

# Yunak, Dmitry Onisimovich (1936–2021)

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## LEV BONDARCHUK

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Dmitry Onisimovich Yunak was a prominent Adventist pastor, public figure, and historian of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.<sup>1</sup>

## Early Life

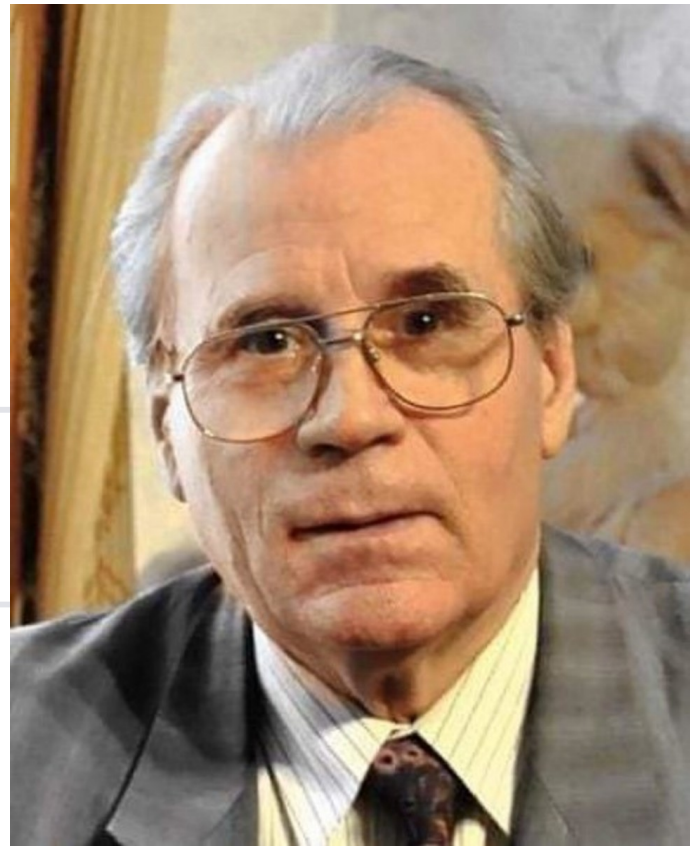
Dmitry Onisimovich Yunak was born into a Baptist family on June 17, 1936, in the village Nicolaevca, Florești District, in the north of Moldova (Bessarabia), which at that time was part of Romania.

In 1938 the Baptist church in Nicolaevca accepted the Three Angels' messages and became an Adventist congregation.<sup>2</sup>

After completing seven years of school in his native village in 1952, Dmitry Onisimovich entered the cooperative technical school in the town of Soroca and graduated with distinction in 1955. For a year and a half, he worked as a senior accountant in a village store.<sup>3</sup>

On August 4, 1957, Dmitry Onisimovich was baptized by immersion in the Adventist church of the village of Nicolaevca. The baptism was performed by I. A. Senyavsky, who was a field preacher and pastor of the local church in the town of Bălți.<sup>4</sup>

Immediately after his baptism, D. O. Yunak was elected as a Youth Ministries leader. He designed programs for the festive youth meetings held regularly on the last Sabbath of the month in one of the nearby congregations, as well as materials for Bible quizzes.<sup>5</sup>



Dmitry Onisimovich Yunak

Photo courtesy of Lev Bondarchuk.

In the fall of 1957, he was drafted into the army and served in cities of Sevastopol and Kerch in the construction units of the Black Sea Fleet.<sup>6</sup>

## Marriage and Early Ministry

In 1962, D. O. Yunak married Lucia Vasilievna Poperechnaya, a church member from the Moldovan village of Prodănești. The couple lived happily together for 60 years.<sup>7</sup>

Upon his return from the army, Yunak took homiletics lessons from the famous pastor and church leader in the USSR, Fedor Vasilievich Melnik, who had graduated from the Adventist Theological Institute in Brașov (Romania) before World War II, and then organized an unofficial Biblical Institute in Moldova that provided education following the curriculum of Adventist universities.<sup>8</sup>

In 1964, Yunak was invited to serve as a Bible worker, and afterwards he was elected as an elder.

In 1969, Yunak was ordained as a preacher and transferred to pastoral ministry in southern Moldova, where he served congregations in Basarabeasca, Cioc-Maidan, Ceadâr-Lunga, Novoivanovca, Lipoveni, Iurievka, and Vulcănești. In the time following he pastored the churches in northern Moldova, including the towns of Bălți, Florești, and Soroca, and the villages of Brătușeni, Codreni, Nicolaevca, Sîngereii Noi, Zarojeni, and Egorovca.

In 1976-1985, D. O. Yunak served as treasurer and executive secretary of the Moldova Conference.

At the beginning of his career, Pastor Dmitry Yunak proved to be an outstanding preacher, an excellent administrator, and a thoughtful and devoted minister. All these qualities contributed to the fact that he was gladly invited to various church ministries.

He considered prominent Moldovan pastors Nikolay Arkhipovich Yaruta and Fyodor Vasilievich Melnik to be his teachers.

