

Ukraine

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Country Profile

Ukraine is a state in Eastern Europe that borders in the north on Belarus. It is in the north and east on Russia, in the west on Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary, and in the south on Romania and Moldova.

The origins of Ukrainian statehood date back to the 5th century A.D., when the city of Kiev was founded and the Kievan Rus emerged, which by the year 882, turned into the largest state of medieval Europe, stretching over time from the Baltic Sea (the lands of Veliky Novgorod) to the Black Sea (Tmutarakan Principality) and ruled by the Rurik dynasty. Totally destroyed in 1240 in the aftermath of the Mongol-Tatar invasion, the Kievan Rus was replaced within the territory of the modern Ukraine by the Galicia-Volyn Principality, which existed until 1340. Then the lands of the Right-Bank (modern Western) Ukraine fell under the dominion of Lithuania, Poland, and Hungary while the Left-Bank (modern Eastern) Ukraine remained subordinated to the Golden Horde. In the 16th century in the lands of Central Ukraine, there emerged a kind of semi-independent state, Zaporozhian Host, that was ruled by Cossack elders. In 1654 in accordance with the decisions of the Pereyaslav Council, the lands of Left-Bank Ukraine became a part of Russia, which also annexed in steps practically all the lands of Right-Bank Ukraine. In 1918 after the collapse of the Russian Empire, the independence of Ukraine was proclaimed. The new state was first governed by the Central Rada, then by the Hetman's government and, finally, by the Directorate. However, these governments controlled only certain parts of Ukraine, fighting against each other and against representatives of the White movement, who were calling for restoration of the monarchy and supporters of the Soviet government. The Soviets won the civil war and proclaimed the Soviet Republic in Ukraine, which in 1922 finally became a part of the USSR. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukraine became an independent state.

Prerequisites for the Adoption and Advancement of Adventism

Because from the middle of the 14th century the lands of the Right-Bank Ukraine were a part of Poland, Lithuania and Hungary, all the processes taking place in Europe during those years had a direct effect on Ukraine. During the Renaissance, the prestige of the Roman Catholic Church was seriously damaged, and the Pre-Reformation movements brought the ideas of Jan Hus to Ukraine that became an adopted country for many

Hussites fleeing from papal persecution. Ukrainians also took part in the famous Battle of Grunwald in 1410, during which the Teutonic Order, by means of which the medieval papacy conducted its expansion to the East and persecuted any freethinkers, was defeated. Consequently, soon after Martin Luther, Jean Calvin, and other reformers began to proclaim Protestant doctrines, their writings quickly spread in the Ukrainian lands. First the Pereyaslav Gospel (1556-1561) and then the Ostrog Bible in Church Slavonic (1581) were published in a large edition of up to 1,500 copies, which made it possible for a wide circle of people to become acquainted with biblical teaching for the first time.

The territory of the Left-Bank Ukraine remained under conditions of strict church censorship for a long time. Nevertheless, the reforms of Alexander I (1801–1825) and Alexander II (1855–1881) contributed to the opening of the Russian Bible Society and the publication of the Russian Synodal Bible (1876) that remains unmatched in its quality to this day. The church censorship was gradually weakening.

During the reign of Catherine the Great (1762-1796), a large number of Germans, most of whom were Protestants, moved to the territory of the Russian Empire, thus laying a good foundation for the future spread of the Adventist message.

In the 1870s, in the city of Tarashcha near Kiev, F. A. Babienko organized "The Community of Brothers Who Study the Word of God." Based on the Holy Scriptures, they eventually came to the same understanding of the key Christian doctrines as the Seventh-day Adventists.

