



The ACSDA Board, Moscow, 1955. From left to right: P. A. Matsanov, F. V. Melnik, S.P. Kulyzhskiy, A. F. Parasey, P. G. Silman.

Photo courtesy of D.O. Yunak.

## Russia

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Russia is a country in Eastern Europe and Northern Asia, which for most of the twentieth century was part of the communist Soviet Union. Today, aside from other Christians, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has a small representation in the country.

### Territory and Statistics

Division: Euro-Asia Division

Unions: West Russian Union Conference, East Russian Union Mission, Caucasus Union Mission, and Far Eastern Union of Churches Mission.

Church workers: Ordained Ministers: 264; licensed ministers: 149; credentialed missionaries: 40; licensed missionaries: 33; all other employees: 142; total active employees: 701; literature evangelists: 262; honorary/emeritus credentialed employees: 202.

Churches: 667; companies: 468.

Church Membership: 42,644; population: 144,326,000.

Adventist deaths per thousand: 16.61; general population deaths per thousand: 13.00; church membership per ten thousand population: 3; population per member ratio: 1:3,332.

## Country profile

Russia (Russian Federation) is a state in Eastern Europe and North Asia with a population of 144,326,000. It is the world's largest country in area (17,125,191 km<sup>2</sup>). The roots of Russian nationhood go back to the history of Kievan Rus, a medieval state in Eastern Europe, which arose in the 9<sup>th</sup> century as the result of the association of a number of East Slavic and Finno-Ugric tribes. The first record of the term *Rosia* (comes from Greek) dates from the mid-tenth century. In the fifteenth century, the name *Rosia* was assigned to the territory belonging to the Grand Principality of Moscow. During the reign of Ivan IV, the state was named the Russian Kingdom. The modern spelling of the word with two letters "s" appeared in the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Under the rule of Peter the Great, the western boundaries of the kingdom were greatly expanded in the aftermath of Great Northern War. The state became known as the Russian Empire, and Peter the Great was acclaimed the Emperor of Russia. In the period between the February and October Revolutions of 1917, Russia was declared a republic, and from January 1918 it became known as the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR). From 1922 to 1991, the RSFSR was part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). After the collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991 the RSFSR was renamed the Russian Federation.

## Theological Forerunners

Adventism reached Russia toward the close of the nineteenth century. Despite the attitude of some researchers towards Adventism as a phenomenon alien to Russian religiosity, numerous Russian reformational movements at the end of the thirteenth and beginning of the fourteenth centuries anticipated many Adventist doctrinal points. The researcher of national anti-Orthodox movements in Russia, A. I. Klibanov, said, "The Protestant Reformation has never affected Russia, but it does not ensue that social development in this country did not give rise to religious-social movements of the reformation type at different stages of history." The

representatives of these movements were known to call for democratization of faith and a return to the value system of early Christianity. They criticized the dominant Orthodox Church for servility to the people in power, for wealth accumulation, and for vices that prevailed among the clergy. Russian "Protestants" preached ideas that brought them together with the Protestants of Western Europe. For example, the Molokans preached "salvation by personal faith" and the Protestant principle of *Sola Scriptura*, denied any mediation between God and man (except for the intercessory ministry of Jesus Christ), rejected the veneration to sacred images and relics, refused ritualism, etc.

The Sabbath commandment, one of the Adventist church's fundamental beliefs, is deeply rooted in Russian history as well. In the second half of the fifteenth century, representatives of the so-called "Novgorod-Moscow heresy," who lived in Novgorod, Pskov, Tver, and Moscow, observed the Sabbath. Among them were the most educated people of that time: priests Dionysiy and Alexey from Novgorod; Archpriest Gabriel; Archimandrite Kasyan, deacon of the Ambassadorial *Prikaz* Fyodor Kuritsyn; Elena Voloshanka, the mother of Crown Prince Dmitry; and many others. Despite repressive acts of the government and the official Church against "Judaizers," as they were called by their opponents, their impact on Russian society remained significant. This is evident from the fact that the *Stoglav* (a great council of Russian Orthodox bishops) held in 1551, during the reign of Ivan IV (Ivan the Terrible), commanded to observe "Saturday along with Sunday on the basis of rules attributed to the Apostles Peter and Paul."<sup>2</sup>

It should be noted that "Russian national conscience has always been marked by tragic sense and eschatological belief in the achieving [of] a better life...."<sup>3</sup> In many ways such consciousness was formed by Christianity itself, when adopted in Russia. This refers to Eastern Christianity with its apocalyptic vision of the future. Many writings of Byzantine authors, imbued with eschatological expectations, were especially popular in Russia, and defined the nature of Russia's church writings. V. Sakharov, an outstanding researcher of old Russian literature, noted, "Russian writers were not backward in joining the state of mind in the East and the West, and from the first days of Christianity in Russia we can distinctly see the idea of the proximity of the end of the world..."<sup>4</sup>

The spread of Adventism in Russia in the second half of the nineteenth century was favored by a number of factors, both socio-political (government reforms imposed by Tsar Alexander II of Russia) and cultural-religious. The latter included spiritual dissatisfaction and hunger, increased interest in Bible study among ordinary people (which manifested itself in such nondenominational movements as *shtundism*), and the translation of the Bible into modern Russian language. Describing the late nineteenth century as the time of "great social and socio-political excitement" and as the era of the "search for truth," the church historian Archpriest Georgiy Florovskiy pointed to the similarity of "the hope for the Coming" among the first Russian Adventists and the "Wanderers" from peasant communities.<sup>5</sup>

## First Adventists in Russia

The first seeds of the Adventist message were sown in Russia by German colonists who emigrated from the Russian Empire to Northern America and became acquainted with Adventist teaching there. In the early 1870s many Germans who lived in Russia felt increasing pressure from the government and the dominant Orthodox Church. They left Russia for Canada, the United States, China, and other countries in search of religious freedom.<sup>6</sup> German immigrants from Russia, having joined the Adventist Church in America, began to send Adventist tracts and books to their relatives and friends in Russia. In 1882 people in the Taurida Governorate learned about the Adventist Church and decided to observe the Sabbath.<sup>7</sup> Among them was Gerhard Perk (1859-1930), a native of one of the Mennonite colonies in Southern Russia, a colporteur of the British and Foreign Bible Society, and a future Adventist pastor who would serve not only in Russia but also in Romania and Germany.<sup>8</sup>

In 1883 Philipp Reiswig, an immigrant to the United States, visited his relatives in Russia. He visited the German settlements in the South of Russia and handed out Adventist tracts, introducing many of the colonists to the Adventist message. The German, mainly Mennonite colonies founded in the eighteenth century by Catherine II guaranteed freedom of religion and exemption from military service. This laid the groundwork for the Adventist message. The colonists were Protestants, and there was a sense of tolerance among them. They were no strangers to many ideas preached by Adventist missionaries, particularly the idea of the imminent Second Coming of Christ. A spiritual awakening and revival of eschatological expectations occurred at that time in many German colonies in South Russia and the Volga region.

