

The Long Road

Foreword

Not everyone knows how and why a large number of Evangelical believers of Slavic nationalities ended up in America at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. Older generations, especially survivors of religious persecution, are nearing the last days of their lives. Soon enough, the memories of these stories will be erased altogether. The stories in this book are written for the young generation. So they will know the lives of their fathers, grandfathers, and great grandfathers. So they will know their roots.

Introduction

A considerable amount of literature has already been written about the persecution of Christians in the Soviet Union, as well as their immigration to the United States. Yet, unlike that literature, this book's main purpose is to trace in a concise, brief and chronological manner the main points of the formation and disintegration of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), its domestic and foreign policies, and its attitude towards religion, particularly towards evangelical Christians.

1. The Bolshevik Party Comes to Power in Russia

By the beginning of the twentieth century, most European countries had separated religion from the state. Because of this move, religious persecutions at the governmental level were not taking place. However, in tsarist Russia, the Orthodox Church merged with the state and continued its intolerance of any religion besides Orthodoxy, even various denominations and sects of Christianity were denounced. Vladimir Lenin would later roundly criticize the tsarist autocracy and Orthodox Church.

In February 1917, the third year of World War I (1914-1918), a revolution broke out in Russia. Tsar Nicholas II abdicated the throne and power was taken over by the Caretaker government. Overnight, Russia turned from a monarchy into a Republican political governance. The plan was to convene a Legislative Assembly (parliament) with the participation of various political parties to create a permanent government. In April 1917, a group of about thirty Bolshevik leaders led by Lenin arrived from exile in Petrograd, the capital of the Russian Empire (initially called St. Petersburg, later to be called Leningrad after Lenin's death, and St.Petersburg again in 1991). Taking advantage of the political instability, on October 25, 1917, the Bolshevik Party made a coup d'état and came to power. They dissolved the Legislative Assembly, arrested all Caretaker government officials and sunk them on a barge in the Neva River. Tsar Nicholas II, his family and servants were sent to Yekaterinburg (Sverdlovsk at the time) where they were brutally murdered. In 1918, Lenin's new government moved to Moscow.

The creation of the Bolshevik Party began in 1903 at the 2nd Congress when the party split into two: the Mensheviks, headed by Martov and the Bolsheviks led by Lenin. The Bolsheviks followed the teaching of Marx and Engels (the founders of the communist ideology) as well as adopted Darwin's theory of evolution, which stated that man descended from apes and life on Earth formed by chance through evolution of simple life forms into complex organisms. The theory rejected the idea of a Creator-God. The Bolsheviks aimed to build a godless society-state, first in Russia, and then in all the nations of the world.

According to Marx's theory, religion was supposed to gradually die through education and propaganda of the denial of the existence of God. His theory considered faith in God as the opium of the masses, the most terrible thing of the past that hindered the construction of socialism and then communism. In the Bolshevik anthem "Internationale" these words were sung: "...the whole world of violence we will destroy completely, and then we will build our new world: who was nothing will become everything..."

The Bolshevik Party was relatively small. Some scholars estimate its size at no more than five thousand people at the time of the October Revolution. The Bolsheviks succeeded in seizing power due to several contributing factors. First, Lenin's principal of organization worked—three organized men are stronger than a hundred haphazard ones, one hundred stronger than a thousand, etc. Second, the Orthodox religion was formally united with the state; therefore all religiousness was mainly limited to the observance of holidays and fasts. Many clergy discredited themselves among the

people by their actions, and no new spiritual teachings were introduced. Third, the party attracted people with propaganda and beautiful slogans. “Power to the People’s Deputies”, “The Land of the Peasants”, and “Peace to All Nations” were common slogans used. Lastly, the party preached separation of religion from the state, complete freedom of all religions and the right to disseminate religion altogether.

2. The Party’s Domestic Policy in the First Years of Soviet Power

The Bolsheviks adopted all of the aforementioned ideologies in the first Constitution in 1918. In the first years of Soviet power, the Bolsheviks were only opposed by the discontented Orthodox Church, which had lost its influence on the people. Ill treatment of clergy, thievery in churches and monasteries, destruction of buildings of worship resulted in the response of the Orthodox Church. To diminish other religious beliefs, the party used anti-religious propaganda. They created a propaganda committee called “The Union of the Fighting Atheists”, later known as the “Knowledge” Party. The head of the “Knowledge” Party was outspoken atheist Yaroslavsky who wrote the book The Bible for Believers and Nonbelievers, in which he ridiculed and distorted the meaning of Biblical stories. This was known to be a pocket book for atheists. The “Knowledge” Party created model debates of atheists versus Orthodox priests, as well as Protestants all across the country. Large crowds would attend the debates, and even though the atheists usually succeeded in discrediting the Orthodox priests, the Evangelical believers commonly won the debates against

the atheists. The common people liked the debates and ironically this contributed to the growth of the Evangelical Churches. Protestant churches from the years 1921-1925 increased in number.

