[52] Ibid.

Petersburg, twenty members of the young men's circle sang in the choir, while seventeen of them taught Sunday School.[53]

Examining these reports, several themes emerge that highlight the priorities of the evangelical youth movement during this period. Throughout 1909 – 1910, *Molodoi Vinogradnik* and the youth circles it represented displayed an interest in international connections, a strong appreciation for music, and an emphasis on Christian literature. These themes may not have been true of every youth circle, but they run throughout the pages of *Molodoi Vinogradnik*, highlighted in both articles and youth circle reports. Not surprisingly, these themes align closely with the life and experiences of Ivan Prokhanov, reflecting his influence on the evangelical youth movement and the course of its history. More importantly, these themes became foundational elements of the Soviet evangelical youth experience, especially during the activity of the Council of Churches of Evangelical Christians-Baptists in the 1960s – 1980s.

Highlighting an interest in global Christianity, *Molodoi Vinogradnik* frequently included stories and articles, which emphasized the faithfulness of Christians in other parts of the world. In November 1909, *Molodoi Vinogradnik* discussed the work of the "Hebrew Christian Testimony to Israel," a mission founded in London in 1893.[54] In the January issue of the following year, the periodical shared a translation of a letter from a female missionary to China, in which she depicted the spiritual hardships of missionary life and the need for a deep relationship with and dependence on Jesus.[55] In February and March, *Molodoi Vinogradnik* shared the stories of a British bricklayer who gave to Chinese missions, of a young African man training for missions in London, and of the Five Martyrs of Lyons who died for their faith in

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[53] "Iz" zhizni S.-Peterburgskago Kruzhka," 20.

[54] "Evreĭsko-Khristīanskoe Svidi͡etel'stvovanīe k" Izraili͡u," *Molodoĭ Vinogradnik* (November 1909), 9 – 12.

[55] A. Renberg', "Chto ozhidaet" nas" v" Kitai͡e? (Slovo k" dobrovol'tsam" na Nivi͡e Bozhīeĭ," *Molodoĭ Vinogradnik* (January 1910), 14 – 15.

1552.[56] As seen by these examples, these windows into the Christian past often included a strong emphasis on evangelism and missions.

However, Russian youth moved beyond simply learning about other countries to engaging with them. During the second youth union congress in 1909, the gathered delegates made plans to send letters to the youth unions of several countries, including England, America, Germany, and Switzerland.[57] In the November 1909 issue of *Molodoĭ Vinogradnik*, they published several letters to these foreign youth unions, including letters addressed to the British Union of "Christian Societies of Young People," the American Union of Christian Societies of Young People, and the Latvian Union of Young People, along with publishing a response from the Committee of the World Union of Circles of Christian Youth.[58] Around the same time, *Molodoi Vinogradnik* reported that two young men from the St. Petersburg and Ekaterinoslav youth circles were leaving to attend the Alliance Bible School in Berlin.[59]

Published in February of the following year, a letter from I. B. Semenov, an Alliance Bible School student from St. Petersburg, sheds light on both the opportunities and the challenges of these cross-cultural interactions.[60] Semenov spoke positively of his interactions with his Prussian and Swiss roommates, even good-naturedly acknowledging their laughter at him when he said something "original."[61] He praised the godliness of his German tutor and enjoyed the freedom that he experienced at the college. However, he also expressed frustration at

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[56] "P͡iat' L̄ionskikh" studentov"," *Molodoĭ Vinogradnik* (February 1910), 13 – 18; "Pozhertvovanīe rabochago chelovi͡eka," *Molodoĭ Vinogradnik* (February 1910), 19 – 20; "Ronda ili obrashchennyĭ dikar"," *Molodoĭ Vinogradnik* (March 1910), 7 – 10.

[57] "Otchet" o vtorom" s"i͡ezdi͡e predstaviteleĭ ot" Kruzhkov" Khristīanskoĭ Molodezhi," 9.

[58] "Privi͡etstvennyi͡a pis'ma drugim" Soi͡uzam" Kruzhkov" Khristīanskoĭ Molodezhi," *Molodoĭ Vinogradnik* (November 1909), 5 – 8.

[59] "Ki͡e ot"i͡ezdu I. B. Semenova v" Germanī͡iu," 23; "Pis'ma," 19.

[60] I. Semenoff, "Pis'mo gr. I. P. Semenova iz" Berlinskoĭ Bibleĭskoĭ shkoly," *Molodoĭ Vinogradnik* (February 1910), 28.

[61] Ibid.

the slowness of his language learning and his desire to move on to the "atmosphere of knowledge, real work."[62]

In addition to their interest in global Christianity, early Russian evangelical youth displayed a strong love of music, integrating it into the program of most of their gatherings. As a key leader of the evangelical youth movement, Prokhanov encouraged and fostered this emphasis on music. In 1901, he published the first evangelical hymnal (*Gusli*), managing to push it through publication despite the extreme unlikelihood of the state allowing it.[63] As editor of the evangelical periodical *Khristianin*, he began including an original hymn written by himself in every issue.[64] Following his imprisonment along with other delegates of the 1921 Youth Congress, he published *Pipe of David*, a hymnal dedicated to Christian youth and containing hymns written during his imprisonment.[65]

From the beginning of the youth movement, music was integrated into the daily patterns of youth activity. The representatives of the second youth congress opened the gathering by singing no. 519 from the *Gusli* hymnal published by Prokhanov.[66] When the Blagovieshchensk Youth Circle reported their spendings for the 1908 – 1909 year, they listed the purchase of a pump organ as one of their expenses.[67] As the Khrakov youth circle said goodbye to one of their members going off into military service, they sang no. 64 from *Piesnei Khristianina* (Songs of the Christian) – "God Be with You Until We Meet Again."[68]

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[62] Ibid.
[63] Prokhanoff, *In the Cauldron of the Russia*, 120 – 123.
[64] Ibid., 144.
[65] Ibid., 147, 201.
[66] "Vtoroĭ S"i͡ezd" Soi͡uza Khrisīanskoĭ Molodezhi v" g. S.-Peterburgi͡e," 21.
[67] "Protokol" Godovogo Otcheta Sovi͡eshchatel'nago Sobranīi͡a Blagovi͡eshchenskago I͡unosheskago kruzhka Evangel'skikh" Khristīan" Baptistov", sostoi͡ashchagosi͡a 2 I͡iuni͡a 1909 goda," *Molodoĭ Vinogradnik* (October 1909), 22.
[68] "Poi͡ezdka br. Ḟ. M. Trosnova," 17.

As integrated as music was into daily life, it was even more deeply integrated into the special gatherings that youth organized for encouragement and evangelism. Writing on September 16, 1909, the Roston-on-Don youth circle invited young believers to an upcoming youth celebration.[69] The range of musical offerings was extensive and impressive, incorporating solo, duet, trio, quartet, and choir performances.[70] Early the following year, *Molodoi Vinogradnik* reported on the first "spiritual-musical" evening of the Moscow Evangelical Christian Church choir.[71] Although not technically connected to the youth circle, young people played an important role, participating throughout the evening through singing, declamations, poetry-readings, and evangelistic speeches.[72]

These large gatherings could be wonderful opportunities for sharing the Gospel, and music often played a role in evangelism. Indeed, Prokhanov argued that music played an important role in the growth of Russian evangelicalism, contributing to the salvation of many people.[73] Almost all of the evangelistic gatherings reported in *Molodoi Vinogradnik* incorporated music to some extent. During the Simferopol evening of love on January 1, 1910, attendees sat around a table eating sweets, drinking tea, and singing together from *Gusli*.[74] Interestingly, some of the participants appeared to treat the *Gusli* hymns as poetry, reading them aloud during the evening.[75] During the gathering two young people accepted Christ as their Savior in a very public, emotional experience.[76] In March 1910, *Molodoi Vinogradnik* reported a *prizyvnoe*

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[69] "Pis'ma," 17 – 18.
[70] Ibid.
[71] K. Gibet", "Dukhovno-muzykal'nyĭ Vecher" khora Moskovsk. Obshchiny Ev. Khrist." *Molodoĭ Vinogradnik* (January 1910), 29.
[72] Ibid., 29 – 31.
[73] Prokhanoff, *In the Cauldron of Russia*, 147 – 148.
[74] "Vecheri͡a li͡ubvi v" Simferopol'skom" i͡unosheskom" kruzhki͡e," 21.
[75] Ibid., 20 – 22.
[76] Ibid., 26.

sobranie in Konotop, similarly structured as a time of food and fellowship interspersed with singing.[77]

In addition to these intimate, personal gatherings, young believers proved themselves extraordinarily willing to sing in public, eager to engage in the evangelism opportunities that arose out of this. In August 1909, a group of children from a St. Petersburg Sunday School group traveled outside the city to enjoy some time playing outside.[78] Throughout the journey, the teachers and the children boldly prayed and sang in public, allowing them the opportunity to share the address of their church with the other passengers on the train.[79]

Finally, the early Russian evangelical youth movement placed a strong emphasis on the printing and distribution of Christian literature. As with the other themes, the printing and distribution of Christian literature was something dear to the heart of Prokhanov. While a student in St. Petersburg during the late 19th century, Prokhanov became burdened by the need for Christian literature in his country.[80] He later wrote in his autobiography, "I began to think about the necessity of using the literary method of spreading the Gospel."[81] He and his brother built a hectograph and began secretly publishing an evangelical periodical titled *Beseda* (*Conversation*), using the postal system to distribute it.[82] In 1908, he helped establish the *Raduga* ("Rainbow") publishing house and opened the first Evangelical Christian bookstore in St. Petersburg.[83]

With this kind of man leading the evangelical youth movement, it is not surprising that it displayed a strong emphasis on Christian literature and its distribution. As already mentioned, the second youth congress established a Literary Commission specifically for the purpose of

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[77] "Iz" pisem" druzeĭ: Ot" br. Ḟ. V. Bykodera iz" Konotopa," *Molodoĭ Vinogradnik* (March 1910), 17 – 18.
[78] "Sredi di͡eteĭ," *Molodoĭ Vinogradnik* (October 1909), 15 – 18.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Prokhanoff, *In the Cauldron of Russia*, 66 – 69.
[81] Ibid., 67.
[82] Ibid., 67 – 68.
[83] Ibid., 149.

writing, editing, and printing a youth periodical.[84] Similarly, the 1909 report of the St. Petersburg Youth Circle emphasized the importance of literature, distributing literature in multiple ways and establishing a library to buy and send books to poorer youth circles.[85] The Blagovieshchensk youth circle showed a similar interest, listing a library in its expense list and electing two librarians for the 1908 – 1909 year.[86]

These examples testify to the creativity and range of the early evangelical youth movement. Indeed, Coleman's description of youth work during the pre-1917 period reads as a cornucopia of activities.[87] Youth activities could be pastor-initiated or youth-initiated; they were held both in rural areas and the cities. Youth meetings incorporated services, Bible studies, literary circles, charitable works, evangelism, and "evenings of Christian love."[88] These latter evenings of singing, speeches, and refreshments proved especially popular, leading to the salvation of both Baptist children and Orthodox youth.[89]

Evangelicals and the Revolution of 1917

On February 23, 1917, a struggle began that would transform both Russia and the evangelical movement.[90] Over the course of the next week, revolutionary forces overthrew Tsar Nicholas II and established a Provisional Government.[91] Although it passed some legislation establishing equality of religion, the Provisional Government viewed its primary function as

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[84] "Otchet" o vtorom" s"i͡ezdi͡e predstaviteleĭ ot" Kruzhkov" Khristīanskoĭ Molodezhi," 9.
[85] "Iz" zhizni S.-Peterburgskago Kruzhka khristīanskoĭ molodezhi," 20.
[86] "Protokol" Godovogo Otcheta," 22.
[87] Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution*, 40 – 42.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid., 40.
[90] At the time of the 1917 Revolutions, Russia was still following the Julian calendar. The "February Revolution" took place on March 8, 1917, by the Gregorian calendar. Similarly, the "October Revolution" took place on November 7, 1917, by the Gregorian calendar. However, both revolutions are conventionally titled according to the old, Julian calendar.
[91] "K" Momentu," *Pravda* 1, March 5, 1917, 1; "The Course of the Revolution," *Manchester Guardian*, March 17, 1917, 6.

"preserving unity and order until the people should have an opportunity to express its own will in the Constituent Assembly."[92] Russian life quickly became polarized and politicized, as citizens of the new government loudly debated what course Russia should take.[93] Hoping to play an active role in the emerging society, evangelicals joined the debate, with one evangelical leader even founding a "Christian democratic" political party named "Resurrection."[94] However, not all believers supported this political activism, concerned about the dangers of Christian involvement in politics.[95] Throughout 1917, evangelicals debated over the proper political role of a Christian.[96]

The events of the next several months may have prompted evangelicals to question the relevance of these debates. At 8:30 PM on November 7, Bolshevik forces demanded the surrender of the Provisional Government.[97] The following day, the Bolshevik Party ordered for all state power to be transferred to the individual city soviets who were to communicate directly with the Bolshevik government in Petrograd.[98] Perhaps sensing what this new political transition meant, evangelicals began engaging in evangelism more urgently.[99]

Whether or not they had read Karl Marx's famous indictment of Christianity, evangelicals had good reason to fear the rising atheistic force. Bolshevik religious ideology blended Marxist thought with the unique experiences of the Russian people, including the Russian Orthodox Church's position of authority in Imperial Russia, pre-1917 church-intelligentsia tensions, the personal experiences of Bolshevik leaders, and the "tradition of

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[92] Richard Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union: Communism and Nationalism, 1917 – 1923*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 50 – 51.

[93] Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution*, 143.

[94] Ibid., 136 – 139.

[95] Ibid., 143 – 148.

[96] Ibid.

[97] "Shooting Begun: Ultimatum to Ministers at Winter Palace," *Manchester Guardian*, November 9, 1917, 5.

[98] "Winter Palace Bombarded and Women Defenders Forced to Capitulate. Workmen's Congress Begins Its Sessions," *Baltimore Sun*, November 9, 1917, 1.

[99] Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution*, 149 – 153.

Russian radical thought."[100] In the long term, however, Bolshevik religious policy was often shaped more by politics than ideology, as can be seen by their attempts to court evangelical support.[101]

Revolutionaries had considered using Baptists as a revolutionary force for decades, with Marxist interest in sectarians beginning as early as the 1880s.[102] During the 1903 Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party, V. D. Bonch-Bruevich gave a lecture on the "latent revolutionary sentiment among Russian sectarians."[103] Aiming to recruit the support of these smaller religious groups, Vladimir Lenin encouraged the creation of a newspaper aimed specifically at them.[104] Titled *Sredi Sektantov* (Among Sectarians), the newspaper only lasted for nine editions. Nonetheless, it testifies to Bolshevik interest in incorporating sectarians, including evangelicals, into their revolutionary force.

The new government's activities periodically reflected these early strategies. On January 23, 1918, the new Bolshevik regime decreed the separation of church and state.[105] In addition to removing the privileged status of the Russian Orthodox Church, the decree stated that religion was a "private matter" and forbade the creation of any laws, which "restricted freedom of conscience."[106] This development was hardly an expression of religious freedom, but evangelicals still welcomed it, hoping that the removal of the Russian Orthodox Church from its position of authority would provide room for them to grow.[107] Starting in 1919, the Bolsheviks

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[100] Luukkanen, *Party of Unbelief*, 35 – 45.

[101] Arto Luukkanen, *The Religious Policy of the Stalinist State: A Case Study – The Central Standing Commission on Religious Questions, 1929 – 1938* (Helsinki: Finnish Historical Society, 1997), 31 – 32.

[102] Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution*, 23 – 24, 130 – 136.

[103] Luukkanen, *Party of Unbelief*, 49.

[104] Ibid.

[105] Ibid., 71 – 73.

[106] Commissariat of Justice (RSFSR), "Dekret o Svobode Sovesti, Tserkovnyh in Religioznyh Obshchestvah," January 20, 1918, in "Selection of documents related to the Decree on Separation of Church and State […]," 2 – 4, *Keston Center – Keston Digital Archive*.

[107] Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution*, 160 – 161.

began enlisting the support of sectarians in response to rising discontent against anti-religious activities.[108] They even allowed draft exemptions for religious pacifists despite the raging Civil War.[109]

Despite these apparently conciliatory actions, the Bolsheviks had not lost sight of their end goal. Within their first year in power, they were already laying the foundations for the transformation of young Russian believers into loyal Soviet atheists. In November 1917, Anatoly Lunacharsky, the Bolshevik Commissar of Enlightenment, stated that the goal of education was to be general literacy and a school system that was "totally secular in character."[110] The accomplish this, the 1918 decree on the separation of church and state forbade religious instruction in public and private schools.[111] In 1918, the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League (Komsomol) was formed as the youth version of the Communist Party.[112] Although the Komsomol organization was initially relatively independent, the Communist Party established gradually enlarging control over its actions.[113]

At this point, however, the Bolshevik government was not able to enforce a widespread atheization of Russian youth. By the early 1920s, they found themselves in the middle of a civil war and more inclined to focus on survival than on secondary matters such as education and religious policy.[114] Throughout the period of the Civil War, state policy towards education and

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[108] Edward E. Roslof, *Red Priests: Renovationism, Russian Orthodoxy, and Revolution, 1905-1946* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002), 29.

[109] Ibid.

[110] Catriona Kelly, *Children's World: Growing Up in Russia, 1890 – 1991* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 66.

[111] J. S. Curtiss, *The Russian Church and the Soviet State, 1917 – 1950* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1953), 75 – 76.

[112] Allen Kassof, *The Soviet Youth Program: Regimentation and Rebellion* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), 11 – 13.

[113] Ibid.

[114] Luukkanen, *Party of Unbelief*, 64.

the treatment of children was relatively decentralized and disorganized.[115] The same was true for the state treatment of believers. The religious policy that did exist focused on isolating the Russian Orthodox Church through legislative action.[116] In the main, though, the Bolsheviks maintained a cautious approach, not wanting to antagonize believers.[117] They instead focused on an "isolation policy" which encouraged loyal clergy while punishing those involved in "anti-Bolshevik politics."[118] Despite experiencing the deprivations and horrors of the Civil War, this period nonetheless proved to be a great time of "activity, expansion, and experimentation" for evangelicals.[119]

In 1921, with victory in sight, the Bolsheviks focused their attention on rebuilding the territories they had claimed. Devastated by the Civil War, the government initiated a New Economic Policy (NEP).[120] Lasting from 1921 – 1928, it allowed limited private enterprise in hopes that this would stimulate the Soviet economy.[121] During the first two years of the New Economic Plan (NEP), religious policy was marked by the confiscation of Orthodox church property and attempts to create internal division within religious organizations by encouraging pro-government factions.[122] Soviet religious policy vacillated from 1924 – 1927 as the Soviet state navigated various challenges, including peasant discontent, political upheavals, and foreign opinion.[123] Despite these waves of repression, this period proved to be a time of relative cultural

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[115] Kelly, *Children's World*, 62.
[116] Luukkanen, *Party of Unbelief*, 5 – 6.
[117] Ibid., 80 – 81.
[118] Ibid., 84.
[119] Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution*, 154 – 155.
[120] Anne E. Gorsuch, *Youth in Revolutionary Russia: Enthusiasts, Bohemians, Delinquents* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000), 8.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Luukkanen, *Party of Unbelief*, 96 – 135. For an example of evangelical reactions to state interference in church life, reference this thesis' description of Soviet attempts to force the "military question" on the Soviet evangelical unions during the mid-1920s (p. 33 – 36).
[123] Ibid., 136 – 207.

openness, allowing cultural and social trends which challenged Bolshevik understandings of what the emerging Soviet society would be like.[124]

During this period, the evangelical community displayed immense vibrancy in their activities, including youth work. In 1926, the Organizational Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party received a report regarding the status of sectarianism in the Soviet Union.[125] The report stated that the "mystical sects," under which the report included Baptists, Evangelicals, and Adventists, had grown from their pre-1917 numbers of 500,000 to over 3 million members.[126] The report also related the high level of evangelical activity among children and youth.[127] From 1925 – 1926, Baptists and Evangelicals participated in a large evangelism campaign, involving harvest festivals and week-long evangelism events. Youth were especially active in these campaigns, travelling from village to village "with choirs and music, holding meetings of peasants and carr[ying] out propaganda among them."[128]

As in the past, evangelical involvement in youth work extended beyond the urban centers of Moscow and St. Petersburg and into the multi-ethnic reaches of the former Russian Empire. Up until the late 1920s, the Mennonite congregation of Apollonvka in Omsk enjoyed relative freedom from persecution, allowing room for their youth group to grow to forty members.[129] In Kazakhstan, Evangelical-Christian and Baptist youth fellowshipped together, with the Evangelical-Christian youth joining the Baptists for choir rehearsals.[130] In the Novgorod region,

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[124] Gorsuch, *Youth in Revolutionary Russia*, 9.

