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# AGENT-OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF SOVIET SECURITY SERVICES IN A PROTESTANT ENVIRONMENT (1945-1953)

By Oleksandr Trygub

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## Abstract

The place and role of Soviet security services in the development of two Protestant movements, Pentecostals and Adventists-Reformists, are examined in the paper, based on previously classified documents of the Committee for State Security of the USSR. The development of these confessions in the late Stalinist post-war period of 1945-1953 is analyzed.

The main intention of the Soviet state security services among Pentecostals was to dissolve them through integration with the Baptist congregations. The August Agreement on integrating Evangelical Christians-Baptists and Christians of Evangelical Faith (Pentecostals), carefully prepared by the special services, was not fully concluded. Most of the Pentecostal congregations did not support the integration and continued their independent existence in the underground. Their radical position led to the intensification of the repressive machinery of the Soviet state. In order to expose the underground Pentecostal congregations, the state security services used a full range of tools and tactics—recruiting agents, conducting special operations, arrests, and deportations, etc. Despite massive repression, Pentecostals retained their congregations and believers.

Soviet security services also adopted an aggressive attitude towards Adventists-Reformists. The latter could not agree with a number of Soviet demands, one of which was compulsory military service. The primary way of struggle with Adventists-Reformists was the use of repression to suppress their religious movement. Using an extensive network of agents, state security services were able to identify the underground Adventists-Reformists congregations and, after well-planned operations, carried out group arrests. Those arrested were convicted in closed court hearings and sentenced to lengthy terms of imprisonment.

Thus, despite the commitment to religious freedom declared by Stalin under pressure from the allies, Bolshevik repressive practices concerning the religious organizations in the 1920s and 1930s persisted. Although the anti-religious strategy of the communist party state toward Protestant movements in the post-war Stalinist era did not change, it gained a new breath and more sophisticated mechanisms of implementation through state security services.

**Keywords:** Protestants, Ukrainian SSR, late Stalinism, repression, Adventists-Reformists, Pentecostals, Soviet security services, KGB

## Introduction

Liberalization of access to archival documents of the Soviet special services, which was initiated in 2015 with the passing of the Law of Ukraine “On Access to the Archives of Repressive Bodies of the Communist Totalitarian Regime of 1917-1991,” has made it possible to reveal many unknown pages of the Soviet history. Of particular interest are the secret mechanisms of Soviet influence on the religious life of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (hereafter UkrSSR) population.

A study of the reporting documentation of the Committee for State Security of the UkrSSR allows us to state the comprehensive nature and destructive role of security services in the life of Protestant confessions in Ukrainian territories, as well as the enormous operational activities employed to subordinate Protestant groups and their leaders to KGB influence, setting aside those who were out of favor through the mechanism of repression, etc.

At the time of the liberation of Ukrainian territory from the Nazi invaders, on November 6, 1943, the People’s Commissar for State Security of the UkrSSR, S. Savchenko, sent a circular note to the regional departments of the NKGB<sup>1</sup> in which he demanded “to maximize the active agent-operational work on church and sectarian cadre.” Among Protestants, special attention was paid to Adventists-Reformists and Pentecostals (Seventh-day Adventists and Baptists avoided massive comprehensive repression, since they managed to legalize and organize religious centers in Moscow). Among the leadership and preaching staff of those confessions, it was proposed “to arrange an agent-informant network in such way that in each... sectarian group or community there would be one or two agents. This will allow for controlling the activities of the group, cultivating its participants and operate among its members.”<sup>2</sup>

The full implementation of this directive began only after the end of the Soviet-German war. In the second half of 1945, the state security services of the UkrSSR began to implement two key centralized agent-operational files: “*Proroki*” (“Prophets” for Pentecostals) and “*Orakul*” (“Oracle” for Adventists)<sup>3</sup> in relation to Protestant movements. To create a general

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<sup>1</sup> The People’s Commissariat for State Security (NKGB). In 1946 it was reorganized into the Ministry for State Security (MGB) which existed up to 1953.

<sup>2</sup> The Sectoral State Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine, Kyiv (SSA SSU). Fund 16. List 1. File 539. P. 200-203.

<sup>3</sup> An interesting fact is that Baptists were not subjected to this explicit suppression and showed a more loyal attitude towards the Soviet regime. Most of the Baptist leaders agreed to cooperate with the special services. The Seventh-day Adventists (*Subbotniks*) also found a common ground with the Soviet regime. This not only saved them from a

scene of the place and role of special services in the life of Protestant confessions in the second half of the 1940s, the rest of this article will discuss the peculiar features and course of these files.

## Historiography

Some aspects of the history of late Protestant movements in the Ukrainian SSR in the postwar period have already been considered in historiography. In the context of the Baptist movement, the authors of the collaborative work *History of Evangelical Christians-Baptists in the USSR* briefly analyzed the Pentecostal movement in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The book is based on official sources and the period under consideration is limited to the events of the August 1945 agreement.<sup>4</sup> The book by V. Zavatsky, *The Evangelical Movement in the USSR after the Second World War*, has a similar character, but also discusses the conditions of the August Agreement and the attitude of Baptists and Pentecostals to it<sup>5</sup>, as does the work of V.A. Slobodyanik “Outlines of Pentecostal History.”<sup>6</sup>

The history of Protestantism in Ukraine has also been studied by some foreign researchers. It is especially necessary to mention the work of Steve Durassoff, *The Russian Protestants: Evangelicals in the Soviet Union: 1944-1964*, where much attention is paid to Pentecostals.<sup>7</sup> This book, like all early works on the history of Protestantism in the USSR, has the same crucial shortcoming of being limited to only publicly available sources.

The first thorough work on the history of Pentecostals in Ukraine is the book by Vladimir Franchuk, *Russia Asked the Lord for Rain*.<sup>8</sup> A great advantage of the book is not only the author’s thoroughness and deep understanding of the religious component, but also the use of both official sources and recently declassified documents of the supreme authorities of the

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massive thrust from the state security services, but also allowed them to preserve their confessional structure in the USSR.