First Adventists in Ukraine

The first Adventist tracts were brought to Ukraine in 1882 and actively distributed in Crimea by Philipp Reisinger. The first Adventists appeared in 1886 in Crimea in the village of Berdy Bulat, as a result of baptism conducted by Pastor L. R. Conradi. In order to intensify the missionary work, the Russian Adventist Tract Society was established in Hamburg in 1892. This society was spreading Adventist literature in the Ukrainian territory as well.¹

Development of Church's Organizational Structure

Given the territory of modern Ukraine was divided between several countries at the close of the 19th and in the first half of the 20th century, the history and the development of the SDA Church in different regions of Ukraine was different. Thus, the territory of the modern Transcarpathian Region initially, until 1918, belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, then, until 1938, to Czechoslovakia, in 1939-1944 to Hungary, and, finally, after 1945 to the USSR. The center of Adventism in Transcarpathia was the village of Ilnitsa. The territory of the modern Chernovtsy Region belonged first to the Austro-Hungarian Empire and then to Romania. The center of Adventism there was the city of Chernovtsy. The territory of the modern Lvov, Volyn, Ternopol, and Ivano-

Frankovsk regions belonged to Austria-Hungary and then to Poland. The center of Adventism in this region was the village of Pozharki in the modern Volyn Region. A prominent figure was F. F. Babienko, who served as the president of the Polish Union in 1932-1936 and played a big role in the formation and development of Adventist communities in Western Ukraine.² A common feature of the development of Adventism in all these regions was - to a greater or lesser extent - the persecution of believers by the state churches, especially in Poland and Romania. The Czechoslovak government generally maintained neutrality in religious issues. Adventist communities in all these regions kept a constant liaison with the General Conference almost up to World War II. Despite certain difficulties, the Church published Adventist books and magazines, including those in Ukrainian and Russian languages.³ Adventist educational institutions functioned in Braşov (Romania) and Bielsko-Biała (Poland). The meetings and travels of ministers were organized according to General Conference Working Policy.⁴

The territories of modern Central, Southern, and Eastern Ukraine were part of the Russian Empire where Adventism was persecuted by the Russian Orthodox Church through state agencies. The Adventist Church in the Ukrainian territory was actually illegal before April 17, 1905, when, as a result of the First Russian Revolution, Emperor Nicholas II of Russia issued a decree allowing conversion from Orthodoxy to another faith, and then there was a decree of 1906 recognizing the Adventist Church.⁵ The period before the beginning of World War I in the Ukrainian territory was characterized by rapid development of the Adventist Church and the emergence of Adventist congregations in almost all regional centers.⁶

After the beginning of World War I, under the pretext that Adventist leaders resided in Germany, the Russian Orthodox Church accused Adventists of conniving with Germans and instigated the authorities to resort to repressions. As a result, prayer houses were massively closed and Adventist ministers were arrested or exiled.⁷ Persecution continued until the czar's demise in February 1917, when the freedom of religion was proclaimed in Russia for the first time in history. The Soviet government that came to power in October 1917 also granted significant privileges, including exemption from military service to religious denominations, thanks to which the Adventist Church, headed in Ukraine by Pastor H. J. Löbsack, not only preserved but even increased its membership in the territory of Ukraine in the years of their civil war.⁸

In general, during the early Soviet era, the Church in Ukraine had wide opportunities for fulfilling its mission and even founded the denominational Publishing House *Patmos*. In 1918-1920, the *Golos Istiny (Voice of Truth)* and in 1926-1928, the *Blagovestnik (Evangelist)* magazines were being published. The Church also published Sabbath School lessons and Prayer Readings and held public disputations about religion. At that time, the Church in Ukraine was headed by Pastor I. A. Lvov, an excellent administrator and talented minister.⁹ In the wake of the 2nd (1925) and 3rd (1927) All-Ukrainian SDA Congresses, the territory of Ukraine was divided into several local conferences in each of which constituency meetings were held in line with the GC Working Policy provisions. However, in 1929 the authorities *de facto*, and in 1931 *de jure* prohibited the activities of the Adventist Church. After a short time, the Church suffered relentless persecution, with all congregations in the territory of Ukraine

closed and practically all (over 110) ministers and most of (more than 2,000) active lay members arrested or exiled.¹⁰ This situation lasted virtually until the end of World War II, but in spite of all this, the Church, albeit secretly and illegally, continued its activities, and believers continued gathering in private houses and apartments. The only church leader in the USSR who remained free was Pastor G. A. Grigoriev. He was entrusted with the leadership of the Church just before the arrest of the chair of the All-Union Council of Seventh-day Adventists (ACSDA), Pastor H. J. Löbsack.¹¹