[125] "Doklad o Sostai͡anii Sektanstva v SSSR – Ego Politicheskoĭ i Ėkonomicheskoĭ Roli," [January?] 24, 1926, in "Selection of Documents about "Sectarianism" (Representatives of Various Protestant Denominations)," 1 – 13, *Keston Center – Keston Digital Archive*.

[126] Ibid., 1-2.

[127] Ibid., 5.

[128] Ibid.

[129] Petr Ėpp, *Ne Ischezli po Milosti Gospoda. Waldheim – Apollonovka, 1911 – 2011* (Steinhagen, Germany: Samenkorn, 2011), 137 – 138.

[130] A. V. Andretsov, *Istoricheskiĭ Ocherk, Posvi͡ashchennyĭ 100-letnemu I͡ubilei͡u 1-ĭ Almatinskoĭ Tserkvi Evangel'skih Hristian-Baptistov "Golgofa": 1917-2017 gg* (Almaty, Kazakhstan: n.p., 2017), 20 – 21.

an active Latvian Baptist community of up to 1,500 members organized youth meetings among the Latvian colonists there.[131] In Karsnoaiarsk, sectarian congregations held a series of "youth evenings," which attracted up to a hundred participants, while a Tambov congregation held regular children's groups with up to forty participants, including members of the Young Pioneers movement.[132]

Despite this activity, youth gatherings during the 1920s occupied a precariously ambiguous legal position due to the 1918 restrictions regarding the religious education of minors.[133] In addition, believers continued to suffer from arrests and church closures.[134] For example, during the 1921 Young People's Conference in Tver, forty-seven young delegates were arrested and held in prison for three weeks.[135] Apparently nonplussed, the delegates reconvened their meeting in the prison cell. The authorities eventually released most of the delegates, but twelve of them were sentenced to hard labor.

For their part, Soviet authorities struggled to understand the evangelical movement. State documents from the period reveal an intense effort to gather information on the evangelical movement. In 1921, the plenary session of the Central Committee of the Communist Party drafted a decree meant to clarify the Bolshevik anti-religious position.[136] Near the end, the draft briefly mentioned sectarianism, encouraging local organizations to gather information on the "modern forms of sectarianism" and send this information to the Central Committee.[137] The

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[131] Gosudarstvennyĭ Arhiv Noveĭsheĭ Istorii Novgorodskoĭ Oblasti (GANINO) f. 1, op. 1, d. 2694, "Dokumenty of Antireligioznoĭ Propagande, Sostoi͡anii Religioznyh Sekt v Gubernii (Protokly, Spravki, Pis'mo)," [1925?], 15 – 16.

[132] "Doklad o Sostai͡anii Sektanstva v SSSR," 6 – 7.

[133] Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution*, 170 – 171.

[134] Ibid., 178 – 179.

[135] Prokhanoff, *In the Cauldron of Russia*, 190 – 197.

[136] "Draft of a Decree of the Party of Workers and Peasants Central Committee's Plenary Session on the Issues of the Party Program's Paragraph 13 Violation and on the Organization of Anti-Religious Propaganda," May 18, 1921, *Keston Center – Keston Digital Archive*.

[137] Ibid., 4.

following year, the Politburo set up a special commission to "become acquainted with the character and various currents within the sectarian movement."[138] To that end, they ordered the GPU to maintain a presence at the upcoming evangelical congress and to report to the Politburo on the "currents" that they observed there.[139] In December 1924, the Orgburo received a report regarding "the success of sectarian groups with Soviet youth," prompting a further study of this development.[140]

Ultimately, the Bolsheviks worried that Baptist success would compete with their own interests.[141] Their concern was not entirely unwarranted. The 1926 report on sectarianism argued that sectarian youth groups were "battling with Komsomol and Pioneers organizations" and had successfully "ruined" a Komsomol cell in Omsk through their activities.[142] In 1928, Nikolai Bukharin estimated that the Baptist Youth and the Christian Youth movements had as many members as the Komsomol.[143] Some officials seemed eager to identify instances of evangelical decline or examples of the Komsomol drawing young people away from evangelical congregations.[144] For example, 1920s report from the Novgorod region highlighted the migration of young people from the Communist ranks, reporting several instances of former Communists now actively engaged in evangelical congregations.[145]

The report's description of Adventist Sergei Rodionov is especially interesting, as Rodionov was not only a former member of the Communist Party but also the former manager of

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[138] "Extract from the Minutes of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Party of Peasants and Workers Meeting about a Permission to Hold a Baptist Convention and about Participation of State Political Administration Members in the Convention," September 14, 1922, *Keston Center – Keston Digital Archive*.

[139] Ibid.

[140] Roslof, *Red Priests*, 144.

[141] Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution*, 178 – 179.

[142] "Doklad o Sostai͡anii Sektanstva v SSSR," 6 – 7.

[143] Matthias Neumann, *The Communist Youth League and the Transformation of the Soviet Union, 1917 – 1932* (London: Routledge, 2011), 132.

[144] GANINO f. 1, op. 1, d. 2694, 9, 15 – 16.

[145] Ibid., 8-10, 17-18.

an *agitpunkt* at the local Novgorod train station.[146] Usually located along railways or rivers, *agitpunkt* ("agitational-educational stations") promoted the propaganda and educational purposes of the Bolshevik Party.[147] They were especially active during the Civil War, during which time members of each *agitpunkt* engaged in a variety of propaganda measures, including distributing literature, holding meetings, and giving lectures. The fact that someone like Rodionov, a former Party member heavily involved in the distribution of Bolshevik propaganda, would choose to leave the Communist Party to join a small, persecuted religious group must have galled and confused state officials.

Foundations of Soviet Policy Toward Evangelical Youth

The 1920s proved to be a key period for the formation of Soviet religious policy, establishing the obstacles that would harass and challenge evangelical youth for the next sixty years. The "military question" debates of 1922 – 1926 serve as a key example of state intervention in the evangelical church and of how these interventions could impact the future of evangelical youth. Up to this point, evangelicals had maintained a neutral, if not antagonistic, stance towards pacifism. During the pre-World War I period, both the Baptist and the Evangelical-Christian unions released statements acknowledging the responsibility of believers to fulfill military service obligations.[148] However, the horrors of World War I and the Russian Civil War led to the rise of pacificist sentiments among Russian evangelical believers.[149] In 1919, the Bolshevik government established a decree accommodating the pacifist sentiments of these and other believers, such as the Mennonites.[150] A *soviet* representing seven of these pacifist-

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[146] Ibid., 9.

[147] *Bol'shai͡a Sovestkai͡a Ent͡siklopedii͡a,* vol. 1, ed. O. I͡u. Shmidt (Moscow: Akt͡sionernoe Obshchestvo "Sovet͡skai͡a Entsiklopedii͡a", 1926), s.v. "Agitpunkty."

[148] S[ergeĭ] N[ikitovich] Savinskiĭ, *Istorii͡a Evangel'skih Khristian-Baptistov Ukrainy, Rossii, Belorussii. Chast' II (1917 – 1967)* (St. Petersburg, Russia: "Bibliі͡a dli͡a Vseh," 2001), 27.

[149] Ibid., 27 – 28.

[150] Ibid., 28.

inclined religious groups worked with the national court to evaluate cases of conscientious objection, successfully intervening on behalf of religious conscientious objectors.[151]

Despite this apparently conciliatory approach, the Soviet government began during the 1920s to pressure evangelical leadership to abandon pacificism. Savinskii suggests several reasons for this policy shift, including an anti-war article by Prokhanov and the abuse of the 1919 decree by unbelievers seeking to avoid military service.[152] Published in 1922 with the approval of the Union of Evangelical Christians, Prokhanov's article, titled "Voice from the East," called the international Christian community to "complete non-participation in matters relating to war," citing the teachings of Jesus on this issue.[153] Sergei Savinskii argues that the Soviet government used this article and rising instances of the abuse of the 1919 decree to divide evangelical churches and interfere in the evangelical unions.[154]

Arrested in 1923, Prokhanov endured several months of "intensive treatment" (*obrabotki*) at the notorious Lubyanka prison before finally signing a statement contradicting his previous stance on the military question.[155] Addressed to all Evangelical Christian believers, the statement explained the "Voice from the East" article as referring only to those countries, which "due to their ignorance, still protect [capitalist interests]."[156] Further, it condemned the preaching of pacifism and called believers to "submit to all of regulations of the Soviet authorities," including

[151] Ibid., 29.
[152] Ibid., 29 – 31.
[153] Ibid., 29 – 30.
[154] Ibid., 30 – 33.
[155] Ibid., 31; Andrei I. Savin, "'Divide and Rule': Religious Policies of the Soviet Government and Evangelical Churches in the 1920s," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* 32, no. 1 (2012), 6 – 7.
[156] ["Message on Conscientious Objection from the High Council of Evangelical Christians to All Evangelical Christian Communities and To Every Evangelical Christian Brother and Sister in the USSR. Russian State Archive,"] 1924, *Keston Center – Keston Digital Archive*, 1.

military service.[157] The Evangelical Christians – Baptist Union adopted this stance officially in late 1923, followed by the establishment of a similar position by the Baptist Union in 1926.[158]

The Soviet archives shed additional light on these events, highlighting the heavy-handed intervention of the Soviet state in these decisions. Writing to the Central Committee of the Communist Party, a group of Evangelical Christians-Trezvenniks protested state violation of freedom of conscience, specifically citing state interference in the matters of the Evangelical Christian Union and the Baptist Union.[159] The group clarified the circumstances of Prokhanov's decisions, stating that he faced "strong pressure" from the GPU during his imprisonment and signed the statement "completely sick physically and under pressure."[160] Regarding the Evangelical Christian Union's stance, the report pointed out that a GPU member was present during the 9th Congress of the Evangelical Christians and pressured the attendees into accepting the views stated in Prokhanov's statement.[161] Furthermore, the report highlighted that F. Savel'ev, one of the evangelical leaders who had signed the original statement with Prokhanov, later recanted his position and consequently endured a four-month imprisonment before being sent to Solovki.[162]

The issue of military service would continue to plague evangelical youth for the rest of the Soviet period. Each generation of young believers was forced to examine the question anew. Some young men did not accept the pacifist view at all, while others were willing to die for it.

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[157] Ibid., 1, 3.

[158] Savinskiĭ, *Istoriia Evangel'skih Khristian-Baptistov (1917 – 1967)*, 32.

[159] "Extracts From a Report of Evangelical Christians-Trezvenniks to the Central Committee of the Party of Workers and Peasants. Russian State Archive," May 15, 1924, *Keston Center – Keston Digital Archive*, 6 – 8.

[160] Ibid., 7.

[161] Ibid.

[162] Ibid., 8. The report is most likely referring to the Solovki prison camps, founded in 1921 – 1922 and run by the OGPU (Peter H. Solomon, Jr., "Soviet Penal Policy, 1917 – 1934: A Reinterpretation," *Slavic Review* 39, no. 2 (June 1980), 201). According to Peter Solomon, "There is considerable testimony about the harsh conditions and ruthless, sometimes sadistic, administration in Solovki" (Solomon, "Soviet Penal Policy," 201).

Sometimes the Soviet state responded with death sentences, while other times it merely sent believers to complete alternative service. Although the consequences have varied, the "military question" has remained a relevant one even up through the modern day.

In 1926 – 1927, the Soviet state began slowly solidifying its policy toward religious education of youth and evangelical youth activity. In 1927, Soviet educational circles launched an intense debate regarding whether educational curriculum should be anti-religious or simply nonreligious.[163] The following year, they chose to adopt the antireligious approach.[164] State organs also took steps to specifically combat evangelical youth activity. The previously-mentioned 1926 report on sectarianism closed with a series of practical recommendations for addressing sectarian growth.[165] The original draft, stenographic notes from the next day and a final 1927 report survive, providing insight into the decision-making process.[166]

The original draft recommended for the Commissariat of Justice and the NKVD to apply the law on the separation of church and state to sectarians in the same way in which it had been applied to the Orthodox Church.[167] Regarding sectarian youth activity, it recommended forbidding gatherings aimed at children, women, and youth. Showing an understanding of the diversity of evangelical youth activity, the draft specified that these groups were not to be allowed "either under the guise of choir groups nor under the guise of Bible, literature, or craft, etc., associations."[168] Finally, the draft recommended that sectarians not be allowed to organize "children's religious services and schools, existing under the guise of group reading, singing, games, etc."[169] Moving forward, children should only be allowed to attend "general choir

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[163] Curtiss, *The Russian Church and the Soviet State*, 213 – 214.
[164] Ibid.
[165] "Doklad o Sostai͡anii Sektanstva v SSSR," 11 – 13.
[166] Ibid., 1 – 13.
[167] Ibid., 11 – 13.
[168] Ibid., 13.
[169] Ibid.

rehearsals and prayer meetings."[170] In January 1927, the Organizational Bureau received another report which reiterated several of these points almost word-for-word.[171]

These discussions hinted at the gathering storm. From 1928 – 1932, the Soviet Union underwent what various scholars have characterized as a "cultural revolution."[172] Taking advantage of an uncertain political situation, Stalin sought to consolidate his power, using the Komsomol to "politicize Soviet society."[173] In 1929, he announced that collectivization was to take place immediately.[174] During this secondary revolution, anti-religious activity increased as the state launched a three-phase campaign against religion.[175]

This more aggressive religious policy stemmed in part from struggles between the Komsomol "activists" and moderate "rightists."[176] Since the 1920s, Komsomol activists had zealously engaged in anti-religious work. In 1923, Komsomol members staged anti-religious parades on Orthodox Christmas.[177] Blasphemous in nature, these parades angered many believers, prompting the Soviet government to discourage the Komsomol from similar activities.[178] Instead, the government encouraged the Komsomol to focus on less offensive anti-religious activities such as anti-religious lectures, poetry readings, and study groups.[179] This advice aligned with a widespread campaign of sending students into rural areas to aid in the

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[170] Ibid.

[171] "Proekt Prakticheskih Prelozhenii po Dokladu o Sektanstve," January 1927, in "Selection of Documents about "Sectarianism" (Representatives of Various Protestant Denominations)," 17 – 19, *Keston Center – Keston Digital Archive*.

[172] Sarah Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia: Terror, Propaganda, and Dissent, 1934 – 1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 73; Luukkanen, Party of Unbelief, 5 – 6.

[173] Luukkanen, *Party of Unbelief*, 6.

[174] Martin McCauley, *Stalin and Stalinism*, 4th ed. (London: Routledge, 2019), 34.

[175] Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia*, 73; Luukkanen, *Religious Policy of the Stalinist State*, 27.

[176] Luukkanen, *Party of Unbelief*, 24 – 25.

[177] Gorsuch, *Youth in Revolutionary Russia*, 70 – 71.

[178] Ibid.

[179] Ibid.

transformation of society through re-education.[180] However, as with most such attempts, the Komsomol found that their re-education activities were unpopular among the peasants.[181]

Members of the League of Militant Atheists also proved to be dedicated and zealous in the fight against religion. The League of Militant Atheists (or League of the Godless) incorporated in 1925 as the successor to the "Society of Friends of the Newspaper *Bezbozhnik*."[182] Its activities included publishing anti-religious propaganda and organizing lectures and demonstrations.[183] During the cultural revolution, the League emerged as a major anti-religious active force, playing an important role through propaganda and by pushing for more practical steps.[184]

Legislatively, this anti-religious activity culminated in the 1929 Law on Religious Organizations which placed a variety of restrictions on religious activity. In essence, the law forbade religious social activity.[185] Echoing the language of the previous internal documents on sectarians, the law specifically forbade religious associations from "organizing religious or other meetings specifically intended for children, young people or women, biblical or literary meetings, groups, sections, circles, or handicraft meetings, religious instruction, etc., excursions, or children's play-groups, or from opening libraries, reading rooms, sanatoria, or providing medical aid."[186] Moving forward, religion was to remain within the walls of the church.

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[180] Peter Konecny, *Builders and Deserters: Students, State, and Community in Leningrad, 1917 – 1941* (Ithaca, NY: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999), 186 – 191.

[181] Gorsuch, *Youth in Revolutionary Russia*, 70 – 71.

[182] Daniel Peris, "The 1929 Congress of the Godless," *Soviet Studies* 43, no. 4 (1991), 712 – 713.

[183] Daniel Peris, *Storming the Heavens: The Soviet League of the Militant Godless* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 2.

[184] Luukkanen, *Party of Unbelief*, 63 – 65.

[185] Luukkanen, *Religious Policy of the Stalinist State*, 66.

[186] "Law on Religious Organizations. Criminal Code of the RSFSR, Religious Organizations (RSFSR). April 8, 1929," *Seventeen Moments in Soviet History*.

Summary

Few transformations of the 20th century have been as wrenching, as painful, or as tragic as the transformation of Russia under the Bolsheviks. From 1917 – 1932, the Bolshevik regime forced the Russian people into poverty, starvation, and death while holding out the elusive promise of Utopia. The Stalinist purges of the 1930s exacerbated these problems, plunging Russia into terror and confusion. Amid these painful transformations, stones were laid by both evangelical youth and the Soviet state, building the foundations and shaping the course of the evangelical youth movement for the next sixty years. However, although shaped by Bolshevik actions, the evangelical youth movement was never fully subjugated by them. Evangelicals represented only a small portion of those repressed during this time, but they still played a role in both opposing Soviet religious policy and helping to shape it. Their resistance allowed young believers to become both an important portion of the evangelical movement and a genuine challenge to state attempts to monopolize youth activity and beliefs.

Chapter Three

"Those Happy Years Given to Christ"

> We loved everyone and everyone loved us, only the MGB agents followed us day and night, opened cases, called us in at night for questioning. It was fine that some of the youth, and later the older ones, ended up having to suffer, **those happy years given to Christ will never be forgotten**.
>
> —Iu. F. Kuksenko[1]

Emerging from the terror of the Stalinist purges into the struggles of the World War II period, evangelical youth faced a constantly-changing set of challenges. Although the foundations laid during the early Soviet period would continue to shape evangelical youth, Soviet society and evangelical churches underwent changes from 1940 – 1965 that shifted the context of how young believers interacted with their society, their churches, and the state. The Second World War forced young believers to navigate issues of military service on a scale that they had not experienced since the Russian Civil War. At the same time, evangelical churches experienced a revival that helped revitalize churches that had been all but destroyed during the anti-religious campaigns and Stalinist purges of the 1930s. Revitalized by this spiritual renewal, but still facing significant opposition, evangelical churches struggled to remain faithful to God while navigating the legal restrictions placed on them by the Soviet authorities. This tension contributed to the 1961 split of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (AUCECB), creating an alternate evangelical union (Council of Churches of Evangelical Christians-Baptists) that would play a significant role in youth work and evangelism during the 1960s – 1990s.

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[1] Andretsov, *Istoricheskiĭ Ocherk*, 48.

