

BEHIND THE IRON CURTAIN: THE IMPACT OF PERSECUTION
ON EVANGELICAL WORSHIP

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Abstract

Despite detailed accounts of religious persecution faced by evangelicals behind the Iron Curtain, many narratives are incomplete, and therefore, the understanding of the extent persecution impacted the worship of believers is limited. With more Christians today being persecuted for their faith than ever before, it is important for believers in America to understand what happens in the lives of their Christian brothers and sisters when they face persecution. By comparing the religious practices of these evangelicals before, during, and after the lifting of the Iron Curtain, the differences in corporate and individual worship as a result of persecution become evident. Worship that was initially characterized by its fervor, evangelism, and outreach was restricted to the church walls. As a result, discipleship was limited, Christians became inward-focused, and there was a greater concentration on depth of personal spirituality. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, perestroika, and the end of the Cold War, there has been much more religious freedom in the countries where evangelicals were once persecuted for their faith. However, Christians in other parts of the world are still being persecuted in record numbers. By understanding how persecution changed the worship of evangelicals behind the Iron Curtain, Christians in America can know how to better assist these believers, recognize the signs of religious persecution in their own country, and be prepared in case they find themselves in similar circumstances.

Keywords: persecution, Iron Curtain, worship, martyr, communism, Cold War

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

During the Cold War, evangelicals living behind the Iron Curtain faced persecution that was both severe and widespread. It was considered one of history's great religious wars, "a conflict between the god-fearing and the godless."¹ In just one decade of the Cold War that spanned from 1945-1991, it was reported that over twenty-two thousand evangelicals were sent to prison camps in Siberia, many of whom never returned.² These were the numbers for evangelicals only living in Russia, but there were many other countries that were also affected by the spread of communism and its atheistic ideals, including Poland, Eastern Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, and the rest of the Soviet Union. Countries that made up the United Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) during the time of the Cold War were Russia, Belarus, Latvia, Ukraine, Estonia, Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Lithuania, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan. Some of these countries today have either ceased to exist, changed names, or merged with other countries, but mainly for political reasons. The religious persecution, however, was felt in all of the countries under communist control.

The term "Iron Curtain" refers to a geopolitical boundary established by the Soviet Union at the end of World War II in 1945 that lasted until the end of the Cold War in 1991. The term became popular with the speech of Winston Churchill in Fulton, Missouri on March 5, 1946 when he used it as a metaphor to describe the division that was occurring in Europe between

¹ Dianne Kirby, *Religion and the Cold War* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan Press, 2013), 1.

² Andrey Kravtsev, "Russian Baptist Mission Theology in Historical and Contemporary Perspective" (PhD diss., Trinity International University, Deerfield, IL, 2017), 97, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/2027374318?accountid=12085>.

Capitalist West and Communist East.³ For evangelicals in America, however, the Iron Curtain symbolized a religious barrier between communist atheists and other countries that had religious freedom. The communist state had absolute control over all religious establishments, restricting religious education for children and eliminating the church press.⁴ Organizations in countries such as England and the United States were formed to print Bibles and other religious literature and smuggle them behind the Iron Curtain. The first well-known smuggler was a man named Andrew van der Bijl, referred to as “Brother Andrew,” a Dutch factory worker who founded the organization *Open Doors*.⁵ Communist ideologies and Christian theology were incompatible, so churches behind the Iron Curtain that did not comply or cooperate with the Soviet authorities were shut down.

Evangelicals could be found in several different denominations behind the Iron Curtain, but most of them identified with either the Baptists, Pentecostals, Mennonites, Lutheran, or Protestant groups.⁶ These were people who believed in the basic tenets of the Christian faith, including the Gospel and the inerrancy of Scripture, and who emphasized salvation by faith in the atoning work of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary. Religious groups, or “cults” as they were often referred to by government officials, were prohibited by law to engage in public

³ Patrick Wright, *Iron Curtain: From Stage to Cold War* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007), 16.

⁴ Helen B. Shaffer, "Religion Behind the Iron Curtain," in *Editorial Research Reports 1955*, vol. II, 859 (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 1955), <http://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher/cqresrre1955120700>.

⁵ Francis D. Raška, “Bibles for Communist Europe-A Cold War Story-Part I” *Hungarian Review* 6, no. 3 (May 2015): 23, accessed July 16, 2019, http://www.hungarianreview.com/article/20150514_bibles_for_communist_europe_a_cold_war_story_part_1.

⁶ Steve Durasoff, *The Russian Protestants: Evangelicals in the Soviet Union: 1944-1964* (Cranberry, NJ: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1969), 25.

discussion or refute atheist propaganda.⁷ The Law on Religious Associations in the U.S.S.R. required religious groups to register with local authorities. In this way, the state could limit the number of religious organizations, reduce their numbers gradually, and even deny legal status to an entire religious denomination, as was the case in the Ukraine.⁸ Although the Soviet constitution theoretically provided for the separation of church and state, religious groups were not given independent judicial status, and therefore could not own property or inherit funds. They had no right to maintain seminaries or publishing facilities, and the law was structured to prevent the clergy from exercising any effective control over church affairs.

Some denominations, however, fared better than others behind the Iron Curtain. The Russian Orthodox Church, for example, was the single largest religion in the Soviet Union, with an estimated 35-40 million adherents.⁹ As a member of the World Council of Churches, the Russian Orthodox Church was often used by the communist regime to portray to the outside world the existence of religious freedom in the Soviet Union and to support Soviet interests abroad. The Soviet regime often relied on these religious leaders to endorse official policies and to make their anti-religious propaganda more credible. In exchange, the Orthodox Church leaders enjoyed privileges comparable to those of the Soviet elite. However, this came with a heavy price. Their institutional integrity was lost, the church was divided into official and unofficial

⁷ *Religious Persecution in the Soviet Union (Part 2): Hearing on Human Rights and International Organizations, Second Session, Before the Committee on Foreign Affairs House of Representatives, 99th Con.* (1986) (prepared statement of Hon. Edward J. Derwinski, Counselor of the State Department), 7.

⁸ Ivan Shustak, "The Position of the Religious People in the Conditions of Functioning of the Soviet System in the Western Regions of the Ussr in 1950-60," *Skhid*, no. 1 (January 2014): 166. <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=asn&AN=95938638&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

⁹ Constantine Prokhorov, *Russian Baptists and Orthodoxy, 1960-1990* (Carlisle, Cambria, UK: Langham Monographs, 2013), 21.

sectors, and many individuals rejected the church as irredeemably compromised. The official sector of the Russian Orthodox Church maintained the position that the Soviet constitution guaranteed religious freedom, and that religious activists were not being persecuted for their faith, only for violating Soviet law.

Efforts by individual believers to counteract atheist ideology or organize religious activities outside of hierarchy controls came with severe consequences, extending religious persecution to individuals as well as institutions. No evangelistic meetings were allowed,¹⁰ and any religious education of children was considered “corrupting the minds of children.”¹¹ Parents and church leaders who did not comply either had their children taken away to be educated by the state, or were themselves imprisoned. Within six years of the announcement at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956 to indoctrinate the minds of all school-age children, more than 1000 boarding schools were established which enrolled 400,000 pupils.¹² Believers who protested were often sentenced to terms in labor camps, psychiatric hospitals or internal exile. Books such as *God’s Smuggler* by Brother Andrew and Richard Wurmbrand’s *Tortured for Christ* were written as personal accounts of suffering and persecution behind the Iron Curtain. People in the community who were suspected to be Christians, either by their lifestyle or their association with an evangelical church, were often fired from their jobs or ostracized from other political and social organizations.

¹⁰ Walter Bedell Smith, “God Won’t Stay Underground in Russia” *Saturday Evening Post* 222, no. 24 (December 10, 1949): 27, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=f5h&AN=19958802&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

¹¹ Michael Bourdeaux, “Baptists in Russia (Cover Story),” *America* 118, no. 5 (February 3, 1968): 144, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=hsi&AN=35956398&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

¹² Allen Kassof, *The Soviet Youth Program* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), 165-166.

However, the extensive persecution and years of pitting atheists against evangelicals behind the Iron Curtain did not diminish their faith. On the contrary, it effected a large-scale revival, where young people and intellectuals alike were joining the unofficial church in increasing numbers—a fact conceded by Soviet atheist literature.¹³ One Soviet educator, Lunacharski, lamented this fact when he declared, “Religion is like a nail, the harder it is driven into the wood, the deeper it goes.”¹⁴ In quiet confidence, evangelicals developed a sense of hope and anticipation of the return of Christ similar to that found among Southern negroes in slavery in the United States. One pastor commented, “We are grateful to our government for putting us in a position where it costs so much to be a Christian. We thank God for the privilege of living in a land of clear-cut faith. Everybody knows who is a Christian.”¹⁵ Their joy in tribulation was external evidence of the fact that Christ was more real to them than the heinous acts of those who opposed them. Yet, beyond the gratitude and incomprehensible joy, something happened to their worship as a result of persecution that has not been fully explained.

Problem Statement

Despite detailed accounts of religious persecution faced by evangelicals behind the Iron Curtain, many narratives are incomplete, and therefore, the understanding of the extent persecution impacted the worship of believers is limited. There is only a small body of literature specific to worship and persecution, most of which speaks primarily of Soviet control of church activities. One recent study used qualitative measures to explore the aspects of Russian Baptist

¹³ *Religious Persecution in the Soviet Union (Part 2): Hearing on Human Rights and International Organizations, Second Session, Before the Committee on Foreign Affairs House of Representatives, 15.*

¹⁴ Durasoff, *The Russian Protestants: Evangelicals in the Soviet Union: 1944-1964*, 289.

¹⁵ John Charles Pollock, *The Faith of the Russian Evangelicals* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 99.

mission theology that developed during the late-Soviet period of their history. The research findings reflected two distinct theological paradigms in relation to global evangelical missiology: the late Soviet model of escapist pietism versus a holistic, missional evangelicalism.¹⁶ With the communist restriction on any religious activity outside of the church walls, the missional aspect of worship was drastically altered. Because of the theological shift that occurred as a result of persecution, after the fall of the Iron Curtain, Christians in Russia were struggling to reach the lost in their communities for Christ. One author notes, “What we need now are intentional Christian communities that are launch platforms for mission and evangelization.”¹⁷ Missions is only one aspect of worship, but this study indicates that the changes in evangelical worship as a result of persecution were significant, with lasting consequences, both corporate and individual.

Worship that is biblical is not only missional, but it is relational, transformational, formational, and reproducible. Studies on the religious practices alone behind the Iron Curtain will not give a full picture of the effects of persecution on the lives of Christians who lived there. However, examination of the literature related to all aspects of worship in these persecuted countries should yield results that give more clarity to how persecution actually changed the lives of the persecuted believers. Worship itself is not a simple variable to identify, but its strength and influence in the lives of the persecuted church are unmistakable. One author commented about the nature of worship in the lives of Soviet Christians in this way,

The persistence of an independent spiritual life is at once an important and mysterious fact in the Soviet state. It is important because it may one day determine the strength and the character of the Soviet national effort, and its influence on the world. It is mysterious

¹⁶ Kravtsev, "Russian Baptist Mission Theology in Historical and Contemporary Perspective," iv.

¹⁷ John Burger, “George Weigel on Our Turbulent Times and the Way Forward” *Catholic Digest* 83, no. 6 (May 2019): 14 <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=f5h&AN=135947227&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

because it is impelled by forces and governed by laws of its own, which not even the Kremlin understands.¹⁸

Due to the nature of worship itself and its centrality to the life of a believer, it is necessary that studies dealing with the real effects of persecution in the lives of evangelicals behind the Iron Curtain not ignore worship.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative historical study is to provide a holistic understanding of how religious persecution faced by evangelicals behind the Iron Curtain affected their worship. The study seeks to examine existing literature on religious persecution behind the Iron Curtain during the Cold War to determine how persecution changed both the individual and corporate worship of evangelicals living there. Combining the literature from testimonials, documentaries, journals, magazines, and books written during and after the Cold War yielded enough information to clarify the role of worship in the lives of persecuted believers behind the Iron Curtain.

Significance of the Study

This study should be of interest to pastors, missionaries, and Christians in America who want to know the correlation between persecution and worship. Today, there are more Christians suffering for their faith than ever before.¹⁹ By understanding how evangelical worship changed behind the Iron Curtain as a result of persecution, Christians in America can know how to better

¹⁸ Smith, "God Won't Stay Underground in Russia," 132.

¹⁹ Gregory C. Cochran, *Christians in the Crosshairs: Persecution in the Bible and Around the World Today* (Wooster, OH: Weaver Book Company, 2016), 17.

support their Christian brothers and sisters around the world today, and be prepared in case they too suffer persecution one day. An estimated 10 million Christians suffer persecution each year. Although this is a significantly small percentage of the 2 billion people that claim to be Christian today, it is still the largest number of Christians ever being persecuted for their faith. Hebrews 13:3 says, “Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them: and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body” (KJV). These Christians should not be isolated from the rest of the body of Christ. Rather, the Bible says that Christians are to identify with their brothers and sisters in the Lord as if they themselves were suffering persecution. This may not be easy for Christians in America to do, since most of them have never lost their job or the life of a loved one because of their faith in Christ. Yet, it is the responsibility of Christians who live in countries where there is religious freedom to support those who do not. By understanding how persecution affects the worship of a believer, Christians in America can begin to identify with the suffering of their believing family and know how to better support them in their time of need.

If Christians in America do not fully understand how persecution affects worship in the life of a believer, then they will not be prepared to handle persecution themselves if they were to face what thousands of other Christians are dealing with every day. John Burger says, “There is no guarantee about democracy. It takes a critical mass of people living certain virtues to make democracy work. We’re suffering from a serious virtue deficit at the moment.”²⁰ Certainly, there are signs of religious persecution in the United States, but they are still rather insignificant compared to what Christians in other countries are facing as a result of their faith in God. According to a recent study done by the Pew Research Center, about three-fourths of the world’s

²⁰ Burger, “George Weigel on Our Turbulent Times and the Way Forward,” 18.

population lives under a government that has highly restricted religious freedoms.²¹ Of those restrictions, the majority, maybe 75 to 80 percent, are aimed at Christians.²² Studies by sources such as the Vatican, Open Doors, the Pew Research Center, *Commentary*, *Newsweek*, and the *Economist* all confirm that “Christians are the single most widely persecuted religious group in the world today.”²³ Paul also told Timothy in II Timothy 3:12, “All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (NKJV). When and to what extent the persecution will occur may be debatable, but the assertion is undeniable.

Research Questions

Research questions concerning evangelical worship behind the Iron Curtain should address the changes specifically as a result of persecution. The research questions for this study are:

Research Question 1: What were the major characteristics of Christian worship in evangelical churches behind the Iron Curtain during the Cold War?

Research Question 2: In what ways did the persecution of evangelical Christians behind the Iron Curtain during the Cold War impact their worship?

In order to better understand the changes in worship behind the Iron Curtain as a result of persecution, it is necessary first to identify the major characteristics of Christian worship in evangelical churches behind the Iron Curtain during the Cold War. This general overview will

²¹ Pew Forum, “Religious Hostilities Reach a Six-Year High.” Pew Research Center 2014 Annual Report, accessed July 21, 2019, <http://www.pewforum.org/files/2014/01/RestrictionsV-full-report.pdf>.

²² John L. Allen, *The Global War on Christians: Dispatches from the Front Lines of Anti-Christian Persecution* (New York, NY: Image, 2013), 33.

²³ Paul Marshall, Lela Gilbert, and Nina Shea, *Persecuted: The Global Assault on Christians* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2013), 4.

then serve as the foundation when considering the specific affects persecution had on the worship in the lives of evangelicals. The first research question must be addressed in order to understand the degree of spiritual fervor that existed already in the worship of evangelical congregations in spite of persecution in order to determine the basis for research question two. The design of the second question requires an answer that must be specific and can be divided into several sub-answers, each of which can then be elaborated.

Core Concepts

In order to understand the purpose of this study, it is necessary first to clarify some core concepts. The primary concept is that worship is a lifestyle. If worship is defined as a set of religious practices, then this study would be no different than the myriad of research already conducted on religious persecution behind the Iron Curtain. By recognizing worship as an integral part of a Christian's life, an examination from various angles regarding the effects of persecution can be performed. Life-shaping worship affects every area of a person's life. Noel Due says, "Worship lies at the heart of true identity and vocation. It is not something that affects the periphery of human existence, or something that can be confined to one particular venue or time (e.g. the sanctuary between 11:00 and 12:00 on Sundays). It is a whole of life activity."²⁴ When evaluating worship as missional, relational, transformational, formational, and reproducible, in the persecuted church setting, life-changing experiences become more apparent. The persecution numbers are more than statistics, they indicate real life changes that affected the worship lifestyle of every believer who suffered under the hands of the communists.

²⁴ Noel Due, *Created for Worship: From Genesis to Revelation to You* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2009), 34.

Persecution challenges a person's faith like nothing else. One Iron Curtain victim described persecution as a demonstration of the "base, fallen, and vicious condition of mankind apart from God. The baseness of the atheistic influence [of the Soviet state] is not an ideological struggle with believers, but is purposefully designed to destroy them physically."²⁵ All Christians suffer like other human beings from frailties, wars, famine, and other natural disasters, but this is not true persecution. If one is to move beyond these genuine but general causes of suffering to specifically Christian suffering, then persecution is restricted to that which happens to a Christian *because* they are Christian. Greg Cochran says it this way, "Christian suffering is persecution only when it occurs because of the presence of Christ."²⁶ It is exactly that fact that makes persecution so difficult to endure. That is, Christians who believe in the sovereignty of God often have difficulty accepting the fact that it is the presence of Christ within them that is the reason for their persecution. The paradox is that the presence of Christ within them is also the only power strong enough to sustain them through the suffering.

Another core concept for this study deals with the nature of evangelism for evangelicals who are being persecuted. The very name "evangelical" would suggest that evangelism is a core tenet of their faith, but when religious activity is confined to the church walls as it was in the Soviet Union, people lose sight of their evangelical mission. They are just trying to survive. This concept is apparent in the literature of the late Soviet period where Russian Baptists in particular exemplified a model of missiological thinking that was "other-worldly, dualistic, and inward-focused."²⁷ By concentrating on their own individual spiritual concerns, they believed that they

²⁵ Bourdeaux, "Baptists in Russia," 144.

²⁶ Cochran, *Christians in the Crosshairs*, 19.

²⁷ Kravtsev, "Russian Baptist Mission Theology in Historical and Contemporary Perspective," iii.

could use their high moral standards and good work ethic as a non-verbal form of missionary work.²⁸ What perhaps started out as a form of religious piety due to the forced constriction of religious exercises to the confines of the church building may have degenerated over several decades into a pietistic form of escapism. Instead of focusing on evangelism, some Christians were more concerned about the internal organization of the church, church choirs, and building improvements, forgetting that this was not their purpose for being saved.²⁹

Working Hypotheses

The hypotheses that answer the research questions are as follows:

Hypothesis 1: The major characteristics of Christian worship in evangelical churches behind the Iron Curtain during the Cold War were spiritual fervor, resilience, and fellowship.

Although the anti-religious propaganda of the communists behind the Iron Curtain had created a new person, the Soviet, not everyone subscribed to the Marxist-Leninist theory. Soviet officials took extreme measures to restrict the religious practices of the population, but they were still able to express their feelings and emotions even under the harsh conditions of the Soviet system. Ivan Shustak says, “Despite the systematic intervention of the Soviet system in the religious life of the population of the western regions of the USSR, the religious consciousness of the people remained at a high level.”³⁰ They demonstrated a resilience in their worship that was evident even to visitors. When General Smith visited the Cathedral square in Moscow in

²⁸ Alexander Kashirin, "Protestant Minorities in the Soviet Ukraine, 1945–1991" (PhD diss., University of Oregon, Eugene, 2010), 446, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/748974224?accountid=12085>.

²⁹ Kravtsev, "Russian Baptist Mission Theology in Historical and Contemporary Perspective," 171.

³⁰ Shustak, “The Position of the Religious People in the Conditions of Functioning of the Soviet System in the Western Regions of the USSR in 1950-60,” 169.

1949, he expressed how “the [Soviet] party could not evoke even a shadow of the genuine emotion which was stamped on the faces of the thousands of worshipers” he saw that Easter night.³¹ Fellowship was also a major characteristic of their worship. In fact, the Russian word for “worship” is very closely related to the word for “community” or “communication,”³² so there is an idea of inherent fellowship and relationship in the Russian evangelical mind.

Hypothesis 2: Persecution of evangelical Christians behind the Iron Curtain during the Cold War impacted their worship in terms of discipleship, missions, and spiritual depth.