Taking advantage of the relaxation in the intransigent attitude of the atheistic authorities towards the Church during the war, G. A. Grigoriev renewed the ACSDA activities in 1945. He contributed much to the restoration of the denominational structures in the territory of Ukraine where the registration of Adventist churches started at the end of the war. The ACSDA appointed the authorized representatives for Ukraine who successively were V. D. Yakovenko (1945-1952), F. V. Melnik (1952-1957), A. G. Galladzhev (1957-1959), and A. F. Parasey (1959-1960).¹²

After the death of G. A. Grigoriev in 1952, Pastor P. A. Matsanov, who was unanimously elected the chair of the ACSDA, put an increased focus on active missionary work, involvement of young people in church life, and providing non-interference of the state in church affairs. Upon his initiative, F. V. Melnik, a strong leader and religious scholar, became the senior preacher for Ukraine. This certainly was unacceptable for the atheistic authorities who insisted that ACSDA remove P. A. Matsanov from his position. Being aware of the necessity to preserve the church structure, the Church purported to yield to this pressure by appointing S. P. Kulyzhskiy the ACSDA chair but reserved the real levers of power for Matsanov. However, the authorities eventually discerned this intention and, by putting pressure on some ACSDA members, forced them to consent to the requirement of ceasing the missionary work and providing non-involvement of children and youth in the church life.

Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority of both ministers and lay members continued to support Matsanov.¹³ After the authorities dissolved the ACSDA in 1960, the Adventist movement in the USSR (and particularly in Ukraine) divided into two organizations: one supporting an active missionary work and Matsanov's efforts, and another loyal to authorities and headed by some former ACSDA members who believed that certain compromises could help the Church to survive. In addition, there were several smaller Adventist organizations of a purely local character.¹⁴

Matsanov energetically worked for overcoming church dissent. At the church session in Kiev (January 20, 1965) attended by virtually all (70) ordained pastors from Ukraine, RSFSR, Moldavia, Belarus, Latvia, and Estonia, Matsanov's policy was completely and totally received. In particular, the delegates wholeheartedly agreed with his criticism of the preachers who, in favor of the authorities and their personal ambitions, undermined church unity. However, the authorities preferred to ignore this fact and continued supporting the dissenting minority.¹⁵

The territory of modern Ukraine served by the Adventist Church was divided by Matsanov into three denominational fields: Western (headquartered in Lvov), Central (headquartered in Kiev), and Eastern (headquartered in Kharkov). The leaders of these fields were members of an unofficial All-Ukrainian Union

(headed by Matsanov) that organized its illegal meetings in Kharkov. Despite its illegal position at that time, the Adventist Church in Ukraine carried out active missionary work and was growing both numerically and in a qualitative manner.¹⁶

In the late 1970s, the leaders of Adventist Church in Ukraine became N. Zhukalyuk, A. Parasey, and V. Prolinskiy, who closely cooperated with Pastor M. P. Kulakov. The latter was appointed, with the approval of authorities, the head of the Adventist Church in the RSFSR and got more leverage for establishing an All-Union church organization.¹⁷

However, soon after the collapse of the USSR, the time came for the Church to conduct large-scale evangelistic programs with the participation of foreign and then domestic evangelists. In 1993, the 1st congress of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Ukraine was held, resulting in the election of new church officers headed by Pastor M. M. Murga.

Today, the Ukrainian Union Conference (UUC) is headed by Stanislav Nosov (president), Vladimir Velechuk (secretary), and Gennadiy Beskrovnyy (treasurer). It unites eight local conferences comprising 813 churches and 267 companies with 46,832 members. The UUC is actively involved in international church programs and organizes numerous evangelistic programs, seminars, and other events.