<sup>4</sup> *История Евангельских христиан-баптистов в СССР*. (Москва: Изд-во ВСЕХБ, 1989), 404-6. [History of Evangelical Christians-Baptists in the USSR.]

<sup>5</sup> Вальтер Заватски, *Евангелическое движение в СССР после второй мировой войны*. (Москва: ИЦ-Гарант, 1995), 102-7. [Walter Zawatski, . Evangelical movement in the USSR after the Second World War. Moscow: ITs-Garant]

<sup>6</sup> В.А. Слободяник, *Очерки по истории пятидесятничества (с комментариями)*. (Ирпень, 2000). [Slobodyanik, V.A. Essays on the history of Pentecostalism (with commentary). Irpin]

<sup>7</sup> Steve Durassoff. *The Russian Protestants: Evangelicals in the Soviet Union: 1944-1964*. (Tenn.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1969).

Ukrainian SSR-USSR. The author's familiarity with certain files of the Ministry of State Security of the UkrSSR (MGB of the UkrSSR) made it possible to reconstruct the events of the underground congress of 1948. Later, V. Franchuk summarized his book in the collaborative work *Late Protestantism in Ukraine*.<sup>9</sup> The history of Adventists in post-war Ukraine has a less sufficient historiography. In *Late Protestantism in Ukraine*, Adventist history is limited to a few lines.<sup>10</sup> Some facts can be found in the biographical essays of Viktor Melnichuk.<sup>11</sup>

With the declassifying of the special services archives in Ukraine, some works have appeared related to the topic of this article. Particularly noteworthy are the articles by Alexander Korotaev, which disclose the history of evangelical movements from the point of view of the Soviet security services.<sup>12</sup> The author tried to combine two visions of the progression of events: through the eyes of the special services and from the point of view of the Protestantism active leaders.

Despite the presence of quite interesting and factually rich works, the history of the main movements of Protestantism in the Ukrainian SSR of the post-war Stalinist era has not been sufficiently uncovered. That is why, based on the unstudied documents of the Security Service of Ukraine archive, the objective of the paper is to reveal the activities of the special services in the Protestant environment in 1944-1953.

## Key Definitions of the Study

For a better understanding of the specifics of the issue being studied, it is necessary to

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<sup>8</sup> Владимир Франчук, *Просила Россия дождя у Господа*. Т. 3. (Киев: Изд-во христианской миссии «Возможность», 2003). [Vladimir Franchuk, *Russia asked the Lord for rain*. Т. 3. Kiev: Publishing house of the Christian mission "Opportunity"]

<sup>9</sup> Петро Яроцький (ред.), *Історія релігій в Україні*. Т. 6: *Пізній протестантизм в Україні (п'ятидесятники, адвентисти, Свідки Єгови)*, (Київ-Дрогобич: Вид. С. Сурма, 2008), 41-247. [Petro Yarotsky (ed.). *History of religions in Ukraine*. Volume 6: *Late Protestantism in Ukraine (Pentecostals, Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses)*. Kyiv-Drohobych: Ed. S. Surma].

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 306-7.

<sup>11</sup> Виктор Мельничук. *Хвалимся и скорбями*. (Черновцы: Букрек, 2005). [Victor Melnichuk. *We also boast in sorrows*. Chernivtsi: Bukrek].

<sup>12</sup> Олександр Коротаєв, "Всесоюзна спілка євангельських християн-баптистів (ВСЄХБ), як об'єкт оперативної розробки радянських спецслужб 1942-1948 рр." *Przegląd Środkowo-Wschodni*, no. 5 (2020): 285–318. [Oleksandr Korotayev. All-Union Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (VSEHB), as an object of operative development of the Soviet special services of 1942-1948.]; Олександр Коротаєв, "П'ятидесятницькі релігійні союзи України як об'єкт оперативної розробки органів НКДБ-МДБ за часів пізнього сталінізму (1944–1953)." *Наукові записки Вінницького державного педагогічного університету імені Михайла Коцюбинського*. Серія: *Історія*, no. 33 (2020): 55–65. [Oleksandr Korotayev. Pentecostal religious unions of Ukraine as an object of operational development of the KGB-MGB during the late Stalinism (1944-1953). *Scientific notes of Vinnytsia State Pedagogical University named after Mykhailo Kotsyubynsky*. Series: *History*]

define some of the concepts and terms used by the special services in their work. This terminology was actively used by state security officers in reporting and operational documents.

All the terms can be divided into two groups: 1) definitions of religious terms through the prism of security services, 2) specific terms associated with the operational work of security services. Let us consider them with the help of the textbook of the School of the Committee for State Security (KGB) of the USSR *Counterintelligence Dictionary*<sup>13</sup> which was used to train KGB officers until 1991 and was classified “Top Secret.”

The first group includes such definitions as a religious sect, which were then divided into legal sects and illegal sects. A *religious sect* was defined as “an association of believers who split for various reasons from one or another denomination in Christianity, Islam and other religions.”

The security services referred to *legal sects* as “officially operating organizations (associations) of believers-sectarians, whose activities do not contradict the norms of Soviet law, and in particular Soviet legislation on religious cults.” Those from the late Protestant<sup>14</sup> environment included Evangelical Christians-Baptists (EChB) and Baptists, Evangelicals and Pentecostals who affiliated with them, as well as the Seventh-day Adventists (*Subbotniki*).

An *illegal sect* meant “a religious organization (association) of believers whose activities, determined by dogmas and rituals of faith, contradict the norms of Soviet law and communist morality.” Such sects were not subject to registration in the highest executive body that controlled religious life in the USSR, the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults attached to the Council of Ministers of the USSR, which meant their activities were officially forbidden. The illegal sects forbidden in the USSR included Pentecostals (*Triasuny*) and Adventists-Reformists. The latter were banned, unlike regular Seventh-day Adventists, due to their implacable refusal to serve in the Soviet army.<sup>15</sup> Thus, according to the documents of the Soviet security services, every late Protestant movement figured in the category of ‘sect.’

The second group includes such terms as: *agent cultivation*, *agent*, *secret collaborator*, *informant*, etc.