The worship of persecuted evangelicals behind the Iron Curtain was restricted to the church walls, so no evangelical outreach was permitted. Even children who were raised by Christian parents could not be properly discipled because of the lack of religious material and the godless ideologies of the state schools. Shaffer says,

The most acute problems were those raised by the deep conflicts produced in children of Christian homes by the anti-religious orientation of the schools; the limited possibilities for missionary work; the confinement of religious activity within church walls; and the inadequacies of the church press.³³

These were restrictions over decades that had permanent consequences on the worship of evangelicals even within their own homes. Very few families had access to even a portion of the Bible, let alone own an entire copy. Bible smuggling, although covert, was “an organized exchange of information among opponents of communism, and it facilitated the coordination of

³¹ Smith, “God Won’t Stay Underground in Russia,” 27.

³² E. I. Mironova, and V. A. Popov, “Communicative Practices of Evangelical Christian Baptists In the Period 1950-1980-X Years (Example of the Tambov Region)” *Vestnik Sankt-Peterburgskogo Universiteta, Seriya 6: Filosofia, Kulturologia, Politologia, Mezhdunarodnye Otnosenia* 33, no. 3 (September 2017): 371, doi: 10.21638/11701/spbu17.2017.312.

³³ Shaffer, “Religion Behind the Iron Curtain,” 859.

their activities.”³⁴ People in this word-centered culture,³⁵ where the printed word traditionally was one of the main means of communication, were desperate for religious literature, but even the most aggressive Bible-smuggling operations fell far short of meeting the need to foster discipleship, missions, or spiritual growth.

Research Method

A qualitative historical research approach is appropriate for this study because the study is based on the identification, location, evaluation, and synthesis of data from the past, so that these events can be related to the present and future. Creswell calls this “interpretive research.”³⁶ It involves the examination of emerging themes that build inductively from particulars to general, while the researcher makes interpretations of the meaning of the data.³⁷ This is an appropriate design for this study because it involves the examination of how persecution changed the worship of evangelicals behind the Iron Curtain which then allows Christians today to anticipate worship changes if faced with persecution themselves. Historical research in particular is “a continuing dialogue, an endless exploration between generations of historians, between different interpretations of the significance of historical events, and between established opinions and challenges arising from new discoveries about the past.”³⁸ In this study, the core concepts revealed by past events can predict the outcome of present-day and future events.

³⁴ Raška, “Bibles for Communist Europe-A Cold War Story-Part I,” 23.

³⁵ Mironova and Popov, “Communicative Practices of Evangelical Christian Baptists In the Period 1950-1980-X Years (Example of the Tambov Region),” 371.

³⁶ John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 4th edition (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2014), 187.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁸ Edward Hallett Carr, *What is History* (New York, NY: Random House Inc., 1961), 35.

Research Plan

The research plan for this study was to examine the existing literature mainly pertaining to the following two themes: religious persecution in communist countries during the Cold War, and evangelical faith and church practice behind the Iron Curtain. Information will be considered and explored for recurring themes and core concepts. Special attention was given to the nature of worship as missional, relational, transformational, formational, and reproducible, and the impact of persecution on every aspect.

Possible sources from which to draw this information included secular and Christian documentaries, reviews, books, journals, autobiographies, congressional hearings, and other peer-reviewed research. Information obtained in Russian was translated into English in order to be evaluated. A distinction was made between those sources that are primary or secondary and assessed for credibility. Any biases³⁹ of the literature were taken into account considering the large number of denominations in several countries behind the Iron Curtain that would fall beneath the evangelical umbrella.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined to help the reader understand the context of each term in this study:

Atheism: disbelief in the existence of God.⁴⁰

³⁹ Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 162, 202.

⁴⁰ John Jefferson Davis, *Worship and the Reality of God: An Evangelical Theology of Real Presence* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 53.

Cold War: the period between the end of World War II in 1945 and the collapse of the USSR in 1991 characterized by a rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union and their respective allies.⁴¹

Communism: a political ideology developed by Karl Marx that advocates a classless system in which economic equality is achieved through the elimination of private property.⁴²

Evangelical: refers to Christians who emphasize a personal relationship with God, the experience of being spiritually born again, and a call to spread the message of the gospel.⁴³

Iron Curtain: the geopolitical boundary formed in 1945 by a division in Europe separating communist East from capitalist West.⁴⁴

Lifestyle Worship: worship as the core orientation of one's life, the defining feature of one's existence.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Wright, *Iron Curtain: From Stage to Cold War*, 174.

⁴² Kirby, *Religion and the Cold War*, 50.

⁴³ David Wheeler and Vernon M. Whaley, *The Great Commission to Worship: Biblical Principles for Worship-Based Evangelism* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2011), 25.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁴⁵ John MacArthur, *Worship: The Ultimate Priority* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2012), 43.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The religious persecution faced by evangelicals in the Soviet Union during the years of the Cold War has been documented by many different sources. A review of this literature will include a description of the Soviet law regarding religious freedom and the function of the Council for Religious Affairs. The next section will discuss the role of state-registered churches, the struggles of the various churches within and outside of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists, those that refused registration, and how they were influenced by the Russian Orthodox Church. Evangelicals, in particular, and their relationship with local authorities as a result of Khrushchev's antireligious campaign will be the subject of the third section, followed by an examination of both the quantitative and qualitative measures used to limit their religious freedom. This will include not only the seizure of prayer houses, but also the calculated attempts of the Soviet officials to deprive evangelical churches of effective church leadership.

The evangelical youth were particular targets of the Soviet anti-religious agenda, so an entire section of the review will also be dedicated to the specific struggles they faced as believers living behind the Iron Curtain. The believing parents of these children faced many challenges to raising their children under communist rule, as the children themselves were subject to many forms of prejudice and abuse. How the evangelicals reacted to this persecution will be the subject of Chapter Four where the specific changes in worship as a result of persecution will be discussed in light of the research questions and hypotheses. As the Soviet religious policy changed, the communist leadership made concessions that leaned more toward co-existence rather than confrontation with religion, so the literature review concludes with the religious state of evangelicals in the 1980s extending into the perestroika years.

Soviet Law Regarding Religious Freedom

In order to contextualize the experiences of the evangelicals under Soviet control behind the Iron Curtain during the years of the Cold War, it is necessary first to understand the brief period of freedom that preceded the Law on Religious Associations made in 1929. The 1920's in the U.S.S.R. have been referred to as the "golden age" for evangelicals in the Soviet Union.⁴⁶ Lenin's decree of January 23, 1918 had given all citizens the freedom of religious and antireligious propaganda. It was a decree regarding the separation of church and state basically intended as a means of controlling the wealthier State Church, whose administrators lost their government income, and whose parsonages and church buildings became state property. Since most evangelical Christians did not own church buildings or parsonages, these actions did not really hamper their activity. Rather, the work of evangelism over the next ten years increased, spreading the Gospel all around Russia and neighboring countries. The message of salvation reached the far-distant cities of Siberia and central Asia, and the Russian "sectarians," as they were called by the Communists, had a large following.⁴⁷ Bibles were printed and distributed; and in 1924, the Evangelicals in Leningrad opened a Bible school to train presbyters (or elders), as the leaders came to be called, and later a school specifically for preachers in Moscow.⁴⁸ Hundreds of Russian soldiers who had become believers as a result of Bible study groups that had formed while they were incarcerated in German prison camps during the war were trained to become evangelists when they returned home.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Chekalo Prokhorov, "The 'Golden Age' of the Soviet Baptist in the 1920s," in *Eastern European Baptist History: New Perspectives*, ed. Sharyl Corrado and Toivo Pilli (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2008), 92.

⁴⁷ Walter Kolarz, *Religion in the Soviet Union* (London, UK: St. Martin's, 1961), 287.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 288.

⁴⁹ J. H. Hebly, *Protestants in Russia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), 90.

On April 8, 1929, however, Joseph Stalin made a new law dealing with religious societies. A religious society was defined as a local association of believing citizens, over eighteen years of age, consisting of at least twenty members.⁵⁰ These groups were required to apply for registration in order to be acknowledged by the state authorities. They were forbidden to collect funds to help others in their community, to give any type of material help to fellow members, or to organize for the children or young adults any meetings that might appear to be religiously oriented in any way. Whether or not these meetings actually had anything to do with the study of the Bible was immaterial. Even sewing clubs or literature consortiums for the youth were suspect. Beyond that, it was forbidden to organize outings or to maintain playgrounds for children, to establish libraries, reading rooms, or offer any type of medical care. In buildings used for religious meetings, only the books required for that specific religious service were allowed.⁵¹ Also, preachers and other church workers associated with that church could only minister to members in the parochial area where the church was located.

As a result of the 1929 decree, the activities of the Evangelical Christians and Baptists were limited to church worship services. Printing and distributing Bibles and other religious literature had to stop. Magazines were not allowed to be published anymore, and training schools were closed. Evangelism could be carried out only through personal contacts, and any religious activity at the national level was made impossible by the restrictions placed on church leaders. The last congress of the evangelical Christians and Baptists was held in 1930. The years following this were extremely dismal, with numerous arrests, convictions, and banishments.

⁵⁰ Nikita Struve, *Christians in Contemporary Russia* (London, UK: Harvill Press, 1967), 378.

⁵¹ John S. Curtiss, *The Russian Church and the Soviet State 1917-1950* (Gloucestershire, UK: JDF & Associates, 1957), 218.

Many believers also became the victims of direct persecution. Evangelical congregations were decimated, and only a steadfast core remained.

When the German armies invaded Russia on June 22, 1941, the attitude of the Soviet government toward the church began to change quite rapidly. It became necessary for the Soviets to mobilize all of their country's resources in their struggle against this foreign power. The Russians citizens, and especially those who were still actively religious, had to be encouraged to support the Soviet leadership's war effort as a national emergency, and any propensity to regard the invader as a liberator had to be adamantly discouraged. All anti-religious propaganda was temporarily suspended, the magazine of the Union of the Godless no longer appeared, and anti-religious museums were closed.⁵² A new harmony developed between church leaders and Soviet authorities. A church that excelled in patriotism and was skillful at playing a role to secure better relations with foreign countries, emerged on the scene. For many evangelical leaders, these changes meant that they were released from prison to take their former places in church ministry, or were given shorter prison sentences in exchange for an appointment to the Council for Religious Affairs.

The Council for Religious Affairs

On May 19, 1944, Joseph Stalin signed Decree 572 "On the Establishment of the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults."⁵³ The decree charged this newly formed agency with "the task of maintaining communication between the U.S.S.R. government and leaders of the

⁵² Kolarz, *Religion in the Soviet Union*, 290.

⁵³ Michael Bourdeaux, *Religious Ferment in Russia: Protestant Opposition to Soviet Religious Policy* (London, UK: Macmillan Press, 1968), 56.

sectarian faiths.⁵⁴ “Cults,” or sectarian faiths, was the term under which all Protestant denominations were combined. The Council was responsible for the preliminary review of questions raised by the various religious administrative organizations and their leaders dealing with issues that required permission by the U.S.S.R. government. It submitted to the government the resolution of these questions and regularly informed government authorities about the status and activities of the sectarian cults. The Council for Religious Affairs (CRA) also gave a specific account of the churches and prayer houses, compiling statistical data for the Soviet authorities. Article VI of the decree demanded that “all central institutions and departments of the USSR” go through a “preliminary consultation with the CRA before carrying out measures concerning issues related to the religious cults.”⁵⁵ This meant that the CRA could investigate any claims of maladministration against religious groups, with the ability to defend believers from the excesses of unprovoked and unwarranted actions of the Soviet authorities against them, as well as the right to correct injustices done to religious communities and individuals.

Through the formation of the CRA, the Soviet state demonstrated a commitment with contradictory intentions regarding the treatment of religious communities within the legal framework of the U.S.S.R. On the one hand, the CRA could defend individual and corporate sectarian religious rights, and on the other hand, it could effectively limit their impact on mainstream society. By continuously interfering with the internal life of evangelical congregations, the CRA undermined their potential for growth. Alexander Kashirin says the CRA’s ultimate goal was to “reduce them (the evangelicals) to a semblance of old folks’ homes

⁵⁴ “V Sovet po Delam Religioznykh Kul’tov” [To the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults], *The Archives of the Russian Union of the Evangelical Christians-Baptists* (Moscow, Russia), F.1, op. 2pd, d. 15, 1958.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, F.1, op. 2pd, d. 16.

in which a dwindling number of aging nominal Christians harmlessly paid tribute to the rapidly disappearing phenomenon of religion.”⁵⁶ In the practical work of the agency, the boundaries between what was legal or illegal were often blurred. There was a fine line between persuasion and coercion that could depend on the mere tone of a particular government instruction or the personal temperament of a government employee.⁵⁷

The CRA was established as a civilian organization answerable to the main Soviet governmental corpus, but many evangelicals viewed it as an extension of the dreaded KGB. The Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti (KGB), was the primary security agency of the Soviet Union. Its precursor, the NKGB, was established by Joseph Stalin during World War II as a military intelligence agency functioning as a type of “secret police.”⁵⁸ Scholars of state-church relations in the U.S.S.R. have repeatedly raised questions about the functions of the CRA and its role in the formation of the Soviet policy on religion. Walter Sawatsky wrote, “Although the creation of the CRA was announced almost immediately after World War II, its powers remained shrouded in mystery for decades.”⁵⁹ Most of the information about the CRA that was available to Cold War Era historians came from the study of western scholars when they came into possession of the notorious “Furov Report.”⁶⁰ Although this report shed some light on the inner

⁵⁶ Kashirin, "Protestant Minorities in the Soviet Ukraine, 1945–1991," 30.

⁵⁷ Serge Bolshakoff, *Russian Nonconformity: The Story of “Unofficial” Religion in Russia* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1950), 72.

⁵⁸ Victoria Barnett, *For the Soul of the People* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1992), 155.

⁵⁹ Walter Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals since World War II* (Kitchener, Ontario: Herald Press, 1981), 59.

⁶⁰ John Anderson, “The Council for Religious Affairs and the Shaping of Soviet Religious Policy,” *Soviet Studies* 43, no. 4 (April 1991): 22, https://www.jstor.org/stable/152299?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents.

workings of the CRA, mainly its interference in the internal life of religious organizations, the date, composition, and authenticity of the document were in question.⁶¹

The KGB managed a tremendous databank containing information on a believer's background, location, education, occupation, employment, etc., and it also reported to the highest party officials on the religious situation in the country. The main difference between the KGB and the CRA is that the KGB did not concern itself as much with the internal processes in religious organizations, but mostly with the quantitative analysis and involvement of religious leaders with the German occupation authorities during the war.⁶² However, the Soviet government continued to rely on KGB services to be informed, and the CRA often involved the KGB in the collection of information on believers. Between the CRA, the KGB, and local Soviet authorities, believers often did not know whose orders to consider final or more authoritative, so it was very difficult for them to remain compliant with the law. Also, many of the local Soviet authorities were ignorant of the differences between the various legal and illegal aspects of religious activity, but were eager to take action against believers without any preliminary consultation with the CRA.⁶³

Cooperation within the various levels of the Soviet Union's governmental hierarchy as a means of reinforcing the authority of the CRA was ineffective, and the Council's unclearly defined role within the Soviet administrative bureaucracy hampered its ability to successfully supervise and coordinate the activity of its subordinate institutions. The CRA was inefficient

⁶¹ Raymond Oppenheim, "Are the Furov Reports Authentic?" in *Church, Nation and State in Russia and Ukraine*, ed. Geoffrey A. Hosking (London, UK: Macmillan Press, 1991), 291.

⁶² A. J. Strover, *Religion and the Search for New Ideals in the USSR* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 79.

⁶³ Kolarz, *Religion in the Soviet Union*, 261.

when it came to correcting the abuses of believers or violations of legislation on cults committed by its own affiliate organizations. This was most likely the result of the government's conflicting and ambiguous policy of simultaneously legalizing yet contending with religion. The legalization supposedly granted certain liberties to religious institutions, yet from the Soviet government's point of view, religion continued to be a competitive system of belief. It was the proverbial "opium of the people" that could not peacefully coexist with the dominant Marxist-Leninist ideology, and had to be combated by all means.⁶⁴ In the postwar decades, the Soviet government tried to resolve this paradox by keeping thousands of religious communities (the opium addicts) legal, while at the same time severely restricting their access to religion (the opium). The effectiveness of the restrictive Soviet legislation to limit religious activity was often determined by the authority of the Soviet agencies at the local level, that is, precisely by those agencies that were least prepared to recognize or uphold the legal rights of believers.

Khrushchev's Empowerment of Local Authorities

On March 16, 1961, Khrushchev issued Decree Number 263 "On Intensification of Control over the Observance of Legislation on Cults." The decree made "the local Soviet organs responsible for the provision of strict control over the fulfillment of legislation on cults and the timely implementation of measures towards liquidation of violations of this legislation by clergy and religious organizations."⁶⁵ Essentially, the decree handed the religious communities over to the mercy of the same inexperienced and legally ignorant local officials whose irresponsible

⁶⁴ Michael Bourdeaux, *Opium of the People: The Christian Religion in the USSR* (London, UK: Macmillan Press, 1965), 159.

⁶⁵ "O Religii I Tserkvi: Sbornik Dokumentov" [On Religion and Church: Collected Documents], *The Archives of the Russian Union of the Evangelical Christians-Baptists* (Moscow, Russia), F.4, op. 3pd, d. 9, 1958.

actions were the basis for many of the believer's complaints of religious legal rights violations to begin with. The local officials quickly formed commissions in every city, village, and kolkhoz to monitor the religious activity of the local communities. This included a scrutiny of the intention of a pastor's sermons and an analysis of their methods of working with the youth. They closely monitored the contingent of those who visited churches and prayer meetings, including choir members, in order to detect any non-registered, illegally functioning sectarian groups, their leaders or activists.⁶⁶ They basically looked for any excuse to close a prayer house, bring charges against capable religious leaders, antagonize parents of religious youth, and terrorize or blackmail the more feeble believers into quitting religion altogether.

Khrushchev's decree only made official what was already happening in practice at the local level. The local authorities had previously taken matters into their own hands and had little interest in following the directives of the CRA. The government's sporadic attacks on religion were triggered not so much by an increase in legislative violations by religious communities, but by their annoyance of the very fact of believers' existence.⁶⁷ The Soviet state officials were inclined to see the mere perseverance of religious communities and their ability to successfully circumnavigate the government policy of gradual reduction of religion as blatant violations of the legislation on cults. Instead of admitting that its policy was defective, state authorities believed that by subjecting religious communities to periodic crackdowns on religious practices, with all of their associated scare tactics, it could somehow reduce the number of believers without any long-term suspension of the notion of legality.⁶⁸ Furthermore, by delegating the task

⁶⁶ Kolarz, *Religion in the Soviet Union*, 269.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 272.

⁶⁸ Herbert Schlossberg, *A Fragrance of Oppression: The Church and Its Persecutors* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991), 112.

of combating religion to local authorities without establishing a feasible and functional chain of command, the government could easily clear itself of any responsibility for abuses committed against believers by laying the blame on the overzealous and disruptive local officials. The government could make people believe it was the “guardian of socialist legality”⁶⁹ while making the low-ranking officials the culprits who misconstrued and perverted the original government idea.

The decision-making authority of state officials in the U.S.S.R. regarding religious activity was not unrestricted, but it would be difficult to argue that freedom of conscience and belief existed in the Soviet Union in a normative sense. The degree of government interference in the life of religious communities often depended on subjective factors such as a state official’s personal qualities or their own interpretation of the state agenda concerning religion.⁷⁰ The government could also modify its antireligious agenda based on the community’s location in the U.S.S.R. and the government’s broader geopolitical goals. For example, Soviet authorities tended to be more lenient in the recently annexed Western Ukraine and harsher in the industrial and more eastern parts of Russia.⁷¹ The treatment of believers also varied according to the type of religious community to which they belonged. Of all the religious sects, Baptist and Adventists fared significantly better than Greek-Catholics or Jehovah’s Witnesses.⁷² In summary, the original agenda of reducing religion through legal constraints and exposure to atheist propaganda

⁶⁹ Bourdeaux, *Religious Ferment in Russia: Protestant Opposition to Soviet Religious Policy*, 19.

⁷⁰ Geoffrey Hosking, *The First Socialist Society: A History of the Soviet Union from Within* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 75.

⁷¹ Dmitry Pospelovsky, *A History of Soviet Atheism in Theory and Practice, and the Believer* (London, UK: Macmillan Press, 1988), 183.