The prominent Protestant religious leaders of that time were: Ivanov, Pavlov (father and son), Mazayev, Martsinkovsky and Prokhanov. Nicholas Peysti (father of the future radio preacher Y.Peysti) and Vince (also the father of George Vince, a future Secretary of the Union of churches) worked in Siberia. Ivan Stepanovich Prokhanov wrote many evangelical hymns, many of which are sung during services today. He also translated many songs from English to Russian. In 1921, Ivan Voronaev and Kohovich came from the U.S. to Odessa as missionaries. They began to preach in the Evangelical churches about the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the sign of speaking in tongues. This began the new Evangelical trend in Soviet Russia.

In December 1921, the establishment of the USSR was announced, which included Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. In 1923, the penal authority to Combat Counter-revolution and Sabotage (VCHKa, later renamed the Main Political Administration) was established. In 1924, Lenin died. Many say his death is attributed to his two year illness after Fenya Kaplan attempted to kill him. In reality, Lenin died from progressive paralysis, a disease characterized by progressive disorder of the mind, dementia, speech and movement disorder, etc. Since there was no successor, the struggle for power began. At first a triumvirate was formed with Rykov, Kamenev and Stalin. The first two took lead of the state, and Stalin became the first secretary of the Communist Party. The main rivals for leadership were Trotsky and Stalin, and both had dictatorial

leanings. In 1927, Stalin—the more skillful schemer—prevailed and became the absolute dictator of the USSR, filling in the party posts with state posts. Meanwhile, Trotsky was forced to immigrate to Mexico, where he was assassinated by Stalin’s agents.

Stalin created a cult of personality. Poems and songs were composed about him, hailing him as the father of all peoples. Yet behind the propaganda scene, Stalin killed not only millions of ordinary citizens, but even many in his own party and those in executive powers (Yagoda, Ezhov and Beria).

3. Changing the Course of the Party in the Fight against Religion— Party Conventions and Formation of Concentration Camps

Religion wasn’t dying. The Bolshevik Party, seeing its failure on the ideological front, decided to kill religion on their own terms. In 1924, the second Constitution was enacted, and religion began to be addressed in a more severe way. Initially, violent measures were used infrequently. Then, in 1927 the all union Congress of “fighting atheists” was held, and a decision was made to fight against religious relics by all means available. Atheists declared a five year program to eliminate all religions in Russia between the years of 1932-1937. Mass arrests and shutting down of churches began. Many believers, including Ivan Voronaev, died as martyrs. A prominent Christian leader, I Prokhanov was advised not to return to his homeland while he traveled abroad at the beginning of the persecutions.

In 1927, at the party Congress, the country industrialization program was established. This created labor camps where political,

criminal, and religious prisoners were sent into exile. The ministry “The Main Administration of the Camps” (Gulag) attached to the NKVD (People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs) was formed to control those camps. The writer and political prisoner Alexander Solzhenitsyn wrote a book in the 70s about the Gulag experience titled The Gulag Archipelago. The word “archipelago” figuratively referred to the large concentration of camps in various parts of the country, like geographic islands suited close to each other. Some of the well-known camps were Mordvinic, Solovetski, Chukchi, Pecherski, and Siberian. Stalin was ahead of Hitler in building concentration camps by about ten years. While Hitler was slaughtering particular nations, Stalin was slaughtering his own citizens.

The next anti-religious campaign coincided with the collectivization of agriculture. Millions of people were tormented by back breaking toil and hunger in the camps. The passport system was introduced in the country and peasants were forbidden from leaving the collective farms. If anyone tried to escape abroad, they would be sentenced to death. In 1932-1933, Ukrainian authorities created a mass starvation even though there was a good harvest. During that period, in one community in Ukraine there was a prophecy that great poverty would come and people would have to move abroad. Many moved to Kazakhstan, then to China. A few years later, some moved to Australia, others to Latin America, and subsequently the United States. In these countries, they formed the first Slavic Protestant communities.