*Agent (operational) cultivation* (agent cultivation file, agent file, group operational

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<sup>13</sup> *Контрразведывательный словарь* (Москва: Научно-издательский отдел, 1972). [Counterintelligence dictionary. Moscow: Scientific Publishing Department]

<sup>14</sup> Late Protestantism is the Ukrainian term for what in the West is usually called Neo-Protestants or “free church” denominations.

cultivation file) was a process of secret, comprehensive study of individual citizens, groups, organizations, and institutions. This process involved obtaining and verifying information about the object of interest; recruiting internal agents; disclosure of the intentions of the governing centers; obtaining information about the activities of an organization or an individual. The materials obtained by operational means were collected in a separate file and were top secret information. In this paper I use the term *centralized cultivation*, i. e. cultivation conducted at the level of the USSR or a separate republic (in this case, the UkrSSR).

*Agent* is a person who voluntarily (sometimes involuntarily) agreed to carry out secret assignments for the benefit of state security services and assumed the commitment to keep an oath of secrecy about the fact of his cooperation and the nature of performed assignments.

A *secret collaborator* was a citizen who secretly cooperated with the state security agencies. Over time, such cooperation took the form of undercover relations.

*The informant* was a non-staff secret agent of the state security services who provided information about the situation in the sect but did not take part in performing the security services tasks.

The mentioned terms give an idea of the state security services specific vision of religious life in the USSR, the place of the security services in it, and religion-state relations in general.

### **Pentecostals over the Barrel of Security Services (File “*Proroki*”)**

In August 1945 the Second Chief Directorate of the NKGB of the USSR opened a centralized agent file “*Proroki*” on “Reform-Preaching activists of the anti-Soviet sectarian underground Pentecostals-*Triasuny*” (Christians of Evangelical Faith, ChEF). According to the Ukrainian researcher Oleksandr Korotaev, that agent file was already opened at the end of 1943 by the Department of the NKGB (DNKGB) of Kiev region, but due to the expansion of the file to all-Ukrainian level, the file was transformed from a regional to a republic, i.e., centralized one.<sup>16</sup>

From the point of view of the state security services, the agent-operational file was

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 292-7.

<sup>16</sup> Олександр Коротаєв, “Всесоюзна спілка євангельських християн-баптистів (ВССХБ), як об’єкт оперативної розробки радянських спецслужб 1942-1948 рр.” *Przegląd Środkowo-Wschodni*, no. 5 (2020): 310-1.

opened by reason of: “agent-investigative and official data, indicating that the leadership of Pentecostals in Ukraine has established a network of illegal congregations and prayer houses,” which “serve as a center for active anti-Soviet propaganda.” The religious movement spread to Kyiv, Dnipropetrovsk, Voroshilovgrad, Stalino (Donetsk), Poltava, and a number of other regions of the UkrSSR.<sup>17</sup> By January 1, 1946, the NKGB of the UkrSSR had information about 560 congregations with 18,177 believers.<sup>18</sup>

The fact that in the middle of 1942 the All-Ukrainian Congress, where the All-Ukrainian Union of Christians of Evangelical Faith was established, took place in Pyatikhatki rayon of the Dnepropetrovsk region was of particular concern to the Soviet special services. Also, the regional centers of the union were established, and they strived for integration with the Baptist congregations.<sup>19</sup> Pentecostals of Dnepropetrovsk, which had become an unofficial center of Christians of Evangelical Faith, established the ‘Collegium of Bishops’ headed by the authoritative leader Gavriil Ponurko. The Collegium subsequently became an all-Ukrainian organizing center and brought under its control the congregations and groups of other regions of Ukraine.

This was possible because the Nazi occupational authorities during WWII proclaimed religious freedom (albeit to a limited extent). Pentecostals took advantage of those freedoms and after an all-Ukrainian congress, held regional and district congresses to form organized centralized bodies of the Pentecostal movement. Exactly that, in the opinion of *chekists*,<sup>20</sup> was an “active collaboration activity,” which during the first post-war years of repression was one of the key charges in criminal cases against Pentecostals.

After the liberation of Ukraine, many Pentecostal congregations went underground since the Soviet executive bodies refused to register them. The official reason was that Pentecostals--to use the language of the secret service agencies--“conducted active anti-Soviet

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[Oleksandr Korotayev. All-Union Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (VSEHB), as an object of operative development of the Soviet special services of 1942-1948.]

<sup>17</sup> SSA SSU. Fund 16. List 1. File 565. P. 7.

<sup>18</sup> SSA SSU. Fund 16. List 1. File 565. P. 1; Олександр Коротаєв, “Всесоюзна спілка євангельських християн-баптистів,” 298.

<sup>19</sup> Дмитрий Веденеев, *Атеисты в мундирах: советские спецслужбы и религиозная сфера Украины*. (Москва: ООО “ТД Алгоритм,” 2016), [http://loveread.me/read\\_book.php?id=70793](http://loveread.me/read_book.php?id=70793). [Dmitry Vedeneev. Atheists in uniforms: Soviet special services and the religious sphere of Ukraine. Moscow: LLC "TD Algorithm."]

<sup>20</sup> ‘*Chekist*’ – was originally an agent of the first Soviet State Security Organization – the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counterrevolution and Sabotage (Cheka). Later, the officers of the Soviet Security Services were called ‘Chekists.’



propaganda aimed at undermining the defense power of the Soviet Union, teaching sectarians not to recognize Soviet power and escape from participation in public and political life.” They also called the Soviet power “the power of Satan,” and spread “provocative insinuations about the supposedly “quick death of the world” and “extermination of godless people.” In rural areas, from the point of view of the state security services, presbyters and preachers acted in order to disorganize the collective farms, encouraged “erratic elements” to leave the collective farms and refuse to fulfil obligations to the state in the delivery of grains, to sabotage all Soviet events, etc.<sup>21</sup> All that put Pentecostal groups outside the Soviet law.