⁷² John Keane, ed., *The Power of the Powerless: Citizens Against the State in Central-Eastern Europe* (New York, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1985), 16.

of the 1940s and 1950s was advanced in the 1960s and 1970s by concerted crackdowns on religious groups, although the law also protected their existence. Soviet law allowed religious communities to maintain a noticeable presence throughout the Soviet Union, and provided believers with the legal framework they could theoretically use to ensure their religious communities' survival.

State-Registered Churches

The All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (AUCECB)

The success of the Soviet government's establishment of the Council for Religious Affairs was dependent on its relationship with state-registered churches. While maintaining its long-term goal of the "withering away" of religion, the Soviet state proposed a new cooperative relationship with religious communities, and for that purpose, it needed organizational structures in each denomination that would facilitate the transmission of state policy. Therefore, the Soviet government revived the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (AUCECB) which had existed previously in the 1920s. This revived organization authentically responded to believers' desire for legal recognition after a decade and a half of repression, but at a cost. With state-appointed rather than democratically elected leaders, the AUCECB was expected to serve the Soviet state's ends of monitoring religious communities and implementing state policy.

The members of the AUCECB were placed in a very difficult position. To carry out their official mandate was to risk alienating believers, while to ignore it could force believers back to the perilous underground existence of evangelicals in the 1930s.⁷³ To a considerable degree, the history of evangelicals in the Soviet Union during the years of the Cold War was the product of

⁷³ Kolarz, *Religion in the Soviet Union* (London, UK: St. Martin's, 1961), 201.

two opposing drives: the movement of the state to integrate believers into the system through coercion and re-education, and the internal resistance within religious communities toward anything that would compromise their doctrinal purity. This struggle was expressed most vividly in the schismatic movements of the AUCECB. The challenge was similar to what was faced by Protestants living under the control of the Third Reich. Roland Blaich's characterization of the dilemma faced by members of the AUCECB was like being "caught in a three-way tug between God, the state, and the church."⁷⁴ The AUCECB opted for its church's security and legal existence while endorsing government regulations that were considered anti-evangelical by many believers. Leaders of the AUCECB also tended to assume powers beyond those traditionally entrusted by evangelicals to their spiritual leadership to make decisions on their behalf.⁷⁵ These abuses provoked a reform movement within the AUCECB that challenged its authority as well as its legitimacy. With the state assisting the cooperative appointed leaders and persecuting the reformers, a schism was unavoidable. What began initially as an internal church movement for purification soon developed into a political movement for the freedom of conscience within the U.S.S.R.⁷⁶

The AUCECB was to unite in one organization all the various denominations of evangelical Christians living in the territory of the Soviet Union. The Soviet government hoped with its new plan of legalized religion to have the cooperation of all the evangelical communities without any external pressure. However, the government did not anticipate the problems that would come when trying to establish this new system of control. Believers felt they were being

⁷⁴ Roland Blaich, "Religion under National Socialism: The Case of the German Adventist Church," *Central European History* 26, no. 3 (March 1993): 260.

⁷⁵ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 151.

⁷⁶ Philip Boobbyer, *Conscience, Dissent and Reform in Soviet Russia* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2005), 2.

asked to surrender their religious identity in order to become agents of a post-totalitarian network.⁷⁷ Vaclav Havel spoke of this new form of domination as “post-totalitarian” because it could “no longer base itself on the unadulterated, brutal, and arbitrary application of power.”⁷⁸

Instead, he wrote:

...it draws everyone into its sphere of power, not so that they may realize themselves as human beings, but so they may surrender their human identity in favor of the identity of the system, that is, so they may become agents of the system’s general automatism and servants of its self-determined goals.⁷⁹

Evangelicals who participated with the AUCECB’s new system of control established by their involvement a new standard, one to which their fellow believers felt obliged to conform. With no outside influence, evangelical participants came to treat any other believers’ dissociation with the AUCECB as an abnormality, arrogance, anti-social, or as an affront to the other members. By pulling all of the evangelicals into its power structure, the AUCECB network made everyone instruments of a mutual totality.

The Soviet post-totalitarian model of religious organization depended to a large degree on a network of self-surveillance and the collective responsibility held by a substantial number of clergy and evangelical believers. Involvement in this network slowly eroded the believers’ sense of identification with their own religious communities.⁸⁰ The more they were compelled by their collaboration with the state, the less likely they were to tolerate manifestations of non-conformism in their own religious community. Both the state leadership of the CRA and the

⁷⁷ Anna Dickinson, “Domestic and Foreign Policy Considerations and the Origins of Post-war Soviet Church-State Relations, 1941-6,” in *Religion and the Cold War*, ed. Dianne Kirby (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan Press, 2013), 23.

⁷⁸ Keane, ed., *The Power of the Powerless: Citizens Against the State in Central-Eastern Europe*, 23.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 36-37.

⁸⁰ Bolshakoff, *Russian Nonconformity: The Story of “Unofficial” Religion in Russia*, 91.

ecclesiastical leadership of the AUCECB closely cooperated in matters of controlling religion from within. Otto Luchterhandt commented about the Council's general goal that it "stood unshakably solid" and involved "the general weakening and final destruction of the very organization [religious community] which alone removed itself from total, complete integration into the totalitarian ideological state."⁸¹ Often ordinary believers were the primary suppliers of information about religious communities to the state and ecclesiastical agencies.

Several religious communities resisted integration into the AUCECB, but the Soviet state did not actually plan the final destruction of religious communities; rather, it hoped that the "withering away" of religion would occur naturally as a result of gradual integration of religious communities into the general auto-totally of the Soviet system. As religious leaders at the union and state levels, senior presbyters, ministers, and church members began enforcing in their religious communities the state's idea of what a model community or what a model believer should be, they added to the existing network of "micro-powers" and became "weapons, relays, and communication routes and supports" for the Soviet ideology.⁸² The Soviet state gradually drew more and more believers into this ritualized collaboration, always portraying these people as law-abiding and patriotic citizens. In return, the state effectively turned these believers into active components of its power and used them as "the principal instruments of ritual communication within the system of power."⁸³ In Havel's words, the state power "does not rely on soldiers of its own, but on the soldiers of the enemy...that is to say, on everyone who is living

⁸¹ Otto Luchterhandt, "The Council for Religious Affairs," in *Religious Policy in the Soviet Union*, ed. Sabrina Ramet (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 60.

⁸² Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1995), 28.

⁸³ Keane, ed., *The Power of the Powerless: Citizens Against the State in Central-Eastern Europe*, 27.

within the lie.”⁸⁴ Morally, this “living within the lie” could not go on unchecked, and it provoked dissent movements within evangelical communities, driven by the desire of those who wanted to live within the truth.

Influence of the Russian Orthodox Church

At the same time as the formation of the CRA, Joseph Stalin established the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church (CAROC). The Russian Orthodox Church was the religion of the Russian nationalists, although they too had suffered intense persecution in the 1930s. The Russian Orthodox Church had roughly 80,000 churches and other related buildings, including monasteries, seminaries, academies, parish schools, etc., at the beginning of the decade. By 1941, however, only 3,000 churches remained open, and 95% of Russia’s priests had vanished.⁸⁵ The extent of the tragedy that affected the various religious communities during the 1930s was part of a larger Soviet holocaust that comprehensively tormented priests, pastors, scientists, army generals, and ordinary peasants alike. All were indiscriminately subject to fabricated charges of anti-Soviet activity or propaganda under the infamous Article 58.⁸⁶ However, the price they paid for their religious convictions could have been much higher if it had not been for a rather abrupt change of direction that occurred as a result of another colossal ordeal, World War II.

Stalin’s sudden renewal of religion during the war first became evident by the practical disappearance of antireligious language from Soviet public announcements. Although the Allies

⁸⁴ Keane, ed., *The Power of the Powerless: Citizens Against the State in Central-Eastern Europe*, 42.

⁸⁵ Pospelovsky, *A History of Soviet Atheism in Theory and Practice, and the Believer*, 120.

⁸⁶ Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals since World War II*, 62.

supposedly mentioned to Stalin during a wartime conference that “believers in the U.S.S.R. (both the Orthodox and Protestants) were still illegal and persecuted for their religious convictions,” they were not prohibited from holding prayer services.⁸⁷ It is clear, however, that this sudden shift in Stalin’s treatment of religion did not indicate that the Soviet atheist ideology had changed to the point that the Soviets now embraced co-existence with religion as theoretically possible.⁸⁸ Stalin’s decision to renew and revitalize religion was determined primarily by wartime demands; it was a propagandist move to mend the Soviet image abroad and help the Allied governments to ensure public support in their countries for the Soviets’ war effort. The Russian Orthodox Church was the face of religious freedom to the outside world, and Stalin wanted to create favorable conditions for them in pursuit of the Soviet long-term geopolitical objectives after the war.

Stalin realized that in order for the war to be won, it had to become a holy war for the Soviet people, and that the church was just the kind of institution that could bring this powerful religious dimension into the Soviet war endeavors. Steven Miner wrote, “Soviet religious propaganda worked because so many people wanted to believe that time and the war would change the nature of Soviet power, and that the alliance with the Western powers would erode the hard edges of Communism.”⁸⁹ Although only a tactical shift at the time, Stalin’s decision to encourage religious support soon acquired theoretical justification that ensured religion’s legal status for the remainder of the Soviet era. In exchange for their patriotic support, the leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church were moved almost immediately from virtually house arrest

⁸⁷ Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals since World War II*, 64.

⁸⁸ Steven M. Miner, *Stalin’s Holy War: Religion, Nationalism, and Alliance Politics, 1941-1945* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 86.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 87.

conditions to the center of international attention. It was necessary for Stalin to provide the Russian Orthodox Church with a certain prestige in the eyes of the international community in order to establish close contacts with influential religious and clerical organizations in England, the United States, and Canada. F.D. Roosevelt, for instance, was a very religious person who was not indifferent to the plight of the church and believers in the Soviet Union.⁹⁰ The resurgence of the Russian Orthodox Church could certainly fuel the Western Allies' hopes that the U.S.S.R. might assume a friendlier stance toward them after the war.

The Soviet government also planned to use the Russian Orthodox Church within the country as a supplementary mechanism of control over the general masses of Soviet citizens, and to use both its relationship with the ROC's central leadership and the ROC's organizational structure as models for building relationships with leaders of other religious groups. Since the overwhelming majority of the religiously inclined citizens in the Soviet Union confessed to being Russian Orthodox, the Russian Orthodox Church had a tremendous political influence in the country, although they never claimed to be a political power. The hierarchical organizational structure of the Russian Orthodox Church was such that its internal life could be controlled and regulated with greater flexibility and effectiveness.⁹¹ The Soviet state's middle of the war rehabilitation of the church, therefore, pursued two practical long-term objectives—to boost the U.S.S.R.'s prestige internationally, and to provide for a more effective control of the population domestically.

⁹⁰ Anderson, "The Council for Religious Affairs and the Shaping of Soviet Religious Policy," 25.

⁹¹ Walter LaFeber, *America, Russia, and the Cold War, 1945-2002* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 2002), 7.

Evangelicals and Local Authorities

Although religion was re-legalized in the U.S.S.R. during World War II, the specific plight of evangelicals in the decades following the war was primarily influenced by the negative assumptions about religion, religious people, and especially sectarians, that the government strongly propagated. The communist society was skillfully taught to perceive religion as backward, and evangelicals as social misfits. The Russian Orthodox Church may have been regarded merely as a vestige of the antiquated mindset of the late nineteenth century, lingering on due to being anchored in deep-rooted indigenous Slavic culture,⁹² but the evangelicals' endurance and ability to adapt to harsh conditions was much more irritating and threatening to the Soviet's agenda. Especially with the advancements in science and society, religion was expected to lose its public appeal and eventually vanish. Soviet leaders assumed that religious belief would yield to human reasoning and education. In actuality, however, the educational model of the secularization of Soviet society was more inclined to exhibit elements of forceful re-education. The forms of antireligious propaganda became progressively cruder as education was substituted for coercion, threats, blackmail, demonization, and blatant administrative bullying.

Victims of Prejudice

Acts of intimidation and violence were an everyday part of believers' lives and occurred frequently in countries behind the Iron Curtain. For example, in one village called Semenovka of the Kiev region, a district militia officer appeared in the prayer house of the local community,

⁹² Ludmila Alexeyeva and Paul Goldberg, *The Thaw Generation: Coming of Age in the Post-Stalin Era* (Pittsburg, PA: University of Pittsburg Press, 1990), 22.

shouting and firing his revolver. Gathering up their hymnals and religious books, the officer ordered them to be locked up in the kolkhoz, or collective farm, storeroom. He then demanded that the minister and the owner of the house in which the prayer service took place sit on the ground outside next to the house. Yelling and pointing his revolver at them, he threatened to shoot them for counterrevolution.⁹³ Narratives such as this were common in the reports of the AUCECB, and although investigations into these complaints may have been initiated, the local church leadership received little to no information about the results of them.

To exacerbate the situation, the government kept believers ignorant of their legal rights in the 1940s-1960s by allowing only the Council's Upolnomochennye, or district leadership, access to the official text of the Soviet legislation on religious cults.⁹⁴ Also, the Council for Religious Affairs and the local Soviet officials often declined any believers' requests to provide them with legal documentation stating the grounds on which a certain action was being taken against them. There was no place where evangelicals could seek any independent legal advice or a court whereby the unconstitutionality of hostile actions against them could be contested. The problems seemed to be the worst in rural areas where local Soviet officials often distorted the Soviet legislation beyond recognition or ignored it altogether. James Warhola called this the "phenomenon of vertical, downward magnification of Moscow's antireligious policies."⁹⁵ Although even the most naive or legally unaware believers wrote vehement protests against what they perceived as violations of their legal rights, they often had little choice but to succumb to the pseudo-legal pretexts for harassment conjured up by the local officials.

⁹³ Paul Froese, *The Plot to Kill God: Findings from the Soviet Experiment in Secularization* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008), 41-43.

⁹⁴ Froese, *The Plot to Kill God: Findings from the Soviet Experiment in Secularization*, 44.

⁹⁵ James W. Warhola, "Central vs. Local Authority in Soviet Religious Affairs," *Journal of Church and State* 34, no. 1 (Winter 1992): 17.

There is little evidence confirming whether or not the CRA or the district communist leaders encouraged or condoned the harsh methods used by the local officials on believers. This fact suggests that these tactics may have been based more on the personal prejudices of some local officials against anything that did not fit in with either their ignorance or their own interpretation of the official state policy on religion. Most of the local Soviet officials who beleaguered evangelical believers during this time were either survivors of the 1930s or people whose character was shaped by their recent experiences of fighting in the war. Soviet popular literature described the former officers as heroes because they “transferred their zeal from the frontlines to pursue the ardent task of post-war reconstruction.”⁹⁶ However, in relation to their government-appointed civilian jobs, the officers’ problem-solving skills demonstrated frontline assertiveness that was often displayed in the mistreatment of anyone who dared to disagree with them. Reflecting on this Red Army typical technique of persuasion, Walter Sawatsky wrote:

Face-thrashing among Generals as well as among all lower ranks of the Red Army was as common as theft and drunkenness...If a corps commander pummeled the face of a division commander, the beat-up commander summoned the regiment commanders and took out his anger on them. The face-pummeling descended from the top to the very bottom.⁹⁷

Resorting to this use of force was considered culturally acceptable for the army officers who became local officials. The general disregard for both human dignity and legal procedures was simply an extension of their military methods of command and control to civilian life.

Like the majority of Soviet citizens, many evangelicals, who themselves had served in the Soviet army and borne the brunt of wartime sacrifices, hoped that in the postwar years they

⁹⁶ Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War: The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 49.

⁹⁷ Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals since World War II*, 71.

would be able to benefit from their service to the country by acquiring a more respected and legitimate place in society. The communist government, however, claimed the soldiers' victory as their own and used it as another reason to justify the legitimacy of the Soviet regime. With this newly confirmed authority, there was no space for individuality, spontaneity, or the feeling of companionship that had held the different sectors of Soviet society together during the war. A study of the formation of postwar ruling elites in the U.S.S.R. by Amir Weiner showed that "the myth of the war defined criteria for legitimate membership in and exclusion from the Soviet family."⁹⁸ A person's level in society and entitlement to rationed benefits or any privileges that a country battered by war could offer depended on one's ability to prove his or her willingness to embrace the Communist Party's ideology as the new official patriotism. This pretext of patriotism was used to condemn and exclude all kinds of dissidents in the years that followed as Soviet officials promoted the dominant ideology in order to secure good rapport with the totalitarian state.

Evangelical communities were especially targeted when local Soviet officials were required to meet state-imposed subscription quotas during the State Bond drives after the war. Rather than spending the time and effort necessary to expand the social base of state bonds purchasers or concentrating more on educating the public about the purpose and necessity of this campaign as a means of improving the postwar Soviet economy, the local authorities resorted to means that would fulfill the state quotas much quicker. Operating under the assumption that religious communities were generally more wealthy than average citizens, local officials forced believers to purchase state bonds twice, first as state employees and then as members of religious communities. Evidence suggests that the government officials specifically singled out believers

⁹⁸ Weiner, *Making Sense of War: The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution*, 50.

and religious communities as targets for illegal extortion.⁹⁹ Antireligious advocates in the localities also plotted new ways to harass believers such as unfair taxation, arsons, and other forms of coercion. In the village Sokolovochka, local authorities claimed they were given the right by their chairman to “check on” and “agitate” the religious community. While one leader thought that cutting off electricity and radio to the prayer house was an effective way to agitate the believers, the secretary of the village party organization disturbed believers with “the smoke of his cigarettes and a threat of resurrecting the sanguine ghosts of the 1930s.”¹⁰⁰ Regardless of the tactic, the methods employed by local authorities to intimidate believers not only disrupted the life of evangelicals but also fostered antagonism toward them by other non-believers in their local community.

Khrushchev’s Antireligious Campaign

Khrushchev’s poorly devised plan of mobilizing Soviet society to the task of combating religion, with its lack of consistency and incompetent regulatory procedures, effectively suspended the existing sectarian legislation and generated some of the worst abuses of believers. The coarse mannerisms which distinguished Khrushchev’s own public behavior and pronouncements, from his infamous shoe banging at the United Nations to his deplorable treatment of Soviet liberal writers and artists,¹⁰¹ set the example for many of his subordinates who were similarly predisposed. Many elderly believers living today in the former U.S.S.R. can still distinctly recall the pledge Khrushchev made in 1961 during a public speech on television,

⁹⁹ Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals since World War II*, 65.

¹⁰⁰ Weiner, *Making Sense of War: The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution*, 53.

¹⁰¹ William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), 588-590.

“I promise that soon we will show you the last priest on television.” Alexeyeva pointed out a similar proclamation made by Khrushchev closer to the end of his political career: “In 1980 [the deadline for the construction of Communism in the U.S.S.R.] I will show you the last priest.”¹⁰² Khrushchev viewed religion as an intolerable obstacle to communism, and his remarks certainly incited the hopes of social climbing local and regional party officials, many of whom were already predisposed to view the postwar shift toward legalizing religion as only a temporary distraction.

Khrushchev had a natural tendency for using administrative methods, although in his antireligious campaign, he repeatedly criticized these methods and urged educational methods instead.¹⁰³ In the resultant confusion that followed, many of Khrushchev’s party leaders interpreted his confrontational verbiage as the annulment of legal terms protecting the rights of believers, and then communicated this altered notion to their underlings. Many regional Soviet leaders, already overwhelmed with the formidable job of rebuilding the local postwar economy, considered the antireligious agenda not so important. The government’s insistence that this agenda be given a higher priority often frustrated the encumbered local administrators who were often preoccupied by trying to meet the deadlines for other governmental procurement quotas. Incapable of securing adequate resources and giving sufficient attention to antireligious propaganda, the local officials routinely resorted to coercive administrative methods as the most efficient way for solving the problem of religion in their area.

Rather than purging the Soviet territories of the last remnants of religious worldview, the Khrushchev campaign actually intensified believers’ religious convictions, raised their legal

¹⁰² Alexeyeva and Goldberg, *The Thaw Generation: Coming of Age in the Post-Stalin Era*, 119.

¹⁰³ Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era*, 592.

awareness, promoted the cause of non-conformists, and effectually alienated from the Soviet government many registered communities that were originally in compliance with the conditions of legal existence in the Republic. An increasing number of disillusioned religious communities resorted to covert, underground activities as a means of survival. By arbitrarily assaulting the legally registered and compliant religious communities, the state weakened its own foundation for control within the realm of religion.¹⁰⁴ Religious communities that went underground were no longer on the books, so they could not be effectively monitored, and they were often irretrievably placed out of reach of the Soviet atheistic agenda.

