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THE IMAGE OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES IN STATE PUBLICATIONS IN THE USSR

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Annotation

The paper presents a description of the image of Jehovah's Witnesses in the anti-religious books of Soviet authors. A comparison is made of anti-religious books from the times of Nikita Khrushchev and Leonid Brezhnev. The main points that Soviet authors drew upon when describing the Religious Organization of Jehovah's Witnesses and its adherents in the Soviet Union are described. Under Khrushchev, anti-religious texts were imbued with offensive rhetoric in an attempt to humiliate members of this denomination in the minds of Soviet society. In turn, during the Brezhnev era, there was a significant decrease in the emotional and offensive coloring of the description of the Jehovah's Witnesses' activities. A comparison is made of the use of such caustic statements during the anti-religious campaign and after it. Although the emotional coloring of statements during the Brezhnev era about Jehovah's Witnesses was noticeably reduced, it did not disappear completely. Since Soviet anti-religious publications about Jehovah's Witnesses occurred at the time of the confrontation between the USSR and the USA, any organization centered in the United States was automatically considered hostile and anti-Soviet. The intransigence of the views of the USSR and the organization of Jehovah's Witnesses regarding the activities of the UN international organization was stated. Descriptions of the attitude of Jehovah's Witnesses in the Soviet Union to various social and political spheres of life are presented, in particular, to participation in elections to government bodies, military service, etc. Separately, a description of the attitude to nationality and citizenship is indicated. The low educational level of adherents of this denomination in the USSR is mentioned. A certain transformation was also found in the description by Soviet authors of the members of the Religious Organization since the 1970s, which, in particular, was expressed in the refusal to identify the views of the leaders of this denomination in the United States with the position of its followers in the Soviet Union on a number of issues regarding the spheres of social and political life societies.

Keywords: anti-religious campaign, Charles Taze Russell, USA, Brooklyn, sect, trade unions, military service.

Introduction

The restriction of freedom of speech and religious freedom is a relevant research topic, including the modern period. Religious freedom in the Soviet Union was declared, but not implemented in practice. In Soviet times, Nikita Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign of 1958-

1964 was especially severe. Its goal was to accomplish the desire of the head of the Soviet state to eradicate religious consciousness from the life of Soviet society in the coming decades. This campaign marked the beginning of the release of large editions of various media products, in an unsightly way representing the religious movements that existed in the Soviet Union. We propose to explore the historical background that largely influenced and shaped the opinion about religious organizations and their followers throughout the USSR using the example of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Therefore, the **purpose** of the article is to present the image of Jehovah's Witnesses in anti-religious books by Soviet authors. To achieve the **goals** set, the following tasks must be completed: make a comparison of anti-religious books from the times of Khrushchev and Brezhnev; describe the main points addressed by Soviet authors when describing the Religious Organization of Jehovah's Witnesses and its adherents in the Soviet Union.

Historiography

Some researchers have been engaged in the study of Jehovah's Witnesses in Soviet literature. In particular, the problem of highlighting the image of the Religious Organization of Jehovah's Witnesses and its members was partially raised in the scientific works of P. Yarotsky,¹ S. Gordienko,² and Y. Katunin.³ This topic was presented quite deeply in the study of K. Berezhko.⁴ He showed that the sources of Soviet authors covering the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses could be divided into two groups: 1) political; 2) atheistic-prophylactic. These two types of work were similar and aimed to make Jehovah's Witnesses look as bad as possible. Berezhko also singled out and described the methods of writing "anti-Jehovist" materials. Among them were the following: distortion of facts; creation of false illusions about the situation in the country; using

¹ Петро Яроцький, ed., *Пізній протестантизм в Україні. Історія релігії в Україні: у 10-ти т.*, vol. 6 (Київ-Дрогобич: Сурма С, 2008). [Petro Yarotsky, ed., *Late Protestantism in Ukraine. History of religion in Ukraine: in 10 volumes*, vol. 6 (Kyiv-Drohobych: Surma S, 2008).]

² Н. С. Гордиенко, *Российские Свидетели Иеговы: история и современность*, 2nd ed. (Санкт-Петербург, 2002), https://religiophobia.appspot.com/jw/rsiis.html#5_0_0. [N. S. Gordienko, *Russian Jehovah's Witnesses: Past and Present*, 2nd ed. (St. Petersburg, 2002).]

³ Ю.А. Катунин and Н.Ю. Катунина, "Борьба государства с религиозными культами в период 40–90-х годов XX века (на примере Свидетелей Иеговы)," *Культура народов Причерноморья*, no. 96 (2006): 185–89. [Yu. A. Katunin and N.Yu. Katunina, "The Struggle of the State against Religious Cults in the Period of the 1940s–1990s (on the Example of Jehovah's Witnesses)," *Culture of the Peoples of the Black Sea Region*, no. 96 (2006): 185–89.]

⁴ К.О. Бережко, "Радянська пропаганда як основний спосіб формування суспільної думки (на матеріалах історії Свідків Єгови)," *Культура народов Причерноморья*, no. 156 (2009): 97–99. [K.O. Berezhko, "Soviet propaganda as the main way of forming public opinion (based on the history of Jehovah's Witnesses)," *Culture of the peoples of the Black Sea region*, no. 156 (2009): 97–99.]

negative facts from the biographies of individuals; popularization of the renunciation of individuals' faith; representing the exception as a pattern; and using facts that could not be immediately verified.

