

Prolinskiy, Vitaliy Ivanovich (1926–1996)

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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.

Vitaliy Ivanovich Prolinskiy was a pastor and administrator who played a key role as mediator for the Adventist Church in Ukraine in time of conflict.

Early Life

Vitaliy Ivanovich Prolinskiy was born in the village of Uladovka, Vinnitsa region, Ukraine, on July 1, 1926. His father, Ivan Stanislavovich Prolinskiy, worked as a train driver in a locomotive depot and his mother was a housekeeper. Although Ivan Stanislavovich was a Communist, he inwardly believed in God. His mother was brought up as a strong Catholic. Prolinskiy finished eight years of school in his village and enrolled in a teacher's training school in the city of Vinnitsa. When the war started, his studies were interrupted and he found a job at a sugar factory in Uladovka.

Conversion

Prolinskiy heard the Adventist message for the first time after the German troops had occupied Ukraine. Given that invaders forcibly sent away youth to work in Germany, the young people tried to hide as best they could from the German police. Prolinskiy found shelter in the house of his neighbor, Roman Polishchuk. It was a safe hiding place because Roman's son left for Germany of his own accord and Germans stayed away from the



Vitaliy Prolinskiy

Photo courtesy of D.O. Yunak.

house.

Once Polishchuk invited Prolinskiy to attend an Adventist worship service. Although he was opposed to the idea, Prolinskiy decided to accept the invitation. It was Easter time in 1943. The pastor based his sermon on John 3:14-16. That sermon turned out to be so exciting that Prolinskiy attended subsequent worship services with unflinching regularity. That autumn, Prolinskiy, his mother, and his sister Wanda were baptized and joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church. His father opposed their choice and banished them from the house.

Incarceration

On January 9, 1944, Germans burned Prolinskiy's village to ashes. The soldiers ordered all men to come out and surrender at the market square. The men who voluntarily came out of hiding were then sent to Germany. Those who refused to obey were killed. That day more than 400 people were burned alive or shot dead. Prolinskiy's father was among the victims. Several men were captured. These included Prolinskiy and other Adventists (including Roman Konoval and Yefrem Rudyukwere) among the prisoners. As they refused to work on Sabbath, they were sentenced to be shot. When they were led to the place of execution, the American war planes appeared out of a clear sky and started bombing the camp. Prolinskiy and his companions fled to a neighboring forest. On that cold February day, they covered ten kilometers, alternatively crawling on all fours and sprinting a stint. They then crossed the frozen river near the settlement of Torchin. From there they had to cover another 300 kilometers to get to their native village. In such a way they escaped with their lives.

Marriage

In early March 1944, after the liberation of Ukraine from Nazi occupation, Prolinskiy was called up for service in the Soviet army. He served in construction battalions until the war was finished in Austria, and he returned home in the autumn of 1945.¹ On February 24, 1946, in Uladovka, Prolinskiy married Alexandra Kulish, a daughter of Pastor Yakov Kulish who had been executed by the Nazis. Prolinskiy had known Alexandra since childhood. Both of them were members of the church in Uladovka and had hidden from the police during the German occupation.

Harassment by local authorities caused the young family to leave their home village and move to Vinnitsa where Prolinskiy found a job as a tinsmith at a military plant. Prolinskiy and Alexandra had one son, Vladimir, who was born in the village of Zabezhye, Khmelnytskyi district, Vinnitsa region, on February 26, 1947. Later he would join the ministry like his father.²

Ministry

In February 1949, Adventist church leaders in Ukraine called on Prolinskiy to serve as a Bible worker at the church in Vinnitsa. In July 1950, he was assigned to supervise three congregations in the villages Panasovka, Lyulintsy, and Sofievka, Vinnitsa region. On March 3, 1951, Pastor V. D. Yakovenko ordained Vitaliy Prolinskiy as an elder to serve in Kiev. Within a short space of time Prolinskiy had baptized a dozen people. This got the attention of city authorities who ordered him to leave Kiev within 24 hours. Prolinskiy and his family returned to Vinnitsa where he was assigned to serve as an elder in a local church and an assistant to district pastor S. P. Kulyzhskiy.

In July 1954, the All-Union Council of Seventh-day Adventists (ACSDA) sent Prolinskiy to pastor in Lugansk. In October 1955, in Moscow, Pastors S. P. Kulyzhskiy, F. V. Mel'nik and P. A. Matsanov ordained Prolinskiy to the pastoral ministry. Prolinskiy served in Lugansk for two years and baptized a good number of people. This triggered a new wave of persecution against Adventists. Once again, Prolinskiy was compelled to change his place of service. In view of this, Prolinskiy yielded to the advice of ACSDA administration and moved from Lugansk to Kirovograd to pastor a local church in 1957.