Local authorities repeatedly reminded their superiors that regulating or directing the activity of the evangelical underground was unfeasible, and that coercive governmental methods fostering the development of this problematic network were obviously thwarting the achievement of their intended goals. Religious communities that had a registered prayer house could not legally deny the entrance of any government official. The CRA could also monitor the activities of registered religious groups by requiring regular meetings with their spiritual leaders. However, a secret assembly of Christians at an individual's home posed a problem even for the legally dishonest local authorities. According to Soviet law, going into a private home or apartment required a search warrant.¹⁰⁵ Although local officials often disregarded such bureaucratic procedures, a homeowner who was cognizant of the law could legally refuse their invasion. Believers who were legally registered through their religious community were frequently nervous about facing reprimands for activity that could be considered outside of their legal confines, or about losing their legal status altogether. In contrast, the underground believers

¹⁰⁴ Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals since World War II*, 66.

¹⁰⁵ Warhola, "Central vs. Local Authority in Soviet Religious Affairs," 19.

had no privileges to guard. They were quick to publicly make their grievances known both nationally and internationally, often pressing the Soviet government to pay the high cost of counterpropaganda.

Khrushchev promoted his antireligious campaign not through the use of publicly visible methods, but by discreetly applying pressure on the various denominational church leaders to assimilate into the state mechanism of control and repression of religion. His antireligious propaganda was directed more towards progress that would endure in the future rather than immediate social transformation.¹⁰⁶ His decrees demonstrated that the undertaking of eliminating religion was a continuing endeavor requiring persistent persuasion and methodical education as its main instruments for implementation. In his decree, “On Errors in the Conduct of Scientific-Atheist Propaganda among the Populace,” he stated, “Profound, patient and properly conceived scientific and atheistic propaganda among believers will help them ultimately to free themselves from their religious errors.”¹⁰⁷ He reiterated that any measure of unpleasant administrative actions or aggressive provocation of believers or clergy could only hinder the atheist cause by strengthening and even reinforcing their religious convictions.

Ultimately, Khrushchev’s approach to propagating his antireligious agenda trivialized atheism by making it one of the Soviet regime’s ideological props. The longer atheism functioned in this way, the more it weakened its own attractiveness for intelligent theorists. Marxist-Leninist ideology criticized religion as an “ideological buttress of the exploiting classes,” but the persistence of religion in a classless society proved this supposition was

¹⁰⁶ Daniel Peris, *Storming the Heavens: The Soviet League of the Militant Godless* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 222.

¹⁰⁷ Shustak, “The Position of the Religious People in the Conditions of Functioning of the Soviet System in the Western Regions of the USSR in 1950-60,” 170.

erroneous.¹⁰⁸ Most Soviet evangelicals, besides being serious and regular students of the Bible, held to their religious beliefs regardless of the persecution they faced. They were also not ignorant of the fact that their convictions would subject them lifelong prejudice and mockery, as well as deprive them of many educational and career opportunities. For the atheist campaigners, however, their beliefs cost them nothing. They were usually just part of the status quo, adopting atheism as simply part of the package that came with Marxist-Leninist ideology.¹⁰⁹ Khrushchev's antireligious campaign destabilized atheism's alleged scientific basis by impeding all chances for legitimate discussion and by regarding atheism as a truism rather than a theory that needed to be proven. Eventually, this anti-scientific arrogance regarding atheism alienated the cleverer scholars and played a significant role in the Soviet party's final deterioration.

Quantitative and Qualitative Reductions

During the seventeen years that Khrushchev exercised his antireligious methods, the Soviet government was able to shut down approximately 850 officially registered evangelical communities. This was almost a forty percent reduction in the number of Protestant congregations across the U.S.S.R.¹¹⁰ The Russian Orthodox Church was equally affected by this diminution, forfeiting 3,146 churches during this time.¹¹¹ These numbers may be misleading, however, because many of the evangelical communities that were formerly registered and had their registrations revoked continued to function illegally underground. Also, although the numbers indicate the quantity of churches was reduced, the attendance of the religious

¹⁰⁸ Pospelovsky, *A History of Soviet Atheism in Theory and Practice, and the Believer*, 186.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Durasoff, *The Russian Protestants: Evangelicals in the Soviet Union: 1944-1964*, 218.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

communities that remained steadily increased. According to data collected by Litvin, church membership in these same communities between 1947 and 1964 increased by 12,388 people.¹¹²

Many government leaders thought that membership numbers of sectarian congregations were sustained only because of familial ties. This idea was expressed by Vilkhovyi in 1951 when he stated, “Regardless of the form it takes, sectarian activity in Soviet society, under the conditions of the victorious socialist order, does not have any social basis contributing to the growth of religious communities on the account of new converts.”¹¹³ However, church membership records reveal that new converts were added to the church in spite of the decrease in the number of churches. A comparison of the recruits added at the beginning and the end of the seventeen-year period established a twofold increase in the number of candidate-members.¹¹⁴ This growth occurred in spite of the prohibition against any form of proselytism and the government-imposed deprivation of capable spiritual leadership. A study of the specific tools the Soviet government used to curtail religion gives evidence of both quantitative and qualitative methods of reduction.

Legal Pretexts for Closing Churches

One of the primary methods of quantitative reduction used by the Soviet government officials to contain religion was the confiscation of “prayer houses” returned to sectarian congregations by the Germans after World War II. During the war, when Germans had temporarily occupied certain territories in the U.S.S.R., religious communities, especially

¹¹² Durasoff, *The Russian Protestants: Evangelicals in the Soviet Union: 1944-1964*, 221.

¹¹³ Alexeyeva and Goldberg, *The Thaw Generation: Coming of Age in the Post-Stalin Era*, 78.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 79.

evangelicals and Baptists, were encouraged by German propagandists to continue meeting in their public houses of worship. When the Soviets returned to reclaim their territory after the war, however, the churches were seized by Soviet authorities on the grounds that anything of a sectarian nature was sympathetic to the German cause and unpatriotic. Although the 1929 Law on Religious Organizations required municipal authorities to find suitable locations for churches,¹¹⁵ church buildings that were in the center of large cities were often asked to relocate to rural areas where they would not attract so much attention to themselves or give a bad impression to foreign visitors. One example of this is the account of the evangelicals-Baptists in Kiev which had a prayer house that was centrally located on Lenin Street.¹¹⁶ Even though the building was purchased and renovated by this evangelical congregation, it was seized by the Soviet party officials in 1949 and never returned. The believers were instead given a building in much disrepair on the outskirts of the city.

Reports such as these were common, and frequently resulted in more problems for the city. Due to churches being closed, congregations from two or three different churches would often have to share one building that was usually over-crowded and ill-equipped for large numbers of people. In the case of the aforementioned church group in Kiev, the building they were given on Spasskaia Street had one small meeting room where over 1,000 people were crammed into a space designed to accommodate 150. This hazardous congestion was brought about by the simultaneous closure of three of the largest prayer houses in the area, and was a clear violation of both sanitary and building fire codes.¹¹⁷ By 1962, a pattern of church closure

¹¹⁵ Prokhorov, "The 'Golden Age' of the Soviet Baptist in the 1920s," 93.

¹¹⁶ Kashirin, "Protestant Minorities in the Soviet Ukraine, 1945–1991" (PhD diss., University of Oregon, Eugene, 2010), 352.

¹¹⁷ Bourdeaux, "Baptists in Russia," 146.

due to overcrowding had developed as the pretext for local authorities' control of religious communities. One protestor complained, "It is well known to you that at the present state of property in the private sector, none of our communities can have a building that has an appropriate area. Therefore, all of them can be easily shut down on the basis of this requirement."¹¹⁸ Municipal authorities also refused to give believers the permits necessary for repair, enlargement, or inspection of these properties.

When the evangelical community was forced to look for buildings to rent in order to have their worship services, municipal authorities would often call into question the lease agreement of the building owner. In a village called Marinskoe in the Apostolovskii region, the evangelical congregation was renting a meeting facility from a certain man who was a pensioner.¹¹⁹ The chairman of the Soviet authorities for that area repeatedly tried to convince the owner to terminate the lease agreement with the church, but when he refused, the chairman held back his pension payment for three months. The Soviet officials then demanded to see all of the building's permits in order to find a pretext for termination of the lease. When it was determined that the owner was in complete compliance with the law in every way, the officials then called in the fire department to look for any safety hazards. The inspector from the local fire department issued the mandate for several modifications of the building, including the removal of a wood stove which was the only source of heat for the building. When the owner completed all of the necessary modifications, the chief inspector then presented the owner with a new list of requirements. These included the rewiring of the entire house, the installation of a water tank, the replacement of the roof, and a new pavement of their driveway. There was literally no end to the

¹¹⁸ Durasoff, *The Russian Protestants: Evangelicals in the Soviet Union: 1944-1964*, 230.

¹¹⁹ Bourdeaux, "Baptists in Russia," 148.

harassment as the criteria for sanitary and fire safety could not be realistically met by congregations trying to survive in a post-war economy.

Religious communities that were deprived of their prayer houses could appeal the action taken against them, but these appeals were often ignored or decisions about them indefinitely postponed. If a congregation was left without a prayer house for any period of time, their legal registration could be revoked. The specific length of time was left to the whim of the municipal authorities, but gave rise to another pretext for a church community's closure. In the case of an evangelical church in Chuguev of the Kharkov oblast, the religious community had legally existed since 1914, but due to a failed fire inspection in 1948 was forbidden to hold any more services in that location.¹²⁰ The CRA ruled that any lease agreement signed by these churches must be for a duration of no less than three years.¹²¹ This presented a major complication for church communities looking to rent a facility because property owners had difficulty obtaining clearances from the sanitary and fire inspectors that were valid for that long. Two years later, when a building was finally found, they were informed that the "community had lost its right to exist," and the local authorities presumed that the congregation had "self-liquidated."¹²² The religious community ended up paying 75 rubles a month to rent a facility in which it could not legally gather. From the believers' perspective, they were given no choice but to join with other functioning churches much further from their homes. The closest church in which the believers at Chuguev could worship was almost fifty miles away, a formidable distance for the elderly in their congregation.

¹²⁰ Bourdeaux, "Baptists in Russia," 149.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

The continuous entrapment of registered evangelical communities under a variety of legal pretexts prompted believers to petition at all levels of state authority, but often churches in rural areas were reduced to smaller numbers of elderly which were then subject to closure based on the quorum law. In a study investigating the causes for church closure during the twenty years after the war, the quorum law was determined to be the evangelical communities' primary reason for dissolution.¹²³ According to Soviet legislation, this law mandated that "not a single religious organization could begin its activity without first registering with the organs of Soviet authority...a petition that must be signed by no fewer than twenty adult citizens..."¹²⁴ It should be noted that in contrast to this, Soviet organizations at the local level such as the Komsomol could be legally formed with only three founding members.¹²⁵ This form of quantitative reduction was especially effective in rural communities where membership was borderline acceptable, but it was also known to happen with religious communities that numbered up to 300 because Soviet authorities had the tendency to interpret these numbers very loosely. Local officials could also reduce congregation numbers by arresting members for a variety of reasons or having uncooperative members removed from the membership. Smaller communities would frequently try to merge with neighboring ones to increase their numbers, but the CRA took active measures to oppose this. Churches with a strict denominational code of ethics who would normally expel members for violations of their own religious law were compelled to overlook major transgressions in order to keep their membership numbers.

¹²³ Kashirin, "Protestant Minorities in the Soviet Ukraine, 1945–1991" (PhD diss., University of Oregon, Eugene, 2010), 412.

¹²⁴ Pospelovsky, *A History of Soviet Atheism in Theory and Practice, and the Believer*, 191.

¹²⁵ Vassili Yunak, *Istoriia Tserkvi Adventistov Sed'mogo Dniav Rossii, 1886-1981* (Zaokskii: "Istochnik zhizni," 2002), 102.

Deprivation of Effective Church Leadership

Another strategy frequently employed by Soviet authorities in their attempt to restrict religious communities was through their control of the church presbyters, or spiritual leaders. There were several quantitative measures that could be taken to reduce their numbers, but there were also qualitative methods employed in their approach to control the growth of religious communities, both spiritually and numerically. The most basic quantitative tactic was the arrest of presbyters for legal violations of any kind. For example, one presbyter of the Poltava evangelical community, D. F. Salo, had his registration revoked because he made an unauthorized trip to a neighboring town.¹²⁶ Ordained ministers were frequently asked to visit smaller congregations in nearby villages in efforts to help boost their morale, but also because religious communities without a presbyter could be legally shut down over time. In this case, Salo was visiting someone who had a personal financial need which was not church-related. Regardless, the government authorities viewed presbyters as public figures in the community who gave up their right to be private people when they became ordained.¹²⁷ He was required by local authorities to notify them of any proposed travel of any kind.

Other legal infractions included alleged tax evasion, failure to meet predetermined state bond quotas, or any public statement that could be considered contrary to the Soviet agenda. Most presbyters received little or no remuneration for their work with the church. Like everyone else in the congregation, they relied on their everyday jobs for income. However, Soviet authorities would arbitrarily expect presbyters to pay exorbitant taxes based on their rank as a presbyter. Occasionally, the presbyters would turn to their congregation for financial help, but

¹²⁶ Bourdeaux, "Baptists in Russia," 152.

¹²⁷ Hebly, *Protestants in Russia*, 155.

often the sums were so high that even the congregation could not afford to pay them. Presbyters were closely monitored, and any of their comments made in public were closely scrutinized by the CRA. In one case, a presbyter made a recommendation to the bride and groom during their wedding ceremony that they give their future children a religious upbringing.¹²⁸ For this general statement, the minister's registration was terminated. No influence of children's minds toward religion or even the insinuation of influence was tolerated under Soviet control.

A religious community could lose its presbyter, or minister, for any number of reasons, and since the Soviet government would not allow presbyters to serve more than one congregation, many religious communities were left without a spiritual leader. They could appeal to their central leadership to provide a replacement, but given the termination rate of presbyters' registrations, the number of available presbyters was greatly reduced. The CRA also reserved the right to reject any possible candidates who applied for registration as a presbyter. The selection process for a replacement presbyter could take months, and even years. In the meantime, the Soviet municipal authorities had ample opportunity to shut down a community on the pretext of not having their own minister for an indefinite amount of time. Soviet legislation did not actually make the registration of a religious community dependent on whether or not they had their own presbyter. This requirement was most likely associated with the hierarchical structures of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists who were obliged to comply with the demands of Soviet authorities. A cooperative presbyter who ensured the compliance of his entire congregations was necessary for this religious hierarchy to function properly.

The methods of quantitative reduction decreasing the number of churches for evangelicals to attend were based on the Soviet's assumption that their religiosity was somehow

¹²⁸ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 167.

linked with the physical space in which they worshiped. Therefore, reducing the number of churches would diminish their faith and the quantity of believers. However, the numbers indicate that the various strategies of quantitative reduction were counterproductive for the Soviets. Pospelovsky noted, “The mere reduction of religious communities had produced results that were superficial and did not indicate a substantive decrease of religiosity in the republic.¹²⁹ When one church was shut down for whatever reason, members would often resort to meeting in smaller groups all over the city. These groups usually gathered in private homes which could not be as easily monitored by government authorities. One Soviet official reported, “It is not accidental that we register an increase in the number of unregistered but de facto functioning groups in a number of oblasts, and in certain places—a growth and revival of sectarian underground.”¹³⁰ The gospel was spread to previously unreached areas as the influence of evangelicals increased through their forced distribution throughout the city. In rural areas where believers had to walk many miles to get to a prayer house, believers would use this as an opportunity to evangelize people they met along the way.

With each new group that emerged came the potential of another spiritual leader who would rise to the occasion and accept the challenge of the call to ministry in the Soviet regime. The communist strategy for weakening the spiritual core of religious communities was only effective in religious communities that retained their registration and remained a part of the religious hierarchy. However, the Soviets recognized that the continuous growth of any religious community was dependent on the quality of its young, capable, and dynamic leadership. When quantitative measures failed, Soviet authorities resorted to an assault on competent leadership as

¹²⁹ Pospelovsky, *A History of Soviet Atheism in Theory and Practice, and the Believer*, 191.

¹³⁰ Shustak, “The Position of the Religious People in the Conditions of Functioning of the Soviet System in the Western Regions of the USSR in 1950-60,” 171.

a means of qualitative diminution of religious communities. By interfering with a church's selection of presbyters and preachers, the communist government tried to decrease the religious activity of an organization and make it completely ineffective. Without capable spiritual leadership, churches became disoriented, lethargic, and more prone to quarrels and schisms. No minister could be appointed to a leadership position in a church without the authorization of the CRA. If they perceived that the proposed candidate was a knowledgeable and skillful preacher, the CRA refused to give their approval for his appointment.¹³¹ In their opinion, the weaker the minister, the better.

The Council also tried to diminish the spiritual intensity of a religious community by replacing experienced organizers and eloquent preachers with those who were uneducated and ill-equipped for service. They noticed that the "internal cohesiveness, dynamism and growth of religious communities were often attributable to the organizational skills, oratory talents, and personal charisma of certain energetic and bold leaders."¹³² CRA authorities dealt with this problem in three ways. First, they filtered out all presbyters who had previously lived on German-occupied territories as being hostile to Soviet authority.¹³³ Second, they terminated the registration of any presbyter who visited a church in another area without their permission. This also served to isolate and weaken smaller religious communities. Third, they established a diarchy that functioned to reduce a presbyter or pastor from a spiritual leader to a mere figurehead who was powerless to help his religious community.¹³⁴ They did this primarily by

¹³¹ Pospelovsky, *A History of Soviet Atheism in Theory and Practice, and the Believer*, 188.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 189.

¹³³ Strover, *Religion and the Search for New Ideals in the USSR*, 92.

¹³⁴ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 155.

manipulating the attitude of a church's executive board against its minister. The meticulous execution of this plan reduced the number of registered presbyters in the evangelical community by nearly 50%,¹³⁵ forcing even more religious communities to go underground.

Proselytism and Religious Propaganda

Evangelical ministers were scrutinized by what they said in their churches, but also were forbidden, along with everyone in their congregation, to exercise any form of proselytism. This included religious conversation with a neighbor, an invitation to attend services, distribution of religious literature to anyone, or the provision of material assistance to others around them in need.¹³⁶ One reason for the restriction of presbyters' travel to other localities was because the Soviet authorities did not want a thriving religious community in one area to fortify the spiritual core of a smaller or weaker religious assembly. Sending out support groups or choirs to boost the morale or assist in any way with their struggling associates was considered an indirect form of proselytism. Even the excellent work ethic of evangelical believers could be considered proselytism if it served to change a village or workplace into an example of religion's transformative strength. Without the spoken word, evangelicals took the opportunity to use their high moral standards as non-verbal forms of evangelism. Soviet authorities recognized the connection between these exemplary lifestyles and proselytism as a means of attracting new members into their religious community.¹³⁷ Their personal discipline, positive work attitudes,

¹³⁵ Bourdeaux, "Baptists in Russia," 149.

¹³⁶ Durasoff, *The Russian Protestants: Evangelicals in the Soviet Union: 1944-1964*, 219.

¹³⁷ Pollock, *The Faith of the Russian Evangelicals*, 105.

and exercise of self-control at work and at home were powerful forms of proselytism in their communities.

Local industries and kolkhozes, or collective farms, were regularly evaluated by the communist government for their efficiency and output. When believers were assigned certain tasks, they habitually exceeded the productivity expectations of their superiors, causing them to draw attention to themselves. For example, in a village called Marianovka in the Korniskii region,¹³⁸ two weeding and mowing crews were organized by believers. The chairman of the Komsomol party in that region objected when he found out they were all participants in an evangelical community. However, their direct supervisor said to the chairman, “If all of my kolkhozniks were believers, I would have fulfilled and over-fulfilled every assignment.”¹³⁹ The religious youth in the communities were known to be good students and were advanced to positions of responsibility above their peers. Young, non-believing women were attracted to religious communities because they knew they could find a husband who had high morals, would be faithful to them, and would lead a sober life. All of this happened within the sphere of normal interaction within a village, and resulted in the recruitment of new members which the government considered proselytism.

