

Kulyzhskiy, Stepan Pavlovich (1897–1983)

DMITRY O. YUNAK

Dmitry O. Yunak graduated in Finance and Economics from a Soviet secular educational institution and completed a six-year course of Theology at an underground SDA Theological Institute (Moldova, USSR). In the Soviet times, he served as a pastor, administrator, and bible/history professor in the underground Theological Institute. In 1990, he was appointed as Treasurer and Publishing Ministries Director for the USSR Division. After the Euro-Asia Division was organized in 1991, Dmitry O. Yunak served as ESD auditor and under treasurer. He was the author of a dozen of SDA history books and scores of other publications. He owns a major SDA history archive.

Stepan Pavlovich Kulyzhskiy served the Seventh-day Adventist Church for almost 60 years as evangelist, pastor, and administrator.

Early Years

Stepan Pavlovich Kulyzhskiy was born in Gorodishche, a village in the district of Litinsk, Ukraine, on August 15, 1897. He had only four years of secondary school. He was raised in an Orthodox family. According to him, he was “in some way religious,” not that he “knew the Holy Scripture, the Creator God or our Savior Jesus.”¹ During the First World War, Stepan Kulyzhskiy was called up for military service where he completed a course as a paramedic.

Baptism and Ministry Firsts

In 1920 Kulyzhskiy was baptized and joined the Adventist Church. The following year he was elected as an elder of the Adventist church in Gorodishche. In October 1923 he was called to serve as a full-time Bible worker in the city of Vinnitsa. At that time the Vinnitsa Conference was directed by G. A. Rauss who was always absent from the administrative office because of his constant travels. Hence, aside from his pastoral duties, Kulyzhskiy also engaged in administrative matters, preparing statistical and financial reports for the conference, as well as



Stephan Kulyzhskiy, 1926.

Photo courtesy of D.O. Yunak.

drawing up reports for the union.

The Adventist Church was recognized in Ukraine in 1924, and in March 1925 Kulyzhskiy was transferred to serve in the city of Tulchin where there was a small Adventist company of about eight members. Two years later the company became a full-fledged congregation. Before going to Tulchin, Kulyzhskiy had already served throughout the Odessa region as an evangelist (traveling minister), being in charge of some ten churches and several companies.

Ordination and Repressions

In August 1928 Kulyzhskiy was again sent to the city of Vinnitsa. In September 1929 he was transferred to the city of Mohyliv-Podilskiy where there were only two Adventists. In November of the same year, Kulyzhskiy was ordained to pastoral ministry in Kiev. He then went to serve in the southwestern part of Vinnitsa Region. By that time, the state authorities adopted a tougher position towards religious organizations. Since the city of Mogilyov-Podolskiy was located near the border of Romania, each time Kulyzhskiy left the city for pastoral visits to other congregations, he had to remove his name from the state register and then reregister immediately after returning home. Early in 1931, Kulyzhskiy and his wife moved to the city of Zhmerinka.

From 1933 to 1934, the authorities arrested all members of the All-Union Council of Seventh-day Adventists, including G. I. Löbsack who was serving as the president. The only administrator who remained at large was Pastor G. A. Grigoryev. Having an official certificate issued by the Commissioner of the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults under the Vinnitsa Region Government, Kulyzhskiy was able to work until the end of 1935. But then the commissioner said the certificate would be renewed with the right to serve only in a church with at least 75 congregants. Unfortunately, there was not such a church in the Vinnitsa region at that time. Hence, Kulyzhskiy could not openly carry out his ministry. He could serve the church only in secret. Consequently, he found a job as a bookbinder who kept records of accounting documents. He also had a day off on Saturday and could visit Adventist congregations.

From 1935 to 1936, government authorities cracked down on religion even more aggressively. They started to close churches and arrest Adventist ministers. From 1937 to 1938, these ministers were massively exiled to remote areas. As a result, at the end 1938 there was no Adventist church left in the USSR except for one in Moscow.

The Second World War suspended the wave of repression for a while. Kulyzhskiy was initially removed from military conscription due to illness. During the early years of the war, the western areas of Ukraine were occupied by German troops. In 1944, after the retreat of the enemy troops, Kulyzhskiy was enlisted for noncombatant military service in the Soviet Army as a fire-fighter. The fire-fighter captain allowed Kulyzhskiy to have a rest on Saturday.

In 1945 G. A. Grigoryev sent a ministerial credential to Kulyzhskiy, thus reinstating his official status as a Seventh-day Adventist pastor. That same year the registration of churches and pastors recommenced. In 1947 Kulyzhskiy returned for the third time to the city of Vinnitsa to serve as a district pastor for a period of seven years. Then in 1953 he was elected as secretary of the All-Union Council of Seventh-day Adventists. In April 1955 he became the union president. However, on December 12, 1960, the Soviet authorities dissolved the All-Union Council of Seventh-day Adventists. This meant that all Adventist pastors were only attached to autonomous local churches.

Marriage and Later Years

Following this event, Kulyzhskiy returned to his native village, Gorodishche, where he married Yevgeniya Grigoryevna Trusyuk. They had no children. In 1981, after several efforts made by leaders of the Adventist Church at the General Conference headquarters, the autonomous Adventist congregations in the USSR were united under a single church organization. Kulyzhskiy, who was then 84 years old, said to leaders of the world Church: "We have accomplished the most important task that was worth living for. Now, I can safely retire."² Two years later, on May 15, 1983, Stepan Kulyzhskiy died.

Memory Statement

In his essay on the life of Stepan Kulyzhskiy, N. A. Zhukalyuk recounts: "He (Stepan Kulyzhskiy) was considered a near saint. It was very seldom that he spoke ill of other people. But if such a thing happened, he spoke very excitedly as if fulfilling a very difficult mission. On the other hand, Stepan Kulyzhskiy could for hours and hours speak of the virtues of a certain minister or any ordinary man whom he personally knew... It fell to him to hear the most terrible news when the Soviet government ordered to strike off the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the territory of the USSR. The Lord used Stepan Kulyzhskiy in the most difficult period for our Church when Satan intended, through the efforts of atheistic authorities, to separate and destroy the Church and encourage confrontation and division among brethren."³

Contribution

As a successful evangelist and pastor, Stepan Kulyzhskiy played a key role in the growth of Adventism in parts of the former USSR where he worked. As an administrator, Kulyzhskiy was a strong force in keeping Adventist churches together during difficult times, repression, and persecution. His legacy is colored by the special role he played to reestablish the All-Union Council of Seventh-day Adventists in the former Soviet regions.

Kulyzhskiy, S. P. *Moi vospominaniya*. N.p., n.d. Personal Archives of Dmitry Yunack.

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Zhukalyuk, N. A. *Vspominaite nastavnikov vashikh*. Kiev: Djerelo Zhyttia, 1999.

NOTES

1. S. P. Kulyzhskiy, *Moi vospominaniya*, (N.p., n.d), 5. Personal Archives of Dmitry Yunak.
2. N. A. Zhukalyuk, *Vspominaite nastavnikov vashikh* (Kiev: Djerelo Zhyttia, 1999), 170.
3. Ibid. 166, 169-170.

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