Even as the evangelical church struggled to find its place in society, Soviet society itself began to change. Nikita Khrushchev's rise to power in the 1950s marked the beginning of a period that would provoke and uncover a growing discontent within the Soviet populace. Beginning in 1953, many Soviet citizens withdrew from the public, state-ordered sphere into a private sphere where they could maintain some level of freedom.[2] This disconnection from the state was aided by the simultaneous growth of cultural exchange and tourism.[3] Soviet youth began displaying an increased fascination with Western music and culture, leading to the development of a separate popular youth culture.[4] Given room to breathe by Khrushchev's de-Stalinization policy, a Soviet dissident movement emerged, using *samizdat* as a primary mode of communication and protest.[5]

Evangelical youth navigated these changes on a personal level, experiencing them not as society-shifting events but as the contexts in which they were to live out their faithfulness to God. By refusing to bear arms, risking their education for the sake of baptism, and making difficult choices about the 1961 union split, evangelical youth helped shape the course and character of the Soviet evangelical movement. In the process, they developed a youth movement uniquely adapted to the Soviet context, characterized by informal gatherings, secret baptisms, and practical acts of service. Furthermore, they slowly began participating in the growing world of underground publishing, adapting the mechanisms of *samizdat* (underground self-publication) to circumnavigate state restrictions on the printing of Christian literature.

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[2] William Tompson, *The Soviet Union Under Brezhnev* (London: Routledge, 2014), 100.
[3] Riasanovsky and Steinberg, *A History of Russia*, 527.
[4] Tompson, *Soviet Union Under Brezhnev*, 102.
[5] Ludmilla Alekseeva, *Soviet Dissent: Contemporary Movements for National, Religious, and Human Rights*, trans. Carol Pearce and John Glad (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press), 3 – 18.

Evangelical Youth During World War II

The outbreak of the Second World War forced Soviet Baptists to confront the issue of military service once again. Despite the anti-pacifist stance taken by evangelical leaders in the 1920s, individual believers still wrestled with their consciences, debating whether it was biblical for a believer to bear arms or take the military oath. Those who took a pacifist stance dealt with military service in various ways. Nikolai Kolsenik, taught since childhood that murder was wrong, hid from Soviet officials throughout World War II, seeking to avoid being drafted into the military.[6] Sergei Savinskii could not avoid the draft and begged God that he would not be forced to "spill innocent blood."[7] When Ludmilla Timchenko's father was drafted into the military, her mother earnestly fasted and prayed for him, kneeling in prayer with her children, "so that he wouldn't kill anyone and so that no bullet would touch him either."[8]

Other believers sought to perform alternative service when allowed. Semen Averbukh, a Ukrainian Jew who served in the Soviet military during the war, recalled how Baptists tried to avoid bearing arms by serving as cooks or launderers.[9] Drafted into the army in 1943, Viktor Brigar observed the firm stance of three young Ukrainian believers who refused to bear arms, instead claiming alternative service: "… when they started studying weapons, [the believers] refused to pick them up. They said: 'We will do any work, but we won't take up arms!'"[10] It is

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[6] Nikolaĭ Semenovich Kolesnik and Vera Danilovna Kolesnika, "Begushchiĭ chelovek," in *Podvig very: Unikal'nye svidetel'stva o zhizni Khristian v SSSR*, comp. and ed. Konstantin Prokhorov, (Sacramento, CA: Pacific Coast Slavic Baptist Association, 2009), 27 – 28.

[7] Sergeĭ Nikitovich Savinskiĭ and Li͡udmila Vladimirovna Savinskai͡a, "Letopise͡ts baptistskogo bratstva," in *Podvig very: Unikal'nye svidetel'stva o zhizni Khristian v SSSR*, comp. and ed. Konstantin Prokhorov, (Sacramento, CA: Pacific Coast Slavic Baptist Association, 2009), 73 – 74.

[8] Li͡udmila Mikhaĭlovna Timchenko, interview by Nadezhda Beliakova, [no city], ul. Geroev Stalingrada, April 23, 2013.

[9] Semen L'vovich Averbukh, interview by A. Ivashin, [no location], February 21, 2014.

[10] Viktor Vasil'evich Brigar', interview by N. Chobanu, [no location], February 3, 2017. Note that Brigar does not identify these believers as Baptists, but he does describe them as "sectarians," a general term which often incorporated Baptists, Pentecostals, and other smaller evangelical denominations. (See, for example, *Bol'shai͡a sovetskai͡a entsiklopedi͡ia*, 3rd ed., s.v. "sektantstvo.")

possible that alternative service became the preferred method of dealing with conscientious objectors towards the end of the war, with one soldier claiming that, by 1944, Baptists were no longer executed for refusal to bear arms but were instead sent to work battalions.[11]

When forced to undergo weaponry training, some believers took a resolute stance, refusing to touch their rifles. Soviet discipline of conscientious objectors could be swift and vicious, especially during the early years of the war. Infantryman Yosef Vul recalled how a Baptist's refusal to shoot was swiftly followed by "a field court, verdict, and execution."[12] Averbukh recalled the similarly swift execution of four Baptists in his regiment: "When they started to hand out weapons, [the Baptists] refused to pick them up. *Osobist* said, 'Shoot them!' They lined up the regiment and immediately fired a volley. I stood very close and saw how the bullets went through their shirts."[13] During the later years of the war, Brigar watched as his commander tried to persuade a group of young believers to take up arms.[14] Finally, the commander grew frustrated: "'Enough! Dig a hole!' And they shot them."[15]

Those believers who escaped execution could face lengthy prison sentences. As a young believer, Yakov Shevchuk was drafted into the military in 1941. When he refused to take the oath required for military service, he was sentenced to ten years imprisonment.[16] In 1943, Mikhail Kolivaiko was baptized in German-occupied Donbass. When the Soviet army freed his

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[11] Aron Semenovich Gorodinskiĭ, interview by G. Koĭfman, [no location], May 23, 2013.

[12] Iosif Isaakovich Vul, interview by G. Koĭfman, [no location], December 4, 2008.

[13] Averbukh, interview by Ivashin. *Osobist* was the term for military counterintelligence officers (Filip Kovacevic, "The Soviet-Chinese Spy Wars in the 1970s: What KGB Counterintelligence Knew, Part III," *Wilson Center*, June 4, 2021.).

[14] Brigar', interview by N. Chobanu.

[15] Brigar, interview by Chobanu. Brigar does not identify the believers as Baptists, but he does describe them as "sectarians," a general term which often incorporated Baptists, Pentecostals, and other smaller evangelical denominations. (See, for example, *Bol'shai͡a sovetskai͡a entsiklopedii͡a*, 3rd ed., s.v. "sektantstvo.")

[16] I͡akov Stepanovich Shevchuk, Aleksandra Sergeevna Shevchuk, and Vera I͡akovlevna Virkh, "Li͡ubov' Khrista protiv broshennykh kamneĭ," in *Podvig very: Unikal'nye svidetel'stva o zhizni Khristian v SSSR*, comp. and ed. Konstantin Prokhorov, (Sacramento, CA: Pacific Coast Slavic Baptist Association, 2009), 104.

village, they immediately sent him to military training. However, when he and another young man refused to take up arms, they were sentenced to execution. This was only commuted to ten years imprisonment after the military tribunal discovered that both soldiers were minors.[17] Ultimately, both Shevchuk and Kolivaiko only served partial sentences due to Stalinist amnesties following the end of the war.[18]

Post-War Revival

Despite the difficulties faced by Baptist soldiers, this period became a time of tremendous growth for the Soviet evangelical church. Sergei Savinskii argues that Soviet evangelical churches experienced a major revival beginning in 1942 and continuing through 1947.[19] The revival incorporated both new believers and former church members who had "grown cold and fallen asleep during the years of testing."[20] During this period, the membership of some churches numbered in the hundreds. For example, the evangelical church of Kant, Kirgizia grew up to 400 members, while the Novosibirsk congregation had 1,000 members by 1945.[21] From 1946 – 1947, the Novosibirsk church reported the addition of 195 new members.[22] These were large numbers, considering that the AUCECB claimed only 350,000 baptized members in 1947.[23]

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[17] Mikhail Mikhaĭlovich Kolivaĭko and Pavel Veniaminovich Sedykh, "Prigovorennyĭ k rasstrelu," in *Podvig very: Unikal'nye svidetel'stva o zhizni Khristian v SSSR*, comp. and ed. Konstantin Prokhorov, (Sacramento, CA: Pacific Coast Slavic Baptist Association, 2009), 175 – 178.

[18] Ibid.; I͡akov Shevchuk, Aleksandra Shevchuk, and Vera Virkh, "Li͡ubov' Khrista protiv broshennykh kamneĭ," 104.

[19] Savinskiĭ, *Istorii͡a Evangel'skih Khristian-Baptistov (1917 – 1967)*, 169.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid., 175; I͡akov Shevchuk, Aleksandra Shevchuk, and Vera Virkh, "Li͡ubov' Khrista protiv broshennykh kamneĭ," 105.

[22] *Istorii͡a Evangel'skikh Khristian-Baptistov v SSSR* (Moscow: Izdanie Vsesi͡uznogo Soveta Evangel'skikh Khristian-Baptistov, 1989), 236.

[23] Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II*, 61 – 62. Sawatsky points out that the statistics listed by the AUCECB have "only relative value" and estimates that AUCECB membership was most likely less than 350,000 members in 1947 (Ibid.).

Sawatsky describes the fascinating power of this revival based on interviews with Soviet German emigrants during the 1970s.[24] In one village, a new believer returned home from working in Vorkuta. News spread throughout the village that he had a Bible with him, and by evening, all three rooms of his house were filled. The young man managed to read only a few verses before closing with a simple prayer, "Lord, I pray to you that each person gathered here will be converted tonight."[25] Soon the house was filled with cries for mercy: " … all in the house were on their knees and screaming to God for mercy. Jacob found himself calming the people and telling them that God could hear them without their screams."[26] In some places, traveling evangelists spread the revival from village to village. Known simply as "Brother Alexei," these anonymous evangelists traveled quickly through the villages, preaching the good news of salvation and baptizing those who believed.

Youth played an important role in this revival, comprising a "significant part" of the new believers who joined the churches.[27] In the Lugansk evangelical congregation, youth participated in church activity by visiting neighboring villages on Sundays and holding *pryzyvnie* gatherings. In Tashkent, evangelical youth secretly met in homes and were active in evangelism and studying the word, holding Bible studies under the auspices of birthday parties and holding evangelistic gatherings in other cities. Youth played a similarly active role in the revival of evangelical churches in Samara and Chimkent.[28]

Evangelical youth occupied a difficult position during the post-war revival, forced to balance their youthful zeal with the restrictions of the Soviet system. This difficult balance was

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[24] Ibid., 56 – 58.
[25] Ibid., 57.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Savinskiĭ, *Istoriia Evangel'skih Khristian-Baptistov (1917 – 1967)*, 169.
[28] Ibid., 172 - 176.

especially evident in baptism. When Yakov Shevchuk became a Christian in 1939, he was baptized at night along with two other young men, highlighting the danger of what they were doing.[29] Similarly, when the Alma-Ata congregation baptized sixteen people in June 1946, they waited until night to baptize a young man who was under the age of eighteen.[30] Although the reason for this decision is not stated, it was ostensibly due to concern about the public baptism of a minor.

This difficult position regarding youth baptism continued through the 1950s – 1960s. Church elders sometimes hesitated to baptize young people due to state pressure, causing many young believers to undergo a long waiting period between their conversion and their baptism. Although Nikolai Babich became a Christian in 1949, he was not baptized until after his return from the army in 1955 due to the church's fear of baptizing young people, even though Babich testified to his willingness and desire to be baptized.[31] When elders were willing to baptize young believers, their baptisms often took place at night or in secluded areas. Petr Chumakin waited three years to be baptized in 1956 at the age of eighteen.[32] He was baptized at night due to legal restrictions on the baptism of young people.[33] In 1965, Ludmilla Gavelovski and her husband, Villi, were similarly baptized at night out of caution due to the dangers associated with baptizing young people.[34]

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[29] I͡akov Shevchuk, Aleksandra Shevchuk, and Vera Virkh, "Li͡ubov' Khrista protiv broshennykh kamneĭ," 103 – 104.

[30] A. V. Andretsov, *Istoricheskiĭ Ocherk*, 44.

[31] Leonid Filippovich Agafonov, Ivan Grigor'evich Panchenko, Ivan Romanovich I͡urkevich, Nikolaĭ Vasil'evich Deri͡abin, Nikolaĭ Dmitrievich Babich, and Nikolaĭ Nikolaevich Gavelovskiĭ, "Baptist, geroĭ Sovetskogo Soi͡uza," in *Podvig very: Unikal'nye svidetel'stva o zhizni Khristian v SSSR*, comp. and ed. Konstantin Prokhorov, (Sacramento, CA: Pacific Coast Slavic Baptist Association, 2009), 145.

[32] Petr Aleksandrovich Chumakin, "'Sila, kotorai͡a v Petre, -- bol'she…'" in *Podvig very: Unikal'nye svidetel'stva o zhizni Khristian v SSSR*, comp. and ed. Konstantin Prokhorov, (Sacramento, CA: Pacific Coast Slavic Baptist Association, 2009), 148.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Villi Nikolaevich Gavelovskiĭ, Li͡udmila Mikhaĭlovna Gavelovskai͡a, Vasiliĭ Terent'evich Vasil'ev, and Raisa Filippovna Vasil'eva. "'Vy, navernoe, Baptist? ..'" in *Podvig very: Unikal'nye svidetel'stva o zhizni Khristian*

Through their baptism, young believers chose to identify themselves with a group that was legally disadvantaged in every way. In schools, at work, on the streets, through the newspapers, and even in their own homes, young believers faced slander, discrimination, and abuse. Although the intensity of persecution varied based on geography and the individual activity of the believer, all believers experienced some kind of discrimination from a system that was fundamentally opposed to them.

Challenges Faced by Evangelical Youth

For many young believers, their first battlefields were the classrooms and playgrounds of their schools. In 1980, Joseph Zajda stated, "The Soviet school is an ideological institution, and as such it is obliged to instil a communist world outlook in the pupil by means of prolonged and constant work."[35] The ideological nature of Soviet education stretches to the beginnings of the Soviet state of 1917-1918, when they secularized the education system by removing church control of schools and establishing "freedom of conscience."[36] During the 1930s, the Communist Party asserted control over education, with Marxist-Leninist pedagogy established as the only accepted pedagogy.[37]

During the 1960s – 1970s, ideology remained central at all levels of education. Nikita Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign of 1959-1964 witnessed an increased emphasis on atheist education, with socialist propaganda starting in fifth grade.[38] Indeed, a 1961 decree stated that the aims of higher education included training specialists "educated in the spirit of Marxism-Leninism."[39] A 1966 decree listed the "formation of an elevated Communist consciousness" as

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v SSSR, comp. and ed. Konstantin Prokhorov, (Sacramento, CA: Pacific Coast Slavic Baptist Association, 2009), 161 – 162.

[35] Joseph I. Zajda, *Education in the USSR* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1980), 109.

[36] Ibid., 16.

[37] Ibid., 25-26.

[38] Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II*, 299.

[39] Zajda, *Education in the USSR*, 93-94.

one of the stipulations guiding secondary education. The 1970 Statute of the Soviet School stated that schools should "build a 'Marxist-Leninist world view' and a love of the motherland and of the Communist Party."[40]

From pedagogy to curriculum, the Soviet education system was well suited for indoctrination. In 1918, the "Fundamental Principles of a Single Labor School" established the principles that would guide Soviet education, highlighting "the unity between the school and politics" as "the most significant principle of Soviet pedagogy."[41] Vladimir Lenin viewed education as a "struggle to depose bourgeoisie."[42] During the Communist Party's Seventh Congress, Soviet leaders established the role of education as the removal of class divisions and a tool for "communist transformation of society."[43] In line with communist views on labor, Soviet education of the 1910s – 1920s focused strongly on labor and manual skills, with early schools completely removing exams, assignments, and homework.[44] Stalin reintroduced these assessment methods in 1930s, in addition to reemphasizing the importance of traditional subjects.[45]

During Khrushchev's time as First Secretary (1953-1964), the Soviet government launched an ambitious education reform project. In 1956, Khrushchev introduced the "schools of the new type," including boarding schools (*internats*) and "schools of the prolonged day."[46] In 1958, he reemphasized the importance of labor education with the Central Committee decree "On the Strengthening of the Link of the School with Life," an extremely unpopular decision that was revoked in 1964.[47] Aside from these structural changes, the 1960s saw increased attention

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[40] Kelly, *Children's World*, 150 - 151.
[41] Zajda, *Education in the USSR*, 10.
[42] Ibid., 14.
[43] Ibid., 14-15.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid., 23.
[46] Urie Bronfenbrenner, *Two Worlds of Childhood: U.S. and U.S.S.R.* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), 17.
[47] Kelly, *Children's World*, 146-147.

paid towards "gifted children," as well as a marked rise in the number of specialist schools devoted to subjects such as music, art, and foreign languages.[48]

By the 1970s, Soviet pedagogy was strongly established. Writing in 1970, Urie Bronfenbrenner reflected on the differences between the American and Soviet school systems. He argued that the primary difference lay in the Soviet emphasis on *vospitanie* ("upbringing" or "character education").[49] The purpose of *vospitanie* was the development of "communist morality," a concept which incorporated collectivism and a "communist attitude towards all forms of socially useful labour."[50] In 1976, *Marksistkaya Etika* (*Marxist Ethics*) argued that this emphasis on the collective served as the primary difference between Western and communist morality.[51]

Anton Makarenko played a primary role in shaping Soviet understandings of these concepts. Indeed, he and Nadezhda Krupskaya served as the founders of Soviet pedagogy.[52] Makarenko focused on "work, group competitiveness, and collective discipline," establishing the "ideal of the rational collective" as of primary importance in education.[53] Highlighting the all-consuming nature of these views, Zajda stated, "In Makarenko's collective the identity of the individual is subject to the rule of the collective."[54]

Makarenko's teachings served as the basis for the collectivism and social competition that defined Soviet schools. The Soviet school curriculum centered around socialist competition between *zvenya* (links – usually the rows of school desks), classes, schools, cities, and regions.[55]

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[48] Ibid., 147-148.
[49] Bronfenbrenner, *Two Worlds of Childhood*, 28.
[50] Ibid.; Zajda, *Education in the USSR*, 118-119.
[51] Zajda, *Education in the USSR*, 118.
[52] Ibid., 26.
[53] Bronfenbrenner, *Two Worlds of Childhood*, 49; Kelly, *Children's World*, 134.
[54] Zajda, *Education in the USSR*, 158.
[55] Ibid., 162; Bronfenbrenner, *Two Worlds of Childhood*, 47-50.

Weekly rankings kept students very closely aware of their standing, while the collective nature of this competition made each student intensely concerned with the status of their collectives.[56] This concern for the status of their collectives led to each student claiming responsibility for others in their collective who were not performing highly. In this way, the children's collective became the "major source of reward and punishment," with peers enacting "groups sanctions expressed through public criticism and, ultimately, the threat of exclusion from membership."[57]

Bronfenbrenner examines the practical application of these ideas, as expressed in the Soviet pedagogical work, *Socialist Competition in the Schools* (1959). As early as the first grade, teachers began evaluating student behavior, encouraging them to compete with other rows in their class or other classes in their school.[58] The teacher eventually added student monitors and began including negative comments in her evaluations of the students.[59] During these evaluations, the teacher "invoke[d] the group process" to correct behavior, publicly criticizing those students who did not conform to collective standards.[60] In second grade, the monitors began making their own evaluations of their peers.[61] In third grade, the monitors started stating their evaluations publicly, while the other students were encouraged to "compete" with the monitors by engaging in self-criticism.[62]

Although this level of competition and collective pressure could produce academic results, it also produced crushing condemnations of those who did not align with the collective. From the moment they began school, "pupils … were exposed to a process of stripping of

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[56] Bronfenbrenner, *Two Worlds of Childhood*, 50.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid., 54-55.
[59] Ibid., 57.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid., 58-59.
[62] Ibid., 60-61.

individual identity and the imposition of a corporate and collective spirit."[63] Those students who were unable or unwilling to conform faced pressure from everyone in their lives, including the administration, teachers, classmates, and parents.[64] In her autobiography, *Children of the Storm*, Natasha Vins remembered being selected by her classmates to be one of the first students from their class to join the Young Pioneers.[65] Her teacher viewed the selection as an opportunity for Vins to "reject her religious prejudices."[66] When Vins refused to join the organization because of her faith, her teacher used the idea of social competitiveness to pressure her: "Do you realize that you undermine the reputation of our class? Don't you care that from now on we will take last place in all our school's competitions?"[67]

This collective pressure was intensified by the youth organizations that guided students towards communism and served as extensions of the classroom. The Octobrists admitted elementary students aged 7-9, while the Young Pioneers admitted pre-teens and young teenagers aged 10-15. Entrance into the Komsomol served as the final stage between childhood and the Communist Party and was open to select older teenagers and university students.[68]

Christian children faced intense pressure to join these organizations or to renounce their faith, exposing them at a young age to the humiliation and cost that came with faith. Growing up during the 1950s – 1960s, Vera Virkh recalled how her teachers would come to church services and make lists of the children present.[69] During the week, the teachers would then call up those

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[63] Kelly, *Children's World*, 509.