Some may argue that the attempt of evangelicals to be a good example to non-believers and establish a decent rapport with their Soviet authorities was nothing more than a Darwinian adaptation as a means of survival in a hostile environment. Evangelical communities did not know how long they would have to live under such restrictive conditions, so they could have

¹³⁸ Mironova and Popov, “Communicative Practices of Evangelical Christian Baptists In the Period 1950-1980-X Years (Example of the Tambov Region),” 376.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

used this “good behavior” strategy to secure their existence in the future. Others viewed this as a surreptitious tactic to seize the general leadership roles in the community for themselves by working their way up the ranks of responsibility in work sectors of the kolkhozes or industries. For communist ideologists, this would certainly help to explain the longevity of religion in a supposedly classless society, but it also caused some Soviet authorities to be very suspicious of their activity. One Soviet official referred to this initiative as the “underhanded plotting of sectarians.”¹⁴⁰ For this reason, evangelicals were often deliberately excluded from having any significant social role in their local communities. This made them feel ostracized from their peers, and also diminished their patriotic sentiments.

During times of harvest, religious communities would hold festivals where their choirs and orchestras would perform for the public. This attracted the attention of many unbelievers and was considered by the communists another form of proselytism. The musical groups were typically well-trained, and were a source of interest both nationally and internationally. The choirs and orchestras would perform patriotic songs, marches, and other popular favorites for their local communities, not just religious songs.¹⁴¹ A great deal of effort went into the preparation of music for the harvest festivals, so religious choirs and orchestras sought to expand their audience. Performing for religious communities in other districts gave them an opportunity to share their gifts with fellow believers and help the weaker church to gain a wider recognition in its community. Harvest festivals, as well as weddings, baptisms, and other youth gatherings were occasions for celebration and music-making. However, anything that drew attention of the

¹⁴⁰ Hebly, *Protestants in Russia*, 158.

¹⁴¹ Steven J. Pierson, "We Sang Ourselves Free: Developmental Uses of Music among Estonian Christians from Repression to Independence" (PhD diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, IL, 1998), 15, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/304470455?accountid=12085>.

populace to a local religious community was regarded as a form of evangelism. In Sinelnikovskaia of the Dnepropetrovsk district, the evangelicals hosted a dinner as part of the harvest festival to which invitations to local communist leaders were extended.¹⁴² This was a very bold move, as any activity outside of the typical religious services held within the confines of the prayer house was suspicious. From the believers' perspective, however, the festival provided an opportunity for them to show everyone the brighter uncensored side of evangelical life.

Religious communities were not allowed to provide shelter or food for the needy in their community. This was especially a problem during the postwar years when many women were left as widows and orphans. Invalids or injured soldiers who could not obtain work or were seeking rest after the war were often ignored or fell through the cracks of the Soviet government which was too preoccupied with the work of restoring its own economy. Believers instinctively tried to respond to the situation by meeting their physical and spiritual needs. However, the government interpreted their acts of kindness as "aspirations of sectarian activists to unfold philanthropic work among the non-believing population as a means of drawing it into their ranks."¹⁴³ Therefore, the Soviet legislation strictly prohibited a religious community from offering any form of assistance not only to the non-religious, but to their fellow believers as well. In rural areas where the number of registered evangelical churches was drastically reduced, believers often had to travel many miles to attend worship services at a prayer house in another district. Going nearly twenty-five miles on foot was what believers living in villages around the

¹⁴² Pierson, "We Sang Ourselves Free: Developmental Uses of Music among Estonian Christians from Repression to Independence," 17.

¹⁴³ Durasoff, *The Russian Protestants: Evangelicals in the Soviet Union: 1944-1964*, 173.

town of Kakhovka in the Kherson district had to travel one way.¹⁴⁴ “This journey”, complained one Soviet official, “gave the pilgrims the occasion to proselytize at rest stops, night lodgings, etc., along the way.”¹⁴⁵ Evangelicals were not permitted to provide accommodations for others or to expect it for themselves if they traveled. Acts of hospitality that came naturally to evangelicals were said to have a dangerous psychological impact on the public.

The distribution of religious literature was mainly controlled by the government’s ban on the printing of Bibles. There was no actual law that prohibited Bibles, but the reality of the situation indicated otherwise. During times of religious crackdowns, Bibles were collected and burned, and people were regularly imprisoned for owning even a portion of one.¹⁴⁶ Regarding this discrepancy, Walter Sawatsky commented, “the Soviet state has a remarkable fear of one book which they like to claim is just a collection of useless myths.”¹⁴⁷ The Bible for evangelicals is the foundation of their belief system, and the critical shortage of them behind the Iron Curtain restricted their ability to evangelize and disciple young believers. Hymnals, New Testaments, and other religious literature were all closely monitored so that most evangelical congregations in the 1970s were still using hymnals from the 1920s.¹⁴⁸ Bibles that were smuggled into communist countries via contraband cost more than a working man’s wages for two months.¹⁴⁹ At one point during the communist years, the government actually allowed the printing of 15,000

¹⁴⁴ Shustak, “The Position of the Religious People in the Conditions of Functioning of the Soviet System in the Western Regions of the USSR in 1950-60,” 180.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Raška, “Bibles for Communist Europe-A Cold War Story-Part I,” 25.

¹⁴⁷ Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals since World War II*, 62.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 73.

¹⁴⁹ Raška, “Bibles for Communist Europe-A Cold War Story-Part I,” 26.

hymnals and 10,000 Bibles. This happened in 1957. However, taking into consideration the number of religious communities and registered believers in them at the time, if equally distributed, each community would have received slightly over 1 ½ Bibles with the individual believers receiving 0.018 of a Bible.¹⁵⁰ In actuality, including the many underground churches, the shortage was probably much more severe. The Bible was considered the ultimate source of religious propaganda with a code of moral values that stood in direct opposition to atheistic idealism.

Attack on the Evangelical Youth

The Soviet's greatest concern was how to win the allegiance of the next generation. Many of their antireligious campaigns were aimed at separating the older believing parents from their children by making them consider religious beliefs as outdated and religion itself as archaic. By depriving religious communities of their ability to reproduce themselves in the next generation, Soviet authorities hoped that the appeal of religion would eventually fade and die. They concentrated their endeavors on the section of society that would "determine the future," and upon which "the greatest antireligious effort should be focused."¹⁵¹ Presuming that intelligent people reject anything that cannot be proven scientifically,¹⁵² the atheist agenda for capturing the minds of the young people began with the Soviet government's control of education. Bibles were confiscated from churches and homes, but a thorough purging of public libraries also took place. Young people were not free to examine philosophies or ideologies that

¹⁵⁰ Raška, "Bibles for Communist Europe-A Cold War Story-Part I," 28..

¹⁵¹ William C. Fletcher, *Soviet Believers: The Religious Sector of the Population* (Lawrence, KS: Regents Press, 1981), 76.

¹⁵² Bourdeaux, *Opium of the People: The Christian Religion in the USSR*, 141.

even appeared to be contrary to Marxist-Leninist doctrine. Artistic experimentation or any demonstration of freedom of expression such as American jazz or western style of clothing was publicly condemned and criticized. Even outside of religious circles, people were sentenced to years of hard labor for finding fault with dialectical materialism although remaining completely loyal to the Soviet system.¹⁵³ In religious communities, children were removed from the influence of their parents, prevented from attending worship services, and educated by the government to ensure the atheistic adherence of the youth.

Challenges to Religious Upbringing

The Soviet state had a monopoly on education behind the Iron Curtain which functioned on the legal premise of the separation of church and state. Although the “Principles of Freedom and Impermissibility of Discrimination against Religious Rights and Customs” act of 1929 supposedly gave parents the right to care for their children in the best way they knew how, the children were to be brought up in a direction that corresponded with the state’s goals and objectives “within boundaries determined by the legislation of each state.”¹⁵⁴ This clause refuted any claims for the right to sectarian education as useless and basically made atheistic state education compulsory for all children. The Soviet government exercised its control of children by treating them as property of the state and shielding them from any influence of religion. They stated that “no one can, invoking his or her religious conviction, refuse the fulfillment of his or

¹⁵³ Pospelovsky, *A History of Soviet Atheism in Theory and Practice, and the Believer*, 94-95.

¹⁵⁴ Moshe Lewin, *The Making of the Soviet System: Essays in the Social History of Interwar Russia* (New York, NY: New Press, 1994), 52.

her civil duties.”¹⁵⁵ Opposing the Soviet agenda for mandatory state education of children was considered unpatriotic and punishable by law.

Evangelical parents in the Soviet Union did not have the right to pass on their religious convictions to their children, which they held as much more than a preservation of their religious traditions for future generations. Holding to the eschatological view of a pending rapture and final judgment day, evangelical parents viewed the loss of their children to atheism in light of eternity. To them, children who did not follow after God in this life would be subject to eternal damnation. The evangelicals also lived with the obligation to bring as many unbelievers to the knowledge of Christ as Savior as they could, including the Soviet atheists with whom they struggled on a regular basis. Believing parents took one of two options with their children. They either allowed them to go to state schools and encouraged them to keep a low profile on their religious affiliation, or they chose to educate the children themselves privately. In both cases, there were circles of religious youth that functioned outside of the school setting which appealed to their natural radicalism, that is, the excitement of participating in something that was “forbidden.”¹⁵⁶ Even these clandestine circles, however, were still extensions of the main vehicle of religious instruction which was the family unit.

Local Soviet officials did now allow evangelical parents to bring their children into the prayer house with them. Like many unofficial policies enforced by local authorities, there was actually no law against this, but this was one way the Council for Religious Affairs attempted to appear compliant with Soviet ideology. In a set of instructional letters to their affiliated churches, the chairman of the council directed the presbyters to select church members who would stand at

¹⁵⁵ Lewin, *The Making of the Soviet System: Essays in the Social History of Interwar Russia*, 53.

¹⁵⁶ Curtiss, *The Russian Church and the Soviet State 1917-1950*, 154.

the entrance of the buildings and prevent children of their Christian friends from entering. These “Egyptian midwives,”¹⁵⁷ as they were called, were necessary because youth attendance at church was a major pretext for church closure during government crackdowns on religion. In practice, however, many evangelical ministers only paid lip service to this instruction of the CRA. Ministers would often bring their own children to worship services, and members of the congregations tended to follow their example. In one case, a fifth-grade son of an evangelical minister showed up at a registered prayer house on his own before his father came.¹⁵⁸ Since he came of his own accord, he protected his father from the accusation of using his parental authority to coerce his son’s attendance. Whereas children of religious parents were often directed to participate in Soviet youth organizations such as Octobrist, Pioneer and Komsomol,¹⁵⁹ they were greatly restricted in their activities with their own parents.

The Octobrist, Pioneer, and Komsomol organizations were the three stages of age-based hierarchy designed by the Soviets to teach the youth from a very young age the value of Communism and to prepare them to be future leaders in the party. The Octobrist was for children nine and under, the Pioneer was for ten to thirteen-year-olds, and the Komsomol organization was for youth aged 14 to 28. Every child who went to state school was expected to be a part of one of these organizations. Parents who refused to have their children join these Communist organizations were labeled as traitors, spies, thieves, bigots, extremists, and perverts.¹⁶⁰ It was considered the height of irresponsibility to deny any child the upbringing of Soviet education

¹⁵⁷ Curtiss, *The Russian Church and the Soviet State 1917-1950*, 157.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 158.

¹⁵⁹ Pospelovsky, *A History of Soviet Atheism in Theory and Practice, and the Believer*, 172.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 173.

within one of these parties that would secure their future career and success in society. Some parents, however, were able to reconcile their religious differences with the mandated Soviet education of their children. They joined the ranks of many Soviets who were secretly Christians but still appeared to be loyal to the government.¹⁶¹ These children generally did not face the same degree of persecution as their believing friends who were more open about their faith. Ultimately, the degree of students' transparency about their religious convictions was established by the orientation and advice they received from home.

Soviet Re-education of Religious Children

Children of evangelical parents bore the brunt of persecution for their faith, especially those who were encouraged by their parents to defend the principles upon which their religious convictions were based. As the most vulnerable member of the religious community, children of faith were often subject to ridicule by their peers, intimidation, and interrogation by their schoolteachers. One student in the sixth grade of a school in Pervotravnevoe in the Izmail region of Odessa in 1961 was called to the principal's office where she was interrogated for three hours.¹⁶² The principal asked her questions about her church and their religious leader, many for which she had no answer. The principal threatened to have her arrested and taken to a correctional facility. When finally she began to cry, they released her back to the classroom. Summoned to the principal's office again the next day, the student was forced to sign papers that she was not allowed to read. Cases like this were frequent as children from religious homes became the tools of the Soviet system and informants for local authorities.

¹⁶¹ Bourdeaux, "Baptists in Russia," 147.

¹⁶² Ibid. 165.

Many of the children from religious homes excelled in their studies at school, with exemplary self-discipline and study skills, but were targeted by their professors when they were found out to be Christians. Due to the mandatory nature of the Komsomol organization, there were often believers present in the meetings. If, for some reason, one of them hesitated to agree or participate with something that was contrary to their religious convictions, they were exposed and subject to specialized re-education. The purpose of this was to pull them out of a “religious psychosis” that was spiritually and ideologically corrupting their minds.¹⁶³ One party organization assigned an “agitator” to every known believer in their group as the teachers worked incessantly to change the children’s minds.¹⁶⁴ Some students were expelled from school in spite of their excellent grades, and others were not allowed to graduate.¹⁶⁵ There were also cases of students voluntarily turning in their Komsomol certificates because they, as Christians, were not able to personally reconcile their religious beliefs with communist atheistic ideology.

The idea of an “educated believer” was somewhat of an oxymoron for Soviet ideologists. Religion was considered a part of the belief system of the older generation, and it was expected to naturally die out as the younger, more educated population replaced them. When the CRA’s statistical analysis of the increasing level of education of believers contradicted these expectations,¹⁶⁶ school officials were encouraged to take radical approaches to ensure that the entire population of high school graduates would be atheist. Conferring a diploma on any known believer was in a sense an admission of failure on the part of the school principal, so they looked

¹⁶³ Bourdeaux, “Baptists in Russia,” 144.

¹⁶⁴ Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals since World War II*, 98.

¹⁶⁵ Alexeyeva and Goldberg, *The Thaw Generation: Coming of Age in the Post-Stalin Era*, 202.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 203.

for excuses to dismiss religious students as dropouts rather than being personally demoralized by their Soviet superiors. In essence, Soviet ideology could not tolerate the notion that students adhering to a backward religious belief system could be on the same level, much less above the level, of their non-believing classmates. Occasionally, principals would accept students as known sectarians,¹⁶⁷ but this was not the norm, and they generally endured much harassment for it.

The Komsomol party leaders could not answer the metaphysical or existential questions that many young people were asking, but the religious youth groups, with their all-inclusive family orientation provided a healthier and more genuine alternative for those who had become dissatisfied with the bureaucratic and spiritually hollow Soviet organizations. Not only did religious students refuse to compromise on their religious convictions, but they also influenced others around them to examine the strength of their ideological background. The Komsomol organization supported the Soviet ideals with projects for community service and aid for the needy, but it was obvious that their interests were self-serving.¹⁶⁸ Religious communities that focused their acts of charity on individuals from whom they had nothing to gain were more appealing to young people who felt a sense of fulfillment and positive identity as a result of participating with their youth groups. The government allocated an increasing amount of funds to train and hire professional atheist lecturers to travel and speak at every public location, but they could rarely restrain the arrogance of their own assertions and often resorted to public mockery of believers. The old clichés and antireligious jargon were all too familiar to the youth and uninspiring. Many of the experts also showed their own ignorance by refusing to acknowledge that a deep religious faith and the most advanced scientific evidence were not mutually

¹⁶⁷ Alexeyeva and Goldberg, *The Thaw Generation: Coming of Age in the Post-Stalin Era*, 203.

¹⁶⁸ Strover, *Religion and the Search for New Ideals in the USSR*, 101.

exclusive. State-imposed atheism retained its mandatory nature in the realm of education, but by the 1970's, it was losing its appeal with young supporters.

Religious students endured much persecution for their beliefs and became better students and stronger orators because of it. One atheist author of an article noted that although most Soviet students claimed to be atheists, very few of them would have been able to win a debate with a believer.¹⁶⁹ The non-believing students demonstrated little motivation to invest any time or energy in studying Soviet ideology for themselves in order to better refute their religious arguments. When asked what the Komsomol members were doing to counter the spread of the religious influence in a particular region, the librarian disclosed that of the eleven Komsomol leaders, or party educators, only one took books from the library; and of the twelve members, only two indicated any interest in the library books.¹⁷⁰ The Soviet government had hoped that the mandatory education of religious children in state schools would effectively lessen their interest in religion, but being harassed by their authorities to speed up this process, educators felt the pressure to abuse their powers. Instead of patiently reasoning with the religious students about the errors of their ideology, teachers resorted to publicly humiliating them, lowering their grades, and often refusing to give them their hard-earned diplomas. However, the more forcefully the State imposed its curriculum, the less plausible the atheistic ideology became.

From Ideological Warfare to Religious Toleration

With the failure of the Soviet antireligious campaign, the communist ideology was effectively deprived of its foundational center. Marxist-Leninism could not provide satisfactory

¹⁶⁹ James Thrower, *Marxist-Leninist 'Scientific Atheism' and the Study of Religion and Atheism in the USSR* (New York, NY: Mouton Publisher, 1983), 127.

¹⁷⁰ Kassof, *The Soviet Youth Program*, 182.

answers to the basic questions of life, from the purpose of man's existence to the problem of evil and man's morality. Religious beliefs were validated by the areas that Marxist-Leninist ideology neglected. Barbara Jancar wrote in the 1970s, "Religion cannot be considered an epiphenomenon that will wither away with the banishment of prejudice and superstition."¹⁷¹ Religion rose above all barriers including social class, occupation, wealth, gender, and education, and attracted the minds of young and old alike. It was not going to become any less relevant as the years passed, and if anything, proved that it could adapt to secularization in a modern society. Paul Froese, a specialist in the study of the Soviet secularization experiment, commented,

While modernization may affect the popularity of particular religious and political ideologies, it in no way necessitates the complete abandonment of absolutist or dogmatic forms of belief. Hence, religious concepts are as fit to survive in a modern setting as any political or moral system of belief.¹⁷²

Persecution could drive religion underground for a few years, but it would not remain dormant. At the first opportunity, it would be revived and thrive once again.

Soviet Religious Policy Changes

Evangelicals in the 1970s and 1980s experienced significant changes in the Soviet policies regarding the freedom of religion. For the first time, in 1975, the role of the Council for Religious Affairs (CRA) was clearly defined as the Soviet government attempted to centralize the control over religion. In the 1960s, there had been a great deal of confusion regarding the written law and the implementation of it because of the subjectivity of local authorities. This gave rise to the evangelical dissent movement, or *Initiativniki*, that challenged church-state

¹⁷¹ Barbara W. Jancar, "Religious Dissent in the Soviet Union," in *Dissent in the USSR*, ed. Rudolf Tokes (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1975), 108.

¹⁷² Froese, *The Plot to Kill God: Findings from the Soviet Experiment in Secularization*, 168.

relations and put a strain on Soviet relationships with foreign countries as well. Now, by giving more authority to the CRA, the government hoped there would be a greater consistency in the execution of religious policy. However, as John Anderson noted, “dissenters charged that now believers had lost even the faint hope that they might achieve results, say in opening a church, by means of exerting pressure on the local authorities.”¹⁷³ The Soviet government’s ability to attain a socialist society free from any religious influence depended on how well they could secularize the Christians and eliminate any unapproved exceptions to Soviet policy.

The responsibility to educate the public with atheistic doctrine during the Brezhnev period which lasted from 1964 to 1982 rested almost entirely on the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee.¹⁷⁴ There were still discrepancies between the practical and legal aspects of government policy, but the government took a much more differentiated approach to the control of religious communities. Religious persecution continued during this time, but the Soviet leaders acted more favorably toward the registered religious organizations whose leaders were passively compliant and willing to speak internationally in favor of Soviet religious policy.¹⁷⁵ Their wrath was reserved mostly for dissident activists, and particularly evangelicals, who printed Bibles and other religious literature illegally, and who continued to educate children and young people with biblical doctrine. However, most of the evangelicals who were arrested during the Brezhnev era were sentenced for trumped-up criminal charges such as embezzlement

¹⁷³ Anderson, “The Council for Religious Affairs and the Shaping of Soviet Religious Policy,” 26.

¹⁷⁴ Warhola, “Central vs. Local Authority in Soviet Religious Affairs,” 22.

¹⁷⁵ Philip Walters, “A Survey of Soviet Religious Policy,” in *Religious Policy in the Soviet Union*, ed. Sabrina Ramet (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 26.

and not for religious activity.¹⁷⁶ This indicated that the persecution evangelicals endured during this time was not so much for their religious beliefs as it was for their refusal to conform to the secularization process in general.