Conrad Laubhan (1838-1923), born in the German colony Shcherbakovka in the Volga region, immigrated to the United States where he adopted Adventism. In May 1886 he returned to Russia and actively preached the Gospel among the Volga Germans, attracting the attention of the Middle-European Conference of the Adventist Church. In 1887, in Basel, Laubhan was ordained and became the first Adventist preacher among the Germans of the Volga region. He served as a pastor in the Caucasus, the Don region, and the Crimea.

The first Seventh-day Adventist communities appeared on the periphery of the Russian Empire. The first Adventist missionary, who arrived in Russia from Germany in 1886, was L. R. Conradi. He organized the first Adventist congregation in the Russian Empire in the Crimean village of Berdebulat. The converts to the new faith were mostly residents of German colonies in Crimea, Northern Caucasus, and the Middle and Lower Volga regions. Adventist missionary efforts among the Russians would not go unpunished. Conradi was arrested after officiating at the first baptismal service. He was accused of three criminal offenses: the spread of "Jewish" heresy, seducing Russian people into another faith, and public baptisms. Conradi and his companion and translator Gerhard Perk faced exile to Siberia. However, because of Conradi's American citizenship, local authorities only detained the missionaries for a term of 40 days in the Perekop prison, and then released them at the request of the American Ambassador in St. Petersburg.

In 1887 Conrad Laubhan organized the first Adventist community in the Don region from the former Baptists, whose leader adopted Adventism after immigration to the United States. Johann F. Hinter, one of the future leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Russia, received baptism in that community in 1888. In 1887, a good many residents of the Mennonite colony Eigenheim in the Caucasus accepted the Adventist message, forming the largest Adventist community in southern Russia, which numbered about 50 members by the end of the same year.

In late 1888 L. R. Conradi told Jacob Klein, a native of Russian Germans who worked as a missionary in Nebraska, about the possibility of missionary service in Russia. After completing the course at the Mission School in Hamburg and being ordained to pastoral service, J. Klein arrived in his native colony Frank in the Volga region. The Adventist community had already been organized there, but the opposition of a local Lutheran pastor did not allow Klein to continue his ministry in the colony. However, Heinrich J. Lobsack of Frank, later one of the most influential leaders of Russian Adventism, heard the Adventist message from Klein at that time. When Klein was traveling in the south of Russia, trying to preach among local people, the authorities arrested him and flung him into prison.<sup>9</sup> Later he successfully worked in the Don region, in the Crimea, and in the Mennonite settlements on the Black Sea coast of the Caucasus. At the end of 1890 the Adventist Church in Russia numbered 356 members, mainly Germans who lived in the colonies in southern Russia. There were relatively few Russians among the first Adventists due to the prohibition of proselytism among the Russian Orthodox population.

The religious affiliation of the citizens of Russia was strictly controlled by the state and the dominant Orthodox Church. Breaking with Orthodoxy and converting to Heterodoxy were regarded not only as a betrayal of Russia's national interests, but also as a criminal offense. According to Art. 187 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Empire, any attempt to "seduce" an adherent of the Orthodox Church into another faith should be punished by exile to Siberia for life. Art. 188 declared that the apostate's children should be given over to the state's care, and his property should be confiscated until he was aware of his delusion. According to Art. 196 all found guilty of aiding in the spread of the doctrinal principles of existing sects, or the organization of new sects hostile to the Orthodox faith, should be deprived of all civil rights and deported for the life term to Siberia or Transcaucasia.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the most severe ban on preaching among Russians, in 1890 in the city of Stavropol, North Caucasus, the first predominantly Russian community of the Adventist Church was organized. It was headed by Theofil Babienko, a former psalm-reader of the Russian Orthodox Church. Babienko was exiled to the North Caucasus for organizing near Kiev the so-called *Society of the Bible Studying Brethren*. Now authorities charged him with conducting missionary work among Russians in the Stavropol area. They sentenced him, together with other seven members of the community, to forcible removal to Transcaucasia. All further leaders of the young Stavropol community suffered the same fate.

In spite of serious obstacles, the Adventist message was spreading across Russia. One of the most effective methods was literary evangelism, the distribution of religious literature by colporteurs. It was a dangerous enterprise. The distribution of any books fostering new religions was strictly prohibited, and colporteurs were often arrested. As a rule, an Orthodox priest in the presence of a public officer scrutinized the offered books and magazines. Colporteurs were often fined and the literature was confiscated.

By 1888 Adventist colporteurs worked in Siberia and the Baltic states. They mainly distributed literature printed in the United States, Switzerland, and Germany, as the publication of such books and tracts in Russia was prohibited. Due to strict censorship, it was impossible to send literature by mail or a large batch of books by rail or ship. Often the customs clearing was delayed for months, and then, at best, the books returned to the sender.<sup>11</sup> After the printing of Adventist literature was organized in Hamburg in 1889, the supply of printed books to Russia significantly improved. Books sent from Germany were not censored as strictly compared, for example, to those from Switzerland, a country which had been for many years the center of the revolutionary movement in Russia.<sup>12</sup>

The growing influence of Protestantism in Russia could not but spark the concern of the state church. Protestant churches tried to inject new life into Russian religion, and strengthened their position in the Russian Empire with every passing day. At the close of the nineteenth century the Russian Orthodox Church held a number of missionary congresses, which emphasized that the Orthodox Christianity was in danger not so much from a split as from the so-called "rationalistic" sectarian teachings (Adventism, Baptism, Stundism, Molokanism, etc.). The second Orthodox missionary congress held in 1891 in Moscow emphasized that administrative measures were required to stop the growth of sectarianism.<sup>13</sup> It recommended establishing strict government control of the lives of workers and peasants, and the compulsory annual registration of all workers, with an indication of their religion. Orthodox missionaries even demanded that special marks should be made in the passports of sectarians and the Old Believers to indicate their affiliation. Orthodox missionaries acknowledged their inability to fight against sectarianism by means of ideological influence, and admitted that they could not cope with Protestants without the police.