In 1936, the third Constitution was adopted under the name of Stalin. Freedom of conscience was declared, but in fact it was a limit

to the freedom of faith. In the years of 1937-1938, Stalin held regular political action known as the “Great Terror”. According to official data published after the collapse of the USSR, about seven million people were arrested, of which three million were either shot or died. The terror was directed mainly against any remaining so-called people of “Lenin’s Guards”, including the first leaders of the Red Army, suspecting them of attempting a coup d’état. This was a time where during the day, demonstrators would sing songs praising Stalin such as “I do not know any other country where a man can breathe so freely” and “broad is my native land”, and at night special cars called “black ravens” drove by homes and took people to prison of the NKVD, where most never returned from. By the beginning of World War II, almost all of the active Evangelical brotherhood was in prisons or camps.

4. The Beginning of the Second World War and the Extension of the USSR Boundaries

In August of 1939, the Soviet Union and Germany signed a secret agreement about the division of land in Eastern Europe. And on September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland. On September 19, 1939, the Red Army entered the eastern regions of Poland. Both of these actions initiated the Second World War. Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia were added respectively to the Ukrainian SSR and Belorussian SSR. In November, Soviet troops invaded Finland and at the cost of enormous losses, part of the land was annexed, forming the Lithuanian SSR. In June 1940, the Soviet Union sent troops into Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, declaring them Soviet republics. In the

same month, Soviet troops entered the territory of Romania, attaching Bessarabia to Moldova and Bucovina to the Ukrainian SSR.

As a result of these aggressive actions, a great communist empire formed encompassing the territory of 1/6th of the world. In 1941, a week after the announcement of a baseless rumor about the possibility of war between the USSR and Germany through TASS (Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union), Germany invaded the Soviet Union on June 22. It was the beginning of the so-called Great Patriotic War. In the first months of the war, the Red Army sustained major losses, rapidly retreating to the East, losing vast territories. To prevent further retreat, the People's Commissariat of Defense issued an order declaring surrendered captive soldiers, "malicious deserters". In July of 1942, another order of "not one step back" established defensive squads in the rear of the Soviet troops and penal companies and battalions. The soldiers had no choice, and these orders created a radical breakthrough in the war course. Valdimir Astafyev, a soviet writer during the adjustment period of the Great Patriotic War, spoke about the victory over Nazi Germany: "We won the war, after covering Hitler by our corpses." The Soviet Union lost 30 million people in this war (including civilians), while Germany lost 6 million. If the Bolshevik party did not have mercy on man's life in times of peace, it certainly did not value it during times of war. Some researchers believe that during the Soviet rule (1917-1991) up to 70 million lives were lost.

As a result of the battle at Stalingrad, in the winter of 1942-1943, the group of 330,000 German troops were encircled and destroyed. From this moment on, the Soviet army began to force the

enemy west. In August 1941, the Volga Germans living in Russia since the days of Catherine II were deported to Kazakhstan and Central Asia. In 1943 and 1944, the Crimean Tatars, Chechens and other Caucasian peoples were deported as well.

5. Restoring Religious Activities and the Beginning of the “Cold War”

In late 1943 and early 1944, representatives of the “Big Three”—Stalin of the Soviet Union, Roosevelt of the United States, and Churchill of Britain—discussed issues of joint warfare and the postwar world at the Teheran conference. At the conference, U.S. and Britain pledged to open the second front in Europe in 1944 for a faster victory over Hitler’s coalition (Germany, Italy, and Japan). The Soviet Union, after the defeat of Germany, agreed to join the war with Japan. During the same meeting, Roosevelt and Churchill insisted that Stalin soften his policy towards religion.

In the same year, some of the religious leaders of different denominations, including those from the Protestant churches, were released from prison. The central authority of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christian Baptists (ACECB) was organized and small pockets of activity arose from the surviving communities. Yet overall, the church was strictly controlled by the authorities. In August 1945, ACECB was joined by some communities of Christians of Evangelical Faith, Pentecostals, and later the Fraternal Mennonites. All of this happened under pressure from the authorities. The Pentecostal Union was not allowed to be created by the authorities, as it was considered a fanatical sect.