The researcher provides a critical analysis of the materials and concludes that the Soviet media were “the largest source of unverified and biased information.”⁵ Highly appreciating the contribution of K. Berezhenko's work, we note that he focuses on materials published only between the second half of the 1970s to the first half of the 1980s. Though, our research is not just focused on describing the characteristics that Soviet authors imputed to the Jehovah's Witnesses. The article attempts a comparative analysis of the rhetoric of publications during the anti-religious campaign of Khrushchev in 1958-1964 and books published during the Brezhnev period. The work on the article also used a number of anti-religious books that were not mentioned in scientific studies on this topic. This article will supplement the information on how Jehovah's Witnesses are characterized in Soviet sources. The study does not directly include an analysis of the reliability of the statements made by Soviet anti-religious authors.

Presentation of the Main Material

Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign of 1958-1964 became a significant period of intensification of the struggle against religion. Its beginning in the autumn of 1958 was the resolution of the Central Committee of the CPSU “On the lack of scientific-atheistic propaganda.” During this campaign, the creation of anti-religious media materials in print, television, radio was initiated. Feature films and documentaries on this subject have also been released. It is worth noting that, to a large extent, anti-religious films were aimed not at discriminating against traditional churches (for example, the Greek Catholic), but mainly at the Protestant denominations. In particular, Soviet cinema released two films dedicated to the religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses, namely: “I love you, life!” (1960) and “Armageddon” (1962).⁶

⁵ Ibid., 98.

⁶ Михаил Карпов, “‘Вывернутое наизнанку христианство’ Советский Союз 70 лет боролся с религией, но создал новую. В нее верят до сих пор,” Lenta.ru, October 25, 2020, <https://lenta.ru/articles/2020/10/25/antigod/>. [Mikhail Karpov, “‘Christianity Turned Inside Out’ The Soviet Union struggled with religion for 70 years but created a new one. They still believe in it,” Lenta.ru, October 25, 2020,] And Александр Федоров, “Анализ советских антирелигиозных фильмов,” Кино-Театр.Ру, 2013, <https://www.kino-teatr.ru/kino/art/kino/3011/>. [Alexander Fedorov, “Analysis of Soviet anti-religious films,” Kino-Teatr.Ru, 2013].

Also during this period, a number of books were published that covered the anti-Soviet activities of Jehovah's Witnesses. In order to expand the readership, certain printed works were presented in the genre of fiction. These include the novel by the Transcarpathian author L. Balla "Clouds Without Rain" (1968),⁷ the documentary story by A. Rekemchuk "Double Bottom" (1959),⁸ and the story by Y. Usichenko "The Black Cross" (1963).⁹ The authors argue that the fiction of these works does not distort the historical truth. For example, Rekemchuk's story is based on authentic documents exposing the underground activities of Jehovah's Witnesses in the Komi ASSR. The book in an artistic form shows the activities of this organization on the example of the city of Syktyvkar. This tradition also continued during the Brezhnev era. The work of L. Balla "Clouds Without Rain" is an artistic description based on the materials of the trial regarding the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses in Transcarpathia, which took place in 1962.

After Khrushchev was removed from his leadership position in 1964, his methods of activity were recognized as ill-conceived and short-sighted. An active anti-religious campaign was stopped because it did not bring the expected results. Religiosity and faith in God could not be ousted from the consciousness of the population of the USSR. Under the leadership of Leonid Brezhnev (1964-1982), the fight against religion continued, but it was no longer as emotional and persistent as under Khrushchev.

Let us consider the emotional epithets of publications during the anti-religious campaign of 1958-1964 using the example of a book about Jehovah's Witnesses called "Double Bottom" (1959).¹⁰ Here are some of them, "obscurantists," "brothers-Armageddonists," "preachers of obscurantism," "a bunch of obscurantists," "sectarian den," "Jehovist sect," the American sect of "Jehovah's Witnesses," "terry sectarians," "floundering in sectarian swamp," "disgusting mask of sectarians," "black sectarian underground," and "Jehovist swamp."

When referring to the leaders of this religious group, the word "leader" was not used, but "ringleader." To designate liturgical meetings, the term "assembly" was not used, but "coven." Let's look at the difference in the use of insulting statements during the anti-religious campaign

⁷ Ласло Балла, *Облака без дождя* (Москва: Советский писатель, 1968). [Laszlo Balla, *Clouds Without Rain* (Moscow: Soviet Writer, 1968).]

⁸ Александр Евсеевич Рекемчук, *Двойное дно* (Москва: Госполитиздат, 1959). [Alexander Evseevich Rekemchuk, *Double bottom* (Moscow: Gospolitizdat, 1959).]

⁹ Юрий Иванович Усыченко, *Черный крест* (Одесса: Одесское книжное издательство, 1963). [Yuri Ivanovich Usychenko, *Black Cross* (Odessa: Odessa Book Publishing House, 1963).]

¹⁰ Рекемчук, *Двойное дно*.

and after it on the example of two books written in collaboration with E. M. Bartoshevich and E. I. Borisoglebsky (Table 1). One book was written during the time of Khrushchev, and the second during the time of Brezhnev.

