

Kucheryavenko, Ivan Mikhailovich

(1894–1942)

ALEKSEY A. OPARIN

Aleksey A. Oparin is head of the therapy and rheumatology department of the Kharkov Medical Academy of Postgraduate Education in Ukraine. Deeply interested in Adventist history, he is the editor of two Russian-language journals, a medical journal and a journal on world issues.

Ivan Mikhailovich Kucheryavenko was a pastor, evangelist, and martyr for Christ in Ukraine and Russia in the 1900s.

Early Life

Ivan Mikhailovich Kucheryavenko was born in 1894 in the city of Obukhov, Kiev. His father died when he was still a child and shortly thereafter his mother went to live in a monastery and left him in the care of acquaintances. When Kucheryavenko was older, some benefactors found him a job as a chore boy in a small shop.

After World War I broke out, Kucheryavenko was drafted into the army and became part of a communication unit. He served with distinction and was awarded the Order of Saint George, second class. After the Russian Revolution, Kucheryavenko turned to small business. He sold ice cream, traded in furs, and kept beehives. His mother returned from the monastery and started attending Baptist meetings.

Ministry

When the Adventist message reached Obukhov, Kucheryavenko was converted. He started sharing his faith with others and soon became a Bible worker.¹ In 1927 he was sent to serve as a pastor in the city of Poltava. It was there that he married Sofia and their oldest son, Mikhail, was born.

In 1929, the congregation apostatized and Kucheryavenko's earnest effort to bring his church members back to the faith proved futile. That same year the Kucheryavenkos transferred from Ukraine to Russia to serve in the city of Tambov.² There Ivan and Sofia's additional three sons were born: Vladimir, Veniamin, and Pavel.

During Kucheryavenko's pastoral ministry in Tambov, the Holodomor occurred, also known as the Ukrainian Genocide of 1932-1933. Adventist ministers, who had no civil rights, could not obtain food stamps and survived only with the help of church members in the countryside. Kucheryavenko would still share or give his food to other needy church members.

In 1933 a new round of Stalinist purges began. The ongoing arrests and closure of churches forced Kucheryavenko and his family to move from Tambov to Tula. There Kucheryavenko worked as an itinerate photographer in the Donskoy district while he continued visiting his church members in secret in the Tambov and Ryazan regions. Two anecdotes will illustrate the tenor of Kucheryavenko's ministry during these years. One day he had to visit a remote village. When he found nobody waiting for him at the station, he decided to find his way to the village. When his church members learned which route he had taken to the village, they were dismayed, for that area was swarming with wolves. In the city of Stalinogorsk, Kucheryavenko would worship with his church members in a forest under the guise of picnicking.

Arrest and Exile

The ever-searching eye of NKVD's secret police eventually noticed Kucheryavenko's ministry. In June 1940 he was arrested¹ and escorted to Tambov. There he and other arrested church members were sentenced to eight years of hard labor on the charge of "misusing religion for political ends."² Kucheryavenko was sent to the Sverdlovsk district, first to the city of Irbit and then to Turinsk, where the prisoners worked on constructing a railway.

Before Kucheryavenko's imprisonment and exile, he had managed to save enough money to buy a house. This meant that when he was imprisoned his family did not end up on the street. His daughter was born in October 1940, after his arrest, and he never saw her. On the day of his arrest, the NKVD officers allowed him a moment to write a note to his wife, which read: "Sonya [Sofia], teach our children!" Kucheryavenko did not enjoy good health and the conditions of imprisonment and hard labor burned out his life quickly. In 1941, after the war against Nazi Germany had commenced, his wife received a letter from him. Half of it was stricken through, and yet she could discern some of the sad lines: "During the six months of investigation [about the reason for my imprisonment], I often dreamt of eating at least a moldy crust of bread; but nobody offered it to me."

Kucheryavenko died March 15, 1942, and his burial place is unknown.⁴

Contribution

Ivan Mikhailovich Kucheryavenko served as a minister of the Adventist church during difficult times. Nevertheless, he was an agent of furthering the gospel. He made efforts that helped a number of persecuted Adventists keep their faith. He died a martyr.

SOURCES

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NOTES

1. D. O. Yunak. *Istoriya Tserkvi Adventistov Sed'mogo Dnia v Rossii (1886-2000) (v dvukh tomakh)* (Zaokskiy: Istochnik Zhizni, 2002).
2. Daniel Heinz, A. A. Oparin, D. O. Yunak, and Andris Pešelis, *Dushi pod zhertvennikom*. [*Souls Underneath the Altar*]. (Khar'kov: Fakt, 2010).
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.

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