[64] Zajda, *Education in the USSR*, 81-82.

[65] Natasha Vins, *Children of the Storm: The Autobiography of Natasha Vins*, trans. Jane Vins Comden (Greeneville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 2002), 9-10.

[66] Ibid., 9.

[67] Ibid., 10

[68] Bronfenbrenner, *Two Worlds of Childhood*, 38.

[69] I͡akov Shevchuk, Aleksandra Shevchuk, and Vera Virkh, "Li͡ubov' Khrista protiv broshennykh kamneĭ," 106 – 107.

children and shame them in front of the class.[70] Aleksandra Shevchuk faced similar persecution at her Novosibirsk high school during the late 1940s, where she was graded unfairly and mocked by her teachers.[71] The pressure became so unbearable that she left Novosibirsk without finishing her education, moving to Kirgizia, an area which had a reputation for being freer for believers.[72]

After graduation, the cost of faith rose. In 1949, Aleksei Bychkov was enjoying some of the best of what the Soviet state had to offer.[73] A student at a Moscow university, he took an active role in the life of the student body, holding leadership positions in both the Komsomol and his trade union. At the same time, he relished the fellowship of the youth who attended the nearby evangelical church, especially enjoying the friendship of Zoya Saveleva, the daughter of one of the presbyters. However, when he became a Christian on November 6, 1949, his comfortable life began to fall apart.

Called to the Human Resources Department one day, Bychkov found himself alone with a KGB officer.[74] The man offered him a simple choice – cooperation or prison. The following year, Bychkov again found himself sitting across from a KGB officer, this time in the notorious Lubyanka headquarters of the KGB. Given the same choice as before, Bychkov refused to cooperate. By the next day, Bychkov's faith had become a university scandal. Looking back at this tumultuous period in his life, though, he rejoiced: "How many meetings and how much condemnation and shame I had to endure, but my heart rejoiced! For Christ, for Jesus I was bearing reproach!"[75]

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[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid., 105 – 106.
[72] Ibid.
[73] A. M. Bychkov, *Moĭ zhiznennyĭ put'*. Moscow: "Otrazhenie," 2009, 14 – 16.
[74] Ibid., 14 – 17.
[75] Ibid., 17.

Bychkov had another reason to rejoice. In January 1950, "on a frosty moonlit evening," he asked Zoya Saveleva to marry him.[76] A godly and active member of their church, Saveleva had faithfully befriended and prayed for him throughout his trials, and now she gave him the best of gifts and agreed to marry him. When he was expelled from the university for his faith on October 22, 1950, Bychkov gave up one dream in pursuit of another, marrying Saveleva in the church that had brought him to Jesus. From a worldly perspective, both he and his new bride had given up much, entering their newlywed life "without an apartment, without work, without personal means of subsistence, and with the KGB threatening."[77] Looking back, though, Bychkov simply praised God for His provision and faithfulness.[78]

Although young women undoubtedly carried their own burdens as believers, young men faced additional pressure while fulfilling their mandatory military service. Testimonies of young believers who served in the military during the 1950s – 1960s reveal a reduced level of viciousness when compared with punishments during the Second World War. However, they continued harassment and legal consequences for their refusal to bear arms or take oaths, with the severity of these measures varying from situation to situation. For example, when Petr Kunda refused to take the oath or work on Easter, the army newspaper *Krasnaia Zvezda* published an article attacking him.[79] He was assigned an "old-time communist sergeant" who constantly stayed close to him. The sergeant brought him atheist literature and tried to interfere in his prayer times, but perhaps more gratingly, Kunda's commander did not allow him any leaves during his three-year service in the army.[80] By contrast, Villi Gavelovski almost faced

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[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid., 17 – 18.
[79] Petr Filippovich Kunda, Nikolaĭ Semenovich Kramarenko, and Viktor Vasil'evich Zinchenko. "Pami͡atnye dni v SSSR," in *Podvig very: Unikal'nye svidetel'stva o zhizni Khristian v SSSR*, comp. and ed. Konstantin Prokhorov, (Sacramento, CA: Pacific Coast Slavic Baptist Association, 2009), 120.
[80] Ibid.

imprisonment for his religious beliefs and was only saved at the last minute by a commander who interceded for him.[81] When Vladimir Zinchenko refused to take the oath, he was sent to work in Siberia.[82]

Throughout the 1950s – 1960s, police and the KGB harassed young members of the church, seeking to either intimidate believers or force them into collaboration with the security services. Baptized in 1956 at the age of eighteen, Petr Chumakin found himself the leader of his church's youth group.[83] During an interaction with a KGB officer, the officer gave Chumakin an odd ultimatum: collaborate with the KGB or he would take away his Bible.[84] Considering the rarity of Bibles during this period, and the fact that Chumakin was the only one in his youth group to own a Bible, this threat carried weight. Despite the pressure, he refused to collaborate. Around the same time, he was arrested along with another believer for preaching in the Altai krai. When Chumakin and his friend began singing Christian songs in prison, the prisoners in the nearby cell stopped the police from quieting them: "Let them sing, if they want to! Can you believe it, they're arresting musicians now, too"?[85]

Although it was rarer, some young believers faced imprisonment for evangelism and their activity in the life of their church. In 1943, nineteen-year-old Leonid Svetlov was arrested for preaching in the barracks where he was stationed at the front.[86] Barely escaping execution, he was sentenced to ten years in a labor camp. While in the camps, he met Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

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[81] Villi Gavelovskiĭ, Li͡udmila Gavelovska͡ia, Vasiliĭ Vasil'ev, and Raisa Vasil'eva, "'Vy, navernoe, Baptist? ..'" 159 – 161.

[82] Kunda, Kramarenko, and Zinchenko, "Pami͡atnye dni v SSSR," 183.

[83] Petr Chumakin, "'Sila, kotora͡ia v Petre, -- bol'she…'" 149.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Ibid.

[86] Leonid Vasil'evich Svetlov and Al'vina Zakievna Svetlova, "'Aleshka-Baptist,'" in *Podvig very: Unikal'nye svidetel'stva o zhizni Khristian v SSSR*, comp. and ed. Konstantin Prokhorov, (Sacramento, CA: Pacific Coast Slavic Baptist Association, 2009), 33 – 39.

and appeared in *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* as "Aleshka the Baptist."[87] According to Svetlov's testimony, the real Ivan Denisovich later became a believer partially through his influence.[88]

Most believers imprisoned for their faith never received the notoriety gained by Svetlov although suffering similar deprivations as those suffered by him. In 1945, security officers arrested twenty-three-year-old Pavel Zakharov, confiscating his notebooks of Christian poetry and photographs of Christian youth with whom he interacted.[89] When Zakharov refused to reveal the location of prayer meetings or discuss the presence of youth at these meetings, he was beaten and sentenced to five years of hard labor.[90] In 1969, nineteen-year-old Vladimir Zinchenko was imprisoned for three years for his active participation in youth work and evangelism, including participating in illegal youth gatherings and singing Christian songs on public transportation.[91]

Although these stories highlight the anti-religious nature of the Soviet system, not every believer suffered imprisonment and physical abuse. Indeed, persecution varied significantly by geographic region, with the Central Asian republics serving as safe havens for many evangelicals. Aleksandra Shevchuk recalled Kirgizia as a place of greater freedom for believers as compared with Russia.[92] Indeed, her decision to migrate to Kirgizia as a teenager was strongly influenced by the persecution she faced in her Russian high school.[93]

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[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid., 38.
[89] N. G. Baturin, "Put' Vernosti Gospodu." *Vestnik Istiny* no. 2 – 3 (1984), 52 – 53.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Vladimir Petrovich Zinchenko, "'Radioperedatchik' v zone," in *Podvig very: Unikal'nye svidetel'stva o zhizni Khristian v SSSR*, comp. and ed. Konstantin Prokhorov, (Sacramento, CA: Pacific Coast Slavic Baptist Association, 2009), 182 – 183.
[92] Ĭakov Shevchuk, Aleksandra Shevchuk, and Vera Virkh, "Li͡ubov' Khrista protiv broshennykh kamneĭ," 105 – 106.
[93] Ibid.

Nikolai Kramarenko's decision to move from Belarus to Abkhazia as a young man was similarly influenced by a desire to escape persecution.[94] After his baptism in Belarus in 1957, Kramarenko struggled to keep a job. By the age of twenty, he had been fired multiple times because of his faith: "At first, they were curious, why I wasn't a Komsomol member … Then they began to 'take measures,' but as I was quite difficult to 'educate,' I found myself once again without work."[95] When another believer wrote to him about the freedom in Abkhazia and invited him for a visit, Kramarenko eagerly accepted the invitation: "… I wanted to take a look 'with at least one eye' at such a wonderful life, the existence of which seemed difficult to believe during those difficult years."[96] He enjoyed the "wonderful life" there so much, that he decided to move to Abkhazia permanently.

Those who migrated from Central Asia to Russia found ministry much more difficult. When I. Shevchuk and his family moved to Syzran, Russia from Kirgizia, they found churches that were much smaller, with less youth activity and more fear.[97] Similarly, when Raisa Vasileva moved to Lipetsk, Russia from Tashkent during the 1980s, her family faced significantly more persecution.[98] These examples highlight that evangelical youth experiences varied significantly based on the geography and individual circumstances of each believer, although some level of state persecution was experienced by all believers.

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[94] Kunda, Kramarenko, and Zinchenko, "Pami͡atnye dni v SSSR," 116 – 117.

[95] Ibid., 116. The word used for "education" in this quote is *vospitanie*, a term which referred to upbringing or moral education. Review this chapter's section on education for further information.

[96] Ibid., 117.

[97] I͡akov Shevchuk, Aleksandra Shevchuk, and Vera Virkh, "Li͡ubov' Khrista protiv broshennykh kamneĭ," 110 – 112.

[98] Villi Gavelovskiĭ, Li͡udmila Gavelovskai͡a, Vasiliĭ Vasil'ev, and Raisa Vasil'eva, "'Vy, navernoe, Baptist? ..'" 166.

Lack of Christian Literature and the Rise of Evangelical Samizdat

Starting in the early 1920s, believers of every denomination suffered from a severe lack of Bibles and Christian literature. In 1922, the Soviet government banned the general import of religious literature and ordered the printing of religious literature to be reduced to a "minimum."[99] During the 1920s, believers were given permission to print Bibles only four times.[100] Even if permission was granted, printing could often be delayed or not take place at all due to a "lack of paper" at the printers.[101] When Bibles were available, they were not free from seizure. The 1930s saw the rise of Bible confiscations, and although the start of World War II provided some loosening of policies, believers continued to suffer from Bible seizures throughout the 1950s.[102]

Believers experienced this lack of Bibles on a personal level. Savinskii argues that during the 1943 – 1947 revival period, churches specifically struggled with a lack of Bibles and pastors.[103] Indeed, Chumakin shared how believers would copy the New Testament or the Gospels by hand and would try to memorize the epistles of Paul.[104] He even listed one case of a family offering a cow in exchange for a Bible, highlighting the high value they placed on Bibles.[105] Ironically, even the security organs seemed to understand the value of Christian literature. Chumakin recalled, "when police or KGB officers took books and journals from believers, part of this literature soon found itself, for obvious reasons, for sale at the local markets. It sometimes happened that we found and bought our own books."[106]

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[99] A[ndrei] I. Savin, "Bibliia v Sovetskom Soyuze: K Istorii Vvoza iz-za Granitsy, Izdaniia i Rasprostraneniia," *Historical Courier* 2, no. 10 (2020), 35.
[100] Ibid., 37.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid., 41.
[103] Savinskiĭ, *Istoriia͡ Evangel'skih Khristian-Baptistov (1917 – 1967)*, 170.
[104] Chumakin, "'Sila, kotoraia͡ v Petre, -- bol'she…'" 151.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid.

This lack of religious literature, combined with changes within Soviet evangelical churches, contributed to a rise in evangelical samizdat in the 1960s. Samizdat emerged in the Soviet Union in the 1950s as a form of self-publication which allowed the author to evade the restrictions set by official censorship. Nikolai Glazkov, a Moscow poet, coined the term *samesbyaizdat*, combining the words for "self" and "publication," to describe his self-bound, self-published poems.[107] This term was later abbreviated to *samizdat.* Although samizdat originally referred to self-publication, it gradually came to describe the entire process of producing and distributing unofficial text-based materials.[108] Evangelicals came to play an especially active role in this underground publishing world, producing materials that were distributed across the Soviet Union and smuggled into the West. The production and distribution of other unofficial materials began to mimic the clever wordplay of Glazkov, with *tamizdat* ("over-there-publishing"), *kolizdat* (publishing in large quantities), and *radizdat* (unofficial audio recordings) entering the vocabulary of Soviet dissidents.[109]

The basic system of producing *samizdat* was simple. After an author wrote a piece, typists (either volunteers or paid) copied it, following which the author distributed the copies to close friends.[110] They, in turn, made their own copies and distributed these copies to those near them.[111] The copying process usually involved personal typewriters, with multiple copies made using "carbon paper and tissue paper."[112] Knowledge of new samizdat publications was often

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[107] H. Gordon Skilling, *Samizdat and an Independent Society in Central and Eastern Europe* (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1989), 4-5; Ann Komaromi, "The Material Existence of Soviet Samizdat," *Slavic Review* 63, no. 3 (Autumn 2004), 598; Friederike Kind-Kovacs, *Written Here, Published There: How Underground Literature Crossed the Iron Curtain* (New York: Central European University, 2014), 7.

[108] Gordon Johnston, "What is the History of Samizdat?" *Social History* 4, no. 2 (1999), 122-123.

[109] Skilling, *Samizdat and an Independent Society*, 5.

[110] Ibid., 9.

[111] Skilling, *Samizdat and an Independent Society*, 9; Kind-Kovacs, *Written Here, Published There*, 261.

[112] Komaromi, "The Material Existence of Soviet Samizdat," 599.

shared informally among friends, although government criticism of samizdat in official publications could occasionally serve as unintended "publicity" for samizdat writers.[113]

The content of samizdat varied significantly. Gordon Johnston's "preliminary" list of samizdat types, released in 1999, includes over fifteen types of samizdat, including Soviet-based literary works, translated foreign literary works, "news, reports, and information bulletins," "open letters, appeals and declarations," and even official documents.[114] Analyzing the holdings of *Arkhiv Samizdata,* a samizdat archive established by Radio Liberty in the 1970s, Hyung-min Joo found that political materials predominated, accounting for 62% of the archive's holdings.[115] Of these political materials, most of them "consisted of personal statements, appeals, protests or some information about arrests, trials and so on."[116] Interestingly, religious materials accounted for 20% of the archive's holdings, with Baptist-based materials predominant.[117]

Throughout the 1960s-1980s, samizdat played a significant role in Soviet protest. Ludmilla Alekseeva, a founding member of the Moscow Helsinki Watch Group, described samizdat as the "backbone of the Soviet human rights movement."[118] Ann Komaromi broadens the significance of samizdat to incorporate all Soviet dissent, arguing that samizdat served as the "lifeblood of all Soviet dissident culture of the late period."[119] H. Gordon Skilling summarizes the practical significance of samizdat, arguing that it served as a "voice for literature," a "vehicle" for dissent and protest, and "the medium of communication" for various dissident groups, including nationalistic and religious groups.[120]

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[113] Johnston, "What is the History of Samizdat?", 125-126.
[114] Ibid., 126-128.
[115] Hyung-min Joo, "Voices of Freedom: Samizdat," *Europe-Asia Studies* 56, no. 4 (June 2004), 574.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid.
[118] Alekseeva, *Soviet Dissent*,284.
[119] Komaromi, "The Material Existence of Soviet Samizdat," 618.
[120] Skilling, *Samizdat and an Independent Society*, 8.

The history of samizdat highlights the adaptability of this form of publication. Although the term itself was coined in the 1950s, the growth of samizdat in Soviet Russia dates to the mid-1960s.[121] Referencing the work of Michael Meerson-Aksenov, a "Russian émigré and former *samizdat* author," Skilling identifies several phases in the development of samizdat.[122] During the first phase, samizdat publications were largely limited to literary subjects. The second phase, marked by the rise of "social samizdat," broadened the scope of samizdat content and authors. This phase was marked by increasingly politicized content and the prevalence of "letters, appeals, declarations, and so on."[123] The third phase consisted of "varied social programmes and expositions of independent social and political thought."[124]

V. D. Stelmakh argues that the rise of political samizdat points to a change in Soviet society itself, highlighting the rise of "independent public opinion" and the creation of opposition groups.[125] These groups "facilitated the self-realization of unofficial culture and its institutionalization."[126] Features of this change included the growth of original texts, a rise in "homemade, uncensored political journalism," greater variety of documents and the ability to copy them, and improved copying technologies.[127]

Moreover, this phase of samizdat development proved especially important in providing ordinary Soviet citizens the opportunity to express their discontent. Meerson-Aksenov describes the growth of "legal" samizdat, marked by the growth of watch groups and letters of protest, and

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[121] Ibid., 3.
[122] Ibid., 6-7.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Ibid.
[125] V. D. Stelmakh, "Reading in the Context of Censorship in the Soviet Union," *Libraries & Culture* 36, no. 1 (Winter 2001), 148.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Ibid.

the ensuing "epistolary campaign" which flowed out of this movement.[128] Interestingly, he argues that the epistolary campaign fulfilled "the same function performed by the press in free societies," although the campaign differed from the western press in the spontaneity of the letters, their separation from an "organizational framework," and their personal nature.[129] The creation of *The Chronicle of Current Events* serves as a perfect example of this rise in "legal" samizdat.[130] Created in 1968, *The Chronicle of Current Events* highlighted human rights violations; although initially focused on events in Moscow, the geographic scope was eventually enlarged to include human rights violations across the Soviet Union.[131]

Although evangelical samizdat reflected the trends and mechanics of secular samizdat, it differed in its content and purpose. Early samizdat publications relied on crude copying instruments such as typewriters and hectographs, although later large-scale samizdat publications made use of homemade printing presses.[132] Printing involved believers of every age, from schoolchildren to adults.[133] Like secular samizdat, evangelical samizdat incorporated a wide range of content and formats, including the printing of Bibles, religious literature, religious-themed cards and illustrations, and the binding of old Bibles and other religious materials.[134] However, Savin points out that religious samizdat differed from secular samizdat in its purpose; while secular samizdat was "primarily an act of personal creativity," religious samizdat "was

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[128] Michael Meerson-Aksenova and Boris Shragin, eds., *The Political, Social and Religious Thought of Russian "Samizdat" – An Anthology*, trans. Nickolas Lupinin (Belmont, MA: Nordland Publishing Company, 1977), 31.

[129] Ibid., 30-32.

[130] Ibid., 31.

[131] Alekseeva, *Soviet Dissent*, 284-286.

[132] Tat'iana Nikol'skaia, "Osobennosti razvitiia protestantskogo samizdata v SSSR (1960-e – 1980-e gg.)," *Theological Reflections* 17 (2016), 135; Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II*, 247.

[133] Nikol'skaia, "Osobennosti razvitiia," 135.