## Administrative Work and Literary Activity

In 1985, Yunak was invited to Tula, Russia, to take charge of the Literary and Publishing Department of the Republican Council of Seventh-day Adventists in the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR). As a member of the said council, he also served as treasurer and executive secretary in charge of publishing denominational materials. He then served as executive secretary of the Central Conference, traveling throughout European Russia, from Murmansk, Arkhangelsk, and Syktyvkar in the north to Belgorod, Voronezh, and Lipetsk in the south.

In 1990, when the Euro-Asia Division (ESD) was organized, D. O. Yunak was elected a division auditor, a position he was holding from 1990 to 1992, and then transferred to the ESD Treasury, where he served devotedly until his retirement in 2000.

Throughout his life, Dmitry Onisimovich collected materials on the history of the Adventist Church in Moldova, Russia, Ukraine, Central Asia, the Baltics, and Transcaucasia. He managed to compile one of the best church archives, which includes Adventist periodicals from 1905 to 2021, an array of documents relating to the external and internal life of the Church in the Euro-Asia Division, and the biographies of Adventist ministers. Along with his enthusiasm for church history, Yunak was also a passionate collector, with a large collection of Bibles in various editions, translations and designs, collections of souvenirs with the logos of the SDA Church and church institutions, collections of stamps and coins, and more.

D. O. Yunak is the contributor to several excellent books on the history of Adventism in Moldova and Russia. In co-authorship with Professor Daniel Heinz, director of the European Archive of the SDA Church at the University of Friedensau (Germany), Professor Alexei Oparin (Ukraine), and Dr. Andris Pešelis (Latvia), Yunak coauthored *Souls Under the Altar: The Memorial Book of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (dedicated to church ministers in Tsarist Russia and the USSR who gave their lives for the preaching of the Gospel) and *The Photo Chronicle of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Tsarist Russia, the USSR, and the CIS* (reflecting, on the basis of a rich photographic archive, the history of the Church in Russia and the USSR since 1886). He co-authored with Professor Alexei Oparin the book *Yellow River* (dedicated to the life and work of Pastor Theofil T. Babienko).

D. O. Yunak wrote and compiled fundamental works on the history of Adventism in Belarus, Central Asia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine, including the books *The Cloud of Witnesses* and *The History of the All-Union Council of Seventh-day Adventists (ACSDA)*. At present, these books represent unique studies on the history of the Adventist Church in these regions and have no equal in the post-Soviet countries.

Together with his wife, Lucia Vasilievna, Yunak wrote and published several collections of spiritual poems, but the most significant poetic work was the transposition of the entire text of the Bible into verse, and the poetic Bible they presented was then published in five volumes.

All books by Pastor D. O. Yunak are distinguished by remarkable clarity and consistency of material, and he used both archival church documents and the memories of Adventist ministers. An important feature of his books is the objective presentation of history. He is considered to be the main historian of the Adventist Church in the former Soviet Union, who gave a complete, detailed, and, most importantly, objective and unbiased account of the majestic path of our Church's history.

D.O. Yunak also authored the book "A Myth or Reality", published as far back as the 1960s. This book has had several editions. It was the first publication in the former Soviet Union to collect, systematize, and present scientific arguments to prove the reliability of the Scripture and to illustrate how the Bible is supported by scientific data. Both in the years of atheism and in our secular age, this is especially important.

In 2016-2019, at the request of the director of the European Archive of the SDA Church, Yunak prepared over 40 articles for the worldwide *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*.

For many years, Pastor D. O. Yunak authored the issues of Sabbath School lessons. He was the author of books devoted to many prominent Adventists. He was also fond of compiling Bible puzzles, crosswords, and quiz questions, and prepared a series of six books containing hundreds of puzzles and thousands of Bible questions. Yunak was an unusually bright preacher. His sermons were always memorable for their depth and warmth.

While retired, the Yunak couple spent enough time rereading the books of the Spirit of Prophecy, noting in passing any typos or inaccuracies in the available translations, which they reported to the publisher for correction in future editions.

A remarkable monument to the life of D. O. Yunak is his family. His three sons - Yuriy, Vasiliy, and Andrey - take a very active part in serving God and His Church. It is impossible not to mention a person who was a faithful companion of Dmitry Onisimovich for many decades - his wife, Lucia Vasilievna. This beautiful woman was a great helper to her husband, and she sought to support his interests, which were inseparable from the interests and mission of the Church. Yunak was a sensitive and responsive man. Throughout his life, he cherished friendship with many ministers, meeting with them in person or communicating by telephone and via Skype.

Dmitry Onisimovich Yunak passed away on November 14, 2021, and was buried in Tula. His life is a vivid example of love for God, love for the Church, and an example of what a true Christian should be. He lived in hope of the soon return of Christ.

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## SOURCES

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Oparin, A. A. "Dmitry O. Yunak obituary." *Put' Internet Newspaper*, November 17, 2021.  
<https://www.asd.in.ua/archives/1188346374>.

Yunak, D. O., and Yunak, L. V. *Vospominaniya 'o letakh minuvshikh...'* [Memories of the Years Gone By]. Tula, 2009.

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## NOTES

1. This article was translated from Russian by Vladimir Ivenko.
2. D.O. Yunak, and L.V. Yunak, *Vospominaniya o 'o letakh minuvshikh...'* (Tula, 2009), 18.
3. *Ibid.*, 72.
4. *Ibid.*, 80.

5. Ibid., 81.

6. Ibid., 84.

7. Ibid., 109.

8. Ibid., 191.

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