



Grigoriy Grigoriev with his first wife Fekla, Moscow, 1935.
Photo courtesy of A.A. Oparin.

Grigoriev, Grigoriy Andreevich (1873–1952)

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.

Grigoriy Andreevich Grigoriev was a pastor and church administrator from Russia. Grigoriev led the Adventist Church in the Soviet Union.

Early Life

Grigoriy Andreevich Grigoriev was born in 1873 in the town Kiliya, Bessarabia Governorate, Russia. His father was a Russian general in the imperial army and his mother was of Moldavian origin.¹ After nine years of a carefree life, Grigoriev's circumstances changed drastically with the sudden death of his father. His father's relatives drove his mother and him from their home and they found themselves homeless out on the street. Grigoriev later recounted the subsequent years as follows:

"After the death of my father, my mother had to work hard to put food on the table for us children, me and two my brothers and a sister. Given our slender means, my mother sent me, as the eldest, to work as a hired hand at different people's houses. It caused me harm since I became addicted to alcohol and tobacco. At thirteen I was

apprenticed to a blacksmith. At sixteen I had become a staunch atheist.”²

Marriage and Family

In early 1903, Grigoriy and his mother moved to the farmstead Yagotintsevo in the Caucasus region. There he became friends with Adventists and was converted. On June 21, 1903, Grigoriy was baptized and became a member of the local congregation. On October 4 of the same year, Grigoriy married Fekla Ivanovna, a fellow church member. Together they had three sons: Pavel, Semyon, and Leonid. The political climate in Russia shook Grigoriev's faith. In November 1906, inspired by popular revolutionary ideas, he left the Adventist Church, but returned in April 1908.³

Ministry

Grigoriev began his pastoral ministry in 1911 in the cities of Sochi, Khasavyurt, Vladikavkaz, and in the Kuban, which are in the North Caucasus region.⁴ The police arrested him multiple times for evangelistic activities. Grigoriev was twice put into iron chains to march on foot to Siberia with other prisoners. During imprisonment he suffered torture. The last time he was arrested was in late 1916, when he was again sentenced to exile in Siberia. Serving his term in Siberia, he was released due to the February Revolution of 1917. The Russian Provisional Government granted amnesty to individuals imprisoned for their religious beliefs.

After the October Revolution in 1917 Grigoriev served the Adventist Church in Siberia and Southern Russia. He was elected as the president of the Don-Astrakhan Conference in 1920, and in September of the same year as president of the Middle-Russian Conference. In 1922 he was elected president of the North-Western Conference, and re-elected in 1924. From 1928 to 1931, he served as a pastor in the city of Biysk in Siberia, making missionary trips and planting churches across that harsh land, severe frost and snowstorms notwithstanding. At the Sixth All-Union Session of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, he was one of the few who opposed the resolution to acquiesce to the state in policies on military service.⁵ In 1932 Grigoriev was transferred to Novosibirsk to serve as the president of the West Siberian Conference. Two years later, in early 1934, Grigoriev accepted an invitation from Heinrich J. Löbsack (also Loeb sack or Lebsak), president of the All-Union Council of Seventh-day Adventists (AUCSDA), to serve in Moscow. This became a turning point in his life and ministry.

In Moscow, Grigoriev witnessed the arrest, persecution, and execution of nearly all the Adventist ministers and leaders. Löbsack was arrested as well. Shortly thereafter he entrusted Grigoriev with the leadership of the All-Union Council of Seventh-day Adventists in Russia until the next possible session.⁶

After these terrible events, Grigoriev faced the task of leading and preserving the Adventist Church in the Soviet Union. The authorities forbade him to leave Moscow, so he managed his work outside of the capital through contacts and correspondence, illegally and at the risk of his life. His main contact was Pastor Silman who lived in Novosibirsk. Silman was a photographer by profession and was, therefore, allowed to travel to various cities, including Moscow, to purchase work-related equipment. Silman used this position to meet with Grigoriev and receive instructions and communication for the surviving local congregations. Grigoriev also maintained contact with the congregations through a voluminous correspondence. Each month he received and responded to dozens of letters from church members from across the Soviet Union. Church members shared with him their sorrows, troubles, and joys, and in turn Grigoriev's letters were more pastoral and personal than administrative,⁷ and included at times materials published in *Maslina*, *Golos Istiny*, and other Adventist journals.

Once World War II had broken out, a story is told that Grigoriev was summoned unexpectedly to the Kremlin to speak with Stalin. It so happened that they had both been exiled by the Tsarist government to the same place in Siberia, and there Grigoriev had explained biblical prophecies to Stalin. This was the reason for the interview. Stalin wished to know Grigoriev's opinion on whether the Germans, in view of the Bible, would occupy Moscow. To this Grigoriev answered: The Germans are doomed to fail. According to Daniel's prophecies, any new global empire will never arise again. Europe will not be united under the rule of Hitler. The Russians are destined to punish him.