Antireligious material written by the Propaganda Department was more objective and less slanderous of individual dissenters. By trying to incorporate the studies of well-respected sociologists into their specialized journals, the Soviets presented publications that appeared to be more responsible and attractive.¹⁷⁷ They tried to take a more objective view of the situation rather than capitalizing on the subjectivity of public law enforcement. Testimonies of religious apostates and slanderous personal attacks were less frequent, and open verbal assaults usually only preceded the arrest or trial of a notorious religious nonconformist. The government through the 1970s remained confident that their anti-religious agenda would ultimately triumph and that their institutional model of the secularization of religious communities would prove to be successful. They made concessions to religious groups that were now cooperative by extending the offer of legal registration to dissident groups that had previously had their registrations revoked. However, this maneuver was considered essentially counterpropaganda, necessary to compensate for the growing disapproval of Soviet religious policy internationally and weaken the appeal of dissident leaders within the country. They hoped that the new institutional model would squelch resistance groups, humiliate religious radicals, and transform the majority of cooperative believers into nominal Christians.

¹⁷⁶ Anderson, "The Council for Religious Affairs and the Shaping of Soviet Religious Policy," 27.

¹⁷⁷ Walters, "A Survey of Soviet Religious Policy," 24.

The Perestroika and Glasnost Years

Many religious communities participated with the institutional model established by Brezhnev during his administration, but it still failed to reduce religious belief behind the Iron Curtain. James Warhola argued, “By the outset of the Gorbachev era, not one of the general goals of the regime—reduction in number of believers, effective control of churches, attenuation of the fervor of religious devotion, and disassociation of religious from national identity—had been minimally achieved.”¹⁷⁸ By all reasonable means of evaluation, the anti-religious methods of the Soviet regime had failed. At the onset of the perestroika, or “restructuring” years between 1985 and 1991, government leaders were beginning to change their rhetoric. People they had formerly referred to as “sectarians” or “religionists” were now being called “believing citizens.”¹⁷⁹ These new forms of address were more than just an acknowledgement of the importance of political correctness under the pressure of international scrutiny. They were an indication that the Soviet government had conceded that religion was there to stay, and that the Soviets were willing to at least embrace the possibility of tolerating co-existence with those who opposed Marxist atheist ideology.

Some researchers have suggested that the Protestant cooperation with the Soviet government’s counterpropaganda campaigns of the Brezhnev era may have been another survival strategy of the religious community. That is, by espousing the institutional model as the safer option for dealing with anti-religious activists, religious leaders effectively subverted the government’s agenda without giving them grounds for legal action against them. While this in no way suggests that religious leaders should be exonerated for saying internationally that there was

¹⁷⁸ Warhola, “Central vs. Local Authority in Soviet Religious Affairs,” 29.

¹⁷⁹ Walters, “A Survey of Soviet Religious Policy,” 25.

religious freedom in the U.S.S.R. during this time, it does offer the possibility that maybe the religious leaders were exercising a foresight that is not often granted them. Catherine Wanner explains it this way:

It is a delicate balance of confrontation through submission, of couching acts of total defiance in apparent acts of compliance, that distinguishes the evangelical response to state mandates they found objectionable. The patterned response of defiant compliance, of challenging from within, on the terms of the state but based on entirely subversive values—this is what gave the resistance they offered its force and often left the state with little punitive recourse. In this way, evangelicals challenged, circumvented, and even subverted Soviet secularism.¹⁸⁰

Evangelicals were able to keep religion from being marginalized and to prevent it from being viewed as just a social problem of a few isolated individuals. They kept religion in the center of the public sphere by lifting the power of God's authority over secular law.

By 1987, the indications of government relaxation over the control of religion behind the Iron Curtain were much more noticeable. The priority of church-state relations was very low on Gorbachev's list in comparison to his preoccupation with more complex political and economic problems. The struggle of evangelicals for their religious freedom had gained international attention and put pressure on a socialist system that was unable to offer any alternative to stagnant Soviet dogma. However, it should be noted that evangelicals were only a small percentage of the Soviet population, and that perestroika was not achieved by popular protest. Rather, it was more of a preemptive reform implemented by Gorbachev to prevent the Soviet regime from collapsing.¹⁸¹ It was during this year that authorities in the Soviet state and religious leaders initiated an open dialogue on the nature of church-state relations within the context of the

¹⁸⁰ Catherine Wanner, *Communities of the Converted: Ukrainians and Global Evangelism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), 86.

¹⁸¹ Wright, *Iron Curtain: From Stage to Cold War*, 290.

modernization of Soviet society. Gorbachev publicly referred to “universal norms and customs which both groups had in common”—a comment that pointed toward a religious policy that would be characterized more by cooperation rather than conflict between them.¹⁸² This was the openness, or glasnost, for which evangelicals were hoping.

Believers demonstrated their eagerness to support perestroika policy by volunteering in infirmaries, orphanages, and prisons, and offering their charitable assistance where the Soviet welfare system had fallen short. However, Gorbachev knew that talk of partnership between the church and state was empty verbiage without legislation to reverse old religious policy. In October of 1990, a law passed that “granted legal status to parishes and religious organizations, permitted private or church-based religious education, allowed ownership of property, removed all restrictions on publishing and charity, and abolished discriminatory tax rates on church employees.”¹⁸³ Believers in the U.S.S.R. enjoyed opportunities for evangelism that were unheard of previously, and even members of the reigning Communist Party were allowed to be religious according to a decree made in June of 1991.¹⁸⁴ The ruling party was no longer one that contested the religious rights of its own people, but one that could be a powerful force for positive change within the U.S.S.R. Unfortunately, the greatest potential for consolidation and cooperation within the Soviet Union came only a few months before Gorbachev was permanently removed from power. Religion had survived seventy years of persecution behind the Iron Curtain, but it was yet to be seen if it would fare as well with the more subtle test of modern freedom.

¹⁸² John Anderson, *Religion, State and Politics in the Soviet Union and Successor States* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 140.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 170.

¹⁸⁴ Fletcher, *Soviet Believers: The Religious Sector of the Population*, 152.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter identifies the research method, states the research questions with corresponding hypotheses, and reveals the procedure of information collection, identification, and interpretation. The purpose of this chapter is to explain the methodology used to conduct the qualitative historical study.

Research Design

Due to the nature of this type of historical study and the vast amount of information that must be examined, it is essential to determine the focus of this study and the method of inquiry used. History will inform people of past events, but historians will inevitably relate that information through their own subjective lens of interpretation. Most of what has been written on the topic of religious persecution behind the Iron Curtain considers the past events in terms of sociological, political, ethnological, or religious themes, and with the specific intent of historical interpretation dependent on the scope of a particular study. The narratives move from being a chronological recounting of events to an analysis of the purpose behind them based on the historian's own worldview which has been defined as "the basic way in which a person sees relationships among people, institutions, and society."¹⁸⁶ The purpose of this study is to consider the specific ways in which religious persecution affected the worship of evangelicals living behind the Iron Curtain. The interpretation of the narratives based on knowledge of past events is from a biblical, evangelical worldview for the purpose of identifying themes that are relevant to

¹⁸⁶ Laurie Hines, "Mystery Solved: Detective Skills and the Historian's Craft," in *Qualitative Research: An Introduction to Methods and Designs*, eds. Stephen D. Lapan, Marylynn T. Quartaroli, and Frances J. Riemer (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 156.

present-day Christians who are privileged to currently enjoy religious freedom in their own countries. The method employed to evaluate the historical information is chosen to allow this audience to glean the most within the determined historical context that can have a practical application to worship ministry within evangelical churches today.

A qualitative historical design is appropriate for this study because qualitative research acknowledges the complexity of a social or cultural experience and seeks to understand it within a particular context and at a particular point in time.¹⁸⁷ In this case, evangelical worship is the experience that is being evaluated within the context of religious persecution behind the Iron Curtain which existed during the years of 1946 and 1991. This type of research is generally characterized by thick description,¹⁸⁸ a term which denotes the density and involvedness of various factors contributing to the interpretation of historical details from which readers can derive a contextualized meaning. Qualitative historical designs also involve the examination of themes that emerge from the historical study which researchers build upon inductively from particulars to general in order to realize the meaning and significance of events.¹⁸⁹ Through this type of data evaluation, overarching themes can be identified that allow for the rendering of a more meaningful interpretation of the information.

By using the qualitative historical approach to research, one is able to obtain a more holistic assessment of past events in order to understand current ones. Even though a historical study may depict a very complex image of a problem or issue under study by considering various

¹⁸⁷ Linda Bloomberg and Marie Volpe, *Completing Your Qualitative Dissertation: A Road Map from Beginning to End* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2019), 42.

¹⁸⁸ Sharon Ravitch and Nicole Carl, *Qualitative Research: Bridging the Conceptual, Theoretical, and Methodological* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2016), 194.

¹⁸⁹ Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 4.

perspectives, a qualitative investigation of the situation according to researchers more closely reflects the way events happen in real life.¹⁹⁰ Multiple sources of data representing different viewpoints allow the researcher to investigate the emerging themes from opposing angles not constrained by predetermined assessment of study outcomes. Building on patterns that surface logically from historical information gathered, a more comprehensive set of themes is generated. Kumar says this “design is based upon the philosophy that as a multiplicity of factors interact in our lives, we cannot understand a phenomenon from just one or two perspectives.”¹⁹¹ What emerges from the dialogue between historians about the interpretation of past events and their significance is a prediction of future outcomes for comparable current issues.

Research Questions

The research questions for this qualitative historical study determine the focus of the investigation. Although there are many accounts of religious persecution behind the Iron Curtain both individual and corporative, the specific emphasis of this study is based on the following questions:

Research Question 1: What were the major characteristics of Christian worship in evangelical churches behind the Iron Curtain during the Cold War?

Research Question 2: In what ways did the persecution of evangelical Christians behind the Iron Curtain during the Cold War impact their worship?

When considering the nature of worship, it is necessary to look beyond the historical accounts of Soviet law and the quantitative reduction of religious freedom as a result of anti-

¹⁹⁰ Lyn Richards and Janice M. Morse, *Readme First: A User's Guide to Qualitative Methods* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2013), 188-191.

¹⁹¹ Ranjit Kumar, *Research Methodology: A Step-by-Step Guide for Beginners* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2014), 158.

religious campaigns and ideological warfare. The intent of these questions is to ascertain from the responses of evangelical Christians to persecution how worship as missional, relational, transformational, formational, and reproducible actually changed.

Research Hypotheses

Interconnected with the research questions in this study are the research hypotheses which are designed as answers to the research questions. Just as the questions help to shape the direction of the research, the hypotheses give logical order to the system of information categorization. They facilitate the definition of the parameters of investigation and theoretical interpretation of the data.¹⁹² In this qualitative historical study, the research questions foster answers that are both descriptive and interpretive.

The following hypotheses for this study are:

Hypothesis 1: The major characteristics of Christian worship in evangelical churches behind the Iron Curtain during the Cold War were spiritual fervor, resilience, and fellowship.

Hypothesis 2: Persecution of evangelical Christians behind the Iron Curtain during the Cold War impacted their worship in terms of discipleship, missions, and spiritual depth.

Gathering Information

With the conceptual framework provided by the research questions and hypotheses, the process of gathering information involved the location, identification, review, and synthesis of literature pertaining specifically to religious persecution in communist countries during the Cold War and evangelical faith and church practice behind the Iron Curtain. Information was explored for recurring themes and for its correlation to worship in its various aspects. Sources included

¹⁹² Bloomberg and Volpe, *Completing Your Qualitative Dissertation*, 129.

books, journals, biographies, articles, book chapters, dissertations, reviews, congressional hearings, research reports, and electronic media. The qualitative historical study was based on the integrative evaluation of this material that served to “review, critique, and synthesize representative literature on a topic in such a way that new frameworks and perspectives on the topic were generated.”¹⁹³ As previous studies were explored, information was assimilated into the proposed framework of this study in order to enter the conversation with a creative and analytical agenda.

Locating suitable information for this qualitative study involved a preliminary investigation of the historical, political, cultural, and religious background of the evangelicals living behind the Iron Curtain during the years of the Cold War. This provided the context for the topic of religious persecution for the evangelical Christians. In order to understand how and why the persecution began for these Christians, it was necessary first to consider the general etiology from these various angles. Although a totally comprehensive study including all of the historical nuances was prohibitive, sufficient research was done to establish a basic frame of reference for identifying the most influential factors related to this study. Researchers say it is important to “cultivate familiarity with and expertise in specific areas of knowledge, including issues and debates in the field.”¹⁹⁴ Studying the topic of religious persecution behind the Iron Curtain within its proper context was crucial for the identification of themes that would be pertinent for today’s evangelical worship application.

¹⁹³ Richard J. Torraco, “Writing Integrative Literature Reviews: Guidelines and Examples,” *Human Resource Development Review* 4(3), 356-367.

¹⁹⁴ Bloomberg and Volpe, *Completing Your Qualitative Dissertation*, 141.

Literature pertaining to evangelical faith and church practice behind the Iron Curtain was the primary basis for the study of worship in the face of persecution. This included historical accounts from various sources and many different countries in the U.S.S.R. Biographies provided information for changes in private worship as persecution affected the personal transformative and formative nature of worship. Congressional hearings also contained the witness of individuals who spoke under oath about the personal sufferings they endured. Journals, books, and other works of research contained material that dealt with changes in worship at the corporate level as a result of persecution. This directly affected the nature of worship as missional, relational and reproducible in these countries. All of these resources assisted in the development of a rationale for this qualitative historical study, exposing any gaps in the literature, and lending to an innovative perspective on the topic.

Information Identification

Once information pertinent to this study was located, it was necessary to identify sources as primary or secondary, to organize material according to theme, and to recognize any biases of the authors. Primary sources are “data or documents created during the time period under investigation by people who actually witnessed or experienced an event.”¹⁹⁵ Many of the authors of information gathered for this study were living during the period of the Cold War, and their books were published between 1946 and 1991. There were also several biographies of people who personally endured persecution behind the Iron Curtain but were not able to speak freely about their experiences until much later. Archival evidence, including documents written internally between different departments of the Soviet government, were recently made available to the public. However, since this material was mostly written in Russian, it was necessary to

¹⁹⁵ Laurie Hines, “Mystery Solved: Detective Skills and the Historian’s Craft,” 151.

consult credible secondary sources for an accurate translation of these documents. One example of a principal secondary source used for this study was a dissertation written by a Soviet soldier who had emigrated to the United States to study and later teach Russian history. In his work, Professor Kashirin examined the archival documents and translated portions of them into English. The witness of persecuted individuals during the Congressional Hearing of the 99th Congress on Religious Persecution in the Soviet Union Before the Committee on Foreign Affairs was also referenced as a primary source during this study.

Whether the sources under review were primary or secondary, all documents were subject to critical assessment and decoding of the information presented. The bias of every author was taken into account, especially considering the variety of denominations that were considered evangelical during the era of the Iron Curtain in the U.S.S.R. Creswell stated, “Being objective is an essential part of competent inquiry; researchers must examine methods and conclusions for bias.”¹⁹⁶ Authors who wrote from the perspective of evangelical groups that were registered with the Council for Religious Affairs, for example, often presented a distinctly different story of religious persecution than those who represented underground evangelical groups. The timing of a written report was also taken into account as well as whether or not the document was published nationally or internationally. Documents that were more visible to the international community tended to portray the Soviet government in a much more favorable light than those that were printed on illegal printing presses or smuggled out of the country.¹⁹⁷ Consideration was given to the author’s cultural background, political stance, religious upbringing, and socioeconomic status. Likewise, the use of peer-reviewed literature was essential

¹⁹⁶ Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 7.

¹⁹⁷ Brother Andrew, John Sherill, and Elizabeth Sherrill, *God’s Smuggler* (Bloomington, MN: Chosen Books, 2015), 207.

to ensure that reports had been critically evaluated and that the authenticity and credibility of information had been assessed.

Interpretation of Material

Most secondary sources of information are interpretations of material. As such, they “combine knowledge from many primary sources and provide a quick way to obtain an overview of a field or topic.”¹⁹⁸ For this qualitative historical study, both primary and secondary sources were examined for recurring themes in regard to worship. Interpretation of the material was dependent on a systematic and thorough method of critical evaluation, with notes taken on every source containing specific information needed for the research questions and hypotheses. In this way, elements that were similar in the various resources could be compared and evaluated. Because the resources for this study were so dense and rich, information had to go through a “winnowing” process before it could be categorized.¹⁹⁹ Themes that were purely political or social could be disregarded, while information that was more relevant to worship was grouped according to the following themes: discipleship, missions, fellowship, resilience, and spiritual depth and fervor. Once the information was examined and aggregated by category, it was again reviewed to determine the overall meaning. The steps of the qualitative interpretation of historical information involve a scrutiny much like peeling the layers of an onion.²⁰⁰ However, once the information has been broken up into different segments, it must then be reassembled to

¹⁹⁸ Bloomberg and Volpe, *Completing Your Qualitative Dissertation*, 148.

¹⁹⁹ Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 192.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 190.

provide maximum coherence which may suggest new meaning derived from a comparison of the findings.

Synthesis of Key Elements

Just as the systematic evaluation of the material involves the separation of information fragments into different categories, synthesis reconstructs these carefully studied fragments into a holistic and integrated explanation. Any variables that may account for similarities or differences based on the research questions and hypotheses are thoroughly examined and compared against existing research findings. In this way, the current study is positioned with respect to prior research and compared and contrasted with themes already addressed by the broader literature base.²⁰¹ Bloomberg states, “Synthesis extends the literal meaning of a text to the inferential level.”²⁰² For example, when the historical accounts tell about the Soviet policies that were designed to reduce the number of evangelical churches in a particular region, it can be assumed that this quantitative reduction not only affected church practice in that region, but also the way individuals worshiped both privately and corporately. When pastors or other spiritual leaders within the evangelical church were arrested, the effects of this on the congregation were more than just numerical. Rather, the inferential deduction is that the formative, missional, and relational aspects of their worship were radically altered. Hart refers to synthesis of key elements as “research imagination,”²⁰³ where the inductive and deductive approach to research allows one to be open to new ideas and arguments. The final product not only reflects the

²⁰¹ Bloomberg and Volpe, *Completing Your Qualitative Dissertation*, 222.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 159.

²⁰³ Christopher Hart, *Doing a Literature Review: Releasing the Research Imagination* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2018), 89.

researcher's knowledge about the topic, but also creates new insight into the understanding of the historical literature.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter will reveal the results and findings of the research study. Using information from the literature review and citing experts in the field of worship studies to substantiate the findings of this research, the major characteristics of worship behind the Iron Curtain and the changes in worship as a result of persecution there will be presented. Research findings pertaining to each hypothesis will be evaluated in light of worship as missional, relational, transformational, formational, and reproducible.

Introduction

The persecution that the evangelical Christians faced was severe and widespread, but the degree to which it changed their worship can only be determined by considering their response to persecution and studying the characteristics of their worship before and during the years of the Iron Curtain. One of the foremost authorities on religious persecution today, Dr. Nik Ripken, asserts, “Persecution is neither good nor bad. What gives it its quality is the believers’ reaction to it.”²⁰⁴ The first hypothesis in this study suggests that the main characteristics of worship in the U.S.S.R. prior to persecution were spiritual fervor, resilience, and fellowship. Christians living in communist countries had a hunger and thirst for God’s Word, and a faith that was strong enough for them to endure the most difficult suffering. Together, they experienced hardships that strengthened the bond between them and drew them closer to the Lord. This was the indication of a worship, both private and corporate, that involved more than just liturgy or religious practice. It was a way of life characterized by their identification with Christ in every area of

²⁰⁴ Nik Ripken, *The Insanity of God: A True Story of Faith Resurrected* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2013), 272.

their lives. Harold Best refers to this personal identification as the “imago Dei,” where worship is the “continual outpouring of what it means to be created in the image of God.”²⁰⁵ Spiritual fervor, resilience, and fellowship are all attributes of a worship that manifests the nature of a holy, omnipotent, and triune God.

Worship is relational, beginning with God drawing a person to Himself through the power of the Holy Spirit. The person’s life is transformed as he or she encounters God in His holiness and recognizes his or her need for a Savior. Gradually, God forms His character in the person who worships Him in spirit and in truth.²⁰⁶ Together, they carry forth the mission of reaching others for Christ and multiplying themselves through a worship that is reproducible. Worship is therefore relational, transformational, formational, missional, and reproducible.²⁰⁷ For the persecuted Christians, worship was not just an event or something they did for God, it was “an act of unbridled obedience even when rational explanations were hard to find.”²⁰⁸ Their inexplicable joy and forgiveness toward their persecutors has been compared to mental insanity,²⁰⁹ where believers demonstrate a love toward those who hate them—a love that is far beyond their own ability to muster. For the persecuted Christians behind the Iron Curtain, this love was a reflection of lives that were defined by worship in every aspect.