[134] Ibid., 132.

required to ensure the publication of religious texts, primarily the Bible, without which the daily activity of religious communities was inconceivable."[135]

Factors which contributed to the rise of evangelical samizdat during the 1960s included greater government laxity towards evangelicals, increased education rates among evangelicals, greater access to the technology needed for samizdat, and greater interaction between Soviet and western evangelicals.[136] Tat'iana Nikol'skaia divides the development of evangelical samizdat into two categories or phases – "spontaneous" samizdat and organized samizdat.[137] "Spontaneous" samizdat occurred on a small scale, with limited copies made and distribution occurring mainly among close friends and relatives.[138] Interestingly, she includes the mailing of religious materials to Soviet journals, magazines, and ordinary citizens in this category.[139] Organized samizdat involved a much higher level of coordination, producing samizdat material on a much larger scale.[140] This type of evangelical samizdat is perhaps best represented by the samizdat undertakings of the *Initsiativniki* group, later consolidated into the Council of Churches of Evangelical-Christian Baptists (CCECB).[141]

Although evangelical samizdat was still in its infancy during the 1960s, it would come to play an important role in the evangelical youth experience during the 1970s – 1990s. By reading samizdat, evangelical youth became part of a larger world, exposed to the activities of believers from across the Soviet Union and around the world. By distributing samizdat, they boldly communicated their dedication to evangelism and their belief in the importance of the Gospel message. Finally, by participating in the creation of samizdat, they played a key role in the

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[135] Savin, "Bibliia v Sovetskom Soyuze," 43, author's translation.
[136] Nikol'skaia, "Osobennosti razvitiia," 132.
[137] Ibid., 132-135.
[138] Ibid., 132.
[139] Ibid., 133.
[140] Ibid., 134-135.
[141] Ibid.

growth and course of the Soviet evangelical movement, not only deepening the spiritual knowledge of individual believers but also exposing the western world to the challenges and experiences of Soviet evangelicals.

Rise of the CCECB and Its Impact on Youth

Emerging in the 1960s, the creation of the CCECB highlights a difficult page in the history of Soviet evangelicals. The officially recognized evangelical union, the All-Union Council of Evangelical-Christian Baptists (AUCECB), had struggled with unity issues since its founding in 1944 as a state-recognized coalition of Evangelical Christian and Baptist congregations.[142] During the early 1960s, the union underwent a split which would have a transformative impact on the course of the Soviet evangelical movement generally and the evangelical youth movement specifically. In many ways, children and youth lay at the center of this conflict. In 1960, AUCECB leadership sent a "Letter of Instruction" to the leaders of churches in their union.[143] This letter encouraged church leaders to act "in agreement with existing legislation," citing examples of previous violations.[144] Several of these examples specifically targeted the religious education of children, including "baptizing persons younger than 18 years" and "excursions for believing youth."[145] The sections of the letter related to children and youth were most likely influenced by Soviet attempts to minimize the impact of religion on children, such as Article 227 of the Russian Criminal Code.[146]

This letter sparked deep controversy among believers, angering many who felt that their leadership had succumbed to government pressure. A group of protesters, later designated the

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[142] Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II*, 159-160; Sergei Filatov, "Protestantism in Postsoviet Russia: An Unacknowledged Triumph," *Religion, State & Society* 28, no. 1 (2000), 94.

[143] Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II*, 177.

[144] Ibid., 139.

[145] Ibid.

[146] Dominic Erdozain, ed., *The Dangerous God: Christianity and the Soviet Experiment.* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2017), 40.

Initsiativniki ("Initiatives" Group), sent a letter of protest to the AUCECB leadership on August 13, 1961.[147] They followed this by an open letter to all Evangelical-Christian Baptist (ECB) churches, criticizing the AUCECB leadership and calling for repentance and sanctification among all the churches.[148] In a series of meetings from 1962-1965, the *Initsiativniki* successively formed an *Orgkomitet* to organize an "All-Union congress of ECB churches," threatened the AUCECB leadership with excommunication, and excommunicated the AUCECB leadership.[149] During a September 1965 meeting, the *Orgkomitet* officially changed its name, creating the Council of Churches of the Evangelical Christian Baptists (CCECB).[150]

Not surprisingly, the new union became a strong advocate for and participator in the religious education of youth through parents, churches, and religious literature. For many evangelical children, the home served as their first and primary source of religious instruction. Indeed, CCECB churches strongly encouraged parents to raise their children in the fear of the Lord.[151] For example, a 1968 edition of *Vestnik Spaseniia* (*Herald of Salvation*), the official journal of the CCECB, includes an article titled, "Whose Child is This?"[152] The article holds parents responsible for the spiritual education of their children, strongly charging them to shape the lives entrusted to them by God. Indeed, Sawatsky points out that the evangelicals had a strong theological basis for this idea: "As historic believers' churches, they had always emphasized that each believer is a priest and above all a priest in his own home."[153]

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[147] Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II*, 178.

[148] CCECB, "Pervoe Poslanie," in Dokumenty Initsiativnoĭ Gruppy I Orgkomiteta po Sozyvu Vsesoyuznogo S"ezda Tserkvi Evangel'skih Hristian-Baptistov, Soveta Tserkevĭ EHB (Avgust 1961 – Maĭ 1966), Keston Digital Archive; Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II*, 178-179.

[149] Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II*, 187-188.

[150] Ibid., 146.

[151] Ibid., 304.

[152] "Ch'ë ėto ditia͡?" *Vestnik Spaseniia͡* no. 3 (1968), 32 – 34.

[153] Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II*, 68.

The 1961 split of the AUCECB impacted youth in a variety of ways. Viktor Zinchenko was serving in the military when the split occurred in his congregation in Alma-Ata.[154] By the time he had returned, most of the youth in his church were gone, apparently having left to join the *Initsiativniki* movement. Zinchenko was faced with a difficult decision: "I stood before a choice: either to join my friends in the [CCECB] or to carry on a ministry with the teenagers in our registered congregation".[155] Although he ultimately chose to stay in his registered congregation and serve there, he acknowledged that the CCECB and AUCECB churches in Alma-Ata would hold youth gatherings together, suggesting a level of understanding and cooperation.[156]

A government report from this period, analyzing the activity of youth in registered congregations, highlights how the 1961 split could alter youth activities on a local level. The report found that following a recent AUCECB congress, youth in the area from registered congregations began meeting together more frequently, often without the permission of their presbyter.[157] The report investigated the rise in this activity specifically in light of the *raskol'niki* ("splinterers") movement, trying to analyze if these gatherings were due to the influence of *raskol'niki* or if they were merely the result of "religious fanaticism."[158]

Despite facing systemic persecution and harassment from a hostile world, young believers maintained an active and vibrant community, playing an important role in the lives of their churches. Many youths deepened their faith through informal youth gatherings in homes, studying the Bible together, singing, and enjoying fellowship with other believers. They

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[154] Kunda, Kramarenko, and Zinchenko, "Pami͡atnye dni v SSSR," 118 – 119.
[155] Ibid.
[156] Ibid., 119.
[157] Gosudarstvennyĭ Arhiv Rossiĭskoĭ Federat͡sii (GARF) [State Archive of the Russian Federation] GARF f 6991. op.3 d.1427 ll.137-8.
[158] Ibid.

participated in the life of the church by extending practical help to the elderly and sick, singing in their church choirs, and serving in leadership capacities on a limited scale.

Throughout the 1940s – 1960s, youth gathered in informal settings for fellowship and spiritual discipleship. In Omsk during the late 1940s, these gatherings served as an opportunity for older members of the congregation to disciple young believers. Gathering in homes in the evenings, "the youth and elderly members of the congregation … read articles from old journals, looked at photographs of those brother-servants who, through bloody paths, carried the word of salvation to their children and those surrounding them."[159] In Moscow, Kirgizia, and Donbass, youth would gather in the evenings to sing together, read the Bible, and fellowship.[160]

With government restrictions on religious gatherings for youth, young people developed creative ways to justify their gathering. Petr Chumakin shared how they used birthdays as an excuse to gather: "We placed homemade food and tea on the table and started the service. If … the police came (and they usually came), we immediately showed them the passport of the one celebrating their birthday, and then they usually left us alone."[161] A government report from this period showed that the state was not entirely ignorant of these tactics. It reported that in 1963 – 1964, young believers gathered under the auspices of birthday parties, New Year's celebrations, and housewarming parties.[162]

Beyond gathering for fellowship, youth could serve their congregations in very practical ways. In 1946, the Alma-Ata congregation began construction on a new church building.[163] The young people of the church helped by scouring the nearby river at night for stones for the

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[159] Savinskiĭ, *Istoriia͡ Evangel'skih Khristian-Baptistov (1917 – 1967)*, 175.

[160] Bychkov, *Moĭ zhiznennyĭ put'*, 14 – 16; Ia͡kov Shevchuk, Aleksandra Shevchuk, and Vera Virkh, "Li͡ubov' Khrista protiv broshennykh kamneĭ," 105 – 106; Kolivaĭko and Sedykh, "Prigovorennyĭ k rasstrelu," 175 – 176; GARF f 6991. op.3 d.1427 ll.137-8.

[161] Chumakin, "'Sila, kotoraia͡ v Petre, -- bol'she…'" 150.

[162] GARF f 6991. op.3 d.1427 ll.137-8.

[163] Andretsov, *Istoricheskiĭ Ocherk*, 45.

foundation of the new church.[164] During the late 1940s, Moscow evangelical youth visited believers in neighboring villages to support those who had lost husbands and fathers during the war. Through tending gardens and fixing roofs, they encouraged these believers that they were loved by their church.[165] In Kirgizia and Tashkent, the youth similarly supported the elderly and sick of their congregations by cleaning their homes, cooking, chopping wood, gathering water, praying together, and holding services in their homes.[166]

As in the past, music remained a central element of youth service and fellowship. When the Alma-Ata choir was revived in 1943, thirteen of the sixteen members were young people, and multiple believers shared that they had served in the choir during the 1950s – 1960s.[167] When asked what distinguished the church services of his youth from modern church services, Vasilii Bondarenko spoke warmly of the singing: "The old evangelical hymns often proved to be stronger than our feeble sermons, and people often repented, hearing the words of the wonderful singing left by our great predecessors."[168] Interestingly, the secular authorities recognized the musical strength of evangelical congregations. A 1966 *Pravda* article, citing the supposed dangers of Baptist work among children and youth, specifically mentions how Baptists preach on God's law and teach children and youth to play hymns on musical instruments.[169]

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[164] Ibid.

[165] Bychkov, *Moĭ zhiznennyĭ put'*, 15 – 16.

[166] I͡akov Shevchuk, Aleksandra Shevchuk, and Vera Virkh, "Li͡ubov' Khrista protiv broshennykh kamneĭ," 106 – 107; Villi Gavelovskiĭ, Li͡udmila Gavelovskai͡a, Vasiliĭ Vasil'ev, and Raisa Vasil'eva. "'Vy, navernoe, Baptist? ..'" 164.

[167] Andretsov, *Istoricheskiĭ Ocherk*, 42; Chumakin, "'Sila, kotorai͡a v Petre, -- bol'she…'" 149; Vasiliĭ Danilovich Bondarenko, "'I͡a prinimal veru v Boga po lozhke v den'!'" in *Podvig very: Unikal'nye svidetel'stva o zhizni Khristian v SSSR*, comp. and ed. Konstantin Prokhorov, (Sacramento, CA: Pacific Coast Slavic Baptist Association, 2009), 168 – 169.

[168] Bondarenko, "'I͡a prinimal veru v Boga po lozhke v den'!'" 172.

[169] R. Stepanov, "Neuvazhenie k Zakonu Neterpimo: Pis'mo v Redakt͡siiu͡," *Pravda* 50, February 19, 1966, 2.

On a limited scale, some youth had the opportunity to serve in leadership positions or to participate in larger youth gatherings. Both Petr Chumakin and Villi Gavelovski were chosen to serve as youth leaders in their congregations while they were still young men, and both they and Vasilii Bondarenko periodically preached in their churches.[170] In May 1969, Yakov Gertsen participated in a two-day youth event in Alma-Ata.[171] On the first day, the police tried to disband the meeting but were unsuccessful. The meetings were held outside in two different places, with older men from the congregation preaching.[172] The following month, twelve of the youth were baptized, including Gertsen.[173]

The testimony of one believer who grew up in Alma-Ata during this period serves as a summary snapshot of how an active youth group could contribute to the life of a congregation:

> The youth performed recitations, solo and group singings, the young brothers preached, studied to become choir directors, and conducted choirs at meetings. On Christian and secular holidays, the youth held Evenings of Love in homes, inviting their friends. They sang, played instruments, preached, prayed. On Sundays and weekdays, they visited many elderly and sick members at their homes, held small services there, traveled to the neighboring villages … participated in services, visited those imprisoned in [labor] colonies. The older brothers … did not hinder us in these things, they only warned us so that we should be 'quieter.' Nobody betrayed us and we didn't suspect or accuse anyone.[174]

Courtships, weddings, and new families flourished naturally from this culture of prayer, fellowship, and service. Looking back on their youth, many men cited their wife's activity in the church as one of her defining characteristics during their courtship. For example, Aleksei Bychkov highlighted how Zoya Savelev, his future wife, was an active member of the church,

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[170] Chumakin, "'Sila, kotoraia͡ v Petre, -- bol'she…'" 149; Villi Gavelovskiĭ, Li͡udmila Gavelovskai͡a, Vasiliĭ Vasil'ev, and Raisa Vasil'eva, "'Vy, navernoe, Baptist? ..'" 159; Bondarenko, "'Ia͡ prinimal veru v Boga po lozhke v den'!'" 168 – 169.

[171] Ia͡kov Petrovich Gertsen, *Pod Vysokoĭ Rukoĭ: O Sluzhenii v Izdatel'stve 'Hristianin'* (Steinhagen, Germany: Samenkorn e.V., 2020), 32 – 34.

[172] Ibid.

[173] Ibid., 34.

[174] Andretsov, *Istoricheskiĭ Ocherk*, 48.

singing in the choir and reading poetry during services.[175] Some young people fasted before choosing a spouse.[176] Weddings became times for both celebration and evangelism.[177] During the 1960s – 1970s, the evangelical church in Kirgizia held massive weddings feasts with up to eight hundred guests gathering outside to celebrate the couple.[178]

Summary

From baptism through courtship and marriage, evangelical youth played an important role in the lives of their churches. Navigating and experiencing the challenges and changes of the 1940s – 1960s on a personal level, evangelical youth developed a youth movement uniquely suited to the context of the Soviet system. They creatively adapted to the restrictions placed on them by Soviet law, seeking new ways to fulfill the commandments of Christ. As with persecution, the activeness of church youth varied based on geography and the individual church. For those blessed to live in areas with greater freedom and an active congregation, however, youth life was active and fruitful. Building on the foundations laid during the early Soviet period, they enlivened their congregations through their singing, fellowship, and acts of practical service. In the process, they helped shape the character and course of the Soviet evangelical movement.

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[175] Bychkov, *Moĭ zhiznennyĭ put'*, 15 – 16.
[176] Kunda, Kramarenko, and Zinchenko, "Pami͡atnye dni v SSSR," 126.
[177] Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II*, 70 – 71.
[178] I͡akov Shevchuk, Aleksandra Shevchuk, and Vera Virkh, "Li͡ubov' Khrista protiv broshennykh kamneĭ," 109 – 110.

Chapter Four

"People … From Another Planet"

> [Those young people drawn to the Baptists] have been deeply offended by the unrelieved vulgarity of Soviet life … An Orthodox church service is incomprehensible to them … Then he meets a simple fellow like himself who gives him a book … 'The Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ' … Simple, clear words, something concerned with living today. He is soon introduced to Evangelical Christians and meets people as simple as himself, but people who do not drink alcohol, do not smoke, who reject debauchery and foul language. This is so unlike everything that surrounds him that **these people seem to him to have come from another planet**.
>
> -- Anatoli Levitin-Krasnov, "Religion and Soviet Youth" (1979)

During the 1970s – 1980s, the Soviet Union underwent deep changes that challenged the common motif of this period as a time of stagnation. As they had in the past, evangelical youth adapted to the changes engulfing Soviet society, engaging with the challenges and opportunities that these transformations presented. Against the context of rising youth interest in religion, evangelical churches and young believers engaged in evangelism using a variety of formats. On the individual level, they witnessed to the truth of the Gospel at school, at work, and in the army. As part of their congregations, they witnessed through church celebrations and evangelism trips to nearby villages. On a regional level, they participated in mass youth rallies, which provided opportunities to grow spiritually and interact with other young believers from other cities. On a larger scale, evangelical youth participated in the printing of Christian samizdat, connecting themselves to other Soviet evangelicals, the growing dissident community, and western believers.

Following Khrushchev's removal in 1964, the Soviet Union entered a period which Mikhail Gorbachev later dubbed the "era of stagnation."[1] Despite this pejorative appellation, the 1970s – 1980s were far from uneventful. Standards of living rose, even as the black market continued to grow.[2] The international Helsinki Conference of 1975 promised a new international order built on respect for human rights and national sovereignty, a promise undermined by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979.[3] Building on the social changes of the 1950s – 1960s, these developments contributed to producing a society ripe for transformation.

The traditional view of late Soviet society as stagnant does not fully account for these developments, nor does it acknowledge the complexity of the Soviet experience.[4] Furthermore, the "era of stagnation" thesis underestimates the vibrancy and vitality expressed by certain segments of the Soviet population, including evangelicals. Far from being a period of social and cultural stagnation, the 1970s – 1980s gave birth to a variety of movements which hinted at the future transformation of Soviet society.

Rising Youth Interest in Religion

Sparked by Khrushchev's de-Stalinization campaign, various dissident groups began emerging in the 1950s – 1960s centered around a variety of causes, both broad and narrow.[5] Human rights activists, Orthodox priests, and Baptists laymen slowly emerged as active voices protesting the abuses of the Soviet government.[6] Western observers were perhaps most familiar with the activities of those who advocated for human rights, a movement that activist Ludmilla

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[1] Dina Fainberg and Artemy M. Kalinovsky, "Introduction – Stagnation and Its Discontents: The Creation of a Political and Historical Paradigm" in *Reconsidering Stagnation in the Brezhnev Era: Ideology and Exchange* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016), vii – viii.

[2] Riasanovsky and Steinberg, *A History of Russia,* 519, 524.

[3] David B. Ottaway, "Cynicism Marks Helsinki Gathering: 10th Anniversary Finds Little Accord in East-West Relations," *Washington Post*, July 30, 1985, A1.

[4] Fainberg and Kalinovsky, "Introduction," vii – viii.

[5] Anderson, Religion, State, and Politics, 82 – 85.

[6] Ibid.

Alekseeva traced to a December 1965 demonstration at Pushkin Square.[7] Although comprising only a small percentage of the total population, dissidents threatened to disrupt state control of Soviet society during the 1970s – 1990s.[8] Indeed, one CIA report highlighted the relative importance of the dissident movement by pointing out that "decisions about individual dissidents are sometimes made at the Politburo level."[9]

Rising interest in religion during this period suggests that the emerging dissidence represented more than just the grumblings of a few idealistic dreamers. Sawatsky marked an increase in religious searching among Soviet youth in the 1970s.[10] Similarly, by 1980, David Kowalewski reported an "increased interest in religion," especially among youth.[11] Attracted to Russian Orthodoxy, young intellectuals began forming study groups such as the Christian Seminar, which "sought to explore the meaning of confessing Christ in the modern world."[12] During the 1979 National Youth Festival of the FDJ (Communist Youth Organization) in East Berlin, the Lutheran St. Mary's Church reported receiving up to 1,000 visitors a day.[13] Young believers engaged with visitors, answering their questions about Christianity: "Many visitors asked what Christian faith really means in the believer's life, what Christian hope and love mean for the community, and what part young Christians play in the life of the community."[14]

Many of those who joined the Christian church were ultimately drawn to stay out of love for Jesus Christ and the Christian faith. However, there were additional factors that contributed

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[7] Alekseeva, *Soviet Dissent*, 9, 269.

[8] Anderson, *Religion, State and Politics*, 85.

[9] Sarah B. Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War: A Transnational History of the Helsinki Network* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 95 – 96.

[10] Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II*, 299.

[11] David Kowalewski, "Human Rights Protest in the USSR: Statistical Trends for 1965-78," *Universal Human Rights* 2, no. 1 (January – March 1980), 10.