Table 1. Offensive speech during and after the anti-religious campaign

	“In the name of the god Jehovah” (1960) ¹¹	“Jehovah witnesses” (1969) ¹²
“sect” or “sectarian”	181 times	4 times
“ringleaders”	27 times	2 times
“Jehovist”	533 times	266 times
“covens”	26 times	0 times
“hypocrite”	7 times	1 times

These figures indicate a significant reduction in the emotional and humiliating coloring of the description of the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses. The frequently used word “Jehovist” has an offensive connotation, but in Soviet times it was widely used to identify representatives of this creed. However, a halving of the use of this word is noticeable (533 times versus 266 times). Though, it should be noted that while the emotional coloring of statements during the Brezhnev era was noticeably reduced, it did not disappear completely. For example, in a book from 1969, the insulting expression “victim of the Brooklyn idol” was used.¹³

The most objective and scientific approach to covering the religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses, in our opinion, was expressed in the books of the candidate of philosophical sciences V. V. Konik, who in the late 1970s and early 1980s devoted several works to this denomination. He believed that the dialogue of atheistic propagandists with believers should be built on the basis of “respectful and benevolent attitude towards each other.” And, the establishment of these contacts should take place even in seemingly unimportant things, namely,

¹¹ Э. М. Бартошевич and Е. И. Борисоглебский, *Именем бога Иеговы* (Москва: Издательство политической литературы, 1960). [E. M. Bartoshevich and E. I. Borisoglebsky, *In the Name of God Jehovah* (Moscow: Publishing house of political literature, 1960).]

¹² Э. М. Бартошевич, and Е. И. Борисоглебский, *Свидетели Иеговы* (Москва: Издательство политической литературы, 1969). [E. M. Bartoshevich, and E. I. Borisoglebsky, *Jehovah's Witnesses* (Moscow: Publishing house of political literature, 1969).]

¹³ *Ibid.*, 92–93.

the use of names for a particular religion. For example, the common terms “Jehovism,” “Jehovists” are perceived by believers as an insult. The same perception also applies to the use of the words “sect” and “sectarians” in relation to the Organization of Jehovah’s Witnesses. In Soviet society, they began to wear a shade of contempt. And the mentioned scientist expresses regret that these offensive terms are used by Soviet atheistic propagandists. The author believes that in relation to this international religious organization with a hundred-year history and a clearly defined system of doctrine, it is more appropriate to use the word “church.”¹⁴

However, not all Soviet authors of anti-religious works heeded this advice. Thus, in 1981, a book by T. P. Korotka was published in Minsk with the tendentious title *Jehovism*, which continued the tradition of using offensive terms. It is only worth noting that here, too, the number of such expressions was significantly fewer compared to books from the time of Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign.¹⁵

Let us consider the characteristics that are presented by Soviet anti-religious books on the coverage of the topic of Jehovah's Witnesses before society, especially those covered in the period 1958-1964.

In the service of American capitalism. Soviet anti-religious publications about Jehovah's Witnesses occurred during the Cold War, a period of military, economic, and ideological confrontation between the USSR and the USA. Therefore, a religious organization whose center is in the United States was automatically perceived as hostile and anti-Soviet. Regarding the Jehovah's Witnesses, it is noted that this denomination has its beginnings in the end of the 19th century in the United States. It was led from the beginning by the energetic preacher Charles Taze Russell, who was later succeeded by Joseph Rutherford and described as an enemy of social and cultural progress. In view of this, with the aim of forming hostile public sentiments in the USSR towards Jehovah's Witnesses and their anti-Soviet activities, the title of a chapter of one of the books is eloquent evidence: “The exact address of the Jehovah's god: Brooklyn, New York, USA....”¹⁶

¹⁴ В. В. Коник, “Истины” свидетелей Иеговы (Москва: Политиздат, 1978), 101–102. [V. V. Konik, “Truths” of Jehovah’s Witnesses (Moscow: Politizdat, 1978), 101–102.] And В. В. Коник, *Иллюзии свидетелей Иеговы* (Москва: Советская Россия, 1981), 95. [V. V. Konik, *Illusions of Jehovah's Witnesses* (Moscow: Soviet Russia, 1981), 95.]

¹⁵ Т.П. Короткая, А.А. Чудникова, and В.Р. Языкович, *Иеговизм* (Минск: Наука и техника, 1981). [T.P. Short, A.A. Chudnikova, and V.R. Yazykovych, *Jehovism* (Minsk: Science and Technology, 1981).]

¹⁶ Рекемчук, *Двойное дно*, 8.]

The activity of this denomination is identified with the work of a capitalist bank or concern that has extended its “tentacles” to all parts of the globe. This religious organization influences the minds of the population in the Soviet Union through the publication of the *Watchtower* magazine, books by Charles Taze Russell and Joseph Rutherford in Ukrainian and Russian. The organization also uses various methods to disseminate its views, in particular, with the help of the Voice of America radio station. The fact that a large amount of the literature of the *Witnesses* in the USSR and some other countries is distributed completely free of charge is considered by Soviet authors as evidence that the activities of this Organization are financed from external sources, namely, the capitalist monopolists, who are the real rulers of the so-called “Kingdom of Jehovah.”¹⁷