The second hypothesis for this study focuses specifically on the changes that occurred in evangelical worship as a result of religious persecution. This hypothesis suggests that because

²⁰⁵ Harold Best, *Unceasing Worship: Biblical Perspectives on Worship and the Arts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 24.

²⁰⁶ John 4:24.

²⁰⁷ Wheeler and Whaley, *The Great Commission to Worship*, 49-54.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁰⁹ Ripken, *The Insanity of God*, 158.

religious activity was confined to the church walls and open evangelism was strictly forbidden, discipleship, missions and the spiritual depth of persecuted Christians were drastically altered. Worship especially as missional and reproducible underwent serious theological changes as horizontal growth was inhibited and the identity and purpose of the church were questioned. Worship became inward-focused with a concentration on personal spiritual disciplines rather than the outward expression of the Gospel and a means of representing Christ to the world. With the forced restrictions on religious activity, evangelicals behind the Iron Curtain lost the hope of worship's transformative influence on society that had characterized the faith of earlier generations of evangelicals in their own countries. Worship as formational drifted from its evangelical center on the Great Commission. The persecuted church may have attracted the attention of unbelievers who were impressed by believers' willingness to die for their faith, but their worship in general had lost its motivation to multiply the kingdom of God on this earth.

Major Characteristics of Evangelical Worship Behind the Iron Curtain

The first hypothesis of this study was affirmed by research findings from historical accounts of evangelical activity during the nineteenth century through the late 1940s. According to historians, influence of Western Christianity and the Great Awakenings spread to Western Europe and the Eastern Bloc countries in the mid-1800s.²¹⁰ This started a revival that transformed the culture by igniting a spiritual flame among Protestant congregations. Under the leadership of men such as Lord Radstock, Colonel Vasiliy Pashkov, and Ivan Prokhanov, evangelicals separated themselves from the formality and moral decay of the dominant state church, and boldly declared personal conversion experiences without the mediation of a priest.

²¹⁰ Hebly, *Protestants in Russia*, 49.

The Bible was available in the people's language for the first time in 1822 published by the Russian Bible Society, with a complete Bible available to the masses in 1876.²¹¹ As people started to read the Scriptures for themselves, they began to reconsider the purpose of religion in their lives. The role of the Russian Orthodox Church as the primary spiritual voice for Russian society was now questioned by a growing number of Christians who thought that its position had been compromised by its entanglement with politics. The political upheaval and internal revolutions of this time only intensified the dominance of imperial rule in the early twentieth century, and it was against this backdrop of repressive collectivism that the spiritual fervor of the evangelicals shown the brightest.

Spiritual Fervor

Russian evangelicals of the early 1900s included people of every class and occupation who were united by their own testimonies of personal conversion and relationship with God. The relational aspect of worship was enriched by the idea that they could have direct access to the Father through the Son. This sparked an enthusiasm for reading God's Word and sharing their insights with other believers. Peasants, factory workers, and members of the social elite all met together to study the Bible and listen to evangelical preachers.²¹² Worship as formational was focused on the Gospel themes of God's love, man's fallen condition, and personal justification and regeneration through Christ's death on the cross. The simple message of the gospel alarmed Orthodox priests who were concerned that the controversial belief of justification by faith alone

²¹¹ Heather J. Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005), 82.

²¹² Wanner, *Communities of the Converted*, 26.

would lead to licentious living.²¹³ However, evangelical preachers such as Radstock asserted that true spiritual regeneration was accompanied by God's grace given to help a believer overcome sin in one's personal life. He emphasized personal holiness as a response to God's love and not out of duty or as a means of justification. One author who knew Lord Radstock well shared, "In studying the feeling of Radstock, I myself sense that the man is in love with Christ, and this feeling is almost irresistible."²¹⁴ This worship effected a transformation of lifestyle in the lives of evangelicals which was a visible indication of the contrast to the Orthodox concept of spirituality as confined to monastic life.²¹⁵

Their passion for reading and studying God's Word became the foundation for a worship that was transformational and biblically centered. The apostle Paul spoke about biblical meditation in Romans 12:2 when he told Christians, "Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (KJV). Through meditation on God's Word, evangelicals were able to memorize large amounts of Scripture, experience God's presence, ponder His promises, and turn them into unceasing praise and prayer. Ordinary believers were transformed into "agents of audacious boldness for His glory."²¹⁶ The revival that was spurred by Radstock was based on the Bible as the exclusive authoritative text essential to faith and true Christian worship. This broke down denominational barriers by uniting everyone who believed in justification by grace, the

²¹³ Geoffrey Ellis and Wesley Jones, *The Other Revolution: Russian Evangelical Awakenings* (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 1996), 84.

²¹⁴ Nikolai Leskov, *Schism in High Society: Lord Radstock and His Followers*, trans. James Muckle (Nottingham, UK: Bramcote Books Ltd., 1995), 23.

²¹⁵ Edmund Heier, *Religious Schism in the Russian Aristocracy: Radstockism and Pashkovism* (The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970), 66.

²¹⁶ Robert Morgan, *Reclaiming the Lost Art of Biblical Meditation* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 2017), 2.

unconditional love of God, and the personal appropriation of salvation through faith in Christ. Worship became missional as gospel-believing Christians exhibited zeal to evangelize millions of Orthodox Russians. For these early evangelicals, the notion that every Christian was an evangelist was well understood.

The primacy of evangelism by means of a worship lifestyle extended naturally to works of charity within the community. Worship as missional began as evangelicals started food pantries, opened orphanages and schools, built shelters for the homeless, rehabilitated alcoholics, created workplaces for the unemployed, established nursing homes for the elderly, visited prisoners, established technical colleges, and gave scholarships to university students from poor families.²¹⁷ Their spiritual fervor advanced the Kingdom of God as they served the Lord in their neighborhoods and surrounding districts. They demonstrated what Paul admonished the Christians in Rome, “Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord” (Romans 12:11, NLT). The transformation that private worship had caused in their own hearts became public through acts of community service, and worship was reproduced in new believers as the evangelical population grew. One leader commented at the 1928 Baptist World Congress in Toronto, “The Russian people represent the most fruit-bearing spiritual ground among the peoples of the whole world. It is a people of God-seekers... We observe signs of a great awakening.”²¹⁸ Their optimism for social reform penetrated all sectors of life with the gospel to the point that some evangelical leaders even believed it would ultimately usher in the

²¹⁷ Gregory Nichols, *The Development of Russian Evangelical Spirituality* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 110.

²¹⁸ Durasoff, *The Russian Protestants*, 74.

millennium.²¹⁹ Prokhanov suggested that if it had not been for the interference of atheism, evangelicals may have spiritually conquered the whole of Russia.²²⁰

Resilience

The evangelical movement may have been the only alternative to the Communist Revolution. Unfortunately, however, the evangelicals lost their hope of a national reformation when their ideas were rejected and their work suppressed by strong governmental repression and control of religious activity. Stalin's anti-religious legislation of 1929 resulted in much persecution among evangelicals, which made the second quality of their worship during this time all the more evident. In spite of severe persecution, evangelical worship displayed a resilience that is well-documented by historical narratives, and continues to be a source of inspiration to evangelical believers to this day. Stories of torture in communist prisons would mean nothing if not accompanied by the personal testimonies of enduring faith and courage in the midst of intense suffering. Brother Andrew brought much of this to light with his biography, *God's Smuggler*,²²¹ along with Richard Wurmbrand's book, *Tortured for Christ*.²²² Other evangelical leaders such as Georgi Vins became internationally known in later years to the evangelical community,²²³ but personal testimonies were also given at the Congressional Hearing for the 99th Congress on Religious Persecution in the Soviet Union before the Committee on Foreign Affairs.

²¹⁹ Andrey Puzynin, *The Tradition of the Gospel Christians: A Study of Their Identity and Theology During the Russian, Soviet, and Post-Soviet Periods* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 129.

²²⁰ Ivan Prokhanov, *In the Cauldron of Russia: 1869-1933* (New York, NY: All-Russian Evangelical Christian Union, 1933), 155.

²²¹ Andrew, Sherill, and Sherill, *God's Smuggler*.

²²² Richard Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2017).

²²³ Hebly, *Protestants in Russia*, 159.

Historical accounts such as these indicate that persecution, especially for evangelicals, was a normal part of their lives.

Worship under persecution is more than a convenience, it is a necessity for survival. Relationally, worship that continues in spite of persecution confirms that a person's faith is genuine and not motivated by any hope of personal gain. Believers behind the Iron Curtain risked everything they had to worship, showing that their relationship with God was more important than anything else to them, including their own lives. Not only did they refuse to deny their faith, evangelicals were known to break into singing while being tortured, much to the confoundment of their persecutors.²²⁴ A similar story is recorded in the book of Acts where Paul and Silas had just been beaten and thrown into prison for proclaiming the Gospel. The Scripture says, "But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them."²²⁵ This resilient worship was possible only because of their relationship with God, and resulted in the jailor and his entire family being saved. In this story, worship that was relational became missional and reproducible. Matthew 5:11-12 says, "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely for my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (ESV). Worship under persecution brings a blessing to those who receive it with gladness. Those who take part in the fellowship of Christ's suffering can identify with Him more closely and strengthen their relationship with Him. There is true joy in knowing that this suffering for the sake of Christ will generate rewards in heaven as well as deepen the relational aspect of worship while here on this earth.

²²⁴ Ripken, *The Insanity of God*, 158.

²²⁵ Acts 16:25, NKJV.

Resilient worship was also demonstrated by the many written appeals and creative alternatives that evangelicals sought while trying to function as a religious community under communist rule. Bruce Epperly states that this resilience “is not the result of denying or evading life’s difficulties, but of committing oneself to creative and imaginative thinking and action.”²²⁶ For example, when evangelicals were forbidden to allow children to enter prayer services, they expanded their worship as missional and reproducible to university students.²²⁷ When ordained pastors were not permitted to travel to other districts and minister to struggling churches, lay members took it upon themselves to carry on this work. Many of the evangelicals also found creative ways to navigate the tax reforms that were a heavy burden too hard to bear for most churches. For churches that could no longer function legally, many evangelicals chose to continue meeting in secret in private individuals’ homes at different hours of the day and on various days of the week. When printing presses were shut down because no religious literature was allowed to be printed or distributed behind the Iron Curtain, many evangelicals resorted to the use of the illegal printing press, or the samizdat, which was the self-publishing of censored or underground literature. Bibles and religious literature were a vital part of worship as missional, transformational, and formational in the lives of believers, and especially new converts. Finding risky but creative ways of getting this literature into people’s hands was a visible evidence that the worship of evangelicals in Western Europe and Eastern Bloc countries was resilient.

²²⁶ Bruce Epperly, *A Center in the Cyclone: Twenty-First Century Clergy Self-Care* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 47.

²²⁷ Alexeyeva and Goldberg, *The Thaw Generation: Coming of Age in the Post-Stalin Era*, 206.

Fellowship

The third major characteristic of evangelical worship behind the Iron Curtain was fellowship. This was true of the early evangelicals in the 1800s, and it continued to be a priority throughout the Iron Curtain years as well. As mentioned earlier, the Russian word for “fellowship” is very closely related to their word for “community.”²²⁸ *Shchestvo* is the root word for both “fellowship” and “community,” and carries with it the idea of brotherhood, sodality, and camaraderie. For the evangelicals in the U.S.S.R., the bond they shared between them as Christians was a natural extension of this already well-developed cultural concept. As the High Priest for His followers, Jesus prayed to the Father in John 17:23 saying, “The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me” (ESV). Fellowship in worship is a relationship that believers have with one another because of their individual relationship with Christ as their Savior. Worship as relational is built upon the unity that Christ has with the Father, and the complete unity to which Christ refers is the oneness that Christians experience in true fellowship with each other, with Christ, and with the Father. The love that is shared between fellow believers is the foundation for worship as missional. When the unsaved world sees the bond that believers have with one another and with God, they are attracted by God’s love to be in relationship with Him also. Missional worship then extends in practical life-giving ways to the unsaved as the love of God becomes the motivational force for reaching others with the Gospel of Christ.

Through Christian fellowship, worship as missional in the U.S.S.R. was realized by the evangelical beliefs, goals and purposes believers had in common. In the 1800’s, the evangelicals

²²⁸ Mironova and Popov, “Communicative Practices of Evangelical Christian Baptists In the Period 1950-1980-X Years (Example of the Tambov Region),” 371.

also shared their possessions, following the example of Lord Radstock. Radstock had grown up in high society in London where his family became very active in the Plymouth Brethren movement, donating large amounts of money to help the poor and rescue prostitutes living in the slums of London.²²⁹ When he moved to St. Petersburg, he and his successor, Colonel Vasiliy Pashkov, were very influential among the wealthy aristocrats of the capital, many of whom gave away vast amounts of their wealth.²³⁰ The Gospel Christians and the Pashkovites, as his followers were later called, visibly demonstrated equality and brotherhood across ethnic and social lines. Russia at this time was a hierarchical society, defined by ten clearly distinct *soslovie*, or social strata, determined by the circumstances of one's birth.²³¹ The Pashkovites, however, attempted to bridge the social gaps between the wealthy and the poor, a fact that is often misinterpreted by secular historians.²³² Ballrooms in mansions were turned into prayer rooms where the nobility along with servants and others of less privileged groups would meet and pray together. Where the socialist agenda promoted the idea of "what's yours is mine," the evangelicals followed Christ's example of "what's mine is yours."²³³ This kind of egalitarianism was very similar to that found in the Early Church during the time of the apostles, where the Bible says, "The full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common"

²²⁹ Mark McCarthy, "Religious Conflict and Social Order in Nineteenth-Century Russia: Orthodoxy and the Protestant Challenge, 1812-1905" (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN, 2004), 51-52, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/305137823?accountid=12085>.

²³⁰ Nichols, *The Development of Russian Evangelical Spirituality*, 109-110.

²³¹ Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution*, 4.

²³² Puzynin, *The Tradition of the Gospel Christians*, 77.

²³³ Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution*, 71.

(Acts 4:32, ESV). Other sects, such as the Molokans, also developed during this time, each with its own alternative vision of society and practical implications for worship in Christian community.

The determination evangelicals demonstrated to remain in regular fellowship with other believers was obvious by the radical measures they took to keep their churches running, especially during Khrushchev's antireligious campaign. When many churches were either shut down or went underground, evangelicals were known to walk a full day's journey just to attend one service.²³⁴ Worship services would often last for hours, with several different preachers sharing from Scripture what was for many younger preachers the only theological training they received. Prayer during the service also strengthened the feeling of fellowship among believers. As the pastor would lead aloud, the members of the congregation would join him audibly in whispers of their own until the whole church was filled with the sound of people praying for one another.²³⁵ Worship as formational and transformational was experienced as believers allowed the maturing process that comes with living in community to humble them and teach them what it meant to walk in favor with God and man.²³⁶ Pollock said about Russian churches at this time, "Evangelical communities have their human weaknesses, problems, and temptations experienced by Christians anywhere in the world, but the Russian Baptist's faith is his absorbing passion. Life centers around his church. Its fellowship is the citadel from which he can operate in a harsh environment."²³⁷ For the believers living behind the Iron Curtain, fellowship was the means by

²³⁴ Pospelovsky, *A History of Soviet Atheism in Theory and Practice, and the Believer*, 192.

²³⁵ Pollock, *The Faith of the Russian Evangelicals*, 92.

²³⁶ Proverbs 3:4, Luke 2:52.

²³⁷ Pollock, *The Faith of the Russian Evangelicals*, 97.

which they encouraged one another through difficult times to remain faithful to the Lord and to exercise their faith through love and good works.

Changes in Evangelical Worship as a Result of Persecution

The second hypothesis of this study was affirmed by research findings from historical accounts of evangelical activity behind the Iron Curtain which lasted from 1945 to 1991. By comparing the characteristics of worship in the evangelical community before persecution began with the quality of worship during and after the Cold War, changes in evangelical worship as a result of persecution become apparent. These changes were theological as well as practical in nature, and are categorized for this study in terms of discipleship, missions, and spiritual depth. This is a comparative study in that the worship experiences before, during, and after persecution were in many ways similar to each other. The changes that did occur, however, reflect shifts in theological and missiological views that had lasting consequences. Because of intense persecution, evangelical views on the nature of the Gospel, the kingdom of God, cultural engagement, and the identity and purpose of the church were all challenged. Some of these views remained fairly consistent throughout the years of the Iron Curtain, whereas others did not. In either case, the quality of evangelical worship as missional, relational, transformational, formational, and reproducible as a result of persecution is critically evaluated and discussed.

Discipleship

Most evangelicals will agree that the three main purposes of the church are worship, evangelism, and sanctification.²³⁸ These portray the three dimensions or vectors of purpose with worship directed upward to God, evangelism directed outward toward the unsaved, and

²³⁸ MacArthur, *Worship: The Ultimate Priority*, 92.

sanctification directed inward. The command to make disciples, however, is more than just a calling—it is a duty. Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 28:19, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (NKJV). This is not an option; it is part of the Great Commission and an important aspect of worship as missional. Discipleship may include evangelism, teaching, and personal mentoring, but as the body of Christ, all believers are to be actively seeking to fulfill God’s mission on this earth. Worship cannot be reproducible without discipleship, and yet this is exactly what happened behind the Iron Curtain as a result of religious persecution. One denominational leader remarked:

For seventy years they forced us behind a religious fence where we had to exercise our religious rites within the constraints of our buildings, never allowing us to take our Christianity outside. Christians have adopted this philosophy as their own... We focused on church worship, choirs, internal organization, improvement within, and beautiful building, having forgotten that this is not what we were saved for.²³⁹

Evangelicals were having worship experiences within their churches, but without discipleship, they were not developing worshipping communities.²⁴⁰ Part of the reason for this was that no one knew how long the persecution was going to last, so they were not always thinking in terms of the long-term growth and development of the church. They were thinking more of the short-term survival of what was left of the churches they had.

Evangelical campaigns behind the Iron Curtain did not occur very often, but when they did, many of them were initiated by Western short-term missionary teams who were mostly project-oriented. They would basically proclaim the gospel and then leave with very little follow-up or discipleship.²⁴¹ Many times, the content of the proclamation would consist of appealing

²³⁹ Kashirin, "Protestant Minorities in the Soviet Ukraine, 1945–1991," 171.

²⁴⁰ Josh Davis and Nikki Lerner, *Worship Together in Your Church as in Heaven* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2015), 37.

²⁴¹ Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, “Evangelism and Social Responsibility: An Evangelical Commitment,” Lausanne Occasional Paper 21, 1982, <https://www.lausanne.org/content/lop/lop-21>.

catchphrases that would give people the impression that all they had to do was come to Jesus, pray the sinner's prayer, and then they would be free from all of their problems. This type of approach to evangelism produced a great deal of delusion among believers who were immediately faced with the inevitable prospect of persecution because of their decision. Worship as relational was stunted because new converts who came to Christ during these campaigns then had difficulty trusting what their pastors had to say. By making a public decision to accept Christ as their personal Savior in a communist country, believers' troubles were just beginning.

With the ban on printing or distributing Bibles or any religious literature behind the Iron Curtain, it was very difficult for evangelicals to obtain follow-up materials necessary to disciple new converts. People who came forward and repented were told that their sins were forgiven, but they did not know what came next. Because many of the pastors behind the Iron Curtain had received little or no theological training, they were unable to provide the answers to questions new converts were asking. There were also very few opportunities for intentional discipleship. Worship as formational was restricted because there were almost no home Bible study groups where people could receive personal mentoring in their faith or the help they needed to grow spiritually. One educator who himself became a Christian commented, "There were very few opportunities to get involved. As you prepared to be baptized, you went to classes, but after your baptism, you were left to yourself and had to be equipped from sermons."²⁴² It was assumed that the Sunday sermon was enough, even without a Bible or any religious material, for disciples to mature in Christ.

Evangelicals under persecution had divided themselves into different theological camps that tended to become sub-cultures of their own. Discipleship, then, in many cases, was

²⁴² Ellis and Jones, *The Other Revolution: Russian Evangelical Awakenings*, 77.

synonymous with acculturation into a specific religious sub-culture.²⁴³ For several years, the only known form of conversion in many religious communities was that of children who were growing up in evangelical families. When these young people professed to have a personal conversion experience, they simply became like the others in their church, and their external conformity to the standards of their religious community was how other members evaluated the authenticity of their conversion.²⁴⁴ When people outside of this religious community became Christians and wanted to join their church, they were faced with the pressure to conform to what appeared to them as a strange and narrow sub-culture. Worship as transformational became more cultural rather than spiritual. In one sense, church leaders had reason to be suspicious of outside professing Christians wanting to join their church given the fact that government informants often disguised themselves in this way in order to spy on the internal workings of a congregation. Pastors felt responsible to guard their people against unnecessary harm, but it also appeared that they were either unwilling or unprepared to accept people who reflected a “worldly culture.”²⁴⁵ As a result, only the most determined and spiritually thirsty people could be tolerated, with many religious groups being labeled as legalistic or narrow-minded.