On May 8, 1945, Germany signed an act of total surrender and declared May 9 Victory Day over Nazi Germany. In August of 1945, the Soviet Union declared war on Japan. In September, it signed an act of surrender after the defeat of its troops in Manchuria, North Korea, southern Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands. That was officially the end of the Second World War. In 1947, differences started increasing between Soviet and Western powers, which resulted in the “Cold War”. There were two opposing military blocs: NATO (North Atlantic Treaty), which included the Western countries with the U.S., and the Warsaw Pact, which included the Eastern European countries that had become dependent on the Soviet Union and led by the Soviet Union (8 countries). The Soviet Union cut itself off from the West with the “Iron Curtain”, creating tight control in all spheres of country life, fighting off the influence of “bourgeois ideology on the minds of Soviet citizens”. According to Soviet propaganda, the West was creating subversive radio stations and broadcasting them into the Soviet Union and socialist countries, especially religious programs transmitted through Trans World Radio. The Soviet Union responded by jamming the radio stations. Despite this, a lot of soviet people enjoyed listening to Western programs. Believers looked forward to listening to radio broadcasts by Peysti, Zinchik, Margulis, Leonovich, Ivan Sergey and others. For believers, these programs were very encouraging.

6. Khrushchev Era

In March 1953, Stalin died. Malenkov was elected chairman of the Council of Ministers, Vorshilov was elected Chairman of the

Supreme Council, and the first secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party was Nikita Khrushchev. Lavrentiy Beria, Commissar of Internal Affairs (NKVD) after attempting to take over power after Stalin's death, was arrested along with other conspirators. He was accused of treason, conspiracy and espionage, and sentence to be shot by court behind closed doors. Malenkov, as Chairman of the Council of Ministers, and with almost two year's tenure, brought some economic relief to the country through a series of reforms in agriculture and industry. The Punitive Authority (NKVD) was reorganized into two enforceable agencies: Ministry of Interior and the Committee of State Security (KGB). The KGB was engaged in affairs abroad and also monitored the ideological, political, and religious situation in the country.

In 1954, at the Central Committee plenum, a resolution on strengthening the atheistic propaganda in the country was enacted. Mass production of all kinds of atheist literature began. All kinds of nonsense about the "sectarians", "Baptists", "fanatics", "morons" and "American spies" were published in newspapers. Movies about the "sectarian fanatics" were made. The population through propaganda was turning hostile toward believers. The word "sectarian", "Baptist" or "Shtundist" was associated with something repulsive, disgusting, and ultimately something that had to be exterminated.

The masses did not even know the value and meaning of these words. They were known only to a few enlightened people. The new agency "Council on Religious Affairs" was organized by the Council of Ministries of the USSR and local, regional and district commissioners

were commissioned by their executive committees. They coordinated with the KGB about all religious life in the country. In 1956, Khrushchev at a closed meeting of the Twentieth Party Congress gave a lecture: “On Stalin’s Personality Cult and Its Consequences”. This information was like an exploding bomb of shock in society. In the same year, the Central Committee of the Communist Party issued a decree “on overcoming the cult of personality”. However, Khrushchev and later Brezhnev both created a cult of personality, but to a lesser extent than Lenin and Stalin.

The “Khrushchev thaw” started in politics. Many prominent figures of the Party, State and Army were rehabilitated. Political prisoners were released. Previously banned literary works were published. Those deported during the war, were rehabilitated. Yet, criminals as well as believers were released under amnesty. One cannot help but to compare the situation that arose with the words of Pontius Pilate: “whom do you want to release—Jesus or Barabbas?”

In the higher echelons of power, a new battle started. Malenkov was replaced from the post of President of the Council of Ministers in 1955 by Bulganin, but Bulganin was ousted from the post in 1958 by Nikita Khrushchev. The factional (anti-party) group’s attempts to remove Khrushchev from his post of first secretary of the Central Committee failed. The basis of the Communist party still was brute force and leadership. Each head of state, Secretary General, was considered the heir and successor of the great Lenin. In 1961, at the 22nd Congress of the Communist Party, it was officially declared that the USSR had built socialism completely and finally. The second stage was to build a complete communist society by 1980. Khrushchev

emphasized that since religion was a major obstacle in the implementation of the “bright” communist future, it would be eradicated completely. Most attacks were directed at Protestant churches and believers, since they were less susceptible to the atheistic persuasion and believers were considered model citizens. Some of the persecution came in the form of being barred from access to higher and secondary educational institutions. Sometimes, children were forced under threat to join Octoberists, Pioneers, and Kosomols. As well, some parents were deprived of parental rights to their children. The Bible was a forbidden book, and import of the Bible was considered the worst smuggling crime. The Party chose loyal servants to head the religious communities. The KGB created “letters of instruction” in which Christians were forced to keep strict prohibitions. On these bases, the two Christian groups split and raised two executives (the same as the Pentecostal communities). The All-Union Council of Evangelical Christian Baptists remained obedient to the authorities, and the newly formed Council of Churches (Kryuchkov, Prokofiev, Vince G.) sided with the persecuted fraternity.