On the one hand, the Witnesses preach about love for one's neighbor, oppose murders, and on the other hand, they consider the international struggle for peace and against the war of the masses to be sinful. The religious organization banned its followers from signing an appeal for the protection of peace and the prohibition of atomic weapons. The Witnesses are also conducting a vicious campaign against the UN. Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the UN is a counterfeit of Satan the devil, proclaiming peace to the world, but its attempts to achieve it will not succeed. In their opinion, the activities of the UN reflect the biblical reference to the “nasty desolation.” and the time when this organization proclaims the slogan “Peace and Security” will be a sign of its destruction. Therefore, the Witnesses hate the possibility of peaceful coexistence and friendship between peoples, and the activities of this organization contribute to the benefit of arms manufacturers. The opposite view is taken by the Soviet people and the government of the USSR, striving for the UN to be an effective body of the world community in order to strengthen the friendship of peoples. The sermon about the advent of the Theocratic State throughout the world is completely in tune with the interests of the US monopoly bourgeoisie. Therefore, Jehovah's Witnesses (JW) actually preach the American type of statehood, the “American way of life” – this is what the propaganda media said.¹⁸

Refusal to follow the Soviet way of life. At Witness meetings, the emphasis was on not joining unions, and those who were already members were required to leave. This ban only affected Soviet trade unions, since the ticket of a member of the USSR trade unions stated that

¹⁷ Бартошевич and Борисоглебский, *Именем бога Иеговы*, 64-65.]

¹⁸ А.Т. Москаленко, *Кто такие иеговисты?* (Москва: Знание, 1959), 26. [A.T. Moskalenko, *Who are the Jehovahists?* (Moscow: Knowledge, 1959), 26.] and Рекемчук, *Двойное дно*, 12-14.]

“Trade unions are the school of communism.” The same prohibitions applied to joining a collective farm.¹⁹

A case is also described in which Andrey Akimovich, a former Witness from the Komi ASSR, stated that because of his stay in the Organization, he almost lost his family. He was required to dissolve the marriage with his wife, since she categorically refused to share his religious views. According to the aforementioned Andrey Akimovich, due to his stay in the sect, he was limited in cultural recreation: “I didn’t go to the cinema for two years, I didn’t listen to the radio, I didn’t touch the button accordion, and once I was considered the first button accordion player in the village!”²⁰

In addition, it is said that one member of the JW was going to build a house. The leaders say to him: “Why are you doing this? All the same, there will be ‘Armageddon, which will not leave a piece of wood from your house ...’” In another story, Natalya, the wife of Roman Lyutnik, a leader of the Witness cell in Vorkuta, even left her job as a nurse. She decided to focus on theological work, specifically copying articles from *The Watchtower* magazine. It is noted that this is an isolated example, since most wives of the JW leaders do not work, are in no hurry to give birth and raise children, and allegedly lead only a parasitic lifestyle.²¹

Anti-religious authors emphasize that the leaders of the JW encourage their adherents to refuse to comply with Soviet laws, participate in government elections, refuse to serve in the army and, in general, refuse to participate in socio-political spheres of life. Fulfilling the civic obligations of Soviet society is considered a sin for Witnesses. In general, sin is anything contrary to the “slavish devotion” of a believer to the teachings of the governing body of Jehovah’s Witnesses. This psychological influence greatly affects the consciousness of ordinary Jehovah’s Witnesses. An important part of church work is the rejection of the Witnesses from voting: the more ballots are not counted by the members of the election commission, the better.²²

The sermon about the omnipotence of Jehovah God and the weakness and impotence of humans distracts the workers of the USSR from the conscious and active class struggle, paralyze the will, and inspire disbelief in their own strength. Also, in an attempt to destroy the exploitative

¹⁹ Бартошевич and Борисоглебский, *Именем бога Иеговы*, 96. And A.T. Москаленко, *Кто такие иеговисты?* (Москва: Знание, 1959), 18. [A.T. Moskalenko. Who are the Jehovahists? (Moscow: Knowledge, 1959), 18.]

²⁰ Рекемчук, *Двойное дно*, 43. [Rekemchuk, Double bottom, 43.]

²¹ Ibid., 28, 44.

²² Ibid., 32; And Бартошевич and Борисоглебский, *Именем бога Иеговы*, 76.

capitalist system, these sermons intimidate the Soviet people with God's punishments. Jehovah's Witnesses are "paid agents of American imperialism" who have a brutal hatred of everything progressive and advanced that personifies socialism and communism. Their activities are aimed at weakening the military, economic, and political activities of the Soviet Union and allowing the outbreak of a new world war. Jehovah's Witnesses in the Soviet Union, obeying their overseas leaders, are trying to poison the mind and consciousness of the Soviet people with bourgeois ideology in order to distract people from participation in the struggle for peace and building communism, and turn them against the Communist Party and Soviet power.²³ Witness ideologues teach that salvation from exploitative oppression can be obtained from Jehovah God and in no other way. Rejecting the idea of a proletarian revolution as a means of liberation from slavery and oppression, these leaders keep workers in social slavery. To enhance the emotional impact, the Witnesses use a variety of means that have a huge impact on a person's consciousness. These include spiritual hymns and verses, which proclaim only the expectation of help from Heaven in solving their problems and suffering. It is precisely this tendency of the common people to endure with patience and humility any misfortunes of life that are beneficial to the class of exploiters, who thus seek to assert their dominance. The workers are consoled with the hope of future bliss in the Millennium Kingdom of Christ, and such sermons benefit not the proletariat but their class enemies.²⁴