Missions

Changes in evangelical worship behind the Iron Curtain as a result of persecution were most obvious in the area of missions. This was due to the major theological shifts that came about through the combination of three important factors occurring in the U.S.S.R. at this time:

²⁴³ Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution*, 32.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

²⁴⁵ Wanner, *Communities of the Converted*, 31-33.

the communist government's suppression of religious freedom, the restoration of the nation of Israel in 1948, and the threat of nuclear war.²⁴⁶ The earlier evangelical vision toward Apostolic Christianity and restorationism gave way to premillennialism as evangelicals lost their hope for socio-political reformation and looked more toward the second coming of Christ. The declaration of the statehood of Israel was a confirmation to many that prophecy was being fulfilled, and the end times were near.²⁴⁷ The threat of nuclear war further solidified this belief as significant changes occurred in the theological understanding of eschatology among evangelical communities. Evangelicals were no longer as concerned with missions or evangelism as they were with just being prepared for the rapture. They could not possibly imagine that the world was becoming a better place, so worship as missional was seriously limited.

In contrast to the earlier social and evangelistic concerns of the 1920's, evangelicals living during the years of the Cold War instead emphasized eschatology and sanctification. Some prominent evangelical leaders during this time even discouraged evangelistic preaching, stating that "it is our fundamental task to instruct those already believing."²⁴⁸ The relational aspect of worship was confined to the church walls as the work of attracting new members was depicted as "an extreme" that led to a dangerous disregard for the "deepening of spiritual life."²⁴⁹ Instead of promoting a worship that was reproducible through missions, evangelical ministers focused more on the spiritual quality of their church members. Social work was now viewed as a function of

²⁴⁶ Fletcher, *Soviet Believers: The Religious Sector of the Population*, 140.

²⁴⁷ Ezekiel 36:8-12 and II Timothy 3:1.

²⁴⁸ Yakov Zhidkov, "Staryi God i Novyi God" [The Past Year and the New Year], *Bratskii Vestnik* 1 (1949): 3-6.

²⁴⁹ Mark Harris, *Historical Perspectives on the Evangelistic Theology and Methodology of Russian Baptists* (Pasadena, CA: Mission Consulting Group, 1999), 14.

the state, and Christians did not need to participate in it. In fact, evangelicals developed a culture of their own instead of engaging in the culture in which they lived. The external pressure of the hostile atheistic society was combined with the internal drive to protect themselves from contamination with “the world.” Hebly pointed out that evangelicals at this time believed there was “strength in isolation,” where new believers were expected to “sever all ties and old friendships with those outside of the church” before they could be baptized.²⁵⁰ Even the evangelical communities who were able to continue to operate legally gradually became more secretive and cloistered.

The new missiological mindset of evangelicals behind the Iron Curtain was a reflection of the theological change that had occurred in their view of the kingdom of God. The evangelicals of the pre-Cold War days who were mostly postmillennialists saw the kingdom of God as attainable here on this earth, where the Christian ideal was to “bring Christ down to earth through reaching His likeness in humans.”²⁵¹ During the years of persecution behind the Iron Curtain, however, evangelicals became more skeptical of this idea, viewing the kingdom of God primarily as spiritual, internalized, and future in nature. Instead of thinking about how they could transform society through missions and the power of the Gospel, Christians saw nothing redeemable in their current culture, and viewed themselves as “aliens and strangers in the world.”²⁵² Early evangelicals viewed the church as an instrument and sign of God’s kingdom where “the Christian sees every labor, spiritual or physical, as participation in the great work of

²⁵⁰ Hebly, *Protestants in Russia*, 114.

²⁵¹ Prokhanov, *In the Cauldron of Russia: 1869-1933*, 110.

²⁵² I Peter 2:2.

his Creator and Savior in renewing the life of humanity.”²⁵³ They were convinced that worship had the power to transform all aspects of practical everyday life. The persecuted believers, however, viewed the kingdom of God as a hidden and invisible reality that had no social or missiological implications beyond the issues of internal spiritual life. Any hardships they endured were not to be perceived as injustices that needed to be set right, but rather God-ordained instruments of spiritual growth. Life was not going to get any easier for them, so they resigned to accepting the fact that the condition of the world must get worse in order for Christ to return and set up His kingdom on this earth.

Spiritual Depth

Evangelical worship behind the Iron Curtain became very inward-focused as a result of persecution. Believers had “little experience relating to people outside of their ecclesiastical microcosm,”²⁵⁴ and instead believed they could show Christ to others by their “strong moral discipline.”²⁵⁵ Worship as missional shifted from evangelism to sanctification with an emphasis on personal piety. Hebly quoted Yakov Zhidkov, the first president of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists, in his letter to the American Baptists:

The spiritual depth, purity, and holiness of life of our churches and members—this is what occupies the first place in our educational work. We do not hunt for numbers...Numbers interest us very little and we are not especially concerned with the statistics of our membership. This is a specific feature of ours, and we do not consider it a bad one. The purity of the church and the high Christian life of its members are most important for us.²⁵⁶

²⁵³ Prokhanov, *In the Cauldron of Russia: 1869-1933*, 105.

²⁵⁴ Fletcher, *Soviet Believers: The Religious Sector of the Population*, 102.

²⁵⁵ Pollock, *The Faith of the Russian Evangelicals*, 96.

²⁵⁶ Hebly, *Protestants in Russia*, 117-118.

The majority of the preaching in evangelical churches behind the Iron Curtain was directed inward, and worship as formational was designed more to meet the spiritual needs of believers than to reach outward toward the lost. The sermon content was mostly salvation through spiritual regeneration and sanctification in light of Christ's eminent return. Their prayers were often eschatological in nature, and their hymns contained many references to the hope of Jesus' coming to "take his own from the earth."²⁵⁷ These prayers have been interpreted by some scholars as essentially "appeals to cut short their life on this earth...this vale of tears."²⁵⁸ This soteriological preoccupation can only be explained by the extended persecution of believers during this time.

Worship as transformational was greatly influenced by a theology of suffering that arose throughout the years of the Iron Curtain. For many in evangelical circles, the acceptance of suffering for the sake of the gospel was an indication of genuine faith and a means of attaining future glory. Verses such as Matthew 5:10 were clung to as promises of this hope. Suffering was also seen as confirmation that the believers were following the "strait and narrow path" (Matthew 7:14) which allowed them to participate in Christ's holiness.²⁵⁹ From this perspective, suffering had a positive value because it was used by God to build character into believers and mold them into the image of Christ. As an instrument of sanctification, persecution was considered a valuable experience, and something for which they could be grateful. Pastor Rob Morgan says, "Gratitude brings intimacy with the Lord and deep, long-lasting joy."²⁶⁰ This focus

²⁵⁷ Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals since World War II*, 137.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 153.

²⁵⁹ Nichols, *The Development of Russian Evangelical Spirituality*, 109.

²⁶⁰ Morgan, *Reclaiming the Lost Art of Biblical Meditation*, 119.

on the Lord drew their minds away from the problems they were facing to give them peace and strength in the worst of circumstances. Persecution and suffering were often considered more valuable than a vast knowledge of theology, and were commonly referred to as the “Siberian seminary.”²⁶¹ The spiritual depth that resulted from suffering produced a faith that grew even in the most hostile environment.

The biblical injunction to “love not the world, neither the things that are in the world” (I John 2:15, KJV) for the evangelicals behind the Iron Curtain was interpreted differently than prior to persecution, and affected their worship as both relational and reproducible. Although the emphasis on sanctification had positive results, the form of spirituality produced during this time tended to accentuate the negative aspects of holiness and the Christian life. That is, a “good Christian” was someone who did *not* drink, smoke, use bad language or go to the theater. This paradigm was portrayed in black and white with no shades or nuances in between. Prohibitions against wearing jewelry or makeup, for example, were issues that became central to spirituality. These rules further distanced believers from unbelievers and highlighted the contrast between the Christian’s lifestyle and that of the world. Sergienko said, “We knew very well what Christians were not supposed to do, but had little idea of what their positive influence in society might be.”²⁶² The relational aspect of worship withered as Christians refused to rethink their culture from a Christian perspective. Worship that could have been reproducible was rejected as “people pleasing” or borrowing from secular culture.²⁶³ Without the ability to critically evaluate outward

²⁶¹ Kolarz, *Religion in the Soviet Union*, 136.

²⁶² Bolshakoff, *Russian Nonconformity: The Story of “Unofficial” Religion in Russia*, 29.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 31.

expressions scripturally and theologically, deviation from the established beliefs and accepted practices were regarded as sin.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

In conclusion, a brief review of the purpose of this study and a summary of the findings will be given. An overview of the core concepts will be presented as well as their relationship to the research questions and hypotheses. Any limitations to the study will be acknowledged and considered. This chapter will also suggest practical implications for the results of this study as pertaining to local worship ministry within U.S. evangelical churches today. Further suggestions for future study will also be recommended.

Summary of the Study

Today, there are more Christians being persecuted for their faith around the world than ever before in the history of Christianity.²⁶⁴ Many evangelicals in the western world are completely ignorant of the nature of religious persecution and how it affects worship within their churches. Through a qualitative historical study of the results of persecution on evangelical worship behind the Iron Curtain, changes in worship within western evangelical churches yet to face persecution can be anticipated. Although there are many detailed accounts of religious persecution behind the Iron Curtain, both individual and corporate, very little of this information deals specifically with how worship was changed because of persecution. Since worship as a lifestyle affects every part of a believer's life, changes in worship during the years of the Cold War were widespread and long-lasting. Information from various sources was gathered in order to establish a basic frame of reference for identifying the most influential factors related to this study. Identification of these themes was crucial for the application of this study to modern evangelical worship. Therefore, by examining worship as missional, relational, transformational,

²⁶⁴ Cochran, *Christians in the Crosshairs*, 17.

formational, and reproducible in light of the historical findings, a more holistic understanding of the worship changes as a result of persecution can be gained.

Summary of the Findings

Due to the extensive amount of literature covering the Cold War, religious persecution, and the plight of evangelicals behind the Iron Curtain, the parameters to facilitate the investigation and interpretation of this information were defined by the specific research questions and hypotheses. In this qualitative historical study, it was determined that the major characteristics of Christian worship in evangelical churches behind the Iron Curtain were spiritual fervor, resilience, and fellowship. Persecution of these Christians impacted their worship in terms of discipleship, missions, and spiritual depth. Both of these hypotheses were affirmed by research findings from historical accounts of evangelical activity behind the Iron Curtain before and during the Cold War. Christians living in the U.S.S.R. prior to persecution had a quality of worship that was characterized by a spiritual zeal and hunger for God's Word. The fellowship of other believers was central to their lives, and they were able to withstand some of the worst suffering. Persecution strengthened their bond with other believers and deepened their relationship with the Lord. However, because religious activity was restricted to the church walls, discipleship and missions were seriously impacted.

The specific changes that occurred in evangelical worship as a result of persecution were based on a historical study of worship practices at the turn of the twentieth century as compared to those during and after the Iron Curtain. Worship has been defined as a "whole of life activity," something that "lies at the heart of true identity and vocation."²⁶⁵ Therefore, to determine the

²⁶⁵ Due, *Created for Worship*, 34.

characteristics of worship prior to the initiation of persecution, it was necessary to a look at evangelical life from every angle. Evangelicals in the early 1900s were experiencing a revival that had spread through western Europe. Worship as formational was centered around the theological concept of the priesthood of believers and justification by faith in Christ alone. No longer dependent on the Orthodox priests for the appropriation of salvation or the forgiveness of sins, evangelicals exhibited a worship that was based on a personal relationship with God the Father. Worship as relational became transformational as evangelicals actively worked to make positive changes in every level of their society. Their optimism for societal change was evidence of worship with a mission. Worship as reproducible was verified by a large increase in the number of missionaries sent out by evangelical organizations in the 1920s.²⁶⁶ Christianity provided the alternative vision for society before communism and the implementation of Khrushchev's antireligious campaign.

Once the persecution began, evangelical optimism began to wane, and worship as missional drastically changed. Believers who were once fully committed to sharing the Gospel with the lost were no longer allowed to share their faith outside of the church building. They did not feel that they could fulfill the Great Commission to "go and make disciples"²⁶⁷ when their Christian communities were just struggling to survive. They lost sight of their outward focus on worship as missional and reproducible as worship turned inward with an emphasis primarily on spiritual formation. Premillennial theology was superseded by pain and the desire to be delivered from intense persecution by the second coming of Christ. Evangelicals no longer believed they could personally extend God's kingdom on this earth, and instead concentrated on their own

²⁶⁶ Prokhorov, "The 'Golden Age' of the Soviet Baptist in the 1920s," 92.

²⁶⁷ Matthew 28:18-20.

personal sanctification so they could be ready for the rapture. Although worship as formational under persecution yielded the fruit of resilient faith, worship as transformational was limited to personal disciplines and the development of a religious sub-culture.²⁶⁸ Relational worship was attractive to those within the fellowship of believers, but evangelicals were not developing worshipping communities that would promote the long-term growth and expansion of the church. Persecution produced a worship that was spiritually deep but with little vision for missions.

Assumptions

For this study, it is assumed that the Bible is true, and therefore, the principles in this paper derived from the core concepts pertaining to worship are timeless and applicable to evangelical worship today. It is also assumed that the translation of documents from Russian into English is accurate for the purposes of this study. Due to the nature of the research, it is also assumed that there will be various interpretations of the information collected.

Limitations of the Study

This study contains certain limitations, some of which are inherent to the nature of qualitative historical studies, and others which were intentionally imposed to limit the scope of the study. The researcher recognizes the following limitations and has attempted to account for their impact on the quality of the research:

1. The primary limitation for this study is the subjectivity of the researcher. Having lived and worked in ministry in a communist country for two years, the researcher has a perspective on worship under persecution that is influenced by this experience. Because the analysis of historical information ultimately rests with the views and interpretation of

²⁶⁸ Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution*, 32.

the person doing the study, the assumptions and perceptions of information will inevitably reflect the interests and bias of the researcher.

2. Generalizations in worship changes in countries behind the Iron Curtain were made to simplify and categorize information for the sake of clarity. Not all religious communities in every country facing religious persecution reacted to it in the same way, so exceptions to the findings will exist. The bulk of the historical information obtained was from prior studies done primarily in Russia, Romania, and the Ukraine.
3. The primary delimitation for this study is based on the definition of worship as a lifestyle. The researcher has intentionally avoided the characterization of worship as principally a style of music. Since this concept is preferential and changes with each successive generation, the researcher determined that the study results would have better practical applications if based on a more certain system of classification.

Implications for Practice

In much of the western world, evangelicals are ignorant of the persecution that their Christian brothers and sisters are facing all over the world. Terms such as the “persecuted church” seem to imply that there are two different types of churches—the free church and the persecuted church, when in reality there is only one church of God. Church leaders of various denominations may suggest as they did when the persecution was happening during the years of the Iron Curtain that believers bring this upon themselves by not complying with governmental legislation. They may even cite biblical references such as Romans 13:1-2 which says, “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is not power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation” (KJV). What is a normal and

expected consequence of becoming a Christian in many parts of the world is almost inconceivable to the western evangelical mind. However, the Bible clearly instructs believers to “remember them that are in bonds”²⁶⁹ as if they themselves were suffering with them. The results of this study implicate the need to identify with fellow believers who are suffering persecution today, the mandate to worship as missional in spite of persecution, and the necessity to be spiritually prepared if and when persecution comes to the American evangelical church.

In I Corinthians 12, Paul compares the church to a body and reminds believers that just as there are many parts in one body, so the church is made up of many members that are united in Christ.²⁷⁰ When one part of the body is hurting, the whole body suffers, and it takes all parts working together to function properly. In reality, there is no such thing as the persecuted church and the free church. There is only one church, and it is the church of Jesus Christ. Evangelical Christians in America cannot ethically justify separating themselves from believers in Somalia, China, Saudi Arabia, or other Muslim countries who are being persecuted today for their faith. Each part of the body of Christ needs the other parts in order to fulfill the Great Commission. In practical terms, this means that believers in America should support persecuted believers through prayer and financial means, but the identification with their suffering goes much further than this. Believers in America must recognize that they are fighting a spiritual battle against forces of darkness that work to prevent people from hearing the Gospel. Nik Ripken says, “Everyone in the world today who claims to be a follower of Jesus plays a part in this battle.”²⁷¹ Identifying

²⁶⁹ Hebrews 13:3.

²⁷⁰ I Corinthians 12:12-27.

²⁷¹ Ripken, *The Insanity of God*, 309.

with persecuted believers, then, means that believers in the western world share the same cause, vision, and mission as those who are giving their lives for their faith.

Believers behind the Iron Curtain lost their focus when their worship as missional was restricted. The Bible says, “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.”²⁷² Evangelical worshipers in America may wonder why so many Christians around the world are suffering persecution, when the real question that needs to be asked is “Why are Christians in America *not* suffering persecution?”²⁷³ This is an entirely different perspective, as persecuted Christians around the world today are not praying to be delivered from suffering, but rather that they would be faithful to Christ *in* their suffering.²⁷⁴ The implication for worshipers in the western world is that they need to seriously question whether or not they are being obedient themselves to the Great Commission. Dr. Vernon Whaley says,

When we love God with all our hearts, we’re compelled to live on mission for Him...From Genesis to Revelation, God actively pursued fallen men and women, first to be redeemed and then to join Him on mission as Great Commission worshipers, proclaiming eternal hope to a lost world. This mandate has never changed.²⁷⁵

Being missional as worshipers means living life in such a way that one is always showing his or her love and commitment to Christ by being ready to share the gospel with others. This goes far beyond just being grateful for religious freedom in America. It implies obedience to the Great Commission regardless of the consequences.

Faithfulness to missional worship in the midst of intense suffering or persecution requires believers to anchor their lives in a Person who is alive and actively drawing people to Himself in

²⁷² II Timothy 3:12, KJV.

²⁷³ Ripken, *The Insanity of God*, 311.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 306.

²⁷⁵ Wheeler and Whaley, *The Great Commission to Worship*, 105.

the twenty-first century. This is not a particular missional strategy or program, but a revelation of who Jesus is in the lives of people who are being persecuted for their faith. The spiritual depth that was cultivated in evangelicals suffering behind the Iron Curtain revealed the strength of their faith and is a testament to the spiritual growth that is often fostered through adversity.

Victimization itself is not virtuous, but persecution for faith in Christ brings incomprehensible blessing. Matthew 5:10 says, “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (KJV). Many Christians in America hesitate to share the Gospel with their neighbor for fear of embarrassment, much less risk their lives or the lives of their family. However, the unspeakable joy and peace that come from obedience demonstrate the depth and power of a resurrection faith. The implication is that instead of believers in America trying to rescue persecuted Christians around the world, God may want to use persecuted believers to instruct western evangelicals and save them from the effects of a weak, insipid, and powerless faith.

Recommendations for Future Study

Based on the limitations and results of this study, there are several recommendations for further study that could bring more insight into the relationship between persecution and worship. First, it is recommended that a follow-up study of current worship practices in countries that were formerly part of the U.S.S.R. be done to determine the spiritual depth of worship in these countries as compared to that of evangelicals living during the time of the Iron Curtain. Several reports written within the last ten years indicate that spiritual fervor is currently much

less than what it was under persecution.²⁷⁶ However, these views tend to reflect the opinion of an older generation who may be reacting more to changes in worship style.

A second recommendation is to specifically compare the worship styles of pre-, mid-, and post-Iron Curtain years in the U.S.S.R. It would be interesting to see how the style changes corresponded with significant theological, philosophical, and methodological changes in worship that happened concurrently. This would probably entail the lyrical analysis of music sung in various churches throughout the different time periods as well as a thorough study of sermon content with theological implications. Although an examination of specific worship styles was intentionally avoided in this study, a comparison of this nature could have practical implications for worship ministries who are struggling with contemporary versus traditional worship issues.

²⁷⁶ Andrey Kravtsev, "Russian Baptist Mission Theology in Historical and Contemporary Perspective" (PhD diss., Trinity International University, Deerfield, IL, 2017), 97, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/2027374318?accountid=12085>.

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