In 1961, with Soviet support, the communist regime headed by Fidel Castro, came to power in Cuba. The Soviet Union began to deploy its own missiles and Khrushchev promised Americans “to show Kuzma’s mother” (an expression of brute threats). This was the beginning of the Cuban Missile Crisis. NATO and the military units of the Warsaw Pact were in a state of combat readiness for three months. The Third World War could have started, but the crisis was resolved by the removal of Soviet missiles from Cuba. However, in Germany, the Berlin Wall was raised as a symbol of the Cold War.

7. Brezhnev Era

The Beginning of the Dissident Movement

In October 1964, there was an anti-Khrushchev conspiracy. Brezhnev, who served as President of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR had already become the General Secretary of the communist party, and Kosygin had become Chairman of the Council of Ministers. After Khrushchev's replacement, the political thaw was over. However, the ten year reign of Khrushchev did play a huge role in the dissident movement. Exposing the crimes of Stalin and printing previously banned books during the Khrushchev reign initiated this movement. Even though the new leaders tried to reverse the dissident movement, it didn't work.

In 1968, the first issue of underground, "Chronicle of Current Events" was published. It informed people about the human rights violations in the USSR. In 1970, the Committee of Human Rights in the USSR (unauthorized by the authorities) was established in Moscow and a large scale human rights movement began. In this dissident movement participated prominent scientists, writers, journalists, religious leaders, including famous people such as Andrei Sakharov (thrice the Hero of the Soviet Union, one of the founders of the Soviet atomic bomb) a former political prisoner, the writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Vladimir Bukovsky, A. Sharansky, etc.

In the early 1970s, Solzhenitsyn's book Gulag Archipelago was published abroad, for which he was strongly disliked by the soviet authorities. The book was daily broadcast on Radio Liberty. The USSR

press called him a literary traitor. Solzhenitsyn was expelled from the Writers' Union of the USSR. In 1974, he was exiled. At that time, the Soviet government was practicing the exchange of people. For example, Louisa Corvalana (a Chilean communist) was exchanged for Vladimir Bukovsky and others. Solzhenitsyn exposed KGB agents abroad, and trained leaders of the international communist movement .

B. Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe--the Émigré Movement

Due to the U.S. and Europe putting an emphasis on freedom and human rights in the field of domestic and foreign policy, this created an atmosphere of tension between the East and West. Moreover, the threat of the Cold War escalating into a real nuclear war was still a possibility. To ease the international tension, Western nations called the USSR to the negotiating table to develop international principles for all participants to be guided by in their domestic and foreign policy.

In July 1975, representatives of thirty-three states in Europe, the U.S., and Canada all gathered in Helsinki, Finland to develop this document. The meeting was held for a few days, and in the end the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe was signed on July 30, 1975. Brezhnev signed it on behalf of the USSR.

This "Final Act" included all previous international agreements on human rights and freedom for people. As well, an international team was established to watch the progress of the "Helsinki

Agreement”, and receive a summarized progress report every two years in European capital cities. The Soviets mainly hoped this document would lead to aiding the KGB. In 1976, the initiative group to monitor the implementation of the “Helsinki Agreement” was established by Soviet human rights defenders. It watched all violations of human rights, printed and transferred materials to international organizations. The authorities attempted to block the conveying of this information, but failed.

At this time, Podgorny had been dismissed from the post of State Chairman of the Supreme Council of the USSR, and Brezhnev took his place instead. With the adoption of the Brezhnev constitution in 1977, the fourth since the formation of the USSR (1918, 1924, 1936 and 1977), there was some liberalization for the Jews and the Germans. They were given the right to leave for their historic homelands: Israel and Germany. To allow the trip, they were required to submit an affidavit of support from these countries to the Passport Office and a confirmation of family relationships.