In order to take the activities of Pentecostals under secret control, on January 26, 1944, the People’s Commissar for State Security of the Ukrainian SSR, S. Savchenko, issued another directive in which the chiefs of the Regional Departments of the NKGB of the Ukrainian SSR were instructed to “conduct new recruiting of agents with authority among various sects in the main congregations of the region which influence the peripheral congregations and groups.”<sup>22</sup>

To execute this plan, in May 1944 the All-Ukrainian Union of the ChEF was dissolved and the active cultivation of the Pentecostal leadership began. Throughout 1945 the decision was made “for a start” to arrest some church leaders (presbyters or elders). In total, 30 people were arrested: the head of the ChEF, Bishop Gavriil Ponurko, the head of the community in Brovary Afanasy Tatarenko, presbyters: Mikhail Ishchenko, Pavel Kostin, and others. Among them were recruited agents “Berezovsky” (presbyter D. Ponomarchuk), “Aleksandrov” (a preacher in the Dnepropetrovsk region), “Vladimirov” (an evangelist in the Kirovograd region),<sup>23</sup> etc. It should be noted that mainly opponents of integration with Baptists were arrested.

In April 1945, the leaders of the HEV, bishops Dmitry Ponomarchuk, Philip Shokalo and Afanasy Bidash, appealed to the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults attached to the Council of People’s Commissars of the USSR with a declaration of their loyalty to Soviet power and unconditional recognition of the obligation for believers to military service with arms in hands, they asked that they ChEF be granted the right to legally exist and to convene an All-Ukrainian Congress for the election of governing bodies. At the end of April, they applied to the Council of People’s Commissars of the Ukrainian SSR with the same declaration. As a result of

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<sup>21</sup> SSA SSU. Fund 16. List 1. File 565. P. 9-11.

<sup>22</sup> Коротаєв, “Всесоюзна спілка євангельських християн-баптистів, no. 5 (2020): 292. [Korotayev.. All-Union Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists.]

<sup>23</sup> SSA SSU. Fund 16. List 1. File 565. P. 11-14, 37-39.

conversations with the authorities, they were told that their petition was had been taken into account and the final answer would be given after getting acquainted with the point and activities of the confession.<sup>24</sup>

It was later revealed that the delay was for the purpose of developing an operation to integrate the controlled Christians-Baptists with the Pentecostals. On that occasion, Colonel I. Polyansky, Chairman of the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults (CARC), wrote in a note to the Authorized Representative of the CARC for the Ukrainian SSR, P. Vilkhovy: "...the integration made it possible with the assistance of Evangelical Christians-Baptists to dissolve Pentecostals—a mystical sect with elements of belief negatively influencing a person's mental state and contributing to various anti-state tendencies...."<sup>25</sup> In addition, the legalized Baptists were well supplied with KGB agents and were actually controlled by the special services.

The chekists operation on integration was undertaken by the deputies of ousted leaders who had been recruited into the agent network, M. Melnikov (agent "Mirgorodsky") from the EChB and D. Ponomarchuk (agent "Berezovsky") from the ChEF.<sup>26</sup> As a result of a carefully prepared and conducted Moscow meeting on August 18-25, 1945, the so-called August Agreement on the integration of EChB and ChEF was adopted and signed.<sup>27</sup>

It should be noted that in spite of the agreement, only 324 congregations (15,600 believers) out of 600 ChEF congregations existing in Ukraine, with a total number of 18,186 believers, accepted the terms of the agreement. Seventy-three congregations from the above mentioned (1950 believers) joined the EHB congregations, and the remaining 251 congregations (13,650 believers) were registered as independent congregations subordinated to the All-Union Council of EChB. Even so, these latter congregations essentially remained faithful to their

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<sup>24</sup> Яроцький (ред.), *Історія релігій в Україні. Т. 6: Пізній протестантизм в Україні (п'ятидесятники, адвентисти, Свідки Єгови)*, (Київ-Дрогобич: Вид. С. Сурма, 2008), 114. [Yarotsky (ed.). *History of religions in Ukraine. Volume 6: Late Protestantism in Ukraine (Pentecostals, Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses)*. Kyiv-Drohobych: Ed. S. Surma.]

<sup>25</sup> Коротаєв, "П'ятидесятницькі релігійні союзи України як об'єкт оперативної розробки органів НКДБ-МДБ за часів пізнього сталінізму (1944–1953)." *Наукові записки Вінницького державного педагогічного університету імені Михайла Коцюбинського. Серія: Історія*, , no. 33 (2020): 58. [Korotayev, *Pentecostal religious unions of Ukraine as an object of operational development of the KGB-MGB during late Stalinism (1944-1953)*. Scientific notes of Vinnytsia State Pedagogical University named after Mykhailo Kotsyubynsky. Series: History.]

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 57.

<sup>27</sup> For more details see: Яроцький (ред.), *Історія релігій в Україні. Т. 6: Пізній протестантизм в Україні (п'ятидесятники, адвентисти, Свідки Єгови)*, (Київ-Дрогобич: Вид. С. Сурма, 2008), 116-25. [Yarotsky (ed.). *History of religions in Ukraine. Volume 6: Late Protestantism in Ukraine (Pentecostals, Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses)*. Kyiv-Drohobych: Ed. S. Surma]

traditions and features and did not show any inclinations towards the assimilation with EChB. The MGB noted a certain number of cases when Pentecostals had formally united with the EChB and attended joint prayer meetings, but also organized their separate illegal meetings in private apartments with their own rituals, i. e. washing feet, shaking, etc.<sup>28</sup> In addition, cases of reverse conversion from Christian Baptists to Pentecostals also took place.

