

Melnik, Fyodor Vasilievich (1903–1989)

DMITRY O. YUNAK

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

Fyodor Vasilievich Melnik (Mel'nik) served the Seventh-day Adventist Church as evangelist, pastor, administrator, and teacher in Romania, Moldova, Ukraine, and Russia.

Early Life and Conversion

Fyodor Vasilievich Melnik was born May 8, 1903, in the village of Shishkovtsy in Bukovina, Austro-Hungary (now Chernovtsy region of Ukraine), into an Orthodox family. His parents were Vasiliy and Irina Melnik Strizhiboroda. He was the eleventh child in the family, feeble and sick from birth. At the age of four, Melnik lost his sight, and in the subsequent four years physicians and witch doctors tried in vain to restore his sight. At the end of these four years, Melnik gained his sight, apparently miraculously, and his mother believed this was in answer to her prayers.¹

At the age of 19, Melnik graduated from high school. While staying at home, he heard that a group of Seventh-day Adventists had settled in his village. He and his elder brother Dmitriy became acquainted with them and accepted the Adventist message. Their parents were not happy with this choice, but this only strengthened the teenagers' resolve. After some time, their parents were convinced that their sons had not brought shame, but truth, to their home. Melnik was baptized January 6, 1929, and his parents on August 18 of the same year.



Fyodor Melnik, 1956.

Photo courtesy of D.O. Yunak.

Education and Marriage

After his baptism, Melnik started his ministry in the Adventist Church as a literature evangelist. In 1930 he was enlisted in the Romanian army where he served until 1932. Upon discharge, Melnik enrolled at the Adventist Theological Institute in Braşov, Romania, where he completed the four-year course in three years in 1935²

In 1936, a year after his graduation, Melnik married Teresa Stepanovna Diener. They had two daughters. Their older daughter, Yekaterina, was born in B Iţi, Moldova, in 1940, and their younger daughter, Lyudmila, was born in Kiev in 1953.

Ministry

At the end of his theological studies, the North Moldova Conference sent Melnik to serve in local congregations in the north of Moldova. In those years, before June 28, 1941, Moldova and Bukovina (now Chernovtsy region) were a part of Romania. In 1938 Melnik was elected secretary of the Adventist work in the city of Chernovtsy. He was ordained to the pastoral ministry on September 2, 1939, at the autumn session of the Romanian Union. That same year Melnik was sent to serve in the city of B Iţi, Moldova.

As early as in 1938, Romanian authorities oppressed Seventh-day Adventists. Adventists were arrested, beaten, and forced to renounce their faith and accept Orthodoxy. In view of the fact that Adventists observed the Sabbath, they were often equated with Jews. For this reason, in 1944 General Antonescu, the fascist dictator, decided to deport all Adventists in one night. However, God prevented the deportation. On the night when church members were to be deported, the Soviet troops occupied the city of Bucharest³

In 1944 Melnik's ministry was interrupted again when he was enlisted for service in the Soviet Army. The medical commission pronounced him unfit for active service due to a stomach ulcer and extreme exhaustion. Hence, Melnik was assigned to a construction battalion in Melitopol, Zaporozhye Region, Ukraine.

In 1945 the All-Union Council of Seventh-day Adventists (ACSDA) resumed its activities. Adventists were even allowed to call back those ministers conscripted in the Soviet army. This allowed G. A. Grigoriev, the ACSDA leader, to extend an official call to Melnik to serve as a pastor for the Adventist church in Moscow and as a member of the All-Union Council of Seventh-day Adventists.

In 1952 Melnik was transferred to Kiev to serve as an authorized representative of the All-Union Council of Seventh-day Adventists for Ukraine (the *de facto* union president of Ukraine). This was a difficult time for the church within and without. The authorities kept advancing stricter demands, such as the ban on children attending church services and the cancellation of Sabbath School activities. At the same time, factions among Adventists caused controversies in the local churches. When the Ukrainian Council for Religious Affairs pushed Melnik to enforce the state regulations, he found compliance unacceptable and refused. As a result, Melnik's credentials as a religious worker were revoked by the state and he was forced to leave Kiev. The Adventist

Church suggested that he move to Stavropol.

In 1959 Melnik was transferred back to Moldova. He settled down in the town of Vulcănești in southern Moldova. Within a short space of time, he baptized 20 young people. This drew the ire of local authorities who ordered Melnik to leave the town within 24 hours. For a long time after his departure he was unable to find any permanent place of residence. Eventually he was registered in the town of Soroki. He was, however, not allowed to serve the Adventist church in an official capacity, and the only livelihood he could find was working as a stonemason in a quarry. This was due to the fact that ministers who did not receive a registration certificate from the Council for Religious Affairs had to combine their ministry with official employment at state-owned enterprises or organizations.

The bilingual congregations in Moldova were badly in need of Sabbath School lessons, not only in Russian, but also in Romanian. It was a time-consuming task and, therefore, the translated lessons were delivered to Moldova rather late without the possibility of a timely translation into Romanian. Because of this, the church administrators in Moldova authorized Melnik, who had received theological education, to compile Sabbath School lessons independently. In addition, he began to educate young ministers. At first, he did this through personal meetings.

In 1961 Melnik moved to Kotovsk (now Hîncești) and served mainly in local churches in central Moldova while continuing to train young ministers and compile Sabbath School lessons. When new ministers were recruited, a decision was made in 1966 to organize their systematic training according to the curriculum of the Institute of Theology in Brașov from which Melnik himself had graduated. Melnik became the main teacher for this underground educational institution. In this way, more than 100 ministers informally completed the full six-year course of the Moldavian Biblical Institute.⁴

Later Life and Contribution

Melnik retired in 1975, and he continued to live in B lți where he had been working since 1971. Despite his retirement, he wished to assist in the pastoral ministry. Hence, he moved with his son-in law to Yoshkar-Ola, capital of the Mari region, in western Russia.

A few years later Melnik suffered a heart attack and returned to Ukraine to live with his eldest daughter in Drogobych, L'vov region. In 1980 he moved to Taganrog, Rostov region, where he spent the remainder of his days. He passed away in 1989 at the age of 85.⁵

After more than 30 years of service to the Adventist Church as evangelist, pastor, administrator, and teacher, Fyodor Vasilievich Melnik left a legacy of an informal educator who trained ministers in the former USSR. His translation of the Sabbath School lessons into Romanian enabled those in Moldova to study the Bible in depth.

SOURCES

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NOTES

1. Fyodor, Melnik, "Autobiography," unpublished manuscript in personal archives of Dmitry Yunak.
2. Dmitry O. Yunak, *Oblako svidetelei. Rukovoditeli Tserkvi ASD v Rossii ot organizatsii ejo pervoi obshchiny do zakrytiya Vsesoyuznogo Soyuzha ASD* ([N.P.]:Self-published, 2013), 383.
3. Fyodor, Melnik, *Opyty propovednika*, unpublished manuscript in personal archives of Dmitry Yunak.
4. Dmitry O. Yunak, *I pomni ves' put.' Istoriya Tserkvi ASD v Moldavii* (Chisinau-Moscow: 2000), 170.
5. N. A. Zhukalyuk, *Vspominaite nastavnikov vashikh* (Kiev: Djerelo Zhyttia, 1999), 223.

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