Life practice shows that the Witnesses know their rights as citizens of the USSR, but they refuse to fulfill their obligations. In the village of Oktyabrskoye, Chugunsky district of the Irkutsk region, there was a real threat of flooding in human dwellings during the spring flood of the Chuna River. All residents of Oktyabrsky came out to fight the natural disaster, except for the local Jehovah's Witnesses. Witnesses believed this flood was the beginning of Armageddon. According to the witnesses, while the "servants of Satan" were working, the "servants of God" were sitting on the shore waiting for a miracle. However, when the expected Armageddon did not take place: the water rose. Then, the Witnesses were the first to request assistance from the local authorities. It is emphasized that they had "enough awareness" to ask for help, while the fulfillment of their

²³ Москаленко, *Кто такие иеговисты?*, 25. [Moskalenko, Who are the Jehovahs? 25]. And A. T. Москаленко, *Секта иеговистов и её реакционная сущность* (Москва: Государственное издательство "Высшая школа," 1961), 38. [A. T. Moskalenko, *The Jehovahist Sect and Its Reactionary Essence* (Moscow: State Publishing House "Vysshaya Shkola," 1961), 38.]

²⁴ Ibid., 35-36.

duty to the state is not worthy of their attention. A significant number of ordinary Witnesses are deceived by sectarians, since they sincerely believe that they follow God's way. They do not realize that the enemies of the Soviet state are operating behind their backs, using the naivety of ordinary believers in the pursuit of goals hostile to Soviet society.²⁵

It was noted that both church cults and legally registered religious sects can freely carry out their activities in the USSR. However, the leaders of Jehovah's Witnesses in the Soviet Union deliberately refused to take the path of registering their congregations. They prefer the use of conspiracy, going underground, and use illegal methods of activity. That is why such activity should be considered not religious, but subversive and anti-Soviet.²⁶

Disrespect for one's nationality, citizenship. For example, in the trial of Witnesses in the Komi ASSR, when asked to name their ethnicity, one could hear answers such as "Former Ukrainian, now a Jehovah's Witness." Others also called themselves "former Moldavian," or "former Lithuanian." The following conclusion is drawn that Witnesses are people "who do not recognize either their people, or family, or father and mother."²⁷

Newly converted persons were convinced that they were no longer citizens of the USSR but members of a special secret religious society. The instructions prepared by the leaders of the Witnesses in the USSR for young members of the organization of military age included motivation for refusing to serve in the Soviet army: "I am from Russia, but I am not a citizen of Russia, because our country is ruled from heaven and I belong to a heavenly leader and am ready to serve only him." Sometimes believers even refused to receive Soviet passports, military registration, and entry into collective farms.²⁸

The open expression of hostile anti-Soviet views by Jehovah's Witnesses is considered a manifestation of "deepest religious fanaticism." Let us quote the words of Mikhailov, a Witness from the North Ossetian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic: "We, Jehovah's Witnesses do not consider ourselves part of this world, but are only part of the 'new world,' that is, theocracy." Witnesses consider the entire globe to be their homeland. Therefore, they do not recognize a

²⁵ Е. Маят and И. Узков, *Жизнь на коленях* (Москва: Детская литература, 1964), 40. [E. Mayat and I. Uzkov, *Life on the Knees* (Moscow: Children's Literature, 1964), 40.]

²⁶ Бартошевич and Борисоглебский, *Именем бога Иеговы*, 4-5.]

²⁷ Рекемчук, *Двойное дно*, 38-39. [Rekemchuk, *Double bottom*, 38-39.]

²⁸ В. В. Коник, "Истины" свидетелей Иеговы (Москва: Политиздат, 1978), 74-75. [V. V. Konik, "Truths" of Jehovah's Witnesses (Moscow: Politizdat, 1978), 74-75.] And Е. Маят and И. Узков, *Жизнь на коленях* (Москва: Детская литература, 1964), 41. [E. Mayat and I. Uzkov, *Life on the Knees* (Moscow: Children's Literature, 1964), 41.]

country as their homeland and consider themselves free from compliance with state laws. For them, all countries and their laws are “satanic.” The Witnesses say: “I cannot call myself a citizen of the USSR and Russian, but only a Christian.” Also, because they consider themselves soldiers of Christ, they refuse to take up arms and serve in the army. They do not take political part in the organization and conduct of elections of deputies of different levels, since the latter are not elected by Jehovah himself.²⁹

Refusal to serve in the armed forces. As already noted, Jehovah's Witnesses refuse to serve in the Soviet army. Refusal to serve in the army is a jurisdictional matter in accordance with the laws of the USSR. Here are a few examples where Soviet authors cite the testimony of Witnesses regarding their refusal to perform military service in the Armed Forces.³⁰

It is recorded that in 1957, in the city of Nizhny Tagil, Sverdlovsk Region, Jehovah's Witness Asersky Nikolai refused to serve in the Army. This “renegade” told the military registration and enlistment office the reason for his refusal to serve in the Army: “I can serve the government, which is from God, but the Soviet government does not recognize God, and I cannot serve it.” Similar refusals also occurred in Stanislav (now Ivano-Frankivsk) and other regions.³¹

According to Mikhailov (one leader of groups of Witnesses in the North Ossetian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic), he considers the Soviet government and its laws to be “satanic,” and therefore, he considers it right not to obey these laws. These are the “visible organizations of Satan.” As a result, the authors of anti-religious books come to the conclusion that under the guise of religious beliefs, the “Jehovist agents” in the USSR openly oppose the preservation and acquisition of the achievements of socialist achievements, and are trying to achieve the literal disarmament of the Soviet people.³²

Influence on the Soviet youth. One of the main directions of the policy of the Soviet government was the education of the younger generation in the ideals of communism. “The struggle for the younger generation is the struggle for communism”—one of the slogans of the Communist Party. According to the direction of development of Soviet society, approved by the

²⁹ Бартошевич and Борисоглебский, *Именем бога Иеговы*, 80-81. [Bartoshevich and Borisoglebsky, *In the Name of God Jehovah*, 80-81.]