It was stated above that the centralized agent-operational file ‘Proroki’ was opened in August 1945. In addition to the reasons stated by chekists, it was opened due to the need for a comprehensive struggle against the “dissentient Pentecostals” who refused to integrate and had an illegal status. During 1946, the main agent work on the ‘Proroki’ file was carried out in order to uncover the anti-Soviet illegal groups of Pentecostals and perform disruptive activity among ordinary sectarians. A striking example of the ‘disruptive’ work is an occurrence that happened in Vorovskoy rayon of the Kharkov region in October 1946. In one community it was decided to perform a ‘staging’ of the ‘Second Coming,’ which failed. Due to the failure, the KGB agents carried out active work among the believers to ‘disrupt’ them. As a result, many adherents broke away from Pentecostals and integrated with Evangelical Christians-Baptists.<sup>29</sup>

At the same time, the discovery of an illegal all-Ukrainian governing center remained a key issue. For this purpose, agent work was combined with investigative measures and sporadic arrests of especially active members of the Pentecostal “underground.” In the first quarter of 1948, chekists attention was focused on the holding of the All-Union Congress of Pentecostals in Dniprodzerzhinsk (today–Kamenskoye in Dnipropetrovsk region). According to agent information, preparations for the convocation of “an illegal meeting of the illegal Pentecostal congregations’ leadership in Ukraine, Belarus, and the Baltics” began in late 1947 or early 1948. At the meeting, it was planned to resolve issues on the administrative strengthening of the Pentecostal organization and creating a governing center. Twenty-two representatives (including 2 MGB agents) from Kyiv, Stalino, Dnipropetrovsk, Odessa, Poltava, Chernovtsy, Ternopol, and Rovno regions gathered at the congress taking place in the house of one of the faithful in Dneprodzerzhinsk on March 16-17, 1948. Representatives from Belarus and the Baltics were not present at the meeting. The following items were on the meeting agenda:

1. Report of regional representatives on the work performed by the Pentecostal

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<sup>28</sup> SSA SSU. Fund 16. List 1. File 575. P. 50.

<sup>29</sup> SSA SSU. Fund 16. List 1. File 580, p. 156.

congregations that did not recognize the integration with the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (All-Union Council of EChB).

2. Discussion of the message-protest from bishops, presbyters-clergymen heading the former Council of Christians of Evangelical Faith which was addressed to the All-Union Council of EChB as well as to the Soviet authorities. Signing of the message by the participants of the meeting.

3. Discussion of withdrawal from the association with the All-Union Council of EChB and the establishment of an independent Pentecostal Union with its governing body.

4. Election of delegates for a trip to Moscow in order to resolve issues related to the withdrawal of Pentecostals from the association with the All-Union Council of EChB.

It was to the discussion of the third question where the agents of the MGB got involved, which caused a split among the delegates. Some of the delegates, headed by S. Marinin, demanded to leave the association with the All-Union Council of EChB and create their own independent governing center. The other part of the delegates was against the withdrawal from the association with the All-Union Council of EChB and proposed to resolve all disagreements with Evangelical Christians by sending a delegation to Moscow, with a message to the All-Union Council of EChB requesting permission to provide Pentecostals with the opportunity to hold prayers according to their ritual.

The provocation by the MGB agents aiming to split the meeting failed and, despite the disagreement that arose among delegates about the creation of the illegal Pentecostal center and its legalization, the decision was taken to send a demand to the All-Union Council of EChB and Soviet authorities to give the Pentecostals freedom of action in organizing an independent legal union.

In addition, another decision was taken (which was the most essential for the Soviet security services) about the requirement that each participant of the illegal meeting in Dniprodzerzhinsk had to strengthen his efforts to disrupt the congregations in order to encourage Pentecostals to separate from Evangelical Christians-Baptists.<sup>30</sup>

Since the chekists' assignment was "to prevent the establishment of an illegal Pentecostal governing center and performing of anti-Soviet and disintegration activity among the united congregations of Evangelical Christians-Baptists," 16 people were arrested immediately

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<sup>30</sup> SSA SSU. Fund 16. List 1. File 645. P. 239-241.

after the end of the meeting and the departure of delegates on March 17 and 18, 1948. Among those arrested were the key leaders of the Pentecostal movement, Seraphim Marin, Afanasy Bidash, Porfiry Ilchuk, Anton Nikitchuk, Ivan Levchuk, Viktor Belykh, and others.<sup>31</sup> Fourteen people were arrested immediately Philip Shokalo and Andrei Pavenko, who missed the congress, were arrested a little while later. Later, Yurchak and Kamlov were also arrested. The file on all 18 people was sent to a Special Council of the MGB of the USSR. All those arrested were sentenced to 5-10 years in camps.

Modern Ukrainian researcher Alexander Korotaev suggested that the congress was a provocation, efficiently prepared by chekists. Serafim Marin (whom the researcher believes was one of the MGB agents) played a key role in its deployment and organization.<sup>32</sup> However, the author of this article believes that the assumption is only partially true (in terms of a planned provocation), but that S. Marin was not an agent. This conclusion is based on the fact that it is unlikely that such a valuable agent would be sentenced to 10 years in camps. Chekists could have found better employment for him in further operational cultivation of the Pentecostal underground.

With the dissolution of the Pentecostal leadership the centralized agent file “Proroki” was closed and the struggle with the Pentecostal underground movement was transferred to the regional departments of the MGB of the Ukrainian SSR.

After the Pentecostal leadership was arrested following the illegal congress in 1948, the remaining authoritative preachers convened an extended meeting of representatives of the congregations in the Rovno region that same year. A governing center of five people (Nikita Kalenik, Ivan Prokopchuk, Mikhail Udodik, Mark Nicheporuk, Khariton Maksimov) was elected with the power to govern all sectarian Pentecostal congregations in Ukraine. The center was named the “Governing Missionary Center for Christians of Evangelical Faith.” According to

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid. P. 241-243.

<sup>32</sup> Коротаєв, “Всесоюзна спілка євангельських християн-баптистів (ВСЄХБ), як об’єкт оперативної розробки радянських спецслужб 1942-1948 рр.” *Przegląd Środkowo-Wschodni* no. 5 (2020): 311-2 [Korotayev, All-Union Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (VSEHB), as an object of operative development of the Soviet special services of 1942-1948]; Олександр Коротаєв, “П’ятидесятницькі релігійні союзи України як об’єкт оперативної розробки органів НКДБ-МДБ за часів пізнього сталінізму (1944–1953).” *Наукові записки Вінницького державного педагогічного університету імені Михайла Коцюбинського. Серія: Історія*, no. 33 (2020): 60-61. [Korotayev, Alexander. Pentecostal religious unions of Ukraine as an object of operational development of the KGB-MGB during the late Stalinism (1944-1953). Scientific notes of Vinnytsia State Pedagogical University named after Mykhailo Kotsyubynsky. Series: History]

NKGB agents “the members of the center gathered around themselves a group of sectarian preachers, so-called ‘*proroki*’ (prophets) and ‘*prorochitsy*’ (prophetesses), up to 30 persons,” who moved around the regions of Ukraine with a missionary goal and were engaged in establishing and strengthening of illegal congregations following the instructions of the center.