## Development of Church's Organizational Structure (1890-1900)

In November 1890, in the Mennonite colony of Eigenheim in the Caucasus, the first constituency meeting of the young Adventist Church was held, attended by more than 100 members representing Adventist companies scattered in the south of Russia and the Volga region. The meeting emphasized ministerial education and centralization of communities, along with health reform, including abstinence from alcohol and tobacco smoking. Delegates reaffirmed the importance of the "gift of prophecy" and the expansion of the colporteurs' ministry. In January 1891, members of the Committee of the GC Foreign Mission who participated in the general meeting of German Adventists in Hamburg, voted to organize the Russian Mission Field. According to reports,

this field was also denoted as the East European Mission Field. The new church entity was headed by L. R. Conradi, and mission board members were G. Holser, C. Laubhan, G. Isaac, and J. Klein.

In 1894, at the next session of the Russian Mission Field, H. J. Lobsack was ordained to pastoral ministry. Lobsack, who came from a Lutheran family, accepted the Adventist message in 1890 and in the same year graduated from the Mission School in Hamburg. After his ordination, the 24-year-old preacher was assigned to work in the Crimea, Bessarabia, and Volynia. In 1894 Lobsack and his assistant Gottfried Tetz organized the first Adventist community in colony Tarutino, Bessarabia.

Beginning in 1895, Adventist missionaries started preaching in the big cities in the northwest of the Russian Empire, in Riga, Vilnius, and Reval (Tallinn). In 1897, Gerhard Perk conducted a series of lectures on biblical prophecies in St. Petersburg, the capital of the Empire. Those lectures attracted the attention of evangelical Protestants. Despite the constant threat of arrest, Perk managed to organize two Adventist communities in St. Petersburg, Russian and German, which by 1901 numbered 20 and 50, respectively.

In 1898, at the sixth session of the Russian Mission Field, Lobsack was charged with the responsibility for the Adventist Church in Russia, which became a part of the European Union, organized the same year in Hamburg. At the session, it was decided to issue credentials to ministers in order to identify their status, and serious consideration was paid to the study of Sabbath school lessons and to more efficient distribution of literature by colporteurs.

The successful development of literature evangelism was facilitated by the opening of the *Tract Society* in Riga in 1898. This organization was allowed to publish Adventist literature in German, Russian, Latvian, and Estonian. By no means all of the books proposed for publishing could pass through censorship, but it was the first time Russian Adventists printed denominational literature in their home country. The book *Temperance* by Ellen G. White was in particularly great demand among readers.

By the early 1900s, there were 33 Adventist communities with more than 1,000 members in Russia. This number would be much higher if we took into account all those who were forced to leave Russia due to their inability to practice their new faith under the czarist-Orthodox regime.

## Development of Church's Organizational Structure (1900-1917)

In 1901, the Adventist Church in Russia became part of the German-Russian Union organized by the church session in Friedensau, Germany. That same year, given the expansion of the Adventist movement in Russia, it was decided to divide the Russian Mission Field into the South Russian Union, headquartered in Rostov-on-Don, and the North Russian Mission Field, headquartered in Riga. H.J. Lobsack became president of the South Russian Union, which consisted of 26 communities in the south of Russia, the Caucasus, and the Volga region, and numbered 787 members. D. Goede was elected president of the North Russian Mission Field, which consisted of

11 communities with 280 members.

In addition to these two officially organized fields in Russia, there was also the Middle Russian Field that united 220 church members who were ethnic Russians. The field did not receive official status so that, in the words of Lobsack, “we could avoid the hard look of those who persecuted the remnant of her seed, and thus freely continue our work [preaching] among Germans and Russians.”<sup>14</sup> Mikhail Kuzmin, Ippolit Pilkevich, Afanasiy Gontar’, and other ordained elders served in Russian-speaking churches and companies.

On the wave of the revolutionary events of 1905 and the political unrest stirred by Russia's defeat in the Russian-Japanese war, the government took a number of measures to democratize civil life. On April 17, 1905, the Imperial Edict “On strengthening the basis of religious tolerance” raised Protestants’ hopes. In a grateful letter expressing their loyalty to the existing government, Adventist church leaders appealed to the authorities to allow them to practice their religion without obstruction. On November 6, 1906, the Department of Spiritual Affairs of Foreign Confessions of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent out to all governors a circular letter in which the rights of Adventists were equalized with the rights of Baptists, who had received the right to freely practice their faith a few years before.<sup>15</sup>

The opportunity to freely practice their faith marked a new stage in the development of the Adventist Church in Russia. The session of the German-Russian Union held in July 1905 in Friedensau adopted a resolution to reorganize the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Russia, according to which all Adventists who lived in the same territory, regardless of their nationality, were to join the local church organization. This resolution reordered the previous church structure in Russia, which was semilegal in nature and built, in a certain way, on a national basis (ethnic Russian church members had not been officially recorded in any reports). The Adventist Church in Russia now included the East Russian Conference, and the South Russian, North Russian, and Middle Russian Mission Fields. The Adventist communities officially included members of different ethnic origins. It was the greatest achievement for the Adventist church at that time, which really pushed its growth. As of the end of 1905, there were almost 2,100 Adventists in Russia. The Church was served by 31 ministers (including 8 ordained pastors), 11 Bible workers, and 12 colporteurs.