[12] John Anderson, "Soviet Religious Policy Under Brezhnev and After," *Religion in Communist Lands* 11, no. 1 (1983), 27.

[13] "Communist Youth Festival Fills the Church," *Keston News Service* no. 87 (December 6, 1979), 6.

[14] Ibid.

to the rise of religious interest at this specific time. Soviet academics and western historians debate the reasons for this rise in youth religious interest. Writing in 1979, Howard Biddulph summarized the arguments of Soviet sociologist Ven'yamin Arsenkin.[15] Arsenkin argued that young people were disillusioned by the low moral level of society and the Soviet system's inability to address the idea of suffering. Pushed away from the Soviet system, Arsenkin noted, youth found themselves drawn to the "heroism and self-sacrifice" of religion, the community found among believers, and the "modernization" of the clergy.[16]

Biddulph qualifies these arguments, pointing out that although the young believers he met displayed a strong sense of self-sacrifice, it was inconclusive whether it was this self-sacrifice that drew them to Christianity or whether their self-sacrifice was the result of their new faith.[17] Regarding Arsenkin's statement about the modernization of the clergy, Biddulph's discussions with young believers suggested that they became disillusioned by the atheist system "not because of the 'modernization' of the clergy, but because of the primitive, unconvincing quality of atheistic propaganda."[18] Indeed, Anatoli Levitin-Krasnov, an Orthodox dissident of the Krushchev and Brezhnev periods, argued in 1979 that disillusionment with Marxism-Leninsm served as a key factor in young people's interest in religion.[19]

Writing after the collapse of the Soviet Union, John Anderson identified four separate developments that contributed to the religious revival of the Brezhnev period.[20] The first development was the rise of a "fashion" for Christian symbols and ideas, sometimes out of

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[15] Biddulph, "Religious Participation of Youth in the USSR," 419 – 421.
[16] Ibid., 420 – 421.
[17] Ibid., 420.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Anatoli Levitin-Krasnov, "Religion and Soviet Youth," *Religion in Communist Lands* 7, no. 4 (1979), 234; Philip Walters, "Obituary: Anatoli Levitin-Krasnov 1915 – 1991," *Religion in Communist Lands* 19, no. 3 – 4 (1991), 264 – 270.
[20] Anderson, *Religion, State and Politics*, 85 – 87.

genuine curiosity and sometimes not, exemplified by Zhuk's description of the "Jesus hysteria" that swept the city of Dnepropretrovsk in 1972 – 1973.[21] A second development was the rising idea of religion as an embodiment of cultural heritage and beauty.[22] A third development which contributed to this religious revival was a growing public neutrality towards, or even support for, religion.

Throughout the post-World War II period, Soviet authorities worried about the growth of anti-Soviet sentiment among youth.[23] During the 1970s, the Soviet government faced three separate challenges from religious developments: the growth of religiously-linked nationalism, closer ties between secular and religious dissent, and the growth of youth interest in religion.[24] Indeed, CCECB activity among youth served as one of the primary challenges to the internal stability of Soviet society.[25] By 1974, *Pravda* contributors fretted over the visible rise in youth religious interest, calling for renewed atheistic activity with the younger segments of the population.[26] Perhaps spurred by these concerns, parents faced increased pressure to raise their children as atheists during the 1970s.[27]

Interestingly, Savin suggests that state concern with youth religion stemmed partially from the challenge which it presented to Soviet understanding of religion.[28] In 1963, the *Baltimore Sun* cited a Soviet source as stating that churches were only a "temporary condition

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[21] Ibid.; Zhuk, "Popular Religiosity in the 'Closed City' of Soviet Ukraine," 190 – 194.

[22] Anderson, *Religion, State and Politics*, 85 – 87.

[23] A. I. Savin, "Bor'ba za Molodezh': Sovetskoe Gosudarstvo i Religioznye Dissidenty v Brezhnevskuiu Ėpohu" in *Lichnost', Obshchestvo i Vlast' v Istoriii Rossii*, ed. T. I. Morozova, V. M. Rynkov, and A. I. Savin, et al. (Novosibirsk, Russia: Izdatel'stvo Sibirskogo Ordeleniia Rossiĭskoĭ Akademii Nauk, 2018), 499 – 500.

[24] Anderson, "Soviet Religious Policy Under Brezhnev and After," 26 – 27.

[25] Savin, "Bor'ba za Molodezh'," 493 – 494.

[26] A. Ivanov and L. Filippov, "Nauchnoe Mirovozzrenie i Ateisticheskoe Vospitanie." *Pravda* 53, February 22, 1974, 2 – 3.

[27] Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II*, 297.

[28] Savin, "Bor'ba za Molodezh,'" 499.

which would end when the surviving believers inevitably passed on."[29] Despite this bold statement, Soviet authorities increasingly found themselves faced with not just the survival of Christianity but its survival through the most unlikely of channels – youth.

Soviet Youth and Baptists During the 1970s – 1980s

Authorities were especially concerned about youth interest in the underground Baptist movement. Known variously as *Initsiativniki* ("Initiatives"), schismatic Baptists, or Reform Baptists, this movement centered around the Council of Church of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (CCECB) that emerged during the early 1960s.[30] Although their lack of official legal status placed the CCECB in a precarious position, they became active participants in evangelical youth work. In 1973, a *Komsomol* article stated that the "schismatic" Baptists were "especially zealous to reach young people."[31] By 1977, Dennis Dunn remarked that the *Initsiativniki* were "particular[ly] successful" among young people.[32] The following year, sociologist Christel Lane pointed out that the "youthful character" of the *Initsiativniki* had contributed to them being known as the "Young Baptists."[33]

Ironically, the *Initsiativniki* were particularly popular among the segment of the population that Soviet ideology claimed as their foundation. In 1978, Lane observed that the social makeup of the *Initsiativniki* Baptists was primarily from "that section of Soviet society which Soviet Marxist ideology envisages as producing the 'new socialist man' and which is regarded as the backbone of Soviet society."[34] Levitin-Krasnov pointed out that while the

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[29] Ernest B. Furgurson, "Red Religion Stand Cited," *Baltimore Sun*, February 7, 1963, 1.

[30] Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II*, 146; Bourdeaux and Murray, *Young Christians in Russia*, 24; Savin, "Bor'ba za Molodezh,'" 499.

[31] Bourdeaux and Murray, *Young Christians in Russia*, 24.

[32] Dennis J. Dunn, "Religious Renaissance in the U.S.S.R.," *Journal of Church and State* 19, no. 1 (Winter 1977), 31 – 32.

[33] Christel Lane, *Christian Religion in the Soviet Union: A Sociological Study* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1978), 155.

[34] Ibid., 156.

Orthodox Church drew urban intellectual youth, the Baptists attracted young people from the rural areas: "lads from the country or from a small town … collective-farm or factory workers, metal-smiths, carpenters or unskilled labourers … white-collar workers, draughtsmen, accountants or technicians."[35] By 1983, Anderson cited the Soviet press as acknowledging the success of Baptist *Initsiativniki* among young industrial workers, "the group said by Soviet sociologists of religion to be the least susceptible to religious belief."[36]

Youth interest in the Baptists reflected similar influences as those stated above, with some nuances. In 1981, the *Komsomolskaya Pravda* identified several reasons for the increasing youthfulness of Protestant churches, including religious parents, evangelistic efforts, the "modernization of religious ideology," western propaganda, and the "failure of atheists to provide convincing answers to questions about the meaning of disappointment and suffering in life."[37] In 1982, Lane argued that Soviet industrialization and urbanization created an opening for the Baptists, who provided a sense of community and stability amid social transformations.[38]

As an Orthodox participant in the dissident movement of the 1950s – 1970s, Anatoli Levitin-Krasnov presented a warmer, more personal view of what drew young people to the Baptist message. He argued that young people were drawn to Baptist congregations by the simplicity of the Baptist message and the holy living of the believers.[39] Other observers echo Levitin-Krasnov's emphasis on the simplicity of the Baptist message and the holiness of the Baptist believers as key factors in drawing unbelievers to the faith. In 1977, Dunn remarked that the Baptist faith spreads easily among the "diverse cultures on the western wing of the Eurasian

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[35] Levitin-Krasnov, "Religion and Soviet Youth," 236 – 237.

[36] Anderson, "Soviet Religious Policy Under Brezhnev and After," 27.

[37] Paul A. Lucey, "The Soviet Press on Religion and Youth," *Religion in Communist Lands* 10, no. 2 (1982), 207.

[38] Christel Lane, "The New Religious Life in the Soviet Union: How and Why Does It Differ?" *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 2, no. 1 (1982), 45.

[39] Levitin-Krasnov, "Religion and Soviet Youth," 236 – 237.

plain" due to the simplicity of its message.[40] By 1978, Soviet Baptists were widely characterized as preserving "deep commitment to religious practice and … thorough knowledge of doctrinal positions, as well as … moral fervour and Christian charity."[41] Indeed, Levitin-Krasnov characterized Baptists as simple, selfless, hard-working, and diligent to help each other.[42] By 1982, Lane argued that Baptist holy living aided them in evangelism, a fact acknowledged by atheist propagandists.[43]

Evangelical Youth During the 1970s – 1980s

Youth activity in the CCECB church faced significant legal opposition. According to the 1929 Law on Religious Organizations, churches could not hold gatherings targeted to children, youth, or women.[44] This prohibition included Bible studies, "handicraft meetings," "excursions," and "children's play-groups."[45] The state reiterated this prohibition in 1966, with the added clarification that religious education of minors was punishable by up to three years in prison.[46]

By the mid-1970s, however, the law seemed to relax slightly, although this relaxation may have been primarily geared towards the AUCECB. Following a 1975 legal revision, the state seemed to allow the AUCECB greater freedom to engage in youth activity, with Sawatsky reporting instances of children being present at church services.[47] Three years later, the chair of the Council for Religious Affairs declared in an *Izvestia* article that children could attend and participate in church services.[48] Interestingly, this relaxation of restrictions coincides with the signing of the Helsinki Accords, an international agreement that had a significant impact on the

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[40] Dunn, "Religious Renaissance in the U.S.S.R.," 32.
[41] Lane, *Christian Religion in the Soviet Union*, 141.
[42] Levitin-Krasnov, "Religion and Soviet Youth," 236 – 237.
[43] Lane, "The New Religious Life in the Soviet Union," 45.
[44] "Law on Religious Organizations," *Seventeen Moments in Soviet History*.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Savin, "Bor'ba za Molodezh,'" 501.
[47] Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II*, 151.
[48] Ibid., 297 – 298.

development of the international human rights movement in the Soviet Union and around the world.[49]

Despite the pressures and deprivations associated with being a Soviet believer, the life of a young evangelical was often spiritually rewarding. Evangelicals placed a strong emphasis on religious education in the home, a point which Sawatsky connects to traditional evangelical belief in the priesthood of the believer.[50] Learned through harsh experience, the lessons that Soviet believers passed on to their children were priceless. Outside the home, the life of an evangelical youth could be highly active. Reflecting on his interactions with Baptist youth in 1976, Howard Biddulph generalized that young Baptists attended church services from one to three times a week, served in choir, orchestra, or some other ministry at least once a week, participated in a Bible study group once a week, attended a youth social gathering once or twice a month, and participated in "excursions or holidays" once or twice a year.[51]

Nurtured by their families and churches, CCECB youth served as vital and vibrant members of their congregations during the 1970s – 1980s. Although limited and harassed by the Soviet state, youth played an active role in the evangelism efforts of this period, engaging in the unique opportunities presented by rising youth interest in religion. At school, at work, and in the army, they individually witnessed to the truth of the Gospel through their holy lives and bold proclamations of the truth. As members of their youth groups and congregations, they witnessed to the Gospel through special church services, informal youth gatherings, and "mission trips" to surrounding villages. When possible, they joyfully participated in multi-city, multi-day youth

[49] "Soveshchanie po Bezopasnosti i Sotrudnichestvu v Evrope. Zaklı͡uchitel'nyĭ Akt," *Pravda* 214, August 2, 1975, 2 – 6; Aryeh Neier, *The International Human Rights Movement: A History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 3.

[50] Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II*, 68.

[51] Biddulph, "Religious Participation of Youth in the USSR," 429.

rallies, sharing the Gospel through preaching, singing, and poetry. Some young people chose to engage in the spread of the Gospel through the preparation and distribution of evangelical *samizdat*, choosing a difficult road that could easily lead to imprisonment. Regardless of the format, Baptist youth faithfully witnessed to the truth of the Gospel through their lives and words.[52]

In doing so, evangelical youth reflected the core beliefs expressed in CCECB samizdat publications such as *Bratskii Listok* ("The Fraternal Leaflet") and *Vestnik Spaseniia* ("Herald of Salvation"). In 1971, *Bratskii Listok* declared that the purpose of the church was the proclamation of the Gospel to a dying world.[53] Five years later, the leaders of the CCECB reiterated this belief, stating that the purpose of the church was to evangelism outside their congregations and holiness within them.[54]

From 1972 – 1976, CCECB publications expressed this belief through articles and mission reports which highlighted a clear understanding of the local and global mission of the church. In 1972, a *Vestnik Spaseniia* article shared several examples of youth evangelism and missions in the west, including Explo '72, a massive youth event organized by Campus Crusade with the participation of Billy Graham.[55] The article also highlighted student summer missions in Italy and the ongoing "Jesus movement" in the west.[56] The same year, *Vestnik Spaseniia* printed two translated articles by Oswald J. Smith, who Billy Graham characterized as "symboliz[ing]

[52] *Vestnik spaseniia* was retitled *Vestnik istiny* in 1976 (Vestnik istiny 14, no. 1).
[53] *Bratskiĭ Listok* no. 4 (1971), 1.
[54] G. K. Kriuchkov, "Slovo otcheta," *Vestnik Istiny* 14, no. 3 – 4 (1976), 24.
[55] "Vesti s poleĭ missii," *Vestnik Spaseniia* 10, no. 1 (1972), 35; "Texas Religious Gathering Seen Largest in U.S. History," *Washington Post*, June 12, 1972, A10.
[56] "Vesti s poleĭ missii," 35 – 38.

worldwide evangelization."[57] The articles examined the need for "missionaries from among the youth of our churches" and described the different roles in missions (go, pray, give).[58]

As individuals, evangelical youth witnessed to the unbelievers surrounding them at school, at work, and in the army. Opportunities for witness often came at times when evangelical youth were placed in difficult situations by Soviet authorities. For example, in 1974, *Vestnik Spaseniia* shared the story of Nadya, a young believer who shared her faith in a very difficult situation.[59] While attending a service in a nearby city, Nadya was arrested along with other believers and taken to the nearby police station. When her school found out, she was called to a meeting with the principal, a teacher, and a representative of the Commission on Minors' Affairs. Threatening to lower her grades, they warned her that they could keep her from continuing her education. When Nadya returned to class, her classroom teacher scolded her in front of her peers, claiming that Baptists were traitors and mistreated their children. When Nadya refuted these statements, the teacher turned to the other students for support. However, the students unexpectedly supported Nadya. After the teacher left the classroom, they gathered around Nadya and asked her questions, giving her an opportunity to refute some of the propaganda they had heard about Baptists.

Opportunities such as this could appear in the unlikeliest of places and through the unlikeliest of ways. While serving in the army in the early 1970s, Yakov Gertsen received a copy of the Gospels in a package from his family.[60] Although hidden inside a parcel of meat, the book was discovered and claimed by several of his fellow soldiers. Rather than destroy it, however,

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[57] O. J. Smith, "Pis'mena i i͡azyki, vse eshche ne dostignutye Evangeliem," *Vestnik Spaseni͡ia* 10, no. 2 (1972), 27; O. J. Smith, "Chto sdelali dli͡a missii vy, drug?" *Vestnik Spaseni͡ia* 10, no. 2 (1972), 27 – 28; Billy Graham, "Foreword," in *Fire in His Bones: The Official Biography of Oswald J. Smith*, Lois Neely (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1982), 9.

[58] Smith, "Pis'mena i i͡azyki," 27; Smith, "Chto sdelali dli͡a missii vy, drug?" 27 – 28.

[59] "Veruĭ!" *Vestnik Spaseni͡ia* 12, no. 1-2 (1974), 17 – 18.

[60] Gertsen, *Pod Vysokoĭ Rukoĭ*, 46 – 47.

they asked Gertsen to read it to them. This unusual, impromptu Bible study was disrupted by the officer in charge, who saw the book and removed it as "unallowed" reading. Whether out of genuine interest or simple comradery, the other soldiers tried to convince the officer to give back the Gospels but were unsuccessful.

Not all opportunities for witness led to positive Gospel conversations. In 1971, a group of children, teenagers, and two adults were riding back on the train from an evening service.[61] Seeing the guitar that one of the girls held, several young men came up and asked her to play a song for them. When she obliged them by playing a Christian song, they called in a police officer. The officer confiscated several copies of the Gospels and other religious literature and took the group to the railway police station. They detained them until two in the morning, only releasing the group after questioning.

Pastors from CCECB-affiliated or independent evangelical congregations frequently sought to nurture the evangelistic abilities of these young believers. In 1973, a document from the Council of Religious Affairs (CRA) summarized *Initstiativniki* youth work as consisting of youth gatherings, "evenings of love," and "concert and theatrical presentations."[62] The report found that these groups encouraged young believers to the "active preaching of the Gospel, the preparation and spread of religious literature," influencing even youth from state-recognized congregations to "a special mission as 'warriors for the faith of their fathers' and 'saving sinners.'"[63] According to the same report, the CCECB had attempted to create an evangelism-focused youth network known as the "Good Samaritan."[64] However, Savin points out that this

[61] "Vesti s Poleĭ Evangel'skih." *Vestnik Spaseni͡a* 10, no. 1 (1972), 31 – 32.
[62] Savin, "Bor'ba za Molodezh'," 500 – 501.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid., 499.

network existed "only … on paper in the form of an anonymous charter [*ustav*]."[65] Although little information is available about this attempted network, the idea of an organized youth network echoes the Evangelical Union of Christian Youth highlighted in Chapter One.

Perhaps inspired by their pastors and the lives of those brave believers highlighted in evangelical samizdat publications, young believers would occasionally attempt mission trips to the surrounding villages. In 1977, a group of Ukrainian young believers began visiting neighboring villages where there were no known believers or churches.[66] As they shared the Gospel and sang Christian songs, they were well received by the villagers and given at least two opportunities to hold services. Around Christmastime, they went caroling and were again well-received.

In 1982, another group of young believers tried to visit a neighboring village to share the Gospel.[67] Initially denied a place to stay for the night, the group ended up staying with a relative in another village. In the morning, they spoke with a leading member of the village regarding their desire to share the Gospel there. Although the man was a Communist Party member, he opened his home for them to hold a service. On the train rides to and from the villages, the youth spoke with those around them, singing Christian songs and sharing the Gospel.

Evangelical Youth Rallies

These daily instances of faithfulness were supplemented by occasional large, multi-day youth rallies. Young believers gathered in large numbers to sing, listen to sermons and poetry, and share their testimonies.[68] During one 1977 gathering in Kazakhstan, the organizers of the

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[65] Ibid.

[66] "Blagovestvuiushchaia Molodezh'." *Vestnik Istiny* 16, no. 1 (1978), 29 – 30.

[67] "'Svoi Ne Priniali'," *Vestnik Istiny* 20, no. 4 (1982), 24 – 25.

[68] "Iz zhizni bratstva: Radost' obshcheniia," *Vestnik Istiny* 17, no. 1 (1979), 30 – 31; Iosif Bondarenko, *Tri prigovora: Avtobiograficheskaia povest'* (Odessa, Ukraine: n.p., 2006), 253 – 255.

event set aside a special red tent where people could come and pray as they felt led of God.[69] In 1978, one couple chose to perform their wedding during a youth gathering in Kharkov, Ukraine, inviting unbelievers to celebrate with them and hear the Gospel.[70] Although not necessarily targeted towards unbelievers, these rallies became times of celebration and growth, sometimes leading to the conversion of hundreds of young people during a single rally. For youth living in a world antagonistic to them, these massive rallies were bright spots in an otherwise dark world.