In August – September 1950, the whole leadership of the center, as revealed by the internal agents of the state security, was arrested.<sup>33</sup> Over a period of eight months (October 1949 – May 1950) 16 groups were dissolved and 103 people were arrested by the MGB of the Ukrainian SSR.<sup>34</sup>

In addition, 18 illegal Pentecostal groups were exposed and dissolved in different regions of Ukraine 1950 alone. Two hundred and eleven people from among the leadership and activists of the ChEF congregations were arrested (the regional courts of the Ukrainian SSR had convicted 181 believers by October 1, 1950).<sup>35</sup>

In order to protect themselves from dissolving or repression, most of the Pentecostal congregations, being without leadership, decided to join the legal congregations of the EChB. Only a few of them decided to remain in an illegal status and conduct religious activities without registration. According to official statistics, 365 ChEF congregations (17,660 believers) had joined the EChB and 305 congregations (8,527 believers) had remained beyond the union by the end of 1950, which was clearly an understated figure. In general, the reports of that time noted that “the indicated number of the former ChEF sect illegal groups (Pentecostals-*Triasuny*) is far from complete, since the believers of this sect behave secretly, operate clandestinely, and conceal information about their groups, especially about the leaders.”<sup>36</sup> However, the state security agencies unequivocally not only played a major role in the life of the Pentecostal congregations but also continued their destructive work among them in the future.

### **Adventists-Reformists (Agent File ‘Orakul’)**

After Stalin, on demand of the Western allies in the anti-Hitler coalition, granted some

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<sup>33</sup> SSA SSU. Fund 16. List 1. File 763. P. 189-194; File 767. P. 147-157; File 778. P. 177-182.

<sup>34</sup> SSA SSU. Fund 16. List 1. File 1102. P. 31.

<sup>35</sup> SSA SSU. Fund 16. List 1. File 767. P. 147, 157.

<sup>36</sup> Яроцький (ред.), *Історія релігій в Україні. Т. 6: Пізній протестантизм в Україні (п'ятидесятники, адвентисти, Свідки Єгови)*, (Київ-Дрогобич: Вид. С. Сурма, 2008), 160. [Yarotsky, (ed.). *History of religions in Ukraine. Volume 6: Late Protestantism in Ukraine (Pentecostals, Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses)*. Kyiv-Drohobych: Ed. S. Surma.]

freedom of activity to religious organizations in 1944, the head of the Adventist Union in the USSR, Grigoriy Grigoriev, began to restore the destroyed Adventist network. In Ukraine some prayer houses were restored, the organizational structure of the Seventh-day Adventists Church (SAC) was in the process of being restored, some religious leaders were released and returned from exile, and the registration of Adventist congregations was renewed.

According to the memoirs of Stepan Kulizhsky, a well-known preacher in the Adventists Church, he was authorized by Grigoriy Grigoriev in 1945 to take up the revival of the Adventist network in Ukraine. In a very short time, together with Vasiliy Yakovenko, they prepared 30 congregations for registration in Vinnitsa region. In 1946, on the initiative of G. Grigoriev, the governing body of the church, the All-Union Council of Seventh-day Adventists, resumed to work, consisting of five people: Grigoriy Grigoriev (chairperson), Pavel Matzanov, Vasiliy Yakovenko, Fedor Melnik, and Alexey Galladzhev.

The legitimacy of this body was recognized by all Adventists of the USSR, although it was not formed in accordance with the principles of the General Conference. In 1946, V. Yakovenko was appointed an authorized person (that is, the leader) of the Adventists in the Ukrainian SSR, and I. Bondar became his assistant.<sup>37</sup> This group of Adventists acted within the official legal framework of the Ukrainian SSR-USSR. As of January 1, 1946, 128 congregations with 4,307 believers were officially registered by the NKGB of the UkrSSR.<sup>38</sup>

At the same time, one of the branches of the Adventist movement, the Adventists-Reformists turned out to be outside the Soviet legal framework. In the opinion of Soviet ideologists, this branch “took an openly antisocial position” forbidding its believers to serve in the army, to be engaged in social work, etc.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, deep inside the MGB, as far back as September 1945, the Second Chief Directorate of the NKGB of the UkrSSR opened a centralized agent file “Orakul” (Oracle) on the “presbytereal and preaching staff and the activists of the ‘Adventists-Reformists,’ anti-Soviet sectarian underground organization.” The grounds for initiation of “Orakul” file were agential investigative materials received by the NKGB of the UkrSSR informing them about the stepping up of the anti-Soviet activities of Adventists-

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<sup>37</sup> Яроцький (ред.), *Історія релігій в Україні. Т. 6: Пізній протестантизм в Україні (п'ятидесятники, адвентисти, Свідки Єгови)*, (Київ-Дрогобич: Вид. С. Сурма, 2008), 306-7. [Yarotsky (ed.). *History of religions in Ukraine. Volume 6: Late Protestantism in Ukraine (Pentecostals, Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses)*. Kyiv-Drohobych: Ed. S. Surma.]

<sup>38</sup> SSA SSU. Fund 16. List 1. File 565, p. 106.