³⁰ Ibid, 76. And В. В. Коник, *Свобода совести и ее лжезащитники* (Москва: Молодая гвардия, 1986), 128. [V. V. Konik, *Freedom of Conscience and Its False Defenders* (Moscow: Young Guard, 1986), 128.]

³¹ Бартошевич and Борисоглебский, *Именем бога Иеговы*, 79. [Bartoshevich and I. Borisoglebsky, *In the Name of God Jehovah*, 79.]

³² Ibid., 114, And А.Т. Москаленко, *Кто такие иеговисты?* 25.]

Government of the USSR, the younger generation should be completely freed from any “remnants of the past,” including religion. Therefore, in the USSR, teaching the religious foundations for young people was banned. Religious education in Witness families was not welcomed since the main focus was service to God and not work for the benefit of society and the family.³³

It is emphasized that the Witnesses in practice give preference to the spiritual development of children over the physical. Already at school age, the children of their families are immersed in theocratic teachings due to participation in the so-called “studii.” From this, it is concluded that in this way religious poison is sown in the minds of the younger generation, and isolation from the influence of the school community is ensured. It is noted in a source from 1959, that children under the influence of this Organization were not recommended to study even in a general education school. For them, there was another school—the theocratic. While their peers “answered a lesson in mathematics, read the works of great writers, breathlessly listened to the teacher’s story about the vast expanses of their native land, the children of the Witnesses were engaged only in copying articles from the Watchtower magazine.”³⁴

The process of rewriting itself has a strong psychological impact. The child thus gets acquainted with the information that is imprinted in one’s memory. As a result, the religious seed is sown in a minor’s consciousness, which subsequently makes it possible to expand one’s activities among other students. Since the rewriting of the *Watchtower* articles, the minds of children were so heavily manipulated that they dropped out of school and gave their youth entirely to the will of their religious leaders. Mikhail Yushchuk, a Jehovah’s Witness from the village of Rozhyshche, Volyn region, said that he would not prepare to study at the institute, since he still would not have time to finish it before Armageddon came.³⁵

In addition to the school attendance prohibition, these children had other restrictions. They were forbidden to visit the cinema, the club, and read fiction. Jehovah’s Witnesses take advantage of the unformed minds of teenagers and make them look like religious fanatics. Thus, children experience moral injuries, and they are implanted with distorted views on life and life guidelines. Communication with these minors does not bring a positive result. Children are deprived of the best years of childhood, friends, the opportunity to become an educated person, to work for the

³³ Бартошевич and Борисоглебский, *Именем бога Иеговы*, 85.

³⁴ Рекемчук, *Двойное дно*, 18. And Бартошевич, and Борисоглебский, *Именем бога Иеговы*. 94-95.

³⁵ В. В. Коник, *Свобода совести и ее лжезащитники* (Москва: Молодая гвардия, 1986), 128. [V. V. Konik, *Freedom of Conscience and Its False Defenders* (Moscow: Young Guard, 1986), 128.]

well-being of the people. The high civil rights of a Soviet person are also lost, and most importantly, a person is losing their homeland.

Children under the influence of the Witnesses lose interest in school and social life, and stop wearing the pioneer tie. Their character becomes gloomy and withdrawn. If Witnesses begin to shape their children in religious ideology in the earliest years, then already at the time of admission to kindergarten, these principles will be rooted in the mind of the child. So Galya Goncharova from the Tomsk region says that she sings only divine songs along with other children attending meetings. Regarding the pioneer meetings, she says that although nothing is written about them in the Bible, it is a sin to go to them, because her mother said so.³⁶

In 1964, third-grade student Luka Shugalina was asked why she did not wear a pioneer tie, she replied: “I don’t need it. We live well without pioneers. When asked why she does not play with fellow pioneers, she replied that the pioneers ‘commit fornication’ because they do not believe in Jehovah God.” This nine-year-old girl said in memorized words that the Armageddon war would soon begin, and the pioneers who were now playing and having fun would cry out in grief and hold on to the clothes of the Witnesses in order to be saved. However, then it will be too late – “God Jehovah will still not let the pioneers into paradise.” These, and similar children, psychologically have already become “believing old men and grandmothers,” who do not notice what surrounds them and fence themselves off from this life, in which, according to them, Satan reigns.³⁷

Henchmen of the Nazis and Bandera. The authors of anti-religious books often focus on the unsightly pages of the past of individuals who later became Jehovah's Witnesses. In particular, they are portrayed as accomplices of the Nazis and Bandera. For example, B. V. Byazrov was an officer in the Soviet army during the Great Patriotic War. However, in 1942, he surrendered to the “fascist invaders.” According to his application, he was admitted to the North Caucasian National Legion of the Fascist Army. As part of the 844th punitive battalion, he performed security service in occupied Poland, France, and Greece. Repeatedly, he took part in punitive and reconnaissance operations, in particular, in the bloody Kalavryta operation in Greece in 1943, where hundreds of Greek partisans and civilians were killed. One woman who was the deputy head of the organization

³⁶ Рекемчук, *Двойное дно*, 21.