After 1905, the Adventist church became noticeably more active. The first issue of *Maslina* (The Olive) was published. The Russian Department was opened in the Friedensau Theological Seminary, aiming to train ministers who would serve in Russia. Adventist missionaries preached not only in the central part of Russia, but also in Transcaucasia, Central Asia, and Siberia. The church was growing rapidly, and in 1907, during the constituency meeting in Riga, the Russian Union Conference (RUC) was organized as a separate entity. It was headed by Julius Böttcher, a U.S. national. Despite being a foreigner, Julius Böttcher was officially recognized by the Russian government as the head of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Russia.

In 1908, in response to the urgent requests of Siberian Adventists, Karl Reifschneider (1869-1929), a graduate from the Hamburg Mission School, was sent to Siberia to do evangelistic work. He settled down in Omsk and in

the winter of 1908-1909 made a missionary trip across Siberia, covering more than 3,000 kilometers by sledge. Constituency meetings were held in 1908 in all conferences and mission fields. In order to protect Adventist believers from hostile acts by Orthodox extremists, police attended all the constituency meetings. This was highly unusual for Adventists after so many years of persecution. "The people expected that we would be dispersed or arrested," wrote O. Wildgrube, one of the church's leaders, "but the police, on the contrary, protected us."<sup>16</sup>

Describing the nature of Russian Adventism, S. D. Bondar', an official of the Department of Spiritual Affairs of Foreign Confessions of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, wrote in his 1911 report, "Along with the Baptists and the Evangelical Christians, the Russian Adventists display great activity. The Adventist movement increasingly captures new territories of European and Asian Russia, showing tendency to a steady growth. The Adventist mission is being carried out persistently and vigorously . . . The strength of Seventh-day Adventism consists in its superb organization and community-based structure. Central Adventist organizations look to the best formulation of Adventist mission, unite the church activities, and guide members to work towards a common goal. Thanks to the spirit of unity and cohesion in Adventist congregations and their internal autonomy, the missionary initiatives of the central organizations are supported by the collective efforts of each congregation. This makes the sect of Adventists the live and active religious community."<sup>17</sup>

In the spring of 1911 Arthur G. Daniells, the president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, visited St. Petersburg, Riga, Moscow, Kiev, and Odessa, meeting with Russian Adventist ministers and lay members. That visit was the first and last in relations between Russian Adventists and the world church. Thereafter, church-state relations in Russia changed. Incited by the Orthodox Church, the czar's government passed laws that significantly limited freedom of conscience. Such a policy turnabout was triggered by the murder of P. A. Stolypin, the Chairman of the Council of Ministers and the Minister of Internal Affairs, which occurred in 1911.

The Department of Spiritual Affairs of Foreign Confessions of the Ministry of Internal Affairs issued several decrees related primarily to the Protestants. Foreign nationals living in Russia were not allowed to organize any societies, meetings, or congresses. It was categorically forbidden for them to preach. Any community had to be registered prior to conducting worship services. Moreover, the community could be registered only if it numbered at least 50 adult members, who had been officially struck off the register of Orthodox believers. All Adventist ministers were to receive a special permit giving them the right to carry out church activities. That right could be granted only to Russian nationals.

It was obvious that the established church organization of Seventh-day Adventists in Russia simply could not work in such trying circumstances. Almost all church leaders and many ministers were foreign nationals. The majority of Adventist communities and companies that numbered less than 50 members could not be registered.

With the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, the Adventist church was finally outlawed. Given the German descent of most church members, many Russians considered Adventism a “German faith.” Even serious newspapers repeatedly mooted this question. Adventists were called betrayers of the nation, and often ridiculed and persecuted. Adventists had to meet secretly to read the Bible and pray. Especially aggressive were the members of the *Black Hundred* organizations, who accused Adventists of aiding Germany and sabotaging Russia’s war effort. In the Kiev Governorate there was a case in the court against a group of Adventists from the Uman’ District on a charge of anti-state activities. However, to the disappointment of local Orthodox leaders, the court declared the defendants not guilty. The head of the Kiev Department of Public Order reported to the Governor: “Neither of the summoned witnesses could prove that the activity of sectarians or their leaders was associated with deliberate attempts to prejudice the public interest. There was no evidence that the Adventists agitated people for not going to war . . .”<sup>18</sup> All these charges reflected corrupt, national-chauvinist ambitions of certain Orthodox circles rather than the real, invariably loyal attitude of the Seventh-day Adventist Church towards the state.<sup>19</sup>

In the first months of the war many Adventist pastors were exiled to Siberia. Among them were A. Klement from Estonia (exiled to Irkutsk Governorate), S. S. Efimov from Petrograd (exiled to Yeniseisk), Gorelik from Odessa (exiled to Tobolsk), and A. E. Gontar’ from Poltava Governorate (exiled to Irkutsk Governorate). Albert Ozol, the chair of the Trans-Caucasus Mission Field, was exiled to Narym Territory of the Tomsk Governorate, where in 1916 he died due to infection picked up by nursing typhus patients.

In view of the coming military actions, the Minsk Governor directed J. Böttcher, president of the West Russian Union, to leave Riga and move inland. The Adventist headquarters was transferred to Saratov, a city on the Volga, in which J. Böttcher was kept under constant undercover observation. In 1916 the czarist government ordered all foreign nationals to leave Russia in the shortest possible time. Adventist leaders understood that it was impossible for J. Boettcher to stay in Russia any longer.

The Adventist church overcame organizational and financial difficulties only after the February Revolution in 1917. The Russian Provisional Government decreed a general amnesty for all political prisoners, including those serving sentences for religious convictions. Elder Otto Reinke, a General Conference representative, actively worked to restore the church organization in Russia. H. J. Lobsack accompanied him everywhere as a translator and advisor.

In July 1917, the Seventh-day Adventist All-Russian Session was held in Saratov. The session aimed to restore the church organization that was completely destroyed during World War I. Delegates addressed a letter to the provisional government regarding a potential new religious law. The letter advocated the separation of church and state, and proposed full freedom of religion. Thus believers could freely organize and dissolve their congregations, without government intervention, while the church would not intervene in state affairs. The proposal was substantially based on the principles of Western democracy.