Reformists in Kyiv, Stalino, Voroshilovgrad, Kharkov, Zaporozhye, Volyn, Lvov, and other regions of the UkrSSR. In addition, in June-July 1945, there were arrests of Adventist groups in Voroshilovgrad, Volyn, and Zaporozhye regions.<sup>40</sup>

After the liberation of Ukraine and the disbanding of governing bodies of Adventists established during the occupation, a significant part of the Adventists-Reformists activists began to act illegally. Speaking at illegal meetings, the presbyters in their sermons called the believers not to work on Saturdays, not to take up arms, and not to serve in the Red Army. At the same time, allegedly, the “provocative rumors aimed at discrediting the Communist Party and the Soviet government were spreading, and the restoration of the monarchical system in Russia with the help of England and the United States was predicted.”<sup>41</sup> The state security found out that the leadership of the congregations had close links with each other. That evidence gave the security services reason to assume the possible existence of an illegal governing center of Adventists-Reformists in Ukraine. In order to suppress the “hostile activities of the leadership of the sects” of Adventists-Reformists, the NKGB of the Ukrainian SSR initiated the “Orakul” agent file.<sup>42</sup>

Members of the congregation of the town of Kuteinikovo, Amvrosievka rayon in the Stalin oblast (region), preacher Mikhail Kozhevnikov, and adherents Vlas Marchenko, Maria Sumsкая, Maxim Tkachuk, and Stepan Vrubel were among the first to be arrested. All of them were accused of “collaboration with the German occupiers.”<sup>43</sup>

All the work of the security services was aimed at identifying the organizational matters and structure of the Adventists-Reformists anti-Soviet underground, as well as the full exposure of anti-Soviet activities and the possible existence of an existing illegal governing center of the underground.<sup>44</sup> A particular “success” at the initial stage of cultivation of the ‘Orakul’ file was the uncovering of the Odessa Adventists-Reformists group. It included Vasiliy Andrusenko (community leader), Stanislav Burovitsky (preacher and a prayer house keeper), Andrian Dudko (preacher and religious poet), active congregational members Olga Donchenko-Burovitskaya, Pelageya Goncharenko, and others. An agent of the NKGB “Nagorny” infiltrated into the group, and became an authoritative member of the community. He informed the agent handlers that at

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<sup>39</sup> С. Сказкин (ред.), *Настольная книга атеиста*. (Москва: Издательство политической литературы, 1978), 142. [S. Skazkin. (ed.). Handbook of an atheist. Moscow: Publishing house of political literature]

<sup>40</sup> SSA SSU. Fund 16. List 1. File 565. P. 14; File 575, pp. 3-4.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 17-18.



the end of December 1945 an underground congress of the congregations of southwestern Ukraine would be held in Kishinev. Operatively, chekists managed to nominate the agent “Nagorny” as a delegate from the Odessa region.

On December 26, 1945, in Kishinev (Moldavian SSR), an illegal congress of Adventists-Reformists, the members of the so-called ‘Mission Field’, uniting the congregations of the Moldavian SSR, Chernivtsi, Odessa and Izmail regions, was held. At the Congress were present; from the Moldavian SSR – Grigory Lavreny, Terenty Cherkov (Chirikov), Fedor Zaburanin, Petr Mongul, Vasily Gingulyak; from the Chernivtsi region – Ivan Pavlovich, Stepan Milenko, Taras Teliman; from the Izmail region – Vasily Kozlov and Tikhon Kozlov; from the Odessa region – agent ‘Nagorny’. At the congress, the governing committee of the ‘Mission Field’ was elected, which included: Lavreny (chairperson), Pavlovich, Mongul, V. Kozlov and “Nagorny.”<sup>45</sup> Thus, the state security services, through an agent gained influence over the activities of the congregations of the southwestern region.

During the first half of 1946, the Adventists-Reformists congregations from the Volyn, Poltava, Kyiv, Kharkov, Stalino, Nikolaev, and Zaporozhye regions were taken into ‘cultivation.’ In total, 26 people were arrested according to the “Orakul” file up to June 1, 1946, and 86 people were taken into cultivation. According the “Orakul” file more than 50 (!) people from the Adventists agent and informant apparatus (internal agents) took direct part in the cultivation process from the second half of 1945 to the second half of 1946.<sup>46</sup> Thus, 112 people taken into cultivation and arrested, there were about 50 agents, i.e. nearly one agent per two believers (!).

At the same time, in 1946, the agents began to report that the leaders of the underground Adventists congregations at the end of 1945 managed to contact the imprisoned Adventists leader Vladimir Shelkov (he was arrested in May 1945 and sent to the Karaganda camps in 1946). The latter proposed establishing a new governing center of the Reformists underground. For that, the decision was made to contact the representatives of the Seventh-day Adventists world center—the General Conference. For this purpose, the members of the All-Union Committee, Terenty Cherkov and Tikhon Kozlov, illegally went to Czechoslovakia passing through Zakarpatye. There they contacted the local Reformists, and through them a

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>45</sup> SSA SSU. Fund 16. List 1. File 575. P. 4-7.

representative of the General Conference Executive Committee from whom they received instructions to organize Adventists-Reformists in the USSR.

Having returned from Czechoslovakia, T. Cherkov and T. Kozlov carried out preparatory work for the convocation of an illegal conference of Adventists-Reformists in Ukraine, which took place in November 1946 in Kiev. At the conference the decision was taken to establish two illegal governing Reformists centers: “The All-Union Committee of Adventists-Reformists,” which governed the activities of the sectarian underground in the USSR, and the “Ukrainian Committee of Reformists,” to direct the activities of the sectarian Reformists underground in Ukraine.<sup>47</sup>

To check the materials gained by the MGB on the establishing and work of the Ukrainian Committee, chekists made a decision to infiltrate “reliable agents into the established governing center of the Reformists.” In April 1947, the aforementioned agent “Nagorny” was sent on a route<sup>48</sup> to communicate with the members of the Ukrainian Center Starikov and Golyak, with the instructions “to infiltrate into the governing body of the Reformists in Ukraine and get the information about their practical activities.” In a conversation with Starikov, “Nagorny” managed to find out that T. Cherkov and others had established an illegal All-Union Committee of Adventists-Reformists consisting of six people to govern and coordinate the activities of Adventists-Reformists on the territory of the USSR. The Committee was headed by Yakov Shchepilov (Shepilov) and Veniamin Markin (known as Pavel Gusev, who was V. Shelkov’s closest assistant) was elected his deputy. The deputy was directly in charge of the Committee’s typing equipment and supervised the copying and distribution of the Reformists literature. The following people were elected as members of the Committee: Prokofiy Starikov, Anton Golyak, Tikhon Kozlov, and Mikhail Markin. In the fall of 1947, Sergei Rodionov and Nikifor Chernov were also elected to the Committee.<sup>49</sup> The members of the Ukrainian Committee were: Prokofiy Starikov, Anton Golyak, Mikhail Krivsha, Dmitry Gordiyets, and Tafanka Glushko.<sup>50</sup>

The active work of agent “Nagorny” led to the arrests in the summer and autumn of

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 4-21.