³⁷ Бартошевич, and Борисоглебский, *Свидетели Иеговы*, 92-93.

during the war worked as a translator in the German commandant's office, betrayed persons who sympathized with the Soviet regime, and hired agents to serve in the Gestapo.³⁸

In Belarus, such an example was citizen Karl-Nikolay Bytov, from the village of Zbunin, Brest region. During the war, he decided to stay in the territory occupied by the Nazis. It is noted that almost all of his fellow villagers then either evacuated or went to the partisans. He voluntarily began to serve the Nazis as an agronomist. In order to improve his financial situation, he agreed to secretly cooperate with the German counterintelligence. He handed over Belarusian patriots to the Germans. During the period of German occupation, N. N. Baranovsky from Orsha, Vitebsk region, voluntarily went to serve in the police.³⁹

In Western Ukraine, a deserter and eventually a Jehovah's Witness was "Nikolai Oksenyuk, remaining in the territory occupied by the Germans, joined the Bandera 'army', and then kept in touch with the leaders of this 'army' and carried out their instructions. Savchuk Petro—among the 14 Ukrainian nationalists, he is well known under the nickname Lebed—was a member of a gang that waged an armed struggle against the Soviet state."⁴⁰

Low level of education. There are only a few representatives of the intelligentsia among the members of the JW organization in the USSR. Most of the members are people who are culturally backward, have no education at all, or have completed two, three, or five grades of school. Quite rare are those who completed the seventh grade. Most of those who joined the Witnesses previously belonged to other denominations: Baptists, Pentecostals, Adventists, etc. Often there were also people with a criminal past among the new converts.⁴¹

It was noted that the majority of JW leaders in the Transcarpathian, Ivano-Frankivsk, and Irkutsk regions, just have a primary school education. Only 4% received a secondary, or secondary technical level, of education. The age of these confidants reaches 40-60 years. They are trying to get that kind of job so they have enough time for organizational duties and missionary work. For example, in Transcarpathia, more than half of these older religious brothers work as seasonal builders, and in winter they have time off from work.⁴²

³⁸ Е. Маят and И. Узков, *Жизнь на коленях* (Москва: Детская литература, 1964), 41. [E. Mayat and I. Uzkov, *Life on the Knees* (Moscow: Children's Literature, 1964), 41.] And Бартошевич and Борисоглебский, *Именем бога Иеговы*, 91.

³⁹ Ibid, 91-92.

⁴⁰ Рекемчук, *Двойное дно*, 16.

⁴¹ Бартошевич and Борисоглебский, *Именем бога Иеговы*, 99. And А.Т. Москаленко, *Кто такие иеговисты?* 25.

⁴² В. В. Коник, *"Истины" свидетелей Иеговы*, 95.

Change in attitude towards the Witnesses during the Brezhnev era. As noted earlier, books about the Witnesses during Brezhnev's time differed somewhat in rhetoric from the period of anti-religious propaganda of 1958-1982. However, for the most part, accusations of Jehovah's Witnesses, of hostile, anti-Soviet activities in the USSR, persisted. Though, the 1969 book highlights a major change in the official Witnesses' view of "higher authority" in Romans 13. It is noted that the 1964 *Watchtower* magazine, which raised questions about the Witnesses' relationship to the "higher authority," notes that the pre-1929 view the organization adopted was based on the interpretation of this biblical passage by first president Charles Taze Russell. It insisted that the "highest authority" are the governments of earthly states, and the apostle Paul called to obey them. Thus, ordinary Witnesses should no longer consider secular power and its laws to be "satanic."

It is noted that a negative view of the earthly authorities, and in particular of the Soviet government, was strongly rooted among ordinary Witnesses until 1964, and no arguments could convince them otherwise. And here, in their own *Watchtower* magazine, the opposite view is held. Thus, it is concluded that "the believers blindly trusted the Brooklyn interpretation as authentically biblical." Looking at this trend towards a change in religious views, Soviet authors ask the question who knows what the leaders of Jehovah's Witnesses will come up with tomorrow and how it will affect the views and behavior of ordinary believers living in the USSR?⁴³

A somewhat distinguishing feature of these works was the lack of identification of the JW leaders' views—who were in Brooklyn, USA—and the worldview and activities of ordinary Witnesses living in the USSR. Positive aspects include the recognition that the vast majority of Jehovah's Witnesses in the USSR are honest workers who are part of certain labor collectives. However, it is the Brooklyn leaders who prevent them from becoming active builders of the communist future, feeling like the masters of their land and country, and being responsible for the life of the team.⁴⁴

Attention is drawn to the fact that, in the 1970s, the Witnesses began to treat the Soviet government more loyally. Those who live in rural areas are collective farmers, and those who work in production are members of trade unions. They have a passport, a military ID, get registered with

⁴³ Бартошевич, and Борисоглебский, *Свидетели Иеговы*, 115-117.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 130. And Т.П. Короткая, А.А. Чудникова, and В.Р. Языкович, *Иеговизм* (Минск: Наука и техника, 1981), 85-86. [T.P. Short, A.A. Chudnikova, and V.R. Yazykovic, *Jehovism* (Minsk: Science and Technology, 1981), 85-86.]