## Soviet Period until Perestroika (1917-1985)

The Seventh-day Adventist Church did not make any official statements regarding the change of power in October 1917. Adventists perceived the popular post-revolutionary slogans “freedom, equality, and fraternity” much more calmly than many who feared future changes. One issue of the Adventist magazine *Blagaya Vest* (“The Good News”) emphasized that freedom, equality, and fraternity could be achieved only through the gospel ideal. “To freedom ... they do not go by a revolutionary-violent way, but by fulfilling in their lives the covenants of Christ and having faith in Him as the Son of God and Savior”. Equality is achieved by “self-humiliation before all and service to all,” and, finally, true fraternity is possible only in the family of God. In conclusion, the editorial said, “That which seems to be so easy and approachable in words, is hardly attainable without God.”<sup>20</sup>

On January 20, 1918, the Bolsheviks adopted the Decree on Freedom of Conscience, which was called “On Separation of Church from State and School from Church.” According to the decree, each person could practice any or no religion. Any disqualifications related to the confession of faith were canceled. At the same time, the decree deprived religious societies of the right to property. All properties of religious organizations would now be owned by the state. These provisions of the decree roused the indignation of the Russian Orthodox Church.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church perceived the Decree on Freedom of Conscience more calmly than the Russian Orthodox Church. Even the articles that assumed the transfer of all church properties to the state were not perceived painfully, because the Adventist Church owned practically no properties in Russia.

Despite the democratic character of certain articles of the Decree on Freedom of Conscience, the Bolsheviks started a merciless struggle against religion. Atheistic doctrine became state policy. In the latter half of the 1920s, the Soviet government advanced the slogan, “The struggle against religion is the struggle for socialism.”

Nevertheless, despite the clearly godless nature of the new regime, the position of Protestant believers, including Adventists, noticeably improved. Compared to the lack of religious rights before the revolution, when believers were persecuted and oppressed, the Decree on Freedom of Conscience, which guaranteed freedom of religion and abolished disqualifications related to the confession of any faith, held promise for the future. Article 13 of the Constitution of the RSFSR, adopted in July 1918, guaranteed freedom of religious expression, which allowed the Adventist Church to do missionary work and double its membership by 1927.

Many young church members had an opportunity to exercise their rights granted by the Decree of the Council of People's Commissars on January 4, 1919, titled “On the release from military service because of religious convictions.” According to this decree, people whose religious convictions forbade military service were given the right to replace the military service with medical service (mainly in hospitals) or other appropriate socially useful work, with the same length of service. In each individual case, the people's court caused an expert examination to be made by the Moscow United Council of Religious Communities and Groups. The members of this Council included the Adventist representatives I. A. Lvov and V. M. Teppone.

A civil war erupted in Russia after the October Revolution, and the Adventist Church, with the support of international Adventist communities, labored to help the country. In 1921 Daniel Isaac, chair of the East Russian Union, attended a meeting of the European Division in Denmark and told of the catastrophic food situation in Russia caused by famine and thoughtless government policies. The church agreed to transport foods from Sweden to Moscow. The Soviet government even approved the establishment of an Adventist charitable organization, headed by I. A. Lvov, to extend aid to the needy.<sup>21</sup> The Soviet government in every way helped in other charity projects, allowing duty-free transportation of cargo, providing protection and assistance in the distribution of humanitarian aid. In Moscow the Adventist Church distributed 600 tons of rice, and thousands of food parcels were sent to Adventist churches in many cities of Russia. Local authorities helped distribute food among the hungry and organized, together with the churches, free dining rooms for children, where homeless children could get a pound of bread and a bowl of soup a day.<sup>22</sup> In the hardest years of hunger and devastation, the church worked to save lives.

Despite the difficulties of wartime, Adventist leaders managed to convene a church conference in Moscow in October 1920, at which the All-Russian Federation of Societies of Seventh-day Adventists (later called the All-Union Council of Seventh-day Adventists) was organized. This new organization, headed by H. J. Lobsack, included the West Russian Union, North Russian Union, Caspian Union, East Russian Union, South Russian Union, the Siberian Union, and their local conferences. At that time, the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Russia numbered 7,500 members.

The mid-1920s brought great opportunities for evangelism in the USSR. Outreach was possible because of a relatively favorable constitutional and regulatory environment and the state's desire to use the significant spiritual and economic potential of sectarianism in the so-called "construction of socialism."

The fifth session of the All-Union Council of Seventh-day Adventists (ACSDA), held in Moscow in August 1924, outlined a major social program, launched immediately after the session. The church participated in literacy programs, opened medical institutions, and organized agricultural communes. Due to the trachoma epidemic in many areas of the Volga region, the authorities agreed to Adventists opening an ophthalmology clinic and a clinic for the treatment of ear, nose and throat diseases in the city of Marxstadt (Saratov Region). Each clinic had 25 beds. The eye clinic treated over 200 patients a day in its first month of operation. The church had the support of N. A. Semashko, the People's Commissar for Health of the USSR.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church supported the initiative of many believers for organizing collective farms and communes. In those years the authorities emphasized the importance of cooperation with sectarians in the restoration of agriculture destroyed by the war.<sup>23</sup> One of the largest Adventist communes, with over 300 members, was called "Fraternal Labor." It was directed by a talented peasant and excellent organizer, Konrad Kalinichenko. The commune produced many types of agricultural products, not only providing for their own needs but also giving money for the implementation of local cultural projects and assisting the surrounding

villages.

However, in November 1929 the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of the Bolsheviks decided to dissolve the Protestant communes. Among the charges against the Christian communes were:

Penetration of “bourgeois-kulak elements” into the communes

Tendency towards retaining all obtained products in the communes

Organized boycotting of military duty

Influence exerted on the communes by the heads of central institutions of a particular sect<sup>24</sup>

The forced collectivization and accusations of religious propaganda prevented the further development of this unique experiment with Christian communes in the Soviet Union. In the early 1930s, almost all Christian communes, including Adventist ones, were liquidated.