These youth gatherings could become massive events, incorporating thousands of young believers from the far reaches of the Soviet Union. The annual Kharkov gatherings drew youth from across Ukraine and the Soviet Union.[71] In 1977, the *Keston News Service* reported on a Kharkov youth gathering, citing attendance numbers of 4,000 with 149 conversions.[72] During the following year's youth event, Bondarenko reported over 150 salvations.[73] A 1977 youth event drew over a thousand participants to a two-day gathering in the mountains near Alma-Ata, Kazakhstan.[74] Although not as large as the Kharkov rallies, this event highlighted the determination of young believers, as they clambered up the mountain to get to the gathering place when the police blocked the road there.[75] Influenced by the preaching, singing, and praying, dozens of people became believers.[76]

Interestingly, evangelical leaders sometimes scheduled these rallies to coincide with Soviet holidays. For example, in 1978, *Vestnik Istiny* stated that it was common among

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[69] "Iz zhizni bratstva: Radost' obshcheni͡ia," 30 – 31.
[70] Bondarenko, *Tri prigovora*, 253 – 255.
[71] Ibid.
[72] "Soviet Baptists on the Increase," *Keston News Service* no. 48 (February 3, 1978), 2 – 3.
[73] Bondarenko, *Tri prigovora*, 253 – 255.
[74] "Iz zhizni bratstva: Radost' obshcheni͡ia," 30 – 31.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid. *Vestnik Istiny* used the term *desiatki* ("tens") to refer to the number of people who became Christians. I translated this as "dozens," as this conveys a similar meeting in English.

evangelical churches to hold large youth gatherings around specific yearly holidays.[77] These events frequently served as opportunities for evangelism, as unbelievers were often present.[78] Similarly, Joseph Bondarenko, a well-known CCECB evangelist during the 1970s – 1980s, recalled an annual tradition of holding large youth gatherings in Kharkov in early May.[79] It is possible that these rallies were meant to coincide with the state holidays of International Workers' Day (May 1) and Victory Day (May 9), which was established as a work-free holiday in 1965.[80] Recalling his youth in Latvia, Ainars Bastiks described a similar tradition of youth gatherings during Victory Day and International Workers' Day, with the leaders of his churches stating, "We also celebrate these holidays in our own church way."[81]

Although many of these rallies faced significant opposition from the local authorities, the young participants responded to this persecution determinedly. While participating in a youth event in Alma-Ata in May 1969, Gertsen and other youth were challenged by police officers who demanded that they stop the gathering.[82] The attendees initially ignored them, but then they noticed a car driving into the crowd towards where the preacher stood. One of the older men stepped forward and laid down in front of the car. The young people rushed to the car, lifting it off the ground to carry it away. They only released the car after being commanded by another one of the believers. In 1977, when police blocked the road to a youth gathering in the

[77] "Blagovestvuiushchaia Molodezh'," 29.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Bondarenko, *Tri prigovora*, 253 – 255.
[80] Edmund Nash, "Hours of Work, Holidays, and Vacations in the Soviet Union," *Monthly Labor Review* 78, no. 10 (October 1955), 1144 – 45; Mischa Gabowitsch, "Victory Day Before the Cult: War Commemoration in the USSR, 1945 – 1965," in *The Memory of the Second World War in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*, ed. David L. Hoffmann (London: Routledge, 2021), 64, 74 – 79.
[81] Ainars Bastiks, interview by Nadezhda Beliakova, Riga, Latvia, July 19, 2013.
[82] Gertsen, *Pod Vysokoĭ Rukoĭ*, 32 – 36.

Kazakhstan mountains, the young people determinedly went off the road, clambering up the mountain to the gathering place.[83]

In at least one case, police intervention aided the proclamation of the Gospel. In 1977, around 2,000 believers prepared for a gathering on the property of Mikhail Zakharov in Rostov.[84] Youth took an active role in the proceedings, with the organizers of the event initially planning to focus half of the gathering on encouraging the youth present at the event.[85] Aware of their plans, the police blocked the way to the gathering and organized an impromptu dance floor in front of Zakharov's home. They advertised a youth dance for that day, apparently hoping that the noise would drown out the nearby gathering. The believers moved to a nearby field but were chased from there by the police.[86] In response, the believers made their way to a central location in the city, where they began preaching and singing publicly to the unbelievers around them. Apparently recognizing that their efforts had only served to increase the city's exposure to the Gospel, the authorities negotiated with the organizers of the event to return to their original location, promising that they would not bother them anymore.[87] Although the gathering was apparently allowed to proceed without further interruption, the authorities fined Zakharov 500 rubles for holding an illegal gathering.[88]

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[83] "Iz zhizni bratstva: Radost' obshcheni͡ia," 30 – 31.

[84] "Iz zhizni bratstva: Nashi obshcheni͡ia," *Vestnik Istiny* 15, no. 4 (1977), 25 – 28; Mikhail Pavlovich Zakharov, "Chto takoe konspiratsi͡ia…" in *Podvig very: Unikal'nye svidetel'stva o zhizni Khristian v SSSR*, comp. and ed. Konstantin Prokhorov (Sacramento, CA: Pacific Coast Slavic Baptist Association, 2009), 245 – 247. *Vestnik istiny* 15, no. 4 (1977) and Mikhail Zakharov's account describe very similar events occurring in Rostov in 1977. Since it is likely that they are referring to the same event, I have treated the two accounts as referring to a single event. Zakharov specifically identifies this event as a youth rally (Zakharov, "Chto takoe konspiratsi͡ia…" 245 – 247), while the *Vestnik istiny* account merely emphasizes the active participation of youth (*Vestnik istiny* 15, no. 4 [1977], 25 – 27).

[85] "Iz zhizni bratstva: Nashi obshcheni͡ia," 25 – 27.

[86] Ibid.

[87] "Iz zhizni bratstva: Nashi obshcheni͡ia," 25 – 27; Zakharov, "Chto takoe konspiratsi͡ia…" 245 – 247.

[88] Zakharov, "Chto takoe konspiratsi͡ia…" 245 – 247.

As in the west, evangelical youth were drawn to certain church leaders in a special way, allowing these leaders the opportunity to nurture youth during these large gatherings. During the 1970s – 1980s, Joseph Bondarenko served actively as an evangelist, especially among young believers. Anatolii Kharchenko recalled how his church held large youth gatherings and a public youth baptism when Joseph Bondarenko and other prominent leaders visited the Caucasian city of Sukhum in the 1970s.[89] Mikhail Vasilev similarly recalled how the arrival of Bondarenko to Krasnodar was met by preparations to hold a youth conference.[90] Unfortunately, these plans were hindered by Bondarenko's arrest.[91]

The cost of youth evangelism could be high, particularly for the leaders and organizers of these gatherings. CCECB and western publications highlighted this through their frequent updates on evangelists, pastors, and ordinary believers who had been arrested or imprisoned for youth work. In 1973, Ukrainian pastor Boris Zdorovets was arrested for preaching at a large youth gathering near Kharkov.[92] In 1979, youth evangelist Pavel Rytikov was arrested along with his eighteen-year-old son and twenty-year old Galina Velchinskaya, ostensibly for holding a Christian children's camp.[93] In May 1978, Joseph Bondarenko was arrested at a youth conference in Krasnodar and sentenced to three years imprisonment.[94]

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[89] Anatoliĭ Timofeevich Kharchenko, "Nebesnai͡a lestnit͡sa," in *Podvig very: Unikal'nye svidetel'stva o zhizni Khristian v SSSR*, comp. and ed. Konstantin Prokhorov (Sacramento, CA: Pacific Coast Slavic Baptist Association, 2009), 373.

[90] Evgeniĭ Danilovich Cherkasskikh, Mikhail Arkad'evich Vasil'ev, and Olimpiada Egorovna Avdeeva, "Primer svi͡atoĭ zhizni," in *Podvig very: Unikal'nye svidetel'stva o zhizni Khristian v SSSR*, comp. and ed. Konstantin Prokhorov (Sacramento, CA: Pacific Coast Slavic Baptist Association, 2009), 333 – 334.

[91] Ibid.

[92] "Harassment in Prison," *Keston New Service* no. 23 (April 8, 1976), 4.

[93] "Soviet Baptists: Arrests and Releases," *Keston News Service* no. 85 (November 8, 1979), 3.

[94] "Iosif Bondarenko Arrested," *Keston News Service* no. 53 (June 15, 1978), 3; "Soviet Baptists Sentenced," *Keston News Service* no. 57 (September 13, 1978), 3 – 4.

Evangelical Youth & Samizdat

The creation and maintenance of the *Khristianin* publishing house serves as a particularly fascinating example of youth engagement in evangelism and the nurturing of the church. As they had during the previous decades, believers continued to face a significant lack of Bibles and other religious literature. During the 1950s – 1960s, the Russian Orthodox Church and the AUCECB periodically received permission to print Bibles or hymnals, but this permission was rarely given and limited in its scope.[95] Even if believers could find Bibles for sale, the price for them might be beyond what they could afford. In October 1976, Radio Freedom reported that a Bible cost ninety rubles on the black market, a price that "almost reached the average salary level of an employee."[96] The Soviet government similarly restricted the printing of hymnals and other religious literature. When Gertsen was baptized, he was thrilled to receive a German hymnal, a valuable gift considering the lack of printed hymnals in their church.[97] Instead of reading from hymnals, his congregation would follow the lead of the song leader, who would read out several lines of the hymn before the congregation sang it.

As summarized in Chapter Two, evangelicals found a solution to this problem through samizdat, a method of self-publication first introduced by Soviet dissidents in the 1950s. The creation of the CCECB marked a rise in evangelical samizdat publications. In 1963, the CCECB began releasing *Vestnik Spaseniia* (*Herald of Salvation*, later changed to *Herald of Truth*).[98] The first editors of the publication, Lyubov Bogdanova and Svetlana Beletskaya, eventually had to go underground due to their work.[99] The following year the Council of Prisoners' Relatives (CPR),

[95] Savin, "Bibliia v Sovetskom Soyuze," 41 – 42.
[96] Ibid., 42.
[97] Gertsen, *Pod Vysokoĭ Rukoĭ*, 36.
[98] Alekseeva, *Soviet Dissent*, 210.
[99] Tat'iana Nikol'skaia, "Osobennosti razvitiia," 135.

a group formed to highlight the conditions of evangelicals imprisoned for their faith, began releasing an informational bulletin.[100] This bulletin included "letters from prisoners, copies of appeals to the state, biographical information, and, at regular intervals, an updating of the prisoners' list."[101] In 1965, the *Bratskii Vestnik* (*Fraternal Pamphlet*), another CCECB publication, began appearing regularly.[102]

However, the crowning achievement of CCECB samizdat was the *Khristianin* publishing house. Started by the CCECB in 1971, *Khristianin* was a "semi-independent publishing house which was closer to the CCECB than to the CPR but also made its services available to other evangelicals."[103] The creation of the publishing house was sparked by government refusal to allow the printing of 10,000 Bibles and 5,000 hymnals.[104] The publishing house maintained a high level of organization, with printing presses scattered throughout the Soviet Union.[105]

In October 1974, a helicopter circling the Ligukalis farm in Latvia identified a printing press, an unusual implement for a Soviet farm.[106] Shortly thereafter, government agents discovered the *Khristianin* underground publishing point that had been operating at the farm up until that point.[107] The printers were arrested, and the publishing point was shut down.[108] Over 2,000 miles away in Kazakhstan, twenty-three-year-old Yakov Gertsen mourned the news with the rest of his church.[109]

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[100] Ibid.
[101] Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II*, 242.
[102] Alekseeva, *Soviet Dissent*, 210.
[103] Nikol'skaia, "Osobennosti razvitiia," 135; Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II*, 247.
[104] Alekseeva, *Soviet Dissent*, 211.
[105] Nikol'skaia, "Osobennosti razvitiia," 135.
[106] Alekseeva, *Soviet Dissent*, 211.
[107] Nikol'skaia, "Osobennosti razvitiia," 136.
[108] Gertsen, *Pod Vysokoĭ Rukoĭ*, 67.
[109] Ibid.

The discovery of the Ligukalis printing press would prove to be a defining moment in Gertsen's life. A few months later, he shared with his presbyter that he wanted to join the publishing ministry.[110] The presbyter informed him that printers had a strong need for host homes in which they could live and complete their work. This information prompted Gertsen to propose to one of the young women in the church so that he could get married and buy a house! After the wedding, he and his new bride began looking for a large house that they could use to host underground publishing work.[111] By 1976, they had bought a house and begun preparations for its transformation into an underground publishing point.[112] Printers began bringing paper to the house, while the Gertsens remodeled their home, creating a hidden room for the printing press.

Once the printing press was established, the Gertsens slowly and carefully began recruiting additional workers. Young men from the nearby Mennonite Brethren congregation helped with the bookbinding process, using their position as workers at the local automobile factory: "Being good specialists and enjoying the respect of their superiors, these brothers were able to produce the parts we needed after their shifts."[113]Another group of young Mennonite married couples spent time each week helping bind the newly published books.[114] The youth of Gertsen's church also helped with the bookbinding, sometimes working late into the night.[115] Over time, the Gertsens began recruiting young people for more serious responsibilities, giving some of the volunteers opportunities to travel to other regions for the work. If they found them trustworthy, and once they had discussed it with their parents, they invited a select few to become printers.[116] Considering the fact that *Khristianin* printers usually had to go underground

[110] Ibid., 68 – 69.
[111] Ibid., 71 – 73.
[112] Ibid., 76 – 78.
[113] Ibid., 104 – 105.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid., 109.
[116] Ibid.,198.

due to their work, it was clearly important that those who chose that path had the support of their families and understood clearly what they were doing.[117]

Indeed, underground publishing was a serious matter. If caught, underground press operators generally faced three years in an "ordinary regimen labor camp."[118] Even the distribution of Christian literature could be dangerous, as evidenced by the example of twenty-five-year-old Anatoly Rublenko and twenty-four-year-old Olga Nikora who, in 1976, were sentenced to 8 months in prison for passing out religious literature and inviting people to listen to Christian radio.[119] Those in the Gertsens' circle maintained a strict secrecy about their activities. Even the Gertsens' young children learned to keep quiet and not answer questions, so much so that they once refused to answer their grandmother's questions about what they had done over the week. One of the children finally whispered to her, "We can't talk about it, or they'll take Daddy away to the police!"[120]

Although at first separate from other dissident movements, evangelical samizdat slowly began to impact other civil rights activists in the Soviet Union. On December 1968, the *Chronicle of Current Events*, a samizdat journal which cataloged human rights abuses, mentioned evangelicals for the first time.[121] Two years later, it reported on the "1969-1970 arrests of Baptists in the south of the USSR."[122] Starting in 1974, the *Chronicle of Current Events* began to publish information about evangelicals more often.[123] The same year, the Initiative Group for the Defense of Human Rights in the USSR "appealed to international public

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[117] Nikol'skaia, "Osobennosti razvitiia," 135.
[118] Alekseeva, *Soviet Dissent*, 211.
[119] "Molites' o Nikh," *Vestnik Istiny* 14, no. 2 (1976), 18.
[120] Gertsen, *Pod Vysokoĭ Rukoĭ*, 110.
[121] *The Chronicle of Current Events*, No. 5 (December 31, 1968); Alekseeva, *Soviet Dissent*, vii – viii, 213.
[122] Alekseeva, *Soviet Dissent*, 213.
[123] Ibid.

opinion on behalf of G[regory] Vins," a CCECB leader in prison at the time.[124] Following this, evangelicals themselves periodically appealed to the Initiative Group with "complaints about the abrogation of their parental rights," to which the Moscow Helsinki Group responded with document no. 5 – "On the Persecution of Religious Families."[125]

The impact of evangelical samizdat on the international community was especially significant. Ludmilla Alekseeva, a member of the Soviet dissident movement, argued that "through appeals to international public opinion, the Council of Churches and the Council of Relatives succeeded in penetrating the wall of official disinformation" regarding the treatment of believers in the Soviet Union.[126] Indeed, the Western press often used CCECB samizdat to advocate for Soviet believers.[127] The creation of the Keston Institute in 1969 amplified the voice of the CCECB, collecting thousands of samizdat publications from the CCECB and other religious groups in the Soviet Union.[128] Indeed, the Keston Archive's stated purpose was to "support this task of Cold War advocacy."[129] The advocacy of the West proved effective. The CPR benefited greatly from Western financial support to support the families of prisoners, while Gregory Vins' release to the United States in 1979 happened because of Western calls for his release.[130]

Evangelical Youth & Perestroika

During the 1980s, Mikhail Gorbachev's policies of *perestroika* and *glasnost* slowly began to thaw the religious landscape of the Soviet Union. The 1988 millennium anniversary of

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[124] Ibid.

[125] Moscow Helsinki Watch Group, "Dokument No. 5 – Repressii Protiv Religioznyh Semeĭ," in *Dokumenty Moskovskoĭ Hel'sinkskoĭ Gruppy (1976-1982)* (Moscow: Moskovskaya Hel'sinkskaya Gruppa, 2006), 57-65; Alekseeva, *Soviet Dissent*, 213.

[126] Alekseeva, *Soviet Dissent*, 212.

[127] Nikol'skaia, "Osobennosti razvitiia," 135.

[128] "About Keston Institute," Keston Institute.

[129] Luehrmann, *Religion in Secular Archives*, 137.

[130] Alekseeva, *Soviet Dissent*, 212; Nikol'skaia, "Osobennosti razvitiia," 135.

Christianity in Russia served as an especially bright moment in Soviet church-state relations. In the years leading up to the millennium celebration, the government began showing greater leniency towards believers.[131] From 1985 – 1987, the number of religious prisoners dropped by almost half, while in 1988, the government gave the Orthodox Church and the Baptists permission to print and import Bibles on a surprising scale.[132] Indeed, Walter Sawatsky remarks that the number of Bibles imported in one year "more than equalled [sic] the total official printing and importation from 1945 – 1987."[133]

Evangelicals from both the AUCECB and the CCECB joyfully participated in the opportunities of perestroika. During an AUCECB gathering in Moscow in December 1988, young pastors pushed for, and were given permission to, hold a youth conference in April.[134] The following year, the *Keston News Service* reported that the AUCECB was releasing a new publication that seemed to have a special youth focus, including incorporating young people as members of the editorial board.[135]

The rapidity of these developments highlights an important point about the AUCECB and its relation to youth work. Although the leaders of the AUCECB had not sanctioned youth work up until this point, individual AUCECB members and churches had been calling for or participating in youth work for at least a decade before perestroika. During the 1970s, the AUCECB-affiliated Alma-Ata congregation held a special youth gathering highlighting the testimony of a hockey player.[136] By 1977, the church had set aside two men as youth leaders,

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[131] Walter Sawatsky, "Glasnost, Perestroika, and Religion: What Role for the Churches in Changing Soviet Society," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* 9, no. 2 (1989), 9 – 10.

[132] Ibid., 9.

[133] Ibid.

[134] "Soviet Baptists to Bold [sic] Youth Conference," *Keston News Service* no. 321 (March 16, 1989), 5 – 6.

[135] "Soviet Baptists Begin New Publication," *Keston News Service* no. 327 (June 8, 1989), 12 – 13. *Keston News Service* refers to the "Baptist Union," but the article most likely means the AUCECB.

[136] Andretsov, *Istoricheskiĭ Ocherk*, 76 – 77.

while by 1979, they had begun a secret children's choir only known about by parents of the children and church leaders.[137] During the 42nd Evangelical Christian Baptist Congress, held by the AUCECB at the Moscow Baptist Church in December 1979, some participants called for a "greater emphasis on youth work."[138]

Those members of CCECB churches who had been faithful during the difficult times of Soviet persecution poured their energies into evangelism. At the start of perestroika, Joseph Bondarenko helped create an "Evangelism and Compassion" mission.[139] Focused on sharing the Gospel, the mission handed out Bibles, visited hospitals, and showed the *Jesus* film, enlisting young believers to aid in the massive work to be done.[140] In 1988, Bondarenko organized a large evangelistic gathering in Tallin.[141] At the time, it was the largest evangelistic gathering he had ever participated in, with hundreds of people becoming Christians over the course of the gathering. After this event, Bondarenko became active in inviting western evangelists to hold evangelistic gatherings throughout the Soviet Union.[142]

Summary

These stories provide only a glimpse into evangelical youth experiences during the late Soviet period. Through individual faithfulness, corporate celebrations, and participation in large-scale efforts such as youth rallies and samizdat production, young believers interacted with their churches and their society in a way which communicated the message of the Gospel. Through these interactions, evangelical youth broadened their experiences and impact. Through personal evangelism and mission trips, they learned to engage with Soviet society in a way which brought

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[137] Ibid., 79, 92 – 95.