Adventist Institutions and the Place of Adventists in Society

The Adventist Church in Ukraine has an *Angelia* clinic, the *Dzherele Zhyttia* publishing house, seven health resorts, the *Nadiya* TV channel, and the *Golos Nadiyi* broadcasting station. The UUC is also the founder of the Ukrainian Humanitarian Institute and the Ukrainian Adventist Theological Institute, 34 Adventist secondary schools, and 21 educational centers. Through ADRA efforts, various social programs are implemented in Ukraine, assistance is provided to people affected by natural disasters, to orphans, to the needy, to people affected in the ATO area and in-migrants from the East of Ukraine. Thanks to religious freedom, the Church in Ukraine can now conduct various social-evangelistic programs, thus fulfilling the Great Commission of Christ.

SOURCES

Due to decades of persecution, historical sources were very often not preserved in the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and as a result, Adventist history in Russia and other successor states of the USSR is dependent on collective memory and oral traditions, on which this article draws.

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NOTES

1. H. J. Löbsack, *Velikoye Adventistskoye dvizheniye i Adventisty Sed'mogo Dnia v Rossii* (Rostov-on-Don: Altair, 2006), 157-158.
2. D. Heinz, A. A. Oparin, D. O. Yunak, and A. Pešelis, *Fotokhronika Tserkvi Adventistov Sed'mogo Dnia v Tsarskoi Rossii, SSSR i SNG* (Khar'kov: Fakt, 2002), 6-11.
3. A. A. Oparin, and D. O. Yunak, *Zheltaya reka* (Khar'kov: Fakt, 2008), 22-30.
4. Ibid., 77-79.
5. D. O. Yunak, *Istoriya Tserkvi Adventistov Sed'mogo Dnia v Rossii (1886-2000) (v dvukh tomakh)* (Zaokskiy: Istochnik Zhizni, 2002), Vol. 1, 54, 58-59.
6. Löbsack, *Velikoye Adventistskoye dvizheniye i Adventisty Sed'mogo Dnia v Rossii*, 285-286.
7. Ibid., 292-296; D. Heinz, A. A. Oparin, D. O. Yunak, and A. Pešelis, *Dushi pod zhertvennikom. Kniga Pamyati Tserkvi Adventistov Sed'mogo Dnia, posviashchennaya zhertvam religioznykh repressiy vo vremya Tsarskoi Rossii i Sovetskogo Soyuz (1886-1986)* (Khar'kov: Fakt, 2010), 20-24.
8. A. A. Oparin, *Psalmy, napisannye krov'yu* (Khar'kov: Fakt, 2007), 66-67.
9. D. Heinz, A. A. Oparin, D. O. Yunak, and A. Pešelis, *Dushi pod zhertvennikom*, 64-68, 199-203.
10. Ibid., 71-89.
11. Ibid., 123-134.

12. D. Heinz, A. A. Oparin, D. O. Yunak, and A. Pešelis, *Fotokhronika Tserkvi Adventistov Sed'mogo Dnia*, 105.
 13. A. A. Oparin, *Kogda plachut sosny* (Khar'kov: Fakt, 2007), 43-47.
 14. Ibid., 47-48; D. Heinz, A.A. Oparin, D.O. Yunak, and A. Pešelis, *Fotokhronika Tserkvi Adventistov Sed'mogo Dnia*, 139-148; E. Cerneviskis, P. A. *Matsanov- fenomen rukovoditelya adventistskogo dvizhenia v Sovetskom Soyuze s 1960 po 1981 gg.* (Riga: Patmos, 1997), 4-11.
 15. A. A. Oparin, *Kogda plachut sosny*, 61-65; D. O. Yunak, *Istoriya Tserkvi Adventistov Sed'mogo Dnia v Rossii (1886-2000) (v dvukh tomakh)*, Vol. 1, 364-365.
 16. A. A. Oparin, *Kogda plachut sosny*, 66-81; Cerneviskis, 11-12.
 17. A. A. Oparin, *Kogda plachut sosny*, 91-94; D. O. Yunak, *Istoriya Tserkvi Adventistov Sed'mogo Dnia v Rossii*, 428-432.
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