In the mid-1920s the Adventist Church organized theological training courses for ministers in several cities, while collecting funds for the building of a seminary. Several magazines were published, including *Blagaya Vest* (“The Good News”) and *Golos Istiny* (“The Voice of Truth”). The church also published a magazine in German, *Der Adventbote* (“The Advent Messenger”, for German speakers. In 1926 Adventists, together with evangelical Christians and Baptists, were allowed to print 25,000 Bibles through the state-owned publishing house in Leningrad. For the first time in the history of the Russian state, non-Orthodox Christians of other denominations had the opportunity to publish the Holy Scripture.

According to the general consensus of most researchers, the Adventist Church and other Protestant denominations grew steadily in those years. The key factors included a sharply increased dislike for Orthodoxy, which was perceived as a symbol of czarist autocracy; the atmosphere of fraternity and love prevailing in Protestant communities; and visible community commitment such as organizing charity events, free lunches, and similar endeavors.<sup>25</sup>

At the beginning of 1928, the Adventist Church in the USSR had 13,500 members, although, according to G. Friesen and A. Reinmarus, the actual number of Adventists was much higher. These two authors put forward the following argument: “Assuming two adult Adventists per family and the average family size of 5-6 persons, we obtain that the total number of people affected by Adventist communities will reach 40,000.”<sup>26</sup> According to the ACSDA Annual Report, in 1926 the All-Union Council of Seventh-day Adventists united 338 churches and 248 companies.

Thus, despite the fragile religious situation, the 1917-1927 period may be considered relatively favorable for Protestants who had endured persecution by both church and state prior to 1917. During this period Protestants, including Seventh-day Adventists, could do much. Thanks to their social activity they were even

able, to some degree, to raise their profile in Soviet society. Some Western researchers call the period from 1917 to 1927 the “golden decade” of Russian Protestantism.<sup>27</sup>

After 1927 Adventist leaders began to notice that the state policy towards believers was changing. The atheistic government decided to gradually mop the floor with the Church. All aspects of church activities were increasingly controlled, and this firm control penetrated into the whole of denominational structure. The state flagrantly intervened in the affairs of the church and sought to impose its will on church leaders, who were pressured to make decisions advantageous to the authorities.

This policy of the state came especially to the fore at the sixth session of the ACSDA in 1928, when the delegates, under pressure from the People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs, adopted a declaration on military service utterly alien to the position of the world Adventist Church. The incident caused uproar and confusion in the Adventist community in Russia and abroad, creating favorable conditions for the development of the “reformation” movements in Adventism.

Beginning in 1929, religious groups in the Soviet Union were perceived as counter-revolutionary organizations. The Second All-Union Congress of the League of Militant Atheists, in early April 1929, passed a resolution, declaring that “religious organizations acting through their leaders, preachers, and activists” were regarded as “political agents . . . and military and spy rings of the international bourgeoisie.” These included Baptists, Evangelists, Adventists, and Methodists.<sup>28</sup> On April 8, 1929 the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of the RSFSR issued a decree “On religious associations” that imposed severe restrictions on church activities.

These radical changes in state-church relations made it impossible for the Adventist Church to retain its existing church organization. In December 1931 the ACSDA plenum, held in Moscow, took a forced decision to change the adopted form of governance in the church in a manner convenient for the authorities.

What was the point of this reorganization? First and foremost, all the intermediate links of the church organization (local conferences and regional unions) that had previously existed between the local church and the ACSDA were liquidated. The only organizational structure of the Unified Union (the name given the church organization after the dissolution of its previous structure) would be the board of five members through which the so-called “authorized representatives” could communicate with local churches. Local churches had to operate on a self-sufficiency basis, in a congregational fashion, a system alien to the nature of the world church and its missiological vision. Each local church or company, while completely autonomous, could join the Unified Union on a voluntary basis, committing to coordinating its activities with the union and implementing all the decisions of the union board, “in order to preserve in the aggregate the basic principles of faith and organization of the SDA Church.”<sup>29</sup> Of course, any hopes for holding Adventist sessions, at least in the near future, were futile. Over the next decades of persecution the church would be scattered and deprived of the very possibility of holding an official meeting. The essence of the state policy towards religion was to weaken the church organization and gradually eradicate the Church, as a relic of the past, from the life of Soviet people.

The arrests that began in 1930 continued for a whole decade. According to G. A. Grigoriev, one of the few Adventist preachers who remained free, a total of 150 ministers, preachers and elders, and more than 3,000 Adventist lay members were arrested in those years.<sup>30</sup> All members of the Church Governance Board formed in Moscow in 1931, including the board chair H. J. Lobsack, were repressed.<sup>31</sup>

The massive repressions were bound to affect the number of church members. Many congregations were closed. While there were five Adventist churches with some 400 members in Moscow in 1927, one of the churches ceased to exist in 1930, and the other four churches merged into one with a total membership of 330. The authorities unceremoniously deprived believers of their prayer houses and arrested Adventist ministers.

The arrest of the minister was tantamount to voluntary dissolution of the local church. This happened, for instance, with an Adventist congregation in Leningrad: "By the beginning of 1937, there were practically no members under the age of forty in this church. Cash receipts almost completely dried up by the year 1938 . . . It must be concluded that there was a definite and significant reduction in the number of members of this sect. As a result, in February 1938, the petition for voluntary dissolution of the SDA sect in the city of Leningrad was filed, on behalf of the Adventist 'Group of Twenty,' in the Council of Frunzensky District."<sup>32</sup>

Paradoxical as it may sound, the Great Patriotic War became in some degree salvation for religion in the USSR. The increased influence of religious organizations, the patriotism of believers and their participation in financial assistance to the field army, the negotiations of the Soviet government with the United States and Britain about the opening of the Second Front, one of the conditions being a safeguard freedom of conscience in the USSR--all contributed to the religious situation changing for the better. Soviet authorities resumed registration of Adventist congregations, and permitted believers to conduct worship services. After 1944 they registered more than 300 Adventist churches, with over 13,000 members.<sup>33</sup>

Shortly after the war ended, G. A. Grigoriev made an effort to recreate the shattered church organization. However, despite a certain thaw in relations between the state and the church, holding a new Seventh-day Adventist session and electing leaders was out of the question. The state strictly controlled the situation at the local and regional level through the Council for Religious Affairs created during the war, and through its authorized representatives, suppressing any initiative that would promote qualitative and quantitative growth of the church. Moreover, being afraid that the situation would get out of hand, the government was not interested in the existence of a single organization structured according to the standards of the world Adventist church. The only thing that had been achieved was the re-establishment of the All-Union Council of Seventh-day Adventists according to the pattern of the early 1930s. The members of the post-war ACSDA were G. A. Grigoriev, P. A. Matsanov, F. V. Melnik, A. G. Galladshev, and V. D. Yakovenko. These Adventist preachers, through ACSDA authorized representatives, had overall charge of the Adventist church in the Soviet Union.