<sup>47</sup> SSA SSU. Fund 16. List 1. File 658. P. 62; File 588, pp. 85-87.

<sup>48</sup> As a rule, such tasks were performed by route agents (agent-marshrutnik) who under instructions, carried out journeys along specified routes and collected information in personal conversations and through observations.

<sup>49</sup> SSA SSU. Fund 16. List 1. File 636, p. 238.

<sup>50</sup> SSA SSU. Fund 16. List 1. File 596, pp. 188-191.

1947 of the leadership of the "Bessarabian Committee." Leaders of the Adventists-Reformists movement in Moldavia, who had not been arrested, refused to recognize the leading role of the "All-Union Committee" established in Kyiv. The newly created governing bodies were not recognized by many authoritative preachers in Ukraine (Kyiv, Volchansk, Kharkov, and other congregations). Taking into account the disagreements that arose, the state security authorities decided to arrest Yakov Shchepilov and his deputy Leonid Murkin, "with the aim of sowing an even greater discord between individual sectarian groups and destroy the brain center of this underground."<sup>51</sup> After those arrests, the MGB authorities planned to begin the "complete dissolution" of the governing bodies of Adventists-Reformists in Ukraine.

In December 1947, Y. Shchepilov, L. Murkin and P. Starikov were arrested. On the basis of the testimonies of those arrested, in January 1948, nine more people were arrested, among them, Sergei Rodionov (member of the 'All-Union Committee'), Domna Popova and Ulyana Vovk (couriers), Iva Timoshenko (head of Kharkiv community), Safon Ivanov (head of the town of Volchansk, Kharkov region community), Matryona Myagkikh (keeper of the headquarters of the 'All-Union Committee'), etc. During the arrest and search, the specially prepared hiding places with typing equipment (two typewriters), and a large amount of religious literature (published abroad and copied using a typewriter) were found. Among the literature found, the most anti-Soviet books were recognized to be "Reckoning to the Peoples of Europe," "The Coming Struggle and the Time of Sorrow," "The Mystery of Lawlessness," "Features of Our Time," and a number of others. In May 1948, all of the arrested leaders were sentenced to different terms of imprisonment.<sup>52</sup>

During 1948, after the conviction of the leaders of Adventists-Reformists, some congregations in Poltava, Dnepropetrovsk, Kharkov, Chernovtsy, Zhytomyr, and other regions were arrested. In the summer of 1948, the members of the committees who had escaped arrests were found and arrested: Anton Golyak, Mikhail Krivsha, Maksim Mostovoy, Yakov Tombaker, and in November (based on materials gained through interrogation of the arrested) Mikhail Kostetsky, Antonina Bobysheva, and Evfimiya Vorobyova.<sup>53</sup>

By the middle of 1949, the reports on the centralized agent-operational file "Orakul" disappeared from the reporting documentation, and all files on Adventists-Reformists started to

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<sup>51</sup> SSA SSU. Fund 16. List 1. File 627. P. 16-17.

<sup>52</sup> SSA SSU. Fund 16. List 1. File 636. P. 235-238; File 658. P. 62.

be considered as separate agent files at the level of regional departments of the MGB of the UkrSSR. Thus, we can state that after a large-scale “defeat” of the above-mentioned governing bodies of the Adventists-Reformists underground, the “Orakul” file was closed and the entire initiative in the struggle against the “anti-Soviet Adventists movement” was passed to the local state security departments.

## Conclusions

As the conclusion, it can be stated that despite the freedom of religious confessions declared by Stalin under pressure from the allies, the Bolshevik practices of the 1920s and the 1930s concerning religious organizations were still in force. The legalized religious centers, including Protestants, were taken under both public (by the MGB branch – the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults) and secret (by the KGB agent network) control. The analyzed centralized agent-operational files on the main late Protestant movements are vivid evidence of the Soviet government’s aspiration to place the religious life of USSR citizens under secret control.

In their work with religious congregations, the state security services applied agent-repressive methods. By expanding the network, using and infiltrating their “voluntary” agents as various types of operatives, the KGB kept the whole inner life of Protestant congregations under control (in 1952, the agent apparatus among sectarians numbered 1,024 agents and four special agents,)<sup>54</sup> guiding it in the right direction and promptly responding to any activity on the part of denominational leaders. In addition to this, an extensive network of informants provided information about the life of believers both in the congregation and outside it (according to our counts, there were five informants per agent).

Repressive means were widely used to remove the leaders of the Protestant movement, leading members, and their assistants. After searching centralized files it is evident that during 1946-1949, monthly regional departments of the MGB, started working on and arresting on average up to 50 people per month. In total, 553 Pentecostals, 185 Adventists-Reformists were arrested between 1944 and 1953.<sup>55</sup> Thus, repression remained the main instrument for a radical solution to the religious issue in the post-war period.

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<sup>53</sup> SSA SSU. Fund 16. List 1. File 666. P. 82-85; File 673. P. 23-24.

<sup>54</sup> SSA SSU. Fund 16. List 1. File 1102. P. 97.

It is worth mentioning that both files are united by a commonality of charges, regardless of the confessional affiliation of the accused. At the final stage of the war and during the first post-war years, one of the fundamental accusations was collaboration with the occupation regime. An obligatory element of the accusation was always “anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda.” Aggravating elements in the formation of the image of an enemy from a believer, were social origin and occupation (not working, personal household), membership in non-Bolshevik parties and organizations, and previous arrests and convictions. By the early 1950s, Protestants increasingly began to be ranked among henchmen or spies for the “new enemies”—the United States, Great Britain, the Federal Republic of Germany, etc. Thus, the anti-religious strategy of the communist party state concerning Protestant movements of the post-war Stalinist era had not changed but acquired a new breath and more sophisticated mechanism of implementation.

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<sup>55</sup> Calculated by the author for: SSA SSU. Fund 16. List 1. File 1424, p. 11a.

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