In October 1941, Grigoriev was evacuated to the city of Ulyanovsk because the state authorities thought that Moscow would be soon occupied by Germans. Therefore, they evacuated government institutions and major industrial enterprises, as well as many civilians (who wished to be safe and secure) to eastern regions of the USSR. Grigoriev likely expressed his wish to leave for a safer place, but he returned to Moscow in August 1942. During his stay in Ulyanovsk, he lived not far from the house of Alexy I, Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, who was also evacuated to that city. The two elderly men became friends.⁸

Not long after Grigoriev's return to Moscow in 1942, the religious situation in the Soviet Union began to improve. In 1944 the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults was formed to regulate non-Orthodox religious activity, and thus the existence of these religions and, to some extent, their legitimacy was implied. Grigoriev repeatedly solicited the Council to allow the re-establishment of the All-Union Council of Seventh-day Adventists (AUCSDA) and to permit Adventist ministers who had been released from prison or were serving in territories now part of the Soviet Union to travel to Moscow. But at this time the authorities were reluctant to allow former prisoners to resume service. To revive the official leadership of the Church, Grigoriev was therefore compelled to travel the country to contact the few surviving ministers. The All-Union Council of Seventh-day Adventists was finally re-established in 1946. Thanks to the efforts of Grigoriev, quite a few Adventist congregations in the territory of the Soviet Union were registered in the first post-war years. Grigoriev shared his small apartment with pastor Pavel A. Matsanov and his family, and the

apartment served as the AUCSDA headquarters.

Later Life

Due to complications from frostbite received in the time of exile, Grigoriev later suffered gangrene in both of his legs, which led to his death on March 12, 1952. He was still the president of the AUCSDA at that time.⁹

Legacy

Grigoriev's leadership played a key role in preserving the unity and existence of the Adventist Church during the brutal reign of Stalin. After World War II, he contributed to restoring the administrative and territorial structure of the Adventist Church at the national, regional, and local levels.

Memory Statements: A. M. Demidov

"All who knew brother Grigoriev cannot but agree that he was definitely a morally sane, kind, strong, and charming person, a Christian who was so great on the Holy Scriptures and stood so close to Christ that everybody felt invisible ties between him and the Heaven and angels. For all that Grigoriy was healthy, energetic, and physically tough... Sociability was his most salient characteristic. Wherever possible, he organized Adventist churches, appointed elders and preachers, clarified disputes, and resolved contradictions. However, he was not only a true Christian and successful preacher, but also exhibited brotherly feelings to all neighbors. All, including his opponents, felt that they had to deal with a friend, a 'brother Grigoriy'... He was at home with all people... and they turned to him... Grigoriy continuously, diligently, and successfully learned from communion with nature and people, as well as from books that he read. It stands to reason that he especially loved and preferred the Bible—a book that he extensively studied and from which he willingly read, with expression, aloud to his listeners... Grigoriy was a man of wide reading, well versed in Russian literature. He had a good knowledge of the best Ivan Krylov's fables, poems of famous Russian authors, writings of Nikolay Gogol, Leo Tolstoy, Nikolay Leskov, etc. It took him only an evening to have a dip in a book so that he could fix its contents in his mind. His cast of mind and behavior were strongly reminiscent of those of medieval Valdenses or Huguenots."¹⁰

Memory Statements: Jean Nussbaum

Once brother Jean Nussbaum, a General Conference employee, happened to be a member of one of the foreign delegations that occasionally visited Moscow during those years. He met with Pastor Grigoriev and, having returned from Moscow, shared his impressions about this man: "That which brother Grigoriev could not speak out was given with his eyes, filled with grief. They expressed so much pain and sorrow...but he had to keep quiet about it."

SOURCES

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NOTES

1. Alexsey, Oparin, *Kogda plachut sosny*, (Khar'kov: Fakt, 2007), 38-40.?

2.

G. A. Grigoriev, "Kak ya sdelalsia veruyushchim," *Maslina*, September 1909, 138-141.?

3. Pavel resided in Novosibirsk and died in 1961. Leonid first lived in Baku and then moved to Novosibirsk. Information about his death is missing. Semyon studied under the famous artist Gurkin in Altay and there he met his first wife Evgeniya. Together they had two sons, Mikhail and Vladimir, who now live in Siberia. After their divorce, Semyon moved to Arkhangelsk, where he established a regional union of artists. There he married his second wife Kapitolina. Together they had children Nina and Aleksey. Semyon died from a heart attack in 1980.?
4. Alexsey, Oparin, *Psalmi, napisannye krov'yu* (Khar'kov: Fakt, 2007), 11-32.?
5. Daniel Heinz, Alexsey Oparin, Dmitry Yunak, Andris Pešelis, *Dushi pod zhertvennikom: Kniga Pamyati Tserkvi Adventistov Sed'mogo Dnia, posviashchennaya zhertvam religioznykh repressiy vo vremya Tsarskoi Rossii i Sovetskogo Soyuza (1886-1986)* (Khar'kov: Fakt, 2010), 29-52.?
6. Oparin, *Kogda plachut sosny*, 38-40.?
7. Heinz, et. al., *Dushi pod zhertvennikom*, 29-52.?
8. Dmitry Yunak, *Istoriya Tserkvi Adventistov Sed'mogo Dnia v Rossii (1886-2000) (v dvukh tomakh)* (Zaokskiy: Istochnik Zhizni, 2002), 308-319, 328-330.?
9. Oparin, *Kogda plachut sosny*, 38-40.?
10. A.M. Demidov, "Kratkoe zhizneopisanie brata G.A. Grigorieva," unpublished manuscript in personal archives of A. A. Oparin.?

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