The years after Stalin's death went down in history as the "thaw," since in many spheres of life, especially culture and religion, there was a significant decrease of ideological pressure. The free confession of faith and the

possibility to freely conduct worship services strengthened the hope of many believers that the terrible past would never recur. The period from 1955 to 1957 can be considered the most "liberal" for believers in the post-war time.

The revival of church activities during the "thaw" period provoked a new anti-religious campaign, which in the late 1950s became massive and organized, with the full arsenal of propaganda. The campaign reached its climax in the last five years (1959-1964) of N. S. Khrushchev's era. According to researchers, the Khrushchev anti-religious campaign was second, in its cruelty, to only Stalinist persecutions of the 1930s.<sup>34</sup> It caused great damage to the church.

The main task of the anti-religious campaign was to demonstrate the weakness of religion contrasted with the achievements of science and technology. Like any other propaganda, it was often mixed with slander, scandalous revelations of the ministers, and accusing them of complicity with the Nazis during the war. Moreover, this was often done so rudely that many people simply did not believe all these stories. One example of such propaganda was the satirical article "The serpent-headed brethren," published in a Moscow newspaper. The article included a number of far-fetched allegations about the Moscow Adventist community and its ministers, trying to slander the church.<sup>35</sup>

In 1960 the Criminal Code was supplemented by Article 142, which carried a punishment of up to three years' imprisonment for violation of the Law on Religious Cults. It was primarily about the law passed as far back as 1929 and the secret instructions for its administration which were developed by the Council for Religious Affairs in April 1961.<sup>36</sup> In July 1962 Article 227 appeared in the Criminal Code, which provided for up to five years' imprisonment or exile for persons who "incited" other citizens to violate the Law on Religious Cults.

The broad interpretation of Articles 142 and 227 opened the floodgates of numerous abusive practices, unfair even from the point of view of Soviet legislation. Subsequently, some of the believers convicted in 1961-1964 were found innocent or partially guilty. For instance, in the Irkutsk Region, five Seventh-day Adventists, who had been sentenced in 1963 to terms of imprisonment of three to five years, were released early and subsequently fully rehabilitated.<sup>37</sup> However, when Brezhnev and Kosygin took up the baton of anti-religious activities, the above-mentioned articles were revised and toughened, especially in relation to "sectarians."

The government introduced new amendments to the Law on Religious Cults, which significantly restricted the rights of believers and empowered local commissioners to oppress believers. Authorities took a tough and aggressive stance and blatantly interfered in the internal life of the church. All this caused division within the church as to how much authorities could intervene in the internal affairs of congregations. Every year this division deepened and, finally, resulted in the emergence of two Adventist church organizations, called at that time as "official" and "unofficial." Apparently, the primary goal of the state policy at the moment was to divide the church and bring believers to look suspiciously at each other, pushing the church towards extinction.

Severe legal restrictions brought religious activities to a near standstill. A kind of “Sovietized” version of the church, convenient to the authorities, was formed. In December 1960 the All-Union Council of Seventh-day Adventists was dissolved, or, rather, liquidated with no reason given by government officials. Thereafter, scores of Adventist congregations in the USSR had to act without external support. “The administrative attack on the Church that began in the late fifties-early sixties,” wrote Alexander Nezhny, “once again demonstrated resolute unwillingness of the bureaucracy to reckon with the interests of a significant part of the population.”<sup>38</sup>

The authors of atheistic books and articles of those years consistently alleged that most Adventist church members were illiterate, backward, and ignorant people, whose desire for knowledge and science and active social position were suppressed by pastors. For example, the atheist author V. Lentin, describing the socio-demographic situation in some Adventist congregations, came to the following conclusion: “Thus, the key figure of the Adventist sect is an elderly illiterate woman – a dependent or a retiree in urban communities, and a collective farmer in rural communities.”<sup>39</sup>

And here is an excellent example of such writings from 1970s: “In 1975, in the Cherkassy Region, Ukraine, persons above 60 years of age, mainly women, accounted for 75% of members of Adventist communities. In the Khmelnytsky Region, women accounted for 82.7%, persons above 60 years of age – 76.3 %, retirees – 95.7%, and those having only elementary education - about 90% of all Adventists. A similar situation was observed in some areas of the RSFSR. The members of the Adventist community in Tula – the only one in the Tula Region – were predominantly women (82.3%), with 48% of believers being retirees and 53% having finished only seven-year school.”<sup>40</sup> Atheistic authors drew attention to the range of professions that determined the occupation of most working Adventists, including builders, janitors, woodworkers, and stockers for men, and maids, cooks, and medical workers for women. Attention was directed to the fact that those professions were not associated with large-scale industry that allowed believers to be in a better position to observe the Sabbath. This was imposed as a charge on them. One author wrote,

*In the village of Kirillovo (Irbity District, Sverdlovsk Region) the young professionals, a paramedic Peter Irinin and an agronomist Ruvim Moiseev, after adopting Adventism, turned into slackers and hacks. Such cases are not uncommon. Generally, Adventists are trying to get at-home work in the farm, or become handicraftsmen working by themselves. They practice participating in travelling construction brigades or working privately.*<sup>41</sup>

While presenting the socio-demographic structure of Adventism in the Soviet Union in such terms, authors emphasized the severe crisis that had supposedly struck the ideology and activities of this Protestant denomination and the religion at large. However, it was pointless for the authorities to guilt the Adventist church for a crisis the authorities had themselves caused. The 1960 and 1970s were the most challenging years in the history of the Adventist Church in the USSR. The church had to survive under constant pressure from the authorities and infighting caused by church split. We must give the leaders of the church the credit of overcoming the wall of division and restoring church unity in that difficult situation.