In the same year, the first meeting of the International Helsinki Group was to be held in Madrid, Spain to monitor the progress of the “Final Act”. Because of the persecution of Christians in some of the unregistered Pentecostal communities, there arose a movement to leave the USSR for capitalist countries. Declarations addressed to Brezhnev, Kosygin, and two copies to foreign organizations were written. At first they were sent through dissident channels, and then directly to the activists of the movement. Initially this was a small scale movement--only large in Kuban and Nakhodka--

but after a while it increased into a massive size, just before the Madrid meeting.

The conference received tens of thousands of applications for the desire to leave the USSR for religious reasons. This exposed the Soviet Union's double play since the Soviet Union attempted to claim that there were only a few disgruntled, not reborn, unstable Christians succumbing to this "provocation". The USSR needed to suppress this movement and continue to assert on the world stage that there was no discrimination on religious grounds in the USSR. The authorities applied a policy of carrot and stick. At first, the pressure on the believers slightly eased, while simultaneously through the KGB various kinds of ridicule and propaganda was spread to condemn emigration and that the believers were provoking the persecution, and that they weren't suffering for their faith but for politics. Authorities advised believers to write applications for denial to leave the country. Although, these suppressive methods were successful to some degree, they did not manage to suppress this movement. After some time, the "carrot" policy was officially replaced with a harsh "stick" policy. Those particularly active in the movement were sentenced to various prison terms. In December 1979, Soviet troops invaded Afghanistan to impose a communist regime.

8. The Gorbachev Years--The Beginning of Emigration

In 1982, Brezhnev died. He was replaced by Andropov, the former head of the KGB, who was in power until his death in 1984. Chernenko filled the post, but died a year later in 1985. The representatives of the

Politburo were elderly, most over 75 years old. A relatively young (54 year old), Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev took the post. A month later he convened the Party's Central Committee plenum which began the perestroika and glasnost movement (reorganization and openness movement).

In 1986, the 27th Communist Party Congress took place and adopted the new version of the CPSU Program, the same one under the reign of Khrushchev which had terribly failed. Communism had not been built and religion had not been eradicated. In May of the same year, an explosion occurred at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant. There was vast radioactive contamination in Ukraine and Belarus. Thousands of emergency workers lost their lives. In the same year, the Council of Ministers adopted a decree on the weakening of censorship and publication of previously banned works. These measures began to contribute to the total collapse of the USSR, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of the totalitarian regime in 7 countries of Eastern Europe, the collapse of the Warsaw military bloc, and the whole socialist movement in general. As well, this became the beginning of resilient religious activities.

Jews and Germans began to leave the USSR in a mass exodus for their homelands. But believers, who sought to leave for religious reasons, were denied. To allow believers to leave on religious grounds would imply that there was religious discrimination in the USSR. However, a solution was found. At this time, many human rights activists were released from prison and mental hospitals under amnesty, and left for the United States or Israel. Well known abroad, Boris Perchatkin left with his family to the U.S. He met with Secretary

of State Shultz and President Reagan. He also gave a speech on the situation of believers in the Soviet Union in Congress and the U.S. legislature. After Perchatkin's speech, two months later in October-November 1988, the U.S. Congress voted to grant refugee status to Pentecostals (Baptists, Adventists) and allocated money to pay for future accommodations of refugees in transit countries (Austria and Italy) traveling to the United States. Boris Perchatkin wrote in his book Fire Trails: "The fact that the U.S. has legalized the status of 'refugee for religious reasons' has still not solved the whole problem. The Soviet Union has been unwilling to recognize that people are leaving the country on religious grounds and in the immigration offices, Israeli invitations were required". Boris Perchatkin had a meeting with Anatoly Sharansky (former human rights activist) who worked for the Israeli parliament and he agreed to send a few dozen Israeli invitations for those who wished to leave the Soviet Union. Unfortunately, there were thousands of people willing to leave, so Israel refused to send invitations to people with Slavic last names. Luckily, at this time, the authorities did not require any proof of kinship from the people inviting them to Israel, which had been required before (the reason for this is not entirely clear).

In 1988, two significant events prompted the further disintegration of the Soviet Union. First, at the All-Union Communist Party Conference a program to reform the political system was adopted and second, the beginning of the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan.