In 1959 Prolinskiy was assigned to serve the churches in the Dnepropetrovsk and Nikolaev regions. It was a very trying time for Adventists. The authorities dissolved their congregations, confiscated chapels, deprived pastors of their registration, and even took them to court for artificial reasons. In July 1960 Prolinskiy was deprived of his registration, and in November the authorities ordered him to leave Kirovograd.³

Subsequently Prolinskiy moved to Keila, Estonia. However, he remained under the watchful eye of the police. On the fifth day after receiving his registration, they expelled him from the city. Until the spring of 1961, Prolinskiy stayed without registration in one of the rooms of the church in Tallinn. But as soon as that fact came to the knowledge of city authorities, they ordered him to leave the city immediately. Prolinskiy had no choice but to return to his family in Kirovograd. In the autumn of 1961, the authorities confiscated the chapel and all church property in Kirovograd and literally threw the Prolinskiy family into the street on October 31. For a short time, until acquiring their own house, the Prolinskiy family lived in a home owned by one of local church members. Despite the lack of a chapel, the local church survived. For three years church members conducted their worship services illegally. It was only in the autumn of 1964 that the Council for Religious Affairs, under the Council of Ministers of Ukrainian SSR, authorized Adventists in the city of Kirovograd to conduct worship services at the Baptist prayer house.

Administrator

On April 3, 1965, Prolinskiy became the pastor of a church in Donetsk, as well as the president of the Donetsk Conference that also included the Lugansk region. He served as pastor and president until 1981. In 1981, Prolinskiy became president of the Podolskaya Conference. In June 1978, a special meeting of church

administrators of the Lugansk and Donetsk Regions elected Vitaliy Prolinskiy as interregional pastor for the churches in the Donbass region. Along with N. A. Zhukalyuk and A. F. Parasey, he initiated a process to reconcile the factions in the Adventist Church in Ukraine. On June 21, 1979, the first meeting of church leaders of 11 fields in Ukraine was held and chaired by Prolinskiy. At the next meeting held on May 6, 1981, Prolinskiy was appointed one of the three co-chairs of the Adventist Church in Ukraine. In 1985⁴ Prolinskiy became a member of the Interrepublican Coordination Council⁵ that was appointed in 1985. In August 1988, Prolinskiy was elected secretary of the Ukrainian Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. He held this office until his retirement in 1992.⁶

Later Life and Contribution

In 1992, following major surgery, Prolinskiy felt the need to retire. He returned to Vinnitsa and preached in churches and conducted evangelistic campaigns as his health improved. He conducted his last campaign in August 1995, but then his health definitively failed. He passed away few months later on January 29, 1996.⁷

Vitaliy Prolinskiy was a prominent figure of the Adventist movement in Ukraine from 1970 to the 1990s. At the time when several congregations were dissenting, Prolinskiy was among the few pastors who were determined to support neither party in the conflict. Just like P. G. Panchenko, he preferred to take an unbiased position throughout the reconciliation process. During the meetings with conflicting parties, Prolinskiy played a key role in mediating for reconciliation. He contributed greatly, not only to restoration of the unity Adventism in Ukraine, but also to further development of the denominational structure in that region.

SOURCES

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NOTES

1. Nikolay Zhukalyuk, *Vspominaite nastavnikov vashikh* (Kiev: Djerelo Zhyttia, 1999), 380-381.

2. Dmitry Yunak, *Prochiye ot semeni yeyo. Istoriya Tserkvi Adventistov Sed'mogo Dnia v Ukraine (1886-2011)* (Tula, 2014), 369. Personal Archives.
 3. Vitaliy Prolinskiy, *Avtobiografia*, unpublished manuscript, personal archives of the author, 22-24.
 4. Dmitry Yunak, *Prochiye ot semeni yeyo. Istoriya Tserkvi Adventistov Sed'mogo Dnia v Ukraine (1886-2011)* (Tula, 2014), 487. Personal Archives.
 5. A special board that coordinated the Adventist ministry in all the republics of the former Soviet Union.
 6. Nikolay Zhukalyuk, *Vspominajte nastavnikov vashikh* (Kiev: Djerelo Zhyttia, 1999), 384.
 7. Alexander Parasey, and Nikolay Zhukalyuk, *Bednaya, brosaemaya bureyu. Istoricheskiye ocherki k 110-letnemu yubileyu Tserkvi Adventistov Sed'mogo Dnia v Ukraine* (Kiev: Djerelo Zhyttia, 1997), 211.
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