## The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Contemporary Russia (from Perestroika to This Day)

In the late 1980s, radical socio-political changes occurred in the Soviet Union, including reform of state-church relations. The need for change in this area was emphasized by Mikhail Gorbachev at the XIX All-Union Conference of the Communist Party. While stressing the “non-materialistic” and “unscientific” nature of religious views, Gorbachev said that “this may not excuse disrespect for the spiritual world of believers and especially for any administrative pressure aimed at affirming materialistic views . . . All believers, regardless of what religion they profess, are citizens of the USSR with full rights.”<sup>42</sup>

Social changes, especially in state-church relations, encouraged optimism in the souls of many believers, who after seventy years of “spiritual captivity” could finally experience authentic religious freedom. The Seventh-day Adventist Church, finally united after many years of split, began to actively develop its organizational structure.

An important milestone in the restoration of church structure was the establishment of union organizations. In 1986, shortly after the Adventist Church in Russia, in the presence of foreign guests representing the world church, had celebrated its centenary in Moscow, the first official session of the reunited Adventist Church was held in Tula from November 28 to 30. The session was attended by 85 delegates representing 6,406 members of 115 churches in the five local conferences in the territory of the Russian Federation. The session decided to organize the Russian Union, headed by M. P. Kulakov.

The democratic process that began in the late 1980s opened a new page in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist church in Russia. In September 1990 Adventists enthusiastically welcomed the adoption of the new Law “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations,” which abolished most restrictions on religious activity. The Adventist church again received the opportunity to engage in charitable and educational activities, establish educational institutions, own property, conduct missionary work, and educate children and youth. In the same year, the organizational structure of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, patterned after the world church structure, was finally formed in the territory of the former Soviet Union.

The democratic transition in Russian society allowed the church to reach a qualitatively new level of community service. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, various church institutions opened, including Christian secondary schools and higher education institutions, a publishing house, a media center, charitable foundations and associations, and nicotine and drug addiction prevention centers. A vegetable-growing program was launched that gained great popularity. The church continued strengthening its infrastructure by developing Christian education and training ministers, and contributed greatly to the preparation of a new translation of the Bible into the modern Russian language. Adventists were actively involved in upholding the principles of religious freedom. Adventist representatives were among the founders and members of the Eurasian Branch of the International Religious Liberty Association (IRLA).

At present, the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Russia has more than 1,000 local churches and 500 companies united in (1) West Russian Union Conference, headquartered in Klimovsk, Moscow Region; (2) East Russian Union Mission, headquartered in Novosibirsk; (3) Caucasus Union Mission, headquartered in Rostov-on-Don, and (4) Far Eastern Union of Churches Mission, headquartered in Khabarovsk. According to academician S. S. Averintsev, today "Adventists and other neo-Protestant denominations successfully show their intrinsic dynamism."<sup>43</sup> The best known Adventist institutions in Russia are (1) Zaoksky Adventist University, the first Protestant higher education institution in Russia (founded in 1988 as Zaoksky Theological Seminary); (2) *Source of Life* Publishing House; (3) Bible Translation Institute; (4) *Voice of Hope* Media Center; (5) the independent ministry *Three Angels* Broadcasting Network (Nizhny Novgorod); and (6) the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) with its offices in various regions of the Russian Federation.

In 2002 the Church approved an important document called "The Foundations of the Social Teaching of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Russia," which reflects the Church's understanding of its place and role in modern society.

The Adventist church today is a significant part of society that is inconceivable without the joys and sorrows of Russia's long-suffering people, with whom it has shared the same fate for so many years. When carrying out serious evangelistic, educational, and publishing activities and actively participating in social service, Adventists look to the future with hope, continue fulfilling the mission entrusted to them by God, and pull their fair weight in the spiritual, moral and socio-economic revival of Russia.

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22. Alf Lohne, *Adventists in Russia* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1987), 82.
23. *Pravda*, No. 108 (1924).
24. A. I. Klibanov, "Piatdesyat let nauchnogo issledovaniya religioznogo sektantstva" *Voprosy Nauchnogo Ateizma*, No. 4 (Moscow, 1967): 360-361.
25. See, for example, L. N. Mitrokhin, *Baptizm: istoriya i sovremennost' (filosofsko-sotsiologicheskie ocherki)* (St. Petersburg, 1997), 365.
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27. See, for example, Kent R. Hill, *The Puzzle of the Soviet Church* (Portland, Oregon: Multnomah, 1989), 115;  
Jim Forest, *Religion in the New Russia* (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 130.
28. Second All-Union Congress of the League of Militant Atheists. Proceedings (Moscow, 1929).
29. Appeal of the ACSDA Plenum to All Congregations and Companies of the All-Union Council of Seventh-day Adventists (Moscow, 1931). Archive of the *Tsentralnaya* Moscow Church of Seventh-day Adventists.
30. P. A. Matsanov, and A. G. Matsanova, *Po ternistomu puti* (Kaliningrad, 1995), 11.
31. In 1938 Hienrich J. Lobsack died in jail. According to some reports, he was shot. Some time later one of his daughters, Amalia, was also shot. In the late 1970s, Lobsack was rehabilitated.
32. The Yearbook of the Museum of the History of Religion and Atheism of the RSFSR Ministry of Culture, No. 4 (Moscow-Leningrad, 1962), 145. According to Soviet legislation, 20 church members should provide their names for the official registration of local congregation.
33. A. F. Parasey, *Vozniknovenie i razvitie adventistov sed'mogo dnia v Rossii* (Kiev, 1989), 64 (unpublished).
34. V. Zavatsky, *Evangelicheskoe dvizhenie v SSSR posle Vtoroy mirovoy voyny* (Moscow: IC-Garant, 1995), 74.
35. *Vechernyaya Moskva* (December 3, 1959).
36. V. A. Kuroedov, and Pankratova, *Zakonodatelstvo o religioznykh kulturalh* (Moscow, 1971), 150-160. Only authorized officials had access to this book in the Soviet Union.
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