9. Emigration

Paperwork to leave the USSR was a complicated and lengthy procedure, associated with high financial costs. Each family member had to pay 700 rubles, which was almost the annual salary of a low-wage worker. Moreover, the family had to make a trip to the foreign embassies in Moscow to gain permission to cross European borders. The Soviet border was crossed in the West at two locations: in Chop town (Transcarpathia) on the border with Czechoslovakia, and in Brest, on the border with Poland. People carried food for 10-15 days, their baggage, utensils, and bedding. Upon arrival in Vienna, those who were traveling with an Israeli invitation were picked up by an authorized representative of the Jewish community and given rented premises. Jews and Christians were separated depending on where they intended to travel further--to Israel, Canada or the United States. In Vienna, émigrés stayed on average up to two weeks to fill in questionnaires for further consideration at the American Embassy in Italy. As the previous group of immigrants would leave Italy, the next batch of immigrants (both Jews and Christians) would be sent to Rome. All of the lodging was paid for by religious organizations in Rome. Jews and Christians were separated. Believers held meetings three or four times a week and went to local Italian churches.

In Italy, immigrants stayed two and a half to three months. They had to pass a medical examination and an interview at the U.S. Embassy to obtain the status of “refugee” or “password”. Many believers waited for sponsorships from churches in America. As already mentioned, Israel refused to send invitations to Slavic families; however, in Brighton Beach, New York many invitation centers were organized. Arriving in America, the majority of immigrants settled on

the Pacific Coast, especially California due to good climate and economy.

The first stage of departures through Israel's invitations was suspended by the U.S. government in October 1989. The second stage of departures was based on family reunification through "affidavits". Those who did not manage to cross the border, got in touch with relatives or friends in the U.S. for sponsoring approval. After the completion of these procedures, they flew directly from Moscow, rather than going through Vienna and Rome.

10. The Collapse of the USSR and Activation of Religious Activities

In 1988, after the adoption of the reform program of the political system, sovereignty was declared to Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, and later Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. In 1990, a ban was imposed on the combination of party and government posts. There was a massive desertion from the party. In 1991, Yeltsin was elected president of Russia and he announced the exclusion of Russia from the USSR. Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus announced their state sovereignty. The military bloc "Warsaw Pact" stopped its activity. The KGB, headed by Kryuchkov attempted to prevent a complete collapse of the Soviet Union. The State Emergency Committee was established. Gorbachev, still being in power, was isolated and then released in late August 1991. He announced his resignation from the post of General Secretary of the CPSU in December 1991. On December 8, 1991, Yeltsin, Kravchuk (President of Ukraine) and Shushkevich (President of Belarus) declared the termination of the USSR, which had lasted 70 years and covered 1/6th of the world's landmass. At the same

meeting, the establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) was announced, which was later joined by Kazakhstan and four Asian republics--Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. Due to the collapse of the USSR, the whole economic system was rebalanced and linked the 15 republics. This, in turn, negatively affected the financial situation.

However, for religious activities, this greatly opened up opportunities. In 1988, the Soviet Union celebrated the 1,000th anniversary of the Baptism in Russia. Many religious trends, including Protestant churches and leaders of these movements were rehabilitated. In the early 90s, the Christians of Evangelical Faith—Pentecostals were officially recognized. The central leadership was created separately from ACECB. New opportunities of preaching the gospel on the radio and television emerged, establishing rehabilitation centers for drug addicts and alcoholics, establishing orphanages and boarding schools, and building churches. The door opened widely for foreign preachers. The freedom felt like the same freedom described in the memoirs of participants and witnesses of the Bolshevik Revolution. Although this freedom was for the Protestants, for the ruling church at the time, they were dark years.

11. Continuation of the Process of Departures from the Former Soviet Republics

Although there was new found religious freedom, the collapse of the economy, the collapse of the political system, the collapse of the currency rate of the ruble pushed people to get out of the

economic chaos. Hearing about the prosperity in the U.S. spurred on a second wave of immigration.

For decades, Communist propaganda had hammered into people that life in a capitalist society was impoverished. Many educated people didn't believe this, and they also didn't believe that life in the USSR would ever be normal. So when the opportunity presented itself, people decided to live in capitalistic "decay" rather than the tatters of former Soviet life.

Emigration as a whole can be likened to casting a net into the sea, which captures all kinds of marine life. Many, who were initially opposed to immigration, now live in the United States. Life circumstances and views change. But everything happens by the will of God. Many representatives of religious associations coming from the former Soviet Union approvingly say that the churches in the U.S. provide strong support for preaching the Good News in the former USSR.

Nikolai N. Romanov