the military, and recognize citizenship and their own nationality. Also, many members of JW, like other citizens of the USSR, work conscientiously in production and achieve high labor achievements. And their work is highly appreciated by the public. For example, they include the Ganguryan spouses, who are honored workers of the association of art crafts in Chisinau. The embroideries and fabrics of Maria Nikolaevna Ganguryan are known both in the USSR and abroad. She received the title of master of folk art. Also she organized a personal exhibition of her products. Her husband Timofey Ivanovich Ganguryan became the inventor of a high-speed loom of an original design. The couple twice received a ticket to VDNKh in Moscow, where they were participants in the festival of folk talents. Despite remaining Jehovah's Witnesses, they felt like full members of the labor collective and Soviet society.⁴⁵

It is alleged that, as of the 1980s, the vast majority of Jehovah's Witnesses in the USSR did not share the political views of their Brooklyn denominational leaders. So Sergey Bogachuk, one of the leading activists of this organization in Volyn, expressed his opinion on the anti-Soviet statements contained in the literature, which is published from the governing body of his organization: "This is all copied from bourgeois books and newspapers. How do they know what 'Soviet power' is." Also, the words of V. D. Pelyavskaya, a former adherent of the Witnesses, who had been in the organization for 13 years, stated that under the influence of these dishonest people, ordinary Witnesses "fought against their people, against their homeland!"⁴⁶

The attitude towards service in the Soviet army has changed somewhat. A recommendation came not to hinder or condemn members of the JW who expressed a desire to join the armed ranks of the USSR. The same began to apply to the participation of Witnesses in voting in elections. Special meetings were held to put pressure on the conscripts. As a result, conscripts shied away from their civic duty in various ways: they violated the rules of military registration, feigned illness, etc.⁴⁷

A large part of the Witnesses was influenced by the Soviet way of life. They are not characterized by hostility towards people around them who do not share their views. Some also showed an interest in the life around them, they no longer look at it only in gloomy colors. It is also noted that in 1970, 60% of Soviet Witnesses showed interest in social problems by subscribing

⁴⁵ Коник, *"Истины" свидетелей Иеговы*, 76, 105.

⁴⁶ Коник, *Свобода совести и ее лжезащитники*, 129.

⁴⁷ Коник, *"Истины" свидетелей Иеговы*, 76.

to Soviet newspapers, listening to the radio, and watching television. Furthermore, 51% of the Organization's members also did not show a hostile attitude towards scientific progress, considering its achievements useful for humankind. Therefore, it is concluded that one cannot equate the ideology of the organization's leaders with the views of ordinary Witnesses living in the Soviet Union.⁴⁸

Conclusions

Consequently, the characteristic feature of Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign was not about direct arguments in favor of an atheistic worldview, but attempts to arouse the hostility of Soviet society towards religious people. Under Khrushchev, the emotional component of propaganda prevailed, and under Brezhnev, the ideological and intellectual one did. During the Brezhnev era, there is a significant decrease in the emotional and offensive coloring of the description of the organization of Jehovah's Witnesses. However, it should be noted that it has not completely disappeared. One of the main signs of hostility between the organization of Jehovah's Witnesses and the socialist system was the fact that the leadership of the denomination is located in the capitalist United States. Soviet authors noted that religion in this sect is just a screen covering anti-Soviet propaganda.⁴⁹

With regard to attitudes towards socio-political processes, the Witnesses are depicted as refusing to follow the principles of the Soviet way of life. This is expressed in the refusal to join trade unions and collective farms, pushing against the concepts of nationality and citizenship, avoiding military service, etc. The same applies to the negative influence of Jehovah's Witnesses on the younger generation, which, according to Soviet authors, puts false goals and guidelines into children and youth. The educational level of both the leaders of the Witnesses in the USSR and ordinary believers is presented as rather low. Another way to show Jehovah's Witnesses in a bad light was to imagine that in the past some of these believers were accomplices of fascists and Bandera.

In anti-religious writings during the reign of Brezhnev, there was a significant change in the description of Jehovah's Witnesses. For example, it was argued that in the 1970s the adherents

⁴⁸ Короткая, Чудникова, and Языкович, *Иеговизм*, 87,90. And Коник, *Свобода совести и ее лжезащитники*, 130.

⁴⁹ Маят and Узков, *Жизнь на коленях*, 37.

of the organization became more loyal to the Soviet government, and as of the 1980s, the vast majority of Witnesses in the USSR did not share the political views of their leaders in the communist system. During these years, the leadership of the organization itself changed its attitude towards military service. A recommendation came not to hinder or condemn the members of the organization who had expressed a desire to join the armed forces of the USSR. The same began to apply to the participation of Witnesses in voting in elections. Although in practice these innovations are often not implemented. It is believed that most of the Witnesses were influenced by the Soviet way of life, because then they were no longer characterized by hostility towards people around them who did not share their views. It is also noted that, in the 1970s, a significant number of Witnesses in the USSR began to take an interest in social problems and generally had a positive attitude towards the Soviet authorities.⁵⁰

Translated from Ukrainian into English by Maria Ovchar

⁵⁰ Editor's comment: It should be noted that for all these improvements the Jehovah's Witnesses were outlawed in post-Soviet Russia. OPREE published articles detailing the persecution.

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