[138] "Democracy Versus Authority: Baptist Congress in USSR." *Keston News Service* no. 90 (January 25, 1980), 4.

[139] Bondarenko, *Tri prigovora*, 307 – 308.

[140] Ibid.

[141] Ibid., 301 – 304.

[142] Ibid., 304 – 307.

honor to God and highlighted the value of the Gospel message. Through youth rallies, they engaged with believers from across the Soviet Union. Through their participation in samizdat production, they contributed both to the Soviet evangelical movement and to western awareness of Soviet evangelical life. Finally, by extending their activities beyond the walls of their homes and churches, evangelical youth contributed to the church's efforts to move beyond the limits established by the 1929 Law on Religious Organizations. In the process, they helped prepare the church for the opportunities of perestroika and the post-Soviet period.

Throughout the Soviet period, evangelical youth played an important role in the development of the Soviet evangelical movement. Some youths were bold, others were quiet. Some received international attention when samizdat publications like *Vestnik Istiny* shared their stories with the West, while others remain forgotten by history. Whatever their local or national impact, these young people left an indelible mark on Soviet evangelicalism, becoming an integral part of the legacy of today's Russian believers. From their activity in evangelism to their faithfulness under persecution, young believers played a vibrant and important role in the evangelical movement of the late Soviet period. Through bold proclamations, quiet acts of courage, and even their moments of weakness, they faithfully proclaimed to the outside world that Christianity was not dead in the Soviet Union.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

> When the persecution of Christ's Church ... subsided, many friends began asking me to write down my memories of the wonders and blessings which we witnessed while serving in the *Khristianin* publishing house during the difficult years of the church ... One brother persistently encouraged me to leave a testimony of God's mercies to at least to my children. **For our generation is slowly leaving, and this current freedom may end quickly, and then from whose examples will our descendants learn to walk faithfully before God**?
>
> —Yakov Gertsen (2020)[1]

From the beginning of an organized Russian evangelical youth movement in 1908 to the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, the content of the Soviet evangelical youth experience remained essentially unchanged. It focused on fellowship, practical acts of service, and Bible teaching through preaching, singing, and poetry readings. Throughout this period, state restrictions and the transformation of Soviet society shaped the form and scope of evangelical youth activity, both restricting and provoking youths' engagement with society. Although shaped by these forces, evangelical youth were never fully subservient to them, creatively navigating the challenges of their environment to produce opportunities for fellowship, service, and spiritual growth.

The evangelical youth circles of early 20th century Russia played an important role in laying the foundations for Soviet evangelical youth activity. Strongly influenced by the character and energies of Ivan Prokhanov, these circles displayed the love for music, emphasis on Christian literature, and evangelistic focus that would define CCECB youth during the late Soviet period. As these early circles grew, they challenged the Bolshevik state's attempts to

[1] Gertsen, *Pod vysokoĭ rukoĭ*, 7.

monopolize the energies of Soviet youth. In retaliation, the Soviet government began a slow process of seeking to subjugate the evangelical church. They pressured evangelical leaders to renounce their pacifist stance on military service and released the 1929 Law on Religious Organizations, which forbade organized religious activity outside the walls of the church. Through these actions, both evangelical youth and the Soviet state laid foundational stones that would shape evangelical youth activity for the rest of the Soviet period.

Over the course of the next seven decades, evangelical youth faced political upheaval, economic disasters, social transformations, and state repression on a previously unimaginable scale. They absorbed the impact of revolutions, civil war, rapid industrialization, world wars, and state attempts to systematically eradicate their churches, their families, and their faith. On a deeper level, they wrestled before God, seeking to reconcile their reality with Christ's commands to them. Denied a role in society by the 1929 Law on Religious Organizations, they grappled with Christ's command to "go and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19, NKJV). Pressured to join the Young Pioneers and the Komsomol, they strove to be holy, for their God was holy (1 Pet. 1:16). Treated unjustly at work and at school, they struggled to love their enemies (Matt. 5:44).

Through this wrestling, young evangelicals learned to creatively navigate and boldly face the challenges of the Soviet period, transforming these challenges into opportunities for fellowship, service, and spiritual growth. Embracing the post-World War II revival, youth sought to become active members of their congregations, despite state attempts to limit the baptism of young people. During the 1950s – 1960s, they circumnavigated state restrictions on youth associations by gathering for "birthday parties" and "New Year's celebrations." During the 1970s – 1980s, they helped produce and distribute samizdat, both addressing the desperate lack

of Christian literature and making the West aware of the ongoing persecution of believers. When perestroika thawed, and then destroyed, the anti-religious policy that had harassed them for so long, they joyfully participated in new evangelism opportunities.

This research fills a significant gap in the study of Soviet evangelicalism, presenting what is possibly the first overview of evangelical youth activity from the beginning to the end of the Soviet period. This chronologically complete perspective is important for understanding the ebbs and flows of the evangelical youth experience. It highlights the changes and continuities of this movement, showing how evangelical youth grew and adapted along with the Soviet system. However, this wide chronological emphasis also produces a cursory perspective, merely providing a glimpse of the questions to be asked and the sources to be investigated.

Music serves as one of the most enduring and fascinating aspects of the evangelical youth experience. From the early St. Petersburg youth circles to the youth rallies of the 1970s, music played an important role in fellowship, spiritual growth, and evangelism. Whether in the form of group singing, choir rehearsals, or solo performances, young believers continually emphasized the importance of music. This emphasis raises questions about the role of music in the evangelical youth experience. How did the content, style, and format of evangelical music change over the course of the Soviet period? Why was music such a foundational element of youth fellowship? Has this emphasis on youth music-making continued to the current day and, if not, why?

The topic of evangelical poetry raises similarly fascinating questions. From 1905 – 1991, poetry clearly played a large role in the evangelical experience, with almost every edition of *Vestnik Spaseniia* and *Vestnik Istiny* containing a poetry section. Moreover, youth appeared to have an especially close tie to poetry, with young women often serving the church by reciting

poetry during the services. This emphasis on poetry appears to be a uniquely Russian trait, not present in most western evangelical churches. What role did poetry play in the spiritual walk of young believers? Why did Soviet evangelicals place such a strong emphasis on poetry? Was this emphasis the result of the Soviet experience, or is it embedded in Russian culture? Is this emphasis evident in the Orthodox Church, or is it a uniquely evangelical occurrence?

Although raising important questions, this research also carries the potential of answering important questions. The study of evangelical youth sheds light on a vital portion of the Soviet evangelical population. It highlights the existential struggle between the Soviet state and the evangelical church and refutes Soviet claims regarding the weakness of Christianity. Furthermore, it provides western observers a more nuanced understanding of the Soviet evangelical church. However, the study of evangelical youth is also practical, holding a relevance that promises to increase over the next several years.

Firstly, the study of evangelical youth is relevant because it helps explain the post-Soviet evangelical church. Peter Mitskevich, the current leader of the Russian Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists, participated in underground Sunday Schools as a child and still remembers how the Soviet police would arrive to write down the names of the children attending.[2] Many of the leaders of Baptist churches in Russia and Ukraine are children of the Soviet era. As youths during the 1970s – 1980s, they were very likely impacted by the challenges, opportunities, and social changes discussed in Chapter Three. To understand the worldview and actions of Russian Baptists today, it is vital to understand the worldview and actions of evangelical youth during the Soviet period.

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[2] "Meet Dr. Peter Mitskevich, President of Moscow Theological Seminary," Dallas Theological Seminary, February 6, 2012, YouTube video, 0:10 – 0:41, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tyosFQbGQ8U; "Rukovodstvo Soi͡uza," Tsentralizovannai͡a Religioznai͡a Organizat͡si͡a Rossiĭskiĭ Soi͡uz Evangel'skikh Khristian-Baptistov, n.d., https://baptist.org.ru/about/leadership.

Secondly, the study of evangelical youth is relevant because it highlights parallels between the Soviet evangelical experience and modern Russian realities, raising serious concerns about the future of Russian religious freedom. Over the last decade, the Russian government has slowly tightened restrictions on freedom of expression. In July 2016, Vladimir Putin signed the Yarovaya Law.[3] Presented as an anti-terrorism measure, the law increased the ability of Russian authorities to access text messages and phone call data.[4] More concerning for Russian evangelicals, the law limits evangelism by apparently restricting the sharing of beliefs to either specifically religiously-connected locations or by officially- or church-recognized individuals.[5] The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) condemned the law, with USCIRF Chair Thomas J. Reese stating that the law "will make it easier for Russian authorities to repress religious communities, stifle peaceful dissent, and detain and imprison people. Neither these measures nor the currently existing anti-extremism law meet international human rights and religious freedom standards."[6]

Since the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict in 2014, there have been several instances of evangelicals facing repression in the Russian-occupied territories of Luhansk and Donetsk. In 2019, the internationally unrecognized Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) "threatened Baptist Union pastors not to meet for worship," with at least one instance of armed and masked men raiding an independent Baptist church and seizing books marked as "extremist"

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[3] Mike Eckel, "Russia's 'Yarovaya Law' Imposes Harsh New Restrictions on Religious Groups," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, July 11, 2016, https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-yarovaya-law-religious-freedom-restrictions/27852531.html.

[4] "Russia: 'Big Brother' Law Harms Security, Rights: Repeal Rushed Counterterrorism Legislation," Human Rights Watch, July 12, 2016, https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/07/12/russia-big-brother-law-harms-security-rights.

[5] Victoria Arnold, "RUSSIA: Putin Signs Sharing Beliefs, "Extremism", Punishments," Forum 18, July 8, 2016, https://forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2197.

[6] "RUSSIA: USCIRF Condemns Enactment of Anti-Terrorism Laws," U. S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, July 8, 2016, https://www.uscirf.gov/news-room/releases-statements/russia-uscirf-condemns-enactment-anti-terrorism-laws.

by the LPR authorities.[7] In 2021, the Arbitration Court in Donetsk received suits to liquidate two Baptist churches for undisclosed reasons.[8]

The ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict has further threatened freedom of expression in Russia. In October 2022, members of a Crimean wedding party were arrested for playing a patriotic Ukrainian song.[9] The same year, hundreds of Russians were detained for protesting a mobilization order connected with the war in Ukraine.[10] Within the last few months alone, multiple people have been detained, arrested, or imprisoned for criticizing the war or publishing uncensored information about it.[11] Even minor acts of anti-war protest can be treated harshly, as when one Russian voter was arrested and fined $430 for writing "no to war" on her voting ballot during the 2024 presidential election.[12]

The state's efforts to influence children and youth have been especially worrying. Starting in 2022, Russian schools introduced a new education segment called "important conversations."[13] These "conversations" were to focus on "what Moscow refers to as its 'special

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[7] Felix Corley, "DONBAS: Luhansk: Baptist Union Churches Forced to Halt Publish Worship," Forum 18, March 15, 2019, https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2462.

[8] Felix Corley, "DONBAS: Donetsk: Three Protestant Churches Banned," Forum 18, October 4, 2021, https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2689.

[9] "Crimean Wedding Party Arrested, Fined for Playing Ukrainian Patriotic Song," Moscow Times, October 4, 2022, https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/09/14/crimea-wedding-party-arrested-fined-for-playing-ukrainian-patriotic-song-a78790.

[10] AFP, "Over 700 Detained in Russian Anti-Mobilization Protests – NGO," Moscow Times, September 24, 2022, https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/09/24/over-700-detained-in-russian-anti-mobilization-protests-ngo-a78882; "Over 1,300 Detained as Russians Protest Mobilization," *Moscow Times,* September 22, 2022, https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/09/21/over-1300-detained-as-russians-protest-mobilization-a78859.

[11] AFP, "Russian Filmmaker Gets 3 Years in Prison for Ukraine Posts," Moscow Times, March 20, 2024, https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2024/03/20/russian-filmmaker-gets-3-years-in-prison-for-ukraine-posts-a84552; "Russia Opens Criminal Case Against Journalist Zygar Over 'War Fakes'," Moscow Times, March 13, 2024, https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2024/03/13/russia-opens-criminal-case-against-journalist-zygar-over-war-fakes-a84442; AFP, "Russia Jails Journalist for Criticizing Ukraine Offensive," Moscow Times, March 6, 2024, https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2024/03/06/russia-jails-journalist-for-criticizing-ukraine-offensive-a84358.

[12] "St. Petersburg Woman Arrested for Writing 'No to War' on Voting Ballot," Moscow Times, March 20, 2024, https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2024/03/20/st-petersburg-woman-arrested-for-writing-no-to-war-on-voting-ballot-a84546.

[13] James Beardsworth, "Russian Schoolchildren Return to Classrooms Changed by War," Moscow Times, September 2, 2022, https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/09/02/russian-schoolchildren-return-to-classrooms-changed-by-war-a78706.

military operation' in Ukraine as well as the virtue of 'dying for the motherland.'"[14] The following school year, basic military training was re-introduced into the Russian high school curriculum, with a special emphasis on combat drone flying.[15]

In addition, there has been at least one instance of a parent being deprived of parental rights due to expression of anti-war sentiments. Last year in the town of Yefremov, twelve-year old Masha Moskaleva drew a picture protesting the war in Ukraine.[16] Portraying a mother shielding her daughter from Russian missiles and the words, "No to war," the drawing was hardly subversive material. However, after investigating her father's anti-war comments on social media, the authorities placed him under house arrest and removed Masha to a juvenile detention facility.[17] The government later deprived the father of his parental rights and handed Masha over to her estranged mother.[18]

Since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, individual evangelicals have faced state pressure due to their political views. On October 9, 2023, Forum 18 reported that Baptist Vyacheslav Reznichenko was imprisoned for his refusal to fight in Ukraine "as he belongs to a denomination which forbids the use of weapons."[19] Later that same year, four young Baptist men were denied the opportunity to complete alternative civilian service instead of military service, despite the Russian Constitution's provision for alternative service.[20] In August 2023, Yuri

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[14] Ibid.

[15] "Russian Schoolchildren to Undergo Combat Drone Training," Moscow Times, July 21, 2023, https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2023/07/21/russian-schoolchildren-to-undergo-combat-drone-training-a81920.

[16] "Russian Man Arrested for Daughter's Anti-War Drawing," *Moscow Times*, March 3, 2023, https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2023/03/01/sean-penns-zelensky-doc-substitutes-bromance-for-storytelling-a80371.

[17] "Russian Man Arrested for Daughter's Anti-War Drawing"; "Daughter of Fugitive War Critic Handed Over to Estranged Mother," *Moscow Times*, April 6, 2023, https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2023/04/06/daughter-of-fugitive-war-critic-handed-over-to-estranged-mother-a80733.

[18] "Daughter of Fugitive War Critic Handed Over to Estranged Mother."

[19] Victoria Arnold, "RUSSIA: Four Now Jailed for Refusing to Fight in Ukraine on Religious Grounds," Forum 18, October 9, 2023, https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2865.

[20] Victoria Arnold, "RUSSIA: 'Faith Forbids Him to Take Up Arms, Kill, or Take Oaths'," Forum 18, December 19, 2023, https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2881.

Sipko, the former leader of the Russian Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists, was charged with "slandering the Russian military and posting 'fake news' online about Russian armed forces involved in the invasion of Ukraine."[21] An outspoken critic of the war, Sipko was aware of the likely consequences of this charge and fled the country with his wife.[22] According to Sergey Rakhuba, president of Mission Eurasia, this is not the first time that evangelicals have been threatened by security forces.[23]

The recent terrorist attack on the Moscow Crocus City Hall concert venue is likely to exacerbate the situation. On March 22, 2024, four gunmen opened fire on concert-goers at the Moscow Crocus City Hall concert venue.[24] As of March 28, the *Moscow Times* reported the death of 143 of those present, with another 360 wounded, making this the "deadliest attack in Russia since the 2004 Beslan school siege."[25] By March 26, Russian authorities had detained eleven suspects, while the Islamic State group had claimed responsibility for the attack.[26] In the aftermath of this tragedy, some observers have raised concerns that the Russian government may use this attack to further reduce Russian freedoms.[27]

When combined with the pattern of Russian government activity over the past decade, the Crocus City Hall attack could represent a dangerous turning point in the history of Russian free

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[21] Ken Camp, "Russia Charges Former Baptist Leader with Criminal Slander," Baptist Press, August 23, 2023, https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/russia-charges-former-baptist-leader-with-criminal-slander/.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Scott Barkley, "Russian Persecution of Evangelicals Exceeding That of Soviet Era, Mission Eurasia President Says," Baptist Press, August 23, 2023, https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/russian-persecution-of-evangelicals-exceeding-that-of-soviet-era-mission-eurasia-president-says/.

[24] AFP, "Moscow Concert Attack: What We Know," Moscow Times, March 26, 2024, https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2024/03/26/moscow-concert-attack-what-we-know-a84590.

[25] "Victims of the Crocus City Hall Attack," Moscow Times, March 28, 2024, https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2024/03/28/victims-of-the-crocus-city-hall-attack-a84649.

[26] AFP, "Moscow Concert Attack: What We Know."

[27] "In the Aftermath of the Moscow Concert Hall Attack, is a Harsher Era Under Putin in the Works?" Associated Press, April 4, 2024, https://apnews.com/article/russia-concert-hall-attack-moscow-putin-torture-a59085c6fe690ea55d43d132ea628eb2.

thought. Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the government has used anti-terrorism legislation to punish dissidents and activists.[28] In 2023, the Sova Center found that "an unprecedented 35% of people jailed for making 'extremist statements' were wrongfully convicted."[29] If the Russian government chooses to apply anti-terrorism laws, such as the Yarovaya Law, more strictly, Russian evangelicals could potentially be swept up in the confusion. If applied strictly, the Yarovaya Law could limit the sharing of religious beliefs to areas owned or associated with religious organizations.[30] The only people allowed to share their beliefs would be those with documented authorization.[31] This could make it much more difficult for evangelicals to participate in evangelism efforts or engage with society.

Russian evangelicals are no strangers to state pressure. Ever since the birth of their movement, they have faced state attempts to indoctrinate, silence, and eliminate them. Despite these efforts, they have successfully survived, grown, and flourished. Russian evangelicals would readily acknowledge that the ultimate reason for this preservation has been the sustaining hand of God. However, it is possible that the history of their movement may help evangelicals face any stormy waters ahead. The story of Soviet evangelical youth reveals the challenges and opportunities of living the Christian life amid state persecution. Their mistakes highlight the pitfalls to avoid, while their victories emphasize the goals for which to aim. As Russian evangelicals stride to face the challenges ahead, may they be guided by the victories and mistakes of their past, may they be reminded of the essentials of their faithfulness, and may they

[28] Olga Abramenko, "Russia's Terrorism Laws Target Everyone but the Real Threat," Moscow Times, April 3, 2024, https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2024/04/03/russias-terrorism-laws-target-everyone-but-the-real-threat-a84729.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Arnold, "Putin Signs Sharing Beliefs."

[31] Ibid.

be encouraged to persevere by those who shone before them, “children of God … in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation” (Phil. 2:15).

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title used for this source ("Message on Conscientious Objection…") is attached to a document at https://digitalcollections-baylor.quartexcollections.com/Documents/Detail/message-on-conscientious-objection-from-the-high-council-of-evangelical-christians-to-all-evangelical-christian-communities-and-to-every-evangelical-christian-brother-and-sister-in-the-ussr.-russian-state-archive./1745550 but is probably referring to the document attached to the link listed in this bibliography entry.

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